

Third Session – Forty-Second Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 3, 2020

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Please be seated. Good morning, everybody.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I am seeking leave of the House, (1) to consider today all remaining stages of Bills 208, 218 and 301; (2) to allow the Opposition House Leader to call Bill 208 this morning, despite rule 23(6) and the fact that this bill is from the government caucus; (3) to send the same three bills to the Committee of the Whole at 10:30 and have them report it back to the House immediately.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House, (1) to consider today all remaining stages of Bills 208, 218 and 301; (2) allow the Opposition House Leader to call Bill 208 this morning, despite rule 23(6) and the fact that this bill is from the government caucus; and (3) to send the same three bills to the Committee of the Whole at 10:30 and have them report it back to the House immediately. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Fontaine: Could you please call debate on second reading of Bill 208, followed by Bill 301, followed immediately by second reading of Bill 218 until 10:30.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider debate on second reading of Bill 208, followed by Bill 301, followed immediately by second reading of Bill 218 until 10:30.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS—
PUBLIC BILLS**Bill 208—The Wildlife Amendment Act
(Protecting Property from
Water and Wildlife Damage)**

Madam Speaker: I will therefore call resuming debate on second reading of Bill 208, The Wildlife Amendment Act (Protecting Property from Water and Wildlife Damage), standing in the name of the honourable member member for Keewatinook, who has two minutes remaining.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): It gives me great pleasure to kind of continue on where I ended up at the last chance I had the opportunity to speak on this matter.

Again, I want to reiterate where I was coming from the last time when I talked about what—any matters that are brought forth by the members opposite just seem to fall short, and they seem to be rather incomplete when it comes time to being able to deal and to represent all of Manitobans.

And I believe this is an issue that, in fact, does that. Well, it addresses some concerns in regards to agriculture, some concerns that are raised, perhaps, by farming and agriculture industry.

It doesn't reflect everybody in the area and the effects that it would have across more than just the riding of the member that raised this issue—in Gimli.

Perhaps there is some other issues that need to be addressed in regards to the Indigenous communities in there and how potential flooding impacts may affect them and— affect them either upstream or downstream in regards to exactly what may happen with the destruction of any beaver dams and beaver things in the area, and exactly how that water and that flood mitigation may affect them in a negative way.

So while this bill on, its face does—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: The honourable leader of the order, please. Order.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Yes. Just quickly, I actually think that the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) was about to wrap up their speech there.

Madam Speaker: The member does not have a point of order.

There was no rule that was breached in the member's comment, so I will turn it back to the honourable member for Keewatinook, to conclude his comments.

* * *

Mr. Bushie: Perhaps I'll just wrap up there and conclude for the day.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further members on debate on this bill?

If not, is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 208, The Wildlife Amendment Act (Protecting Property from Water and Wildlife Damage).

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

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS— PRIVATE BILLS

Bill 301—The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: We will now resume debate on second reading of Bill 301, The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable member for Selkirk (Mr. Lagimodiere), who has one minute remaining.

The honourable member for Selkirk?

Is there leave to allow the bill to stand in the name of the honourable member for Selkirk?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave is denied.

Are there any other members wishing to speak on debate on Bill 301?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education): We want to thank the Opposition House Leader for bringing this bill forward and, of course, others who have supported it.

The great work of the Humane Society is recognized in many different ways, and—including in this bill, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, we're pleased to support this bill.

We recognize the important work that's been done by the Winnipeg Humane Society under the leadership of people like Vicki Burns, Bill McDonald, Javier Schwersersky *[phonetic]* and a variety of other people who have played an important role in building and in operating the centre. So, we're pleased to support this.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak on debate on this bill?

If not, is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 301, The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act.

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

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 218—The Somali Heritage Week Act

Madam Speaker: We will now move to second reading of Bill 208—The Somali Heritage Week Act.

* (10:10)

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), that Bill 218, The Somali Heritage Week Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, this bill proclaims June 25th to July 1st in each year as Somali heritage week. Somali-Canadians make significant and important cultural, economic, political and social contributions in Manitoba.

The week of June 25th to July 1st includes significant days in the history of the Somali community including independence celebrations for Somalia. July 1st is recognized as Independence Day for Somalia.

These dates represent important moments of pride, resilience and self-determination for all Somalis in East Africa and the Horn of Africa. Many celebrations are held here in Manitoba during this week that reflect the rich culture, heritage and traditions of the Somali people and celebrate independence, liberty and freedom.

Somali heritage week is an opportunity to recognize, reflect on and celebrate the history and culture of the Somali regions in Africa, and the diversity and immeasurable strength that Somali-Canadians add to Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, I'm honoured to be able to bring this bill forward. It was brought to me by community—by members of the community, and I'd like to especially recognize Fowsia Sheikhali, who first brought the idea to—the idea for this bill to me. I'd like to also recognize Mayran Kalah, who was a community organizer and Somali translator. I'd like to make sure that we acknowledge and we thank the local community organizations that support this bill and that have endorsed this bill, and just a few of them are Unity Somali Centre, the Bilal Community Centre and Family Centre, the Somali outreach centre, and special thanks to Abdikheir Ahmed for his contributions as well.

I look forward to receiving the unanimous support of the House for this bill.

Thank you.

Questions

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

Could I ask any members that are wishing to ask questions or to speak in debate to please let the moderators know.

An Honourable Member: Oh. Sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for McPhillips. His jacket is throwing me off a little bit.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): Merry Christmas, Madam Speaker. We're good to go?

Madam Speaker: We're good to go.

Mr. Martin: Okay. Good morning, Madam Speaker. I want to thank my colleague opposite for introducing this bill and educating—and continuing to educate—Manitobans on the importance of Somalis' contribution to Manitoba and Canada.

I'm wondering if the member can tell me if there is similar recognition in other provincial jurisdictions, and if so, what can we emulate in those jurisdictions to ensure success here in Manitoba?

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I thank the member for the question. There is actually a similar bill in Ontario that was brought forward by NDP MLA Faisal—MPP—MLA—I'm sorry, MPP in Ontario. It's a bill that received assent there and was the first of its kind in North America. And so, you know, it's important for us as Manitobans to do what we can to recognize Somali communities right here in Manitoba who make immeasurable contributions to our communities. And so, you know, it's an opportunity for us to help lead the way in North America for pieces of legislation like this.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Madam Speaker, I don't actually have a question for the member bringing this bill forward, but we are very happy to be supporting it.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): I'm wondering if the member could tell us a little bit more about these organizations, the kinds of the work that is done, and perhaps just give some examples. I'd just like to know a little bit more about the good work that the member referenced.

MLA Asagwara: Absolutely. Two of the organizations actually are in the constituency of Union Station. They've been in existence for a few years and they do incredible work, especially with youth in the community. And so everything from tutoring young students after school to, you know, tutoring sessions and gatherings on the weekends. Most recently, actually, Somali women in the community organized an Independence Day celebration on July 1st that was for Somali Independence Day and for Canada Day, right in Central Park.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko).

The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet needs to unmute his mic. The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, are you there? No?

He's indicating that he does not have a question.

Are there any further questions?

Mr. Martin: Just one more short question for my colleague across the way. I'm just wondering what ways will be utilized to ensure that Manitobans, especially Somali Manitobans, but indeed all Manitobans who want to share in this week, are properly informed—knock on wood—of the a passage of this legislation, and more importantly, the significance of the week.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for the question. I look forward to all members of this House using their platforms to amplify this legislation, to inform all Manitobans and their constituents about this legislation, about Somali heritage week, about Somali Independence Day and us working collectively to make sure that all Manitobans are aware of the important contributions of Somali peoples in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Debate

Madam Speaker: If not, debate is open.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): Good morning, Madam Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise in the House on any occasion, and today marks just another one of those.

As today may be my last opportunity to speak before our winter break, I'd like to wish all my colleagues a very merry Christmas and happy New Year, and hope that they have an opportunity to reconnect with family and friends and, more importantly, unwind.

It is indeed—it has been, indeed, a difficult and stressful time, not just for Manitobans but for MLAs as well. We all have families and friends, and it has not been without its stresses, though I'm just encouraging everyone to please check their own mental health during this break, and more important, be sure that their self-care is dealt with.

With that being said, Madam Speaker, I think any opportunity that we have in the Legislature to reflect residents and constituents from our areas to—as the member opposite indicated, to use our collective voices to amplify their voices. Whether it's for social media platforms and that, our Legislature has been at

the forefront for a number of years recognizing a variety of communities in this province for their contribution.

* (10:20)

Now, to our rich cultural mosaic. Today's inclusion or request for a Somali heritage week I think is a wonderful example of the cultural mosaic in which Manitobans thrive, and more importantly, that makes Manitoba the destination it is for newcomers across the globe. I know that Somali has a very rich heritage. It is one that is fraught, though, in the early 20th century, one that was, unfortunately, with a lot of African countries, was a subject of colonial rule, was unfortunately part in—unwitting part of the conflict of World War II involving invasion by Italian military and overthrow, Madam Speaker, until ultimately independence was again achieved. Those kinds of action, though, do scar a community's psyche and can leave lasting consequences. I think any opportunity that we have to hold a community up and allow all of us collectively to share in their successes, in their contributions, not only to our local culture here in Manitoba, but more importantly, their contribution to the world culture.

So I think, that the—that my colleague opposite has done their diligence taking a look at what the member of the provincial parliament in Ontario has done, in terms of a bill, which we can emulate here in the Manitoba Legislature and 'ultimately' is the easiest route to go, because then the legislation and proclamations are all—almost essentially pre-vetted in a parliamentary style, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member opposite for listening to her constituents and bringing this forward today so that we can all have an understanding and a sharing of the community, or at least one of the communities, which she represents in Union Station.

So I look forward to hearing other colleagues share their perspective on the legislation. I look forward to being one of 57 MLAs to celebrate Somali week next—this coming summer. And again, let us hope that we have an opportunity to actually celebrate it in closed quarters but in a safe manner and that this unfortunate situation with the pandemic is behind us.

But again, just to my colleague opposite, I look forward to supporting your resolution this morning. And again, I congratulate you for representing your constituents here in the Manitoba Legislature, and again, I'd like to extend to all my colleagues a very

merry Christmas, a happy New Year and a reminder to stay safe.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I did just want to have the opportunity to put a few short words on the record. We are very happy to support Bill 218, the Somalia heritage week act, that proclaims June 25th to July 1st in each year as Somalia heritage week.

As a time that includes significant dates in history of the Somalia community, some of these include independence celebrations for Somalia, Somaliland and Djibouti. Madam Speaker, these dates represent such pride and importance, and that is why we want to be able to celebrate here in Manitoba, because as the bill reinforces, we know that Somali-Canadians make significant and important cultural, economic, political and social contributions to Manitoba.

We are very happy to support.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further members wishing to speak on debate?

Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House, then, is second reading of Bill 218, The Somali Heritage Week Act.

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

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): On House business, then—and I thank the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for bringing forward their legislation—can we move to Committee of the Whole to consider the bills, as agreed earlier?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to call it 10:30 and move into Committee of the Whole? *[interjection]* Oh, is there leave to move it into Committee of the Whole? *[Agreed]*

The House will now resolve into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 208, The Wildlife Amendment Act (Protecting Property from Water and Wildlife Damage); Bill 218, The Somali Heritage Week Act; and Bill 301, The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act, for concurrence and third reading.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of the Whole please come to order.

As previously agreed in the—by the House, this committee will consider Bill 208, The Wildlife Amendment Act (Protecting Property from Water and Wildlife Damage); Bill 218, the Somalia heritage week act; and Bill 301, The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act.

Bill 208—The Wildlife Amendment Act (Protecting Property from Water and Wildlife Damage)

Mr. Chairperson: We shall begin with the Bill 208, The Wildlife Amendment Act (Protecting Property from Water and Wildlife Damage).

Does the bill sponsor, the honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, have any opening statements?

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): I think this great legislation speaks for itself.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the member.

Does the other member wish to make any opening—any other members wish to—opening statements on Bill 208? No?

During the consideration of the bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order. Also, if there is agreement from the committee, the Chair will call clauses in blocks that are conformed to pages, which is—understanding that we will stop at any particular clause or clauses where members may have comments, questions or amendments to the proposed. Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

Clauses 1 and 2—pass; clauses 3 through 5—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

Bill 218—The Somali Heritage Week Act

Mr. Chairperson: We'll now move on to to Bill 218, the Somalia heritage week act.

Does the bill sponsor, the honourable member for Union Station, have an open statement?

Does the other members wish to make an opening statement on Bill 218?

During the consideration of bills, the preamble and the enacting clauses and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their

proper order. Also, if there is any agreement from the committee, the Chair will call clauses in blocks that conform to pages, with the understanding that we will stop at any particular clause or clauses where members have comments, questions or amendments to the proposed. Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

Clauses 1 through 3—pass; preamble—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

* (10:30)

Bill 301—The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, now we'll go on to—move on to Bill 301, The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act.

Shall the Bill 301—on Bill 301, we will first hear from the reports from the bill of Glenn Joynt, Legislative Counsel, in the accordance to rule 154-1. The—I'll get Mr. Joynt to—

Mr. Glenn Joynt (Legislative Counsel): As required by subrule 154(1) of the rules of the House, I now report that I have examined Bill 301, The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act, and have not noted any exceptional powers sought or any other provision of the bill requiring special consideration.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the Legislative Counsel for the report. Thank you.

Does the bill sponsor—or, the honourable member for St. Johns have an opening statement?

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Yes.

I just want to take this opportunity to once again thank all of the remarkable people that sit on the board of The Winnipeg Humane Society, all of the folks that work at the Winnipeg Humane Society and, certainly, all of the volunteers. It takes an extraordinary amount of labour to able to offer amazing rescue and animal services, and they do it with love and compassion.

And so I say to them, miigwech.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the member.

Does any other members wish to make any opening statements on Bill 301? No?

During the considering of bill, the preamble and the acting clause and the title are postponed until all their clauses have been considered in their proper

order. Also, if there is agreement that—from the committee, that the Chair will call clauses in blocks to conform to pages with the understanding that we will stop at any particular clause or clauses where members have any comments, questions, or amendments to propose.

Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

Clause 1—pass; clauses 2 through 4—pass; clauses 5 though 8—pass; clauses 9 and 10—pass; preamble—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

Shall the bill be—I understand that the motion for the refund of fees will regard to this bill?

Ms. Fontaine: Yes. That this—I move that this committee recommends that the fees paid with respect to Bill 301, The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act, be refunded, less the cost of printing.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: So, all in order? The motion is in order. The floor is open for question.

I don't hear any questions. Hearing no further question, shall the motion pass? *[Agreed]*

That concludes business before the committee.

Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has considered the following: Bill 208, The Wildlife Amendment Act, protecting property in water and wildlife damage; Bill 218, the Somalia heritage week act; and Bill 301, The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act, and reports that the same without amendments.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson), that the report of the committee be received—sorry, I'll do that again.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, that the report be—of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I may need to ask leave to deal with a government motion related to the United Church amendment act. It's a government motion, although it deals with a private members' bill, so I'm not sure if I need leave for that.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave at the moment for the honourable Government House Leader to bring forward the government motion about the fees being paid in respect to Bill 300, which is in fact a private members' bill? *[Agreed]*

GOVERNMENT MOTION

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I move that the fees paid with respect to—sorry.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that the fees paid with respect to Bill 300, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, be refunded less the cost of printing.

Motion presented.

Madam Speaker: Is there any member wishing to speak on debate on this motion?

* (10:40)

Hearing no further debate on the government motion, shall the motion pass? *[Agreed]*

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, can you canvass the House to see if it's the will of members to call it 11 o'clock?

Madam Speaker: Is there will of the House to call it 11 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 9—Call on the Provincial Government to Support Manitobans on Employment Income Assistance

Madam Speaker: The hour now being 11 a.m. and the time for private member's resolution, the resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Call on the Provincial Government to Support Manitobans on Employment Income Assistance, brought forward by the honourable member for Thompson.

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): I move, seconded by the honourable member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino),

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected people living in poverty, particularly Manitoba's homeless population; and

WHEREAS people living in poverty and homeless people are disproportionately people of colour, Indigenous, single parents, women, trans and non-binary people, and people with disabilities; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has an obligation to ensure that all Manitobans have access to housing and can live free of poverty; and

WHEREAS minimum wage rates have stagnated and are significantly less than the \$15.53 living wage determined by Make Poverty History; and

WHEREAS Employment Income Assistance (EIA) rates are woefully inadequate for the 73,000 Manitobans who depend on them as they provide an annual income that is only 53% of meeting the poverty line as determined by Statistics Canada; and

WHEREAS this Provincial Government has taken action that has actively worsened poverty in Manitoba particularly by clawing back Employment and Income Assistance for people who received the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and its replacement, the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB); and

WHEREAS many benefit recipients were unaware of the claw back and have had their EIA benefits held back or cut off; and

WHEREAS the Federal Government was clear that CERB was intended to build upon provincial income support programs so that people would be better off; and

WHEREAS British Columbia, Yukon, and Northwest Territories exempted CERB from social assistance claw backs; and

WHEREAS many people on EIA rely on organizations to access things like food, telephone, internet, and laundry facilities whose services have been reduced or closed altogether due to the pandemic; and

WHEREAS pre-pandemic poverty in Manitoba was above the national average with 274,910 people, 21% of Manitobans, living in poverty.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba will urge the provincial government to fully exempt CERB, CRB and other federal COVID-19 recovery measures from EIA clawbacks, ensuring EIA benefits are not interrupted or cut off during the remainder of

COVID-19 pandemic, and will work towards a livable wage for income for all Manitobans.

Motion presented.

Ms. Adams: This private member's resolution is important because many low income and vulnerable Manitobans are experiencing difficult times and the PC government is making their lives harder. The clawing back of EIA is unnecessary. Families and persons who have applied for CERB and were not entitled have to pay back the federal government. Other provinces like BC, Yukon and the Northwest Territories have not clawed back their EIA recipients' money if they did not include CERB as income.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

In April, the Province decided to claw back income and employment assistance for those who were receiving the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit. In fact, the PCs were looking for people. They were doing a review of all EIA recipients from March to September, regardless if they had already had their annual review.

Some of the clawbacks that are being applied for CERB and CERB replacement for some recipients were unaware that the clawbacks and—have had their benefits clawed back and/or cut. This has left many unable to pay for rent and put food on the table, putting them a greater risk for homelessness. Increasing homelessness at this time is particularly alarming with the cold weather months as COVID-19 infection rates rise. This is not adequate support for families and individuals who are at risk. All the funding announcements the PCs have made are for people who have tested positive for COVID, which is great, but like most things this government's done, it's a half of a job and with federal money. The federal government was clear the CERB was intended to be built upon provincial income supports, so people that were better off. Typically, provinces deduct federal benefits from social assistance dollar for dollar, but the CERB was an exceptional emergency measure that was put in place for exceptional times.

British Columbia, Yukon and the Northwest Territories agreed and exempted CERB from social assistance clawbacks, but it's not too late for Manitoba to do the same. Clawing back only serves the Manitoba government to save money on the backs of our most vulnerable people.

Now COVID-19 has made it even harder to get by. The costs of things are going up and additional access—additional barriers to access basic services.

For months, there was a reduction in public transportation for Winnipeg. And some communities, due to cuts by this government even before the pandemic, were forced to cancel their public transportation, making it harder to access those basic services like going to the grocery store or going to the doctor, and their EIA benefits didn't recognize that. They were forced to use other means of transportation like taking cabs. In fact, a lot of the resources that the EIA recipients rely on to put food on the table were closed or had reduced hours.

We know people experiencing poverty and homelessness are disproportionately people of colour, Indigenous, single parents, women, trans and non-binary people and people with disabilities. Neither the federal government or the provincial government provided any supports for these marginalized groups and left them to figure it out for themselves.

With more and more services going virtual, it added more and more costs to technology, as places that would have provided technology for free were closed. Many families were having to do home-schooling and trying to make sure their kids had the technology needed to stay in school, which was not reflected in their EIA benefits. And nor did the government stand up and help these families; they left it to school districts to support families.

Government has an obligation to ensure people can live with dignity and have sustainable housing and a living wage. This is something the government had a responsibility for, even before the pandemic. And what are they trying to do? They're trying to privatize and sell Manitoba Housing. In fact, they left over 1,600 units empty, with 9,000 people on the wait-list. They have not—fun fact, this government has yet to build any affordable housing units since they took office. Employment and Income Assistance rates have been proven to be completely inadequate for those who depend on them. There are 73,000 Manitobans dependent on EIA that are struggling as a result of this government's inability to prioritize anybody but their wealthy friends.

We are heading towards a housing catastrophe, and more and more people and low-income, marginalized people are ending up on the streets. This government is handing—governments have handed out billions of dollars to mega-corporations and forgiving millions and millions of debts and taxes owed by the wealthy, but they are trying to recoup the money they gave—money received, \$1,000 at a time, thinking they were accessible and eligible. The government

should've waited to get their money back and do it through other means, more humane means.

We need to stop pushing—punishing people for being poor. The people that accessed CERB spent the money on local goods and services. Most of them needed the money for essentials. This highlights the need for a basic minimum income. I just wish the provincial and federal governments would put this much effort into getting the people listed on the Panama Papers.

The Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his government have actively made poverty worse in Manitoba. We have now dropped to the bottom one third of Canadian provinces. And this government doesn't seem to care. I don't know if they realize it's their policies that are causing this. Clawing back the EIA is a perfect example. In fact, I received—I've been receiving calls from people who truly thought they were entitled to CERB. I had one woman call me and tell me she was a lunch monitor at a northern Manitoba school, and with the school closed there was no lunch program, so she was told to apply for CERB. She didn't know it would be counted as income and didn't know she wasn't entitled.

These clawbacks are having negative impacts on families in northern Manitoba where unemployment is high and families rely on EIA. Due to a lack of messaging from the federal and provincial governments, many northerners applied, thinking they were entitled and now are having to pay back the federal government and fight with the Province to have their EIA reinstated. I have had people reach out that they thought that—one person reaching out that they thought they were—they had received CERB without applying for it. So now they're having to fight with the federal government and fight to have their EI reinstated.

* (10:50)

Most of the decisions to claw back the EIA from people received the Canadian—have left Manitobans at risk. For some northern families, it's hard to get to major centres for shopping and rely on shipping in food. There is added cost for that. I represent a number of communities that don't even have a local store. These are the realities the northern—that northerners face.

We are in the middle of the second wave, and who does it help to have more people on the streets in winter with less shelter beds? I don't know what's worse: the fact that the government hasn't done

enough for people that are vulnerable or the fact that they think they've done a good job supporting low-income Manitobans during the pandemic.

That can be seen in the fact that the government has not extended the ban on evictions or rent increase. Even the pandemic restrictions are a half-measure by this government.

We need to start taking poverty seriously in this country and this province. The Premier takes every opportunity to take federal dollars in lieu of making real investments in this province. This government has not made any investments for Manitoba in—when—in terms of poverty. The only money they've used is federal dollars, and now they're trying to balance the books on the backs of Manitobans' poorest citizens.

We have seen how other provinces treat CERB when it comes to EIA. I would urge this government to stand up and do what's right for Manitobans and do what British Columbia, Yukon and the Northwest Territories did, and stop the clawbacks from EIA recipients.

Knowing that the federal government isn't stepping up to support low-income Canadians and that their costs are rising, let's all work together to make sure that Manitoba works for all of us.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period up to 15 minutes will be held—10 minutes. Sorry about that. A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held, and questions be addressed in the following sequence: the first question to be asked by a member from another party; any subsequent questions must follow a rotation between parties; each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): I want to thank the member from Thompson for her presentation, but I also want to know if the member is aware that, while under the previous NDP government, Manitoba had the highest child poverty rate in Canada?

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Thank you for the question.

This resolution is about what this government is doing now. And we need to support people that are in low-income situations. We're not here to talk about

what happened in the past. This is what your government is doing and you are putting more and more people out on the streets, and we need to address those issues. And stopping the EIA clawbacks is one way to stop that.

It is a simple and easy solution.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I'd like to thank the MLA for bringing this forward. It is an important resolution and an important issue which I'm dealing with as well. We support the resolution.

I'm dealing with, for example, a fellow who did get the CERB and is on EIA and is now being asked to have \$300 a month taken from his EIA money.

Can an individual live on EIA if \$300 a month is taken from it?

Ms. Adams: No, which is why we need to have an increase in EIA rates and we need to stop the clawbacks for EIA rates.

I would also say that the federal government needs to stop taking back the CERB payments from low-income Canadians, implement a wealth tax and go after the Panama Papers people to raise the funds to pay for CERB.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I want to thank my colleague for bringing this important resolution forward, especially during a pandemic.

I'd also ask my colleague, how has this government harmed Manitobans experiencing poverty and homelessness during this pandemic?

Ms. Adams: I'd like to thank the member for the question.

This government has harmed Manitobans during this pandemic in a variety of ways. They've made a lack of—with their half-measures. They have not invested for—in shelter beds. All of the announcements have been made for people that have tested positive for COVID. While that is good, it's only half. What about people that are being evicted?

I'm receiving phone calls daily from people that are getting evicted from their homes, and they have nowhere to go, which puts them on the streets, and the shelters are already at capacity. And they were at capacity before the pandemic, and they're at even less capacity now.

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): I can appreciate why the member doesn't want to deal with things in the past that the NDP have done.

Can the member indicate why the NDP have not supported a reduction in the PST to help the lower income earners keep more of their money and put more on the kitchen table?

Ms. Adams: Well, thank you for the—I thank the member for the question.

This government needs to stop the clawbacks on EIA recipients, implement a rent-ban on evictions and the rent increases. And those are real-life experiences that people that are low income are facing. And this government needs to stand up and do the right thing by Manitobans and actually be on team Manitoba.

Mrs. Smith: Can the member tell us how exempting CRB, CERB and other federal COVID-19 recovery measures from EIA clawbacks would help Manitobans recover from this pandemic?

Ms. Adams: Well, it would mean that they would have to stop fighting the provincial government to get their EIA back. It would also mean that they would be able to access all of the other programs.

I would also—I'd like to point out to this House that I'm a little confused on how this government is classifying CERB as income when you have to pay it back. I don't know anywhere that would say something is income if you have to pay it back.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): In typical NDP fashion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, their MO all the time is please do what we didn't do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they had 17 years, and I'd like to ask the member from Thompson, who I know was a staffer within some of the NDP ranks at times, they had 17 years to take some action to address poverty here in Manitoba.

Instead of simply talking about it today, why didn't they get something done in the 17 years they were in power? *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Adams: I'd like to thank the member for the question.

What we are talking about is how this government is treating low-income families and low-income individuals during a pandemic. There was not this level of a pandemic when the NDP was in government. And this government has gone out of their way to hurt Manitobans. And they have left so many Manitobans at risk. And all this government has been about is a good headline and not actually helping Manitobans.

And this resolution would actually make direct impacts on Manitobans today.

Mrs. Smith: Can the member tell us, how would an NDP government better support Manitobans experiencing poverty and homelessness, especially during a pandemic?

Ms. Adams: Yes, I'd like to thank my colleague from Point Douglas on that very important question.

It's very simple. If we were in government, we would've made the focus Manitobans. We would have put Manitobans first and not made it about how we're going to help our rich friends and our rich donors. We would have looked at how we treat Manitobans. And I think a government should be judged about how they treat the most vulnerable people in this province.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): Good afternoon—or good morning. I appreciate the opportunity.

The member opposite indicated that—talked about speaking for rich friends. I'm asking the member if she would join me in condemning her rich boss's comment where he indicated that he was riding in his limo back to his king-size suite and feeling really bad for children in poverty.

* (11:00)

So I'm asking the member to join me in condemning her boss's comments where he marginalized those people who live in poverty and actually work together to find an opportunity to help those people who truly need our—

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

Ms. Adams: Thank you for the question.

Well, I would say to the member opposite that I would like him to support my resolution in standing up for Manitobans, and I would hope that he is standing up to his bosses at the—his boss, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) of this province, and the Cabinet table that are putting in all of these policies that are hurting Manitobans.

So I would like him to stand up today and support this resolution.

Mrs. Smith: I'd like to ask the question about poverty reduction here in our province. Today we're going to a committee to hear, you know, they're going to present three years of poverty reduction strategies.

We know that poverty is a huge issue here in Manitoba, so I'd ask the member: Why do they believe this government has not developed a plan to help low-income Manitobans?

Ms. Adams: Thank you for the question.

Well, I think the reason they haven't developed a plan for Manitobans dealing with poverty and affected by poverty is because they simply are out of touch and don't care, that they made a plan and that this is—and, in fact, that we're—this is going to be our last poverty reduction committee meeting, because when they don't like something, they just stop.

Look at what they've done with child care. The wait-list was going up and up and up, so they just said, oh, well, we can't do anything about it so we'll turn off the counter.

So they're not making any real investments on poverty. So instead of actually addressing it, they're just not going to deal with it and ignore it and hope it goes away. And that's not what is going to happen.

I will continue to stand up and work with my colleagues on—in the NDP caucus—

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

Mr. Ewasko: It gives me a great chance to put a few words on the record in regards to asking this member from Thompson a question.

I appreciate her comments that, basically condemning the previous NDP government for their 17 years of absolute failed policies. She knows that under 17 years of the good times, they didn't get anything done, and I'd like her to admit today that it is a good thing that, since 2015, that our government has reduced child poverty by 31 per cent.

So I'd appreciate her to stand up and applaud our government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And merry Christmas, everybody.

Ms. Adams: I'd like the member to know that, in fact, that under his—under this, the PC government, Manitoba has actually dropped to the bottom one third in poverty. So I'm not sure why he thinks his government should be celebrating that. For me, I would be ashamed of that and be working extra hard to address those issues.

So I am very proud to be part of the NDP caucus that continues to stand up and fight for Manitobans and ensuring that Manitobans have a good quality of

life and that Manitoba works for all of us and not just the few.

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

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The debate is open.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): Good morning to everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to put a few words on the record in regards to the member from Thompson's resolution.

I want to begin by acknowledging that we are in unprecedented times. The way forward has no road map, nor does it come with clear-cut directions. What I do know, though, is that as a government we have been doing our best to support Manitobans as we go through these times.

Protecting everyone and ensuring the health and safety of everyone is a top priority. I also want to acknowledge that the many years I had working in the social services sector I learned a lot from the families that I was working with and from the resources and community supports I connected them to.

Families are a very cohesive and strong group of individuals. The need to find a better solution to where they were or to seek out a resource to help a member of their family was key, the most important thing they could do.

So the strongest people I know I met through my many years working in the social services field. Our government supports individuals through the many programs and supports available. These supports have been expanded to continue to meet the needs of those requiring assistance.

EIA, housing and child-care supports have been enhanced and additional programs have been introduced to support families. These programs have helped many individuals and provided supports for the many individuals who have been able to gain employment and not require further government assistance. This hand-up assistance has benefited youth, adults and families.

Deputy Speaker, I would like to first look at our EIA program and the work that has been done to improve and modernize the supports available to the citizens of Manitoba. Our government is making strategic investments in EIA to get more Manitobans off social assistance and back to work. We have invested nearly 25 per cent more in EIA than

the previous government. To be exact, a total \$476 million was invested in EIA in 2019-2020.

Individuals living on the EIA benefits are from many different backgrounds and vary in age. Government is working collaboratively to ensure clients that the supports they need to enter into the workforce are in place for them.

This is why programs like the Ready-Set-Work program, Community Living disABILITY employment project and Futures Forward programs are available. Deputy Speaker, \$3.7 million has been invested into these programs: money that is being invested in the future of Manitobans. These programs offer all Manitobans an opportunity to build on their strengths and talents and to gain the skills needed to enter or re-enter back into the workforce.

Deputy Speaker, the job readiness programs have benefited over 1,000 people. There have been 1,000 fewer people accessing general assistance through the EIA program. In addition, the Jobs on Market in Winnipeg has served over 6,000 people since February 2017, and over 3,000 Jobs on Market have joined the workforce.

These are two great examples of how the supports offered to individuals on assistance have benefited them and their families. Training and supports offered to individuals in the community help build stronger communities today and for the future of their children.

Deputy Speaker, to further support Manitobans during these tough times, the Disability Economic Support Program provided \$4.6 million of support to help Manitobans during this pandemic. This was a non-taxable benefit and did not impact other program eligibility. In addition, our government has exempted all one-time COVID-19 benefits from determining EIA financial eligibility, including benefits for people with disabilities and for seniors, as well.

By treating CERB like earned income, our government has ensured that all previous EIA clients are able to keep their health, dental and optical benefits under the Rewarding Work health plan side. Health is a priority, and not worrying about the cost of medication, eyeglasses and dental are a huge burden removed from anyone who is looking to become independent of the social programs they are on.

To further support families and those on assistance during these tough times, our government has not reduced their assisted benefits by the increased money they receive from their child tax benefits or

from their increased GST rebates. The extra money they received was theirs to assist with any of their expenses. To ensure no one is left without financial support when CERB ends, our government has worked to ensure individuals are eligible to access and continue to receive EIA benefits.

Our government is committed to making child poverty a thing of past. Through the Pathways to a Better Future, Manitoba's poverty reduction strategy, the goal to reduce child poverty by 25 per cent was not only met but surpassed. Our government was able to reduce the number of children living in poverty by 31 per cent—yes, 31 per cent.

This means more families are living above the poverty line and relying less on assistance. More families are able to earn an income that will support their needs. Children are our future and our government wants to ensure a healthy and strong future for these families and their children.

Indicators to support fewer children in poverty are many, some of which are: a 6 per cent increase in the high school graduation rate; 82 per cent of Manitoba high school students now graduating on time; 4.6 decrease in income inequality in Manitoba; 4.4 per cent increase in the availability of licensed child care for Manitobans, so everyone has an opportunity to go back to school and to seek employment; and an 8.1 per cent decrease in the number of children that are now in CFS care.

* (11:10)

Hungry children don't focus in school and their health is affected. This is why our government has invested \$4 million in a new Home Nutrition and Learning Pilot Program. This program provides healthy and nutritious breakfasts for 3,400 children in need of an extra meal every week. The meals provide nutrition and ensure children are not going hungry. We are helping families.

I am proud of what our government has done to improve the lives of children in our province. Our government has not talked about poverty, whether—they have worked to help children and get them out of poverty.

Deputy Speaker, our government is aware of the challenges that the pandemic is causing for the homeless population and for those organizations that are helping. The restrictions and guidelines around social distancing and isolation have placed extra pressure on the ability to offer the much-needed services. Shelters are limited to the number of

individuals they can accommodate and are using extra precautions and protective equipment to ensure safety and health of staff and clients.

Three and a half million dollars has been invested to expand shelter capacity. Of these, Main Street Project received over \$550,000—over 100 new overnight shelter beds were supported and daytime programming for vulnerable Winnipeggers was also supported; Salvation Army received over \$720,000; Siloam Mission was able to operate 50 new shelter beds with the \$225,000 they were given; and Resource Assistance for Youth was able to operate 20 housing units for those at risk with the \$115,000 that they received.

We have invested \$1.6 million to operate an isolation space for the homeless using a former Manitoba Housing property on Sargent Avenue, and added a 138-bed isolation site in Winnipeg. We are supporting the organizations and the work that they're doing with the individuals and the needs of those individuals.

Deputy Speaker, our government believes in accessible and affordable housing. Housing has always been a priority, and our government has made strategic investments in housing. We have partnered up with Habitat for Humanity, Wabnung and various housing projects throughout the province.

These additional housing supports have helped families achieve the dream of purchasing a home for their family and providing a living environment safe and free from violence. Habitat for Humanity received funds to construct 60 new units. Wabnung received funding to assist families escaping domestic violence.

Madam Speaker, our government has actively worked to ensure families receive the benefits they need to have a better future. EIA support programs, job readiness training, support to help children and families out of poverty and housing investments create an opportunity for all futures.

We have committed to helping Manitobans who need help in the past and even more with the 'challenging'—challenging changes we face. Our government has actively invested in the future of our families, not just talked about it, as the previous government has.

Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. James (Mr. Sala). [*interjection*] Oh, sorry about that.

The honourable member for Point Douglas, then.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): It gives me great pleasure to put some words on the record about this private member's resolution brought forward by the member from Thompson.

This is certainly an important resolution, one that's timely, as we are in a global pandemic and as we see food costs rise here in our province and other costs like hydro. We just saw an increase of 2.9 per cent instituted by this Pallister government a couple of days ago, which is making it even harder for Manitobans here in this province.

And here we have a government that is clawing back CERB payments and CRB payments. These are payments that were made to Manitoba's most vulnerable, and here's a government that just said that they want to help Manitobans, that they're worried and they are doing their best to take care of vulnerable Manitobans.

But, Deputy Speaker, actions speak louder than words. And the member from Seine River just said that we're in unprecedented times. We absolutely are, but this government has failed to act. They've failed to put in any extra supports for Manitobans, especially our vulnerable population.

We have 73,000 people that are reliant on EIA, and I would say probably 50 per cent of those that were on EIA took CERB or CRB. And now this government is trying to claw back those dollars that were taken to only help them during this global pandemic, help them with rent increases to help ensure that they stayed in their housing, to help ensure—like this government likes to say—to keep, you know, food on the table.

Well, this government has done nothing but take food off the table for Manitobans. They've cut everywhere. They've cut in education; they've cut in health care. They say, oh, we've increased spending. Well, we have inflation in this country. We have inflation all over the world, and things go up and this government has never accounted for that.

They have not increased EIA benefits for Manitobans and they've sold off Manitoba Housing, and for those that don't know on the other side, Manitoba Housing is safe, affordable housing for those that can't afford to pay high rents. They take into

account 30 per cent of your income, and that's what's paid for rent.

We know that rent in Manitoba for a one bedroom is about \$1,000; for a two bedroom is \$1,200; that's just for an apartment. Try getting into a house if you have four or five kids, and now you're paying, you know, upwards of \$2,500. Well, now this government has clawed back CERB and CRB payments and have cut people off.

And the only reason Manitobans knew that they got cut off is because their landlord actually got in touch with them and said, hey, your rent hasn't been paid. And then they get in touch with their worker, which was, you know, took days for people to get a call back because they've also received cuts from this government, so there's less people working in social services that are supporting Manitobans—vulnerable Manitobans.

So, you know, this government talks about, you know, wanting to support vulnerable Manitobans, but they are just making it harder. Someone that wants to get back onto EIA that took CERB, that did cut themselves off EIA, are having to wait up to six weeks to even get a phone call—just a phone call. And that phone call tells you when your appointment is; then you go in and you see someone, and then they determine whether you can get back onto EIA or not.

If you did receive CERB payments and you did not cut yourself off, then what this government is doing is they're taking back those payments off of people's monthly EIA payments. Well, I can tell you that they're already living under the poverty line, Deputy Speaker. They're already struggling. They're struggling to keep their lights on. They're struggling to keep their kids fed. They're struggling to pay rent.

And, you know, getting on a bus to go somewhere—the member from Thompson talked about, you know, there is extra added costs to this. If someone, you know, was ill and they needed to go to the hospital or had to go and get a COVID test, well, are you going to go on a transit bus? Probably not. Chances are you're going to probably take a taxi so that you have the shield at least; you can sit in the back and you're not, you know, perhaps infecting anyone else. And you take a taxi there and then you get your test and you take a taxi back. Taxis are not cheap in this province.

The member from Seine River talked about extra supports that they provided to Main Street Project. Really? Extra supports? There has been absolutely no

extra supports. The only extra supports that this government has provided is for isolation units— isolation units for people who possibly have COVID to isolate while they get their tests back and those that have COVID, Deputy Speaker, because you can't live in a shelter when you have COVID and infect other people.

So, that is the only dollars that this government has provided, and they had to provide those funding dollars, because if they had left people in the homeless shelter with COVID, then what? This government would have been facing a lawsuit.

* (11:20)

So, when the member from Seine River says that her government has provided extra supports for vulnerable Manitobans, that's simply not true. I've had lots of contact with the shelters in this riding of Point Douglas, and there's Main Street Project, there's Siloam Mission and there's Salvation Army. And all of these shelters have been struggling. They are asking from this government for a plan that actually would put people into housing and get them out of shelters, but this government has not, you know, invested any new dollars for these shelters to be able to set up some housing.

I know there was a proposal that was put in to transform one of the hotels—it's not a drinking hotel, but it's a hotel where people rent rooms—to transform that into second-stage housing for people who were struggling with addictions that needed some extra supports to stay on that road. And this government failed to provide any funding, and that's no longer on the table.

So when we talk about, you know, supporting vulnerable Manitobans in this province, this government's track record is, you know, very shameful. You have more Manitobans now that are homeless in this province than you ever have in the 17 years that we were—and I might say, glorious years—that the NDP were in power.

And, you know, it's nice to see that, you know, some of the members across, they're shaking their heads. Well, we took care of Manitobans. We took care of our housing stock. We made sure that there was Manitoba Housing for vulnerable Manitobans that needed safe, affordable housing. And what has this government done? They've continued to sell off that housing. They've continued to make it less affordable for Manitobans and they're clawing back

benefits from people who are already living in poverty that need every single dollar.

And, Deputy Speaker, Manitobans that were on EIA used to be able to go out and volunteer. They could volunteer 100 hours and they could make up to \$200 a month. And many people on EIA were doing that. They could, you know, do that while their kids were at school; some were disabled and couldn't work full time. So that's no longer there. So they're no longer able to, you know, top up their income.

And then, here's a government who comes back and says, well, we're going to actually take a portion of your income, and we don't even know what that portion is. We've called several EIA offices. We've called the minister's office, asking what is the percentage that you are clawing back from each recipient. And we've got no answer from this government.

In fact, I actually got a letter into my office from the Families Department saying that my office can no longer advocate for people who are on EIA, that we have to go through the minister's office. Well, I can tell you, Deputy Speaker, for the last three years, we've not had to deal with that bureaucratic tape. We have been able to work collaboratively with EIA workers to get issues resolved and not have to wait, you know, six weeks to actually get on the phone and talk to a worker.

So—and these are Manitobans, you know, who have lost their housing due to CERB, have been struggling, that now find themselves homeless. And these aren't just individuals, Deputy Speaker. These are actually families who this government has now put on the street and has made homeless. So if this government wants to talk about, you know, supporting vulnerable Manitobans, put actions to words.

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

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): Certainly appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record today in regards to the livable income resolution that's in front of us today.

Just before I get into making some comments, this is the last opportunity that I'll have to speak to the House, so I would like to express best wishes and a merry Christmas to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as well as the clerks and the legislative staff, as well as all of my colleagues, the members of the official opposition.

It's been a very difficult time for us all. I know that we have different philosophies on how to address issues, but the reality is, is that we've all stepped it up and look forward to ultimately getting through this pandemic and getting on to business. So my best wishes to all for, hopefully, a peaceful Christmas.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government's goal has been to treat Manitobans in a sensible and responsible way, which we've been trying to accomplish through this whole very difficult situation. The last nine months have certainly been a situation where we've all had to sort of refocus and re-understand exactly the challenges that we've been facing.

As set out in our Throne Speech, our goal has been always to protect Manitobans, to protect our children, to protect our jobs and, certainly, the health care of the citizens of Manitoba.

Interesting comments from the member from Point Douglas. I'm a little surprised that she would indicate that there were glorious years by the previous NDP government. I certainly appreciate her vivid imagination. However, the results don't seem to support that. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 2016, the people of Manitoba indicated—I thought very aggressively—that they wanted a change of government, a change of direction, putting the Progressive Conservative government in with one of the largest majorities, if not the largest majority, in the history of Manitoba.

And then Manitoba—and then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2019, the people had an opportunity to certainly evaluate what our government has been doing and the initiatives that we've been taking, certainly to address livable incomes in Manitoba, as per this resolution. We were elected again with one of the largest majorities in Manitoba history.

So the member from Point Douglas may seem to think that there were glorious years, but obviously the people of Manitoba did not, and I think that, as per the direction of our government, we certainly can expect further support—not taking it for granted, but certainly expecting further support from the people of Manitoba, and we're humbled by the support that we have received.

The other thing here that absolutely floors me, and I brought the question up to the member when we were allowed to ask questions in regards to a resolution, is this continued effort by the NDP to indicate that we're a government that does not sympathize with livable incomes and low-income earners, but yet the people of Manitoba spoke very,

very aggressively in indicating that they didn't support PST, and yet the NDP continue to indicate that they will not support reductions in the PST, which addresses a liveable income. It absolutely amazes me that they would—they don't recognize the fact that less taxation certainly is a benefit to the people of Manitoba. I don't get it.

But, anyway, our government recognizes that this is an unprecedented time Manitoba—in Manitoba. The effects of the pandemic certainly look a lot different and certainly is challenging for all people, including those on lower incomes. We realize that and that is precisely why we are continuing to support the most vulnerable through the pandemic.

In light of this, our government has moved to make sure that those who rely on EIA benefits are able to receive one-time COVID-19 benefits without feeling the impact on their EIA financial eligibility, meaning that the EIA—which seniors or people with disabilities collect—will not be reduced based on what the individuals receive in COVID-19 benefits. Like, that's a fact.

* (11:30)

Overall, our government has made the decisions to treat CERB benefits as if we were—they were earned income under the EIA system, which has two very obvious implications.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the first is that the EIA clients who receive CERB benefits will now receive more money than they would on EIA alone. The second is that these measures ensure that the EIA clients maintain their health-care coverage, including receiving prescription drugs, dental and optical benefits.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me reiterate that our government is committed to supporting all Manitobans. For EIA clients specifically, we offer several methods of support, including a \$2.89 million for ready start work, which is a program that's been extremely successful; \$296,000 for Community Living disABILITY employment projects; \$600,000 for the Futures Forward programs for youth aging out of care; a \$3.6-million support for Manitobans through the Disability Economic Support Program.

What's more, Madam Speaker, our government has moved to make sure that individuals with disabilities who are new applicants to the EIA received the same enhanced exemptions as the existing clients. Our government is committed to realizing an easier, more fruitful process for

individuals with disabilities who have had to turn to EIA as a result of this terrible, terrible COVID-19 pandemic.

As I had said previously, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone in similar but certainly different ways. As we approach the holiday season, it's not lost on our government, or certainly not on myself, that many Manitobans this time of year have daunting challenges.

As you know, this is a government that has always been committed to fixing finances and making sure that there's more money on the Manitobans' kitchen tables. We need to have security—excuse me—we need to have security and support for families, and we have tried to do that.

Our government has made it possible for families to keep the increased Canada Child Benefit and GST rebate without feeling the impact on their EIA benefits. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a practical and sensible solution to ensuring that the vulnerable families have more money and support available to them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I certainly have a lot more in my notes but I note my time is becoming very, very short. So I just would like to end that I do understand we're in the House and we do certainly go after each other, but I can assure you that the members on our side of the House do fully understand that the challenge is out there for everyone and we are doing the best job that we feel we can.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): A few words on the resolution, one that we support because people who are vulnerable are having a lot of difficulty right now and we think that the best would be for the government to make the changes, as BC, the Yukon and Northwest Territories have done, and continue so that CERB would not be considered as income under EIA.

Let me give you a story. This is an individual who was chronically homeless for many, many years; finally was able to achieve a home, accommodation in 2016 and it made a world of difference to him. This year he was on CERB and EIA and he is now being asked by EIA to pay back the CERB payments and it will come at \$300 a month.

Now, he's on EIA, and if you claw back \$300 a month from his EIA, it is quite likely that he will end up homeless and destitute. It doesn't make any sense

at all, what this government is doing. If there has to be a clawback, if there was no other way, it should be extended over a much longer period and be no more than \$25 a month. But even that \$25 a month is a lot of money for somebody who's living marginally on EIA.

And so we need a government which has got some compassion instead of trying to give impossible bills to people who are on EIA who can't afford to have \$300 a month taken away from them.

There are, you know, a number of issues that I'd like to raise in terms of EIA, which is not operating very well—needs more staff. Access to EIA is a challenge; intake is waiting three weeks. This is ridiculous. As people can appreciate, accessing systems is very challenging for those living along riverbanks, in stairwells, in derelict buildings, in encampments, in bus shelters. Rapid access to EIA is a critical step to successfully linking people who are homeless to any level of housing.

The current EIA intake system is not user-friendly for those who live homeless. Access to EIA is currently remote, requiring individual calls to request an intake appointment. Many, if not most experiencing homelessness don't have access to a phone.

Further, the current public health order has closed public spaces that may have otherwise allowed homeless individuals use of phones or computers to connect with EIA or other supports. Those providing street-level services to this population also face challenges. Thrift stores are being closed, when that's one of their vital access to health and to clothing.

COVID-19 prevention protocols prevent the sharing of cellphones, and privacy legislation requires direct communication between EIA and the EIA applicant. Under these conditions the current EIA system and its processes have become a significant barrier to assisting those who, more than any other time in our living history, need to be able to access systems on an immediate basis.

The government needs to act urgently and swiftly to get rapid access to EIA. The system is not working right now. There needs to be, within 24 hours, immediate access to EIA, and then individuals can, hopefully, get housing beyond that. But getting EIA is so critical, and access to housing requires EIA, essentially, and so without EIA functioning well, we have a big, big problem.

One of the results of the lack of people who are homeless having access to EIA and to housing is that COVID now appears to be spreading rapidly in the homeless population. We understand that, of the isolation units, the first two blocks are now full, and that 140 units—or 138 additional units are now being available. This—these individuals are referred either because they are positive for COVID or because they're awaiting a test result, and most test results are coming back today, fortunately, a little more quickly.

So I think that the majority of people in these places will be those who have been positive for COVID. That's a lot of people testing positive. The government is not taking account or reporting the number of people who are associated with homeless shelters or are homeless in their accounts, so that the people who are homeless have become not only homeless, they have become nameless in the reports being provided by the public officer of health. Because they are not being mentioned, they are overlooked. There needs to be an accounting.

The public health officer, Dr. Roussin, reported, just in the paper as this morning, as it was reported, that there is a widespread community-based transmission disproportionately affecting some of the lower income quintiles, disproportionately affecting those where there is housing insecurity, those who are homeless.

* (11:40)

So in a veiled way, Dr. Roussin has referred to the fact that this exists, but we have no numbers; we have no accurate reporting. This must change. The government has to get on board, has to pay attention to those who are homeless, has to start counting people who are getting COVID-infected who are

homeless and reporting that, and has to start getting EIA working quickly and rapidly and well for people who are homeless so they can be helped.

The situation at the moment is just not tolerable. It's inexcusable that the government could have let this go as they have, and it's inexcusable that they are now forcing people who are on EIA to pay back CERB. And what I'm hearing, that a number of these, and perhaps many of these, are being rendered homeless and exacerbating the very population, or the very problem, that we're seeking to address.

As I found, when I visited people in Medicine Hat, who have had a much better success rate dealing with those who are homeless, the—it's much cheaper to keep somebody housed than to have them become homeless and then start all over again.

So with those few words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will wind up. We support this resolution and hope it passes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. James (Mr. Sala)? No.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It gives me great pleasure this morning to put a few words on the record in regards to this resolution from the member from Thompson, who I'd like to congratulate her for bringing forward a resolution as a newly elected MLA in this incredible, incredible province of ours, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. When this matter's before the House, the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet will have 10 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 3, 2020

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