

**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**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
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, Hon.	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, Hon.	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, Hon.	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	Wolseley	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

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

*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.

### Speaker's Statement

**Madam Speaker:** And I have a statement for the House.

I am advising the House that I have received a letter from the member for River Heights and the Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) indicating that the member for River Heights has identified Bill 217, The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act, as his selected bill for this session.

As a reminder to the House, rule 24 permits each independent member to select one private members' bill per session to proceed to a second reading vote, and requires the Government House Leader and the independent member to provide written notice as to the date and time of the debate and the vote.

I have been advised then that Bill 217 will be debated today, Tuesday, March 19th, 2021, at 10 a.m., with the question to be put at 10:55 a.m. this morning.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

#### SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

#### Bill 217—The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act

**Madam Speaker:** Accordingly, I will now call second reading of Bill 217, The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** I move, seconded by the MLA for St. Boniface, that Bill 217, The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative et la Loi sur la Commission de régie de l'Assemblée législative, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

#### Motion presented.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Madam Speaker, Bill 217 is to address a longstanding need to change the definition of what is a recognized opposition party in order to have better democracy, better government and better results for Manitobans. In an important sense, the current rules around official 'party'-party status defy reality and depend on a fiction that MLAs who run together on the same banner, for the same party, and elected together, work together and vote together are all independents.

Political parties are essential in our democracy. They bring people together in a common cause. Recognizing what constitutes a recognized political party is a cornerstone of democracy in our province. Recognized political parties have privileges, including the right to speak on ministers' statements without leave, the right to be represented as members on legislative committees, the ability to ensure they have a proportionate share of questions in Estimates, and many more.

We have many rules and procedures in this House, many of them important, meaningful and justified by past practice, but the reason for choosing four seats is not known. It appears to be arbitrary, especially when compared to other provinces. It is time it is revisited in order to better reflect the current reality.

If we look across Canada, we see the following. In British Columbia, the Green Party was granted official party status with three seats in a legislature of 87 members; in Alberta, the NDP was granted official party status with two seats in 1997, in 2001 and in 2008, in a legislature of 87 MLAs; in Saskatchewan, official party status is provided for a party of two seats in a legislature with 61; in Nova Scotia, a party with two seats get—gets official party status, provided the party ran candidates in three-quarters of the

constituencies and received at least 10 per cent of the overall vote, in a legislature with 51 seats; in Prince Edward Island, the precedent is that a party of one will receive official party status in a legislature with 27 seats; in Newfoundland and Labrador, official party status is with two seats out of 40; in New Brunswick, the Green Party has received official party status with three MLAs, and the People's Alliance received official party status with two seats.

This means that Manitoba has set a higher bar for party status than other provinces. It's time to change the approach to deciding the criteria for official party status in Manitoba to make it similar to what's happening in other provinces, which most commonly would be a party with two seats, as is present in six other provinces, which is most other provinces of a similar size to Manitoba.

In Bill 217 we will also require that, for a party to have official party status, that the party must receive more than 10 per cent of the votes cast in the most recent provincial election. There is an important distinction here. It means that two or three MLAs who are independents would not simply be able to declare themselves a party without popular support or running for election first to establish a mandate. Floor crossing would still be allowed.

Indeed, any party in Manitoba which receives 10 per cent of the vote is one which represents a large number of Manitobans. In the most recent provincial election, as an example, Manitoba Liberals received 14.5 per cent of the popular vote. This is just over a percentage point less than the 15.98 per cent of the vote that the NDP received at the federal level.

And, like the NDP at the federal level, the popular support we received is much greater than the number of seats: 14.5 per cent of the current population of Manitoba is about 200,000 Manitobans. It is important that the views of 200,000 Manitobans are well represented in our Legislative Chamber. This is what democracy is about. Without official party status, the views of 200,000 Manitobans are not able to be adequately represented.

It is to be noted that if the seats in the Manitoba Legislature were allocated in proportion to the vote for each party, as happens in some jurisdictions with proportional representation, then the Manitoba Liberals would have received eight seats in the Manitoba Legislature.

The distortions of our first-past-the-post system are well known. Underrepresentation of a party like

the Manitoba Liberals with seats in the Chamber is another reason why it is appropriate for the party to receive official party status.

\* (10:10)

In fact, we believe that at the time this definition of official party status was first created in the 1920s to the 1950s, Manitoba had a different electoral system. We had ranked ballots. Winnipeg—in Winnipeg, people voted for their MLAs on a list, and the people with the most votes won: proportional representation.

The fact that we have a first-past-the-post system means that the fundamental electoral system that elected MLAs has changed since this rule was established, but the rule has not changed. Supporting this legislation is thus important for all parties and is important for democracy. It's also important to achieving better outcomes for all Manitobans.

It has been said, especially in politics, that there are three sides to every story. We recognize, though we disagree with the other parties, that they make valuable contributions to debate, policy and legislation. We are proud of the fact that Manitoba Liberal legislative contributions, ideas and bills, which the NDP and the PCs alike have chosen to adopt and call their own.

There is real value in democracy, in society, in business, in government, to have more voices and more perspectives. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Gerrard:** This is a Legislature where the vote and voice of a single MLA has changed the course of our history. Elijah Harper is just one example.

As MLAs, we all depend on our constituents to bring us new information and new perspectives. Expanding and modernizing the definition of official party status means greater inclusion.

I will add, finally, that there is no financial component to this bill, nor is it essential. This is simply about expanding and enhancing democracy in this Legislature, something I hope we can all agree on.

I hope this bill will receive the support from members of the Legislature of all parties so that it can proceed to committee stage.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

### Questions

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

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

And for those members that are wishing to ask questions remotely, it would be very helpful if you would contact the moderator to let them know that you are cueing up for asking a question remotely.

**Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** Well, I would ask my colleague—he's been here long enough—I would ask him why, out of all of the bills that he could have brought forward, in the midst of a global pandemic, Madam Speaker, where people are suffering—Manitobans are suffering a lot from what those folks—that get-along gang over there—have been doing for Manitobans—

**An Honourable Member:** You'd know about gangs.

**Ms. Fontaine:** —but why bring forward, on the one day that they have—maybe for the whole sitting—a bill that is so self-serving?

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Yes. Madam Speaker, the answer is quite simple.

Liberals have important questions to ask—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Liberals—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Gerrard:** —have important questions to ask in Estimates, and last fall, we saw a shemozzle when the NDP gave us very little time to ask any questions. We clearly need to have the ability to ask questions in Estimates, which is proportionate to the number of seats we hold.

That's why—one of the reasons why, during COVID, when it is so important to keep this government to account and to ask questions, that the Liberal Party has official party status.

Thank you.

**Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye):** I know, typically, when somebody brings a bill forward, they usually do a lot of consulting before they do.

I would ask the member who he consulted when drafting this bill?

**Mr. Gerrard:** Madam Speaker, we talked with people across Canada to find out what the situation

was in other provinces. We talked to—as we went door to door in the last several elections, for me—talked to people at the door, and they have voiced strongly the need for the Liberal Party to be a louder voice. And this is what we—one of the reasons why it is important that the Liberal Party, in this instance, has official party status.

But you have to remember that the numbers of any party can go up and down. Wasn't too long ago that the Conservatives had only two party—two members, federally. There may be a time when the NDP and the Conservatives will be glad this resolution came forward.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I do just want to put it on the record here that the Minister for Justice, in response to my last question, heckled and said that I would know about gangs.

I would actually ask the minister to get up and apologize or explain why I, as an Indigenous woman, would know about gangs. That is extremely disrespectful and shameful coming from somebody in such a position of privilege. Disgusting.

So, Madam Speaker, shouldn't the Liberals be focused on electing more members rather than changing the rules for their benefit?

**Mr. Gerrard:** We are indeed focused on 'elecshing' more members.

And one of the important things that we want to achieve, so that we can show Manitobans that we are worthy of having more members, is to be able to be fairly treated in this Legislature, to be able to have our voice heard. And this is a part of that effort.

It is not all the effort; we are doing many, many other things to get more Liberals elected. But it is also important while we are in the current situation—there's no by-elections right now—to make sure we're addressing democracy in this province.

**Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Turtle Mountain):** Madam Speaker, can the member opposite speak on how these changes would impact the financial position of his caucus?

**Mr. Gerrard:** The—first of all, this bill is not a money bill. It will have no impact on—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Gerrard:** —the number of staff that we have; it will have no impact on any salary that the Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party might have. This is purely

a bill to provide a rearrangement of what is official party status.

It is a bill which recognizes that the situation has changed across Canada, that every other province of our size now requires only two or three elected members to have official party status. And it's time that Manitoba keeps up with the times and keeps up with what's happening in other provinces.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** I just wanted to ask the member whether there were any petitions or the number people who we've—petitions we've had signed in support of this measure.

**Mr. Gerrard:** We have had many petitions signed in support of this measure, and it's an important sign that there is substantial support.

We have had many people come to us and say, you know, the situation is not fair in the Manitoba Legislature; we don't have proportional representation. But—we accept we don't have proportional representation but, within the system we have, we can move to a position which is much closer to other provinces, where parties with two and three seats will have official party status.

**Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River):** If this bill becomes law in Manitoba, when would you expect these changes to take place?

\* (10:20)

**Mr. Gerrard:** The bill is written so that it—the act comes into force on the day it receives royal assent. That would be whenever this bill received royal assent.

Thank you.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I do want to just refer back to the member for St. Boniface's question about petitions.

Wouldn't it make sense that if you actually did have quite a few Manitobans that supported this, wouldn't you have had thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of signatures, and wouldn't that translate into actual votes, where you would have gained more seats?

And so I would ask the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard): How is there not that translation into votes that would ultimately give more seats here in the House?

**Mr. Gerrard:** As I pointed out earlier, the Manitoba Liberals received 14.5 per cent of the vote. That was some approximately 70,000 votes but, in fact, for—as

a representation of the whole population of Manitoba, that would be representing about 200,000 people.

And so, yes, whether it be on this petition or on other petitions which we are circulating, we are building support and we are getting more and more people realizing that the Manitoba Liberal Party is a major option in this province.

**Ms. Morley-Lecomte:** Independent members of the House already have a lot of power, including the ability to block unanimous consent.

Can you describe how you vetoed the agreement on the distribution of the bills last session?

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes. There was a major problem in this Legislature last fall, in that a whole lot of bills were distributed at first reading and—but the bills were not tabled.

And we now have a very interesting situation where the government yesterday sent out two press releases saying that they had just introduced two bills yesterday. Two separate press releases saying they'd introduced bills, but in fact they introduced them at first reading four months ago.

The government shouldn't try and cover up what they've done by suggesting they introduced them yesterday, when they actually introduced them—

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

**Ms. Fontaine:** Could the member provide us with the names of the people and organizations outside the Liberal membership that are actually supporting this bill?

**Mr. Gerrard:** Madam Speaker, there are many, many people, as I've already talked, who've expressed this keenness to have this bill passed through signing petitions.

There are many people who we have talked with and met with who have—support this, and that includes groups of people. This is an idea which has been readily accepted in other provinces with similar or slightly larger sizes than Manitoba, but it is now an idea which needs to be accepted in this province as well. And that's why we're bringing forward this bill.

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

### Debate

**Madam Speaker:** Debate is open.

The honourable member for St. John's—actually, I think the order for this debate—*[interjection]*—that's right.

And I would therefore call the honourable member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter)—oh, the honourable member for La Vérendrye.

**Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye):** Before I get started with my comments on Bill 217, I would like to welcome everyone back to this third session of the 42nd Legislature.

To you, Madam Speaker, to the clerks and the rest of the legislative staff that is—have made this Legislature work as smooth as it does, even in the middle of a pandemic, I thank you.

To the members opposite: I look forward to working with you. I know we disagree on some issues, but we do have a lot of legislation to be debated and I hope you use this time wisely to debate, not delay, this legislation.

Madam Speaker, it is an honour to be in this Legislature today and be able to put some words on record in regards to Bill 217, The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act, brought forward by the MLA for River Heights.

Madam Speaker, this bill changes the definitions for a political group to be recognized as a recognized opposition party and other opposition party, lowering the limit to be recognized to at least two members elected, if that group received at least 10 per cent of all the valid votes cast in the general election. This new definition would apply to both The Legislative Assembly Management Commission Act and the Legislative Assembly Act.

Madam Speaker, I listened to the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) when he asked questions during question period or he is speaking to a bill. He focuses a lot on health care. He is very passionate about health care, and I give him credit for that.

I would ask the member for River Heights why the Manitoba Liberal Party would want their one selected bill for the session, the one they want to come to a vote, is not health care related but is one to give the Liberal Party party status or, in reality, more money, which we all know that they say it's not a money bill but, in the end, it does result in more cost to the Legislature.

After the 2019 Manitoba general election, the Manitoba Liberals lost their official party status. They

failed to win the four seats required to be an official party. Madam Speaker, we all know that there are benefits that are provided to members who are part of an official party. This status includes research staff, additional time in question period and participating in a vote at committee meetings. I can see why the Manitoba Liberals brought this bill forward. They miss the perks of official party status.

Madam Speaker, the current legislation that defines the status of official party was drafted almost 100 years ago and it may be time to revisit this legislation. Our PC government is always willing to have a conversation about improving how our democracy functions.

As politicians, we cannot make these decisions alone. We need to involve Manitobans. We need to hear from the public what their thoughts are. If changes are to be made to this legislation, we need to make sure that any changes made will be for the benefit of Manitobans in having their voices heard in government.

Madam Speaker, the current legislation has worked for almost 100 years, and if changes are to be made, they should be lasting changes. We cannot be going into this legislation every few years to make changes just to please a political party's wants and needs.

Madam Speaker, this bill will have financial implications for the Legislature. There will be a need to make changes to the rules of the House and for L-A-C—LAMC. If any changes are to be made, we need to make sure that these changes are for the right reasons. We need to make sure that all stakeholders are heard from.

I would be fine with allowing Bill 217 to move on from second reading. This would allow for more public input into this bill.

I'm sure that there are a number of other MLAs wanting to speak, so with these few words, I will give up the floor to others so they may give their comments.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** Well, Bill 217, The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act—it's quite a mouthful. But actually, you know, for those folks that are watching or are trying to figure out what Bill 217 is in all of those

words, it is simply a self-serving bill for the independent members in this Chamber right now.

\*(10:30)

And as I stated earlier in one of my questions, in all of the bills that the Liberal independent members could bring forward to Legislative Counsel and bring forward to this House to introduce and have us debate in the midst of a global pandemic, the three Liberal independent members chose to bring a bill that would only serve them.

I think that that is pretty indicative of where they are currently situated and the things that really matter to them, that, in the midst of a global pandemic, you would try to bring forward—you'd try to force legislation in respect of changing the rules of the House.

I would say this, Madam Speaker: there are other avenues for the Liberal independent members to try and gain official party status. They can call the rules committee, or try and get a rules committee, or try to participate in a rules committee and have some of those rules changed by agreement of the House, by consensus.

But I think that it's pretty egregious to be sitting here today, on the very limited time that they have to actually bring forward their private members' bills, and have them voted on—I don't know if the public realizes that when we, you know, have opportunities for private members' business, that's only once every week in the morning.

And it's only for one hour, as opposed to the afternoon, where sometimes you can have a couple of hours to debate a bill. But private members' bills, you only are given one hour. And this was the bill that the Liberal independent members brought forward.

You know, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) says that this bill is about enhancing democracy. I would submit to the House that democracy is actually going out, meeting the electorate, talking to the electorate and ensuring that the electorate actually understands what you stand for, what your platform is, what your commitment and your dedication is, and have those same very people vote for you, and elect you in this Chamber. That's what democracy is.

I would suggest that every single member in this House has gone out, done the work, and been elected. It's incumbent on those folks to get more seats for their parties. That's what elections are about. You have to work hard; you've got to put the time in; you have to

have the platform and the dedication and the commitments that Manitobans want from those that they elect.

And so, you know, I don't buy and I reject that Bill 217 is about enhancing democracy. If the Liberal independent members really want to enhance democracy—and—as I've said in the past: get out there and work harder, and earn those seats and win those seats.

Again, you know, as well, the member for River Heights says that the bill—and he's not wrong, there's no dollars attached to this private members' bill, he's not wrong in that sense, in the letter of the bill. However, we know that that's not true, Madam Speaker, because let's just say, you know, all the stars aligned and then Bill 217 somehow, by some miracle, the Liberals got 217 passed—and again, let me stress, by some miracle, that 217 got passed—you can bet your bottom dollar that the next thing the Liberal independent members would do was they would come to LAMC and they would start asking for those additional dollars that go to—directly to the member for St. Boniface's (Mr. Lamont) salary.

Because then the member for St. Boniface would be officially—in these areas, in this Chamber—considered the leader, an official leader of a party. And I think, if I'm correct, I think that's a raise of \$50,000.

**An Honourable Member:** Ah. Well, maybe he can afford a necktie then.

**Ms. Fontaine:** And I don't disagree that maybe he would remember to put on a necktie, then.

But, at any rate, he would get a \$50,000 raise. He would come to LAMC and immediately ask for that money.

What else would they get? Well, they'd come to LAMC, they'd ask for bigger offices; they'd ask for more staff, which costs money; they would ask for more dollars that goes towards their caucus, which costs money.

And so, I don't buy—and no Manitoban should buy—that this has nothing to do with money. This Bill 217 has everything to do with money. It has everything to do with the member of St. Boniface wanting his salary increased by \$50,000. It has everything to do with the Liberal independent members wanting more staff and more money for their folks. So I would—I suggest to Manitobans not to buy what's being sold here in the Chamber today.



You know, I—it's important to recognize that, you know, to be—to lower the threshold in these chambers, in this Legislative Assembly, at what constitutes an official party is problematic. It's particularly problematic, Madam Speaker, when we know over the years that the liberal—the Manitoba Liberals in this Chamber have had a hard time actually keeping their members. We know that there have been members over the years that keep jumping ship from the Liberal Party that keeps sinking here.

And we know don't know. Like, so you're going to keep every—after every election or every time a Liberal member jumps ship, you're going to keep trying to lower that threshold on what constitutes an official party? I mean, Madam Speaker, to be honest, we don't know if any of the three Liberal independent members might not jump ship very, very soon to run for federal politics in the next federal election.

We don't know if that's going to happen. It could very well happen. And so then, you know, if, let's just say, there was, you know, a Liberal member that jumped ship and decided to run federally and all of a sudden the Liberals are down to two members in the Chamber, then does the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) come back with, you know, bill 17, 2.0, and said well, you know, the threshold should be even lower than that now, the official party status should be if you've got two members elected?

What does that say for the rest of us that work our butts off to get our—to get members elected in this House by doing the work on the ground, in elections, every opportunity that there is?

So again, Madam Speaker, this bill is incredibly self-serving. It's incredibly self-serving in the midst of a global pandemic.

And, you know, right after this, in the next little bit, we're going to have private members' resolutions and we're going to be debating—or we're going to be acknowledging those that have been on the front lines during this pandemic.

I would have suggested—or I would have thought, at this particular juncture in our history, that the Liberals would be more concerned with putting some type of legislation that maybe officially recognizes all of those that worked on the front lines during this pandemic: all of those Manitobans that worked in the hospitals in a variety of different capacities; or all of those Manitobans that worked in essential service businesses or essential service in its totality; all of

those that drove the buses; that work within our city services.

I would have thought that Liberals would have put forward a bill that would have maybe determined an official day in Manitoba where we recognize and we say thank you to those individuals, but no, you know, the same individuals who have, you know, a member in their caucus who is, you know, apparently the leader of their caucus, who can't even remember to wear a tie when they come into the Leg., it shows you how little the rules of this House and the protocols of this House are taken seriously by the independent Liberal members.

So, Madam Speaker, I mean, I think it's—I've made it pretty clear: we're not in favour and we're not going to be supporting Bill 217. The Liberals could have done a lot better by using their time—their very, very limited time in this House—say, for putting forward a bill that is only meant to self-serve and only meant to give a raise to the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont).

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain):** Madam Speaker, I'm honoured to put a few words about the Bill 217, The Legislative Assembly Amendment and the Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act.

You know, I just want to first welcome everybody back from a long winter. I know with COVID, you know, we were, you know, looking at a—possibly a bleak winter and—which was great. We had the great weather and it made time—the winter go by fast. And now we're back in March and we're looking at vaccines. So I'm hoping that we can all get together in the Chamber in the next number of months here before we get back to recess for the summer.

\* (10:40)

But I want to thank the staff at the Legislature for doing all the great work. I know we—Madam Speaker, you and I, we were actually on a presiding conference back in the fall with the Zoom meeting, and we were in the forefront when it come to our Legislature, how we were able to do Zoom. And so I really appreciate all the work that everyone has done in the Legislature, including yourself, Madam Speaker.

Going back to speaking on Bill 217, I guess it really struck a nerve for the member from St. Johns when it comes to a self-serving bill, that she indicated to the member from River Heights. Well, people in

glass houses should not be throwing stones when it comes to saying those comments. Even to go after—personally—after a person mistakenly not putting a tie on, she makes a point about saying that this situation is disrespectful to the Legislature. What about her heckling and yelling across and screaming? This is a really serious debate and we should take this serious, not going after somebody personally.

Madam Speaker, when it comes to this bill, you know, there is some comments there like, there is—what I would have to put on the record here is that, when it comes to official party status, I know in the past there is an increase in salary for the leader. What happens then if they get, you know, Liberals go back to the situation where there was only one member? Do they want to review this again when—if this is ever passed down to two members as official party status? That is a concern that I have.

The other thing is, why is it two, why not three is another question I would have for the member from River Heights. Because again, you know—want to make sure that, you know, if you look at other legislatures, I believe it's three, not two.

You know, I know everybody has to work hard. The member from St. Johns, I'll give—she did mention about, you know, you just have to go out there and campaign harder and make sure that you win seats in the Legislature. That's what it's all about. This is what the whole thing about democracy is, is making sure that your party is a well-oiled machine that goes out during campaign time and actually wins as many seats as they can. Getting great candidates, that's what it's all about.

And the Liberals have the opportunity to do that, much like the other parties, our official parties, PC Party of Manitoba, to the NDP party of Manitoba, too. They do have the opportunity to work hard and win those seats.

So, I would say that. The other thing was too, I remember the member from St. Boniface—actually, when he first became an MLA, he actually made an issue about his offices. And I remember the thing was, he wanted bigger offices. He actually decided that this is what he wanted and he made demands to the Legislature. I know, Madam Speaker, you probably had to listen to his demands for that.

But getting back to the bill here, you know, again, we respect, you know, the work that, you know, everybody does in this Legislature. We respect the opposition when they—when it comes to debates. I

think now, with the official opposition, we struck a nerve there because I feel that if this is a—if they're official status, they get more air time to ask more questions. And you know, that one might not be a bad idea after all.

So, Madam Speaker, I'm probably going to pass the opportunity for other people to put words on the record here for this bill, and I want to thank you for my time, and everyone have a good day.

**Madam Speaker:** Are there any—*[interjection]*

Yes, the honourable member for St. James. I'm sorry, it's not identified on my list.

**Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James):** Happy to have a chance to speak to Bill 217, which seeks to amend The Legislative Assembly Act and The Legislative Assembly Management Commission Act. That is a mouthful.

We know this bill would seek to change the definition of a recognized party and would help to offer the Liberals official party status. And I think it's clear to most Manitobans what this bill is really all about, and it's a response to the fact that the Liberals once had four members and now they only have three. And so, clearly, what's being put forward here has serious implications for the province, and we need to talk about some of those implications here today.

Now, Manitobans want to ensure that these types of decisions are made in the best interest of the province and not to be driven just by the interests of one party. And, as has already been mentioned, I think there's a lot of reason to be concerned here that, in the midst of a pandemic—we're still struggling to fight COVID.

We've got businesses that are failing, we've got people who aren't able to access the health-care supports that they need, we still have huge numbers of Manitobans that are being put at risk due to this virus—that the Liberal Party has chosen, instead of putting forward a bill that would be focused on improving the lot for Manitobans, improving life for people in this province, they've focused inward and they've focused instead on improving their lot as the independent Liberal Party. And that's, frankly, concerning and it's shocking to see how self-serving it is to put forward a bill like this at a time like this when there are a lot of other really important things at play in this province.

You know, we know that this isn't the first time that the Liberals have brought forward a bill of this nature, and it seems that this happens every time that

their situation changes, that there's a desire to change the goal posts to meet their needs so that they can regain official party status in this province.

Again, as my colleague mentioned, while this—while the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) suggested this bill has nothing to do with money, we know the implications of this and it is all about money. It's about increasing their access to funding, increasing their access to staffing. And, frankly, those benefits should come to parties who've worked for it and have demonstrated to Manitobans that they have a vision that's worth supporting.

So who knows, you know, if this bill doesn't pass, we'll see after the next election probably another bill, maybe one that would allow them official party status with only one member. Who knows what they'll bring forward. What we do know is that they are constantly looking to shift goal posts and move them to suit their needs no matter what the broader situation that our province is facing.

So I think most Manitobans would expect that to make these kind of changes to gain official party status, that we have to work for it, that we have to speak to our vision, we have to put forward a compelling set of policies that make Manitobans want to support you, want to support your party, want to support your vision, and that we shouldn't be legislating our move to official party status.

We should be working for it, hitting the doorstep, talking to voters, not putting forward a bill that will help to give a leader a \$50,000 raise, help to increase their staff complement without any complementary vision or set of policies that have inspired Manitobans to support them.

You know, and frankly, one of the main reasons the Liberal Party is in this situation is because their MLAs leave. One of their MLAs left. We know that Ms. Klassen left in 2019, and that took the Liberal caucus from four members to three which, of course, removed them from having official party status. And this has happened before. This happened in 1997, when two Liberal MLAs also left that caucus and became independent.

So it seems as though the Liberal Party here, the independent Liberal Party of Manitoba, has an issue retaining MLAs in their fold for whatever reason. We don't know what that reason is, but we do know that that's a problem and it's an issue that they continue to face, and instead of, again, fighting to put forward a compelling vision, to bring in great quality candidates

and to sell that vision to Manitobans, instead of doing that work and expanding their caucus to four, we're instead seeing them use this kind of a legislative tactic to try to change their situation.

And we know, again, if this passes—they've protested against this or they've tried to make an argument today that this isn't about money, that this is about enhancing democracy, but this is about money. This is about increasing their access to funding, This is about increasing their ability to get more staffing.

And frankly, the impacts in terms of their ability to have bigger presence in the House are enormous. That's a real concern given that it just doesn't seem like they've done their work. It doesn't seem like they've made the case to Manitobans that they're a party who deserves to have that bigger voice in the Legislature, that they deserve to be a bigger presence in committee hearings and responses to throne speeches and all the important things that happen on the day-to-day in the Legislature.

I think, if we step back, I think a bigger question that a lot of Manitobans might wonder about here is why the Liberals should deserve official party status given that there isn't really a lot of clarity on what they stand for. I know as an MLA, as a relatively new MLA, I've often—I've heard members of the Liberal caucus seeming to ride both sides of the line depending on how the day suits them. And I don't think that—I think that that's an opinion that a lot of Manitobans share, and certainly a lot of Manitobans that I speak with would agree that they're just not really quite sure what the Liberal Party is arguing for, who they're fighting for, what it is that they're—what their policies are. It's not a lot of clarity on who they're representing.

\*(10:50)

And I think that's an important issue, I think, that they need to resolve, which is to create clarity for Manitobans on what it is that they are seeking to enact, what is it that they're fighting for in our province. And a lot of Manitobans, I think, are just generally confused about that, and maybe that's why the party's having some struggles in bringing on board more support and bringing more Manitobans into the fold that will support them and ultimately help them get to that official party status and get to four caucus members.

And I would urge the members of the independent Liberal Party to consider thinking that through and thinking through maybe that's a better path towards

achieving official party status. Maybe it's through hard work, through hitting the doorstep, through making the case to Manitobans through that outreach and through determining a vision that resonates with Manitobans. And I would argue that they just quite haven't figured that out yet.

And so, you know, we've heard a lot of high-minded arguments today from the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) about why this is important, why this will help to enhance our democracy here in Manitoba, but Manitobans understand what this is about. It's about an easy path towards getting them more money, towards helping them to get more staffing, and fundamentally, this is about the failure of the independent Liberal Party to inspire Manitobans. It's about their failure to bring more Manitobans into the fold to support them.

And I would argue that the most important thing that the Liberal Party can do here in the province is to work out what that vision is, to get on the doorstep, to do that hard work. And maybe it's through that path that they can finally find their way back to having a bigger voice in the Legislature, to having a bigger presence in the day-to-day affairs of the Legislature and to ultimately, you know, do that work. And so I would argue that that's important and that's maybe the best path forward here.

So I can say we won't be supporting this piece of legislation for all the reasons mentioned by myself or with my colleague for St. James, and look forward to seeing the Liberal Party maybe do the work that's required to get them to the end state that they seem to so strongly desire.

Thank you so much, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** That was entertaining, Madam Speaker.

I will point out—I'll make a number of corrections over some of the very misleading statements that have been made—or, just correct the facts that so many people are maybe misunderstanding.

For example, I'll just say part of the history of the Manitoba Liberal Party, we actually—our government brought in votes for women. We brought in votes for all First Nations.

And when it comes to losing MLAs, I'm very proud to say that, whether it was under Jon Gerrard or any other—myself or any other leader, we never had to kick any of our MLAs out of caucus for their misbehaviour, for harassing and abusing people. So

that's something I think we can be all be very proud of, which is—I think that's something that the other parties can't say.

This is about democracy, and the—frank—it's incredibly undemocratic to suggest—

#### Point of Order

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Ms. Fontaine), on a point of order.

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Yes, you know, as a—

**Madam Speaker:** Sorry, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Kinew:** Thank you.

I was just listening to the member's commentary, and I think we all know that every person has an inalienable human right to participate in our democracy.

It's a sad history that, at various points in time, our country has not recognized this right for women, for First Nations people, for newcomers and for other groups. However, I would hope that the member who is speaking before the House at this moment is not in some way trying to claim partisan credit for recognizing what has always been self-evident. To put it more plainly, no one should be trying to claim partisan credit for recognizing the fact that women should always have the right to vote, that First Nations people should always have the right to vote, that newcomers should always have the right to vote.

So I wanted to put that point on the record and invite the member who is speaking to correct his commentary and reflect the self-evident, universal, inalienable human rights that we all enjoy now, forevermore, and always have through the past.

**Madam Speaker:** The—I would respectfully indicate that the member does not have a point of order. It is more of a dispute over the facts than a breach of the rules.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Lamont:** I'm more than happy to make the comment that—

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please. Order, please.

According to our rules now, according—in accordance with rule 24 and as previously announced,

I'm interrupting debate to put the question on the honourable member for River Heights' selected bill.

The question before the House, then, is second reading of Bill 217, The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Madam Speaker:** I hear a no.

#### Voice Vote

**Madam Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

**Some Honourable Members:** Aye.

**Madam Speaker:** All those opposed, please say nay.

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**Madam Speaker:** In my opinion, the Ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

\* \* \*

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Is it the will of the House to call it 11 a.m.?

**Madam Speaker:** Is there the will of the House to call it 11 a.m.? [*Agreed*]

### RESOLUTIONS

#### Res. 11—Expressing Thanks and Gratitude to All Those Who have Carried Us Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Madam Speaker:** The hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolutions. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution brought forward by the honourable member for River Heights on expressing thanks and gratitude to all those who have carried us through the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** I move, seconded by the MLA for St. Boniface, that,

*WHEREAS the province is marking a year since the declaration of a global pandemic, and the arrival of the first case of COVID-19 in Manitoba; and*

*WHEREAS the disease itself, and the measures required to combat it, have required extraordinary efforts on the part of all Manitobans; and*

*WHEREAS workers from all industry sectors have gone above and beyond, and the people who keep the province running every day such as grocery store workers and delivery drivers, teachers, EAs and early childhood educators, farmers, and Manitoba manufacturers who stepped up to be bold and innovative with personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies; and*

*WHEREAS many Manitobans, including artists and performers, have been unable to work and have contributed to the safety of others, sacrificing income and opportunity; and*

*WHEREAS countless Manitobans from every walk of life have risen to the challenge, pushing themselves to the brink to provide care for their fellow Manitobans; and*

*WHEREAS it has also been a time of suffering and loss, especially for the families of those who lost their lives to COVID.*

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba formally express its thanks and gratitude to the people of Manitoba who have come together during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### *Motion presented.*

**Mr. Gerrard:** Madam Speaker, it has been a year since the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Manitoba on March 12th, 2020. The disease itself and the measures required to combat it have required extraordinary efforts by all Manitobans. With all that we, as Manitobans, have been through in the last year, it is time to say thanks to all who have helped in our efforts to survive and to do well—as well as we can during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many of those we thank are unsung heroes, people who, for example, kept our food supply moving so that we were not short of food. This includes everyone to farmers, to those involved in food processing, to truckers who deliver the food to stores and to those who work in retail outlets.

\* (11:00)

Less than a block from my constituency office is a Food Fare store, and I can attest to their always being there. I can attest to the changes that may—they and many other food service providers have made to ensure safety, including, for example Plexiglas screens in front of the desk at the cash register.

There are many more essential services that have continued to function. We thank the police, fire-fighters, security personnel and many others. Thanks also to teachers, who have managed under conditions which often changed quickly, from virtual to in-class—and sometimes both at the same time—and the cleaning crews and the office managers who all helped with the extra chores. I know students have appreciated your efforts even when sometimes things were not going perfectly.

Retail stores have been there for us with essential items, from toothbrushes to razors and many others. Pharmacies have made sure people can get their medications that they need. Hair salons and fast-food outlets have been open when they could.

Health-care workers across a wide spectrum have pitched in to do their best, even when, as Winnipeg doctor Jill Horton has emphasized in her book just published, *We Are All Perfectly Fine*, she said being a doctor is hard work. We thank you. We thank all doctors.

Nurses—including registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and psychiatric nurses and health-care aides—have stepped up again and again and again and often work more overtime than they wanted. We thank you. We thank you.

We thank, as well, the allied health workers, respiratory therapists, laboratory technicians, physio-therapists, athletic therapists, chiropractors, dentists, massage therapists, contact tracers, COVID testers and the cleaning staff who work hard to keep us all safe in these spaces.

There are an incredible number of people who have shifted their services and how they deliver them. A yoga provider in River Heights pivoted online as soon as we were initially locked down. To her amazement, she found herself providing yoga classes not just in Winnipeg but across North America.

We owe a big thank you to those who have collected the garbage, never missing a day, all through the pandemic. We owe a thank you to those who cleared the snow in winter and made our streets and sidewalks safe.

For many others, it was not easy or not possible to go online or change directions easily; it has been tough.

We thank the poets and the artists and the performers, many of whom who have tried to entertain us in new ways, singing for balconies on YouTube,

for example. But too often, they have not been able to work and they have been struggling to survive.

Thanks also to those who have worked in industries which were severely affected, from airlines to travel agents to hotels to tattoo artists, to many school-bus drivers.

Thanks to everyone who put on a mask and carefully social distanced for so long and who continues to do so.

Thanks to those who understood the mental stresses and strains happening during the pandemic and stepped forward to help others.

We have learned much of the struggles of those with disabilities and those who are challenged, experiencing homelessness. I think we have a new appreciation for the challenges you face. We thank you for helping us understand the realities of life in COVID.

We also thank those who have given time and effort to help, whether looking after a brother with Larsen syndrome or with cerebral palsy, or a parent with dementia. These tasks of love are not easy, but they are so appreciated. Families, from great-grandparents to grandparents to parents to children to brothers to cousins and so many more, have connected and pulled together in new ways.

Thanks to those who came forward and—with innovative ideas, including those who helped get vaccines developed or provided new ways of doing or working. We have a new realization of the digital world, for it has become, more than ever before, the world so many have spent so much time in.

Thanks to those who were involved in research to better understand the treatment and prevention for COVID-19.

Thanks to those who produced masks and other personal protective equipment. Thanks to those who worked in other areas of manufacturing, which received less attention but were no less important.

And a thank you to all the staff in our Legislative Assembly, because they have done so much to make our work as MLAs possible.

*Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Speaker, in the Chair*

We remember the many who have passed away during this pandemic. I remember, personally, my brother-in-law passing away from COVID-19. It has been a difficult time. We thank those who have

reached out to console and help those who have lost loved ones.

From the heroic to the mundane, people around the province have chipped in to help out in their own communities, often in new ways, sometimes just by staying home and not visiting others in person, all in the efforts to reduce the spread of the mutating SARS-CoV-2 virus which has caused this devilish pandemic.

Remarkably, except for the runs on toilet paper early in the pandemic, essential items have been readily available.

It has been a year that we will always remember. A year later, now as the days are getting longer and warmer, as the bitter cold of winter—and its severe impact on those who were homeless—is ending, as the number of infections are trending down, we breathe eagerly the spring air and hope with several vaccines now here that we are reaching a time for optimism. We feel swept up in it, hopeful, yet still concerned lest a third wave might come.

It is time to give thanks to everyone in Manitoba, from Gretna in the south to Tadoule Lake in the north, from Roblin in the west to Falcon Lake in the east. Thank you, Manitobans. Thank you. Merci. Miigwech. Salamat po. Dyakuyu. Dhanwaad Ji. Miigwech. Todah. S'efharisto. Gomawo. Xie xie. Arigatou. Shukran. Dhanyavaad. Dhonnobad. Danke schön. *[Translation, all languages: Thank you]* Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

### Questions

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

Do we have any questions?

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Just wondering if the member can tell us whether or not he thinks this government has made life more difficult for Manitobans, including all of the invaluable workers he's identified during this COVID-19 pandemic?

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** I appreciate the comment today, and this resolution is not about casting stones. It is not about raising problems. It is

about thanking so many Manitobans who have done so much. And, quite frankly, we have all benefited from that in little things to big things. And it is time today to put aside the rancour and the problems and focus on the fact that we want to say thank you to Manitobans for going through some really tough times.

**Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail):** Does the member for River Heights know of anyone who received the government's Caregiver Wage Support? If so, can he elaborate on their story?

\* (11:10)

**Mr. Gerrard:** Madam Speaker, I can speak to many who have received varied supports, whether from the federal government or the provincial government or, in certain circumstances, the City has provided some supports, and what I would say is that those supports have been taken gratefully. They have been received with gratitude and they have been important in getting people through—

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** The member's time has expired. *[interjection]* Forty-five seconds, yes. Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** Can the member share with us whether or not he thinks that early childhood educators, who've taken significant risks and made tremendous sacrifices during this pandemic—does the member agree that the government should reverse their cut to nursery school grants and end the funding freeze as a way of showing gratitude to our early childhood educators?

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments, and I want to signal to all members that early childhood educators have done an incredible job under often difficult circumstances, and we thank them. We thank them heartily and with great gratitude.

We are here to say thanks for people who have worked, often through difficulties, but find a way to help and look after children who are young. And looking after children when they're young is crucially important, as we all know, because those years often have a tremendous impact on the later years—

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** The member's time has expired.

**Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin):** I want to thank the member for bringing the resolution and recognizing that—I know Manitoba stepped up in a big way, and I know the—there's been help and support for people in

social services and for people that have put themselves at risk every day.

So does the member from River Heights know of anyone who received Risk Recognition pay and, if so, tell us about their experience working on the front lines of the pandemic?

**Mr. Gerrard:** I think that there were a remarkable number of programs, including the rent Risk Recognition Program, and that we need to be grateful for those on behalf of those who were helped, but we also need to recognize that these programs have been important for many businesses.

It has not saved all. In many ways, we would have wished more and better. But, right now, we're saying thank you for what is there, for—thank you for what has been done, thank you for the people on the front lines, who have taken the brunt of this.

And we know well that it is often the people who are—

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** The members' time has expired.

**MLA Asagwara:** Can the member please—and I appreciate that he's done a great job, a tremendous job of articulating the gratitude that I think that we all feel for Manitobans' efforts during this pandemic.

But I'm wondering if the member could talk about whether or not he would say that a gesture from this government would be—that would be supportive of food producers, thanks for them, would be reversing their planned closure of more than 20 MASC offices so that producers can continue receiving services close to home.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I have spoken to many who are in the food production business—to farmers out on the fields who spent time focusing on planting their crops and producing food for us, to people who have worked in food processing industries, and they were often challenging places to work which needed a lot of attention to prevent the spread of COVID, to truckers, to people who have worked in grocery stores.

We thank everyone who has participated because, remarkably, there haven't been food shortages and we have been able to get food—

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** The member's time has expired.

**Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River):** Can the member opposite speak to experience of educators within his

constituency during the pandemic? Has any story in particular inspired this particular resolution?

**Mr. Gerrard:** Educators—K to 12 and early childhood education and post-secondaries—have all had an important role. And I can tell you that I have talked with educators who are struggled with teaching in class and teaching virtually at the same time. And it has been an amazing challenge, but it's also been amazing learning experience.

And I've talked to students who, recognizing the problems, have appreciated and often thrived under these challenging circumstances.

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** [*inaudible*] Rookie mistake.

The member from Union Station.

**MLA Asagwara:** Can the member share whether or not he agrees that the government should implement a living wage in recognition of the fact that some of the lowest paid Manitobans are, in fact, those who have carried us throughout this pandemic?

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, we need to recognize, indeed, that those who are in poor circumstances or in districts in Winnipeg which are less well off have been those which have been disproportionately affected by COVID.

And that is one of the reasons why we are thanking everybody here. We are thanking those who have struggled and have made it through, often with help. I think that there is time for reassessment, but right now there is a time for saying thank you. And once we have said thank you, we can think about what we need to do as the next step.

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** Any other questions?

**MLA Asagwara:** I'm wondering if the member could identify ways—other ways, other than expressing gratitude and thank you—are there other concrete, tangible ways that the government could help the very Manitobans that the member is encouraging us all to thank with this resolution outside of just the verbal thank you and expression of gratitude?

Are there concrete, tangible steps the government could take, should take, should have taken to help those very same Manitobans, many of which who are struggling during this pandemic?

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, as a physician I recognize that where there is a problem or a mistake, one of the



important things first is to say you're sorry, and then to move to addressing the issue more.

And here we are saying thank you, and I think this is a really important thing to say at this time. Thank you, thank you, thank you. And we will move on and we will debate here, but this resolution is being brought forward on behalf of all MLAs to thank the people of Manitoba who have done so much under such circumstances to carry us through these difficult times.

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** Thank you.

The time for questions has ended.

### Debate

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** We'll move now into debate.

There 'endy' members that wish to speak on debate?

**Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail):** I'd like to thank the member opposite for raising this issue in the House today. As MLAs, many times we wear a few different hats, splitting our time up between our constituencies and our work here in the Assembly. This resolution is a great opportunity to bring our constituency work into the House.

The reality is that the risk of COVID-19 is still 'presenant' and will likely remain for some time. Whether we like it or not, this is our new normal.

\* (11:20)

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the everyday heroes who have helped us through the COVID-19 pandemic: the grocery store workers, delivery drivers, educators, child-care providers, foster parents, farmers and manufacturers, moms who had to stay home, dads who had to stay home and become teachers. Countless Manitobans have risen to the challenge of COVID-19 and proven their resiliency.

Every single one of these workers is invaluable, and our ability to manage through the pandemic has hinged on their commitment and sacrifices. I believe all members can agree that front-line workers across all sectors have gone above and beyond the call of action. These individuals are those—are the heroes who have risked their well-being to maintain relative normalcy. These actions do not go unnoticed or unappreciated.

To recognize and thank the sacrifices of all front-line workers, our government has opened a number of programs, such as the \$120-million Risk Recognition Program, which was one—a one-time payment of \$1,500. Nearly 80,000 Manitobans received the Risk Recognition payment, 95,000–9,500 of which were social service workers. This includes approximately 3,600 people who served Manitobans with disabilities; 2,300 Manitobans working in the CFS agencies, group homes; and 1,050 child-care workers and nearly 700 Manitoba Housing staff.

The \$35 million in Caregiver Wage Support Program, providing more than 20,000 front-line workers with extra support—this program reached workers in Child and Family Services group homes, Community Living disABILITY Services, shift-staffed group homes, emergency placement shelters in CFS, family violence and prevention shelters, homeless shelters, personal-care homes, retirement residences and supportive housing residences.

The Caregiver Wage Support Program complements investments our government has made in front-line staff: \$10-million pandemic staffing support benefit for overtime, staff replacement and sick leave costs during these challenging times; \$120 million in the Manitoba Risk Recognition pay program; \$3.5 million in PPE for our front-line workers, providing over 5 million masks, gowns, hand sanitizer and other necessary PPE.

There a whole host of services that are critical to our success as a community. Our government, throughout this pandemic, has been committed to supporting front-line services regardless of sector. Our back work program—Back to Work program and reopening initiatives have hinged on the sacrifice of front-line workers. The health-care sector and social service sector depended on each other to meet community needs. This is especially true in a global pandemic. For instance, the safe reopening of child care has meant that health-care workers who have been redeployed to critical departments can go to work assured that their children are still receiving the care they needed.

Our government recognizes that child care has been a key contributor to our reopening, such as our government pandemic child-care investment, including over 1.6 million individual PPE items; including masks for all workers; \$1.4 million from the Risk Recognition Program; over 1,000 eligible child-care workers; nearly \$90 million in provincial operating grants; over \$15 million through a

one-year extension of bilateral agreements with the federal government; \$2.4 million in the COVID-19 response grant to help child-care centres with COVID-related costs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I've said many times before in this House, these are unprecedented times. They are unprecedented to us because we know a different reality.

I wanted to take a moment to recognize child-care providers specifically, because they have worked to establish some kind of normalcy for our children, who are especially vulnerable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our day-to-day life does not look nearly the same as it did just one year ago. In a lot of ways, we've been able to make it because of the arts. I would like to venture to guess that every single member of this House spent many days throughout this pandemic reading, watching Netflix, Disney+, or Amazon, just to—or listening to music or even creating.

Culture is an integral part of our everyday lives, values and communities. In light of this pandemic, the arts are one of the only few things that has maintained our sense of community and sanity.

While we indulge in arts and culture, we don't necessarily see how artists and creators, who have created this outlet, have been affected. Manitoba's cultural sector is a large economic driver in our province. In 2016, arts and cultural accounted for \$1.6 billion total—of the total Manitoba economy. More than 22,500 jobs in Manitoba are based on this sector. Many artists, athletes and performers have been out of work with the closures of theatres, festivals, galleries and gyms.

In response, our government has acted to launch our Safe at Home Manitoba grant campaign. The Safe at Home grants provided nearly \$5 million in grant funding across sectors in order to produce free programming for Manitobans. This grant program is an initiative this government is extremely proud of. Approximately 300 grants were approved.

The Safe at Home grant program has been one step in bringing back jobs and opportunities to the gig economy in Winnipeg. Cultural engagement improves our fiscal, mental and spiritual health, and contributes to our communal well-being, which I think we can all agree is much needed in times like this.

While these programs have surely enriched both our communities and our lives, they also reached out

to an area that among the hardest hit by COVID-19. With this time, I'd like to take a moment to recognize a member of my constituency, Juno Award-winner Al Simmons, for the program Sounds Crazy, which is an exploration of science of music. It's artists like Al who have made getting through this pandemic easier for both kids and families.

Our government recognizes the sacrifices and efforts made of all front-line workers. Though we do not agree on a great many things, I believe that all members can agree that Manitoba is a better place because of our front-line workers, pandemic or not.

Again, I'm thankful for the opportunity to speak on this resolution. I will conclude in order to let others have the chance to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this resolution this morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to thank the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for bringing this resolution forward.

I really appreciate how thoughtfully he articulated all of the many, many organizations and essential workers and, you know, everyday Manitobans who have carried us through this pandemic. I agree with the member that it's critically important that we all, as often as we can, thank our neighbours, thank our family members, thank our friends and community members who have risen to the occasion during this pandemic—and continue to—and put their personal health, the health of their families at risk in order to make sure that everyone else is able to navigate this pandemic as safely as possible.

The reality of COVID-19, here and globally, is that it's not going anywhere anytime soon. There's certainly a lot of hope on the very close horizon with the approval of a number of vaccines now in Canada. And I think that that's created a palpable positive shift for many folks, and that's a very good thing.

But we are still living with the reality of COVID-19 being in our communities, including variants that we're learning more about every single day. And while I certainly think this resolution is positive—I think it's a great opportunity for every member of this House to express their own level of gratitude, and express that beyond this Chamber, ensuring that Manitobans know how we think and feel on this matter in particular—I do think it's important to also reflect on the fact that, while we are all very grateful for the efforts of essential workers and all of

the identified groups in Manitoba, while we'll continue to share our thanks with these folks, we have to be able to acknowledge that thank you is not enough.

\* (11:30)

We have to be able to acknowledge that thank you is not enough. We have to be able to be honest with ourselves, especially as legislators, and be able to say that, you know, all the gratitude in the world doesn't put food on people's tables. Thank you does not provide people with the resources they need in order to keep their families safe.

And thank you does not mitigate the harms that are related to coming into contact with COVID-19. Many communities disproportionately understand that, unfortunately, and simply saying thank you doesn't mitigate those harms or risks or solve those problems or realities for folks, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And so I do think it's important and I agree with the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) that we express gratitude and we situate ourselves in that and we're present with that. I think it's actually equally, if not more so, important for us as legislators, all members of this House, to do better by all of the workers who we have identified and who we do thank—do better by those folks, do better by everyday Manitobans and provide what they are saying they need, what they are identifying as required, in order to be able to navigate not only this pandemic but beyond this pandemic, the recovery aspect of this pandemic as well as possible, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And so, you know, I think about—when I think about who I could thank in the constituency of Union Station, I think about front-line organizations. I think about health providers like Women's Health Clinic. I think about Nine Circles. I think about, you know, grassroots, community-centered and focused health-care providers who seemingly have to—not seemingly, they do have to beg and fight and compete for funding and dollars and resources that they really shouldn't have to.

These are organizations that fill in health-care gaps, these are organizations that continually find adaptive and creative ways to meet the needs of many folks in our communities who would otherwise be neglected by the health-care system, unfortunately, and yet, these are organizations that aren't having their needs met in terms of funding and resources by the government.

I think of a number of other community organizations, but I think of folks mentioned by the member for River Heights, like artists, who have suffered and struggled during this pandemic and who are realizing now just how long it's going to be before they can fully participate in the arts and earn income and provide for themselves in that way, but artists who have been, again, creative and adaptive and have provided for all of us to be able to navigate this pandemic and manage our mental health and find ways of connecting and enjoy the arts still. And yet, those artists aren't being afforded resources that would make their day-to-day lives easier to navigate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I think about the health-care workers that we thank all of the time, health-care workers that I'm sure you are talking to on a regular basis, health-care workers that I'm hearing from on a regular basis, not only in Union Station but beyond that, and how so many of these health-care workers continue to have their wages frozen, continue to deal with cuts in a health-care system that creates an increased burden and challenge for them.

I think about the fact that these health-care workers have been pleading for not just financial resources in the form of, you know, being able to collectively bargain fairly and increase wages, but also just increase opportunity to be meaningfully consulted and engaged so that as they navigate this pandemic, their expertise is informing decision making.

I think it's reasonable to say, I think it's important to say, that thank you and gratitude is simply not enough. And it's important and I don't want to minimize that, but it has to be met and matched with action. It has to be met and matched with the demands, the asks of the very folks that we're thanking and expressing gratitude for.

And so I would hope that we can all very seriously reflect on this resolution as—for what it is, as an opportunity to celebrate and highlight and thank those very people who have put themselves and their families at risk during this pandemic to the benefit of all Manitobans. It's certainly important, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But I think it's, like I've already stated, critically important for us to not only thank folks like—I think of Susie Erjavec Parker, who is a local small-business supporter and creative and, you know, somebody who, you know, we express gratitude for for creating things like the #saveMBrestaurants campaign with a few other folks in the province, and have worked so

hard for small businesses to be able to thrive, navigate, get through this pandemic.

But we should do more than thank folks like Susie. We should be able to ensure that small-business owners have the resources that they need as they continue to step up for Manitobans during this pandemic.

You know, we've already mentioned this but, you know, I'm very proud to be a part of a caucus that has worked so hard to address the issues around early childhood educators, daycares, in our province. Incredible work being done in our caucus to fight for early childhood educators and child-care centres to have the resources that they need.

Those folks get thanked all the time. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I—and they should. They're doing tremendous work. But again, thank you and gratitude is simply not enough when a lot of those centres will close if not during this pandemic, but after this pandemic, due to lack of resources.

And, you know, we've got some great ideas on this side of the House as to how we can do more than express our gratitude for those folks, how we can actually tangibly, concretely support them and ensure that our kids in all of our communities are not only well taken care of, but the places that they're attending are well-resourced so that they can be sustained beyond this pandemic, and early childhood educators can also provide for their own families, and not be making wages that are not allowing them to do so in an adequate manner.

So these are just a few points that I wanted to put on the record. I do think it's really important for us to be able to be frank about these issues. As legislators, we have it within our capacity to ensure that action is taken in order to do more than just thank and express gratitude. And I think we have a responsibility to do so.

And this pandemic has really highlighted the fact that many of the folks that we're thanking—who are negatively, disproportionately negatively impacted by this pandemic—Black, Indigenous and people of colour, folks earning low wages—that we have it within our capacity and within our purview in this Chamber to do right by those folks and make life better for them based on what they're identifying their needs to be.

And I think that we should do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

**Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin):** And again, I'd like to thank the member from River Heights for raising this resolution today, which expresses thanks and gratitude to all those who have carried us through the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's—pandemic is something I think we're all experiencing over the last year for the first time, and it's, of course, a global pandemic. It's a significant issue up in disruption and I want to say that, you know, Manitobans really did step up in the last year, you know, across the board, and, you know, many thanks are deserved and—to recognize all the help that Manitobans have helped Manitoba get through this.

So you know, again, we're not—we're going to be some lingering effects of this to go, and as we move to some sort of new normal. But what's clear: there's many, many people to thank.

And I want to just highlight—now, during this pandemic, which is, again, it's quite significant within Manitoba and across Canada and around the globe—governments of the day are having to lead and show strong leadership and respectful and responsible leadership at this time.

I think it's incredibly important in this new age of noise that, you know, that's a good, solid, clean government messaging needed to be filtered out. And so I do want to, in particular, thank Dr. Roussin and Manitoba's health-care and pandemic response team for the outstanding work that they've done in helping Manitoba and leading Manitoba.

\* (11:40)

And of course, I want to recognize the government of Manitoba. Over the last year when—you know, when this pandemic was evolving, you know, there was daily updates being provided by Dr. Roussin and Manitoba's health team and a lot of appearances by ministers and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to give questions and updates on what was going on, on related issues and essentially, you know, fielding general questions to the public. And that was important, extremely important at a time of pandemic, and I think that needs to be recognized.

The—Manitoba's health team did an outstanding job and the government of Manitoba, the staff at the Legislature, you know, communication and communicating to Manitobans was extremely important and helped guide Manitobans and helped with a lot of the efforts that Manitobans were doing.

So, you know, we moved over to a virtual world and a lot of thanks has to be given to communications staff in enabling that clean message to go out to Manitobans. So again, there's work on the web, engage Manitoba, these things are, again, essential and useful tools and the government and Dr. Roussin and Manitoba's health team has—really has to take a great deal of thanks for help and support along the way here.

So I'd also say, again, agriculture—there's a number—it's difficult to pick any one sector because really, Manitobans across the board stepped up on this pandemic. And again, there'll be lingering effects that we still have to deal with and adjust to.

But it—you know, what I've seen over the last year in my constituency is, you know, a business community, you know, service providers all adapting and adhering to the doctor's orders, which are again, designed—it's a public health emergency and a public safety issue.

And it was great to see right across the board, from business to public services to, you know, essential sectors of agriculture and manufacturing service that keep the wheels turning during pandemic. Again, totally outstanding work. And, you know, it's difficult to name them all in a few short minutes here. But I will recognize again, ag was essential, utility operators—municipal operators kept the roads and things functioning during pandemic.

Farmers, manufacturing, delivery drivers—again, they're the ones that, you know, keep things going, whether at full code red or in orange, you know, they're the ones that keep things rolling. So, equipment shops, mechanics, you know, parts service guys, you know, they're the ones that keep the oil in the machine and keep the machine running. So again, big hats off to them, you know.

And I witnessed again schools and during last summer, you know, a really co-ordinated effort to ensure our schools got up and running again and really diverse thinking on how are we going to make this work and I was really, really happy to see that our—you know, I haven't heard a lot so I assume everything is going well and it's being—you know, it adapts to the changes that a pandemic will create. But hats off to everybody that made sure, you know, that the education, post-secondary education continue. And so that's huge as well.

And big hats off to small business in general. They're essential to our community, essential to our

province, and it was great to see them modify and follow doctor's orders to keep Manitobans safe and try to keep the business operating as best they could under the circumstances and you know, a lot of these small-business owners are much, much more than small-business owners.

They're—I know in Dauphin, they're a big, big part of the community, big supporters of the community and they go above and beyond just business. And I'd have to say that they totally stepped up in—during this pandemic and again, I thank them, and I think we all deserve to be thanking our small-business owners for the great contributions that they make.

Again, we look for—during pandemic, you know, effective management. Again, I think I've cited that already, that the PC government did do this. Over the course of the year they provided—filled in gaps, you know, were called on. And what was really unique, and I thought uniquely Manitoban, you know, there was a strong call to the volunteer base to step up and help and, you know, in fine form, Manitobans did that. And, you know, and it was a great way to build support across the province that was dealing with pandemic.

And, you know, that call out to volunteers and the actions of volunteers to step up and help out was outstanding. I know that was the case in Dauphin and the surrounding region and you just know you can always, always count on Manitobans to step up in the middle of something challenging and difficult and absolutely that they showed up in spades.

I can, you know—specifically, you know, when you're looking for supports to keep the wheels going, we have \$120 million of Risk Recognition and, again, that was a helpful measure implemented by the government and I know, you know, we had—at the early stages, we had a young delivery driver who was, you know, delivering medication to seniors that were at home and, you know, he didn't ask for this, but, you know, there was an outstanding example of how people stepped up, and, you know, in the face of pandemic and facing risks, you know, they did their jobs and they did their job in supporting our most vulnerable and that was the—again, just an outstanding example.

There was \$31.3 million of wage subsidy. Again, it designed to get Manitobans rehired, encourage rehiring and support our essential small businesses—great, great program; \$35 million in Caregiver Wage Support Program. Again, that's another one that, you know, there was some targeted support for people that

were working in, you know, higher risk situations like Child and Family Services, community group homes, emergency placements and homeless shelters. Again, I thought that was an extremely—

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** The member's time has expired.

**Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona):** Well, thank you Mr. 'deputy'—Deputy Speaker for allowing me to put these next few words on the record.

I want to thank the member from River Heights for bringing forth this private member's resolution. It is, indeed, time that we reflect on the many sacrifices that Manitobans have made during this pandemic. And when I think of those sacrifices, I noted that the member from Dawson Trail, the member from Union Station, the member from Dauphin all brought up some very salient points in thanking the many Manitobans that have sacrificed a great deal during this pandemic.

I do want to say that back in May—late April and May of 2020, I had a—kind of an inside look as to what was happening at our hospitals. And I will say that our hospitals only run because of the health-care aides, the incredible work that the health-care aides do at the bedside, not only providing support to the patient but support to the families. I noted during that time as well that when you're sitting in that hospital room and you don't have the benefit of visitors, well, health-care aides stepped up and took that extra time to be with patients.

You know, when I was in the cardiac-care unit, my roommate, Patrick—I remember Patrick because Patrick had to come from Sprucewoods for his procedure and Patrick was expressing how grateful he was but also sort of lamenting the fact that he used to have this service at the Brandon general hospital that he could no longer access and now had to come all the way into Winnipeg.

\* (11:50)

I said to him, you know, Patrick, I encourage you get a hold of your MLA. And I believe Patrick did, and he had a really fruitful conversation with his MLA, and I do want to thank the member from Spruce Woods who took the time, and I think listened quite intently to some of the concerns expressed, because some services now are—have been centralized here in Winnipeg, and it is a bit of a burden for people to attend here and—especially during the pandemic—and how to get to services.

You know, this pandemic has also—and when we're thinking of thanking workers, I could think of those workers that—the health-care aides, nurses and the physician on-call at Park Manor Personal Care Home in Transcona. I can say that Park Manor was devastated by the pandemic. Out of 100 residents, we lost 27.

We can all do the math there; that is a staggering percentage of people that were impacted, and I want to take this time to thank the health-care aides, to thank family members, because during the height of that time at the end of November and early December, family members were called in to help with feeding, bathing, at tremendous risk, right? They were concerned because of the health not only of the resident but also what they may have been bringing back home because the exposures were getting out of control at that time.

And I want to thank those people that literally put their lives on the line every day. The health-care aides at Park Manor had a very high infection rate as well, and that impacted greatly the services that were—that needed to be provided. And, again, like I said earlier, the family members that stepped up at that time were just amazing.

And a number of them phoned me concerned, concerned because we have to do better by our long-term-care residents, concerned because we have to have a plan post-pandemic, because we can't emerge the same as we were before, because that's not good enough anymore, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would hope that this government right now is taking the time to do some of this post-pandemic planning so that when we emerge we can have a plan in place so that places like Park Manor don't get outwardly impacted.

There is still some heartbreak in Transcona because Park Manor wasn't expanded and the plans that were put forth and in place for that area, if they were undertaken, may have had a—maybe the pandemic wouldn't have had the impact that it did.

And I would hope that in this government's post-pandemic planning, that there is something for that, because this part of Winnipeg has the least amount of PCH beds in the northeast, in this—in our city, and we need to rectify that. We need to put the resources in place for that so that we don't have that happen when we have even just a seasonal flu, so that we can plan properly and ensure that these resources are in place.

I also now want to take some time to express our gratitude as MLAs to the people that work in our

public schools, right, everyone from custodians to school secretaries, custodial aides, EAs, clinical staff, senior administrators, those that work in our lunch programs, those that bus our kids to school and the tremendous amount of sacrifice that they made to ensure the safety of our kids, right.

We talk about them as our most precious resource, but when we say that, and just like the member from Union Station articulated earlier, thanks is sometimes just not enough; we also have to plan and say that we are going to put things in place so that we're not caught in these positions again.

I remember my school custodian saying to me, Nello, you know, I have to go change the filters in the air exchange system in the school. And he said, you know, this system is so old that every time I change a filter I'm a little afraid that I'm actually going to create a shutdown of the system requiring some repairs, and that repairs typically take anywhere from 10 to 15 days.

And what I would hope, when we talk about air exchange systems and those pieces that are important in our schools, that there is a plan in place for post-pandemic so that we can tackle things like the infrastructure deficit that we have in our schools, that there is a plan for that and that we put it in place, right. I mean, we can say that it's there but we need to see those pieces actually happening post pandemic.

In these last couple of minutes, I just want to—I know sometimes it's difficult to talk about our families, but I do want to thank my family. I just want to—I know this will probably embarrass them a little bit, but I will say that last March—early April, my daughter moved out because she works in the assisted living place and she was concerned about my health, and so she moved out, right. So when we talk about sacrifices, those are some of the sacrifices that many of our own family members have made.

So at this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for allowing me to put these few words on the record, and I look forward to this government living up to their commitments to Manitobans post-pandemic.

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** The member for St. Boniface.

Do we have the member for St. Boniface?

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** I want to thank the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard). I'll be very brief. We really wanted to come together. This has been an incredibly difficult year for everyone, and I know that there are lots of people who—

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 10 minutes remaining.

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

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Tuesday, March 9, 2021**

**CONTENTS**

<b>Speaker's Statement</b>		<b>Resolutions</b>	
Driedger	1447	Res. 11—Expressing Thanks and Gratitude to All Those Who have Carried Us Through the COVID-19 Pandemic	
<b>ORDERS OF THE DAY</b>		Gerrard	1457
<b>PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS</b>		<b>Questions</b>	
<b>Second Readings—Public Bills</b>		Asagwara	1459
Bill 217—The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act		Gerrard	1459
Gerrard	1447	Lagassé	1459
<b>Questions</b>		Michaleski	1459
Fontaine	1449	Wowchuk	1460
Gerrard	1449		
Smook	1449	<b>Debate</b>	
Piwniuk	1449	Lagassé	1461
Lamont	1450	Asagwara	1462
Morley-Lecomte	1450	Michaleski	1464
<b>Debate</b>		Altomare	1466
Smook	1451	Lamont	1467
Fontaine	1451		
Piwniuk	1453		
Sala	1454		
Lamont	1456		



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