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

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AL TOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
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	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLEIN, Kevin E., Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
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, Hon.	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg, Hon.	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
REYES, Jon, Hon.	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
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SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
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TEITSMA, James, Hon.	Radisson	PC
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WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Morden-Winkler	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 20, 2023

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.

We acknowledge we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Good morning, everybody. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Good morning, Madam Speaker.

First, on House business, pursuant to rule 34(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Flin Flon (MLA Lindsey). The title of the resolution is Calling upon the Provincial Government to Follow Through on its Commitment to Provide Manitobans with High-Speed Broadband Services.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Flin Flon. The title of the resolution is Calling upon the Provincial Government to Follow Through on its

Commitment to Provide Manitobans with High-Speed Broadband Services.

* * *

MLA Fontaine: Would you call for second reading debate, Bill 227, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Access to Washrooms for Delivery Persons), please.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider this morning second reading of Bill 227, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Access to Washrooms for Delivery Persons).

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 227—The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Access to Washrooms for Delivery Persons)

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I move, seconded by the member for Notre Dame (MLA Marcelino), that Bill 227, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act, access to the washrooms for delivery persons, now be read a second time and referred to the committee of this House.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for The Maples, seconded by the honourable member for Notre Dame, that Bill 227, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Access to Washrooms for Delivery Persons), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Sandhu: This is my honour to bring forward the Bill 227, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Access to Washrooms for Delivery Persons).

Madam Speaker, this is a non-partisan bill. Let's be clear in the front. This bill directly comes from the truck drivers.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to start by thanking our truck drivers and delivery drivers who delivered food, life-saving medical supplies and other essential products during COVID-19 pandemic. Let me clear: they were our heroes pre-pandemic, during pandemic and post-pandemic. This is very clear, they are our heroes today as well. They will stay our heroes forever because what they are doing.

Madam Speaker, however, there is another side to this story. During the pandemic, truckers have taken risks and faced hardship just doing their jobs. They have left their families to head out on long-haul routes far from the safety of their homes, where we were sitting our homes, following Canada Health and Manitoba Health guidelines.

They have dealt with closed road-side restaurants, closed restrooms and closed shower facilities along the way. While most fast-food restaurants kept their drive-through windows open during the early stage of COVID-19—again, Madam Speaker, when we are talking about truck drivers, this is the big rigs; this is 53-foot tractor trailers that we are talking about—most had policies against serving walk-up traffic. So, you just can't park your truck on the side of the road and go and get the food or even go and use their washrooms. So, truck drivers often could not buy food or access even basic amenities while on the road.

Madam Speaker, while bringing this bill forward, I was approached by my Maples constituent regarding access to washrooms during the pandemic. While I thought this was maybe a rare case, maybe one or two cases where it might have happened, but actually it wasn't. It was an everyday—there were so many people have approached me that this is existing every single day during the pandemic.

Madam Speaker, last season we didn't have a chance to debate on this bill. Well, before I even brought this bill forward, I wanted to make sure the issues that we were dealing during the pandemic still exist. To confirm, I have spoken with so many of the truck drivers who brought this forward to me during the pandemic and now, to confirm to see that still exists; actually, this still exists.

So, Madam Speaker, this legislation recognizes the essential work that delivery persons been doing and providing them with the work conditions and respect they deserve. So, it is really, really important for us as members of this House, 57 of us, we recognize their contribution during the pandemic, before the pandemic, even after the pandemic, that what they have done for us was above and beyond.

* (10:10)

Madam Speaker, I also want to clear this: this is—a majority of the businesses do care about our truckers. This is not like I'm seeing the majority of the people are against truckers using their access to the washroom. This is a—it's not real, but the majority of

the people are good people in the business community, but then there are people who are not following the rules.

Madam Speaker, I would like to share the sacrifice truckers made during the pandemic. People have shared their stories. They have told me when they were out while driving 12, 13, 14–13 hours; that's the guideline for the truckers to drive—when they get home, they have a separate room. They could not see their family. They could not hug their kids. They have to go to a special room that was just designated for those—their family members going, just go into the room, changing the clothes, taking shower, staying in the room and saying hello, hi to their kids from far and away.

And then, next morning, leaving for another tour of providing a good service to Manitobans, to Canadians; bringing produce, medical supplies, be it from the States, is from Canada. So, that's how their life revolved around. So they couldn't hug their kids, couldn't see—like, they have to be far away. They have special clothes that will—they themselves go and put it in for washing and drying. And the next day, they will leave their home without even hugging their kids. So that's—that was the sacrifice of our truck drivers.

You may be wondering, Madam Speaker, if I have consulted anyone on this bill. Manitoba Trucking Association is—have been consulted, and they are in favour of this bill. And there are other people who have favoured this bill, that this bill is needed today. We know there was a bill from Ontario, but I don't think so that bill was passed or proclaimed. So, Manitoba will be the leader. So, we don't have to follow other provinces when it comes to recognizing our heroes.

So, this is, for us, for the other provinces to follow us here. So, I'm really, really looking forward to passing this bill, sending it to the committee and then acclaiming it. And this way we can tell our truckers, our delivery drivers, yes, we have your back.

With this, Madam Speaker, I want to conclude and also want to give other people a chance to put comments on this bill. Again, I—this bill is—came from the truck drivers, and I will try to answer best to my knowledge that I have regarding trucking industry. And I'm really looking forward to actually a unanimous consent on this bill and passing it today.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Just really quickly for the member opposite: I know he had mentioned access to washrooms for delivery persons was an issue during the pandemic, and I'm just wondering if the member can explain if this issue, even with truckers, is still ongoing today even though, you know, we're past that closure phase.

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): This is a very, very important question actually.

This is what I—actually, in my preamble, I have mentioned that I—before I even brought this bill forward, I want to make sure that this still exists. Actually, there is—this is not the majority of the businesses, as I mentioned earlier. This is the minority. But this still exists out there today.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I know that, you know, the trucking delivery industry has drastically changed over the past 10 years. There's been so much more demand for this service in our communities and in Manitoba here.

So I'd like to ask the member, why does he think it's so important to be bringing forward this bill now at this time?

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you—that very excellent question by the member from St. Vital. Actually, a few—maybe even members for this House to follow a Manitoba Trucking Association's website: 95 per cent of the stuff that you have in your house is trucked in; only 5 per cent came through rail or other transportation. So it is very, very important that we recognize the truckers, we appreciate the truckers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Swan River—oh, the honourable member for Tyndall Park, sorry.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the member for The Maples for bringing forward this important piece of legislation.

I just want to be very, very clear: In the legislation itself, it talks about, and the exact wording is to present at the workplace to deliver anything to the workplace or to collect anything from the workplace for delivery elsewhere. So, I interpret this as being applicable for, like, DoorDash and SkipTheDishes.

I just want to be very clear that truckers would also be, under this legislation, allowed access to washrooms.

Mr. Sandhu: Actually, this is also another excellent question.

Actually, yes, this is DoorDash, SkipTheDishes, even the taxi drivers who deliver. We—you know, some people think that taxi drivers only drive people. No, they also deliver. And it's related to every person who delivers or picks up something from a workplace.

Thank you.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): If this legislation passes, will there be any financial penalty for small businesses that deny washroom access to delivery persons?

Mr. Sandhu: Another excellent question.

Actually, this is what I was thinking while coming here to the Leg. today. How can we actually—because we cannot bring any bill related to money. So, this was there that this had to be something in the regulations that from workplace safety can have it. Or, originally they have it—something in place.

So, it is not that we can say it's going to be a penalty to businesses. It may be a first warning and then in future, after it is a repeating offence, it can be—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Moses: I just—I appreciate the member's response to the last question.

And so, I'd like to know whether the member thinks it would be a good idea, since, if there's no penalties, for us to have some sort of information campaign to businesses or educational campaign so businesses know, once this bill passes, that they are now supposed to allow washroom access for delivery drivers.

Mr. Sandhu: Actually, I have spoken with the Manitoba Trucking Association regarding this, how can we implement this bill. And this is—one of the questions was, if we were to pass a bill, what the implications of this bill are.

* (10:20)

So, this is another—again, as we can't bring any bill that have money attached to it, and the government can on its own any time advertise that this bill has passed and this is the law and you cannot refuse access to a delivery driver on their premises.

Mr. Isleifson: Again, thank you to the member for bringing this forward.

I know a lot of folks have home-based businesses and a lot of deliveries go to those home-based businesses, so I'm wondering if his intent is for this to also include those who run businesses out of their houses.

Mr. Sandhu: No, simply no. This is not for the home businesses.

It is up to—if somebody were to ask, can I use your washroom, it's up to that person if they want to allow that person to have access to the washroom. But this is—only is regarding a business that have a storefront or you can call it a business that exists outside from the house.

Mr. Moses: I know that the member mentioned conversations with the Manitoba Trucking Association, so I'd like to just clarify who the member consulted with, with the creation of this bill.

Mr. Sandhu: Well, that's also a very important question, Madam Speaker. Thank you for that question.

You know, I was talking to Creekside Transport and the person that I've spoken is Ravi Chahal and they are in support of this bill.

There's another person—another company, Highway Motor Freight. The owners are Jass Dhillon and Anoop Chahal. If you see an orange truck outside and—that means it's a Highway Motor transport truck. And actually, me and my colleague from Tyndall Park had a chance to visit their grand opening—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wowchuk: Yes, given that food establishments often receive a lot of pickup and delivery services, how will this influence these businesses and the experience for patrons who choose to dine in, particularly for small, locally owned restaurants that may be limited to only one or two people in the—one or two washroom stalls?

Mr. Sandhu: Sorry, I didn't have—I wasn't really paying attention at that time.

I really want to see what the question is, and I think the member said if there's only access to one or two persons. And I'm sure the person can provide an

access to a delivery driver or a truck driver or even a cab driver or a SkipTheDishes driver.

Thank you.

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): I'd just like to ask the member about his own personal experiences or dreams of being a truck driver himself.

Mr. Sandhu: I have to go back 30 years, Madam Speaker, on this.

And at that time, all I was thinking, you know what, I do want to drive a truck. Why do I want to drive a truck? I want to go see places. And that was my understanding at that time, that truckers are going places, visiting places. I never, ever dreamed of being a MLA at that time.

Mr. Wowchuk: Yes, under the definition of work, does this include private residences whereby a person may run a business out of their home?

Mr. Sandhu: Madam Speaker, as I have indicated earlier, this is—private residence is not included in this. This is only businesses that have storefronts or even—nothing from the home, that somebody runs from the home.

Mr. Moses: I'm sure the member wants us to get on debate—to debate and to have this bill passed unanimously, but just one more time, maybe he can explain and go through the list of people he consulted with; I'm sure there's people he left off as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Sandhu: Yes, definitely. Thank you for giving me an opportunity at the end again.

I have also consulted with the Swag Transport. The owners are Gurpreet Kaaira and Jagdeep Gill. And the Tornado transport; Harde Gill.

So, those are the people, and many, many more truck drivers, that I have consulted, and they really want to see this go forward and have unanimous consent and back of this House for all those truck drivers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Labour and Immigration): First of all, I want to thank my good friend from The Maples for introducing us this bill,

Bill 227, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Access to Washrooms for Delivery Persons). I also want to thank him for, you know, coming to Manitoba, sharing his personal story.

I first met him, actually, at my family member's funeral. We had gotten to know each other prior to him having his aspirations—becoming an MLA. And one thing that I—that he did tell me, that he actually, you know, employed a lot of people—or, was in charge of a lot of people, including my aunt. So, again I thank him for gainfully employing my aunt, and sometimes I go back to her asking her for help.

I also want to thank truckers: truckers, delivery drivers, because they were very, very important prior to the pandemic, during the pandemic and after the pandemic. He stated some really important facts here, why they are tremendously important for economy.

I know a lot of them—we have mutual friends in that industry that gainfully employ many immigrants as well, coming to our province. So, again, I appreciate for him introducing this bill. The one thing I do want to state, as well, is during the pandemic there were many COVID-19-targeted relief measures for small businesses, for employers, for employees.

And I'm very proud of what our government had done in collaboration with other levels of government and many stakeholders to ensure that truckers, delivery drivers could do their job in the proper and safe way that they do. Because it's a very difficult occupation, and I sort of relate it to my time when I served in the armed forces.

You're away from your family, you're travelling a lot, you're on the road, you hardly get to see your family. So it's a very, very tough job. And it's a unique job and not everyone can do that job. So, again, I commend them for that.

So, one thing I do want to say is that access to washrooms for delivery persons is important, and we have seen that majority of public-facing business already allow for this access. I know that when I owned my small business—I owned a UPS store in Kenaston Common—whether its delivery driver would come in.

Yes, as the member said: just, if they ask to use the bathroom, I mean, by all means, use the bathroom. Again, during the initial COVID-19 response period, there may have been some hesitation around whether or not to provide washroom access to others. People adjusted.

In August 2022, Department of Labour launched a legislated five-year review of the Workplace Safety and Health Act and its associated regulations. Hundreds of comments were received through EngageMB relating to strong protections that meet the needs of modern workplaces, improving consistency and ensuring requirements are clear and reasonable.

The input received from Manitobans will help enhance our province's workplace safety and health framework. A workplace safety and health review committee comprised of labour, employer and technical representatives, is working to provide recommendations on the submissions from the public.

While reviewing public submissions, I've asked the committee to consider the proposal and provide its recommendations, if any, on the issue of washroom access for delivery persons through the lens of the review. And I look forward to receiving the final report of the committee.

Now, I'm all—as the Minister of Labour and Immigration, and our government—we're all, and I think all sides of the House are all in it to improve and enhance programs, services and in this case, legislation. So, again, I thank the member for bringing up this important issue.

* (10:30)

I do want to say, and just to put a few words on the record so I can allow others to speak on this bill, is by working for workers, our government is making Manitoba the destination of choice for more skilled workers. Why our flagship program, the Provincial Nominee Program, was created in 1998, welcoming hundreds, thousands of Manitobans to our province.

The priority of this government is to ensure that when workers go to work, they can come home safe after the end of a hard work—hard day's work. We are going to continue ensuring our workers in Manitoba have a service or a workplace in the country. And that is why we are going to continue, every single day, to have the backs of workers in this province, ensure that they go to work in the morning, they come home safe to their family at the end of a hard day's work.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I'm really pleased to put some words on the record with respect to this bill today that my colleague, the member for The Maples (Mr. Sandhu), brought in and introduced: Bill 227, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Access to Washrooms for Delivery Persons).

This is an important bill. I think if you look at the landscape that we're in right now with the number of delivery drivers—as the member alluded to, this includes truck drivers, short delivery drivers for services that are—you know, that deliver food to your door, places. That also includes cab drivers, as the member informed us here in the House today. And so, you think about the number of people in the province that would get—that are affected by this bill.

Now, some members might think that this is just a small change, to give access to a washroom, and some people are—some business owners are already friendly and doing that, but in many cases it is an obstacle. It is a real obstacle for delivery drivers who are impacted in the quality of work, and the workplace health and safety.

When they're trying to work safely, they're trying to travel around, deliver goods to Manitobans, they often need access to go to the washroom, and do so with dignity and honour, and not have to fight or get into an argument with a business owner, or cause any issues like that. They want to be able to simply do their job and help all of Manitobans, deliver the goods that we are all counting on. And these are the sort of goods that I think many of us, a decade ago, might not have thought we might be getting delivered with such frequency to our door.

Now, I think it goes in two parts, both with the boom of online delivery services that are now very commonplace, delivering all sorts of goods right to our door, to our workplaces, for lunch and dinner every day. We see that growth happen over the past decade, but I think that was amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, where many of us were told not to go out to our favourite restaurant, or limit the amount of times we could go out to the store.

And it pushed us all to rely on delivery people much more frequently. It relied us to—forced us to rely on these services. And at the same time, when health experts and health officials were telling us to stay at home, you know, shelter in place, to limit your contacts. That was when our society put the most pressure on our delivery drivers and asked them to deliver the goods right to our door. And we asked them to do that and they did it. They helped to keep our society going while we were all doing our part to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

And at that same time, now I think it's up to us as legislators to look at the ecosystem, the atmosphere, the environment for delivery drivers and to see whether the current standards and current regulations

meet the need of delivery drivers today. And with that growth, with that added need and pressure and frequency, both because of the growth of online delivery services and—caused and amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, we're in a world right now where having something delivered to your door is just commonplace. It just happens every day.

Nobody thinks—even bats an eye when they see a delivery driver walk into an apartment building, or into a house, or into an office, delivering one—any variety of products to Manitobans, in any corner of our province. And so, with that, it's time for us to review the sort of regulations we have in place, to make sure that the work atmosphere is conducive to this type of delivery service that we all now, quite frankly, expect.

And one thing—and that's why I applaud my—the member for The Maples (Mr. Sandhu) for bringing forward this bill, because he's listening to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Moses: —because he's listening to the needs of workers in Manitoba. He's listening. He heard their concerns and they expressed to him quite clearly the need for more washroom access in order for them to be able to do their jobs effectively, to deliver the goods to Manitobans. And he listened to them.

And they said, we would like to be able to access washrooms in public businesses, to have access to the washroom; it allows us to do our jobs more effectively.

You know, the washrooms already accessed in these—they're already available in these public spaces, and they just want to be able to have safe and convenient access to that so they can go back to doing their job, which is delivering goods, many times from that very same establishment, out to customers across our province.

And so, by our member listening to these individuals, these workers who are trying to do their job safely and effectively, he's brought forward this bill, this bill which would require public, commercial businesses with a storefront to provide washroom access for delivery drivers.

And I think that goes not only to ensure that we are meeting demands and staying relevant to the world of work that we're seeing in Manitoba today, but it also goes to show that we need to continue to be responsive to the changes that are happening in our society. And like I said at the top, nobody might have imagined a decade or two ago with—the frequency that

we might have delivery drivers. And it's up to be responsive and find ways to ensure our laws and our regulations are meeting the demands that our workforces are putting on them.

And so, I applaud the member for The Maples (Mr. Sandhu) for listening, for taking charge and taking action in bringing forward this bill, which I don't think is quite controversial at all; I don't think there should be really any opposition to this.

I know that at my workplace, when I want to go to the washroom, I simply go to the washroom. I know that if many people who might be reading this in Hansard or watching this online might be thinking to themselves, well, when I'm at work or when I'm at home or when I'm at school, if I have to go to the washroom, I simply go to the washroom.

But if you're a delivery driver and you're thinking about when I have to go to the washroom at work, what goes through your mind? Is it, do I just go to the washroom? Or is it, okay, now I have to time out my route? I have to plan a scheduled stop at a place where I know there is a washroom available, which might take me off my destination route, which might cost me a little bit more in gas on my vehicle, which might delay me and might—maybe fines and—have some fines or penalties from my work because I now have to deviate off my route, slow me down.

And this is the sort of things that might go through a delivery driver's mind when they simply have to go to the washroom.

By being able to access a washroom in a public place, we now allow them to simply do their job. We increase the health and safety—the workplace health and safety for delivery drivers and we improve their lives, their working conditions. And ultimately, at the end of the day, for all of us Manitobans who are relying on these delivery services, we will have improved service because we know that we're at least in one way helping to improve the lives and the work experience of delivery drivers.

And to close, Madam Speaker, I just want to thank all those people who do that really important work, all those delivery drivers, whether you're a truck driver, a delivery driver for an online business, a delivery driver directly for an establishment like a restaurant, a taxi driver. We all rely so much on the work that you do. And we thank you for all the work that you do, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when your service was relied on even more.

So, we thank you for that hard work, we thank you for everything that you have done and continue to do. And I think this bill would be a good way for us to show that appreciation by improving your workplace health and safety by giving you access to washrooms at public establishments.

And I think that this would be a good sign for all of us in Manitoban—all of us in Manitoba through an unanimous vote here in the Legislature today to show that appreciation and show that thanks by passing Bill 227.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (10:40)

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I really appreciate that the member for The Maples brought forward this legislation. I think that, not only is it very good legislation, but it also allows for us as MLAs to express some of our appreciation for the incredible work that truck drivers have and continue to do, and just for their efforts throughout the entire pandemic.

Truck drivers were one of the industries that never shut down throughout the pandemic, even with rules constantly changing, whether that's over the borders, here in Manitoba, being able to deliver, and how they're delivering into business, whether that be grocery stores or smaller businesses, Madam Speaker. And I don't think that we talk about that enough, the truck drivers and the incredible work that they did, continue to do throughout the pandemic to ensure that all of us Manitobans had the resources that we needed to get through the pandemic.

So, I want to thank the member for bringing forward this debate just so we can put those words on record as well.

Madam Speaker, this legislation would actually bring us on par to some other legislation that has been introduced, but not yet passed, is my understanding. I know in Ontario, they have similar legislation and it talks about delivery drivers, whether that be industries like SkipTheDishes or DoorDash.

It talks about couriers. So, if a courier is delivering a package to, we'll say an Esso gas station, they would be able to go into the gas station and utilize the washrooms if they so needed.

It talks about truck drivers. Sometimes, some of these long-haul, and even some of our shorter cab truck drivers, they're on long commutes. And I really appreciated what my colleague who spoke just before me, member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses), had shared

about how truck drivers should not have to plan their routes around washroom access. And I think, to even take this a step further, they should not have to plan their intake of water and beverages and hydration, Madam Speaker.

I know—I think sometimes about when I go camping in the summer, I actually have to strategize a little bit, and I try not to drink too much water before going on a long hike, because I might not have access to a washroom right away. And so, this is another, I think, positive part of this legislation, is we never want to put a barrier up between a truck driver, a taxi driver, a delivery, food or grocery driver, in being able to hydrate themselves for work, Madam Speaker.

I think that providing these services should never be denied to anyone. It is just a basic need, whether it's—we all have basic needs, Madam Speaker, and going to the washroom is one of them. We all need to sleep, we all need to hydrate, we all need to eat.

And we're known to be friendly Manitobans. Let's be friendly. Let's ensure that everyone has access and can utilize washrooms when they need to.

And very happy to support the legislation.

Thank you.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): You know, there's a few things here that we just, we've got to think out. I know a lot of times in today's world, you'll stop in and, you know, a lot of the—lot of the people that run small businesses will request a person to purchase some food before they can use their washroom, or they'll ask them to—you've got to buy something. It's just not a walk-in anymore. And it's—there's a lot of things that have to be thought out. And I really appreciate, because that's one of the most important things when you're travelling, is access to washrooms. Or delivery, I'm sure.

You know, we have great appreciation for a lot of our truck drivers and the things they do, and during the pandemic especially, it was, you know, it was a daunting task for them. And so, you want them to be able to have access to these washrooms.

Sometimes, you know, store owners will refuse, and they'll say, hey, we've got to brunt the cost here of pumping out this sewage, and it's an added cost. And then, when you get an influx of people, a lot of times, that go ahead and they use washrooms and—you know, a number use it. And then, when the staff want to use it, you know, they—somebody has to clean them, so to speak.

And, you know, these things all have to be thought in in a lot of detail, and there's a few things that have to be. But, No. 1, access to washrooms for delivery person is very, very important. And the majority of public-facing business already allow for the access. However, there are some that do not.

In 2022, our government launched a legislated five-year review of the Workplace Safety and Health Act and its associated regulations. And our government recognizes, too, that the—workplace safety and health should not be a political issue, and has to be developed through proper consultation with Manitobans.

And that's why our government, we're engaging in consultation through Engage Manitoba relating to strong protections that meet the needs of modern workplaces and improving consistency and ensuring require—or ensuring that the requirements are clear and reasonable.

This year, from—I think it was August 30th to November 30th, Manitobans will have the opportunity to participate by sharing their ideas and recommendations. And the review will be focused on ensuring strong protections are in place that meet the needs of today's workplaces and improving harmonization and consistency with other jurisdictions and ensuring requirements are clear and reasonable and helping Manitobans meet its obligations under The Regulatory Accountability Act.

You know, it was more so an issue during the pandemic when, you know, there were some really tight restrictions on the number of people in a restaurant and the various types of, you know, mandates were in place. So, when people went into a washroom, you know, and they left that washroom, possibly it would have to be cleaned after each individual visit.

Is it still a huge issue? You know, this is something that a committee can look at and say, you know, yes, it is and we've got to ensure—but, hey, the bottom line is we do want to have that access out there for a lot of the people. And these inputs from Manitobans are vital and important to help enhance our province's workplace safety and health framework.

A workplace safety and health committee comprised of labour employer and technical representatives is working to provide recommendations on the submissions from the public at large. It would be inappropriate to pass this legislation without receiving

a recommendation from this review committee that's working so diligently on this task.

And before passing it, it's important to hear the perspectives of workers and employers. And as I said, during the COVID restriction situation, the issue of accessing to the washroom for the delivery person gained attention during peak COVID cases as restaurants used to have some COVID restrictions, as I mentioned earlier.

And although very few complaints were received by the provincial and federal regulators, Ontario's the only province to amend its legislation to include these requirements in October of 2021.

Our government recognizes that Manitoba families are struggling with making ends meet, and we're making smart investments to give Manitoba the release they deserve. And our government is lowering income taxes by adjusting the basic personal amount, allowing Manitobans to keep more income by adjusting Manitoba tax bracket thresholds.

And so, these changes are making things much more affordable, and a lot of these small businesses are looking at how can we save, what do we have to do, what's going to be our responsibility. This is putting more money in hard-working Manitobans' pockets and our government is focused on this.

By the—you know, the minimum wage: again, something with small businesses. And this relates to small businesses because these are where these people are going to be stopping in and using the restaurants. And we're increasing, of course, in October 2023, the minimum wage to \$15 and providing the support to small businesses so their rising cost of wages can be minimized.

And we also released—recently passed a bill to extend 'bevearment' leave to five days from the three days. So this—a lot of this is SAFE Work Manitoba and in Manitoba, we have the SAFE Work Manitoba strategy that uses the national standard for psychological health—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wowchuk: Psychological health and safety in the workplace as its guide. The strategy aims to improve psychological health and safety in Manitoba workplaces and it prevents and reduces workplace psychological injury and illness and enhances the culture of workplace safety and health to include psychological health.

Great example of the success of this strategy at work is the Royal Canadian Mint created its own two-year workplace mental health strategy calling—or called starting the conversation, using the guidelines of the national standard. A follow-up survey showed 76 per cent of respondents saw an increase in psychological health awareness at work.

* (10:50)

SAFE Work strategy and recommendations fall into three steps and raise awareness of the workplace. And psychological—or, the workplace—psychological health and safety and develop practical tools and resources for workplaces to build a capacity of partners to provide the services.

So I guess, you know, in summary, it's really, really important for us to look at all the avenues, all the ways that it's going to impact the small business. Is there going to be a financial burden? Is there going to be, you know, additional staff required to be brought on to, you know, clean these washrooms, et cetera? And I'll let some of my other colleagues maybe share a few words on this important issue.

Thank you.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): My first word on this is the absolute disrespect that came from the member from Swan River towards the trucking industry—front-line workers.

And through the course of the pandemic, we've talked about front-line workers and the impacts and their need for us to thank them and appreciate them. And everything that member just said goes against that appreciation, goes against that respect and—instead looking for a reason just to make this a partisan issue when it should not be.

We talk about the respect for trucking industry and the heroes—and we've referred to them often as that, as heroes. And what are they asking for? What is the trucking industry asking for? They're asking for something that every Manitoban, every citizen across the world should be able to do.

And when we talk about this legislation—and I'm sure there's people that are asking what this legislation is about. Because they're asking, why does this have to be? Why isn't this just the case? Why isn't this just the norm? And the fact of the matter, it isn't. And that's what this legislation is attempting to do, to make this the norm, so to make this so that everybody has that equal access.

And I know the members opposite were standing up and trying to make this, you know, a huge cost issue. For those of you that ever have the chance to stop at a restaurant or a place of business and you've asked to use the washroom and they've said, sure, go ahead. There's not, go ahead, and there's golden toilet paper in the bathroom that somebody is going to have to pay a thousand dollars for. It's just a matter of simple little things.

So, they're trying to make this about a significant cost, across the way, and that's not what this is. It's about respect. It's about respect and thanking our front-line workers who are there every day.

And I know members opposite also stood up, and whether it would be in the Chamber or whether it be in their constituency, and thanked those trucking—those truckers and the trucking industry for the pandemic and the work they did during the pandemic, but this also goes prior to. This'll go into the future, as well, if this legislation is passed, and we're hoping that it is. Because that's the thank you, that's the value.

So, I know the member from Swan River represents a rural constituency, so maybe the question should be what happens if no trucks went through your community.

What would happen to your community? What would happen if those deliveries were not going to your community because there was just a simple denial, because a trucker couldn't navigate their way, saying, you know what, there was no way for me to use the facilities in this community so I'm not going to go there. How do we measure that cost versus the cost of doing this, which is basically nil?

So, Madam Speaker, when this legislation came forward, it was just to show our—show thank you. To show and try and bring something in place that everybody across Manitoba, I'm sure, already assumes is the norm, and everybody has that ability to go and use facilities wherever they may go.

And there's a lot of businesses that do that as well, that do that without giving it a second thought: sure, go ahead. It's no different than if a customer came in and asked to use that washroom as well. They would say, gladly. Because that whole cycle and that whole chain to make our economy function needs to work hand in hand.

So, for us to be able to do that, let's pass this legislation. Instead of trying to make it a wedge issue, a partisan issue, let's go ahead and pass this to make this the norm, to show our true appreciation for our

front-line workers. Because we talked about front-line workers in education and health care, but the trucking industry was also front-line workers and you really seen that over the course of the pandemic.

But this issue preceded the pandemic, it was very evident during the pandemic and it will go on past the pandemic. So, we need to show our appreciation and step up to the plate here and do this. This is not a partisan issue, this is not a significant financial issue as members across the way will try and claim that to be. It is not that whatsoever. It is about respect and appreciation.

So, with those few words, Madam Speaker, miigwech.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Again, I mean it's—we talk about truckers and people, and I just want to say, with the condition that the roads are in, I wish them all the safety and all the best for them and what they're doing out there for us.

And I agree with the member opposite that just spoke. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Isleifson: You know, we do respect—respect is huge. And the respect for the work that these truckers do, I think it goes unfolded. I don't think you'll see anybody in any side of this House disrespecting the work that truckers do.

I mean, even the stats that were mentioned by the presenter of the bill, you know, it's easy to see how much work that the truckers do. I live on a—in a community right off of a main thorough-through, through Brandon and we have truckers going back and forth all the time. And again, we've certainly come to appreciate what they do.

So, I don't think it's about—it's definitely not a lack of respect to the truckers, as the previous member just stated. I think that's a little harsh, it's a little out of line. I didn't hear anything in the member from Swan River that disrespected anybody. I think, if anything, I think we all support the idea of having safe access to facilities when they're needed.

When you're growing up as a little one, the last thing that you want to talk to your friends about are your washroom needs. But let me tell you, it's a fact of life that every one of us has to use the washroom at some point in time. And I'm sure every one of us have been out shopping and had to use the washroom somewhere and we appreciate the fact that washrooms are available to the public. But I understand it's—you

know, going through COVID with, you know, places that were restricting access, places that were shut down, it was difficult.

I would like to see some more data. I'm certainly not against the proposal what's for us today. I think that everybody should have access. But again, I would like to see just a little bit more data on, you know, whether it's just provincially or whether it's nationally or federally or even global on what is happening.

I don't want to lose fact on the bill, and I know it's a lot and I appreciate the passion that the member has for trucking. But there are also others in the industry that are on the road every single day delivering. And that's why I asked the question about delivering to households, because you do, you have your DoorDash drivers, your Skip delivery drivers. And I'm not talking about them coming into my home and using the washroom. However, if I had a delivery coming to my house and they asked if they could use the washroom, I would absolutely let them do so.

But I'm talking about—and I think something that the bill is missing is those delivery drivers, when they go into a small business, when they go into a McDonald's to pick up a delivery order, when they go into any place to pick up a delivery order that they can take out, to ensure that they have access to washrooms in those areas as well.

And I know there are some areas right now, you know, in—and I've seen it myself in Winnipeg, for example, if you run into a small—a fast-food place and run into the washroom—and I say that because just down the street from the Legislature is a fast-food restaurant that, if you were to go in there just to use the washroom, you're going to find the doors locked. But all you have to do is go to the counter—and I've seen people ask for the key to use the washroom.

You know, so access is important, but at the same time, when you bring a bill forward, I think one of the factors that we have to look at, bringing bills forward, when you're trying to force businesses or recommend businesses allow access is, what happens if they don't? And I don't see that in the bill.

And I know the member talked about being unable to bring a bill forward because it's got money in it; I would still like to see recommendations. I mean, we're not asking the government to spend money. The bill is saying that we need to have something in place so that people can use the washroom when they're making deliveries.

But what do you have—what happens if someone can't—you know, doesn't follow that and says no, you're not using the washroom?

* (11:00)

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

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

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 12—Calling on the Provincial Government to Fairly Negotiate with Allied Health Professionals

Madam Speaker: The hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolutions.

The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Calling on the Provincial Government to Fairly Negotiate with Allied Health Professionals, brought forward by the honourable member for Concordia.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I move, seconded by the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) that,

WHEREAS allied health professionals, including, diagnostic and lab technologists, respiratory therapists, physiotherapists and social workers, alongside other highly specialized front line workers are a critical part of Manitoba's health-care system; and

WHEREAS this Provincial Government has kept over 6,500 of these front-line health professionals without a current collective agreement for over five years or 1,800 days; and

WHEREAS these allied health professionals have had their wages frozen for the longest to date of any health-care contract in Canada; and

WHEREAS Manitoba is losing many critical professionals to other jurisdictions, like Saskatchewan, where they pay better wage rates, have benefits and better working conditions; and

WHEREAS some allied health professionals such as perfusionists are paid 40 percent less than their colleagues in neighboring provinces; and

WHEREAS unsustainable workloads over the past few years are leading to burn out among allied health professionals and some are leaving their professions altogether.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to bargain fairly and finally negotiate a new collective agreement with Manitoba's allied health

professionals for their tireless work alongside doctors, nurses and support workers, over the last five years, including three years of the global pandemic.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to consider the motion as printed? [*Agreed*]

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Provincial Government to bargain fairly and finally negotiate a new collective agreement with Manitoba's allied health professionals for their tireless work alongside doctors, nurses and support workers, over the past five years, including three years of the global pandemic.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wiebe: Appreciate the opportunity to bring this very important resolution before the House this morning. It is certainly top of mind for everybody in this province right now.

And, you know, we know that because we've been out talking to people on doorsteps. We've been knocking on doors. We've been going to community meetings and community events. And it's certainly something that you hear all the time.

And, you know, you hear across the board, universally—it doesn't matter somebody who's an NDP voter or a PC voter or, you know, or maybe not even engaged in politics or engaged in the normal sort of back and forth that we do in this place. To a person, everybody in Manitoba knows that the PCs have been an unmitigated disaster when it comes to our health-care system.

And, you know, that's not even a controversial statement here in this House, because we know that this Stefanson government has been doing everything they can to run away from their record and even they agree that health care is a mess in Manitoba. They understand that Brian Pallister brought us to the brink and it's only continued under this Stefanson government. So they do this every day. They try to distract and they try to distance themselves from their record. And they try and change the channel about how bad things truly are.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And out of one side of their mouth, you know, they're saying, well, you know, things are bad and, you know, they understand that there's a serious problem when it comes to what they call, I think, health human resources, which is sort of a bureaucratic way of saying that front-line health-care workers in our

system that need to be supported and need to be made to feel valuable and appreciated. And then, on the other side, they say—on the other side of their mouth, they say, well, you know, it wasn't our fault. And just trust us this time; we're going to fix it.

Well, Manitobans don't trust them. And they know that this government's record will be the one that will be on debate and as part of the discussion for this year's election.

Manitobans understand that at the end of the day, it comes down to our front-line health-care workers to ensure that our health-care system is stable and is strong. And, of course, we often talk in this place about doctors. Everyone, of course, appreciates the work that doctors do, the important work that they do. We all—obviously all understand the work that nurses do or support staff in the hospitals.

But it's interesting, when you talk to front-line workers themselves, when you talk to those nurses, when you talk to those doctors, who do they talk about? They talk about the allied health-care workers within the system and how valuable they are to ensure that the overall system can perform and can deliver the health care that folks need.

They understand that allied health is critical to building our health-care system and repairing the damage that's been caused by this Stefanson government. They understand that, at the end of the day, it's those workers feeling respected, feeling like they're a part of this solution to our health-care woes that will ultimately decide whether we're successful in repairing the damage or not.

And so, Manitobans understand that, and they want that to happen. But what has happened under this government? Of course, seven years of disrespect to all health-care workers. It was, you know, the first 100 days that this government came out and started slashing and cutting in our health-care system, but beyond that, going directly after organized labour and directly after organized labour within the health-care system after decades of respect and labour peace and—you know, and understanding how important those health-care heroes have been.

The first order of business under this government—of course, they didn't say this in the election in 2016, they said, just trust us—I think we've heard that one now a few times—they said, we're—the first thing they're going to do is they're going to start going after organized labour and start cutting in our health-care system.

That was the—and, you know, and this may feel like distant memories, right? This is ancient history, right? This is the beginnings of the dark days of the Pallister government, right? So it's—you know, it feels like ancient history. But the reality is, for some of our health-care workers, they're still caught in this government's disrespect. They're still waiting for fair negotiations.

And that—those are our allied health-care workers. Those are the health-care workers I was talking about, that are so well respected within the system, they're so well respected by Manitobans that folks understand the necessity and the importance of those workers. They are now five years without a contract, Mr. Deputy Speaker—five years.

And, you know, what we hear from health-care workers day in and day out, is they say, we want some respect, we want to feel like we're being heard and we want to be a—have a seat at the table. And yet, for these workers, they aren't even able to negotiate a contract with this government because of their interference. For five years they haven't even been, you know, not even the most basic thing that a worker in this province should expect: fair wages, fair respect from a government. They haven't even be—able to get that.

And so what's been the result? Well, you know, our health-care system has suffered. Ninety-nine per cent of allied health-care professionals are, you know—have voted and have said that they are not in favour of this Stefanson government and the way that they've been operating.

And, you know, this unprecedented mandate leaves us in a very precarious position. Because, not only are we dealing with an issue across the health-care system in recruitment and retainment within the allied health-care system, why would anybody feel that the Manitoba government and the—and Manitoba is the place to come and work and be a part of the solution when they've got a government that isn't at the table?

So, we need a change, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we need it fast. You know, the PC government says, well, we, you know—this is a problem all over the country, everybody—well, no. This is a uniquely—it's uniquely bad here in Manitoba. This is the longest date to date of any health-care contract that is outstanding in this country. And it's shameful.

The results of this, well, the impact—of course, we know in rural Manitoba, our EMS, our emergency services are—you know, they are stretched thin. When

we're talking about how to fix rural health-care in this province—not the slide and the chart and the plan that was released by this PC government that showed closure after closure after cut after cut—but to actually build rural health-care and to actually support our rural health-care system.

We know that allied health is absolutely crucial to allow our rural paramedics to be a part of that system. They're without a contract; they're saying, why are we supposed to work for a government that doesn't respect us?

We know that in my neck of the woods—I know we're—I hope we're going to hear from the member from Transcona, because he's certainly got a lot to say about the importance and the value of our allied health-care workers.

We know that at that Concordia Hospital, for instance, they have been struggling because their respiratory therapists, who are without a contract, are continuing to be disrespected. The government cut the number of respiratory therapists at Concordia.

And then, with the closure of the ER, with the loss of ICU beds and with the cuts to CancerCare, and sort of all of the cuts that we've suffered in northeast Winnipeg—this only exasperates that problem, and it only pressures those health-care workers even more.

* (11:10)

And, you know, and at a time when Manitobans across the board understand health care is the most important thing, right? So, we all know that inherently, but the pandemic highlighted that, it showed it, it demonstrated. Manitobans across this province were supporting health-care workers, banging pots, were saying our front-line workers are the most important thing that we can invest in.

And, you know, even this PC government doesn't disagree. Because now they'll say, well, we're going to—you know, just trust us—we're going to spend billions of dollars. No. No PC, no Conservative is coming out and saying, don't spend that money. Even they understand that it needs to be done. Even they understand how important it is to invest in health care.

But, ultimately, what health-care workers are telling us is there's disrespect from absolutely from the ground level all the way to this minister's office, and to the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) office—disrespect. We've seen that in the House, we've seen that in the deplorable comments that have been made around health-care workers and the concerns that they've

brought in good faith to this government, right—they've been disrespected.

And allied health-care workers at the very least deserve a contract to even begin to discuss about how they can be a part of the solution, how they can help build our system, how they can build health care in this province and begin to repair the damage of this PC government.

We're going to spend a lot of time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the next few months talking to Manitobans on the doorstep. We already have; we've heard from them, we know this is their No. 1 issue. But, ultimately, it's for this government to answer for their disrespect.

And I—you know, I welcome the debate here this morning. I think it's important that we spend some time on this, and we tell Manitobans clearly whose side we're on.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Questions

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

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): My understanding is that negotiations are ongoing. They've been going well between the employer, Shared Health and the union that the member references.

Is the member suggesting that we toss out all those negotiations, all the hard work that has been done by the union representatives and negotiators, and intervene? That's what he's asking us to do. The government should intervene somewhere where it doesn't belong.

Are you suggesting we throw out and disregard all the work that has been done?

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Well, this PC government, of course, had no problem interfering in fair negotiations in the past. Of course, the courts have ruled on that. The minister knows they were found guilty of that in the past.

What we're saying is, is that if this government would stop souring and poisoning the relationship with our health-care workers, they could at least get started on negotiating a fair deal with our allied health-care workers.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I thank my colleague for bringing this resolution forward. It's very important.

We're in an unprecedented time, as my colleague has already eloquently articulated, that we have a strike mandate with allied health-care professionals that has never been seen before, the impacts of which are significant, not just here in Manitoba, but certainly the ripple is felt across the country.

Can my colleague from Concordia advise what the consequences on our health-care system have been in terms of allied health-care professionals being left without a contract for over five years?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the member for Union Station is exactly right. This is unprecedented, and the impact that it has on our health-care system is wide-ranging. And, as I said, we've heard a lot from other members in the health-care system. They are in the same boat, feeling that they're disrespected.

This is specifically a problem now with allied health, where, without a contract, without even a government willing to sit at the table and actually get to work to figure this out, you know, this could have major impacts in a province where we haven't seen that, and that's because we've, in the past, had governments that respected our health-care workers.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): My question to the member for Concordia is: Does he believe politicians should negotiate all labour agreements with the public service directly? So, at the negotiating table, should it be elected officials sitting across the table, with the negotiators of the public service on the other side?

Does he believe that's the way this should proceed?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, of course, this minister was at the Cabinet table; he sat with Brian Pallister as Brian Pallister came and said, we're going to interfere with the University of Manitoba Faculty Association. He said, we're going to interfere, we're going to step in, and this member said, that's great, I support that one hundred per cent.

The courts ruled against this government and we're ruling against this government in interfering by

not sitting at the table, not beginning a fair negotiating process now with our allied health care.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): This negotiation has apparently been going on for five years, but my question is: When did the negotiation actually start?

Is part of the problem that the government was very slow to the table to even start negotiations?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, as I said earlier, I mean, really, Manitobans knew right from the get-go that this government was not going to protect health care, was not actually going to make things better but was, in fact, looking to cut, looking to pit health-care workers against one another.

And so, really, I would suggest that this started right from day one of Brian Pallister's government and continued on as, you know, the current Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) was the Health minister. And so the negotiations, as the member said, have been ongoing, I would suggest, right from day one with a government that disrespects health-care workers.

MLA Asagwara: Again, I thank the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) for bringing this resolution forward.

And I know that this member has been engaged for years in his community with folks in terms of what's going on in health care, you know, especially at the Concordia and other places.

And I'm wondering if the member can share with us: What is he hearing from people in his own community in terms of why and how we're losing allied health-care professionals from Manitoba to other jurisdictions?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think that was maybe a bit of a backhanded compliment about how long I've been fighting this fight in this House with regards to health care.

But it is true that we're hearing from allied health—from health-care workers in general, specifically allied health, where they, of course, see incentives, they see opportunity in other provinces, for some going down south—we've seen that problem in the past.

But now what we're seeing under this government is a push for privatization, a hyper focus on privatizing our health-care system. And so for many in our health-care system, they're looking at the private system.

Is that the way to go? I can tell them, under a NDP government, we would certainly prioritize our public health-care system.

Mr. Helwer: Well, the government has a long record of respect for collective bargaining, especially in the health-care system. It has worked very well.

Shared Health is the employer, as the member opposite well knows, even though he seems to discount that all the time. There is ongoing negotiations in health care, as is happening right now. And the member wants to throw out all those negotiations and he wants to be the one that cuts a deal, disregarding the professionals that are at work here.

Does the member want to, again, throw out all the hard work, disregard the hard work has been done at the negotiation table and just sign a deal? He would be the one to sign off on it?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, how out of touch is this member.

You know, we spent some time in Brandon, and one of the things that was brought up time and time again was the idea that Shared Health—Shared Health—was a barrier—a barrier—to providing health care to his constituents and to people across this province.

It's absolutely ridiculous that this member would now say, well, we know—it has nothing to do with us; our cuts and our attacks on organized labour in the past, that has nothing to do with it; now, it's up to Shared Health to make these decisions.

It is a disrespect from the top down from this government that is forcing this to be an issue with our allied health-care workers.

MLA Asagwara: The member is speaking so well to this issue, and really shows the grasp that he has on this. And I know, as his colleague on this side of the House, it's—it reflects the fact that he talks to people and he listens to people in this area.

* (11:20)

And I'm wondering, based on all of the conversations the member for Concordia has had with many allied health-care professionals, if he could share some of his thoughts on what can be done to retain these health-care experts here in Manitoba where we need them in our health-care system.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, absolutely.

The member for Union—and this—I appreciate the—you know, the straight-up compliment this time, rather than that backhanded type. I do appreciate that they have given me some credit, you know, and really, as I am not an expert; I'm not the expert in the field.

But as they've said, I listen to those allied health-care workers. First of all, I think that's half the battle. And I do think that there needs to be, you know, a fair contract that's negotiated that offers fair wages. Again, other provinces have managed to do this. We know that the—you know, this is a problem. So this needs to be solved by a government that's actually going to fund health care and respect our health-care workers.

Mr. Schuler: Does the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) know that the 57 politicians in this Chamber are not the employer of allied health professionals in Manitoba—in fact, that it is Shared Health in Manitoba that is the employer?

Does he recognize that there's a difference between the 57 elected officials and Shared Health?

Mr. Wiebe: So, here we go again. I mean, the member is proving our point about Shared Health.

He understands that Shared Health is a level of bureaucracy that actually doesn't benefit Manitobans. He wants to hide behind Shared Health; he wants to say, well, no, no, that has nothing to do with our cuts, has nothing to do with the way that we've gone after front-line workers since day one under Brian Pallister and the failed Health minister and now Premier (Mrs. Stefanson). He wants to say, oh, no, no, no, this is all Shared Health.

Well, we know that Shared Health is a level of bureaucracy that ultimately doesn't serve Manitobans. What they're bargaining about is a government that cuts, right from the top, sends a message of disrespect, doesn't listen to front-line workers and, ultimately—

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

The time for questions is over.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Hon. Kevin E. Klein (Minister of Environment and Climate): Thank you, Mr.—*[interjection]*

Apparently, I don't need all my time. But I appreciate the acknowledgement from my colleagues, and thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, I've been here for a few months now in the Chamber and been honour—and it truly is an honour, but sometimes I do believe I'm watching a Netflix TV series, because much of what was said on camera, much of what is directed is spun and doesn't necessarily equate to facts.

The reality is I've negotiated several contracts with different unions: CEP at the time, Unifor and others. And all—during all those negotiations, it was always understood that you don't negotiate in public. You don't negotiate outside of the walls of your meetings at a table.

This is a common practice. This is out of respect for the employees and for an employer but, more importantly, for employees, because putting that pressure of them—thinking that a strike is imminent, that a deal is not imminent puts more pressure on people. And they don't need that when bargaining is going on.

It's a stressful time; I've talked to employees for years that always find those situations difficult. And in most negotiations it doesn't matter, really, what organization you are: if you weren't able to reach an agreement soon, it is upon the union itself to take the strike vote. That is part of the negotiations, to let the employers know there's—know that they're serious about reaching an agreement.

But they're still sitting at the table. What I'm hearing is that people—it's being presented in a sense that people are walking away, they're packing up their trucks, they're moving out of the province, nothing's being done. But that is clearly, clearly not the case.

A CBA is to be negotiated at the table between the employer and the employee. This House is not the employer. And I would certainly stand here today and say most Manitobans don't want elected officials sitting at a negotiating table. They want professionals. They want people that know what they're doing.

And that's what both parties want. They don't want to deal with politics. They don't want to get involved in a pending election and trying to get votes. They want to get their life settled and they want to get their contract settled. That's what's important to them, not what we say in here. What's important to them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is what is done and said and communicated from the negotiation tables.

And often, I've been at negotiation tables where there's 20 people. You have 10 representatives of the employees. You have 10 representatives of the organization. And it's a conversation back and forth, and you talk about getting to where the final decision is together. You present offers back and forth.

And not always do you sit at a negotiating table, when it sounds like to me that we've been at a negotiating table for five years and we're just not doing anything. If that were the case, the reality is,

based on my over 20 years of experience at this, is that they would have had the strike vote long ago. It would have happened in the start of the communication.

So, they've sent their message; it's been well-received by people. We understand that they deserve a good deal. I haven't heard one member of this party, the PC government, say that there shouldn't be a deal done for the allied health-care workers.

I was proud to have paramedics stand with me during my elections. And I'm proud to call many paramedics friends. My children have friends who are paramedics in the region, and I talk to them about—they understand the process. These are people who want to go to work. They don't want the stress of what's happening in here, and all the spin. They just want their union to sit at the table with the negotiators that are trained—that—*[interjection]*—they're trained to do.

I don't know—he's waving at me. I think a plane's coming in.

But what I wanted to make clear is that there are negotiators. And there are professional negotiators that sit there. And to say in any way, shape or form that the ongoing negotiations have put people's lives in danger, that have, you know, caused havoc amongst the medical process or systems throughout Manitoba, well that's just disappointing. That's not a reality. That's not what we should be saying to residents.

What we should be sending to residents is, listen, we respect the employees and, because of that, we have professionals at the table that are there to negotiate with their union who represent them, that it's not argued on the floor of the Legislature, that we don't make comments that are, you know, twisted a little bit, let's say.

I mean, there—comments are fine and opinions are fine. I respect that. But let's really think about what's going on here. I mean, I could—you know, during my time in media, I could list off a number of former NDP members, members opposite, that have—that were ministers, that spoke out about getting involved with, you know, negotiations, ministers responsible for labour that spoke out about interfering.

And now we've had a change in belief. All of a sudden, now we think the government should go in there, just like we've heard from the NDP and Liberal coalition, the NDP especially federally, wanting to give whatever raise is necessary to the workers that are on the picket lines today.

You need to negotiate at the table. That's where those negotiations are done. And I can sit here and I can list all of the things that we're doing from a human resources standpoint to help health care. And I've talked, as I said, to a number of paramedics who stood beside me, and who I'm honoured to have stand beside me during elections.

And I know what's important to them. And, of course, a good wage is important. Security is important. Their family is important. Nobody wants to strike. It's difficult when you go on strike. It's difficult when you're worried about that next paycheque, and we don't want that. I don't think any member in this Legislature—it doesn't matter what party we're from—wants that.

But this shouldn't be a political issue. This is what—we want the staff that have been hired to do their job, people that we should be respecting, people that we trust to do their job at the negotiation table and talk. This is not for MLAs to bring in to here. This is not fair to the people working; this is not fair to the residents in that area, that we're creating more fear, more concern.

* (11:30)

Everyone knows in this House; everyone wants a deal done. And we want a deal done as soon as possible. But there is no ability to wave a magic wand and say, here we go.

In negotiations, we heard today, federally, that the union who is on strike right now wants a 12 per cent increase and the Feds were offering nine. That's part of the negotiation. Should that be public? I don't believe it should be, but it got out there. But that's not fair to the employees because then they're judged, and then we have others judging the government for that. And, again, I want to prove my point, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Negotiating a contract in public is not the way to go. It is unnecessary. It's not fair to the staff. More importantly, it's not fair to the staff. It may seem like great bait and it may seem like a great weapon to throw in an election and throw at people and throw it on the wall and let's see what sticks. But it's not fair to the people that pay our salaries, the people that pay for us to come to this building every day and do a job for them. Again, doesn't matter what party you represent; that's what we're here for. We're not here to instill fear. We're not here to spin the facts.

The reality is, the union has a vote strike. They've got a mandate that they can strike. We have to respect

that and respect the fact that that is part of negotiations. And I respect their option and opinion to do that. And I also respect the negotiators on behalf of the government of Manitoba. Not the PC government, not any member of the MLA—not any MLA, sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is for the people.

And I really sometimes do sit here and feel bad that this is all being made public and being fought out in public, because every day they have to go to work worrying about what might happen. What are the facts? Is the government not at the table? We have negotiators. We have to be there. I mean that's a fact. You can't just walk away. And nobody's saying we're going to walk away. We're taking a reasonable approach. We're taking the approach by respecting the process of a CBA negotiations and we will continue to do that.

I really find that sending a message like we are today is disappointing and unfair to Manitobans.

Thank you.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Thank you, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to put a few words on the record in regards to my colleague, the MLA for Concordia's very important resolution this morning.

This resolution speaks to the heart of the issue as to why over 6,000–6,600 allied health-care professionals across Manitoba voted to the tune of 99 per cent of that membership for a strike mandate.

It's really important that our colleague has brought this resolution forward today because it speaks to what these allied health-care professionals have been enduring for seven years under a PC government that has treated them with disrespect and disregard since 2016.

And I'd like to pick up on something that the member for Kirkfield Park (MLA Klein) just talked about because I think it's important. He expressed concern, wakes up every day and is concerned about how the narrative in here affects allied health-care professionals.

And I think his comments are important because it really does speak to how a recently elected MLA in that PC caucus, someone who was anointed a minister very quickly, someone who had the opportunity to come into his caucus, talk to his Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and bring a new perspective to that Cabinet table, is—was so quickly and so easily moulded into, shaped into yet another perpetuator of the harm

that these allied health-care professionals have been experiencing at the hands of this PC government for seven years.

It is so striking to see how quickly on that side of the House they are willing to adopt an approach that has time and time again been proven to be detrimental to the health care of Manitobans. And that's sad to me. What a missed, important opportunity.

Instead of waking up every day—that member from Kirkfield Park—and thinking, what can I do to make sure that allied health-care professionals in west Winnipeg feel supported, are able to show up at the Grace Hospital and do their best with the resources they need, instead of showing up every day, waking up with that attitude and that perspective—instead, he says, you know what, things are gravy. Things are good. Everything's just fine. They're going to work it out. They're going to work it out.

After seven years of the PC government treating these workers as an—less than an afterthought, members on that side of the House actually believe that their ongoing lack of any effort to listen to these allied health-care professionals is adequate. It is so shameful.

And the reality is that it is obvious that although, you know, the minister will stand up and talk about paramedics standing beside him at different events, he's never had a conversation with them about the fact that they are dwindling in numbers here in Manitoba, that our EMS response times are increasing across the board, especially in rural Manitoba, where every single minute counts in terms of EMS response.

It is evident that, in the area of allied health, this government continues to fail to listen. Because if they were listening, we wouldn't see allied health-care professionals leaving Manitoba for other jurisdictions. And that isn't fear mongering, that is quite literally what is happening right now.

There is a reason why there were zero applicants to the advanced paramedic program here in Manitoba at Red River College. There's a reason why zero people applied for that program, when this government doesn't allow advanced-care paramedics to practise to their full scope in rural Manitoba.

There are real consequences for this government's decision making over the past many years. This government has frozen the wages of the people we depend on to keep our health-care system not only operational but improving, strengthening it.

I haven't heard a single member of the PC caucus talk about the fact that our largest hospital, just a month ago—two months ago now, announced that they're having to go without a perfusionist, a dedicated perfusionist. I bet you, Acting Speaker, that they don't even know what that is. They don't even realize how critically important it is to have perfusionists in Manitoba, working in our hospitals. Our largest hospital without a dedicated perfusionist, essential to cardiac care.

I had a conversation with a respiratory therapist recently, someone I've known for years, someone who loves her job—sorry, loved her job. Woke up every day grateful to be able to provide her expertise to Manitobans; spent a lot of time, energy and money advancing her education in this specialty, and through tears, this respiratory therapist told me that she had recently made the decision to resign and leave her profession because she could no longer deal with the mistreatment of this government.

She could no longer stand hearing this government say, essentially, that they don't care that they've mistreated these workers since 2016. She couldn't stand to hear this government talk about thanking these allied health-care professionals while freezing their wages for over seven years. She quit the profession she loves because the investment she made into her career was unmatched by this government.

Advanced-care paramedics, who we should see in our health-care system, you know, in a few years we won't. They're not investing in that education because they see a government who doesn't invest in their ability to practise anywhere in our province and provide great care to Manitobans when they need it. That is shameful.

I've spoken to lab technologists who essentially work around the clock in rural Manitoba to make sure that our ERs stay open. They've told me to my face what they've been doing now under this government for years while their wages have been frozen by this government is unsustainable. And so, they make decisions to leave. They go to Saskatchewan, they go to Ontario, as I've already given a clear example of. They leave their careers.

* (11:40)

All while this government stands up in this House, and he goes on Twitter and tells everybody that it's not their fault, that things are playing out as they need to right now. Forget about the last six and a half years, don't worry about that. Let's focus on the

fact that during an election year, we're making announcements; we're deflecting, we're dodging, we're diving, we're avoiding any accountability. We're trying to make Manitobans forget.

But unfortunately for this PC government, their decisions have very real human impacts, and there are so many people across our system who are living with the consequences of their failure to lead health care in a way that puts people first.

We are in the midst of an unprecedented, historic strike mandate with allied health-care professionals here in Manitoba. Yet again, Manitoba has the distinction—the distinction—of something unprecedented that should never have happened, as we had the distinction of having some of the worst health-care outcomes during COVID-19, having the most devastating impacts seen in our long-term-care homes in Manitoba, running out of capacity in ICUs that also depended on allied health-care professionals when no one else did.

We have a Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) who, when she was the minister of Health, could have and should have rectified this situation with allied health-care professionals, but she couldn't be bothered during that time. She was more focused on herself and her own aspirations. The fact that our colleague, the MLA for Concordia, had to bring this resolution forward today is a testament to the failings of this PC government in the area of health care.

And what I want for all allied health-care professionals to know is that our NDP team stands with you. We believe in you as health-care professionals. We know you deserve to be treated fairly, and not just right now. You deserved it since 2016.

And we hope that Manitobans will remember the failings of this government in health care over the past several years and make a decision to vote in an NDP government that treats you with the respect and the care that you deserve as allied health-care professionals.

Thank you, Acting Speaker.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): I'm pleased to rise in the House today and speak to this resolution.

Unfortunate the member opposite is trying to interfere in negotiations that, you know, he has no role in, but he thinks he does. So, he knows better than the professional negotiators; he knows better than Shared Health.

Our government has a record of working well with the collective bargaining process. And especially

in health care, we have many—signed many contracts with professionals that are working in health, and this one is well under way. I understand the negotiations are going well, and it would be unseemly and improper for any government to intervene in negotiations—especially when they're going well, at any case.

You know, the member opposite seems to think that a strike mandate from the union members is unnecessary, unseemly. I would be worried if a union came to the negotiating table without a strike mandate. That would mean that they do not have the support of their members.

It's a tool that they use. And all negotiators know that you want to bargain from a position of strength. And that is what the strength mandate does: give the union negotiators, in this case, a position of strength from which to negotiate. It means they have the support of their members, as we would expect that they do. And Shared Health has the full confidence of the government that they are negotiating well.

As I said, the collective bargaining agreement is well under way. We have very severe hangovers from the NDP mismanagement of health care that we had to deal with. The numerous bargaining agencies and groups that just didn't work. We had to make it all work better. And it has. We've worked with all the unions to find a better path on how everyone can work together. And I'm pleased to see that under way, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The members opposite talked about paramedics and ACPs, and they had no need for paramedics nor ACPs when they were in government. I don't even—I wouldn't imagine the members opposite had ever heard the term ACP when they were in government. It is not something that they're familiar with. Certainly they had no support for paramedics as we have.

We are the party that—and the government that reduced ambulance fees by half. Because Manitobans were so afraid to call an ambulance. They were afraid that they wouldn't be able to pay for that ambulance, that they would deny themselves care. They would have someone drive themselves to the emergency room. They would drive themselves to the emergency room. And in rural Manitoba, they would discover that the NDP government had closed those emergency rooms, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And then they'd have to go on to the next one and they'd discover, again, that the NDP government had closed that emergency room.

So, you know, there's no lessons from the members opposite on health care. We all know how much destruction they caused in the health-care system where they were going to do away with hallway medicine with a \$20-million investment and that came and that went. And what they ended up doing was they stopped counting people in the hallway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that they were no longer counted as hallway—as patients in hallway medicine.

In fact, I had an aunt, as I've spoken to you in this Legislature before, recovering from open-heart surgery in the hallway of St. Boniface, a great institution in Manitoba. And she wasn't a—she wasn't counted as being in the hallway because every so often, someone would come along and move her—move the bed just a little bit so that it wasn't in the same place as it was. So then that wasn't counted as a member of the hallway medicine team that the previous government brought into existence. It's very sad to see that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And, you know, they—we also hear from the Labour minister under the NDP, Jennifer Howard, that they would not intervene in collective bargaining process. I do recall asking her in the Brandon University strike, not just one of them but two of them, if there was a role for government to play to appoint a mediator or conciliator, and her response was that there was no role for government in the collective bargaining process. But these members seem to have forgotten about that, that their Labour minister at the time, as our Labour Minister at the current time, is very, very well invested in the collective bargaining process.

There is a process where the professionals come to the bargaining table and they present options and they discuss how they can come to an agreement. And that, as I've said, is well under way in this case. It is up to those negotiators when that will conclude and how it will conclude. But we do know that negotiations are well under way and we do expect that we'll see something in the not too distant future. But that's up to the negotiators, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It's not up to government to intervene, as previous Labour ministers have spoken about in this House. And I'm sure the members opposite have great respect for then-minister Howard as the minister of Labour. She's gone on to great things. I knew her when she was a student at Brandon University and always well respected there; well respected in the Legislature here as well.

And I know it was painful for the government when Brandon University was on strike under their watch, not once but twice. And they had to deal with that at arm's length because it's not the government that was the negotiator, even though they had some tools available to them. Those tools are rarely used, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (11:50)

But the strike mandate is one that unions often use. And as I've said, if a union came to the negotiating table without that mandate, they're often bargaining from a weak position then, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that doesn't bode well for the union membership. We know that we want to have a good collective agreement that pays the members well, that government can depend on them working in a good environment. And those are all very important things that we see in this union environment and how we work with it in Manitoba.

It's nothing new. It is something that is ongoing. We've had health-care negotiations going on with Shared Health for many months and other—with other unions. And they have come to fruition, they've been signed, they've been voted on. And this is just the current one that they are in negotiation.

It's unfortunate that it has taken this long to get to this agreement, but we did have some hangovers from the NDP government that caused these delays, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We worked as quickly as we could to make sure that changes to the workplace were put in place to—that the particular unions that are representing these individuals were voted on by the individuals. They got to choose, in some cases, which union they wanted to have represent them. And once those negotiations were all done, then we could start to look at how we negotiate through Shared Health in the collective bargaining process.

You know, it's quite sad to see members opposite that don't seem to understand at all how collective bargaining works. Obviously, on our side of the House, we're well apprised of what the process is, what the role of government is and where the government can intervene, where the government cannot intervene. In this case, there certainly is no role for government.

We have the professional negotiators from the union that have been given their marching orders, they've been told what they want to negotiate. We've got the professional negotiators from Shared Health

that have been told what their role is. And those two negotiators are at the bargaining table with support staff and they are working very diligently to make sure that they can get the best deal for the union and the best arrangement for the government, so that we can make sure that they get their—once the agreement is signed, once the agreement is ratified and it goes into process, that those union members get all the back pay that they're fully available to get. We know that that's happened in past—past union negotiations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's sad to see members opposite try to fear monger with union members.

Obviously, once that collective agreement is agreed to and is ratified by the union members, that process falls into place and all those union members get the back pay. For all those years that were not under union contract are now under a ratified union contract, they will get their back pay. They will proceed on with 'whatsoever'—ever agreement the union has reached with Shared Health. And then, we will continue to deliver the best health care that we can for Manitobans when and where they deserve it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to start by emphasizing the importance of allied health professionals and allied health workers to health care in Manitoba. They make an extraordinary contribution.

There are almost 200 different positions or disciplines that are represented, from audiology to diagnostic medical sonography, to medical laboratory technicians, to occupational therapists, to paramedics, to physiotherapists, to speech-language pathologists, to respiratory therapists, to social workers, to psychologists and, in fact, many, many others.

Without the allied health professionals, our health system would grind to a standstill. There's just no doubt that—the importance that they have.

It is sad that the current government has not paid enough attention to allied health professionals. There are a number of professions which should be registered health professions, but the government has been very slow—and its NDP government before them—slow to move them along to get registered as registered health professionals. There have been slow and—delays of—in order to fill staffing positions. There are many areas which are crying out for people to work in labs so that people can get tests.

There are clerks; we heard not long ago of a shortage of clerks in making endocrinology appointments, which was backing things up. It is a problem with this government that they have not given the allied health professionals the credit and the importance that they should have.

And we see this in the fact that the contract negotiations here—we had a contract which ended about five years ago, and the government has been very slow to get moving on negotiations, and to get serious about negotiating.

It's good that we're finally getting some word from ministers that there is an effort now to move negotiations along, but it is—this delay has caused a lot of, you know, havoc in areas of health care, quite frankly, because, for lack of a contract, members of these disciplines and professions are now looking and taking jobs elsewhere and moving out of health care in Manitoba.

And it is going to be difficult to replace them. Indeed, the government needs to have a focus on making sure that the staffing levels are what they should be, because while we sit at the moment with—very short of many critical staff people who are in the allied health disciplines and professions, it is really a critical time.

And we know that health-care system has been under stress under this government for a whole variety of reasons, but particularly because they've not been very effective in planning ahead, and have let things like this negotiation be delayed and delayed and delayed.

So, it's a sad situation that we're faced with, and it is something that the government should have been

paying much more attention to and doing much more planning for.

With those comments, I will sit down so there can be a vote on this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Springfield-Ritchot—oh.

Okay, according to the rules of the House and the speaking order which is predetermined by those rules, I do need to recognize the honourable member for Transcona.

That was my error, and I correct it by recognizing that member.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I just want to say thank you to the allied health workers that helped keep me alive in part of my health-care team. It's the reason I'm standing here today. I look forward to the vote on this PMR.

Thank you.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): The member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) was asked, should politicians negotiate all labour agreements with the public service directly; and his answer was yes.

He was then asked again, should the 57 politicians, the elected officials of this Chamber, should they negotiate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Springfield-Ritchot will have 10 minutes remaining.

The time being 12 noon, this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m. today.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 20, 2023

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