

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

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Third Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
ALTOMARE, Nello, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
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BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
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MOYES, Mike	Riel	NDP
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PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
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WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, December 5, 2023

*The House met at 10 a.m.*

**The Speaker:** O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may lead 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.

Please be seated. Good morning, everyone.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** Will you please call for second reading, debate, Bill 200, The Firefighters Recognition Day Act, commemoration of days, weeks and months act amendment.

#### SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

##### **Bill 200—The Firefighters Recognition Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)**

**The Speaker:** It has been called for second reading, Bill 200, The Firefighters Recognition Day Act, commemoration of days, weeks and months act as amended.

**MLA David Pankratz (Waverley):** I move, seconded by the member from Assiniboia, that Bill 200, The Firefighters Recognition Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), be now

read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

#### *Motion presented.*

**MLA Pankratz:** Good morning, everyone. Today I am proud to rise in support of the 43rd Legislature's first private member's bill, The Firefighters Recognition Day Act.

It is so special to bring this part of my life into the Legislature and to emphasize the outstanding work of our firefighters across Manitoba.

And I want to draw attention to a number of firefighters in the gallery today, many of whom I worked alongside here in Winnipeg, and they're also coming all the way from Brandon this morning. So, if we could give them a round of applause, please.

You know, I consider a lot of these folks up in the gallery as extended family, truly. So, when you've gone through so much together and shared so many common experiences, you develop a really special bond.

Firefighters are there on Manitobans' worst days. As I look up in that gallery, I see faces of firefighters who've been there with me when we've had to tell a father that their daughter didn't make it, or that we were in a fire together and the roof collapsed.

So, firefighters have put their lives on the line day after day to make sure Manitobans had someone there for them on their worst day. It's the kind of connection that's difficult to describe, try though we may in this Chamber.

We've also been alongside each other as the job of firefighters has changed over recent decades. Increasingly, firefighters are asked to respond to mental health and addictions crises alongside paramedic and police services, because the need has become so great.

When you're the closest first responder to any crisis, you go, regardless of the type of emergency. And when all of the community resource organizations have closed down for the night, firefighters and other first responders are often the only ones left to deal with the complex social problems, which never sleep.

And, on a personal note, I am very excited for the work my colleagues here are digging into to make

certain firefighters have the resources required to do their job and the work they are doing to make sure a firefighter's perspective and experience is taken into account when policy decisions are made.

Firefighters know all too well that the volume of 911 calls across the province has been steadily increasing over the past many years. Being exposed to continuous and repetitive trauma takes its toll on firefighters' bodies and minds. I've had friends step away from the profession due to mental health reasons, and every firefighter here, I know, can empathize with their colleague when they decide to take a break due to physical, psychological, mental or emotional strain.

Firefighting is a constant exercise in expecting the unexpected. There are just so many unknowns when you approach any scene. It's not just about running into a burning building knowing exactly what you're going into. There have been times when I thought things were under control, and then, in an instant, black smoke dropped from the ceiling to the floor and the heat picks up and everything changes. And every firefighter up in that gallery would be able to tell you their own personal similar stories about this.

There are also increased unknowns when it comes to firefighters' health. Despite our best efforts to prevent smoke inhalation and stay healthy, firefighters are at increased risk for several types of cancer. The volume of emergencies causes firefighters to endure several cycles of stress per shift, a trend that has been shown to have negative effects on long-term sleep patterns, cardiovascular health and a multitude of other health outcomes. So, this is yet another often unrecognized sacrifice made by our firefighters.

But, where there are unknown risks and personal sacrifice, there is always pride of helping folks in their greatest hour of need, and the unexpected joy that comes from being the right person at the right time, positioned to make a huge difference in people's lives.

Above all else, firefighters are bonded in our dedication to helping others. Many firefighters across this province are volunteer, especially those in rural areas, and simply love their work.

And I want to just take a moment to tell a quick story. I was 18 years old, and this actually ended up influencing my decision to get into this profession.

\* (10:10)

My family and I were driving home from my grandparents' place in Gimli, and we unfortunately were T-boned on the on the highway. So, it was a

terrifying incident, and the people that showed up, 15 minutes earlier were probably sitting with their families having dinner. They were volunteers in the community. They showed up, they calmed us all down. They made sure we were all stabilized and they got my family to the hospital.

And it's—it made an indelible impression on me and was a big driver for why I decided to move forward as a firefighter. So I just want to take a moment to really make sure we emphasize the importance of volunteers and in the community, what firefighters are doing.

So, it's not all go, go, go on this job, either. Participating in educational initiatives at schools, teaching fire prevention skills to do—to everyday Manitobans who want to increase their training. And building connections with local resource organizations creates trust between firefighters and their communities. Seeing people excited about out work gets us excited to go to work each and every day.

So, firefighters recognition day will be a day to honour the bravery and sacrifice of our firefighters. But also a day to advocate for the proper supports firefighters need to do their job. Firefighters play an integral role in our emergency response system, one which many underestimate.

In such a stressful line of work, firefighters take care of each other. And I've been encouraged by recent efforts with firefighting organizations across this province to acknowledge and address the mental health challenges associated with firefighting.

Incredible leaders have been hard at work breaking down the social barriers hindering first responders from processing the trauma they witness and experience. It's not a question of if firefighters will encounter traumatic events, but rather, when. And work is being done to ensure they have the right tools to process these events in healthy spaces.

Firefighters take care of one another. You know, whether that's through a listening ear, helping hand, an incredible meal at the hall, depending on who's cooking; you know, take that under advisement. But they take care of one another. And firefighters across the province show up every single day. And whether it's helping in an overdose crisis, rescuing folks from a burning building, stabilising a car crash victim, or giving a kid and their parents a chance to just sit in the driver's seat of a fire truck.

Firefighters recognition day will be a day when we can say thank you to our firefighters and express

our appreciation for all the work that they do keeping our communities safe. And, you know, there is a real and true toll on the firefighters and the families and there have been a number of losses over the years.

So, first I want to thank you, Honourable Speaker, for letting me speak on this bill. And in recognition of those firefighters who did pay the ultimate sacrifice, I'd like to ask leave for a moment of silence.

**The Speaker:** Before we get into question period, is there leave for a moment of silence? [*Agreed*]

*A moment of silence was observed.*

### Questions

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

The floor is open for questions.

**Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk):** I'd like to thank the member opposite for bringing forward this bill. As a proud uncle of a firefighter, I'd like to know how the general public will be educated on the importance of May the 4th, firefighters recognition day.

**MLA David Pankratz (Waverley):** Thank you for the question, and thanks to your nephew for his service with the fire department.

I think it's just yet another chance for firefighters to be able to sort of say to the public, you know, this is what we do every day. This is our work.

There aren't necessarily formal institutions in place to push this out to the public, but on May 4 and leading up to that day, this will allow administrations across the province to emphasize the important work that firefighters are doing all across the province.

Thank you.

**Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye):** I'd like to thank the member from Waverley for bringing this legislation forward.

I have tremendous respect for firefighters and the dedication that they provide to the betterment and safety of our province.

During my time on the RM of Stuartburn municipal council, I was able to serve as the fire department

liaison to the municipality. It was during my time serving in that role that reinforced my level of respect for the commitment, dedication and sacrifices that firefighters provide with very little expectation for recognition. I was able to first-hand see the dedication that volunteer firefighters have to the betterment of their communities, both inside and outside of that fire hall.

Knowing that much of our province is served by volunteer firefighters, has there been consideration for separately recognizing the commitment of volunteer firefighters?

**MLA Pankratz:** Thank you for the question.

What I would say to that question is that, to me, there isn't necessarily a delineation between volunteer and career firefighters, right? We're all a family. So, firefighters in this province, we speak to members from Headingley, for example. I can speak to the member from Roblin on that, right? We're friends with them. We talk about training. We work together on all of these things and there's constant communication.

So I certainly wouldn't want to suggest that there's any difference in the service that a volunteer firefighter brings to the table rather than a career firefighter.

**Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside):** I want to thank the member from Waverley for bringing this long overdue proclamation forward. It's kind of near and dear to my heart.

I spent 15 years on the Woodlands municipal fire department, and I want to recognize our chief, Dean Campbell, and our deputy chief, Debbie Buchanan, for their years of service, that I got to spend time with them and now in their capacity.

So, I just want to know, can the government ensure that all municipalities across the province are made aware of this proclamation so they can all take part in celebrating and recognizing their members of their departments?

**MLA Pankratz:** Thank you for the question. Thank you for your service with the fire department.

I think that this government has shown very clearly over the last month and a half, two months, that we're very focused on making sure that we're communicating with municipalities in this province with our attendance at AMM and meeting with all kinds of stakeholders across the province in many different ways.

So that relationship will certainly continue, particularly with my role here as MLA for Waverley, and making sure that awareness for firefighters is made all the way across the province.

So, yes, absolutely. The municipalities and volunteer departments will be well aware of this appreciation day.

**Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler):** First, I want to thank all the firefighters in the province for the sacrifice that you make to us every day for keeping us safe. To the volunteer firefighters in my home community of Morden-Winkler, we are so grateful for your service.

I would like to ask: What will you be doing to honour those that are retired from the firefighters brigade?

**MLA Pankratz:** Thank you for the question; 5 Platoon, as they are lovingly referred to—the retired firefighters—will be honoured just the same.

This—as I mentioned with volunteer and career firefighters, retired firefighters are also part of the family, right? This is—there's no delineation there, right? So, this will just continue on to them, and they will be part of ceremonies or any sort of appreciation events that are happening on that day.

\* (10:20)

So, thank you for the question.

**The Speaker:** No further questions?

### Debate

**The Speaker:** The floor is open for debate.

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** Thank you to the member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz) for bringing forward this bill, and thank you for your service prior to entering political life and the good work that you did there.

And I'd like to thank all of the firefighters that have joined us today in the gallery. Welcome here, thank you for coming and thank you for the tireless, selfless work that you do every day to keep us safe. As the member for Waverley mentioned, we know it's a 24-7 job—just tireless and selfless work. It is physically and emotionally gruelling and we can't thank you enough for everything that you do for us as the people of Manitoba.

My constituency of Roblin is very well served, on the Charleswood side, by the Winnipeg Fire Department at Station 18 on Roblin Boulevard, and in

Headingley by the Headingley Fire Department. And I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to put a few words on the record about the good work that firefighters do in our communities as it relates to this bill, The Firefighters Recognition Day Act.

So, not only do firefighters keep us safe in one of the most terrifying situations that any of us could face, they're also very community-minded and very present in our communities. We all know they spread important community safety information, for example reminding us all to change our smoke detectors, educating kids about the importance of fire safety and—this one I just became more cognizant of, actually, during the election campaign—but the importance of having a visible address at your home.

I think any of us who have door-knocked in a rural area have felt the frustration of not knowing what house you were at, and I can't imagine how stressful that must be for some of our rural firefighters out on a call when they can't find the house that they're sent to, because people don't have their address posted. And I think that's just really important safety information to get out there.

Our firefighters visit schools and attend community events. I think those of us in Winnipeg are all familiar with the Fire Safety House that's often placed at school barbecues and community events and fun runs. And here in Winnipeg, actually, I'm a Girl Guides leader, and we took our Embers unit on a tour at Station 11 in St. James. And there was a mix-up with our tour date on the day of, but the gentlemen at Station 11 were game anyway and they put on a heck of a tour.

And you might be familiar with Station 11 if you're in the city, because their trucks have the Spider-man on the front of the truck. And if any of you are from Station 11, I'm going to mess this up, so I apologize. The reason for the Spider-man is that the firefighters at Station 11 are actually specially trained to particular risky types of rescues that involve climbing and rappelling, hence the Spider-man.

But the tour that they gave the girls was just incredible. They have a rappelling wall in the station for training. They actually did demonstrate the fire pole, which the kids got a kick out of. And they were so patient with the girls too. You know, they'd be sitting in the fire truck, just getting a kick out of it and we'd be like, okay, come on, come on down. They'd be like, no, no, just let them sit, let them enjoy it.

So, I thank them for the work that they do in our communities and with kids in particular. And as a Guider with that unit I actually got to try on the firefighting equipment, and I can tell you it is very heavy and very hot, and it gives you a new appreciation for the work that our firefighters do, having to wear that when they go to a call.

And in Headingley, the volunteer fire department supports so many community events, on top of the life-saving work that they do. Just last weekend, they were out in full force at the Headingley Santa breakfast, flipping pancakes for hundreds of people.

And they also put on an event every year called the Headingley Run for Wishes, and that's a charity run, and it's organized by the fire department. And I'd like to just take this opportunity to thank those involved in organizing—but in particular, Josh Mulvenna, he's a resident of Headingley and a volunteer with the Headingley Fire Department—for all of his efforts to organize the run.

The run has been getting bigger every year, and every year the run supports some great causes. This year, funds raised went to support the Children's Rehabilitation Foundation and the Westgrove Family Resource Centre. I participated in the run with my husband and my kids. It was actually their first fun run and now they're hooked, because they had a great time.

The fire department put on a great event—bouncy castles, snacks for everyone. It was a great atmosphere and it really brought the community together, and I just want to thank them for that and for the funds that they raised for some great causes in our community.

And, I'd also like to congratulate the new captain of the Headingley Fire Department, Brett Mueller. I also just wanted to put on the record a few words about some of the changes to The Workers Compensation Act that took place under the previous government.

And, I know some of my colleagues who were here for that are very proud that those amendments received all party support, because they were very important.

Those included initiatives to expand the list of cancers presumed to be caused by firefighting, to include thyroid, ovarian, cervical, pancreatic and penile cancers. Those changes came into effect in 2022.

And then later on, the previous government introduced changes to The Workers Compensation Act to

add wildfire firefighters; to expand their coverage to the same level as traditional wildfires. And I think as wildfires become a more common reality, unfortunately for us, that's increasingly important.

Wildfire firefighters were previously excluded from coverage. So, those changes received all party support earlier this year, and come into effect on January 1 of next year.

And I just wanted to put on the record, as well, that the member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz) has chosen Star Wars day as The Firefighters Recognition Day. And, I was going to give him a little bit of a hard time about that, but I think it's probably actually an honour, and may the fourth be with you, yes.

I think it's great that we're going to have a day in Manitoba to recognize the great work that firefighters do in our communities, and I'd like to thank him again for bringing forward the legislation, and I look forward to hearing what other members have to say about this bill.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member from Brandon West—no, sorry.

The honourable member from St. Boniface.

**MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface):** C'est un honneur d'avoir le droit de parole ce matin.

### **Translation**

*It is an honour to have the floor this morning.*

### **English**

And it's an honour to be present with so many firefighters that every day put their life on the line to keep us safe. And I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the member for Waverley for bringing such a bill forward.

In October, I had the chance to visit the hazardous materials response hall at Hall 2, I believe, on Archibald and I was impressed by the level of preparedness, dedication, training, know-how, equipment and overhaul knowledge that these men and women have in order to be able to keep us safe.

And having all these incredible firefighters present, I'd like to take this opportunity to reflect a little bit on why is it that they do what they do? Because they are heroes. And in today's society, why is it that we need heroes?

And I think part of it is that we need role models. And I'd like to, once again, publicly thank them for the role models that they are: for our society; our young children; our young boys and girls, because role models help us and help our young children recognize who they are, where they're from, and where they're going.

The other thing I'd like to recognize is that, you know, sacrifice and putting one's life on the line does have a toll, as the member of Waverley had spoken to. Mental health, especially in the last ten years, has been recognized, as something that we as a government, we as a society, has to be something that we deal with, not only on a daily basis, but on a better basis.

And, when I spoke to the tools, the physical tools that our firefighters have access to, we have to make sure, as well, that they have the supports. And I think that this day of recognition helps us ensure that they have the supports that they need to have every day so that they can do the job that they do to keep us safe.

Taking care of one another, I think, is central to how we move forward as a society. The fact that the respect and the care that these firefighters demonstrate for us on a daily basis is commendable.

\* (10:30)

I can go to work every day, my wife can go to work every day, my children can go to work every day, knowing that, in a moment's notice, in a time of need, 24 hours a day, we can count on our firefighters to be there for us.

And I also want to reflect on the fact that, you know, the training that needs to be there for our firefighters is ever-evolving. We have to ensure as a government that we continue to make sure that our firefighters have the best possible equipment, the best possible training to be able to respond in moment's notice to a crisis.

When I think about our cities in general, and how complex our cities are—active transportation, railway, all sorts of vehicles running through our cities—our firefighters sometimes are asked to jump into impossible situations. And I'm sure, personally knowing quite a few firefighters, that they don't give it a second's thought—or, a second thought. When the bell rings and they're asked to deploy, they do it. Yes, because it's their job. But it's also because, I know, that they care about their families, they care about their communities and they care about us.

And I think that having an official day like this that I believe aligns with the international recognition day for firefighters, which happens to be May the 4th, as well, sends a strong message that we as a society support the men and women that do this work and that we stand behind them.

And I know that sometimes firefighters talk about a sisterhood and a brotherhood of firefighters, but I want them to know that they have brothers and sisters within our government that back them every day.

Alors, merci l'honorable président. C'est un honneur d'être ici aujourd'hui, d'avoir la chance d'appuyer de tout mon cœur le travail que les pompiers font pour notre communauté et notre société.

Merci.

#### **Translation**

*So, thank you, Honourable Speaker. It is an honour to be here today, to have the chance to wholeheartedly support the work that firefighters do for our community and our society.*

*Thank you.*

Miigwech.

#### **English**

Thank you.

**Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West):** It gives me incredible pride to rise in the House today and speak to this bill as another former emergency services member.

As a former police officer and spending decades doing that work, I would like to recognize all of the firefighters that are in the gallery today. And particularly a shout-out to members from Brandon, my home constituency. Thank you for being here today. And I don't like having my back to you, but for this purpose, I will continue for my address. So, thank you to each and every one of you for being here today and supporting this important bill.

I would also like to thank the member opposite, member from Waverley, for his service during his time as a firefighter and for bringing this important bill forward and the recognition that the firefighters deserve for what they go through on a daily basis, on a weekly basis, on a yearly basis and throughout their career.

We already know that the previous government, the PC government of the day, passed legislation to



assist firefighters in dealing with different presumptive cancers throughout their time of firefighting. And I know The Workers Compensation Amendment Act was brought forward, introduced by the former leader—sorry, the former premier, our leader of our party, on November 26, 2021 and it received all party support and came into effect on January 1, 2022.

And again, that looked at a number of additional presumptive cancers that firefighters are subjected to throughout their career. And bringing that forward is very important. I had a friend, he was a friend of my parents, and a long-time firefighter with Brandon Fire and Emergency Services. I believe he retired as a captain. Dick Pow was his name.

And unfortunately, after retirement, Dick came down with cancer and ultimately passed away because of that cancer. And because of his dedication to firefighting and a career of firefighting, he paid the ultimate sacrifice. So this day will really resonate with me, when we look at people that have lost their lives, people that have put forward their time, their energy and their career towards firefighting.

I also know that there are several members of the Brandon Fire & Emergency Services that have battled cancers and certainly, a lot of this is because of their work that they have done within firefighting. So, my respect to each and every one of them, and to the member opposite for bringing this bill forward, as it is important.

Now, you've heard already that it is on May 4, so I say, may the fourth be with you because I truly mean that: the force be with you, including your fire and emergency services force. I have never seen an organization that is so drawn together, so family-oriented and each and every one of you is a family to each other.

This includes spending thousands of hours each year together, in your halls, whether it's having a supper together, whether it's attending training together, whether it's having your briefings or attending major calls. And I have so many stories that I can tell, where firefighters have had influence during my career. I'm going to highlight two of them that are very important to me.

And I'll also note that I mentioned Brandon Fire & Emergency Services quite often because that's who I've familiar with, but I would like to make sure that all firefighters throughout the province are recognized, whether you're career firefighters, career fire paramedic service, or volunteer firefighters,

paramedics, throughout the province. So, really like to commend everybody for their work.

Well, the first story that I have is from the Brandon Police Service and it happened when I was about four years into my career. And we had a high-speed pursuit and while we were chasing this motor vehicle, the cruiser car that was in lead ended up in a motor vehicle accident, hitting a pole, and the car instantly filled with smoke, and there was great concern.

So, immediately, we had radio contact and we called our emergency dispatchers and they were able to send the paramedics to the scene. They were quick to respond because we were only, probably, about six blocks from the No. 2 fire hall when this happened, and they responded and quickly extracted our two members, assess them.

Turned out that it was not a fire that had happened in the car, but the airbags had deployed, which is also a major concern for firefighters when they're dealing with motor vehicle accidents, is the deployment of airbags post-collision, or when they're fighting a fire, they have to be very careful that those explode on them.

So, that resonates with me because I knew that, even though we were doing our job as emergency service operators, they were there. The firefighters, Brandon Fire & Emergency Services were there to make sure that we were well attended to and that my colleagues could go home safely that night.

\* (10:40)

The other one is—Brandon has had, several years ago, a major fire that devastated our downtown. And Brandon Fire & Emergency Services is one of the few across the country that are a dual service—fire and paramedic, dual trained. So, they are responsible for responding to not only fire service calls within the city of Brandon, and the local RMs, but also for paramedic calls.

And so, when we had our devastating fires that started in an older building in our downtown, it quickly spread to two or three other buildings, and it is the first time in history, of the Brandon Fire & Emergency Services, that they had to call in mutual aid.

Usually, they are providing the mutual aid. This time, they had to call in the mutual aid. So, it was—it resonated with me that we still had protection in our

city, even though our resources were fully expanded within the city.

So, not only did we have three active fires going on within the city of Brandon, we still had to deal with all of the emergency calls to our E9-1-1 centre. And, those emergency calls included any paramedic or transports, or anything else. So, very important that, again, the triaging happened at the fire hall and they had to look at their emergency command.

I would also like to make a shout-out to our E9-1-1 operators, and my daughter-in-law, Shelayne is an E9-1-1 dispatcher in the fire hall here at Brandon that—sorry, in Brandon, that houses the E9-1-1 centre.

So, they are a lifeline to firefighters who are dealing with active situations, as well as the paramedics, and making sure that they have a voice to each and every one of the first responders. And, again, that's all part of the family, the emergency services family that take care of each other within our organization.

So, in closing, Honourable Speaker, I would like to thank, again, the dedicated, selfless, and brave firefighters, firefighter paramedics, the volunteers, and all of those who provide this service across our great province. This also has to include firefighters that are working in the forest fire industry, through natural resources, and making sure that, you know, their lives are protected.

So, thank you to the member from Waverley for bringing this forward.

**The Speaker:** Are there any other speakers?

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** We look forward to this bill passing second reading this morning before 11 a.m. But prior to that, I just want to put a few words on the record, to join my colleagues on all sides of the House who have already spoken on this important bill.

And, it's actually interesting, because when I saw the bill come forward, I was surprised that it hadn't been done before. And we've had so many different recognition days, and seen so many pass, and I went, oh, this is interesting that this had not been done before time, and I'm glad that it is being done now. So, I want to commend the member for bringing it forward, because it was, I would say, an oversight, that—over many, many years—that the legislation hadn't come forward, so this corrects that.

But it gives us an opportunity, then, to speak about, as we have already, the important work of firefighters in all parts of the province and the work that

they do might be the same, to some extent, on the scene, but the actual departments are quite different.

I have a brother-in-law whose on a volunteer fire unit in New Bothwell, he's the chief of the New Bothwell firefighter unit, and that of course is a volunteer unit. So, different than Steinbach, where it is a bit of a mix. Where the majority of our volunteer are part time, but they have a full-time chief, and then of course in Winnipeg where there's cross-trained and there's full-time. So, we have a very diffuse system in terms of those who are doing this very important life-saving work, but at the end of the day when they get called out, it's the same sort of response.

There's—still have to ensure that they're protecting themselves while they're protecting others. And that we have to remember, because we often, you know, speak about how they're protecting Manitobans, and that is true, but we as legislators, as those who are elected have a responsibility to ensure we're doing what we can do to protect those who protect others.

And in that way I'm really glad that through a number of different governments there have been different ministers or individual members who have brought forward legislation on presumptive workers compensation legislation. That's been really important and it's been across party lines, and I think it's always been supported by the different political parties when that's been seen as something that should come forward.

You know, often we see the partisan divide and the bickering, and people see question period and that's almost all they ever see of the legislative process, either in Manitoba or in Ottawa. But they don't see our moments like this, when we agree, either on a bill like this or on legislation that would ensure that firefighters have that protection when it comes to things that they're more predisposed to in terms of disease, simply because of their work.

Often we talk about, and rightly so, the dangers of—whether it's firefighting or police work—and we've seen in Manitoba, I think it was 2007 where two firefighters lost their lives responding to a fire. And we saw the community really rally around and recognize the danger of firefighting at that time. And there was quite a large outpouring of support, rightly so, and a service that went along with it.

And we talk about, of course, the ultimate danger that can come with going into an emergency, but sometimes that danger is 10, 20, 30, 40 years down the road; long after a firefighter may no longer be in that occupation. Then the danger appears.

And so, I'm really, really glad to see that Manitoba has been a leader across political parties. It's not a Progressive Conservative or a Liberal or a New Democratic thing. All political parties have supported that particular legislation when it's come forward, and I think that that speaks well of this Assembly as a whole.

I'm also very impressed, always, when it comes to those who work in emergency response; how invested they are the community beyond their work. Of course we look at it and go, the work that firefighters and other emergency responders do is already a community service, what more should be expected? And yet they don't see it that way.

And so, you see so many charitable causes that are initiated or supported by firefighters, not just to support their own members, you know, through things like the burn fund. But they are involved in charities in so many other ways in the community, which is important, I think, because, you know, some of the occupations, you know, that deal with emergency response—fire, police, others—sometimes they're a little bit set apart from the community.

And I think I know, in talking to those who serve in their roles, sometimes feel it's hard to get into the community in a way that people always understand the kind of work and the roles that they have to perform. So, reaching out and being involved in charities is a great way to bridge that a little bit, and to show the caring nature of those who are involved in firefighting. And this day will recognize that caring portion as well.

And finally, you know, it might have been mentioned earlier today, but we had an opportunity this summer to welcome firefighters from across the world who came to Winnipeg as part of the police and fire games.

Honourable Speaker, just across the street from here on Memorial Avenue, right between Memorial Park and the Law Courts, there was a number of obstacles that were set up where the firefighters were going up the ladders carrying lots of heavy things in a lot of heat and demonstrating their ability to—and not only their physical ability, but their aptitude for being able to respond to things and situations that most of us simply couldn't. I know I couldn't, for sure.

But it was quite something to watch the firefighters perform in those different games and activities. But then even more so at the athlete's village at The Forks, I had the opportunity to attend for a couple of evenings to see the interaction—police, firefighters,

together from around the world, literally around the world, Honourable Speaker, you know, talking about their shared experience as humans, but also talking about their shared experience as firefighters.

\* (10:50)

And that was really, really heartening, to see such a group of people, from around the world, who care so much about their individual communities and their individual countries.

And so, with those words, Honourable Speaker, I believe that our side is not only willing to see this move on to the committee stage, we're enthusiastic to see it move on to the committee stage.

We're grateful for those who have come and joined us here this morning, and of course they are representative of a much larger group who wasn't able to come this morning because, of course, they are working and doing the important things of keeping our community safe.

But I would ask them to pass on, on behalf of all members of the Assembly, the unified support for this bill and our eternal and unified gratitude for the work that each of you do.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**The Speaker:** The question before the House is second reading of Bill 200, The Firefighters Recognition Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended).

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

I declare the motion carried.

**Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader):** Can we ask if there is will to call it unanimous?

**The Speaker:** Is there will to call it unanimous?  
[Agreed]

And, just to be clear, the motion was passed unanimously.

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** Is it the will of the House to call it 11?

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

## RESOLUTIONS

### Res. 2—Commitment to Keeping Manitoba Public Insurance Publicly Owned

**The Speaker:** The hour now being 11 o'clock, it's time for private members' resolutions.

**Mr. Logan Oxenham (Kirkfield Park):** I, seconded by the member for Radisson (Ms. Dela Cruz), therefore be it resolved—I move—sorry, my bad—seconded by the member for Radisson,

*WHEREAS the Schreyer Government created the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation in 1971 to provide universally available auto insurance; and*

*WHEREAS Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation offers some of the most affordable rates and strong services for customers in all of Canada; and*

*WHEREAS Manitoba Public Insurance is owned by the people of Manitoba; and*

*WHEREAS the previous Provincial Government's agenda was to mismanage and privatize public services in Manitoba, including Manitoba Public Insurance; and*

*WHEREAS Manitoba Public Insurance employs thousands of Manitobans in good paying jobs; and*

*WHEREAS it is essential to preserve Crown Corporations to keep essential services affordable and public for Manitobans; and*

*WHEREAS the former Member for Kirkfield Park in a recent article promoted the privatization of Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation.*

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to unanimously affirm its commitment to forever keep Manitoba Public Insurance a publicly owned, Crown corporation.

**The Speaker:** It has been moved by the honourable member from Kirkfield Park, seconded by the honourable member for Radisson,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to unanimously affirm its commitment to forever keep Manitoba Public Insurance a publicly owned corporation.

The motion is in order.

**Mr. Oxenham:** Honourable Speaker, I rise in the House today on what I believe to be an important issue: affordability.

Our government is committed to lowering costs for families across Manitoba. To do this, every Manitoban needs access to affordable public services. We know this, Manitobans know this. But I worry when members of the party opposite, current and former alike, publicly support the privatization of one such public service: Manitoba Public Insurance.

But, Honourable Speaker, I don't think the party opposite shares our support for public services. We have a former PC Cabinet minister and ousted MLA for Kirkfield Park still trying to sow distrust in our public services. His party was unwilling to negotiate a fair deal before the election, jeopardizing everyone's access to affordable rates and services.

Manitobans are just trying to get by during these difficult times, but Manitoba families didn't receive any support from Kirkfield Park's previous representative, or for seven years during the previous government.

The PCs' record shows the negative consequences of privatizing parts of public services and parts of Crown corporations. It impacts the finances of every family who lives here in Manitoba. Maintaining MPI as a public entity has proven to provide affordable and accessible rates for all Manitobans, regardless of their background.

In 1971, the Schreyer NDP government established Autopac as a public service so that every Manitoban would have affordable insurance rates because having access to a vehicle is essential for travel across the province. And to this day, the Manitoba NDP proudly advocates for families and businesses in this regard and works with everyone to ensure that families across the province have access to affordable rates.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Order, please. If I could just interrupt the member for a minute, we have some guests in the gallery that are leaving right away that I want to be able to recognize before they leave.

We have seated in the public gallery from Neepawa Area Collegiate 30 grade 9 students under the direction of Michelle Young. The group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Agassiz (Ms. Byram).

\* \* \*

**Mr. Oxenham:** Our government stands with workers who work hard and patiently waited for a fair deal to

be presented. We went to work right away to end the strike that the PCs started, which was an apparent effort to sow public distrust in what was one of our key Crown corporations. It was the government, the government that my predecessor was a part of, who decided that it was not in their interest to work with workers.

Public services, like MPI, employ thousands of hard-working Manitobans, the same Manitobans that ensure access to affordable and quality services, which provide safe roads and safe drivers.

You know, I knocked on thousands of doors in Kirkfield Park, and I earned this seat. I worked really hard to get this seat. And as I approached one door, Honourable Speaker, there was a gentleman coming out, and he looked to be in a hurry. And I asked him if it was okay if I ask him a question. And he said, yes, I'm on my way to get gas. I can only afford 10 bucks in my tank because I'm an MPI worker and we're on strike right now.

And, you know, he was—he told me about his struggles to try and put food on the table, to try and pay rent, and to try and make ends meet for his family. And it was really terrible, and he asked me, what are we going to do about the strike? And I told him, we're going to end the strike. We're going to work with workers. And that's exactly what we did.

But when workers and families needed them the most, the previous government left them struggling. And I know, this new government, this new NDP government is proposing real solutions to address these concerns of affordability and mismanagement.

We've tabled legislation that will cut the fuel tax, saving people 14 cents a litre when they fill up at the pump. We've secured a commitment from the federal government to help families switch to geothermal pumps, saving them money, and lowering our carbon emissions.

In this short time alone, Honourable Speaker, we have secured \$500 million in new investments with the federal government to deliver low-carbon and affordable electricity, measures the previous government couldn't—could have taken but failed to.

Throughout this session alone, the PCs have proven they do not hold the public's interest at heart. They've been playing games with the fuel tax amendment, jeopardizing the hundreds of dollars families could save. We are in an affordability crisis and now, more than ever, we need to ensure integral services remain public.

Despite that, the previous PC government raised auto insurance rates on Manitobans, undermining the savings a publicly owned system provides to them.

This is just one step in the PCs' plan to slowly privatize our Crown corporations. As someone who grew up in Alberta, I've seen firsthand, that in other jurisdictions where auto insurance is privatized, it's ratepayers who get squeezed.

A private operation's primary concern is making money, not saving money for working- and middle-class Manitobans. We do not need to make families pay more for essential services. They need a publicly owned system that will keep rates sustainable and affordable.

\* (11:00)

We've seen the advantage low Autopac rates have for Manitoba families and businesses. If MPI were to be privatized, people would not receive the rebate cheques they get in the mail every year. Instead, it would be pocketed by wealthy CEOs.

We've already seen what the PCs have done to Hydro, Honourable Speaker, the Crown jewel of our province. There's a reason why several prominent PC ministers and MLAs didn't run for re-election. They couldn't stand the mismanagement by the previous government, whose Cabinet included the previous member for Kirkfield Park.

How can we trust the opposition when their former colleague, who aspires to be their next leader, works against making life more affordable? I fear for Manitobans if this is the type of policy the members opposite endorse.

We have only to look at how the previous PC government handled the MPI strike. As soon as our team formed government, we didn't blame working people and we didn't call for privatization. We came together with a plan, and we went straight to work to resolve the strike immediately. We empowered a new board of directors with a mandate to fix the mess the opposition left behind and negotiate a deal that balanced the needs of ratepayers and employees and the needs of families and workers, who should never have been pitted against each other.

The former government wants to talk about what they left behind for us. Well, they left a bad taste in the mouth of working Manitobans and their families when they decided to play games with their finances.

People are looking for affordability measures now, and keeping services like MPI public just—does

just that. Former minister and member for Kirkfield Park unabashedly supports the privatization of MPI. He was well at home with the PC Party who mismanaged essential services like health care and education. When they got the chance, they cut hundreds of front-line jobs and created an environment so dysfunctional that health-care professionals left our public health-care system.

But I want to encourage the members opposite to turn over a new leaf and to stand up and show people they have changed from the divisive rhetoric that Manitobans voted against. That's why the former member isn't here anymore.

The members opposite have the opportunity to make it clear to the House and Manitobans today that they support MPI workers and families by voting in favour of this resolution.

What more do I have to do to illustrate to the members opposite that attempts to privatize public services like MPI cost Manitobans millions of dollars?

Previous government launched Project Nova, moving several MPI services online. But because of PC mismanagement, the costs have exceeded initial projections. After all this, how can the members opposite expect Manitobans to trust their opinions, let alone the opinion of a wannabe political 'pundit' who will run to be their next leader?

*Mrs. Rachelle Schott, Acting Speaker, in the Chair*

They've shown to be poor managers of public funds and services.

I have a suggestion: to vote unanimously in favour of this resolution today and keeping MPI public and affordable.

The previous government failed to maintain what is initially budgeted for. The project was rife with turmoil from senior leadership leaving to making financial commitments they couldn't keep. Sound familiar? They did not leave behind a balanced budget, but debt for Manitobans.

But I assure you, Honourable Speaker, we will make sure MPI stays public so to ensure that Manitobans can still work in our province and achieve an affordable life here for their families.

And so, Honourable Speaker, I encourage every member of this House today to adopt this motion, because Manitobans are in a bind right now. Affordability measures are at top of their mind, and they face some of the most significant challenges of our age.

We are working to ensure Manitobans can access safe, affordable and healthy living. We cannot afford the attempts and calls for privatization, which the PCs endeavour to do through its mismanagement, threaten low rates for families who need affordability measures right now.

Many of Manitoba's affordability advantages are because of the public nature of MPI and all of our Crown services. The need to pay for auto insurance should not be a luxury. Manitobans deserve access to a safe and affordable public service, and so I submit this resolution today—

**The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott):** Order, please. The member's time has expired.

### Questions

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

**Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North):** I ask the member from Kirkfield Park: Who did the member actually consult with on this resolution?

**Mr. Logan Oxenham (Kirkfield Park):** You know, where the previous government picked fights with workers and allowed a strike to continue, week after week after week, we took immediate action to end the strike and get MPI back to work.

You know, it's a new day in Manitoba, a day where Manitobans can be assured that their government isn't gambling with their livelihoods, or their paycheques.

**MLA Billie Cross (Seine River):** Other failed PC candidates have either been silent or disavowed their previous colleagues since the election, due to their conduct. Manitobans rejected old ideas in favour of our plan, which is to fix health care and address affordability.

What does the member for Kirkfield Park think was the purpose of the former member writing an article supporting privatization?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Look, I think the former member is just trying to find a job. Specifically, to be the next leader of the official opposition.

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** The last time the NDP were in government, they took millions of dollars from MPI ratepayers and tried to funnel that money over to universities.

I wonder if the member could tell the House, whether (a) he supports the funnelling of MPI rate dollars to universities, and whether or not the government is planning to do it again?

**Mr. Oxenham:** I will say a few things here about this. We will not take any lessons from the members opposite on Manitoba Public Insurance and Project Nova.

**The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott):** The honourable member for Steinbach.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, actually, it was—[interjection] Well, I was recognized now, sorry. [interjection] It was the Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott):** Honourable member for Burrows.

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** Honourable Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the current member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham) for bringing this resolution forward today.

We've seen the previous government be silent about its leadership flaws. I wonder if the former member in question even read his op-eds with the PC caucus leadership?

Does the member for Kirkfield Park think the PC caucus agrees with the failed member of Kirkfield Park on privatizing MPI?

**Mr. Oxenham:** You know, we've seen the previous government's attempts to privatize public services here in Manitoba. I won't speak on their behalf as to whether they support their former colleague's ideas, but they can tell us today, by supporting this resolution.

**Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods):** Just curious, it's only been about three weeks, so, you know, it's a bit confusing, I guess, that early start, but the government would make a decision on a Crown corporation, not the Legislative Assembly.

So, who in the government is the member for Kirkfield Park concerned about privatizing MPI?

\* (11:10)

**Mr. Oxenham:** We know the members opposite have supported the privatization of MPI.

The former MLA for Kirkfield Park, the riding I'm now honoured to represent, made many comments indicating his support for privatization.

Thank you.

**MLA Nellie Kennedy (Assiniboia):** Honourable Assistant Deputy Speaker, it is clear that the previous government did not make workers and families priority during its mandate. If this was not enough, they threatened our public services that keep Manitoba affordable.

Can my colleague from Kirkfield Park tell us how the previous government mismanaged MPI?

**Mr. Oxenham:** We have to only look at the strike and Project Nova, both of which the previous government had no idea what was going on.

**Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Turtle Mountain):** Speaker, I just wanted to ask the member for Kirkfield Park that if the member was so—deep respect for MPI that, as he professes, is he willing to apologize on behalf of his party for the years of the neglect where the NDP let the IT infrastructure rot without investing in more money into the system?

And I want an answer for that.

**Mr. Oxenham:** You know what? The PC government allowed the MP strike to drag on for 10 weeks, leaving thousands and thousands of Manitobans unable to get their driver's licence, their vehicles repaired, and so much more.

And, another thing, Project Nova—\$300 million—what a mismanagement, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

**Ms. Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson):** I would like to thank the member for Kirkfield Park for bringing forward this resolution and for ousting the former member for Kirkfield Park.

Honourable Assistant Deputy Speaker, it is thanks to our government that we were able to negotiate a fair deal with workers and balance the needs of ratepayers. On this side of the House, we understand the need to preserve the public good.

We didn't play games, and we put hard-working Manitobans first. Can my colleague from Kirkfield Park explain why public auto insurance is important for families and businesses in our province?

**Mr. Oxenham:** It is important because it ensures Manitobans keep its affordability advantage. Public Crown corporations make sure people get rebates,

which is not pocketed by wealthy CEOs, like other sectors. Thank you.

**Mr. Wharton:** It's clear from my first question that the member from Kirkfield Park actually consulted with the member from St. Johns, so I thank him for that answer.

The second question is: Can the member tell the House what partnerships does MPI have currently with the private sector?

**Mr. Oxenham:** So the mandate we gave to MPI allowed folks to come together at the negotiating table and settle the strike. This deal demonstrates our respect for the workers at MPI, and our commitment to responsible management of the public purse. It shows that we can value workers and work towards balancing the budget within one term.

**Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière):** Manitobans are struggling right now. They face an affordability crisis while the talking heads from the PCs reiterate old ideas of privatization, robbing families of affordable services.

I ask my colleague from Kirkfield Park: Do you think the PCs will vote unanimously in favour of this motion?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Well, I certainly hope so.

Manitobans voted for a new government with a plan to fix health care and address affordability. If the PCs want to prove they're listening, they'll vote in favour of this resolution and disavow the former member of Kirkfield Park.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Can the member confirm that the reason that he is so passionate about this issue today—and we all, of course, support keeping MPI as it is—is because the government, previous NDP government, took money and tried to move it to universities; took money from MPI and tried to move it into roads; and then took money and gave Jets tickets to all the Cabinet ministers in the NDP?

They want to keep it public simply because they want Jets tickets and to funnel the money around like a private public-piggy bank.

**Mr. Oxenham:** All right, you know, going forward—moving forward, our priority in this government is to fix the serious problems left behind by the previous government and to make sure rates remain affordable.

**The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott):** The time for oral questions—for question period has expired.

## Debate

**The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott):** The floor is open for debate.

**Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North):** It's certainly a privilege to get up again and talk this morning about this resolution that we've just gone through a question period on, with no answers from the member.

It's disappointing for Manitobans that are tuned in today, hearing some of the responses from the member from Kirkfield Park, who obviously wasn't able to debrief or do the research that's required when you are presenting—whether it be a bill, private member's bill, or a resolution to this House.

So that, for the record, is shameful, when—

**The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott):** The member's time has expired. *[interjection]* Oh, sorry. I apologize, member from Red River North. Please, continue.

**Mr. Wharton:** Getting tired here; up and down like a yo-yo. So, anyways, great—thank you, Honourable Deputy Speaker, for recognizing me for a second time and again, it gives me great pleasure to put some facts on the record. We know—*[interjection]* Thank you.

We know the resolution, again, is essentially a sad cover up for the NDP plans. And I know my colleague from Steinbach spoke about some of them, and we know that in the past, MPI has been essentially a piggy bank for the NDP government, much like Manitoba Hydro was as well.

Certainly, I look forward to the next resolution coming from the member from Kirkfield Park on Manitoba Hydro and fear mongering Manitobans about privatization with Hydro, as well, because that seems to be the only thing they have to go on in the first three weeks in government, is the blame game.

Certainly, we're looking forward to some solid policy, hopefully, in the spring of 2024.

That being said, we know that when this resolution was introduced by the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine) the resolution read to keep Manitoba Public Insurance private. Well, we know that there was a flip-flop to move it from private to public, which on this side of the House, we fully agree, that Manitoba Public Insurance will remain public, for Manitobans.

\* (11:20)



Some of the areas that the member from Kirkfield Park did touch on, and I want to provide the opportunity to give the member some information on exactly how our Crown jewel of Manitoba Public Insurance does work to support Manitoba ratepayers—the owners of Manitoba Public Insurance.

We first worked with MPI to expand their investment portfolio, which allowed them to grow their reserve fund, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

We know that, whether it is public or private, we know that a corporation needs to have a healthy reserve fund to ensure that, in the private sector, stockholders and owners of the company are protected. But, Manitobans in this case are protected from rate shock.

We know that rate shock—particularly this time in this year and going forward—has been a challenge for all Manitobans, and it would be a challenge to see—and we're waiting for it, of course.

We know that the NDP will be ensuring that MPI's rates go up substantially over the coming six to 12 months.

We are looking forward to the Public Utilities Board discussions coming this fall on the rates for '24-25 for MPI. And you can be rest assured, Honourable Deputy Speaker, we will be keeping an eye on that on this side of the House, to ensure Manitobans are not going to be left out in the cold when it comes to insuring their public vehicles.

We also know that—we know that the reserve fund is very important for small insurance companies, like MPI, because of the diversity of their investments. We know that we have two types of investments—or two types of streams at MPI.

One is basic coverage, which is subject to the Public Utilities Board, which again is an independent board, Honourable Deputy Speaker, for the benefit of some of the new members in the House. This Public Utilities Board independently decides on what rates will be on our two Crown corporations: MPI and Manitoba Hydro.

We know that this is a necessary process to keep rates affordable for Manitobans, and more important than ever to ensure that the Public Utilities Board doesn't get stepped on like it did by the previous NDP government when they are determining rates when it—when the new rates schedules come out this fall.

So, again, we will be keeping an eye on that.

Rebates—the member from Kirkfield Park talked about rebates, and this is one area I will agree with the member from Kirkfield Park; where rebates are extremely important when corporation—when the Manitoba Public Insurance is doing well.

We know that over the last three years or so, under the former PC government—our government—we know that rebates went back to ratepayers, and I know the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham) wants to write this down.

Approximately \$500 million—that is right, Honourable Deputy Speaker, \$500 million in a time when affordability was just starting to ramp up. Insurance rates were rising, mortgage payments were going up, fuel costs were going up; everything was going up—grocery.

Well, we understand now that the NDP have a plan for that. But, we'll wait and see the outcome of the freezing of grocery prices. But, we know that \$500 million went back to the ratepayers—the owners of Manitoba Public Insurance, over the last couple of years; money that went back to them so that they could support their families, buy groceries, fill up their car, insure their vehicle.

To ensure that they can continue to be active in the economy and grow their economy and support, what we need to do to ensure that services like health care, education and social services are properly funded through our Crown corporations, particularly in this case: Manitoba Public Insurance.

We also know that—and I mentioned this to the member from Kirkfield Park as well—that I—the question was pretty clear. I said: Does the member know what private sector organizations MPI partners with? And that is partnering with to supply services to Manitobans.

And the answer back was, well, certainly we're working with labour to ensure that labour gets taken care of.

Well, I don't know if that was an answer to the question, but let me help the member and the members opposite, to ensure that they understand that we do—MPI does partner with private sector right now, and continue to.

And hopefully—hopefully—under this new NDP government, they will continue that process.

Because, these private sector businesses, hundreds, if not thousands of them across Manitoba—let's talk about a few of them. Let's talk about the IBAM,

the association of Manitoba. We know that IBAM's brokers supply services, not only in Winnipeg, but right across this great province of Manitoba.

We know that—well, case in point, my grandmother, who still drives, can go down to her local corner insurance office and renew her insurance and renew her driver's license right there—a one-stop shop. Convenience. Choice.

Boy, that's a good buzzword, hey? Convenience and choice, Honourable Deputy Speaker, two very important aspects to Manitobans, particularly, in these tough times.

We know that providing that choice, working with the private sector, with a very strong Crown corporation like MPI, that we were helping to ensure that would be strong, took them out of the Atari years—boy, I'm going to jump around a bit, but Atari was a good one.

And first of all, I would certainly extend my congratulations to the new board chair at Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Ben Graham. I had the privilege of working with Mr. Graham as the Crown Services minister in '19 and '20, pre-pandemic, and I can tell you that without Mr. Graham's foresight, we wouldn't have been able to move forward with modernizing technology. Not like the NDP for 17 years, that were working on spreadsheets in the 1980s and 1970s.

We were proud to work with Mr. Graham and the board and the executives at Manitoba Public Insurance to ensure that we bring Manitoba Public Insurance out of the Dark Ages and move them 'forim,' so I thank him for that.

And we also, of course, can recognize the fact that MPI provides—should be focused in on their core initiative, and that's providing low-cost insurance coverage to all Manitobans. And we know that we set the table for that to happen.

One other group that I'd—I wanted to recognize before I finish up is the Manitoba Motor Dealers Association, MMDA, who fix our vehicles after a hail storm, after an accident—God willing, no bodily injury.

But I can tell you that MMDA, one of the, again, prime jewels of Manitoba private business, working in collaboration with our Crown corporation, which will remain public for as long as I'm here and probably as long as every member sitting on this side of the House is, not like the member from St. Johns.

**The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott):** Before recognizing the next speaker, I would like to make the House aware that because we called it 11 a.m. at 10:52 a.m., the noon recess will be at 11:52 a.m.

**MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips):** Still getting used to the time changes in this building. Apparently, it's never the time you think it is on the clock, so it's an adjustment.

But proud to stand up today and support this resolution from my honourable colleague. It's fairly important, and I know that throughout the summer, we heard a lot about MPI from those folks who were on the picket line fighting for fair compensation and from those who were impacted by MPI: everyday Manitobans, businesses.

I've been sitting here and listening to my colleagues across the way talk about the private sector, and you know, I think they failed to mention that the private sector was also impacted by the strike—a strike that they failed to address and, in fact, treated those workers like adversaries.

You know, we even saw a video over the campaign where the former premier, the Leader of the Opposition, made it pretty clear that she was not interested in supporting workers.

So, I'm proud to say that our government stepped up, gave a fair deal to those workers and got them back to work for Manitobans. And I'm so happy to see MPI back to what it does best, which is providing great service—great, quality service to Manitobans in a cost-effective way. That is their mandate, and that's what makes MPI so special.

\* (11:30)

You go to different jurisdictions—and I think it's been proven time and time again—privatization costs more. And so, you know, it is a part of Manitoban identity to have public insurance that is affordable and, you know, I know that us, on this side of the House, we're going to fight for that. And I'm, again, very glad that my colleague brought this resolution up, and I think we're all united in this.

You know, I've been hearing a lot of numbers as well being bandied about, but one number that jumps out to me particularly is 190 per cent—190 per cent is the cost jump of Project Nova. And this speaks to the sheer abdication of responsibility of the previous government.

To let things get so out of hand at MPI, so out of hand that we are now paying the consequences

for this, as Manitobans. And, you know, one has to wonder.

All Manitobans want to keep MPI public, and we are voicing that right now, but unfortunately it doesn't feel like the opposition wants that. It sort of feels like when they were in government their intent was to let things get so out of hand at MPI that it would inevitably be privatized.

And thank goodness for the election and for the mandate we received from the voters, because we're not going to let that happen.

Just going back to, you know—I heard a lot about this over the campaign, too, from businesses—small-business owners, driving instructors, transportation schools, garages—every one of them asking when are we going to get MPI back to work?

When are things going to get back to the way they were? And, you know, it seemed like everybody just wanted to have those workers get a fair deal, get their fair wages and for all the other businesses and folks in Manitoba who were impacted by that, to get back to how things were. And I just cannot imagine why the previous government did not want to do that.

One thing I will note: I have the privilege of serving on the board of the directors now at MPI, and I am very grateful for the opportunity that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has given me.

I'm really blown away by the composition of the board of directors at MPI today. These are some incredible Manitobans. Incredibly smart, talented folks who are now in charge and tasked with the big responsibility of cleaning up a pretty big mess left by the previous government.

And so, I just want to give a shout-out to those folks, who I know are going to do hard work, and also the entire team at MPI. There are a lot of good folks there looking to get MPI back on track, and I know we're going to do that. But, you know, it needs someone in government fighting for MPI.

We did not have that for the last seven years. I think right now, with this resolution, we are making pretty clear where we stand. I would love to see the opposition support this resolution, that would be fantastic, because that would send a pretty positive message to Manitobans. But, apparently there is no interest in this.

And, you know, now we're hearing that former—now former MLAs—are, you know, being given columns to voice their opinions; opinions that they are

now just throwing about and pretty comfortable with, and I guess that's—you know, that's what you do when no one listens to you anymore: you get a column in the Winnipeg Sun.

So, you know, that individual's making their buck. I guess, good on them. But, I'm very pleased to have my colleague now represent Kirkfield Park because we've got a fighter in my colleague for MPI and for the folks at Kirkfield Park.

And, I just want to close by saying, again, you know, we heard from a lot of my colleagues here about the work that we're going to do as a government that keeps Manitobans at the centre of our policy and decision making here.

And with MPI, with Manitoba Hydro, with health care, everything is focused on Manitobans. And what we saw in the last government was private interests getting the best of the decision making that happened here by the previous government.

And I'm happy to see this change, and I'm very confident that our government is going to get things back on track, and, you know, it was a privilege to speak to this resolution.

Thank you.

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** This may mark the first time in legislative history, though I'd have to go back and do some research to see if a government had to bring forward a resolution to prevent them from doing something that was wholly within their power.

I mean, think about this a little bit, Honourable Speaker. The member—who, actually, I learned today sits on the board of MPI—has brought forward a resolution to stop his government from privatizing MPI. I don't think in the history of Manitoba a board of director of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation has brought forward a resolution to stop their own colleagues from selling the corporation.

So, of course, it begs lots of questions. Why is he so concerned? I haven't had a chance to talk for a long time to the new member. I congratulate him on his role. I assume he's an earnest individual who, when he sees reasons for concerns, he acts upon them.

So he must have, in the early days, been speaking to some members of the new NDP caucus and discovered that amongst them were privatizers, people who were trying to privatize MPI.

So then he probably went to some learned individual about the rules of the Manitoba Legislature

and said, I have a concern; I'm on the board of MPI; it's probably not appropriate to raise it at the board level per se, because it's a government responsibility, and I'm within the government, although not sworn into Executive Council. So, how would I go about stopping my NDP colleagues who want to privatize MPI from doing so?

And then somebody—I don't know, I won't speculate on who in the Legislature might have given him the idea, but somebody might have said, well, there's this thing that we have—I didn't do it during the Throne Speech because we're not allowed to—but there's this thing that we have that's called private members' business.

And during private members' business, members who are not sworn into Executive Council can bring forward bills—and we debated one this morning—or they can bring forward resolutions.

Now, the resolutions aren't binding per se, but they are instructive in some ways and they sometimes get some degree of intention, and they are an opportunity for members to be able to raise concerns in a broad way, of things that they have by virtue of the resolution and the clauses contained within them.

So, probably, that sent my friend scurrying off to the research end of the Legislature, maybe over to the library to do a little work on the resolutions. And he realized quickly that because he had those concerns of people within his own government who might be looking to privatize MPI over the next four years, he could bring forward this resolution.

So he crafted a resolution to try to encourage his government, who are the only people in this Legislature who would have such a power to privatize MPI, to not do so, and then brought forward the resolution. I actually give him courage for doing that, for outing the fact that there are those among the NDP caucus who want to privatize MPI.

I'm glad that he brought that forward. It's brave for a new member to bring forward such a thing. I hope he doesn't, you know, suffer repercussions because of it from the Premier (Mr. Kinew) or others in the government. In fact, he should be applauded—he should be applauded. And I do applaud him.

I applaud him early in these days for bringing forward a resolution to stop his government from doing these things. Now—and I would encourage him to continue on that path of bravery, because I'm sure as he is within the caucus, he probably hears of members of the NDP who want to raise taxes.

Of course, they've already indicated that they're going to be cutting some schools that were announced. They've already indicated and might not be proceeding with personal-care homes, as an example. I'm sure we'll hear those announcements sometime soon.

I know the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) looks particularly sad these days, so he probably knows what it is he's going to be forced to announce.

\* (11:40)

But maybe the new independent member—now, he's only able to bring forward one resolution a session, so he might have to go to some of his other brave colleagues in the NDP backbench and say, we need you to bring forward a resolution to stop our government from increasing taxes; we need you to bring forward a resolution to stop our government from not proceeding with the schools that have been committed to; we need you to bring forward a resolution to stop our government from not proceeding with the personal-care homes which Manitobans are expecting and have been announced.

There's a lot of other resolutions that that brave new member could bring forward to this House and for good reason.

And I understand why it is that he would have these concerns, because he, probably a student of history, has looked back a little bit at some of the days of well, let's say, Gary Doer.

Some of the members of the House may remember Gary Doer, some more than others, and they'll remember that one of the things that Gary Doer did with Manitoba Public Insurance is he tried to lift money out of MPI and drop it into the universities.

Now, at that time, of course, Manitobans came forward and said, well, that's very concerning because we're paying into MPI and it should be a reflection of the risk that we have when it comes to insurance.

It really has nothing to do with tuition, has really nothing to do with universities. Why are we taking the money that I'm putting into MPI, lifting it out and dropping it into universities?

Now, after some degree of controversy, the then-NDP government backed off of that plan and decided not to do that. And for that, I would give Gary Doer credit.

But my friend across the way from McPhillips probably did a little further studying and also found out then, you know, the NDP, I'll give them this,

they're resilient. Because a few years later, they then went and said okay, that whole university thing, we were trying to take money out of MPI and put it in universities, people probably forgot about that.

So, let's try to take money out of MPI now and drop it into road construction because we don't want to put money into road construction. So, now we'll take the rates that members have paid for MPI and put it into roads.

Well, you know, the public is smarter sometimes than the NDP give them credit for, and it turned out that the public actually remembered the university fiasco and said, hey, this is just as bad. We already pay taxes into general revenues to have our road fixed.

The money that we're putting into MPI is really about our rates and it's about whether or not I should be paying so-and-so much based on my risk assessment as a driver and other things, and the vehicle that I'm driving.

So, there was a controversy again and the public rose up and it took some weeks—maybe it was months—and the NDP said, whoops, I did it again, okay, we're going now step back and they changed their mind and they changed that policy.

Well, then they got into trouble with MPI a few years later when it turned out—now it's not quite the same, I wish that the arena was full over across the street at Canada centre all the time—but back when in the earlier days, when the Jets came back, of course, you couldn't get a ticket.

It was the hottest ticket not just in Winnipeg but really North America. You had people around the country trying to get a ticket and come here for a Jets game.

But there was a select group of people who could get tickets. Yes, there were. There were a select group of people who could get tickets, and those were the ministers in the NDP Cabinet.

And it was interesting because we saw a picture of the former minister of Justice, who was also the member responsible for MPI, sitting in the front row—the front row. There was a few of us who were in ticket groups and we were in the very top row of the arena and I'd look down and go, oh, that looks like—

**An Honourable Member:** What section?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Three-oh-three or something like that; I can just show you a picture. And I'd look down and

go, that looks like Andrew Swan down there. And I'd go, how did he get tickets?

And then I'd find out other NDP Cabinet ministers had gotten—and I figured, boy, they're just lucky people, you know? They went onto the website when the tickets went on sale and they—like the rest of us did, it was a bit of a lottery, right?—and they just lucked out. They happened to get all these great tickets.

And then I found out something and Manitobans found out something: it wasn't actually luck. It wasn't actually luck.

They were taking tickets that MPI had to the Winnipeg Jets and sending them to the offices of the Legislature, here. And they tried to deny it for a little bit and you know, it became a big scandal and Manitobans got angry.

Now, I only got 40 seconds left or I'd go into the contract that they gave to the former CEO of MPI and the contract said that they should do absolutely no work, gave \$50,000 contract to a former CEO of MPI.

Well, now they're mad, of course, now they're angry, we've got them all worked up because they know this resolution is not only about protecting them from themselves, but Manitobans will soon find out. Manitobans will soon find out and they'll remember. Just like when they tried to lift money for universities, for roads and then the Jet's tickets.

When it comes to the NDP, they don't think MPI is for the public; they think it's their individual piggy bank.

**Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain):** I'm honoured to bring some words on the resolution when it comes to the relationship I have with MPI.

I actually—I don't know if many of them—there is so many new members within the Legislature right now that I—my background was that I had—I was from the financial world. I actually had my own insurance agency in Virden, Manitoba, Reston, Oak Lake.

We had an Autopac licence for all three locations. And was honoured to work with a lot of MPI individuals over the years, and relationships that we had as brokers, and I just want to thank all the brokers out there—the importance.

One thing that this resolution does not even speak about is what the relationships and the contracts that MPI has with all the insurance brokers who provide insurance and special services and expertise about

Autopac across this province. And nothing was ever mentioned about that.

So, the member, all they focused on was the unions. And in this case, they—you know, we actually settled with a lot of unions over the years—this past few years before the election. Many when it came to nursing unions.

But it was—you know, I—we—the NDP played games, political games, when it came to the strike with MPI.

And the thing is, they can't forget that, you know, there's, again, insurance brokers, these—there's mechanics that work side-by-side to making sure that the consumer get their cars fixed in a timely manner, and it's all part of a system. And nothing was mentioned. All that was mentioned was the protection when it comes to the unions.

And so, the thing is, we are—my—I actually—one of my business partners, my business partner Brent Patmore came from the insurance—MPI. He actually was an adjuster in Brandon for a number of years, and he became my business partner in 2000—no, it's actually—I have to go back date—1995, he became a business partner.

And back then, I remember that first year. We—it was the PC party that was in government at the time, that implemented and got MPI to make sure the—we put a new system in, computer system. And, again, it was archaic.

And even—and I'll talk about a history lesson when it comes to the NDP. I remember how our Pawley government was really thrown—was thrown out because of the mismanagement of MPI and the increases that they were going to do in 1988 that basically was the bias of the NDP at the time.

And they—so they don't have a very good track record when it comes to MPI. And, again, the Howard Pawley government failed, because—one of the main reasons was the MPI situation.

And then, when it—we implemented the new computer system back in the mid-90s, it was a PC government that actually implemented that.

And then again, in—during the time that the NDP were in power, from 1999-2016, nothing was done to the computer system.

So, when we took over, we had to make sure that we—make sure that MPI gets back into the 21st century.

Again, this is—again, the MPI was, you know, was—when it came to the finances of MPI, again, the reserve fund, which is very important. Being that I come from the insurance industry, there has to be reserves.

Reserves get built up and basically get investments, and like the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) said, that these get—we were able to invest more diversified to making sure we get a better return, so that in the long term, it actually keeps the prices—rate prices on car insurance down.

And the thing is, back in the day, the NDP actually took the money from the reserve to put it through their general coffers to make sure that they—the way that the—the spendy NDP, we used to call them—are the ones that spent so much money over the years. And they actually took money from the reserve account, from Manitoba Public Insurance.

And so, the thing is, it's kind of interesting that the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham) has brought this resolution forward. And it's amazing that they don't know the history of what the NDP has done to MPI.

\* (11:50)

And the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) has also indicated, too, the record that the NDP have when it comes to MPI; all they really care about is the—protecting the unions.

And, in this case, we believe that, you know, what's important, the—you know, when it came to the negotiation with management and the employees of MPI, that was something that should not be interfered by a political party.

And I'm sure—I'd like to see what actually happened the time when they became into power now and how much interference they had.

And of course, they have a track history of all the interference that they had with a lot of Crown corporations and even including Manitoba Hydro that they more they—the Selinger government—more than doubled the debt of Manitoba Hydro.

And again, should not take any lessons from this NDP government. The dark days of the NDP, back in the day, not only did they double the provincial debt, they doubled the Manitoba Hydro debt. So, they do have a really bad track record when it comes to Crown corporations.

So, it's kind of ironic that the member from Kirkfield Park would bring this resolution forward because of the track record that the NDP have.

And so, like I said, I want to thank, you know, all insurance brokers in Manitoba for all the work that they do to make sure that the customer gets looked after and making sure that the ratepayers—it's affordable and then we give special services to all that.

And so, I also want to thank the mechanics out there for all the work they have done to make sure that we—they fix the vehicles that Manitoba consumers need, to make sure that they get to work and to make sure that we provide—again, Manitoba Public

Insurance is not just about just the unionized employees; it's about a whole system out there.

So again, I just want to thank the opportunity to put some words on the table here about this resolution and—

**The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott):** Order. When the matter—when this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have four minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 o'clock, this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Tuesday, December 5, 2023**

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