



Third Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COMPTON, Carla	Tuxedo	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CORBETT, Shannon	Transcona	NDP
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	Ind.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike, Hon.	Riel	NDP
NARTH, Konrad	La Vérendrye	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
OXENHAM, Logan	Kirkfield Park	NDP
PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
ROBBINS, Colleen	Spruce Woods	PC
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu, Hon.	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SIMARD, Glen, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
SMITH, Bernadette, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	Ind.
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	The Pas-Kameesak	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 5, 2026

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 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, 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.

ORDERS OF THE DAY**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): I move, seconded by the MLA for Burrows—*[interjection]* Oh.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Radisson.

MLA Dela Cruz: Honourable Speaker, this morning I'd like to call Bill 217 for second reading.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS**Bill 217—The Celebration of Philippine Independence Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)**

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will now proceed to second reading of Bill 217.

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): I'd like to move, seconded by the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar), that Bill 217, The Celebration of Philippine Independence Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended); Loi sur la Journée de la célébration de l'indépendance des

Philippines (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

MLA Dela Cruz: Magandang umaga. *[Good morning.]* Honourable Speaker, good morning.

Today it is a pleasure of mine to bring forward Bill 217 a second time for second reading as the MLA for Radisson. And as an immigrant daughter in this Filipino-Canadian diaspora, recognizing that today is May 5, otherwise known in Canada as Red Dress Day, I find it profoundly important to reflect on the privilege that I have as a legislator in this Chamber to move a bill that recognizes the journey to independence, the freedom and the indigeneity of my ancestors on a land that has a history of colonization, harm by colonization, but also genocide and many, many other harmful forms that colonization has taken.

We can't talk about our indigeneity as Filipinos without making space for, you know, creating attention to the harms of colonization here in Canada. And the gratitude that us as newcomers—relatively newcomers—have to the nations that have taken care of this land, the Anishinaabeg, the Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, Nehethowuk nations, Inuit and the Red River Métis as well.

Honourable Speaker, reflecting on the history of our peoples and the strength that we have shown over centuries and millennia and the global landscape that we are looking at today in 2026, it is important for me to put words on the record about how our people, our kababayans *[compatriots]*, our kapwa *[fellow person]*, our countrymen, our friends, our neighbours, even strangers we call kapwa.

We have never been people who have brought war to other lands. We have always held the line on our own. We have always been people who protect what we have known, who stand up for what is right and frankly, even when we go to other countries to seek a better life, we also seek to preserve the freedoms and improve the spaces that we are in.

So today is not only, you know, historic in that we have the ability to send Bill 217 to committee to hear from countless other Filipino Manitobans on their

own reflections on our journey to independence, but it's also a love letter to the lands that we now call home here in the Filipino-Canadian diaspora and the work that we do here and how that work is intertwined with our journey.

Honourable Speaker, like I mentioned, this is the second time I'm bringing this bill to second reading. It's been two years now that we've had to gather, you know, thoughts from the opposition, thoughts from community. But also, two years ago, just about, we had a gallery full of passionate Filipinos who were so, so excited to finally see legislation that not only acknowledged how good our food was or how incredible our art is, how talented we are, how skilled we are as workers, how compassionate we are as neighbours but also acknowledges the story that comes with it and the very political story at that.

And so before I get any further, I'd like to spend this time acknowledging folks who we have in the gallery with us today. Honourable Speaker, I'd like to table this list of our guests who join us this morning and who are joining us for the second or third time or fourth time in the gallery and have been supporting this legislation all throughout. Those individuals include representatives of the Knights of Rizal: Sir Ronald Mervin Sison, Sir Feling Dionisio de Jesus, Sir Akio Utsonomiya, Sir Ray Sator, Sir Kenn Green, Lady Baby Green. And from Barangay Canada media initiative, Kris Ontong; Anakbayan, we have Ana Ilagan, Danritch Balute, Angela Ciceron and Jaden Dela Rosa. From Bahaghari Pride, we also have Athena Santiago; and from Hiligaynon, Visayan group, we have Johnny Ortizo, Toto Sarmiento and Sheina Palec.

* (10:10)

As well, we have a constituent of the McPhillips MLA, Eduardo Villamar, and I'd encourage members of this House to join me in welcoming them here today.

Honourable Speaker, in addition to these folks who join us here today, again, when we arrive in this space, we arrive with the backing of our ancestors, of a never-ending list of folks who, you know, may not have even gone by their given names when they'd made history themselves. Though here in Manitoba, in honouring each of those people, we have countless, countless groups, and that list keeps growing. And as the MLA for Radisson, over the past two years, I've had the privilege of working with every single one of them.

We have the 204 volunteers, the Aklan Ati-Atihan of Manitoba, ANCOP, Barangay Canada media initiative—we mentioned earlier—BIBAK Association of Manitoba, the Bulacan Association of Winnipeg, Filipino Friends of Immigrants in Manitoba, Filipino inter-church association of Winnipeg, Filipino Members Chapter—of engineers and geoscientists Manitoba, Filipino Music and Arts Association of Canada, Filipino Seniors Group of Winnipeg, Hiligaynon, Visayan ethnic subgroup, Knights of Rizal Winnipeg chapter—who is here today as well—Magdaragat Philippines, Manitoba Association of Filipino Teachers, Manitoba Filipino Street Festival, Manitoba Table Tennis Association, Philippine-Canadian Centre of Manitoba, Philippine Heritage Council of Manitoba, Quezon Province Association of Manitoba, Solid Mindanaoans Association of Manitoba, Teatro Filipino Manitoba, the Filipino Journal, The Pilipino Express Incorporated and the Ukulele Club, Filipino members chapter.

We also have, of course, the Mabuhay District. We have as well many, many, many more organizations. And last but not least, of course, the great Perla Javate who is a school trustee, but has been everybody's tita [*aunt*], whether you are Filipino or not, here in Winnipeg. She has championed so many things, including the Philippine Heritage Council of Manitoba as well as the Philippine Historical Society as well. And not to mention, the next generation of Filipino organizers and Kultivation Festival.

Honourable Speaker, we have been here for so long. We have been here for nearly 100 years on record as a people in Manitoba. We are on our way, if not at, the 100,000 mark here in Manitoba. We are also the highest per capita population across all of Canada. And so, while it's taken two years to get to this point, I am very excited for the opportunity today for members in this Chamber to stand together for Filipinos across Manitoba to shine a great light and great opportunity to bring each and every single one of us together in a way that is not political.

Honourable Speaker, we have an opportunity as legislators today to put the differences of this Chamber aside to honour the legacy of Filipinos that maybe we haven't even met yet that maybe are the exact reason why we're here today in Manitoba, but that will benefit, that will have their journeys heard through the work that we carry out because of this historic day.

So, Honourable Speaker, again, I encourage members to bring this bill to committee to ensure that

June 12, the Araw ng Kalayaan [*Independence Day*]-independence from the Spanish rule in 1898-is recognized permanently here in Manitoba so that Canadians of all walks of life, but particularly of Filipino descent, can look to us as inspiration of how we can be seen truly, fully and as our full selves here in Canada.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

The 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: the 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. No question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I want to take a moment and just welcome our guests to the gallery here today and also thank them for their contributions to our great province here in Manitoba. And we know that Manitoba has seen a significant growth of the Filipino population and specifically in my constituency of Agassiz; Neepawa has seen a significant growth; individuals adding to our economic platform in Neepawa and adding to our workforce.

And I'm just curious if the member can tell us what specifically supports this legislation that this bill would bring to rural communities, to ensure that those in rural Manitoba can properly recognize and celebrate this Filipino independence day.

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): I thank the member for Agassiz for her question. I know that just last year we were there alongside the member for Notre Dame (MLA Marcelino) at the incredible festivities and the vibrant, vibrant celebrations that happened, you know, within her constituency in the town of Neepawa. And I do have an incredibly growing population, and of course as Filipinos we go to where the work is, and that's how we wound up here in Manitoba.

And so, Honourable Speaker, when it comes to supports, last year our government announced \$900,000 for three Filipino groups across three years in this province, the first announcement of that grandeur for the Filipino community ever. And so I'm excited to see how that funding unfolds and how these groups that we've given that funding to-

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface): Mabuhay [*Long live*], Honourable Speaker. I am not a kababayan [*compatriot*]; I wish I was.

So my question for the honourable member for Radisson is: How will recognizing Philippine Independence Day uplift Filipino Manitobans?

MLA Dela Cruz: He may not be a kababayan [*compatriot*], mais [*but*]-but he is-and there was my French coming out-but he is a kapwa [*fellow person*] to all of us.

Honourable Speaker, recognizing Philippine Independence Day here in Manitoba will allow us the opportunity to extend the Filipino identity beyond our food, beyond our skill set, beyond our-all-arts, our compassion. The things that we bring to the table include the journey that we carry with us. And so this day allows us to bring attention to just that.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I would like to thank the member for bringing this very important bill. I know throughout our-or my constituency in Swan River constituency-we have very many Filipinos who have, you know, within each of the areas; Russell, for example has a great Filipino community, Swan River has.

Could the member just share the consultations that she held with the Filipino community regarding the bill and what kind of feedbacks did they provide on this?

MLA Dela Cruz: As mentioned in one of my responses thus far, you know, and kind of alluded to in a way, as the MLA for Radisson, having the privilege of being one of two Filipinos in this Chamber-of course the other being the MLA for Notre Dame-I have had the privilege of being invited by communities, not only in Winnipeg, but outside any major municipality as well, to connect with them and to hear about what their community looks like, where they've settled.

And so, Honourable Speaker, when it comes to who we've consulted for this bill, in addition to all of the events that we've attended and the relationships we've been able to build, I'd also listed a number of organizations that I can actually table for the House today as well.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Loiselle: The NDP government is following through on its promise to begin advocating for all

Manitobans. Filipinos have had an incredible impact on our province since the very beginning.

My question for my colleague is: What does it mean to her for Philippine independence to become a recognized holiday?

* (10:20)

MLA Dela Cruz: Again, Philippine Independence Day, June 12, being recognized here in Manitoba carries such a weight for the Filipino community, to extend our identity beyond the surface, to ensure that we recognize the history and the people who have battled for our continued suffrage for independence as Filipinos, and for our freedom as Filipinos.

Those people include, you know, the famous Dr. Jose Rizal, Datu Lapu-Lapu, many, many individuals who have fought their way to get to where we are as a people today. And so it carries an immense weight and personally, again, an immense privilege being here as the MLA for Radisson in a country that my ancestors—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): Again, I, too, would like to thank the member from Radisson for bringing Bill 217 forward today. I do have a question for the member. Basically, back in the '90s, a provincial nominee program was started. Does the member know who started that program?

MLA Dela Cruz: I thank the member for that question. When it comes to how Filipinos find their way here to Manitoba, again, like I had mentioned in a previous answer, we find our way to where the work is because we have no problem with rolling up our sleeves and getting to work and earning our place here in Manitoba, Honourable Speaker.

Just to shed a little bit of light, you know, many people find their way here through elected officials who allow—or who walk through the process with a lot of newcomers who find their way here for work to bring their families here themselves. And for myself, that was Bill Blaikie. And through the MPNP program, later on—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Loiselle: June is an amazing month that celebrates many communities, including Philippine heritage month. This has been an opportunity for many Manitobans to learn and celebrate Filipino culture.

My question for the member is: How do they celebrate Philippine Independence Day?

MLA Dela Cruz: I thank the member for that question. This gives me the opportunity to lift up once again two incredible groups: the Philippine Heritage Council of Manitoba, but also the Philippine-Canadian Centre of Manitoba, which I was once the youth chairperson.

These two groups work together every single year to ensure that we commemorate and celebrate Philippine Independence Day on the grounds of the PCCM. There is an incredible flag raising that happens every single year. I would invite members to join us if they haven't yet.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Wharton: I just wanted to again remind all members of the House, particularly the member from Radisson—and the Provincial Nominee Program has been a great asset for Manitobans, bringing new Manitobans, including Filipinos, here to our great province.

In 1996, a federal-provincial framework was signed by the federal-provincial governments, and that framework was started and completed by the member at the time from Kildonan-River East, the member from—MLA Bonnie Mitchelson. So we are proud to have that ability to do that today, and I know the member from Radisson is excited about having that framework started in the '90s by Bonnie Mitchelson.

Thank you.

MLA Dela Cruz: I don't think that there was quite a question there. Though—while members opposite seem to be far more concerned about getting credit for something, I don't—I can't seem to wrap my head around the placement of that right now.

Personally, as a Filipina woman myself, who is grateful for the opportunities that Canada has presented me and my family, and as a hard-working person who has earned her place here, I caution members opposite against the erasure that they are implying of the Filipino struggle and the effort that we have put in. And not only did, you know, that agreement have to happen, but the country of the Philippines had to sign on to it. So by erasing that piece of it, they are effectively working against the purpose of this bill.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mrs. Rachelle Schott (Kildonan-River East): Let's just give a big round of applause to our amazing colleague from Radisson for bringing this forward.

Just to echo her sentiments, it's not about who said what, who did what, in what year and trying to politicize this. This is just about working collaboratively to celebrate the great work in our province. And to echo the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), Bonnie Mitchelson was an incredible legislator, did incredible good work here in the building and in our community and she's still an icon throughout northeast Winnipeg.

But I know that she would love to support fellow women and any person in this Chamber that's trying to bring good legislation forward. So I encourage all members to not make this partisan or give credit to certain folks but just rather work collaboratively to get things done.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

MLA Dela Cruz: Like I'd mentioned many times today already, this doesn't have to be part of the political game in this Chamber. Honourable Speaker, this is a bill that stands on its own two feet, that carries the merit in and of itself for members opposite to feel compelled to bring it to committee.

And so, Honourable Speaker, with guests in the gallery here today who have been working their entire lives to get to the place that they are today and to ensure that the next generation of Filipinos can thrive here in Canada as well, I encourage members opposite to not delay this any further. It's been two years. Let's bring it to committee.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is now open for debate.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I'm pleased to rise in the Chamber here today and speak to Bill 217, The Celebration of Philippine Independence Day Act. This legislation is both timely and meaningful as it recognizes the rich history, enduring contributions and vibrant culture of the Filipino community right here in our province of Manitoba.

Manitoba has been a province that celebrates cultural heritage and recognizes the many communities that contribute to our shared identity. Through this bill, we turn our focus to the Filipino community, one that has played an important and vital

role in Manitoba for generations. Filipinos have maintained strong communities in Manitoba dating back to the 1950s when expertly trained physicians and nurses first arrived to our province. These early pioneers helped lay the foundation for a growing and thriving Filipino presence and one that continues to expand and we see here today.

Since that time, Filipino families, Manitobans, have played a crucial role across many sectors. We see that in health care, health-care professionals caring for our families, academics advancing knowledge, artists enriching our cultural landscape and entrepreneurs creating jobs and opportunities. Their contributions are woven into the very fabric of our province.

June 12 holds deep significance for Filipino communities around the world. It marks the declaration of Philippine independence from Spanish rule in 1898, a defining moment in the history of the Philippines and a power symbol—powerful symbol of resilience, self-determination and national pride. It is a—Filipino independence is a day that celebrates democracy, freedom and culture, a day that resonates deeply with Filipino Manitobans and offers an opportunity for all of us to learn and reflect.

I've had the opportunity, and it's been a great honour, to attend many of these independence celebrations in my home community of Neepawa, and I want to thank the Filipino community there, who always extend an invite to participate and be a part of that special celebration. We also see that Bill 217—or—it formally recognizes June 12 as the celebration of Philippine Independence Day. This recognition would give all Manitobans an opportunity to learn, to celebrate and appreciate the vibrant Filipino culture and heritage.

Closer to home in my community of Neepawa, we've seen first-hand the growth and strength of the Filipinos. This growth has been supported by our local industry and economic opportunity, but what stands out most is the sense of community that is built.

Like I mentioned, I've had the privilege of attending many Filipino events in Neepawa over the years. Like I mentioned, Independence Day and the flag-raising ceremonies. I've attended heritage celebrations, parades and cultural events, birthday parties, basketball openings and tournaments. I've gone to a Mr. and Mrs. talent show which was unbelievable, a showcase of dance, song, artistic talent and one that brought our community together.

* (10:30)

I've also attended store and restaurant openings in Neepawa, celebrating the entrepreneurial spirit that continues to grow in rural Manitoba. These businesses not only contribute to local economy but also introduce new cultural experiences to the entire community. I know it wasn't an easy road for some of these new business owners and entrepreneurs that have opened their doors, but they didn't give up and I think that speaks to the resilience that we see throughout the Filipino community.

What stands out at every one of these events is the warmth and welcoming nature of the Filipinos. There is a genuine openness, a willingness to share culture, traditions and stories with others. It's something that leaves a lasting impression. And I must say the food. The food is always amazing, it's always plentiful and you never leave an event hungry. And along with that, of course, there'll be dancing and singing and an energy that is beautiful and filled with spirit and laughter.

Equally notable is the strong work ethic that the Filipino community brings to Manitoba. We see it in health care. We see it in agriculture. We see it in service industries or small businesses, like I've mentioned. Filipino Manitobans are known for their dedication, professionalism and commitment. They're very active in volunteering, always ready to lend a hand and support all community initiatives.

Just recently, I had the opportunity to meet with the consulate general during a visit to Neepawa. And I was honoured to take part in a dual citizenship ceremony where several families took their oath. It was a meaningful experience and one that highlighted both a deep connection to heritage and a strong commitment to Canada and Manitoba and also their culture and their home in the Philippines.

These moments reinforce why recognition matters. When we formally acknowledge days like Philippine Independence Day, we're not only recognizing history. We are affirming the value of the community and its contributions.

This bill reflects that understanding. It promotes multiculturalism in Manitoba, provides an opportunity for all Manitobans to engage with and appreciate the Filipino culture. It encourages learning, celebration and connection, valuing the strength of our province as a whole.

While we celebrate diversity, we must also remain mindful of the challenges that can arise in a multicultural society. We see differences in language,

differences in customs, as well as perspectives that can sometimes lead to misunderstanding or barriers. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. We can work together to create opportunities for cultural exchange.

As we approach the summer months, Manitobans will have many opportunities to take part in festivals and cultural celebrations across the province. Filipino independence day, celebrated on June 12, will be among them, featuring vibrant parades, traditional music and dance, colourful attire and, of course, the incredible food. These events are more than just celebrations. They are invitations: invitations to learn, to connect and to appreciate the cultures that make Manitoba.

Bill 217 is important and meaningful. By recognizing June 12 as a celebration of Philippine Independence Day, we honour the history and contributions. I look forward to the month of June as we celebrate Filipino Heritage Month and all the celebrations that I know I will be attending not just locally but outside of the constituency boundaries.

Especially excited to be a part of their heritage day in Neepawa where we see the most amazing, fantastic parade. A lot of the Filipino communities set a significant amount of time in setting up their parade floats, planning these celebrations. I'm especially excited to be a part of the celebration this year, an active participant in their program, quite honoured to be a part of that and donning some of their traditional attire to participate.

Again, I enjoy all that the Filipino community brings to my home community in Neepawa and visiting their restaurants, visiting their stores and what they add to our communities across our province. We see it in all rural Manitoba; my colleagues can attest to that as well. So I look forward to the many celebrations not just in Neepawa but, like I said, outside those boundaries as we celebrate Philippine Independence Day but also Filipino Heritage Month.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Order, please.

Prior to recognizing another member, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have seated, from École Laura Secord School, 47 grade 3 students under the direction of Chantal Côté. The group is

located in the constituency of the honourable member for Wolseley (MLA Naylor).

And we welcome you here today.

* * *

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I rise today to speak on Bill 217, The Celebration of Philippine Independence Day Act. This bill proposes to designate June 12 of each year as the celebration of Philippine Independence Day in Manitoba within the framework of The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act.

It's important to recognize the context in which this bill has been introduced. Filipino Manitobans have been part of the social, cultural and economic fabric of this province for decades. Their contributions span many sectors including health care, education, business, public service and arts. The history referenced in the preamble beginning with the arrival of skilled professionals in the mid-20th century and continuing through successive waves of immigration reflects a long-standing and meaningful contribution—or connection between Manitoba and the Filipino community.

The bill also highlights June 12 as a date of historical significance. It marks the declaration of Philippine independence in 1898 and is recognized by Filipino communities around the world. In Manitoba, this day is already observed through various community-led events and celebrations that promote cultural awareness and engagement.

From a legislative perspective, Bill 217 is relatively straightforward. It doesn't create new programs or impose obligations. Rather, it adds a formal designation to an existing statute that recognizes various days, weeks and months of significance. As such, its primary function is symbolic. It signals recognition and provides an official framework within which the day can be acknowledged across the province.

Symbolic recognition can play a role in fostering awareness and encouraging education. By formally identifying a day of significance, the Legislature can help draw attention to historical events and cultural traditions that may not be widely known. In this case, the bill also connects the observance of Philippine Independence Day with broader themes, including the impacts of colonialism and the value of solidarity among communities.

Same time, it's useful to consider how this bill fits within the broader approach to commemorative—or designations in Manitoba. Over time, The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act has grown to include a wide range of observances. Each reflects a particular community, cause or historical moment. Bill 217 would become part of that larger framework.

It's also worth noting that the work of individuals who've contributed to strengthening relationships between government and the Filipino community. For example, former minister Jon Reyes, who served in the PC government, was involved in a number of initiatives and community engagements that highlighted Filipino heritage and supported cultural recognition in the province. His role often included participating in cultural events, working alongside community leaders and helping elevate awareness of the contributions Filipino Manitobans have made across many sectors.

* (10:40)

In addition, during his time in government, Mr. Reyes was part of an—or part of efforts to address workforce needs in Manitoba's health-care system, including outreach to the Philippines. This included initiatives aimed at recruiting internationally trained nurses with efforts focused on bringing over 300 qualified health professionals to Manitoba to help meet staffing demands. These efforts reflected both the long-standing ties between Manitoba and the Philippines and the important role Filipino health-care workers have played in the province for decades.

This type of work illustrates how engagement can extend beyond symbolic recognition into practical collaboration. It highlights the ways in which cultural connections, immigration pathways and workforce development can intersect and how governments of different political stripes have, at times, worked with Filipino communities in both symbolic and substantive ways.

Members may wish to reflect on the role of legislation in recognizing cultural and historical events. For some, formal designation in statute provides a clear and lasting form of acknowledgement. For others, recognition may also occur through community initiatives, educational programming, or annual proclamations that do not require legislative amendment. Both approaches can contribute to public awareness and engagement in different ways.

It's also worth noting that the effectiveness of any commemorative day often depends on the level of participation and awareness it generates. Community organizations, cultural groups, educators and public institutions all play a role in bringing such observances to the legislative recognition. They may support these efforts, but it's typically one part of a broader ecosystem of activities and initiatives.

Bill 217 is symbolic measure that recognizes historical and cultural importance of June the 12th for Filipino communities in Manitoba, while highlighting the value of cultural awareness, learning and community connection across the province. At the same time, it also invites continued consideration of how recognition is best expressed, ensuring that symbolic gestures are paired with meaningful actions that support communities in tangible ways.

Thank you.

House Business

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): On House business.

The Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on House business.

MLA Fontaine: Pursuant to rule 34(7), I am announcing the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member 'fil'—for Kildonan-River East. The title of the resolution is National Strategy for Silver Alerts.

The Speaker: It has been announced that, pursuant to rule 34(7), that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Schott), and the title of the resolution is National Strategy for Silver Alerts.

* * *

French spoken

MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface): J'aimerais prendre quelques moments pour signaler l'importance de célébrer l'indépendance 'Filipino' ici au Manitoba. Comme vous savez, ici au Manitoba, nous avons une variété de communautés culturelles. Et je pense que, en respectant, en reflétant et en célébrant la communauté 'Filipino,' nous célébrons toutes nos communautés culturelles.

Translation

I would like to take a few moments to highlight the importance of celebrating the Filipino independence here in Manitoba. As you know, here in Manitoba we have a diverse range of cultural communities. And I believe that by respecting, reflecting and celebrating the Filipino community, we are celebrating all our cultural communities.

English

As I said earlier, Honourable Speaker, I'm not a kababayan [*compatriot*]; I'm a Red River Métis. Red River Métis are proud of their culture. There's about 100,000 Red River Métis in Manitoba. There's about 100,000 Filipinos in Manitoba; thousands in Brandon; 15,000 in Agassiz; tens of thousands in Winnipeg. And I'm sure that all Filipinos across Manitoba would greatly like to see this pass this morning.

Merci, l'Honorable Président. [*Thank you, Honourable Speaker.*]

Mrs. Colleen Robbins (Spruce Woods): I am so happy to speak on this, as I worked with Filipino nurses in Vancouver when I was there. And then when I moved to Souris, throughout the program, we had several nurses come to the community and brought their families. And me being in business at that time, my husband and I both employed Filipinos and built a great relationship with them, and have been invited to all different personal celebrations but also have celebrated many, many community celebrations in Souris and actually in Brandon. And we just celebrated at the Filipino pavilion in the winter.

So, yes, very welcoming people. The Filipino community has made and continues to make significant contributions to Manitoba's growth, prosperity and cultural richness. For decades, Filipino Manitobans have been an essential part of the province's story, helping to build strong communities, support key industries and shape the social fabric in meaningful ways. Beginning in the mid-20th century, many Filipinos came to Manitoba to fill critical shortages, particularly in health care and manufacturing. Their skills, professionalism and dedication helped sustain vital services and contributed to the province's economic development during important periods of growth. Over time, these early contributions laid the foundations for a thriving and well-established foundation that continues to expand and evolve.

Today, Filipino Manitobans are leaders and contributors in virtually every sector. In health care, they remain a cornerstone of the workforce, providing compassionate and high quality care in hospitals, long-term-care facilities and community settings. In education, Filipino professionals are shaping the next generation as teachers, administrators and researchers. In business, many entrepreneurs have created successful enterprises that generate jobs and serve community across the province. Their presence is also strongly felt in public service, skilled trades, technology and the arts.

Beyond their economic contributions, the Filipino community has enriched Manitoba culturally and socially. Filipino traditions, values and celebrations have become an important part of the province's multicultural landscape. Community organizations, cultural groups and grassroots initiatives have helped preserve heritage while also creating opportunities for broader community engagement and understanding.

A defining strength of the Filipino community is its 'emphas' on family, resilience and mutual support. These values have helped build close-knit networks and not only support community members but also extend outward through volunteerism, mentorship and civic participation.

Filipino Manitobans are actively involved in charitable work, local organizations and community-building efforts that benefit people from all backgrounds. The community has also demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of challenges. Whether navigating the complexities of immigration, adapting to new environments or responding to broader social issues, Filipino Manitobans have consistently shown strength, adaptability and a commitment to moving forward while supporting one another.

Recognizing the contributions of the Filipino community is not only about acknowledging the past, but it's also about understanding the ongoing role they play in shaping Manitoba's future. Their impact can be seen in the stronger institutions, more vibrant communities and more inclusive and dynamic province. Continued engagement with and support for Filipino Manitobans is essential to ensuring that their contributions are valued and their opportunities for participation and leadership continue to grow.

* (10:50)

Creating spaces for dialogue, cultural exchange and collaborations helps foster a deeper sense of

connection across Manitoba and communities. Manitoba's diversity is one of the greatest strengths, and Filipino community is a vital part of that diversity. Their contributions past, present and future help define what makes the province resilient, welcoming, forward-looking. It's one of the fastest growing and most vibrant communities in Canada.

And this bill is about recognition, respect and shared values. June 12 of 1898, Filipinos declared independence from Spain, a proud moment of self-determination and national identity, of freedom, 'sovereignty', resilience, democracy, diversity and human dignity. Recognize the Filipino Canadians as essential contributors. Their strong presence in communities like Brandon, Winnipeg, Neepawa and my own community, Souris. They are hard workers, they're very family-orientated, faith-based and a great community spirit.

Constituency connections for local Filipino events or individuals have been great. The Filipino culture is rich and vibrant. Their food, yum. Festivals, music, dance. They're helping one another, lifting communities. Celebrations like Independence Day are opportunities for all Manitobans to learn and participate and reinforce multiculturalism.

Canada is stronger because of its diversity. Why this bill—it matters? It recognizes value, dates, identity and history, sends a message of inclusion and respect—symbolic, but powerful. Encourages education, awareness and especially important for younger generations. It helps Filipino youth feel seen and valued and builds bridges between communities. Events are already happening: festivals, parades and community gatherings.

Bill 217 strengthens these efforts, encourages broader participation across the province. Bill 217 is a meaningful step toward recognizing the contributions and heritage of Filipino Manitobans. When we celebrate one community, we strengthen all communities.

I am proud to support this bill and stand with the Filipino community in celebrating June 12 as Filipino day.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I just want to put a few words on the record quickly; I won't take too much of time. But I'm so honoured today to have this opportunity to speak about Bill 217, which is brought to the floor by the youngest MLA in this Chamber, who is a Filipina. So I'm so proud of my colleague.

And when you hear the words like magandang umaga [*good morning*] this morning, that makes you happy. That speaks of the diversity we have in this province, that speaks about the contributions of our kababayans [*compatriots*] have to this beautiful, beautiful province. It could be contributions to our economy, it could be contributions to our social landscape.

I would quote a few examples of how Filipino Manitobans are contributing to this beautiful and friendly province. When you look at the team of the guests here today, you look at so many people; this is just a sample of the whole population. When you look at Ron Mervin Sison, you think about art, literature and musical events in this community, and many of them must have witnessed those events in this building as well and in this community. And when you look at Sir Ray Sator, you think about Knights of Rizal and how much difference that organization is making in Manitoba.

And at the same time, you also think about engineers and geoscientists of Manitoba that has so many Filipino professionals in it. And when you talk about Ana Ilagan, an interesting story that happened this weekend with me: I was taking greetings to the FascinAsian Film Festival on behalf of the government, and I was looking through their publication, and I saw—this face is familiar—it looks like Ana Ilagan and she was acting in a film. I found out last Saturday. And Ana used to work with the Burrows office. I was so proud.

And when you look at Kris Ontong, you call him for any event, he would drive from Steinbach straight to be part of the celebration. Thank you so much. And Bisayan [*phonetic*] Association of Manitoba. And when we talk about the seniors, like Tita Gloria, Tita Perla, Tito Ted, Tita Flor. So that speaks volumes about how we are working together to build our province. I want to request all members to support this bill. Let's send it to the committee.

Thank you so much for your attention. Salamat po. [*Thank you.*]

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): I rise in the House to put—to offer a few remarks on Bill 217, The Celebration of Philippine Independence Day Act. This legislation seeks to formally recognize June 12 each year as the Philippine Independence Day in Manitoba through its inclusion in The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act.

Filipino Manitobans have long been an integral part of Manitoba's growth and success. For generations, individuals of families from the Philippines have contributed to the province in a meaningful way. Whether in our health-care system, classrooms, businesses, public institutions or cultural life. The background outlined in the bill reflects that history, from the arrival of highly skilled professionals in the mid-1900s, as the member from Radisson alluded to in her opening comments, to the continued growth of vibrant Filipino communities across Manitoba.

June 12 itself holds deep historical significance. It marks the Declaration of Independence in 1898 and is widely celebrated by Filipino communities around the world. Here in Manitoba, that date is already recognized through festivals, gatherings, educational events organized by community members who take pride in sharing their heritage and traditions. From a legislative standpoint, the bill's purpose: symbolic designation. It does not establish new programming or regulatory requirements, but instead places formal recognition of the day within an existing statutory framework. In doing so, it provides an official acknowledgement that may help raise awareness and encourage broader participation in these great celebrations.

Symbolic measures such as this can serve a purpose. They can bring attention to important histories, create opportunities for learning and reflect the diversity of the population we serve. At the same time, it is helpful to view this within larger context of how Manitoba recognizes commemorative dates. The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act includes a wide range of observances, each with its own significance. Adding another designation invites reflection—

* (11:00)

The Speaker: Order, please.

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

DEBATE ON RESOLUTIONS

Res. 4—Women's Health in Manitoba

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

And the resolution before us this morning is resumption of debate on resolution No. 4, Women's Health in Manitoba, standing in the name

of the honourable member for Morden-Winkler, who has nine minutes remaining.

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): It's an honour for me to stand up again today and finish my speech—or my remarks on women's health. Women's health is such a important part of our health care in Manitoba; women make up 50 per cent of our population and it's something that we really need to pay attention to: the needs that we have, specifically more—women, because women are very different and we have different health-care needs.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

In every family, in every community we have women, and women's health is a huge factor in how our families function and how women are able to do their life. Women's health is more than just doctors visits. It's about the successful care, timely care and making sure women feel supported at every stage of their life. Right now in Manitoba there are serious gaps we cannot ignore, and I'm going to bring those to attention.

Women in rural and northern communities are facing much longer wait times to see specialists like gynecologists. These delays can stretch months and years. Currently women are waiting in rural Manitoba for up to two years to see a gynecologist. That's too long. It's leaving women waiting for a diagnosis, treatment and answers. That uncertainty can make—take a real toll, both physically and emotionally on women.

We're also seeing growing pressure on maternal care. The College of Midwives of Manitoba has made it clear that demand for midwives continues to exceed supply. I know young women in my community that are desperately wanting a midwife to do their prenatal journey and their birthing alongside and there's no opportunity for them to have a midwife.

In simple terms, there are not enough midwives for the number of women who need them and we need to do better. We need to make that a priority in our province. Midwives—they play a critical role. They provide care throughout pregnancy, they support during childbirth and follow-up care after the baby is born. They offer personalized continuous care and many women rely on that. That follow-up after having a baby is so important. Right now too many families cannot access those services. Women really need those services.

The shortage of specialists is serious in rural and northern Manitoba, in areas that are less—are

more remote. Where health-care options are already limited, without enough midwives, women are often forced to travel far from home to give birth or rely on already burdened—overburdened hospitals. We've already seen the impact on staffing shortages. In the Westman region, birthing services were paused—nearly paused twice within three months. That kind of instability is not acceptable. Women deserve better.

We urgently need more 'midwives' and that means expanding training, improving recruitment and making sure midwives are supported so they stay in Manitoba. Strengthening midwifery care is essential if we want health-care systems that truly support women and families. I urge the government to look at increasing training and providing supports for women who want to go into this field.

Fertility care is also another area that is under strain. Clinics offering services like IVF are struggling due to staffing shortages also. These services are life-changing for families trying to have children, yet access to it is becoming more difficult because we don't have enough trained health-care workers.

At the same time preventative care remains critical. Breast screening saves lives—we know that. We know women are having—are being diagnosed earlier in life. We need to make sure we increase breast screening. Lowering the screening age from 50 to 40 allows earlier detection and better outcomes for women.

This change didn't happen by accident. It came after strong advocacy, including the introduction of bill 221, an earlier screening for breast—or, sorry—an Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer Act, by MLA from Roblin. This bill set a clear deadline to lower the screening age and required public reporting to track progress. During debate, the government announced plans to lower the age, but this was not until after they were pressured and pushed to do it. That's unfortunate. That's not putting women first.

But this does show the impact of opposition advocacy and how the MLA from Roblin brought—bringing this forward has made a big change in our province for women. So thank you to that—for her—to her for that. However, the bill itself still ultimately not did not pass. They took this bill and did what they wanted to do with it. But it's still—we're still looking forward to the breast screening changing and for all of the work that our MLA from Roblin did.

Now, it's also important to recognize the work that has been done to advance women's health care. The previous PC government made a number of important investments and changes to support women across Manitoba.

They expanded health-care facilities across the province to improve access to gynecologist services as well as breast and ovarian cancer care. Through the diagnostic and surgical task force, they increased capacity for gynecology surgeries and reduced times—wait times by partnering with local health-care providers.

They also expanded support to survivors of sexual violence through the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program, including a \$1.3-million expansion. This is all so important for women in our province. This allowed women to access care in safe community-based settings like Klinik Community Health and other organizations and areas of the province rather than only in hospitals.

And I just want to put a little plug in there that I hope that we can also expand this to the Boundary Trails Health Centre Foundation and also add a clinic there, as well, for women in southern Manitoba that can't travel to Winnipeg.

They also partnered with organizations like the Toba Centre and provided additional forensic nursing services for women.

The PCs also took steps to support women in their daily lives. They partnered with Shoppers Drug Mart to provide free menstrual products to schools, shelters and community organizations. It started with us. As of 2024, many of—5.2 million products have been distributed. That was because of the PC government.

They invested in prevention and long-term health as well, including launching a social impact bond in 2022 focused on reducing heart disease risk for Manitoba women. Support the vulnerable women was also strengthened. Funding for women's resource centres was more than double, from \$2 million to \$4.1 million, to support programs addressing family violence and supporting women in our province.

Investments were made for eating disorder prevention and recovery programs at the Women's Health Clinic. The government also—the—sorry. Additional funding was provided to the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre of Winnipeg to support outreach programs for women who are pregnant or new mothers facing substance and—use challenges.

As you can see, there's been lots of things done by the provincial PC government in the past, and we will continue to advocate and support women and women's health journeys in this province. On our side, we support women's health. We, the women on this side, will advocate continuously for supports that we need for women's health in Manitoba.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no further debate—the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet.

* (11:10)

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I gave a few extra seconds to see if there was going to be anybody from the government benches or independents to stand up, put a few words on the record today in regards to the resolution, women's health day—or health in Manitoba, brought forward by the MLA for Tuxedo.

So I'd like to start off by saying thank you to the member for bringing forward this resolution because I think it's an opportunity for us to debate here in the Manitoba Legislature today on this resolution. And it is a topic where I think that more consultation from the member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton) to their Health Minister, I think, would benefit all Manitobans and in particular women's health here in Manitoba, based on the MLA for Tuxedo's experience in health care and her being in the nursing profession.

So I would like to start off, of course, by talking about how serious attention and commitment that women's health here in Manitoba desperately needs. And we're seeing, unfortunately, under the current NDP government in Manitoba has repeatedly failed to deliver on promises made to improve women's health care, leaving many women and families without the necessary supports.

In contrast to the previous Progressive Conservative government made substantial advancements that transformed women's health services for the better. Recognizing these efforts is essential to understanding the current state of women's health in this province.

Our PC government introduced bill 221, brought forward by the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook), The Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer Act, which aimed to lower the eligibility age for routine breast cancer screenings from 50 to 40 by December 31, 2026. This initiative emphasized accountability by mandating yearly public reporting on progress. Even though the Health Minister has now announced plans

to lower the screening age during the bill's debate, the NDP ultimately had killed the bill, denying women in Manitoba the assurance of accountability and transparency that they deserve.

Access to health care was a top priority for the PC government, which built and expanded several facilities across the province. This included increased access to gynecology services, breast care and ovarian cancer care. It was through initiatives like the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force that the previous government worked to build capacity for women's health, reducing patient wait times and ensuring timely access to necessary surgeries.

The PC government also introduced and expanded the provincial Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program, better known as SANE. With a \$1.3-million investment, survivors of sexual violence were able to access vital forensic nursing services in non-hospital settings. And this initiative was crucial in supporting vulnerable women, yet the current government has not prioritized such critical services, leaving many without the care that they need.

Another significant achievement was the partnership with Shoppers Drug Mart which provided free menstrual products to schools, shelters and other vital programs. I had the pleasure of working with my co-chair—our co-chair on the Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet, Rochelle Squires, in that initiative.

And it doesn't necessarily have to be all government all day. We know that the NDP bent on various different programs and that has to be totally owned and operated by government, and that's what they like. We feel that working with private industry, potentially businesses, to bring services to the front lines is a win-win situation.

So we know that this effort led to the distribution of over 5.2 million menstrual products, showing a commitment to supporting women and girls throughout the province. In contrast, the NDP has failed to maintain this momentum, leaving many without access to these essential items.

In 2022, the PC government launched a social impact bond dedicated to reducing heart disease risk for women and invested over \$200,000 in a provincial pregnancy and infant loss program. These initiatives show a comprehensive approach to women's health and the current government appears to lack. Support for vulnerable women also saw improvements under the PC government, which increased funding for

women's resource centres and expanded the province's eating disorder prevention and recovery program.

At that time, since we're bringing up topics of lack of support for vulnerable women and girls, I would like to do a bit of an acknowledgement that today is Red Dress Day 2026, so May 5, which is a day to bring awareness for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited. Originated from the Métis artist, Jaime Black, the REDress Project and this serves to honour those lost to violence and address systematic issues. We know that Jaime Black-Morsette, as the founder of the REDress Project, was developed and initiated in 2009, and this is commemorated through displays of red dresses in public spaces across Canada and the United States.

So with that, I'd also like to say, in regards to this resolution about supports for vulnerable women and girls, that the support—that support is also available 24-7 for those affected via the national MMIWG crisis line at 1-844-413-6649. Once again, the support is available 24-7 for those affected via the national MMIWG crisis line at 1-844-413-6649.

So now getting back to the resolution at hand, again brought forward by the member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton) who I think would do us all a service by going and having that conversation with the Health Minister and moving some of these initiatives forward, if the Health Minister would take time to actually listen not only to Manitobans, but her own caucus. So—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I'll just remind all members that pronouns are important in all spaces, particularly this Chamber. Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care (MLA Asagwara) uses they/them pronouns.

Mr. Ewasko: Tragically, the current government's inability to manage health care effectively has resulted in heartbreaking outcomes, stories of women waiting for critical surgeries, like Debbie Fewster's nearly two-month wait for a triple bypass surgery, highlights the urgent need for change. The tragic deaths of women like Genevieve Price, who spent 30 hours waiting for care, and Kaitlyn Albert, who suffered abuse during a hospital visit, underscore the failures of the NDP government to provide adequate support for women in vulnerable situations.

These are just a few examples, and it's unfortunate that since the Kinew government has formed government, we see that wait times has increased to access care in our hospitals, and that goes for absolutely

every culture and gender here in the province, and it's unfortunate. We know that while the NDP made various different promises—again, during the election—and have fulfilled very few of those, especially improving women's health care, the reality is that they have broken many of those promises and failed to deliver on essential services.

The previous Progressive Conservative government made significant advancements that supported women and families, and it is crucial to recognize these efforts as a benchmark for what women's health care should look like right here in Manitoba. Women deserve a government that prioritizes their health and well-being, and it is time to hold the current administration accountable for its failures.

Thank you for your time.

* (11:20)

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you for the opportunity to stand today and speak on this resolution on women's health, something that is extremely important to all Manitobans across our province, as we know the importance that women play in each and every one of our lives. And let me be clear, on this side of the House, we will always stand for strong, accessible and comprehensive health care for women across our province. That's because women's health is not a political talking point. It's not a slogan, and it is not something that should be reduced to a resolution in this Chamber, while real challenges continue to grow outside of it.

It's about real people, real families and real outcomes. And right now too many Manitobans, especially women, are not getting the care that they need when they need it. Honourable Speaker, this resolution makes broad statements about access, about rights and about services. But what it does not do is address the most urgent issue facing women's health care today: access in principle—or access, I should say, in practice, not in principle. Because you can pass resolutions, and you can make announcements, you can have nice, fancy press releases, but none of that matters if a woman in Brandon cannot access maternity care, if a patient in rural Manitoba cannot find a midwife, if a Manitoban is waiting hours or days for care in an emergency room.

We have seen all of these real world examples clear across our province. In Prairie Mountain Health region, at-home birthing services were suspended due to staffing shortages. In Brandon, a maternity ward nearly closed. Across Manitoba,

the College of Midwives has been clear: demand far exceeds supply. These are not theoretical gaps. These are real failures in service delivery and no resolution, no matter how well worded, will fix that.

We also need to talk about the accountability of this government, because while this NDP government speaks about expanding services, they voted down legislation that would have ensured transparency and progress. Our colleague, the MLA for Roblin, brought forward legislation to lower the breast cancer screening age to 40, with clear deadlines and mandatory reporting. And what did this government do? They killed that bill, then they turned around and announced the same policy, without the accountability. And that seems to be a trend for this government.

They want to talk about non-partisan legislation benefiting all Manitobans. There have been numerous examples of that brought forward under this current mandate, from PCs on this side of the House, turned down by NDP on the government benches. In that example, the NDP then turned around and announced that policy, like I said, without the accountability. And that we can all see—Manitobans can see—is not leadership. That is politics and Manitobans deserve better than that.

On this side of the House, we have a strong record of supporting women's health, not just in words, but in action. We expanded forensic nursing services so survivors of sexual violence could access care in safe, community-based settings. We invested in programs to support women facing addiction, pregnancy challenges and family violence. We expanded access to menstrual products across the province, millions distributed to those who needed them. We built capacity in surgical and diagnostic services to reduce the wait times. And we partnered with organizations on the front lines because we know best what women in the province actually need.

But today, the challenge is not just about programs; it's about the people; it's about the workforce; and because without doctors, without nurses, without those midwives, without allied health professionals, there is no system. And the organizations representing those workers have been clear. They are telling this government, the NDP government, that recruitment is now falling behind, that retention is a challenge, that burnout each and every day is something that has become a real reality and something that is a growing concern. And they've been clear that help under the new

NDP government and their mandate is not coming fast enough.

So I ask: How does this resolution address all of these concerns, the concerns of groups across Manitoba, the concerns from front-line workers and, most importantly, the concerns from women who are unable access the health care that they need? How does this resolution train a midwife? How does it recruit a nurse? How does it retain that specialist they need? How does it ensure that a woman in rural Manitoba can access care closer to home? Because those are the questions that actually matter.

Honourable Speaker, there is another concern here, and that is the growing divide between urban and rural health-care access. This resolution speaks broadly about expanding services, but the reality is that in many rural and northern communities, services are shrinking; they're not growing. And we see that each and every day as representatives of those communities, not the representatives of the government that represent a single city. Women are being asked to travel further, to wait longer, to navigate a system that is stretched far too thin. And that is simply not acceptable.

We also know that women face unique health challenges across their lifetime. From reproductive health to maternal care, from cancer screening to menopause support, from mental health to recovery from violence, those are complex and interconnected issues, and they require more than just these announcements. They require comprehensive and a co-ordinated plan.

Honourable Speaker, we can all agree that women's health matters. We can all agree that access to care must be protected. We can all agree that the services must be strengthened. But agreements are not enough. It's results that really matter. And right now, Manitobans are seeing service disruptions, staff shortages, longer wait times. And not just longer wait times—we're talking wait times that are reported to have doubled. The system is clearly under pressure.

So instead of bringing forward another resolution, instead of patting themselves on the back, this government should focus on delivering real improvements: a clear workforce recruitment and retention strategy, support for rural and northern health-care delivery, investment in infrastructure that actually works and measurable outcomes that Manitobans can see and trust.

Honourable Speaker, we will continue to advocate for women across this province, and we will continue to push for better health access, better accountability and better results. Because women in Manitoba deserve more than promises. They deserve a health-care system that works for them.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

* (11:30)

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Women's health care should never be a partisan issue. It is one of the most fundamental responsibilities any government holds. Every woman in Manitoba deserves timely access to care, early diagnosis when it matters most and the dignity of knowing the system will be there for her and her family. I've been involved in this building for the last two and a half years and one of the things that we tried to introduce was an MRI into the Portage hospital.

MRI wait times across Manitoba have skyrocketed to almost 30,000 people. That is affecting all types of health care but not just only—it—for women, but for all people here. We have read petitions here for close to a year or more supporting an MRI to be put into the Portage hospital, again to help with women's health care as well, too. This NDP government has decided that the \$5 million that the Portage hospital foundation has been offering is not good enough. It's not enough that we are not doing enough for women's health.

The brand new hospital going into Neepawa, Manitoba, no CT scan. Again, a misstep. Why can we not have these diagnostic services available to all people in Manitoba? Why are a lot of these people that can afford it going to the States or going out of province and paying for these diagnostic services when we have a solution right here in Manitoba?

We have a brand new health-care facility ready to go in Portage la Prairie. This government has chose to delay it for a number of months; unfair to everybody involved. But increasingly, what Manitobans are seeing is a government that is putting politics ahead of patients. And that's why I had to speak of the issue that continues to evolve, continues to go on regarding the MRI in Portage la Prairie.

We are seeing partisanship take priority over progress and wedge politics replace meaningful action; and when it comes to women's health, that approach has enormous consequences. Our Progressive Conservative team has always recognized that protecting women's health starts with access:

access to screening, access to facilities and access to specialized care. That is why we took action on breast cancer screening.

Breast cancer remains one of the most serious health risks facing women. We know that early detection saves lives. It's not a theory, it's a fact supported by medical evidence and by the lived experiences of families across this 'provincin'—province. That is exactly why our team, led by the MLA from Roblin introduced bill 221, The Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer Act.

The legislation proposed lowering the routine screening from 50 to 40. It was a practical evidence-based step that can catch cancer early. Women in their 40s are often at the busiest stages of their lives. They're raising families, building careers and contributing to our communities. They should not have to wait until it's too late to access screening that could save lives.

But instead of supporting that effort, the NDP chose to kill that bill. They chose not to legislate accountability or transparency in screening. They chose delay over action. Early detection should never depend on political convenience. And yet it's exactly what Manitobans are seeing right to this day.

Beyond screening, we also understood that strong health care requires strong infrastructure. You can deliver timely care—you cannot deliver timely care if the facilities are not there. That is why under the previous PC government, we made significant investments across Manitoba in the billions and billions of dollars. We built a new regional health facility in Portage la Prairie. We expanded the Bethesda Regional Health Centre. We expanded Boundary Trails Health Centre. And we moved forward with a new hospital in Neepawa, just to name a few.

These projects were not just announcements. They were real improvements that meant shorter travel times, faster diagnosis and better care for women, especially in rural communities—rural communities where these women have to travel hours and hours and hours for diagnostic services in the middle of winter, in the middle of the night, in order—and with them having already worrying about what the diagnosis may be, we choose politics instead. They meant that a mother, a daughter or a grandmother could receive care closer to home when time matters most.

Today, however, we're seeing a very different picture. Under the current government, more health-care facilities are greylisted than ever before. Services are inconsistent. Staffing shortages are abysmal and continue to impact access. You cannot claim to improve health care while access continues to shrink. You cannot promise better outcomes while more doors are effectively closing every day.

Women's health is not just about physical care; it's also about safety and dignity. That is why our government took action to support survivors of sexual assault. We introduced and expanded the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program. This ensured that women who experience trauma could access immediate, compassionate and professional care. These nurses are specially trained not only to provide medical attention but also to handle forensic evidence with care and sensitivity.

Those first hours after an assault are critical. Survivors deserve support that's available, accessible and respectable. This program made a real difference and has demonstrated what it means to put patients first. Because women's health means supporting women in their most vulnerable moments—not just talking about it, but acting on it.

We also recognized the need for more mental health supports, particularly in the area of eating disorders. These are complex challenges that disproportionately affect women and required specialized, timely care.

Our government made targeted investments in eating disorder programs with a focus on early intervention and treatment, because we know when it comes to mental health, delays can have long-time consequences, just as we're seeing today with the drug addiction issues that are going on. And yet, today many families are still struggling to access timely care. Wait times are long and systems continue to fall short of what Manitobans expect and deserve.

At its core, the issue facing our health-care system is not just funding; it's about focus and it's about accountability. Manitobans do not measure success with press releases. They measure it by whether they can get a screening appointment, whether they can see a specialist, whether they can walk into a hospital and receive care they deserve. And right now, too many women are being let down.

The current government has had the opportunity to build on that foundation. Instead they have allowed access to decline—avoid accountability.

Manitoba women deserve more. They deserve a health-care system that works. They deserve—

* (11:40)

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

The member's time has expired.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): I, too, wish to speak and debate this resolution that's in front of us. I don't know if we need leave. Maybe one of the NDP members would like to get up. It is a legislative Chamber. It is where we come and we discuss issues that are important to Manitobans and we debate.

This is a resolution, fairly long one. It's quite exhaustive, has a lot of detail to it. And yet no NDP member gets up and wants to debate it. They all sit with their faces down, nose on their—in their phones and whatever else that they are occupying their time with, but they have no time to get up and debate a very important issue on women's health. Isn't that telling?

They want to put stuff forward, and then they're just too unmotivated to speak to it. *[interjection]* And there's the one member, if I knew his constituency I'd call him out, but I actually don't know which constituency is because he is fairly unnoteworthy in this Chamber. So I don't actually quite remember what his constituency is. I'm sure eventually it'll come to me and I'll reference it.

Very important that we be debating all health care. We've one of the worst if not the worst system in the country, so I mean it's your typical NDP approach: whatever they are worst at then they try to blame on somebody else. And I'm disappointed, I thought for sure in here somewhere they would still find room to debate politicians south of the border because that seems to be their default position. They fail because of somebody else and that's what this is.

And our health-care system is troubled. We are worst in many categories in the country and not just are we the worst, not just are we at the bottom but we are increasingly dropping below all the others. And so it's a very telling, typical NDP tactic: put forward something and try to distract from a very, very poor health-care system.

I would like to point out that there are amazing men and women who are working in the health-care system who have taken a lot of schooling. They believe in what they do, they love their job, they do the best they can.

I would like to thank all of the individuals who were involved in the newest addition to my greater family. We have a new young individual who came forward. Her name is Maria Rosamunde Tully and she came into this world at seven pounds, 10 ounces and just delightful. *[interjection]*

And yes—clap for her—and she is just the sweetest little thing, and her mom is just a terrific mom and just loves her and of course her older sister who I call Mausie, but it's—her real name is actually Tamira, just loves her little baby sister. And, in fact, my daughter Brigitta gave birth at about 6:30 in the morning. By 11:30 she was at home already and brought the little baby home and—but she got amazing care, was very well taken care of.

And there are amazing people in the health-care system. The failing isn't the health-care system, the failing is this NDP government. The failing is individuals, elected officials, who have no idea where they're going. They have no roadmap. All's what they have is announcements and resolutions that they don't even trust their own backbenchers to get up and speak on. They won't let them. Every one of them—it's like in an airplane; they all have their seatbelt on and the sign is up, leave your seatbelts on because you're not allowed to get up and speak.

And that's the typical NDP approach. They put forward a resolution, try to cover up the mess that they've created in health care and then allow nobody to speak on a resolution that they put forward. And, you know, we as a Progressive Conservative caucus want to debate this. We'd also like to hear what members opposite have to say, but evidently their leadership—their Premier (Mr. Kinew) for sure doesn't trust them. That's why in most of these debates, you have ministers speak, and even they are all scripted. They don't allow the backbench to speak to any of these resolutions—or legislation, for that matter. They all have their seatbelt on, big red sign, you know, seatbelt use mandatory, and they don't let them speak. How unfortunate.

But you know what? We have men and women who do an amazing job. And we all are related, have family, have friends in the health-care system, and they are doing an amazing job. *[interjection]* And now the members opposite in the NDP bench find all this funny. They take great pleasure in one of the worst health-care systems in Canada across North America, and they laugh and jeer and—totally, totally out of touch. This is a group of men and women who are so out of touch—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

I'd invite the member to bring his comments back to the private member's resolution, which has to do with women's health.

Mr. Schuler: Absolutely we want to talk about women's health and the fact that this NDP government is failing women and is failing our health-care system. And that's why they won't speak. That's why they're not allowed to speak, because of all these failings towards women's health care.

And I—again, I would reiterate that there are amazing men and women in the health-care system who are providing great health care to women. They do an amazing job. I know many of them and they are—whether it's a newborn at seven pounds, 10 ounces or somebody who is in their 90s who needs health care. And we appreciate and respect the fact that they are providing amazing health care to Manitoba women in spite of a failing NDP government who, the last time they were in power, drove this health-care system into the ground. And they're back at it again. We have men and women—but we're talking about the women today—sitting in emergency rooms, after 30 hours, passing away and were never attended to. That is not health care for women. That is not providing health care for those who need it.

And I understand. I understand why not one NDP MLA—none of them will get up and debate their own resolution. They won't even speak to it: (a) the backbench can't be trusted, and the ministers evidently can't be bothered. And women are often those who are in need of very special health care, and they need a good, robust health-care system, and we know that they are not getting it from this particular NDP government. In fact, we've seen some very sad and tragic cases of individuals who—and women who have been failed by this health-care system, and that is really unfortunate.

And you would think that the NDP backbench, those who have a lot more time than, say, ministers would, that they would be able to be advocates for these women who need health care. And they need it in—quickly; they need a quick response. And that's not being provided. That is—that leadership is not being provided. And I would point out to this Chamber that putting a resolution forward isn't going to help women's health care. Just putting a resolution forward and then not talking about it, not debating it, not being allowed to debate it, being forced to sit in their seats and not stand up and debate it. That is very unfortunate.

And I struggle—I struggle with bringing up individual cases. I find I—it bothers me. And, you know, a woman who for five days in the Grace ER had brain bleeding and dementia, and we all know that outcome. I mean, those are just troubling.

And to put something like this resolution forward—and it's gratuitous—and then not talk to it, not debate it, not discuss it, you know, put their heads down. The NDP all sit there, put their heads down; they're all working their cellphones, all working on their papers and won't get up and explain to Manitobans how someone can be in the emergency room for five days and not get care.

* (11:50)

Somebody was in an emergency room for 30 hours and—in agony and passed away. And families are coming forward and discussing it. Families want their loved ones, for the women in their family to have proper health care. And this isn't about the health-care providers who are doing a magnificent job, doing the best they can with what they have. It is a political system, it is—

The Deputy Speaker: And the honourable member's time has expired.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): So I rise today to speak about something that affects almost every family in this province, and that is women's health.

And, quite frankly, like my colleague, the member for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler), I'm surprised that there is not a single member on the government benches that wants to stand up and actually speak to their own resolution. Yet on our side, we've had numerous speakers stand up and talk about the importance of women's health. So, clearly we are the ones that will always stand up for meaningful support and accessibility of women's health care.

Women's health care is something that affects myself. It'll affect my seven-year-old daughter as she grows. And so it's important that we have accessible and meaningful support to the issues that face women directly. When women's health is overlooked, delayed or unprioritized, as it has been under this NDP government, the consequences are not abstract, but they are deeply, deeply personal. And they are felt in our homes, in our workplaces and in our communities.

So today in particular, I want to focus on three areas of women's health that should be and must

be prioritized. My colleague, the MLA for Roblin, has spent hours, countless hours, working with survivors and advocates to advocate for earlier breast cancer screening for women.

Breast cancer remains one of the most common cancers affecting women in Canada. And we are seeing more and more that breast cancer is impacting and affecting younger women. And we know something critical, that early detection does save lives. Because when breast cancer is caught early, treatment is less invasive, survival rates are significantly higher and outcomes for families are dramatically improved.

Yet many women face barriers to this earlier screening. And up until my colleague's countless advocacy efforts, routine screening did not start until the age of 50, yet women in their 40s, the ones raising young families, building careers and contributing to our communities through countless volunteer efforts, they're the ones that partnered with my colleague to advocate for earlier screening. And yet while this NDP government decided to play political games over the past two years, other jurisdictions moved ahead. They moved towards earlier and more accessible screening, recognizing family history, genetic risk and evolving medical evidence.

As I am closely approaching that 'ange' range, so are many of my friends. I have a family of—and I also have a history of family with breast cancer. And while other screening, cancer screenings, start 10 years before your—earlier than your closest family member, like colorectal, breast cancer screening did not. So I think that we all need to recognize the MLA for Roblin for her countless efforts over the past two years, working with those survivors and advocates to reduce breast cancer screening age to 40.

Another key area of women's health that I want to focus on that is often overlooked is fertility care. This is often talked about quietly but felt very, very deeply.

Across Manitoba, many individuals and couples are struggling to start or grow their families. Fertility clinics are not a luxury, but they are a lifeline; and access to fertility care in this province remains limited, very expensive and out of reach for far too many. Treatments like IVF can cost tens of thousands of dollars, often with no guarantee for success.

There are limited options in this province to receive IVF, and so for many families, that does mean incredibly difficult choices: delaying treatment, taking on significant debt or giving up the dream of

having children altogether. This is why our PC team committed to a fertility tax credit, and we are pleased that the government did follow through on that.

A third critical area of women's health that is being ignored by this government is prenatal care, and this is a third area that really sets the foundation. Healthy pregnancies lead to healthy babies, stronger families and healthy communities. But for too many women, especially in rural, northern or underserved communities, they face long travel distances, limited access to obstetrics and family doctors and emergency care, if necessary, that takes far too long to either arrive or sitting in waiting rooms.

In fact, when the NDP was last in power, they shut down rural emergency rooms and this is exactly the population that is underserved right now when it comes to prenatal care. Prenatal care is critical for women's health. It includes heartbeat checks; ultrasounds; monthly, sometimes weekly, blood work; and something that's incredibly important as a woman is going through pregnancy, mental health checks.

So let's talk about where this NDP has failed on women's health. And similar to my colleague, the MLA for Springfield-Ritchot, it's very difficult to talk about the challenges and the tragic outcomes that have occurred over the past two years, specifically with women as it results to access to emergency care in our ERs.

A 69-year-old woman, Debbie Fewster, died in October 2024 after waiting almost two months for triple bypass surgery that she was told she needed urgently. Genevieve Price died in that same St. Boniface Hospital emergency department on November 22 after spending 30 hours awaiting for appropriate care. Stacey Ross died on January 16 of this year after an 11-hour wait for admission in, again, the St. Boniface Hospital emergency department and her family was subsequently told that the long wait was a factor in her tragic death. Judy Burns, again, died on January 21 of this year at St. Boniface Hospital and her family has raised serious concerns about the care that she received.

Last year, a First Nations woman named Geraldine Mason was thrown in jail for a whole month because she had tuberculosis. And Kaitlyn Albert, an 18-year-old pregnant woman from Norway House Cree Nation, was left traumatized after a nightmare hospital visit that included verbal abuse, neglect and cruelty from medical staff at the Thompson hospital.

So we recognize that the NDP is trying to play political games with this resolution that they brought forward. But everything that I have just discussed—those women, tragic outcomes and circumstances, tragic deaths that their families are now having to suffer through under this NDP's watch. Yet this is the resolution that the NDP brings forward today, not on actually having to—or improving health-care outcomes for women, not focusing on improving women's health when where they actually need it.

This is incredibly disappointing that this is the stuff that this NDP government is bringing forward.

Women make up the majority of the population in the province now. Our health-care outcomes are changing. Our focus needs to change. We need to look at evolving medical evidence as to where cancer, breast cancer, colorectal cancer, heart conditions that affect women, those outcomes, those solutions.

That's what the government needs to focus on, not playing political games with something that they have no plan of improving access to women's health.

And if this is so important, then why aren't those members on the opposite side standing up to speak to this resolution? They're the ones that bring it forward. Clearly they think it's important, but yet they're refusing to put any words on the record—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

The hour being 12 p.m.—the next time this matter is before the House, the honourable member will have one minute remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 5, 2026

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