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Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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<i>Vacant</i>	Southdale	—

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, November 26, 2015

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Good morning, everyone. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTIONS OF CONDOLENCE

Mr. Speaker: As previously agreed, I will be calling condolence motions.

René Toupin

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Monsieur le Président, j'aimerais, appuyé par le ministre des ressources naturelles et minérales, proposer que l'Assemblée transmette à la famille du feu René Toupin, qui a été député à l'Assemblée législative du Manitoba, ses sincères condoléances et sa gratitude pour le dévouement dont il a su faire preuve dans son travail au service de sa collectivité et de la population du Manitoba, et que le Président fasse parvenir une copie de la présente motion à la famille du défunt.

Translation

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the minister of natural and mineral resources, that this House convey to the family of the late René Toupin, who served as a member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, its sincere condolences and its appreciation of the devotion he showed in serving his community and the people of Manitoba, and that Mr. Speaker be requested to forward a copy of this resolution to the family.

Motion presented.

Mr. Selinger: Monsieur le Président, c'est un privilège d'être debout aujourd'hui pour payer hommage à la vie d'un homme comme aucun autre.

Translation

Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to stand here to pay tribute to the life of a man like no other.

English

René Toupin was a true man of the people. He was deeply connected to his constituency and he worked in so many ways to better the lives of all Manitobans.

Ayant grandi dans le petit village de Ste. Rita, René comprenait bien l'importance de la famille et de la communauté.

Translation

Having grown up in the small village of Ste. Rita, René understood well the importance of community and family.

English

These are the values that guided his service for the people of Springfield as a member of the Legislature and as a Cabinet minister.

We often talk about the 1969 election as a watershed moment in Manitoba's political history. Manitobans embraced a forward-thinking vision for Manitoba and elected their first NDP government. But what is truly memorable is the caring and compassionate members who were elected as Premier Schreyer's team as they swept the province.

René était un tel candidat, et le Manitoba est une meilleure province à cause de ses contributions.

Translation

René was such a candidate, and Manitoba is a better province because of his contributions.

English

René served the people of Manitoba as minister of several portfolios including, at the same time, as the most-minister of Health and Social Services—health and social services, which are now two departments—as well as chairing the Treasury Board. You can imagine that the Department of Health did quite well.

René was always thinking of others, and as a Health minister he was the first volunteer to sign a

donor pledge card in the Kidney Foundation drive to obtain transplant organ commitments. The pledge served to launch the Kidney Foundation of Canada's organ donor program in Manitoba.

Il est-il s'est toujours battu pour ceux qui n'avaient pas de voix.

Translation

He always fought for those who did not have a voice.

English

He always fought for those without a voice, tackling issues like income redistribution, low-income housing and job creation programs to help keep the province's unemployment rate among the very lowest in the nation.

He introduced an incredible 33 pieces of legislation in this Chamber, including Manitoba's first consumer protection act, which set up what is now the Consumer Protection Office, and protected Manitobans making purchases from door-to-door salesmen, borrowing from loan companies and more. He was also a tremendous advocate for the co-op movement and the caisse populaire movement.

He presented the legislation on The Prescription Drugs Cost Assistance Act, established Manitoba's pharmacare program and helped seniors pay prescription drug costs.

He was also introduced The Health Services Insurance Act, which gave Manitobans coverage for hospital and other medical costs and made Manitoba the first province to have hospital and health insurance services under one agency.

He also introduced The Heritage Manitoba Act, which was groundbreaking legislation aimed at preserving historical and cultural artifacts, buildings and property in Manitoba for future generations.

The legacy of René's contributions live on today and laid the foundation for innovative, forward-thinking work in so many areas.

À travers tout cela, René n'a jamais oublié ses racines franco-manitobaines.

Translation

Through all this, René never forgot his Franco-Manitoban roots.

English

He was a strong voice in the Schreyer government for francophone rights and services. Just

weeks after being elected, René accompanied Premier Schreyer to a premier's conference in Quebec City shortly before the federal Official Languages Act came into force.

Étant un ministre bilingue du Manitoba, sa présence a porté beaucoup d'attention aux actualités de la communauté francophone au Manitoba.

Translation

As a bilingual minister of Manitoba, his presence brought a lot of attention to the issues of the francophone community in Manitoba.

English

René also greatly enriched Franco-Manitoban culture by giving generously of his time to the community.

Il était un membre fondateur de la Société franco-manitobaine.

Translation

He was a founding member of the Société franco-manitobaine.

English

He was president of la Fédération des aînés et des aînées francophones du Canada, the only national francophone organization for seniors at the time, where he was a strong advocate for culturally appropriate care for francophone seniors.

Il était toujours là pour ceux qui n'avaient pas encore trouvé leur propre voix, en défendant leurs intérêts et plaidant leur cause pour faire du Manitoba une meilleure place où vivre pour tous.

Je n'oublierai jamais ce que j'ai appris de René quand nous avons cogné de porte à porte ensemble en 1999.

Translation

He was always there for those who did not yet have their own voice, defending their interests and pleading their case to make Manitoba a better place to live for everyone.

I will never forget what I learned from René when we went knocking door to door in 1999.

English

I was amazed by how well he knew every family we would meet. He knew where they came from, where they were born, who their relatives were, including all those he knew as a Père blanc.

René made tremendous contributions to his community because he knew his neighbours and was deeply connected to his community. His legacy is that of a dedicated community member and tireless advocate. Manitoba is a stronger province for his many contributions, and we are thankful to his memory that will live on through his legacy in the community, his friends and family.

* (10:10)

J'aimerais reconnaître les membres de sa famille qui se sont joint à nous ce matin.

Translation

I would like to acknowledge the members of his family who have joined us this morning.

English

His wife, Frances.

Ses fils, Paul et Michel; ses filles, Louise, Yvette et Rosanne; et je suis heureux de voir ses petits-enfants et des membres de la famille de Frances aussi.

Translation

His sons, Paul and Michel; his daughters, Louise, Yvette and Rosanne; and I am happy to see his grandchildren and members of Frances's family as well.

English

I know you all miss him deeply but I know what a truly incredible person René was and that we will never forget his many contributions to life here in Manitoba.

Nous n'oublierons jamais ses considérables contributions.

Merci beaucoup.

Translation

We will never forget his considerable contributions.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to say a few words and extend condolences to the family and friends of René Toupin.

René était une vraie voix pour les peuples franco-manitobains.

Translation

René was a real voice for Franco-Manitobans.

English

He spoke long and hard on behalf of people in the Franco-Manitoban group in Manitoba, and he was not only involved before he entered politics but he continued to be involved afterwards, chairing the national francophone seniors organization and continuing to make contribution after contribution.

I want to note in particular René Toupin's contributions to health in Manitoba. He served as Cabinet minister at a pivotal time shortly after medicare had brought in nationally. And I think we can and should recognize him for the important role that he played as medicare rolled out in Manitoba and became part of the fabric of our province.

He was able to make a number of seminal contributions, and, while I was practicing as a physician and at the Children's Hospital and later, I frequently heard people talking about the contributions that René Toupin had made during his time as minister of Health. And I think that we owe him a significant debt in the health-care system that we have today because of his role very early on in making the medicare provincial from the national program.

He was clearly a man who stepped forward, who didn't hesitate to put himself on the line to—whether it was signing up for the kidney transplant organ donor program or in other things. I think that it is a compliment to René Toupin that, you know, he was not just a Cabinet minister who presided over bills and presided over this and that. He was a person who had a feel for people. He had a feel for what was needed and I think he did a remarkable job. Medicare in Manitoba has evolved greatly since then, but he got us off on a pretty good start.

Je voudrais dire merci à René Toupin pour ses contributions pour la santé pour notre société ici au Manitoba. Je voudrais dire aux amis et aux familles de René Toupin nos condoléances et notre appréciation pour tout le travail qu'il a fait.

Merci.

Translation

I would like to say thank you to René Toupin for his contributions to health here in Manitoba. And I would like to say to the friends and family of René Toupin that we extend our condolences and our appreciation for all the work that he has done.

Thank you.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the seconder ability to actually speak.

Now, I want to talk about the René Toupin I got to know, first of all as a young member of the NDP going to NDP conventions. He was one of those people that was an icon. I don't think I've made any secret of the fact that I got involved in politics because of Ed Schreyer, and I remember going to conventions. I actually joined the party in 1973. I've been to every convention since. I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing; I consider it a positive thing. I've seen pretty well everything, and he was one of those people that was always open, always friendly, always willing to talk to people, including someone such as myself, a 17-year-old that was inspired by politics and somewhat in awe of seeing MLAs and Cabinet ministers.

And I did take a particular interest in René's work because it was an incredible time, actually, really, in terms of Manitoba politics in a lot of ways. And we often tend to forget—you know, there was the establishment of Autopac, actually quite remarkably in a minority government. There were a lot of things happened in my area of the province, in northern Manitoba. But it really was the time when, as the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) referenced, when medicare was really becoming fully established. And I'll never forget, too, medicare started with medicare premiums, and the Schreyer government actually took those premiums out. And it was very much, I think, a part of a broader sense that certainly René brought forward, that, you know, if you're going to have medicare, it should be universal and accessible and should not have any financial side to it.

And what was unique about, certainly, my sense of René, is, of course, I came into politics after René was no longer active in politics, but he was someone that you always saw. He was always involved; he was always around. And that unique disposition that I know his family reflected so well at the funeral is something that really continued any time you ran into René. And what I found really inspiring was just even the last few years already. He was a smiling fighter. You know, and no matter what health issues he was dealing with, he fought back. But he fought back in a way that I—you know, if I ever asked him how he was doing, it was, fine. And he didn't want you to dwell on it. He was fine. And I commented at the funeral how proud family must be, and, certainly, I know how proud Frances is.

And I want to put on the record that as we have this opportunity, which is a unique opportunity for MLAs to talk on the condolence motion, I think René Toupin will be remembered as someone that contributed a lot to Manitoba and contributed a lot to Manitoba even after he was an MLA. And I know other colleagues will talk a lot about the specifics, but I'll never forget being a 17-year-old inspired by politics, involved in politics, and really it was through the encouragement of people like René Toupin that led me to get involved in politics. And it's one of the main reasons I'm still here today.

If I could, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say René Toupin was a great Manitoban, contributed a lot and our thanks to his family.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): We would like to extend our condolences to the family of René Toupin. Listening to the tributes to him, and this was before my time in politics, but it's always interesting to go back and listen to his many accomplishments, and particularly as the minister of Health. It was described as a watershed time for health in Canada in the health act. So he was the MLA for Springfield, and as I understand he also lived in La Salle, so it's—and a francophone, and we know in my constituency, I have a number of francophone communities, so I'm sure he was well known within the francophone community.

And with just those few words, Mr. Speaker, we would really like to thank the family for René's contributions to Manitoban—to Manitoba, and we wish the family the fond memories that they have of Mr. Toupin and cherish his memory, and our sympathies to the family. Thank you.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): Je suis très heureux de parler aujourd'hui de M. Toupin à toute la famille. C'est un grand honneur pour moi de discuter des choses pendant sa vie.

Translation

I am very pleased today to be speaking about René Toupin in the presence of all his family. It is a great honour for me to talk about some of the things he did in his life.

English

He'd probably laugh at my French, but it is important, I think, that I reflect that.

* (10:20)

I want to reflect some of the comments that were echoed earlier today and that I think are—prevail throughout René's life and that of his family.

First off, I want to say, you know, there are teams, right. You can't think of Patrick Kane without thinking of our local Manitoba Jonathan Toews; they're a team. You can't think of Bob Hope without Bing Crosby. You can't think of Stan Hardy without—Stan without Laurel and Hardy. You can't think of the Toupins without thinking of the Spooners. Like the Spooner-Toupin family group is pretty dynamic—pretty dynamic.

So it's probably hard for any of us to imagine in this Chamber what it was like in 1969 when all of this stuff was happening, when a lot of change was happening in North America and there had been change at the federal level. And all of a sudden this young, diverse, dynamic group of people were elected to the Chamber.

Now, call me, you know, a little bit idealistic, maybe call me naive but those people are my heroes. They were my heroes in life. When I got to meet Ed Schreyer for the first time, I almost fainted; that's what it meant to me. When I met René, it was the same thing, and Sam and Saul and the other Saul. Those people to me were my heroes, and they did things that made me want to be like them. I'm not saying that any of us are maybe approaching even the trials and the tribulations that they went under because they were the first NDP government elected in North America, really, because the Tommy Douglas government elected in 1944 had been a CCF then an NDP government.

And they brought in watershed—watershed changes—watershed changes. And how—and they had another aspect that maybe some of us miss a lot. And I told the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) the other day I'm trying to work on it: humility.

We don't know all of the things that they did, and it was mentioned earlier. I mean, René was minister of health and social development in the most formative time of change in the federal-provincial relations perhaps in a century—*[interjection]* And in charge of the Treasury Board and brought in medicare to Manitoba and brought in pharmacare. We worship those programs in this country. We—that's part of our DNA in this country. You never heard René and all of that group walk around and say, we did it; they just did it and they did it quietly, and they did it with dignity.

René told me a story once. He might have told some of you this story when he was Health minister, and some rather wealthy lobbyist walked into his office, and this was in different days, and offered him some inducement not to do something. And I'll quote René; he threw him out of his office. It was a different time, but his fair amount of courage and a fair amount of advice to all of us.

So many of these achievements we take for granted and we don't know really all of the benefits, but when you talk about what they sought, they didn't seek fame; they sought justice, fairness and equality.

So we have two statutes here. We have Moses and Solon. Now, no one even knows who Solon is, mostly, unless you really know history, and we know Moses, not so much for the person, but we know him for the legacies they left. They've made this world, this Western world, this entire world a different place.

It wasn't the person that we remember as much as their legacy. And if you leave a legacy of kindness and justice and fairness, that lasts forever, right? It lasts forever. We have a short time on this planet. If we're fortunate enough, we get elected to this Chamber. We have a chance to make a difference, and you make a difference. And most of the time you're forgotten as a person, except by your loving families, and you're forgotten—your name in this Chamber—because we're all but mere players—I won't quote and—but what lasts is the legacy of what we do. And René left a lot of that for all of us.

After he left office, he was as active—he never stopped being active in so many ways, and I think we'll hear a lot about that, but I have a few moments I want to talk about, personal encounters I had with René that I want to add to the discourse.

One of the toughest decisions is in—one of the toughest times I ever had in my life is when I had to appear in front of eight to a thousand people about the abolishment of their particular police force. I actually had security for the first time in my life because of that event. And to say that I was a little bit frightened would be an understatement. I had never been in that situation before, and there was this whole crowd of people. And then they got to ask questions.

And René stood up in the crowd and asked me to explain exactly what should happen, asked me to explain to the people why I made the decision I

made. He didn't say this was a good decision, this was a bad decision that—he said, he gave me the opportunity to speak to the crowd and outline for them why I made a decision, we as a government made a decision. It was very difficult and a lot of people in that crowd did not like. But René, because of his innate sense of fairness and understanding, allowed me to convey to that crowd the rationale behind the decision, which made it much more easier for me to survive that evening, which was a tough evening.

There was another time when we were at one of our NDP conventions, where, believe it or not, the party was arguing about something. I know you find that hard to believe, that it's hard to believe at an NDP convention, but there was back-and-forth discussions, and that's healthy for democracy, but you know it goes on and on sometimes. And sometimes it's the same issues and, you know, we're a family who don't agree with everything all the time, but we still try to do our justice and do what we believe in the world is right, as do all political parties, I believe.

And René was sitting alone at a table, and everyone was arguing something, and I think it was about health care. And I stood up on a point of order and said, you know, we have in the room right now—I didn't quite get it right, I said, the first Health minister in Manitoba. He wasn't exactly the first Health minister in Manitoba, but he really was—and I said, we have here the first Health minister in Manitoba. Most—a lot of the young people did not know who René was, and he was able to stand up, and through his experience, sensitivity and knowledge, provided the delegates at the convention with a perspective that perhaps some of them had lost and perhaps some of them had not thought about.

And, in that instance, it was the wonderful congruence or coming together of an elder and a statesman and a man who is humbly sitting at a table by himself at a convention, not seeking to speak to the crowd, not seeking anything other than to be at a convention, but through his experience and through his career, made an impact.

*(10:30)

We also know that there's one thing that I personally learnt from René and Frances, which has been conveyed into me in so, so many ways, is you don't give up. You never give up. Life is precious. It's a gift, and no matter how much illness you have

or what you're going through, you don't give up. And it's not just that you don't give up for yourself. You don't give up for those around you who love you, and René fought a battle. He fought illness and he didn't give up. And to those of us who saw that and to those of us who lived it, that message ought to be passed on; you don't give up. Even—well, you don't give up for yourself, but really more important, you don't give up for others.

And that kind of gets me back to where I was before. You don't give up when you're just a new, off-the-street candidate and you're approached to run for a party, and all of a sudden you're in Cabinet in a minority situation, or when you're tasked with one of the toughest jobs ever, being health and social development minister, or when you lose and go into private life.

So, I want to close with—I'm so happy to see the family here. I looked at all your pictures. I don't know a lot of your names, I have to admit. I forget the names of people who work around me today, so—*[interjection]* It's a well-known fact that I have issues. But I've seen you all in pictures and all of you in pictures, in loving pictures with René. But my favourite—now, I love babies and I love family, and there's some wonderful pictures of René with babies, beautiful pictures, and you can see him playing on the floor with kids. You can see him carrying kids; you can see him carrying cats, you see him carrying—he loved a lot of things.

My favourite picture is the picture of René and Frances holding hands and walking by that waterfall along that waterway, and that's kind of my final comment to Frances and family about love that kind of lasts forever, and obviously did in this case. And I could very easily digress and speak twice as long or as long about the Spooner family and their contributions, but my favourite picture is Frances and René holding hands and walking along that waterway as a memory of a very kind, gentle, hard-working, decent man who loved and left not just a legacy of accomplishments, but a legacy of love and a great family who I know will never forget him but who should always remember that he used this—his time on earth working for others. No greater legacy can be left by anyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I feel absolutely honoured to be able to stand today and pay respects and condolences to the family of a very

great man and a very good MLA and Cabinet minister.

René had a—I think a stellar career before, during and after politics, Mr. Speaker. Especially those of us who are New Democrats, I think, though, it means a lot to everybody from every side of this House, and he opened a lot of doors for a lot of people and provided a lot of leadership and a lot of very practical things that all Manitobans benefit from.

But I don't think I get to be an NDP MLA for Dauphin without people like René opening doors back in the '50s and the '60s, especially in 1969, as the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has mentioned here earlier. It was a watershed election that brought very good people to this House, representing—connected to people back home and representing them here, understanding what their needs were and then turning that into action here in the Manitoba Legislature.

In 1969, I was a young guy. Our family lived in a little town called Durban up in the Swan River Valley, and in the early part of June in 1969, there was a provincial election, and Ed Schreyer and René Toupin and some other very good people came into government. I remember at the time that one of the things that the opposition talked about was that masses of people were going to leave the province, and they were all going to move to Saskatchewan and wherever else.

At the end of June, do you know what my family did? We moved to Saskatchewan. We were transferred by the Canadian National Railway. The timing couldn't have been worse, now that I look back on it. Dad didn't have a choice; he was moved out to Saskatchewan by the railway. But what I remember, I remember in the Swan River Valley, which was a Conservative area, I remember at the time little lawn signs coming up. I remember at the time debates that took place.

Up until that point, the people that I looked up to and my heroes were, you know, the Johnny Bowers and the Frank Mahovliches and the Dave Keons. I was into hockey and, you know, Ferguson Jenkins pitching, and all of a sudden there was a—coming at the late '60s and early '70s a whole cast of characters that I had respect for. Not the least amongst them was the Ed Schreyer government that came forward and as I watched from Saskatchewan and I was—I've always been a political geek—as I watched and followed the issues, whether that be in Manitoba or in Saskatchewan, I can't underestimate the

inspiration, the—I mean, I was hooked. Here were people that were doing things that in my mind mattered; they were important.

René Toupin was second to none amongst that group. He came up to our area at one point. I was over visiting my grandparents in Swan River and some of us were on our bikes and went to this meeting. We—quite honestly we didn't know what this was all about but it seemed to me to be kind of exciting, almost as exciting as the Maple Leafs and Frank Mahovlich and the rest of them. I was interested in this and I wanted to see what was going on, and I remember not understanding so much about what René was talking about, but it seemed to me he had a connection with the people he was talking to, the adults around there who were listening. And I think the message there was that when they left that he was a very practical guy talking about things like home care and, you know, prescription drugs, and things that mattered to people.

I think he—given the timing I think he probably was the Health minister at the time and social development and chair of Treasury Board, which is pretty amazing, as the Premier has pointed out, but it seemed to me that René could listen to people and then understand what needed to be done to fulfill those needs. I think that's what we're all about here and he would get it right.

My colleague from Kildonan talked about Moses and Solon. Solon was a Greek lawmaker. He was one of the ones that could—who also could take the needs of people, translate them into laws and then make things happen for folks. That's—that kind of is what strikes me about the approach that René Toupin had to government, and he connected with people in doing the things that folks wanted to have done. In short, I think he made a real difference for Manitobans.

I want to just wrap up a few comments I made by saying that I'm really very pleased to see Frances here. Frances Spooner served our caucus, served our party, a great friend to all of us here. I—Frances, I want to say on behalf of Michelle and Alex and I, our condolences, and it's very good to see you here today.

So with those few words, Mr. Speaker, please accept my condolences and my utmost admiration for René Toupin.

* (10:40)

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): This is, again, a very honourable thing for me to put a couple of words after hearing people and looking at the family there, as I had shared only a few days back about my intention to retire from politics. Now, I understand, when my colleagues have spoken about this wonderful gentleman who was Cabinet minister and MLA during Ed Schreyer's time. I didn't meet him; I heard of him because he was minister of Health when I came in '69, December. It was a beautiful situation then. I got—as I mentioned, I got a job and I had a tremendous amount of quality of life.

So I met Ed Schreyer and his wife first time in Centennial Hall when there was a Ravi Shankar—a music, you know, legend here. And a young guy and his wife, I'm sorry, I said, my God, this is amazing. The image of a premier of a province in Canada, coming from India was like, wow, I'm going to meet God. But, when I met him and realized it was so interesting, so relieving to see the real democracy that we talked about, you know, about our premier's humbleness and how we all are here to do our job.

So I like to thank you for being the family of the great gentleman that we are remembering today. Because, when you see the families who sent their loved ones to work here, we all—I share with all of us—have gone through these emotions of being torn inside, fighting within ourselves to see, what should I do? Should I or shouldn't I?

So this is not an easy job; it's not an 8-to-4 job. It is a 24-hour job, and it goes after and beyond your time. You feel guilty if you didn't do something right; you feel happy if you did something. So I think this is a great place for somebody to work and lead the world. As a member from Kildonan says, you may not have statues here, but his statue is in your hearts and the hearts of people whom he served during that time.

For being minister of Health during a period—I can assure all of us here that it must have been a tough job for him to continue. And I understand that he also installed the registry of marriage commissioner and all. So all these works will be remembered.

And I always say to myself, when, 30, 40 years from now, people would not even know who Bidhu Jha is, but my spirit will be right here in this Chamber. My spirit will be with my constituents, and my spirit will be with the young people that loved me—love me even in the Windsor Park area. So my great-grandchildren, if they at all be remembered,

then they will be feeling my spirit, because I have worked very hard for the last 12 years to help my constituents.

So a person like that who has achieved a lot, who has achieved tremendous amount of success and has made our Manitoba, our Chamber much more dignified, my hat's off to his soul. I salute and I thank the members here for being a member of that great individual as our MLA, as our representative, as our Cabinet minister.

As Ed Schreyer's comment, I believe, in the press says, that trusted and loyal colleague. He was given the tremendous amount of workload on Health portfolio, which is one of the toughest portfolios we have, and I think the member from Kildonan can share. When you look at—I have children who are medical doctors, and they come home and they say, God, this is such a tough profession, Dad. One—Reena came home one day and she was crying. I said, what happened? You don't know, Dad, the tension I go through. I just witnessed somebody's little child dying. You want me to laugh? I said, no, you did your best, but it's a tough profession. When you're minister of Health, and responsibility comes on your shoulders to say, I have to decide how I have to move this. It's not an easy task.

So, again, I am humbled, very happy that I had the occasion to put a couple of words here, and I'm sure that his soul is resting in the heavens, and he's blessing all of you and the rest of Manitoba and the rest of the people that he served.

Thank you very much and my sincere condolences to all of you. Thank you.

Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital): Mr. Speaker, it's an honour today to put a few words on the record today about René Toupin. And I want to say thank you to all of the family for being here. I understand that some family members have flown in from out of the province to be here today. And I am truly—I feel truly blessed to put a few words on the record today.

I got inspired to speak this morning because Dave started talking about 1969 and what an incredible time it was here in the province of Manitoba. And I remember being with my mother in—and I'm not going to say MacGregor, Manitoba, just for the MLA for Dauphin who always teases me when I say that.

My mother paved the way for women to run in this province and she was a friend of the Spooner family and I felt so honoured to know the Spooner

family. And we had a lot of fun and we had a lot of laughs.

I remember being in my mother's living room, watching the election results in 1969. I was 17 years old, and my mother was a very—she was the opposite to me, actually. She was a very quiet, calm woman. She was religious. She belonged to the United Church. I can count the number of drinks that I saw her have on one hand. But she was deeply political—deeply political—and came from the CCF movement and believed that people needed a hand up.

And we were sitting there watching the election results. And I might have even been doing homework, who knows, and I saw this woman, who I have never seen in my entire life get super excited about anything, and the results were coming in, and all of a sudden we realized that there was a possibility that we could win. And my mother was sitting in a chair, and all of a sudden she got up in the middle of this living room and started pacing the floor and going, Nancy, I think we're going to win. And I went, wow, this is great.

But it was so wonderful to watch her reaction to this. She was, literally, by the time we had won the election that night, jumping up and down in the living room, screaming with her hands over her head and just in complete and utter joy. And that's when I knew she was truly my mother, when I think back on it.

And, of course, it was just such an exciting time for, as Dave said, for so many CCFers and New Democrats in this province. And, of course, we came to conventions, and I felt what the MLA for Kildonan said, I felt that. It was—you were just in awe of these people that had done what nobody had done in this province. And it was so amazing.

And you know, I have to tell you, Frances, René always had time for me. He always would stop and talk to me, and it would be a real conversation. He was terrific. And I feel blessed that I got to know him and I feel blessed that my family and your family were friends in those heady times when people believed in social justice issues.

Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and say a few words about René Toupin. Now, I wasn't born in 1969, when the breakthrough happened. But in many respects, when I think about my life, my childhood, it was shaped by

the things that René fought for and achieved. And without him, my life would have been very different.

* (10:50)

And no more than this than his work to introduce The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act, his work to ensure that in Manitoba we had a system of universally accessible health care. I was born—I've said—told this story before in this Chamber, but I was born with disabilities. My parents were very young, young by today's standards, anyways. Then it was common to have children in your 20s, but I had mine in my 40s, so that's how the generations change. But they were young and faced with a child that they loved but a child who had an uncertain future. And they never added to all of what I only know now as a mother, must have been tremendous stress to have this baby and then immediately be faced with the challenge of having to make decisions about surgeries and seeing your child in pain and all of those things.

But they never had to worry about paying for any of that. They never had to face the stress that so many families in the United States have to face still, even with added health insurance coverage, about whether or not they could pay for it, whether or not their insurance company would approve it. That was a stress that they never had.

And throughout my life I had the advantage of having access to whatever kind of physical therapy I needed, whatever kind of devices I needed, whatever kind of subsequent surgeries I needed. When we had to travel out of the province to Toronto to see specialists, although there was, of course, the financial burden to that, we knew that the access to those specialists would be covered, and that is because of the work that René did, but also because, in 1969, Manitobans chose to take a chance.

And I don't know if René thought he would win in 1969. I know there were several candidates that—Len Evans included, who often told the story that he went off onto the campaign trail assuring his wife, Alice, that, don't worry; this will be about six weeks of our lives and then I'll be back teaching at the university. And then 30 years later, of course, he retired from politics.

So I don't know if he expected to win. I'm sure maybe he didn't expect to form government. I'm not sure he expected to be thrust into the role of Health minister at 35, but there is a saying, you know; sometimes we have glory thrust upon us, and we

have to rise to the occasion, and René did exactly that.

When I look at the history of his achievements, not only did he bring in medicare—really, I mean, I think he can be—he can claim to be the father of the medicare system in Manitoba, but he also brought in pharmacare which, today, all of us in this Chamber who represent people who either have prescription drug needs, people who are seniors, who are trying to make a life on a limited income, we know the difference that that program makes. I know the difference it makes for my own mother. If my mother had to cover the costs of her drugs every month, you know, she would have help, but she would live a very different life. She would not be able to afford to buy my kids far too many plastic things and bubble gum, and she wouldn't be able to live the life of dignity that she deserves, and that's because of that pharmacare program.

And that is forever now. We still have to work to protect those things. I believe we have to be ever vigilant, but I believe the people of Manitoba know the value of caring for each other, and I know that they would never allow a program like pharmacare to be taken away. We have to guard to make sure that it continues to be the strong program that it is.

I also know from reading a bit about him that he loved animals, and this reminds me of my own grandfather who loved most animals, would love birds, watched birds, would have a—pet any stray dog or cat that you came across. He did not love squirrels. He would—did sit on the porch and pick off the squirrels, one by one, with his pellet gun, but aside from the squirrels, he loved all other animals. And so when I read that about René, it just touched in me—I can remember—I can completely see him pausing to chat with animals and take care of them.

He was really a champion for all people, and especially those in need, and this is something that he carried through his entire life. My mother worked with René a little bit to make sure that our party had policies that were sensitive to the needs of seniors, that our government was following through on our commitment to a good life for seniors.

And my personal memories of René are him sitting in our caucus room on the couch by the coffee maker, perhaps waiting for Frances to be done work or just coming by to chat. And he was a quiet presence there, but he always gave us a word of encouragement and me a word of encouragement.

I agree with what the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) said, that being in government is better, but it is not easier. And there are often days, I think, when you know that your time here is short and is likely not within your control and so you want to accomplish great things. And René accomplished great things. But it is a frustrating process, and sometimes you feel like you're making no progress at all. But in those moments, René would offer a word of encouragement to keep going, that we were doing a good job, that we were making a difference. And that meant a tremendous amount to a new MLA and to someone who worked in the caucus.

And I also had the privilege of working with Frances when I first came to work in government shortly after our win in '99. Frances was the person you would submit any written material to. Nothing could go out until Frances had read it because even if you'd read it 17 times, she would find the mistake that you hadn't found.

And the love between Frances and René was visible. There was no question that he loved you and that you adored him.

So what I would say to the family—and I want to recognize I may not have an extensive list—but we've spoken of Frances Spooner, who was René's cherished wife. I understand his son Paul and his partner Carmen are here; daughter Louise; daughter Yvette; his daughter Rosanne and her family, Darren and their children Zara and Mira; son Michel; Frances's brother Rob and partner Wanda—if I've left any of you out, I apologize—are here today with us.

What I would say to you—I don't know that it will be comfort—but do not doubt for a minute that René's life made a tremendous difference, a difference in your lives as someone who loved you but a difference in our lives and a difference in the lives of Manitobans, many of whom will probably never know his name. And that wouldn't have mattered to René.

So he leaves a tremendous legacy and an example, I think, for all of us in public life but in private life, that the measure of our success is how we care for each other and what we do for the least among us, and he walked that path. So my condolences but also my appreciation for giving René to the life of this province and for giving us a man that made my life better.

Thank you. God bless.

Hon. Erna Braun (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, as an MLA from the northeast corner of Winnipeg, I feel I need to stand and put a few words on the record and offer my condolences but also my thanks for his family sharing him with us and—as a province.

And last night, as I was going through all of his accomplishments, all I could think of is, my gosh, he started when he was 35, which meant that with a young family that it's certainly a huge contribution and sacrifice that families make when someone enters the world of politics. And it just was, to me, quite outstanding.

Although I didn't know René personally, growing up—and I sort of think to what our member from Dauphin was saying—as although he was talking hockey stars, growing in the—in the northeast corner in those days, quite a number of years before one could vote but certainly when the Schreyer government was elected and came into power and then, by extension, René was part of that northeast section, that we all sort of were quite excited. To me, I would equate them more as rock stars and—of that period. But even though you didn't meet them or you knew about them and you knew the things that they were doing and the incredible—I don't—I just—I seem to think back to those days and the amazing things that happened over that time and that we honestly stand on their shoulders. I mean, had that not occurred, the opportunities that have occurred since then would not have happened as well.

* (11:00)

I think my first meeting of René was actually Frances bringing—coming to one of our fundraisers in Rossmere, and it was sort of like, oh, my God, this is a person that one has heard about so much and now have a chance to meet him. So thank you for that opportunity of actually being able to put a face to the name and the incredible accomplishments.

And, absolutely, Frances, being elected in 2007 and having the kind of support and encouragement and always being there for us, and I know for myself that I really valued the opportunity to work with you, and I think it was more than just working with us but rather being there to support us to make sure that as newbies that we felt included and that the work that you helped us do made us look good in many ways. And I think that when I look back at the many things that we now have as a result of the work of René is amazing.

Actually, I can say that I—thanks to him, I got to be a marriage commissioner twice and able to perform wonderful wedding ceremonies with two very special people to me, so that was quite something when I read that last night.

So, again, thank you for sharing him, thank you for being here today, and it's a privilege to be able to say thank you to you. Thank you.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): As the House leader for the Progressive Conservative Party, I wanted to—just a few words, and to thank Frances and the family for being here this morning.

It's been wonderful to hear the tributes. The member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), I think that was—I know you talked about humility but I think that was one of your finest addresses in this House, and to hear the different remembrances of René was instructive for me.

I was born in 1969 in June, but only by about seven days, so I don't have a tremendous amount of memories. I heard a lot about Ed Schreyer and I often referred to them as Ed Schreyer Conservatives because I run into lots of Conservatives who tell me they voted for Ed Schreyer. And I think René, as being part of that government, would have spoken a lot about the trust that that premier at the time had in him and the abilities that he saw in him. It's wonderful to hear the remembrances of an individual who served in this Chamber.

I think one of the challenges or the problems that we have is, you know, we are here for a short period of time relative to our lives generally, and we don't always know who's come before us. We can sometimes look around at the seats and wonder about the history that's happened here, but we don't have a lot of things to refer back to, to see the different people who served here and to see what they've been able to accomplish. So, when we have moments like this, even though they are sad moments and they're not ones that we relish in terms of having to remember somebody who is not with us anymore, it's great for those of us who didn't have the same sort of personal history to learn about somebody, and it gives us, I think, a better respect for this Chamber and the House and it certainly gives us better respect for an individual.

We often talk about how we are here because of our constituents, and that is true, but we are also here because of those who served before us in this House and who made this Chamber democratic, who make

it strong and who make it possible for each of us to run.

And listening to the remembrance this morning, René is certainly somebody who contributed greatly to that, and so we thank Frances and the family for lending him during that time to this Chamber, and for the strength and the things that he added to this province. We appreciate his legacy. We know for the family it will be a legacy because that is one of the great things about serving in this Chamber is there is a true legacy that is left, and René has left a tremendous legacy for this province.

So thank you for the family for being here, and we offer you our condolences but our thanks for his service.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Like a few of the speakers previously, I haven't been around long enough to really be able to claim that I celebrated in 1969 the way that others were able to. I was also born that year, so—and I was the first member of my family born in Canada actually; it was in January of '69. So while I've always regretted not becoming political earlier in my life, once I finally realized what was going on in the world and the role that government can and should play in addressing more of those issues, it was—there certainly were a lot of celebrations in our province in that year, and regrettably, of course, I did not know René particularly well and have learned many more things about him just from this morning. And I want to echo the comments made by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) and others prior to him.

I really like this tradition that our Chamber has of taking time out to just talk about people that have come and gone and the people who made it possible for them to be here in the first place. And I'm sure my family is not the only one where there's the occasional interesting conversation about family commitments versus work commitments and how are we going to get all of these things to happen.

There isn't a single one of us who got here on our own, and there isn't a single one of us who accomplished anything in this job on our own. It doesn't matter what the titles are behind us. If our families, our partners, our communities, our constituents hadn't made it possible for us to run and support us in a whole bunch of different ways—probably most important of all keeping our egos in check—so that we continue to stay focused on the issues that do matter and remind us of why it is that we're here, and to remind us that every single minute

is a privilege, and also remind us that there's a sacrifice that has been made, not just by all of us, but by our families and communities to make it possible.

So, for us to take a moment, and we'll all be tearing each other apart in a few hours in question period; that's the nature of the beast. But this is different. This is about stepping back from that partisan foray and just acknowledging that everyone who came here came here with a purpose, and they came here from a family, and they came here from a community, and they made their contribution to the province and to our province's history as they saw fit. And I really appreciate the opportunity that we give ourselves and that we give to families and communities to have a moment for all of us to learn more about the accomplishments and struggles of those that came before us and to reflect on that as we think about the work that lies ahead for all of us as elected representatives.

And in the case of René, of course, he not only had someone supporting him, he not only had his family supporting him, but someone in his family was supporting him at work, and if ever you needed to have your ego kept in check for a little bit, you just had to write something and send it to Frances. I don't know how many boxes of red crayons you must have gone through in your career, correcting all of our ridiculous grammar and run-on sentences and things that just did not fit, but Frances was one of those people who you just never had to ask if she was there. You never had to wonder whether she was going to be able to play her vitally important role in helping all of us do that piece of our job.

And I had a chance to serve on our caucus executive for a number of years and, I mean, it was—in a way it's ironic. You just never had to worry about what Frances was doing; it never came up, because she was just always so spectacular, and not just here in this building, but out in the community. When we did go to battle with our political opponents in elections, you always knew that Frances and the family were going to be there for the cause in whatever role or manner was requested. And it was a beautiful thing and still is, and it's a great sacrifice and a great contribution.

And I guess the last theme that I'll just pick up on is listening to remarks here is, you know, re-emphasize for me something I try to remember. We really do stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us. I mean, would my oldest child have survived multiple bouts of croup, which he had

when he was an infant, and we would have the first responders coming up the stairs to help him breathe again, if it weren't for universal health care? I don't know; I didn't even have to think about that. I knew that he was in distress, there was someone we could call, I knew they would show up, I know the chances were it would all work out and he would be fine. And the next day we would, you know, go to daycare and wander around the neighbourhood and go about our way. That experience is still tragically rare in our world today. And yet it is entirely achievable in every single corner of the planet, and it was people like René who latched onto an idea and had a vision and refused to accept the word no for an answer. It's like this is the just thing to do.

* (11:10)

If you've ever had a spare moment, the book, you know, *Life Before Medicare*, will really bring to focus what day-to-day life was like for folks. If you didn't have enough money for your child or if you lived in rural Manitoba and all you had to offer to the doctor was X number of chickens or cattle or grain—whatever it maybe was that you grew, and if that wasn't good enough for the doc, well, the doc wasn't going to show up and you might lose a family member or multiple family members as a result of that.

The 1969 government and the work of Tommy Douglas and everyone else changed that fundamentally, and it is the first thing that Canadians will identify with, unless it's playoff hockey season. The first thing Canadians will identify with is our universal health-care system, and René—I hadn't done the math before, but he was elected at the age of 35. I was first elected at the age of 34. I'm not ready to run

the health-care system now, 12 years later, never mind having that thrust upon me, having never been an MLA before, never been involved in life in the building before and never been a Cabinet minister. That is a huge responsibility, and he not only took that on, he helped create the system in its very, very early stages.

So everything that we do in this Chamber is only possible because of the work and the sacrifice that not just the MLAs have made who have been here before, but all the people who made it possible for us to get here in the first place. And the fight for social justice will never end. It has multiple fronts and I am just so proud to be a part of that fight, and I will do my best to honour your sacrifices and René's and all of your accomplishments for the rest of the time that I have here and beyond. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Speaker: Is there any further discussion on this matter?

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

Would honourable members please rise and remain standing to indicate their support for the motion.

A moment of silence was observed.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I am seeking leave of the House to call it 12 noon.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to call it 12 noon? [*Agreed*]

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, November 26, 2015

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