

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

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

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
ALTOMARE, Nello, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
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
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
JACKSON, Grant	Spruce Woods	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie	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	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike	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
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
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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

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 17, 2024

*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 and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

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

Please be seated.

The honourable member for Spruce-

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

**Mr. Grant Jackson (Deputy Official Opposition House Leader):** Can you please call Bill 217, The Men's Mental Health Awareness Week Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), for second reading.

**The Speaker:** It's been announced that we will now call Bill 217, The Men's Mental Health Awareness Week Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), to resume debate on second reading.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS—  
PUBLIC BILLS**Bill 217—The Men's Mental Health  
Awareness Week Act  
(Commemoration of Days, Weeks  
and Months Act Amended)**

**The Speaker:** Standing in the name of the honourable member for River Heights.

**MLA Mike Moroz (River Heights):** Honourable Speaker, I have no further comments at this time.

**The Speaker:** Are there any other speakers wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, is the House ready for the question?

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**The Speaker:** Question before the House is Bill 217, The Men's Mental Health Awareness Week Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended). Is it the—second reading of that bill.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

## House Business

**Mr. Grant Jackson (Deputy Official Opposition House Leader):** Pursuant to rule 34(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Selkirk (Mr. Perchotte). The title of the resolution is removing the land transfer tax for first-time homebuyers.

**The Speaker:** It has been announced that, pursuant to rule 34(8), that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Selkirk. The title of the resolution is Removing Land Transfer Tax for First-Time Homebuyers.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Jackson:** Will you now call for second reading of Bill 214, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act (Net-Metering Agreements), please.

**SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS****Bill 214—The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act  
(Net-Metering Agreements)**

**The Speaker:** We will now call for second reading Bill 214, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act (Net-Metering Agreements).

**Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli):** I move, seconded by the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Jackson), that Bill 214, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act (Net-Metering Agreements), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

***Motion presented.***

**Mr. Johnson:** Today, I am here to talk about a topic that is not only timely but crucial to the future of energy production: solar panels and how they benefit our electricity grid. As we continue to search for sustainable solutions to meet growing energy demands, solar energy has emerged as one of the most promising alternatives. From reducing carbon emissions to enhancing grid stability, solar panels offer a range of advantages to the grid and society at large.

The first and perhaps most obvious benefit of solar panels is that they harness energy from the sun: a clean, renewable resource. Solar panels offer a way to generate electricity with minimal environmental impact, making them a key player in our fight against global warming.

According to the International Energy Agency, solar power could account for over 30 per cent of global energy production by 2050, drastically cutting down carbon emissions from electricity generation around the world, also reducing strain on the energy grid during peak demand.

One of the most significant ways solar panels benefit the Manitoba electricity 'grid' is by reducing the consumption of water that is required to generate our total demand. Typically, peak energy demands occur in the winter when heat is required to sustain our rural homes and farms that don't have access to natural gas.

Now, you may ask what help solar panels will have in electricity generation in winter. Well, in Manitoba, peak solar production is in spring and fall. During these times, a home, depending on the size of their system, can generate more electricity than they use. When a home does that, it requires no electricity from the grid, therefore not requiring any water to run through the turbine, resulting in greater storage

reservoir of water with potential energy—i.e., waters backed up behind a dam.

Storing energy in this form is currently the most environmentally friendly, no need for batteries and their hazards. This storage of water is quite important for drought years, as we've recently experienced. The reduction in consumption at most any point through the year will result in water savings for Manitoba Hydro.

Solar energy can act as a buffer, ensuring that supply meets demand without needing additional fossil-fuel-based generation purchased from our American friends.

Generally, solar produces better in drought years, as the sun is shining more, and less so in cloudier years when water is usually more plentiful, so the correlation is normally spot on.

Solar panels also promote distributed generation, meaning that electricity is produced closer to where it is consumed. Rather than relying on dams and the vast network of transmission lines, solar panels installed on homes generate electricity locally. This decentralized production reduces the need for long-distance transmission, which is costly and inefficient due to energy loss along the way.

\* (10:10)

Another major benefit of solar panels is the potential to lower electricity cost, both for the individuals and for the grid as a whole. For homeowners that install solar panels, the ability to generate their own electricity means they can reduce their reliance on the grid, cutting their energy bills. For the electricity grid, integrating solar power reduces the overall demand for electricity from more expensive traditional sources.

When solar energy reduces the need to purchase power for fossil-fuel-based plants, Hydro can lower their operational costs. These savings will be passed on to consumers in the form of lower rates. Passing this bill is an incentive for solar energy installation. This incentive will not only encourage more people to adopt solar technology, but also make the overall electricity grid reliant—less reliant on fossil fuel electricity from MISO.

Now, looking at it from a financial perspective, as a government, this is private money being invested into generate power. Win-win. The solar energy industry is a growing sector that creates jobs and stimulates economic growth. A solar panel installation

increases—as solar panel installations increase, so does the demand for skilled labour from engineers to technicians. These jobs support local economies, reduce unemployment and create a skilled workforce that contributes to a greener, more sustainable future.

When electricity is generated at northern hydro dams, it must travel long distances to reach consumers. During this journey, a good portion of the energy is lost due to inefficiencies in the transmission and distribution system. By placing solar panels closer to the point of use on homes, these losses can be minimized. This not only makes the grid more efficient, but also reduces the increasing need for investment and costly transmission infrastructure, freeing up resources for other improvements to the grid.

A critical complement to solar panels is energy storage. This is not done with batteries but, as mentioned, in the form of water with potential energy stored behind hydro dams. While solar panels generate electricity during the day, hydro dams can store excess energy produced during sunny periods and release it during times of high demand or when the sun isn't shining and ultimately drought years.

This combination of solar panels and storage enhances the flexibility of the electricity grid. It allows for better management of energy supply and demand, helping to smooth out drought years caused by varying weather conditions.

Solar energy also contributes to energy independence by reducing the dependence on imported fossil fuel electricity. Our neighbours to the south rely on coal or natural gas to meet their energy needs, making them vulnerable to price fluctuations and supply disruptions.

If we experience a year where we have excess water, we can still supply MISO with spot electricity. By generating electricity locally from solar panels, Manitoba can reduce their reliance on foreign energy sources, leading to greater energy security and price stability. The shift can also improve the trade balance as fewer resources are spent on improving energy, allowing funds to be reinvested in domestic priorities.

In conclusion, the benefit of solar panels to the electricity grid are profound. They help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, ease the strain on the grid during peak times, promote distributed generation, lower electricity costs, create jobs, minimize transmission losses and enhance grid flexibility. Furthermore, solar

power contributes to a national energy independence, reducing reliance on imported fossil fuel electricity.

As the world continues to grapple with climate change and the need for sustainable energy solutions, solar panels represent a powerful tool for transforming our electricity grid into one that is cleaner, more efficient and more resilient.

It is clear that investing in solar technology is an investment in a brighter, more sustainable future for all of us. And just a reminder, this type of incentive reduces government funding that is required to invest in generation. Private citizens across Manitoba will invest for the benefit of all Manitobans.

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. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

**MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips):** I'm a little surprised to see this bill come from the opposition given their terrible record on Manitoba Hydro for the last seven and a half years, raising rates on Manitobans, selling off parts of Hydro.

So I would ask the member opposite: Why bring this legislation forward now and not when you were in government, when costs were rising?

**Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli):** Well, with all the consultations, that takes time. And being a minister, not allowed to bring forward private members' bills. I'm hoping the member would be aware of that.

But this bill will do great for all Manitobans, people that invest in solar and also people who benefit from it.

**The Speaker:** No further questions?

**MLA Devgan:** Okay, well the PCs now all of a sudden want Manitobans to forget about their terrible record on energy production in Manitoba. But folks know that they don't have a leg to stand on hydro.

Under this member's watch, hydro rates increased over 20 per cent since 2016.

Can the member opposite, considering he was a minister at the time, tell us why he thought it was okay to set hydro rates at the Cabinet table and sidestep the Public Utilities Board?

**Mr. Johnson:** Well, that member is part of a government that will go down in history as the debacle of bipole and how much that has driven up the prices of energy costs for all Manitobans.

So this bill is brought forward in non-partisan manner, but I can hear comments from members opposite that it's not going to stay that way.

**Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain):** I want to thank the member from Interlake-Gimli for bringing forward this important, well-researched bill.

I want to know how Bill 214 will incentivize Manitobans to install solar systems here across the province.

**Mr. Johnson:** Well, as across most of western Canada, this will catch us up with them. And it's shown that private investors can invest in their solar system for their home. And then it benefits the rest of Manitobans by making the grid more stable and also reducing energy prices as a whole for consumers of Manitoba Hydro, as there's less investment that needs to go into generation.

This also levels out—helps level out drought years.

**MLA Devgan:** So the previous government had a pretty bad habit of making energy policy decisions behind closed doors.

My question for the member opposite is: Why was this PC administration's energy policies always made at the Cabinet table, and why did he push for an unsafe mining project and not this piece of legislation?

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

I would remind all members to keep their questions and answers relevant to the bill we're discussing here this morning.

**Mr. Johnson:** Yes, I just want to talk a little bit about the reliability of solar panels. I think the longest standing solar panels operating in Canada are some 45 years old now. And they are producing at nearly 80 per cent of their original capacity when they were first introduced to the skies 45 years ago. And they're producing almost 80 per cent with no maintenance other than the occasional washing if it doesn't rain.

So it's a very reliable source of energy. I just wanted to make note of that, Honourable Speaker.

\* (10:20)

**Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye):** Thank you to the member from Interlake-Gimli for bringing this important piece of legislation forward.

My question for the member is whether other provinces have net metering currently in place.

**Mr. Johnson:** Yes, absolutely. Net metering is available in 34 of the 50 states, if we're looking North American wide, and Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta to a certain extent and BC all have net metering.

And they have shown the investment—private investment of solar has gone up substantially in their provinces, helping them stabilize their grids. Ontario especially was in high need of solar panels for—to help stabilize their grid, and this accomplished it.

**MLA Devgan:** So, Honourable Speaker, speaking of solar energy and the opposition now being super pro-solar energy.

I'd ask the member opposite—there was a program that the previous NDP government had implemented, providing farmers and rural folks with a rebate.

I'd ask the member why his government chose to cut that program.

**Mr. Johnson:** So increasing or making net metering available to the public in Manitoba will encourage investment in solar panels and solar systems.

And this, as mentioned, every kilowatt hour that's generated through a solar system is stored in the form of water behind a hydro dam. It backs it up and then it can be used in drought years or, say, at night when the sun isn't shining.

So this is a benefit to Manitoba Hydro, it's a benefit to the person making the investment and has benefit to Manitobans as a whole.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I want to ask the member if he can explain how seasonal energy consumption demands align with optimal generating conditions here in the province.

**Mr. Johnson:** Seasonal demands, obviously solar generates in Manitoba the best in March and September as solar panners—panels are cooler, they are more efficient. But they also produce throughout the summer to a substantial amount.

And all that time throughout the summer, if it's not being used for air conditioning by your neighbours, anything that is being displaced is backing up water behind a dam. So when we get seasons that are dry, this helps alleviate drought conditions for Manitoba Hydro.

And I know it's starting small, but with many systems over time, it will help in drought years, Honourable Speaker.

**MLA Devgan:** In my first question, Honourable Speaker, I asked the member why he had not brought this legislation forward previously and the member stated that they were consulting for—so seven and a half years.

I would ask: Who did you consult with?

**Mr. Johnson:** Oh, many, many Manitobans, including Manitoba Hydro workers. And I also took the liberty to consult in different provinces where this has been brought forward, where net metering has been brought forward, and also in provinces that have—it has not been brought forward.

And the advantages that was shown in the provinces where they do now have this has been outstanding for the investment in solar and helping stabilize their grid, especially in Ontario. They needed solar to help stabilize their grid and they're well on the way to achieving their goals.

**Mr. Narth:** Knowing that the NDP use Manitoba Hydro as a piggy bank, I'm shocked that this question hasn't come up.

So I'll ask the question for them: What is the difference between the rate Manitoba Hydro charges for residential service versus what will be paid for excess energy?

**Mr. Johnson:** Yes, this bill addresses the kilowatt hour per kilowatt hour. So if you generate one kilowatt per hour in excess, you get to put that in the piggy bank for later and take it back.

Currently, the majority of the systems are set up where it's actually a money transaction. And so the consumer is purchasing hydro for 4 cents per kilowatt hour more than they are giving it back to their neighbours. So this would make it a lot easier for Manitoba Hydro, for the consumer, to just keep track of the kilowatt hours, rather than dollars and cents and PST and GST and all the convoluted efforts that have to go along with this.

So this clearly keeps it at—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

**MLA Devgan:** I will note, Honourable Speaker, that in his response to who he consulted with, the member did not mention First Nations. Throughout their seven and a half years, the PCs hid the details of multi-billion-dollar contracts. It went as far as preventing the Crown on bidding—from bidding on fibre optics network.

So my question would be: If he cares so much about affordability, why did his Cabinet politically interfere with Hydro's operations and their capability to build capacity?

**Mr. Johnson:** Yes, the member asked about consultation with First Nations and absolutely I did. Fisher River, which created a one-megawatt solar panel generating station—I visited that site many times, had many conversations with Chief Crate at Fisher River. That's an outstanding investment in solar, which helps stabilize Manitoba's grid, and it's benefited by all Manitobans.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The time for questions has now expired.

### Debate

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

**Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism):** I'd like to thank the members opposite for bringing this bill forward, because it gives us an opportunity to talk about Manitoba's clean energy future.

And the future is bright for Manitobans in terms of development of clean energy, especially solar. And our government is creating more jobs in this sector. We are investing in Manitoba. And we want to make sure these strategic investments are done with cost savings in mind. And one of the things that we want to discuss about this bill and want to make clear is that we want to ensure that the costs savings to Manitoba are doable and that they're done in a most cost-efficient way.

And, of course, solar power has a lot of benefits and we are not here to debate whether or not it has benefits. But I think the important part is whether or not it's the most efficient. This proposal's the most efficient way of doing that.

And we actually—our government is going out there and creating government-to-government initiatives for clean energy. Really proud of—to stand with

the government that addresses the need for wind energy as well.

And when we create these types of partnerships with Manitobans, we also demonstrate some economic reconciliation, which I think is extremely important. And one of the things that I would like to really point to and address is that the recent approval, the CPS mine, and its contributing role that it will have increasing solar panel generation here in Manitoba is a clear indication that we are, of course, extremely excited about the potential of solar power.

But again, we need to make sure that costs are controlled. And we want to make sure that we are speaking about clean energy all of the time. And Hydro, of course, is a large part to play in that.

Our investments in New Flyer, our investments in their all-Canadian-build facility is extremely important.

I just wanted to warn members opposite, if they are—they need to expect from me that presentations will often be bilingual, channel two on your device if you're interested in hearing what I have to say.

And, alors je voudrais remercier mes amis ici, et vous dire que notre équipe croit dans la nécessité de rendre la vie abordable pour les Manitobains. Et c'est un certain — c'est certain que le solaire, ça fait une grande partie de cela.

Nous nous engageons à explorer toutes les avenues possibles pour économiser — to save — de l'argent pour eux et leur famille. Cela inclut le maintien des tarifs publics bas et la possibilité qu'ils soient fixés de la manière indépendante par la commission des services publics.

#### **Translation**

*I would like to thank my friends here and tell you that our team believes in making life affordable for Manitobans. Solar will certainly be a big part of that.*

*We are committed to exploring every possible means of saving money for Manitobans and their families. This includes keeping public utility rates low and allowing for these rates to be set independently by the Public Utilities Board.*

#### **English**

Because what we come from and what we want to talk about consistently is what is the savings to the average Manitoban?

\* (10:30)

And how can we make sure that whatever energy we do buy from the solar panels have a cost savings for Manitobans? And I think that's something that is debatable in this House, and happy to do so.

Et le Hydro Manitoba est le joyau de notre province et sera renforcé par notre gouvernement, et non pas privatisé. Cela garantit que l'énergie demeure abordable. Notre gouvernement sait que les Manitobains feront le choix respectueux du climat lorsqu'on va les permettre.

#### **Translation**

*Manitoba Hydro is the jewel of our province and will be strengthened by our government, not privatized. This will ensure that energy remains affordable. Our government knows that Manitobans will make the climate-friendly choice when we allow them to.*

#### **English**

We will allow people to make the choice to have clean energy choices in their homes of course. But I think that we have to make sure that whatever we are buying from the solar investor is done at a cost that can be sold. And I think that's a really important point to be made here.

We are leaders in clean energy in Canada. Our government is insured to making Manitoba rates affordable. Can we lower costs in Manitoba with this proposed solar plan when there may be instances where we're buying solar energy above the cost we can sell it?

Through Efficiency Manitoba, Manitobans have been saving dollars. We also brought in rebates for electric vehicles: up to \$4,000 available to buy new EVs and up \$2,500 for used EVs. Electric vehicle ownership is important and having a grid powered by solar is a big part of making sure that we have the energy to power these. And that's why, again, we will tout all of the investments that we are making, such as making solar panels. People will save at the pumps with electric vehicles.

When we talk about solar, we invest in hydro. But we're also investing in the future, right? That's what this is really about, the future and whether or not we can continue to create clean energy for Manitobans.

Alors j'aimerais aussi parler un peu de notre — des plans qui ont été faits par notre gouvernement précédent. Notre équipe s'engage à trouver les moyens d'économiser de l'argent aux Manitobains sur leurs factures d'énergie. L'ancien gouvernement PC a échoué à augmenter les tarifs de l'hydro et n'a pas



produit un seul mégawatt. Ils ont même tenté de contourner la fixation indépendante des tarifs en établissant des tarifs de l'hydro au sein du Cabinet.

Ils ont eu sept ans pour faire cette action – seven years to put in this action. Why the delay then? Mais au lieu de faire cela, ils ont fait la vie plus difficile pour les Manitobains. De notre côté, on fait le travail, et je pense que c'est super important que nous avons ces débats dans cette Chambre pour parler des bénéfiques du solaire. Le solaire, c'est actuellement très, très bénéfique pour les Manitobains, mais c'est nécessaire que l'investissement remporte l'argent qu'on met dedans.

Alors, de plus, ils ont engagé Brad Wall. C'est même Brad Wall qui, lorsqu'il était en Saskatchewan, a introduit une législation pour privatiser plus de 40 pourcent des sociétés de la Couronne. Il a privatisé des nombreuses fonctions de SaskTel. Comme prévu, le rapport de Brad Wall a recommandé de vendre les soi-disant parties non essentielles de l'hydro, privatisant ainsi progressivement les parties de Hydro.

#### **Translation**

*I would also like to talk a bit about the plans that were made by the previous government. Our team is committed to finding ways to save Manitobans money on their energy bills. The previous PC government failed to raise Hydro rates and failed to produce a single megawatt. They even tried to get around the independent rate setting by deciding Hydro rates in Cabinet.*

*They had seven years for this move. Why the delay then? Instead of doing that, they made life harder for Manitobans. On our side, we are getting the job done, and I think it is really important for us to have these debates in this Chamber to talk about the benefits of solar energy. Solar energy is actually very beneficial for Manitobans, but the investment has to pay off.*

*Furthermore, they have hired Brad Wall. It was Brad Wall who, when he was in Saskatchewan, introduced legislation to privatize over 40 per cent of Crown corporations. He privatized many functions of SaskTel. As expected, Brad Wall's report recommended selling off the so-called nonessential parts of Manitoba Hydro, thus progressively privatizing all its parts.*

#### **English**

We will not sell off Hydro; we will invest. And of course, investing in clean energy like solar is something we are doing, as referenced before. And I just

wanted to talk about, a little bit, about why it's important that we have these debates.

On the surface, the idea seems great. We agree that solar is the future, wind is the future, renewable energy is the future. However, we always have to keep an eye on whether or not it's the most cost-efficient way of doing things. Buying energy at a certain amount and selling it for less? I don't think that makes much sense.

So, just to conclude, I wanted to really say that our government is working to reduce costs for Manitobans. We are working to make sure that people have the hydro when they need it. We are doing the work and investing the grid. We are doing the work on making sure that business owners have negative impacts on their business, and we are making sure that when we invest in something, we get the returns. And it's important that those upfront costs, when we put them forward, will have dividends for future generations.

Alors j'aimerais remercier mes collègues pour avoir écouté en français. Je pense que c'est quelque chose de super important dans cette Chambre, parce que d'économiser, ça touche tous les Manitobains.

#### **Translation**

*I would like to thank my colleagues for listening to me speak in French. I think this is a very important issue in this House, because savings are an issue for all Manitobans.*

#### **English**

And I also wanted to say, saving dollars, that's for everyone. And saving the planet is for everyone. And that this opportunity to just debate and to talk about solar energy is welcomed by our side of the House. We bring it any time. However, we—you know, we take it with a grain of salt when people have the opportunity to do something and haven't done it for seven years.

We'll get the job done. Proud to stand with this team and happy to debate these issues over and over again.

Thank you.

**Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain):** I'm pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 214, put forward by my colleague for Interlake-Gimli.

This bill is about empowering Manitobans, making renewable energy accessible and giving homeowners

the tools they need to contribute to a sustainable energy future for our province.

With this bill, we have the opportunity to take a meaningful step towards making Manitoba a leader in residential solar energy and promoting a greener, more resilient energy system.

The Manitoba Hydro amendment act, also known as Bill 214, seeks to implement a net-metering system, providing residential customers who have solar systems with fair compensation for the electricity they generate.

Essentially, net metering allows homeowners to feed excess electricity generated by their solar panels back into the Manitoba Hydro grid in exchange for credits. These credits can then be used to offset future electricity bills, helping to lower energy costs for homeowners over the long term.

Under the proposed amendment, Manitoba Hydro would be required to enter into these agreements when customers meet 'specific' criteria, allowing for a fair and streamlined process.

Let me make it clear why this bill is necessary and why now is the time to act. Currently, Manitoba Hydro uses a system called net billing, where customers are compensated for their surplus electricity at a much lower rate than the price they pay for electricity.

While net billing provides a small incentive for homeowners to install solar panels, the reality is that the financial return is not nearly enough to encourage widespread adoption.

Under net billing, Manitoba Hydro pays approximately 5.607 cents per kilowatt hour for excess electricity while charging residential customers nearly double that rate. This gap in compensation makes it difficult for Manitobans to see a return on their investment, discouraging solar adoption and ultimately slowing down our efforts to build a more sustainable energy grid.

Bill 214 proposes to change this by introducing net metering, which provides a one-to-one energy credit for every kilowatt hour that homeowners contribute to the grid. This is a fair system. It recognizes the value of renewable energy produced by Manitobans and compensates them accordingly.

With net metering, if you produce more energy than you consume, you earn a full credit that can be used to offset future energy use. These credits can be carried over month to month, allowing homeowners

to maximize the benefits of their solar energy systems, particularly during the summer months of the year—sunnier months of the year.

This bill is about fairness and creating incentives. Homeowners who invest in renewable energy are helping to reduce demand on Manitoba Hydro, and in turn, reduce the need for future investments in costly energy infrastructure.

By allowing Manitobans to bank their energy at a one-to-one rate, we can make solar power a financially viable option for more households, which can lead to increased adoption.

The benefits of this approach are numerous: it reduces a strain on our existing power generation facilities; it helps Manitoba meet its renewable energy targets; and it puts power, literally and figuratively, back in the hands of Manitobans.

Net metering is not a new or radical concept. It has been successfully 'implemated'—implemented in other Canadian provinces, including Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. These provinces have seen significant growth in residential solar energy systems, and they have found that net metering provides a fair, simple way for individuals to contribute to the power grid.

British Columbia, who for a few more days are under an NDP government, allows homeowners to even convert their energy credits to cash at the end of the year, adding flexibility to the system.

\* (10:40)

The success in other jurisdictions shows us that net metering works, and it can work here in Manitoba too.

Manitoba has immense potential when it comes to solar energy. We have some of the highest levels of solar irradiance in Canada, making our province one of the best places to produce solar power. By passing Bill 214, we can take full advantage of this natural resource, making Manitoba a leader in solar energy production and ensuring that Manitobans are rewarded fairly for their investments in clean energy.

Moreover, encouraging solar adoption helps diversify our energy mix, making our energy system more resilient in the face of changing energy demands and climate challenges. The current NDP government has set ambitious targets for reducing carbon emissions and promoting renewable energy use, and while I commend these goals, their actions have been insufficient. Without practical support for residential

solar adoption, these targets will remain nothing more than empty promises.

Bill 214 is a step in the right direction. It provides the practical support needed to encourage Manitobans to invest in renewable energy systems. We know that our neighbours, like Saskatchewan, have already seen the positive impacts of their net-metering program. Why should Manitobans be left behind in the growing movement towards a greener energy future?

Honourable Speaker, it's disappointing that the NDP government has allowed Manitoba Hydro to continue with an outdated net billing system that penalizes Manitobans for trying to make environmentally responsible choices. Instead of empowering Manitobans, the current government has chosen to protect the status quo, a system that benefits Manitoba Hydro at the expense of the people. Bill 214 changes that. It levels the playing field, giving Manitobans the chance to take control of their energy consumption and be fairly rewarded for their contributions.

In addition to the environmental benefits, expanding residential solar installations will stimulate our economy. Net metering can lead to the creation of new jobs in the solar energy sector, from installation and maintenance to technical support. Local electricians, contractors and renewable energy companies stand to benefit from increased demand for solar installations, creating good, well-paying jobs right here in Manitoba. This is an investment in our workforce, in our local businesses and in our provincial economy as a whole, something the NDP has failed to deliver.

The introduction of net metering also complements other initiatives currently under discussion, including the NDP's heat pump plan, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by promoting energy-efficient heat pumps. However, these heat pumps will increase the demand for electricity, placing additional strain on the Manitoba Hydro grid.

By encouraging homeowners to install solar panels and enter into net-metering agreements, we can offset some of this increased load, providing balance and stability to the grid. Solar energy systems, paired with net metering, can reduce the need for costly infrastructure upgrades while ensuring that homeowners can affordably meet their energy needs. This is a practical solution to a problem that the NDP's plan alone cannot solve.

I understand that some may be concerned about the financial impact on Manitoba Hydro. It is true that net metering may mean reduced revenue in the short

term as homeowners generate their own electricity rather than purchasing it. However, the long-term benefits outweigh these costs. By reducing demand on the existing grid, Manitoba Hydro can delay or avoid significant capital expenditures on new generation capacity.

In other words, the more homeowners produce their own power, the less pressure there is on Manitoba Hydro to expand costly infrastructure. Furthermore, many energy experts agree that investing in decentralized renewable energy production such as residential solar makes our energy system more resilient and cost-effective over the long term.

To summarize, Bill 214 is about fairness, empowerment and progress. It is about giving Manitobans the ability to produce their own energy and be fairly compensated for it. It is about reducing our reliance on traditional power generation and embracing the 'renewable' energy options that are available to us. It is about investing in our communities, creating jobs and helping our province meet its renewable energy target.

Honourable Speaker, I urge all members of this assembly to support Bill 214, and to join me in making Manitoba a leader in renewable energy adoption. The NDP government has no good reason not to support this bill. It promotes renewable energy use, reduces strain on our existing grid and provides long-term cost savings for Manitoba families.

The NDP has talked a big game about renewable energy, but it's time for them to put their words into action. This bill is an opportunity for us to come together across party lines to do what is best for our constituents and to finally deliver real, tangible progress for Manitoba.

We cannot afford to wait. Climate change is a defining challenge of our generation, and we must take every opportunity to promote clean, renewable energy solutions.

Bill 214 provides a clear path forward, a path that supports Manitoba homeowners, reduces our carbon footprint and help us build a more resilient and sustainable energy system.

Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

**MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips):** It's a privilege to rise, put some words on the record.

I actually want to start by just shouting out our Finance Minister, who's responsible for Manitoba

Hydro and his work in stabilizing Manitoba Hydro after a pretty challenging seven and a half years. Manitoba Hydro is, after all, our Crown jewel, it is worth protecting and I think Manitobans know where the NDP stands on Manitoba Hydro.

**An Honourable Member:** Keep it public.

**MLA Devgan:** Keep it public, absolutely. And we heard a little bit about, I remember, door knocking during the summer of 2023 and hearing how concerned folks were about some of the things that were coming out of the government at that time, the PC government, related to surge pricing, and, you know, we saw what happened with raising rates at the Cabinet table and subverting the Public Utilities Board.

So sitting here today and hearing the member opposite speak to this bill, it's a little bit surprising to hear, I guess, change of heart, but the reality is it is very difficult for the PCs to run away from their record on Manitoba Hydro. I will note that the member opposite spoke a little bit about the creation of jobs, and I thought that was very rich considering the fact that the PCs actually cut jobs under their watch. I think it was 936 jobs in total, and, you know, if they had their way, there would've been more job cuts to Manitoba Hydro.

So, you know, they can present a different image today, but they have a record of seven and a half years at Manitoba Hydro, and not taking some of the opportunities to strengthen Hydro and, you know, make affordability a priority for themselves and really listen to where Manitobans were.

I asked this during my questions as well. When they had the opportunity when they were in government to make life more affordable for Manitobans, they opted to push through sketchy mining projects and make decisions at the Cabinet table that were contrary to where the priorities of Manitobans were. So I want to speak a little bit about the—what the member had referred to as the—well, the importance of solar energy, and we do know that solar energy is important.

My colleague from Brandon East mentioned that we fundamentally do agree that solar energy is important. Clean energy is important, that is where we stand as well. But it matters how you approach this, well, this legislation and getting Manitobans to adopt solar energy. And you have to do what is best for Manitoba Hydro and keeps Manitoba Hydro financially viable.

We know that wasn't a priority for the PCs under their tenure in government. In fact, looking at the collection of their decisions and their actions over seven and a half years, one could easily deduce that these were done intentionally to undermine Manitoba Hydro, to undermine the public's trust in this Crown corporation. And so, with our government, there, I—you know, it gets said often, and I'll repeat it again: It's a new day in Manitoba, and Manitobans now have a government that will strengthen Manitoba Hydro and not undermine it.

I do want to talk about a little bit of the history with the previous government and their history of cuts and interference with the Manitoba Hydro.

\* (10:50)

As I mentioned, cutting 936 jobs from Manitoba Hydro, threatening to lay off 700 employees at Manitoba Hydro, threatening to go even further than that. And there was a point where the Hydro spokespeople had said that any further staff reductions would have significantly increased the risk of public and employee safety as well as system reliability.

The former government also undermined the board's authority by cancelling two key agreements with the MMF: a \$67-million project won for Minnesota transmission line and the \$20-million Turning the Page Agreement for the future projects, calling them, quote, hush and persuasion money, which was incredibly disrespectful at the time.

And the board had felt that they were unable to resolve a number of critical issues related to the finances and governance of Manitoba Hydro, including matters related to Hydro's efforts to further develop relationships with Indigenous peoples.

Something on the positive side, earlier this summer, our Finance Minister had announced that Manitoba would be reviving the international consulting line of business, which would take Manitoba's—or Manitoba Hydro's expertise and connect them to prospective customers across North America and really strengthen a potential line of business for us, something that the PCs had the opportunity to do under their time in government but, again, opted not to do.

And it's just one of many examples of the PCs not taking opportunities to strengthen Manitoba Hydro, so when the—piece of legislation like this comes forward, you would take it with a grain of salt.

Our team is, of course, committed to finding ways to save Manitobans money on their bills. Previous

government increased hydro rates and failed to produce a single megawatt of energy—not one megawatt of energy under their watch. Like I said, they even tried to sidestep the independent rate setting through the PUB and set rates at the Cabinet table, essentially politically interfering with the rates and increasing rates on Manitobans at a time where Manitobans were feeling the pinch in affordability and cost of living.

On this side of the House, we're actually getting the work done for Manitobans. We're reversing a lot of the PC government's constricting legislation on Manitoba Hydro's finances. The Stefanson and Pallister governments hid Hydro's financial performance from Manitobans while they actively sold off parts of the Crown and prevented them on building future infrastructure projects.

In October of 2020, they sold Manitoba Hydro's profitable 40 per cent stake in Teshmont. Then in 2021 of–February 2021, they announced the closure of their international consultancy of Manitoba Hydro International, which meant fewer expert jobs here in Manitoba where the 'expertee' is.

The PC government also, as my colleague mentioned, hired former Saskatchewan premier Brad Wall, who has been very clear on his position on Manitoba Hydro and Crown corporations and, while under his tenure as premier, introduced legislation in Saskatchewan to privatize over 40 per cent of its Crown corporations and as well privatized many of—many functions of SaskTel.

Of course, we here in Manitoba have a little bit of, I guess, PTSD from the Filmon years in privatization, which is exactly the route that the former PC government was headed down. I think, thankfully—

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

Think the member's getting a little far afield from the bill that we're debating here this morning. So if he could kindly draw his comments back to be more relevant to the bill before us, that would be greatly appreciated.

**MLA Devgan:** I appreciate the note, and I was simply trying to create a historical context, which I think is important for Manitobans to know with the introduction of this legislation.

Nothing in this Chamber happens in a vacuum. And despite the opposition's efforts to erase the 'plast' seven and a half years by introducing legislation that, on its face, may seem positive, it is important for

Manitobans to know exactly where they stood for the last seven and a half years.

Again, fundamentally, our party, our government is very much in favour of renewable energy and promoting solar energy, and we'll do things the right way. But I think it is important for Manitobans to know where we are today and how we got here.

And so with that, Honourable Speaker, I guess the final thing that I will say, for any Manitoban who is listening and interested in renewable energy and our environmental approach to governance, our party—whether it's the EV rebates, investing in Manitoba Hydro, strengthening Manitoba Hydro—we are the party that will strengthen Manitoba Hydro, that will make life more affordable for Manitobans. PC government had seven and a half years to do so. They chose not to. That's their record.

Thank you.

**MLA Mike Moyes (Riel):** Thank you to the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson) and the PC Party for finally waking up and paying attention to the energy needs of Manitobans. The PC record on energy and Manitoba Hydro is pretty clear. For seven and a half years, the failed PC government, they raised hydro rates on Manitobans and failed to produce one single megawatt of energy.

In fact, things got so bad that in 2019 the entire Manitoba Hydro board quit, a board that they had put together, because they could not get a meeting with the premier, despite two years of asking. The PCs would, in fact, have us shivering in the dark if it was left to our—or left to their own devices.

This isn't surprising, however. In fact, the PCs throughout history have always been against any expansion of hydro energy generation. Instead, it's always been the NDP who are the builders of Manitoba Hydro.

We're going to ensure that we're meeting the energy needs of Manitobans while keeping rates low. So I'm glad that the members of the PC caucus are finally at least examining something energy-related that isn't simply a way to privatize our Crown jewel.

Ensuring Manitoba Hydro remains public for the next generation and the generation after that and the generation after that is incredibly important, Honourable Speaker.

So while the members opposite dabble their toe in the water of energy production, our NDP government is going to stand firm against the PC record of

privatization. We know that is exactly what the PC Party wanted to do with Manitoba Hydro. In fact, the PC Party is the party of privatization, whether that's the P3 model that the PC Stefanson government was going to use for schools, where Manitobans were going to purchase a lease back from their own schools, or whether it was with the air ambulances or—

**An Honourable Member:** Relevance. Relevance.

**The Speaker:** Order, please. Order, please.

I'd ask the member to please keep his comments relevant to the bill. *[interjection]*

And I'd ask the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) to remain quiet while the Speaker is standing. Ask the member for Riel (MLA Moyes) to keep his comments relevant to the bill before us.

**MLA Moyes:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for the guidance.

My concern is that while they talk about energy and whatnot and they talk about these different ways that we can produce energy, they have, in fact, a record of privatizing aspects of Manitoba Hydro, whether that was different subsidiaries with Teshmont or whether that was with Manitoba Hydro International, something that our government has revived.

It's deeply unfortunate and deeply troubling when that side of the House is in charge of Manitoba Hydro. It seems like they're always looking to sell off Manitoba assets and maybe sell out to the highest bidder.

We're taking a different approach, Honourable Speaker. In fact, we recently released our affordable energy plan. And thank goodness that we have a fantastic Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro (MLA Sala) and a fantastic Minister of Environment and Climate Change (MLA Schmidt) to guide that work.

\* (11:00)

So in our plan, we are taking a broad approach to energy. This starts with energy efficiency. This is going to 'expland'—or expand, sorry—

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

The hour now is 11 o'clock, time for private members' resolutions.

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

## RESOLUTIONS

### Res. 24—Including an MRI in a Portage District General Hospital

**The Speaker:** So now it's time for private member's resolutions. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution brought forward by the honourable member for Agassiz. The title of the resolution is Including an MRI in a Portage District General Hospital.

**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** I move, seconded by the member from Portage la Prairie,

*WHEREAS an MRI is a noninvasive medical imaging technique that uses a magnetic field and computer-generated radio waves to produce detailed images of internal structures in the human body; and*

*WHEREAS early detection and diagnosis of cancers and other diseases and injuries using MRI not only saves lives, but reduces pressure on the healthcare system; and*

*WHEREAS there are currently more than 24,000 Manitobans waiting for an MRI scan; and*

*WHEREAS in the City of Portage la Prairie, a \$450 million state of the art Regional Healthcare Facility is currently under construction; and*

*WHEREAS the Portage District General Hospital Foundation has generously pledged \$5 million in funding towards having an MRI located at the new hospital; and*

*WHEREAS having an MRI located in Portage la Prairie's new hospital would reduce the number of people waiting for a scan by approximately 8,000; and*

*WHEREAS local doctors and health-care professionals support the inclusion in the new construction and have called on the government to do so, describing the lack of scanner as "a glaring omission" that will hurt patients; and*

*WHEREAS thousands of Portage la Prairie residents have signed petitions urging the government to reconsider and include an MRI scanner in the new hospital; and*

*WHEREAS having diagnostic imaging closer to home would benefit many surrounding communities and First Nations reducing transportation costs for patients as well as reducing the burden on ambulatory and stretcher services; and*

*WHEREAS two of the fastest growing communities, Oak Bluff and Headingley, would also benefit from an MRI located in Portage la Prairie; and*

*WHEREAS wait times for MRIs are up by over 16% in Manitoba in the past year, with hospitals in Winnipeg seeing waits as high as over 46 weeks; and*

*WHEREAS the invitation from the Member for Portage la Prairie to the Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care to participate in an MRI townhall event to hear directly from the local community has gone unanswered.*

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to listen to the calls from over 35 local doctors and thousands of community residents to include an MRI scanner in the new Portage la Prairie hospital to reduce wait times for diagnostic imaging and provide care closer to home.

Thank you.

***Motion presented.***

**Ms. Byram:** I'm pleased to sponsor this resolution that speaks to the urgent need for a magnetic resonance imaging, or otherwise known as MRI machine, at Portage regional health centre, which is under construction.

*MLA Robert Loiselle, Acting Speaker, in the Chair*

Portage regional health centre is under development on a schedule to open this \$455-million hospital in Portage la Prairie in late 2025 or early 2026, replacing the current Portage District General Hospital.

My colleague, the member from Portage la Prairie, has been stating publicly, clearly and effectively during the past many months that the Portage area very desperately needs MRI scanning as part of the health-care diagnostics services available in that part of Manitoba.

The community of Portage la Prairie has rallied together in support of the new hospital getting an MRI. Financial commitment has been made by community members and foundation, and petitions are being signed and meetings are being planned.

It was determined as a result that patients in Portage la Prairie area could continue to be scheduled for MRIs at other regional health centres in Winnipeg, Selkirk, Morden-Winkler, Brandon and Dauphin. However, the urgent need for M-I-R-MRI diagnostics services at Portage la Prairie's new hospital has been

made clear by doctors, health-care professionals who work in that area.

In fact, dozens of doctors sent a letter this year to the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and the Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care (MLA Asagwara) to implore them to reconsider their plan to exclude MRI services from Portage regional health centre.

The physicians called the lack of MRI machine a glaring omission for the new hospital. Again, a glaring omission, which will serve a growing population that has many health inequities. The doctors also added that if patients must be transferred from Portage la Prairie to other centres for MRI scans, it will further burden already overworked and understaffed emergency medical services.

According to doctors, the 3,000 images, the number referred to in Shared Health's assessment, is only the number of completed scans, and what had not been factored in this number of MRI appointments that are missed, due to economic and social barriers such as lack of transportation.

Many patients, often senior citizens, have no way to get to MRI appointments because they have no ride or no means to pay someone to take them. The number of these people and individuals is not tracked.

This is the case, too, with cancelled MRI appointments and those that are missed or rescheduled. The numbers do not appear to be tracked at all. So actually, many residents of this area of Manitoba are going without the proper testing, the diagnostic MRI scans that they need.

The member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza) has, as well, been in contact with Indigenous communities in Portage la Prairie's surrounding areas, speaking with leaders of these communities. He's also made aware of the cultural barriers to MRI services at some health facilities in our province.

At the new Portage regional health centre, the plan is to offer cultural spaces and services for Indigenous patients so they can practice their cultural health practices. It will be a better facility for those First Nation patients so it should have an MRI machine for their diagnostic needs.

An MRI machine at the new Portage la Prairie hospital would bring benefits to far beyond the community itself and the immediate surrounding areas. This is because it would lessen the burden on diagnostic services at hospitals in other parts of the province. Let's look at Winnipeg, for instance. The Grace

Hospital, it's about an hour drive from Portage la Prairie, so some of those patients waiting for diagnostic MRI scans in Winnipeg would be able to be served in their home community of Portage while alleviating pressure from other facilities in our province.

For residents of northern communities of northern Manitoba, an MRI scanner in Portage la Prairie could work well with the potential access for air travel and medevac flights through Southport Aerospace at the Portage area. And I believe they have committed to offering 20 to 30—or they have the capabilities to offer 20 to 30 medevac flights per day.

The overall numbers right now paint a clear picture of the need for the additional MRI services in Manitoba. One of the first things the NDP did when they formed government a year ago was to fire the doctors in charge of the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, whose job was to address surgical and diagnostic waits. Since then, MRI wait times have climbed. As of June this year, the waits were up to 49 weeks at Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg, a 10-week increase from July 2023, and up to 27 weeks at the St. Boniface Hospital—that's an increase of eight weeks from July 2023. At Grace Hospital, for another example, the wait time for an MRI scan was 27 weeks this past summer.

Indeed, the provincial waits for MRIs is trending upwards. Figures compiled by Manitoba Health this past summer indicated that almost 24,000 people, province-wide, were waiting for MRI scans—24,000 people waiting for scans. An MRI machine operating at full capacity in Portage la Prairie would perform approximately 8,000 scans per year, which would significantly decrease the backlog and ease the pressure on those other facilities.

The dire situation regarding the waits faced by Manitobans in need of MRI scans is becoming known to many who are now making their voices heard. Between 3,000 and 4,000 people have signed a petition calling for an MRI at Portage regional health centre. And this number is equivalent to about 25 per cent of the population of the city of Portage la Prairie.

\* (11:10)

Furthermore, the Portage la Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce has reached out to the member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza) to commend him for pushing for an MRI scanner at the new hospital. The chamber told him, in a letter, that an MRI machine in that facility would enhance the medical

care not only in Portage but throughout the province. The chamber said, as well, that an MRI machine would potentially lead to a healthier local workforce and a stronger local economy, and that would make Portage la Prairie area more attractive to health-care professionals, doctors, nurses—they would move there to work and to live.

So we can see this community's desire and its need for a local MRI scanner. This desire and need are illustrated as well in the Portage District General Hospital foundation's pledge of \$5 million towards the installation of an MRI machine. The foundation has offered to collaborate with Manitoba Health to make this diagnostic tool a reality.

As the new Portage regional health centre is well in progress with its construction and moving toward completion, the Manitoba government should act now to make MRI diagnostic services part of this facility.

An objective stated in the Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care's (MLA Asagwara) mandate letter is: to make it easier for every Manitoban to access health care at every level, no matter where they live. For this reason, the Manitoba government must work with the Portage District General Hospital foundation to install an MRI scanner at the new Portage la Prairie hospital for the benefit of Manitobans in the city and the region across the province.

**The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle):** Order. Thank you.

### Questions

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

**MLA Billie Cross (Seine River):** This topic continues to be the PCs' one health-care speaking point, and like their previous approach to an austerity government, it's filled with misinformation and only gets people's hopes up. Our team's doing the real work of listening to people and the experts, not those who profit from illness.

My question for the member opposite: Why is she covering for her colleague from Portage la Prairie and continuing to perpetuate false claims?



**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** Well, I want to say thank you to the member opposite for that question.

I am not perpetuating any false claims. What I will repeat is what the PCs committed to when we were in government, and that was a \$1.2 billion in capital spending across the province to make its state-of-the-art upgrades to facilities such as the renovations at the St. Boniface Hospital ER; the Grace Hospital, the ICU upgrades that were done there; the new hospital in Portage la Prairie; the new hospital that's being under construction right now in Neepawa; CancerCare Brandon and upgrades to Brandon's hospital; Flin Flon's hospital; Dauphin's hospital—

**The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle):** The member's time has expired.

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** Can the member tell us about the amount of travel time her constituents currently endure to go for diagnostics tests at this time, and how an MRI in Portage would be beneficial?

**Ms. Byram:** Well, I want to thank the member for that great question—thank you, Honourable Speaker.

So, wait times for people in rural Manitoba are significant. We have people that are travelling two to three hours one way for an MRI test, and not only that, the time that they wait at an—or for the testing itself, so it could be a full day for an individual to seek an MRI, and—

**The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle):** Order. The member's time has expired.

**MLA Cross:** Manitobans spoke loud and clear a year ago. They elected a government that was going to make progress in our province and rebuild health care. We're delivering and we're going to ensure people can get the care they need close to home.

My question to the member opposite: How does she think seven and a half years of PC cuts and mismanagement impacted health-care services in her constituency?

**Ms. Byram:** Again, I thank the members opposite for that question. And if we want to talk about cuts, let's talk about what this NDP did when they first got into government. What they cut and—was the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force. They fired the doctors that were hired to eliminate and alleviate the wait times for MRIs. They fired those doctors and—putting pressure on other facilities.

And let's talk about what—since they took office the MRI wait times are up. Up to 49 weeks at Health

Sciences Centre. Up to 27 weeks at the St. Boniface. That's—

**The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle):** Order. The member's time has expired.

**MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie):** Thank you to the member from WestLake-Gladstone for—or for Agassiz for bringing this forward.

My question is: Can the member tell us what she has heard about the local doctors in Portage la Prairie on the importance of an MRI locally, to be able to properly diagnose and treat patients?

**Ms. Byram:** Again, thank you, the member from Portage la Prairie, for that question.

So what we've heard from the doctors in Portage is the diagnosing through an MRI much more quickly and efficiently than having to wait for testing to come back from other facilities. And not only that, but having the state-of-the-art technology and services provided in a new facility will also attract doctors and recruit doctors to a facility that offers the up-to-date technology.

Thank you.

**MLA Cross:** When the PCs were in power, health-care staff kept leaving due to the disrespect of that failed government—their—that failed government's policies. Under their watch, there were far fewer doctors per capita in rural Manitoba; specialists left, and ERs were closed.

My question to the member opposite is: Will she accept that her colleagues left their constituents worse off after seven and a half years of cuts and mismanagement?

**Ms. Byram:** So our PC team actually added over 400 nursing seats and 80 physician seats to the Manitoba education system, which the NDP want to take the credit for. We cleared over 80,000 surgeries and diagnostic procedures from the backlog. We put forward \$400 million to recruit, retain health-care workers in Manitoba. The PCs succeeded in hiring over 2,000 health-care professionals in over two years.

And again, I'll say that we committed to more than \$1.2 billion in spending across the province to make state-of-the-art upgrades to hospitals. So we did not—

**The Chairperson:** Order. The member's time has expired.

**Mrs. Cook:** Could the member tell us about the fundraising efforts of the local hospital foundation and all the work that went into raising money in the community to support bringing an MRI to Portage la Prairie?

**Ms. Byram:** I thank the member from Roblin for that great question.

\* (11:20)

The community of Portage la Prairie has worked hard through their foundation, raising funds, \$5 million, to invest to a new hospital or the services and diagnostic tools that it might require. They've done significant fundraising events through annual galas, live auctions, and, of course, there's been lots of private donations go into this showing the support and hopefully the encouragement of the provincial government to invest in this important diagnostic tool for that new hospital in Portage.

**MLA Cross:** When the PCs were in power, they cut rural health care significantly. They left health regions understaffed on top of their cuts and closures. They've made things worse when they tried to privatize health-care services.

My question to the member opposite—and I feel bad she has to answer this because she wasn't in government—does she agree that privatizing health care led to negative impacts on her constituents and the constituents of her PC colleagues?

**Ms. Byram:** I will tell the member opposite what I do believe in, and that is investing in health care across our province.

I believe in having the proper tools and the proper technology and state-of-the-art facilities. I believe investing in Manitobans' health and well-being and providing those services closer to home and having patients get that care closer to home. Saving lives, that's what I believe in, honourable Deputy Speaker, and I believe in providing that service here in Manitoba.

**MLA Bereza:** Can the member tell us about what she's heard from her communities and their members about the importance of health care closer to home, and the challenging—challenges of commuting long distances to get health-care services?

**Ms. Byram:** Thank you, again, for the question from the member of Portage la Prairie.

This is significant for people who live in rural Manitoba. It is significant for patients right across our

province. In particular, I'll make reference to my community having people travel a great distance, and again, this is time away, you know, up to two hours away from—one way, to seek this diagnostic service. And again, time away from work.

And again, this can save lives, so you get that testing done closer to home, could save lives and providing better—

**The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle):** Order. The member's time is expired.

The time for questions has expired.

### Debate

**The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle):** The floor is now open for debate.

**MLA Carla Compton (Tuxedo):** I'd like to thank the member opposite for this resolution.

I'm glad to be—I'm glad to hear that the member is an advocate for health care and is speaking with her constituents on this important issue. And it sounds like we have some common ground. Manitobans do deserve access to health care close to home anywhere they live, and health care—and the health-care system needs to improve capacity to serve the needs of Manitobans better.

But as I stand here in a Chamber that is representative of integrity, truth, wisdom and respectable debate, let me be honest with you, honourable Deputy Speaker. I'm here because of what I experienced and witnessed happen to my patients, colleagues, family, friends and the Manitoba health-care system in general under the last seven and a half years of the PC government.

And I'm honoured as well to be here to represent the great people of Tuxedo, who've placed their confidence in me to represent them.

Now one thing the member of Agassiz and I have in common as—again, is representing many health-care professionals. I respect and value the perspectives, education and experience of all members of the health-care team because each profession brings a unique insight and solution to the challenges facing health care.

However, it's also important to have the ability to reflect on our own current understandings of any situation, and sometimes realize that our own perspectives are incomplete and our focus may be too narrow for the challenge presented.

So I want to share a little bit of a story to kind of explain this comment a little bit more. So early in my nursing career—I started nursing in a more rural context—and I worked in many different areas at once. And in my facility at the time, they didn't have a float nurse. They actually created float nurse positions based on me. And the reason they did that was because I worked throughout the whole facility. I was able to go between different areas. So I worked in the medicine and palliative care unit; I worked on general surgery and day surgery and the pre-admission clinic preparing people going for their surgeries; I worked in pediatrics, labour and delivery, post-partum unit; and I also worked in public health.

And so this provided me a very unique perspective and experience compared to most of my colleagues at the time, and it also awarded me the opportunity to bridge understanding between my own colleagues and between the different areas with which I worked.

So, for example, one day it was lunch time and in lots of places they have a cafeteria and in general, most of the nurses would gather at the cafeteria for their lunch break, coffee breaks. And the topic of conversation that came up was the labour and delivery nurses amongst everyone else. And in particular it was comments of, oh, they think they're better than us; they don't need to come down for lunch.

Or one of the things that had recently been resolved in my facility had been a Norwalk outbreak. A little bit of context of that is when a Norwalk outbreak happens—it's a gastrointestinal virus that is highly contagious. And, you know, following proper infection control staffing measures, staff from the labour and delivery unit were not deployed to help out on that unit that was under quarantine.

And so there was a little bit of frustration I was feeling from my colleagues in relation to this one specific area. And I had the opportunity to lift up to my colleagues and say, hey, I hear what you're saying. I can appreciate the frustration when it's the middle of the night, you're running short, and it would really be helpful if someone could come and help you. However, remember they work in labour and delivery and post-partum, so they're delivering babies, brand, brand new, newborn babies. And in particular, Norwalk virus is highly dangerous and can be deadly for a newborn. So the need of keeping those nurses away from potentially contracting that virus and sharing it with a vulnerable baby was extremely important.

And a couple of my colleagues, they're like, oh, right, right, I forgot about that. And also I lifted up the fact that in Labour and Delivery, you don't get breaks in the same way as you can in some others. When a lady is showing up in labour, everyone needs to be available to support that person and what they need. And so the reality is, is you can't necessarily go down to the basement and have your 45-minute break because you might be called back in two minutes, so it's more reasonable that they stay on the ward and are readily available.

So with that discussion with my colleagues, they were able to listen and be open to the reality that their vision of what they thought the solution was to the staffing challenge in the middle of the night, or what appeared to be a lack of co-operation or collegial connection with their colleagues in the labour and delivery unit—

\* (11:30)

**The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle):** Order.

I will encourage the honourable member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton) to bring her comments back to the relevance of the resolution before the House.

**MLA Compton:** I appreciate that. I am getting to a point. I realize I tell stories sometimes to impress my point.

The story—the moral of the story, I guess you could say, is reality—even myself in the few months that I've been in government and am able to speak directly with the Health Minister, I am myself learning so many factors within the health-care system, so many barriers and challenges that I was not even aware of. And my point is, as much as I respect—I highly respect the doctors from Portage la Prairie that are advocating on behalf of their own patients and what they see as an absolute need.

We're hearing from doctors and nurses and diagnostic folk across the province, sharing experience, story, statistic after statistic, story after story, of need in their area. And the reality is, it's a big mess to fix, and our government—the Health Minister and their team—have been doing an amazing job, day in and day out, trying their best to look as far back and as upstream with their solutions that they're bringing forward.

And often, we're not fully privy to all the factors at play and, again, I want to admire the advocacy, and I hear it and I understand it from the folks in Portage,

and it is so awesome and impressive that they are already fundraising; they are engaged.

And honestly, honourable Deputy Speaker, this is exactly what we need for fixing health care, is we need citizens as engaged as their elected officials in finding solutions and everyone willing to step up and work together, because that's the only way that we're going to find a real path forward, a sustainable path forward.

And we know one of the biggest things that needs to be improved is capacity within our health-care system. That's what this is about. Our government has already announced the MRI, the mobile MRI, is going to be coming to the North, with a plan to create a permanent MRI at the Thompson General Hospital, right? That is a solution coming forth.

In the meantime, we're also working on rebuilding capacity, rebuilding our relationships with front-line health-care workers because I can speak from personal experience. I was not—I did not feel respected by the PC government when they were in government.

Repairing relationships takes longer time; instilling confidence and showing that we are here to work with Manitobans, it takes time. And we are doing that. We are putting in the effort. And again, I just want to lift up, it is a shared value between both sides of this House that all members deserve—all members of Manitoba deserve access to health care and that it be close to home.

Thank you.

**MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie):** Honourable Speaker, I want to thank the member from Tuxedo for her words because there's a number of them I think that this whole House can agree on. And I think the one thing that we can agree on is this MRI situation in Portage la Prairie should have nothing to do with politics. It should only have to do with people, the 24,000 people that are waiting for an MRI today.

I wanted to take this opportunity because I think when we're talking about this in—this might be my last opportunity to speak about this before the break—is I want to dedicate what I'm going to talk about today to a mom—to a mom that's here today with us. Please join me in welcoming Sandy Balch to our wonderful Chamber here today.

I want to talk about some of the stories and some of the commitments, and, yes, we do advocate for a lot of the same things out there, especially when it comes to health care. But this one's a little bit

different. The citizens of Portage and all across Manitoba have spoken, Honourable Speaker. We're now over 4,000 people that have signed a petition to put the MRI into the hospital, the new hospital, the new half-a-billion-dollar hospital, the new hospital that is one of the largest infrastructure projects in Canada today.

But I also want to set the record straight before we move on any further, because I've been accused, without any evidence, of spreading misinformation, and I want to make it perfectly clear: the hospital foundation has committed a minimum of \$5 million, and I tabled yesterday, from the executive director of the Portage hospital foundation, that they'd be willing to speak to the government if there was some other opportunities out there as well, too.

Because the Portage and district hospital foundation started this fund many, many, many years ago that I'm happy to be a part of, that a number of people in Portage la Prairie and surrounding area are proud to be part of. And it was set up for two things: No. 1, to help with the capital cost of the new Portage and district general hospital. Check, done. It was also set up so that it could help enhance equipment going into the new hospital. Already started. It is also been there to help with the purchase, and I reiterate, the purchase and construction of an MRI in Portage la Prairie. Roughly one and a half million dollars for the MRI itself, and I know we've heard that the NDP has set aside \$1 million for a mobile MRI up in the North at some point.

So one and a half million dollars for the machine I would expect to be in line, as that's what the NDP has been using for numbers, and well—while we're under construction, approximately three and a half million dollars to accommodate the project that does not include people to run it, it does not include operating costs. But again, I challenge across the way, have you talked to the foundation about operating or people?

The importance of doing this right now, and again, I will go back to the member from Tuxedo, we're short on health-care workers. So why not start this project now when we are roughly 18 to 24 months from the first patient entering that regional hospital? Does that not give us time to attract the proper technologist? If they don't have the training, it will give them the opportunity to do that.

From what I've heard from the technologist association, or technologists association, is that it is roughly an eight-month course if you're already a lab

and X-ray tech. But again, going back to people, because this is what it's about, the person in the gallery that I mentioned, Sandy Balch, has a daughter that has been waiting for an MRI for over six and a half months. She is prepared to go anywhere in the province for this MRI.

\* (11:40)

It is most important, too, because there's other underlying health concerns. Sandy's daughter should not need to wait six and a half months to go somewhere else for this MRI.

I also want to dedicate this to two people that couldn't be here today: Dave and Judy Jeffries. They're away right now, Honourable Speaker, in Quebec paying out of their own pockets for travel and paying to get their MRI. Dave Jeffries is extremely concerned because he suffered and was treated for kidney cancer. He has been diagnosed that he has another lesion on his kidney; he has been waiting months and months to get an MRI. Fortunately, Dave and Judy have the means to be able to do that, but many, many Manitobans don't have the opportunity to do that.

The member from Agassiz talked about two to three hours each way; close your eyes for a minute and think about the person that is living in Amaranth, Manitoba. He has to go to Boundary Trails or Health Sciences Centre. It's approximately three hours to get there and a three-hour trip back; six hours, it's a lot of miles. He doesn't have a driver's licence. How does he get there? A trip for him to Portage la Prairie would be a round trip of approximately three hours.

So how are we not looking after all people of Manitoba? We have given the government an opportunity that, across the way, that they can—that there's \$5 million at least sitting on the table right now during the construction of this facility, where there's over 400 people working in this facility now, where there's over 4,000 people that have signed a petition for this MRI in Portage la Prairie.

Yes, our health-care system is suffering. Yes, we can fix it. But we must have the want to be able to fix this. We have offered the government an opportunity here that this want can be fixed.

In the past, I've had the opportunity to try and talk to many people, including Dr. Sikora, who is the lead diagnostic person that the government keeps relying on; this is what we're getting from diagnostics. Dr. Sikora has sent me an email back and said that any requests I have, have to go through the minister's

office; I started that process in—towards the end of June.

Every day, because I'm thinking about people like Sandy's daughter and Judy and Dave Jeffries, I want to know: are we counting the people that missed or can't get to MRI appointments?

Let's do the right thing. Let's do it for the people of Manitoba. Let's put that MRI into Portage la Prairie.

**The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle):** The member's time has expired.

**MLA David Pankratz (Waverley):** I want to also just quickly acknowledge and thank the member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton) for standing up for the first time on this very topical issue, as a former nurse in our system.

And I also want to welcome the guests that were brought in by the member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza). Thank you for being here today to advocate on this important issue.

You know, Manitobans, no matter where they live, they deserve to have access to timely, quality health care, and it's got to be close to home. You know, it's a fundamental right that we on this side of the House are committed to upholding and that's been made clear in our first year in government.

We understand that the people of Portage la Prairie, like all Manitobans, want and deserve the best health care possible. You know, we've been hearing loud and clear: the call for an MRI in Portage is one that speaks to a need for better health-care infrastructure overall. We agree and that's a need that we can all understand. And we also know that when people are calling for improved health-care services, they're doing so because they care deeply about the well-being of their families and their communities.

But it's critical that we take a step back and examine how a health-care infrastructure is actually built and sustained. This is an incredibly important step, and it's not as simple as just saying we'll buy a machine. The challenges of establishing and maintaining health-care infrastructure and services, they go far beyond those initial costs of equipment. And it really requires a co-ordinated multi-faceted approach that ensures those services are not only available but sustainable over the long term. And this is incredibly important, particularly in rural Manitoba, where we want to make sure that everybody has good health-care access close to home.

You know, and again, like I said, it includes staffing operational capacity, maintenance, the integration of services into the broader health-care system. And I know this sometimes sounds a little bit like bureaucracy but this is not just abstract bureaucratic concerns. These are real-world factors that a responsible government needs to take into account, to determine whether or not a health-care system can meet the needs of the people it serves.

And, unfortunately, when the previous government built the hospital and started the planning for this new hospital in Portage la Prairie, they either didn't fully understand or perhaps, more cynically, didn't seem to care about the amount of careful planning that needs to go into health-care infrastructure to make it functional for the community.

And truly, building a facility is one thing, but making sure it can deliver on those necessary services is something else entirely. And you know, we've seen clearly from the previous government's mismanagement of the provincial public purse that they don't seem to have a great eye for detail. And maybe that was part of the planning issue, when it came to this hospital.

So the question to be asked, you know, is: What is a hospital good for there if we don't have the capacity to actually meet the needs?

And that's what we've been working so hard—and our incredible Health Minister's been working so hard on, is to adjust some of these plans to make sure that we're delivering for all Manitobans. And, you know, it's the gap that we're diligently working to fill.

You know, we're committed to making sure that health-care facilities like the one in Portage not only exist, but they have those resources that we need. And building this capacity is going to take a ton of time and effort and planning, and we're doing that work. And it's not just in the short-term. We want this to be available to all members of Manitoba, whether it's Portage la Prairie, Neepawa, anywhere in Manitoba, for decades to come.

You know, we know that good health care is not something that can be delivered overnight. You can close an ER overnight, as was made clear by the previous government, but it can be delivered when we commit to making the smart, strategic investments over time to create a robust health-care system.

You know, we've been increasing surgical capacity in Manitoba. We've brought in MRIs to serve remote communities; we're working on those projects.

We've launched two new minor illness and injury clinics. These are the kind of investments that will, in time, reduce wait times and improve access to care and ensure that more Manitobans can get the health care they need close to home.

You know, those changes though, like I said, they can't happen overnight. And after seven and a half years of those cuts and the mismanagements, Manitobans have been left with longer wait times and fewer staff in hospitals and services that were shuttered under their watch.

You know, I worked rurally for a while as a paramedic and worked in the hospitals. And I saw some of those issues first-hand. And I know how important it is to have that access close to home, because when you're living rurally and you're in an emergency situation or you have an illness come up, it can be incredibly challenging to try to find your way to a open ER. As we saw, a number of rural ERs got closed under this previous government, and it made things more difficult to get that health-care service that they needed. And that's again something that we're working very hard to correct.

\* (11:50)

So we're committed to fixing this broken system, like I said. We're—we've made a promise to Manitobans to rebuild health care, and we're delivering on that. You know, we've already hired 873 new health-care workers. We've got 116 new physicians, over 300 new nurses in the system. *[interjection]*

You know, and I know that I'm getting heckled a little bit. Maybe you're not happy to hear those numbers. I'm really disappointed to hear that they're upset with progress just because of their own partisan concerns, right? We're make good, good progress here in Manitoba.

So these are the kinds of investments that, as I said, in time, they're going to reduce wait times. They're going improve access to care. And they're going to make sure that more Manitobans can get that health care that they need close to home. That's what we all want here. As the member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza) said, and that's why we are doing that hard work, to make sure that that gets done.

You know, that 873 health-care workers, it brings us closer to our goal of 1,000, but like I said, that's just the beginning. We've got a long way to go. But we have hired those 873 new health-care workers. We're working on the culture within health care, and our Premier (Mr. Kinew) and the Minister of Health are

meeting with health-care workers regularly to hear how we can actually change things in a functional, real way here in Manitoba.

So like I said, and I've said this a few times, we know that rebuilding the health-care system is not going to happen with a single resolution or a single piece of equipment. And I appreciate the member bringing this forward. It is—it's incredibly important.

But it is more than just about the dollars, right? It's about ensuring that infrastructure is in place, that the staff are in place, that the services are properly integrated into the larger health-care system, and this takes time. But we are making progress, as I said.

And we know that it's not about short-term fixes. It's about the long term. I've got three kids at home, right? And I want to make sure that their kids and their kids after them have a strong health-care system to rely on as they go forward.

You know, and while the opposition seems to be running out of questions a lot lately, we'll keep on providing answers. We'll keep on doing that hard work to deliver for Manitobans because that's what we were elected and we promised to do.

You know, just like the gas tax, we said we were going to do it and we did it. We followed through on that promise. We got rid of the gas tax for a year. We're going to do that same work in health care.

You know, we've already seen how much can change when it's treated as a priority, health care, and not as some line item to be cut or neglected. The people of Manitoba, they really—they deserve better than the system they were left with after the years of PC management. I'm speaking directly about health care here because it matters. *[interjection]*

You're saying relevance, but this matters because you cut the budget year after year. You were not—this is all connected and this is where the confusion comes for the opposition. I don't think they fully understand that this system is fully connected. They think they can throw things in one piece at a time.

But what we're doing is actually working with health-care workers to make sure that the services like an MRI in Portage la Prairie are delivered.

So you know, as I was thinking about this today, I thought of a line from Robert Frost's poem. And maybe they want to hear this, it's nice. The woods—I don't know if they've read Robert Frost on that side of the House but: "The woods are lovely, dark and

deep, / But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep."

And I think that this is really apt right now, right? We're here. We've been elected, and we're committing to keeping our promises to Manitobans, to build a health-care system that works for everyone and ensures the care they need is close to home.

And you know, while there is still so much work to do, we are working with Manitobans to keep on walking that path together to make sure they have the services they need close to home.

Thank you so much.

**Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture):** It's a real privilege to stand up and say a few words on behalf of rural Manitoba and the importance of the health situation.

Obviously it's not a ungone fact, seven and a half years of the government across. If MRIs were so important, why was that part of their agenda in the seven and a half years of government when they existed?

Let me tell you a story about the actual fact. Back in 2015 and 2016, Dauphin hospital had plans in place to bring in an MRI machine in. They actually put an addition onto the hospital.

And then in 2016, the government changed, and guess what? The MRI machine was delayed; in fact, almost to the point where the Pallister government made a decision they were going to cancel the MRI machine to be installed in Dauphin.

And we talk about the importance of rural opportunities. We have—what is our closest distance as far as travel for people in the Pine River and the Ethelbert area, Winnipegosis area, Dauphin area? Where would they have had to go? So we—talking about possibly Brandon. The other location was four hours away, two and a half hours to go.

So when member opposite here was talking about Portage, and in all due respect we'd love to address the shortage of MRIs machines in the province of Manitoba, but we do have one other main component moving forward is the fact—can you imagine if you lived in The Pas, you lived in Flin Flon, you lived in Thompson—can you please tell me in calculation-wise that—how many hours of travel would they have to be gone in order to obtain an MRI?

So let's be realistic on the subject. We, as government, treat everybody equally, and we need to have opportunity of discussion of the importance of

MRI machines in the province of Manitoba. So here we go; we have a situation that member from Portage la Prairie, and I—and all due respect, it's very important, I agree. But we all have the opportunity not to only serve one centralized area in the province of Manitoba.

And to the members in the audience, please accept the fact that we have areas that have five, six, seven hours of travel one way to an MRI machine, so let us be realistic about the opportunities. But what's more troubling is the fact that seven and a half years of the PC government and the Pallister government and Stefanson government chose not to move forward of the opportunity, the MRI machine, in Portage la Prairie.

And you know what's—what is really troubling is the fact that not only during their lack of an infrastructure development, we had numerous closures of hospitals in the rural areas. And I can really tell you about the sad situation of Grandview, Manitoba, where there was potential opportunity. They wanted to close Grandview hospital altogether and actually turn it into a care home. Is that a benefit to the communities of Grandview and the surrounding areas in accommodating the individuals in that geographic area?

They even cut programs in the ERs in Pine Falls, Melita, Shoal Lake, Treherne, Leaf Rapids—

**The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle):** Order. Order. Order.

I will remind the member from Dauphin to keep his comments to the matter at hand—honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) to keep his topics to the matter at hand. *[interjection]*

The honourable member for Dauphin (Mr. Kostyshyn).

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Okay. May I? Yes.

So, you know, we're back to the same old, same—but at what point in time is the priority? But I have to honestly say, the importance of health care is a critical component, but we also have outlying areas that have priorities. A mobile MRI machine in northern Manitoba makes a lot of sense and I think, as a Health Minister and our government made that proposition, we are going to focus on that to accommodate the opportunities and the priorities of MRI machines.

Well, we continue to have deficits that were created by lack of health-care workers and health-care opportunities, of doctors and of nurses, that are so critical. And our province of Manitoba—without a lack of human intervention of operating these, we need the numbers to grow back up.

And, unfortunately, what happened was, in the last seven and a half years, we've lost the professional people, the health-care workers, the doctors and nurses, where we need to have them in place in order to fulfill the importance of our medicare system in rural Manitoba.

And we will continue to work on that and to benefit—not only is it important as far as an economic benefit as well to our rural communities, whether it's Eriksdale, and we can talk about Ashern, Manitoba; we have an expansion going on in Ashern. I've talked to the doctors in Ste. Rose, Manitoba. They're getting more patients coming from that geographic area—

**The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle):** Order. Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable minister will have—Minister of Agriculture will have five minutes remaining.

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



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Thursday, October 17, 2024**

**CONTENTS**

<b>ORDERS OF THE DAY</b>		<b>Resolutions</b>	
<b>PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS</b>		Res. 24—Including an MRI in a Portage District General Hospital	
<b>Debate on Second Readings— Public Bills</b>		Byram	2962
Bill 217—The Men's Mental Health Awareness Week Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)	2951	Questions	
<b>Second Readings—Public Bills</b>		Cross	2964
Bill 214—The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act (Net-Metering Agreements)		Byram	2965
Johnson	2952	Cook	2965
Questions		Bereza	2965
Devgan	2953	Debate	
Johnson	2953	Compton	2966
Nesbitt	2954	Bereza	2968
Narth	2954	Pankratz	2969
Debate		Kostyshyn	2971
Simard	2955		
Nesbitt	2957		
Devgan	2959		
Moyes	2961		

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**<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>**