



Fifth Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

Standing Committee

on

Law Amendments

Chairperson
Mrs. Myrna Driedger
Constituency of Charleswood



MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert	Steinbach	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FAURSCHEU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen	Springfield	P.C.
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GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	P.C.
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane	Osborne	N.D.P.
McINTOSH, Linda, Hon.	Assiniboia	P.C.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn	St. James	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	P.C.
NEWMAN, David, Hon.	Riel	P.C.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PITURA, Frank, Hon.	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
RADCLIFFE, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack, Hon.	Niakwa	P.C.
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<i>Vacant</i>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LAW AMENDMENTS

Wednesday, July 7, 1999

TIME – 7 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

**CHAIRPERSON – Mrs. Myrna Driedger
(Charleswood)**

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mr. David
Fauschou (Portage la Prairie)**

ATTENDANCE - 11 – QUORUM - 6

Members of the Committee present:

Hon. Mr. Cummings, Hon. Mrs.
Mitchelson, Hon. Mr. Tweed

Ms. Cerilli, Mr. Downey, Mrs. Driedger,
Messrs. Fauschou, Martindale, McAlpine,
Ms. McGifford, Mr. Sale

APPEARING:

Mr. Steve Ashton, MLA for Thompson
Mrs. Linda McIntosh, MLA for Assiniboia

WITNESSES:

Ms. Von Haywood, Canadian Association
of Non-Employed
Ms. Michelle Forrest, Private Citizen
Ms. Theresa Anne Swedick, Winnipeg
Community Centre of the Deaf Inc.
Mr. Rick Juba, Juba Neighbourhood
Resource Drop-in Centre
Ms. Deborah Graham, Private Citizen
Ms. Susan Bruce, National Anti-Poverty
Organization
Mr. Joseph Stephenson, Youth Against
Poverty
Ms. Natalie Encontre, Private Citizen
Mr. Eric Encontre, Private Citizen
Mr. Tim Jackson, People Empowering
Themselves Against the System
Mr. Rick Pettigrew, Private Citizen

MATTERS UNDER DISCUSSION:

Bill 40, The Employment and Income
Assistance Amendment Act

* * *

Clerk Assistant (Ms. JoAnn McKerlie-Korol):
Good evening. Will the Standing Committee on
Law Amendments please come to order. We
must proceed to elect a Chairperson. Are there
any nominations?

Mr. David Fauschou (Portage la Prairie): I
would like to nominate the honourable member
for Charleswood, Mrs. Myrna Driedger.

Clerk Assistant: Mrs. Driedger has been
nominated. Are there any further nominations?
Mrs. Driedger, would you please take the Chair.

Madam Chairperson: The next item of
business is the election of a Vice-Chairperson.
Are there any nominations?

Mr. Gerry McAlpine (Sturgeon Creek): I
nominate Mr. Fauschou.

Madam Chairperson: Mr. Fauschou has been
nominated. Are there any further nominations?

Some Honourable Members: No. Agreed.

Madam Chairperson: Mr. Fauschou has been
elected Vice-Chairperson.

This evening the committee will be
considering Bill 40, The Employment and
Income Assistance Amendment Act.

We do have a number of presenters who are
registered to speak to the bill this evening. I will
then read the names of the persons who have
registered to make presentations this evening:

Theresa Anne Swedick from the Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf. The next organization who does not have a name mentioned yet for the presenter is for the Workers Organizing Resource Centre; Von Haywood, Canadian Association of Non-Employed; Michelle Forrest, private citizen; Shauna MacKinnon, private citizen; Rick Juba, Juba Neighbourhood Resource Drop-in Centre; Deborah Graham, private citizen; Susan Bruce, National Anti-Poverty Organization; Tabitha Stephenson, private citizen; Joseph Stephenson, Youth Against Poverty; Darrall Rankin, Community Party of Canada-Manitoba; Bev Le Blanc, private citizen; Natalie Encontre, private citizen; Randy Kotyk, private citizen; Sid Frankeo, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg; Allen Bleich, Canadian Union of Public Employees-Manitoba; Patrick Martin, Member of Parliament; Neil Cohen, the Community Unemployed Help Centre; David Martin, Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities; Pauline Riley, Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women; Sylvia Farley, Manitoba Federation of Labour; Rabbi Levenson, Temple Shalom; David Herry, private citizen; Peter Kaufmann, private citizen; Valerie Price, Manitoba Association for Rights & Liberties; Thomas Novak, OBLATE Justice & Peace Committee; Rhonda McCorrison, private citizen.

We have a clarification. There is a typo, and I apologize. Going back to Darrall Rankin, it is the Communist Party of Canada-Manitoba.

Those are the persons and organizations who have been registered so far. If there is anybody else in the audience that would like to register or has not yet registered and would like to make a presentation, would you please register at the back of the room. Just a reminder that 20 copies of your presentation are required, and if you require assistance with photocopying, please see the Clerk of this committee.

Before we proceed with the presentations, is it the will of the committee to set time limits on presentations?

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): No. In fact, I am glad the government is now changing its standard policy. That is quite interesting.

I am just wondering, though, in terms of further accommodation if we can get some indication when—first of all, I believe there is a committee meeting scheduled for tomorrow, so some people may be registered on that. I do not know how many people have indicated that, but I was going to suggest that no later than midnight, we assess where we are at, standard practice.

Mr. Faurschou: Madam Chairperson, I think, being that we have a sitting tomorrow morning already scheduled, just, in fact, for all committee members to remain alert and comprehending the presentations. I would ask that there be consideration of the committee that we visit the clock at ten o'clock to see perhaps if there are presenters who still want to be heard tonight and make the decision at that time, but to certainly canvass the room at 10.

Madam Chairperson: Is there willingness to revisit the clock at ten o'clock tonight? [agreed]

With the previous question, before we proceed with the presentations, is it the will of the committee to set time limits on the presentations themselves?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Chairperson: No? We will then proceed.

* (1910)

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): I wonder whether there would be will of the committee to look to the presenters to see whether there are any with disabilities who might have required transportation who would need transportation home to be looked at as priority presenters, and also any who might have children who require child care, if, in fact, there are those presenters who have children at home who are requiring child care and feel it important to be heard expeditiously. I would like to recommend that we canvass the presenters and ask whether it might be the will of the committee to hear those presenters first.

Madam Chairperson: If I can pose the question, then, is it the will of the committee to

hear presenters first who might have either a transportation issue or a child care issue? [agreed]

I would ask then that any people who do have a transportation problem or a child care problem, if you could identify yourself to the Clerk, and we can proceed from there. Thank you.

We have had a request from Ms. Theresa Anne Swedick who is listed as presenter No. 1 on the list. She has requested that she be able to speak either fourth or fifth this evening, and I would ask what is the will of the committee on that? [agreed]

In which place would you like to hear her presentation? She has asked to be placed either fourth or fifth.

Some Honourable Members: Fourth.

Madam Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee then to have her placed fourth? [agreed]

How does the committee propose to deal with presenters who are not in attendance today but have their names called, keeping in mind that another meeting of this committee is scheduled to sit tomorrow at 10 a.m.?

Mrs. Mitchelson: I would recommend that they be placed at the bottom of the list. If all of the presenters are finished tonight, we could call them again but also leave them on the list for tomorrow morning.

Madam Chairperson: The suggestion has been that the people who are not here be dropped to the bottom of the list, and their names would appear on tomorrow morning's list for the ten o'clock meeting.

Mr. Ashton: I am just wondering, because I know that these people were given the opportunity to register for tomorrow as well. Are there any individuals that are registered tomorrow morning?

Madam Chairperson: I have just been informed that nobody indicated when they

would wish to speak, so our list is just a straight running list.

Mr. Ashton: We do have two committees scheduled to make sure that people do have that opportunity tomorrow. So as long as they are not going to drop off the list without being aware of it.

Madam Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee then that the presenters who are not here tonight be dropped to the bottom of the list and reappear on tomorrow morning's list? [agreed]

We will now commence with public presentations. The first group to present is the Workers Organizing Resource Centre. I do not have a name, and I wonder if they could come forward to make their presentation to the committee. The committee is the Workers Organizing Resource Centre. Are they present here to make their presentation? They will then drop to the bottom of the list.

The next presenter is Von Haywood, Canadian Association of Non-Employed. Ms. Haywood, do you have written copies of your presentation for handout?

Ms. Von Haywood (Canadian Association of Non-Employed): Yes, I do. I was told to give it to the girl.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you. We will just wait a moment for them to be handed out. Ms. Haywood, please proceed.

Ms. Haywood: It has become very clear, after reading the first three assertions of Bill 40, that it rests on and is operating from the assumption that human beings are lazy, devoid of cognitive thought and unable to make their own decisions. It further suggests that human beings are selfish and unable to or not wanting to contribute to their community. CANE challenges these ideas.

We are for good jobs that pay a fair wage and do believe that work is preferable to welfare. For the most part, we believe welfare recipients are responsible, because if they did not attend to gathering what they need to survive, they would

surely get sick and perish. This activity is an all-consuming activity for welfare recipients and really leaves little time for other activities.

There is evidence, though, of how welfare recipients are working together to help each other in spite of their socioeconomic conditions. Harvest is a good example of this, and community drop-in centres that are run on volunteer help is another good example. So you see, people do not have to be forced to contribute to their community. Many people do it naturally on their own initiative.

People are naturally productive and creative. Given the means to express themselves in their chosen field, they will find pleasure in doing the work they have chosen. They may lack the means to acquire the skills that would allow them to make a decent living, but our present welfare system does not assist people in gaining training of their choice. Many people only access the training programs that are available because they feel threatened that their welfare will be taken away from them. Instead of languishing on welfare, they would rather do something that gives them a sense of a meaning in their lives.

We realize there are some people that do not want to work. They do not need coercion to do so. They need therapy and career training. Help them to become functional and then allow them to train for their chosen field. Why is this not possible? We as a society want a better, safer community to live in. We want our citizens to be healthy, productive, decision-making individuals, but we remove from them their right to make their own decisions when they become welfare recipients. This is demeaning. No one has to tell a drug addict that he is an addict. The truth about this is painfully obvious to him more than anyone else. This person does strongly need to be encouraged to seek treatment for his problem, but this can be done through instruction and encouragement. Coercion is not necessary. Saying to a drug addict/welfare recipient that the governing body has decided to remove that person's only means of support is tantamount to saying to a person on life support: since you are not getting better fast enough, we have decided to pull the plug on your life-support systems.

It is true that a person who has lived in a dysfunctional family setting knows only what they have learned through observing the dynamics of their family setting. Because this is the case, these young people do need instruction on what is a good parent and how to be better parents, because they no doubt have a warped view of what is normal. They may need some therapy for their healing process, depending on how emotionally destructive their particular family experience may have been. This could be achieved through comprehensive parenting courses and a mandatory daycare parenting observation course of study. It is not necessary to legislate this course of action.

The present welfare system is stayed in its conviction that it knows best what is right and good for human beings, and yet it treats human beings like cattle. Welfare recipients are simply people with feelings, hopes and aspirations just like everyone else. They do not need assistance to choose what to do with their lives. They need assistance to gain the education and direction necessary to gain their end, which is to make a decent life for themselves and their children. Some people need to acquire a better value system because their life experience did not provide instruction on what the proper values are. This can be done with instruction and encouragement. Coercion is not necessary.

If people are going to be treated like cattle, they should be fed like cattle. We, as a society, feed and house our animals better than we do human beings. We believe that Bill 40 is unnecessary and is simply a band-aid solution for two problems which have arisen because our society has failed to address our greatest social ill—poverty. Thank you. That is all.

* (1920)

Madam Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation. Ms. Haywood, I wonder if you could come back to the mike. There may be some questions from the members of the committee. I would ask are there any questions?

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Chairperson, I would like to ask Von if she believes that when there are people who are on assistance who want to volunteer, do you believe

that the vast majority would do so? Do you think that it would be helpful to them if someone identified organizations that they could volunteer for?

Ms. Haywood: If it was totally voluntary, yes. If people are not pressured, yes, that would be lovely, but welfare recipients are in a position where they feel threatened. Whether or not that is the case, that is the way it is. People normally, when they feel so inclined to do, contribute to the community and volunteer on their own. Why is it necessary to suggest that they go out and volunteer in their community rather than concentrate their efforts on acquiring the skills to do a decent job or to seek out appropriate employment?

Mr. Martindale: Similarly, you said that people need opportunities for training and education. Do you think that people need more opportunities for training and education, that they need more variety of courses, more appropriate training and education? What suggestions do you have?

Ms. Haywood: Yes—

Madam Chairperson: Ms. Haywood, I have to acknowledge you into the mike so that the recorder can actually start picking up your conversation.

Ms. Haywood: All right. Now I have forgotten the question.

Mr. Martindale: I believe in your presentation you said that people are willing to volunteer and willing to enter training and education. I am wondering if you have suggestions about whether there need to be more opportunities for training and education, or more affordable training and education, or more variety. What suggestions do you have to offer?

Ms. Haywood: For some people, student aid is an option. For some, it is not, for various reasons. Some people may have had calamity in their life, and student aid is not available to them anymore. They may be in the middle of a degree and unable to finish the degree in order to secure employment that would be suitable, right for them, and they are stuck there until they finish

their degree. If they are on welfare, they have no access to post-secondary education because welfare assumes, since they have a post-secondary education or at least a portion of it, that they have enough education to go out and get an ordinary job. If the person was retraining for another job because they were not fit to do the work for which they had been trained, they are stuck in that place until they finish their degree.

So we are concerned with people who are on welfare who were in the process of educating themselves, and their studies were terminated because they are stuck on welfare until they finish their degree, should that ever happen. It is, as you know, very difficult to find the funds to re-educate yourself in ordinary circumstances. Well, there is not an ordinary circumstance.

There are many people who could work, want to work, but are unable to do so because they have not either finished their recertification or do not have access to the type of training that they would like. It is important that people do work that they do enjoy, because they will excel, they will stay at it, and they will not want to change employment. I do not know if that has answered the question.

Madam Chairperson: Are there any other questions from the committee?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thanks for your presentation, Ms. Haywood.

I was just going to ask you a question or two, if I might. Sorry. This is obviously a new process, and we thank you for your understanding.

I know back in 1996, when we brought in previous legislation around welfare reform, the Canadian Association for the Non-Employed did make a presentation at that time too. I was just going to ask the question of whether some of the comments that might have been made back in 1996 were still appropriate to the Canadian Association for the Non-Employed. One of the comments that was made in the brief that was presented at that time said: "Every individual has the (1) right to an adequate income; (2) to appeal decisions made about their income

support; (3) not to be required to work or train for assistance, and to freely choose work."

I think, from your presentation, that your sense would be that that would be the same position that your organization would hold today.

Ms. Haywood: Yes, that is correct.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thanks, Ms. Haywood. I wonder if you are familiar at all with a caucus report that was presented to the Manitoba New Democratic Party convention in 1997 that indicates a resolution encouraging the provincial government to introduce legislation guaranteeing the rights of social assistance recipients, including the right to a level of assistance adequate to meet one's needs, the right to appeal decisions which limit or deny assistance, and the right not to have to participate in work or training programs, i.e., workfare, in order to receive assistance.

Although the words are just slightly different, it appears to me that sort of the philosophy of your organization and the philosophy of the New Democratic Party would be very similar.

Ms. Haywood: We believe that income assistance and work or training should be separate. Income assistance should be separate from work or training.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thanks, Ms. Haywood. I thank you. Just one other comment, would it appear to you that given that the New Democratic Party has not really taken a stand this time around with the introduction of this legislation, would you be at all concerned that they may have changed their position from their position in 1997? I just thought I would ask.

Ms. Haywood: I have not given that any thought. I do not know what to say.

Point of Order

Mrs. Mitchelson: A point of order, Madam Chairperson, I notice that the New Democratic Party finds that this is a laughing matter. I would think that the question that I asked was a serious

question, and I would like to afford Ms. Haywood the opportunity to answer without the laughter.

Madam Chairperson: Mr. Ashton, on the same point of order.

Mr. Ashton: On the same point of order, I would note that it was not just members of the New Democratic Party that were laughing at the question. I do find that the minister rather than asking questions of the presenter about the brief or the bill even is getting into what appears to me to be a political debate. As the minister will see as we progress, we are here to listen to the public, and the minister will have plenty of opportunity to debate this bill afterwards.

I think the minister would do well to listen to the members of the public and ask questions about their briefs rather than get involved in the political discussion. We are prepared for that and we will debate the minister anytime on this government's abysmal record in terms of welfare and its treatment of the people on income assistance in this province. We are ready for that debate anytime, Madam Chairperson.

Madam Chairperson: The minister did not have a point of order. It, in fact, was a dispute of the facts.

* * *

Madam Chairperson: Ms. Haywood, did you have any comments?

Ms. Haywood: It is something I would have to give some thought to.

Madam Chairperson: Are there any other questions from the committee? Thank you very much for your presentation.

The next presenter is Michelle Forrest, private citizen. Ms. Forrest, would you please come forward to make your presentation. Do you have written copies of your presentation for distribution? We will just take a moment to distribute those.

Madam Chairperson: Ms. Forrest, please proceed with your presentation.

Ms. Michelle Forrest (Private Citizen): Thank you very much. My name is Michelle Forrest. I am here as a private citizen, and I am here to speak to Bill 40, the amendment to The Employment and Income Assistance Act.

To begin, it was interesting to note the media release announcing Bill 40 was entitled Learnfare and Workfare and that the public speak around this issue is workfare. The fare portion is spelt f-a-r-e, not f-a-i-r which sets the tone for the proposed amendments to The Employment and Income Assistance Act.

The only issue left to discuss is what the fare or cost or tariff or entrance fee will be. I would like to explore this at some length. Starting with Bill 36, and I noted that the honourable minister opened the floor for that for me because she had questions about it, the changes to the income assistance have been profound. The amendments have painted a picture of this government's changing view of people who are living in poverty and the costs have escalated.

The first glimpse we have from Bill 36 is generational poverty and the harm that it does to children.

Madam Chairperson: Excuse me, Ms. Forrest, are you referring to Bill 36?

Ms. Forrest: Bill 36 is the bill that you are amending?

Madam Chairperson: No.

Ms. Forrest: Well, you know, I am just going to keep reading, and, eventually, I promise you it will all just tie together.

Madam Chairperson: For the record, we are dealing tonight with Bill 40.

* (1930)

Ms. Forrest: I know that. You see, it is right in the very first sentence. I am just taking you on the journey that people who live in poverty in this province have followed, well, for a long

time now. [interjection] She was not here? Okay, sorry. I was, and I am still an anthropologist.

Now, where was I? Oh, yes, the first glimpse we have from Bill 36 is generational poverty and the harm that it does to children, not the poverty you understand, but the idea that these folks have not worked for generations.

This government's response was to make sure that moms and dads got out to work as soon as possible or be cut off welfare. It was not a feeling. It is a reality. I believe the term used was employment incentive, but basically if you were a parent it set a bad example if you were at home. Of course, it was good for a mom or dad to be at home with children for generations if someone was working in the household. Then it was labelled family values and was something that we wanted to protect.

So the first picture we have is that it is bad if you are poor and at home with the kids. The second part of this picture is that you want to live in poverty or else we would not have to cut you off welfare to get you to work and theoretically out of poverty.

How this was experienced in the real world was the generation of low-income jobs with no security, in short, cheap labour for Canadian and multinational corporations who should know better than to co-operate with these kinds of schemes.

I was amused to find folks on welfare phoning into the United States and raising money for the National Rifle Association while we were debating gun control in Canada. The cost of this phase was quite high for these folks, worry if the kids were okay at home, if they got home, and internalizing the belief that you were not a good parent because you were poor.

As an aside, one really nasty aspect to this type of direct phone sales and workfare project was that if a person did not make the quota for sales, they were fired and unable to apply for income assistance. Why? Because they had lost their job through no fault of their employer. I did an appeal for someone who refused work because of unsafe work conditions on a workfare

job and was just surprised to find that the Appeal Board thought workfare jobs were exempt from labour law. Of course, they were proven wrong, but it was interesting.

The second change that occurred with Bill 36 was that education became a reward or privilege rather than a right. If you were very good and fit the right picture at 18, 20, or 21, for example, you might be allowed to go back and get through high school. Once again, I was in an appeal and was told by one of the panel members that, of course, this young man should not be allowed to go to school, because he had the opportunity before, and he had quit and should not be allowed to go back. He had to get out there and work, work, work.

We pointed out that he had quit because he had no way of coping with all the emotional trauma in his life and was now able at last to continue. We won the appeal but only after my client disclosed the real horror he had been through at home. The cost of this amendment was to let youth know that they were expendable in the new economic order, that irrespective of their life experience or mistakes they were condemned to poverty and were essentially the throwaway generation.

With learnfare, we want everyone to go back to school or be cut off income assistance. One wonders how this education system will cope with thousands of youth going back to school at once. The cost of this will be quite remarkable.

To summarize, the first picture we have about youth is, no matter what their life experience was or has, you cannot quit school and/or you will pay that cost forever. The new picture is that we cannot have youth visible on the streets in any community. Therefore they must go back to school irrespective of where they are in life. Once again, it is a may, not shall, situation, leaving it up to an income assistance employee who might or might not have the skills to assess what you need.

Such a picture, government reeling from one direction to another just to find the right foothold with the public to call an election. When one realizes that this government has been in power for many years, one would logically think that

any minister would have had the time to deal with poverty, perhaps doing an assessment, developing short- and long-range plans to eliminate poverty and finally taking great care to implement each step of the plan in turn. Any real political will to eliminate poverty, whether child or adult, would mean planning, supporting people in the struggle to get out of poverty, for instance, more subsidized child care spaces to support parents as they look for work, real educational and/or vocational training to assist adults and youths into a trade. Stopping the flow of money to inner city slumlords and a real commitment to assisted housing or co-ops would have been helpful.

The picture this government paints of people living in poverty is that the only thing they understand is force and, by gum, they are just the guys to do it, especially in an election year.

The amusing thing is that even if I agreed with the slick public-speak about Bill 40, it is simply not the bill to do the job. I wonder to myself if the Tories really thought we were that stupid. Bill 40 offers nothing new, but especially not workfare.

Thus I came back to the concept of the fare, charge, entrance fee, tariff or the cost of workfare and learnfare. With Bill 36, the cost of workfare program was having to acknowledge that being at home with the kids was bad, that the reason your family was hungry was because of your own fault because you were too lazy to work or you could not manage your money well enough. In those hearings' eyes, I and others pointed out that giving someone \$5 a day to pay for transportation, phone calls, clothing, laundry, food and other personal needs was to guarantee hunger and illness. We now have local and national studies that confirm that prediction and is causing public health workers to become more alarmed with each passing day.

The cost with Bill 40 goes even farther. No client will ever know if they are complying with the legislation or eligible for assistance from one day to the next. Everything is a matter of worker discretion. Reference Clauses 5.5(1), 5.5(2) where the worker has only to believe, believe, a person has an addiction and is refusing treatment, to be cut off welfare. They have to

believe that. Now what on earth do you think would cause someone to believe that? Who will this worker be, and what evaluation will he or she use to make this decision?

Clauses 5.6 and 5.7(1) allow a director to reduce or suspend income to a recipient who refuses to participate in a training or support program. However, Clauses 5.8(1) and 5.8(2) allow the benefits withheld from recipients for the listed reasons to be paid into a fund for their dependent children. This was, frankly, baffling. What does this mean? Will the children be removed from the home so that they can access the money for food and shelter? Will the parents be removed from the home so that they do not benefit from the trust fund, and will they live on the street until they see the error of their ways? It was extremely confusing. The cost of this process, even to administrate, will be fascinating to know.

Finally, the new clauses are all permissive. There are no programs, just a group of powers which government might or might not act on. This will cost each client his or her self-respect, any concrete information about their situation, and does not tell them the role or responsibility of government. But I am equally as certain that this is precisely the outcome that governments of this ilk desire. Theirs is not to count the cost, only to move blindly from one ill-conceived solution to another.

In closing, I will say that it saddens me to be here today because I do not believe that I or anyone else will cause this government to change one word or punctuation mark. They will only make changes if they think it will increase their chances for victory at polls. However, I must stand here as a witness because I believe what Martin Luther King, Jr., said about the silence of the good. I stand here also because Gandhi said that, whenever he was discouraged, he remembered that history is the living record of the downfall of tyrants and, I might add, bad governments. It is in that thought that I find hope, and at least one real good reason to vote. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much, Ms. Forrest. Mr. Martindale has a question.

Mr. Martindale: Thank you, Michelle, for your brief. Would it surprise you to know that this bill was cobbled together in one day in the Premier's Office, and then sent to the Minister of Family Services' department, and then to legislative drafting?

Ms. Forrest: Pardon me?

Mr. Martindale: Would it surprise you to hear, or to know, that this bill was cobbled together in one day in the Premier's Office and then sent to the Department of Family Services?

Ms. Forrest: You know, I do not even think shock or—well, imagine that. People are deciding on the fate of what? The last time I checked income assistance rolls, it was 70,000-ish people, or 72,000. Seventy-two thousand, I thought. And we are making decisions that affect their day-to-day lives, how they can interact in this world, on a draft from the Premier's Office? A one-day work session? How many other bills did they do at the same time? It just reinforces my belief that this is only for the election.

* (1940)

Mr. Martindale: Would it surprise you to know that the government, or maybe you already do know, already has the power to do everything that is in this bill under the existing Employment and Income Assistance Act and regulations passed in 1996, Bill 36 at that time, and that they really do not need this legislation?

Ms. Forrest: That really did surprise me, because when I read this amendment, I could not understand why it was coming forward. That was why I put the election stuff in my brief, because it was the only reason I could think of that they would need this piece of legislation, was just to put a little balloon out there and test to see how the public water flowed, or if it flew, or whatever it is that balloons do when you let them go in a political sense. So I was very confused.

I spoke to Bill 36 here when they decided to pass that, and it gave them all of these powers. I did not notice anything new, except that trust fund. The trust fund was a little baffling, because

I really do not know how they are going to administrate it. So maybe that is what— [interjection] Well, of course, one day. There you go. That is what you get, a thing you cannot administrate, and regulations to follow. Who knows what they will be. They ought to be fun.

Madam Chairperson: Are there any other questions from the committee?

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): I just want to make a point on the record. During the presentation, I wanted to wait until the presentation was finished because I could hear the minister and the Chair having a discussion about if the minister was going to ask questions first or not, and I just want to clarify that the Chair of these committees is to be impartial, and she should not be arranging strategy with the Chairperson.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I want to clarify that, because, quite frankly, the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) had his hand up trying to get the Chair's attention. I poked the Chair and said, Mr. Martindale has his hand up to ask questions. She said a comment that he must want to be first to ask questions. I happened to say to her that that is okay, I will go last. That was exactly the comment.

So I was just letting the Chair know that Mr. Martindale was trying to get her attention, which I think any responsible minister would do, try to ensure that if I saw something that the Chair did not see, a hand up, that I would provide that information for her benefit so that she could get people on the list in the order that they identified themselves.

Ms. Cerilli: Just to clarify, the comment by the minister that I overheard was that she preferred to ask questions last. I just wanted to make the comment that the Chair is to be impartial on these committees. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: For the record, as the Chair, I would like to indicate that the comments that were just made—in fact, I was being totally impartial. After the minister indicated to me that Mr. Martindale's hand was up, I took note and indicated that he must want to speak first after

the speaker. The minister did say, well, that is fine; I do not mind speaking last.

I just would like to reinforce the fact that I am sitting here very impartially, and I will be a very fair Chair to whomever wants to ask questions, or to the speakers.

Are there any other questions of the presenter?

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Chair, I just wanted to commend Ms. Forrest on the particular story of the people who were sent to Telespectrum to solicit memberships for the National Rifle Association. That indeed is a true story, and it is not fanciful. That is what they were employed to do, and that was one of the campaigns that that company carried on for a long period of time, soliciting memberships in the NRA from Winnipeg while they were on learn- and workfare. Of course, that company is a company that the government took great delight in having a major photo op for and an announcement of a major amount of money and lots of ink, lots of television coverage.

The irony, which you may not know, is that the company never received any government funds at the end of the day. So all the publicity and all of the good stories, government wound up not giving it any money, because, in fact, the company never met any of the criteria that it was supposed to meet in terms of being a good employer and all those sorts of things. So that is the kind of thing people were pushed into. I think, for the record, it is important to know that your story is absolutely correct.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I want to thank you, Ms. Forrest, for your presentation. I believe, by listening to your presentation and reading along with it, that you would then agree with the comment that individuals should have the right not to have to participate in work or training programs, i.e., workfare, in order to receive assistance. Would you agree with that statement?

Ms. Forrest: I do not know who made that statement. It was not me. I did not say that. My brief does not address the government's problematic workfare programs. But what I did say in my brief was real education, real

apprenticeships, real training so that people can indeed move out of poverty—boy, that would be just ducky.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I would also like to ask Ms. Forrest whether she would support an opposition party that, through several hours of Estimates within the Department of Family Services, never once asked a question on welfare when, in fact, we had announced all of our learnfare and workfare programs. I would indicate that in years past the opposition party has spent many, many hours asking questions about the welfare program, and when something as significant as this legislation was introduced, was she aware that the New Democratic opposition took no time in the Estimates process to even comment on workfare or learnfare, and—

Point of Order

Mr. Ashton: On a point of order, Madam Chairperson, the minister just seems intent on having the ability with every question or to put on the record comments which really fall into the category of comments that should be made in the speeches that are given on this particular bill and others. I would point out that in terms of relevancy this is not Estimates.

We are quite happy. We could spend the rest of the evening debating amongst ourselves and asking questions about the abysmal record of this government, 11 years into its mandate, now coming in and talking about education and training, which is something, by the way, that the presenter did talk about. This government has cut education and training for the poor and for people on welfare. We could talk a lot about the situation in many communities in terms of lack of real job opportunities. We could get into that kind of debate, but, Madam Chairperson, we are supposed to be here to listen to members of the public, ask members of the public questions related to this bill and to this brief, not about Estimates.

If she wants to debate Estimates, we have concurrence in the House. We can deal with that, but I would suggest out of respect for the presenters that the minister, instead of trying to engage in this process, follow our normal rules of order. We are prepared to debate this minister

at the appropriate time during the session of the Legislature, but this is the time for the presenters. Quite frankly, one of the things that is encouraging about this bill, this is probably, outside of Bill 36, the first time in 11 years that this government is going to really hear the story from a lot of people who are directly affected in this particular set of circumstances. That is why we are here. Not to debate what the NDP or the Conservatives did in Estimates.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I think that, if the honourable member for Thompson practised what he preached, he would have listened very carefully to the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) and the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) that were not asking questions of the presenter around clarification of the comments of their presentation, but, in fact, were condemning the Conservative government and the Conservative Party and Tory policies.

So, I mean, it works both ways. It is fine for the member for Thompson to get on his high horse and talk about the kinds of questions or comments that I am making, but maybe he had better look internally at his own caucus and make some recommendations to his colleagues about the kinds of comments that they are making during the presentations from individuals. This does cut both ways, and he would love to have it one-sided. I would certainly love to hear him say that he supports or does not support this legislation.

Madam Chairperson: The honourable member did not have a point of order. It was a dispute of the facts.

* * *

Ms. Forrest: Can I answer your question?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Absolutely.

Ms. Forrest: It might surprise you to know that I am a wholly political animal. I do not really care who is in opposition. I only care about the government in power, because you are the only people who have the real power to do anything. So whether the NDP gets up or the Liberals get up and scream and yell and pull out their hair and wail in the night about any piece of

legislation is absolutely useless information for me. What is information for me is what you as a government intend to do because you have the power to do it.

If the NDP government is in power, the Liberals, I will come and yell at them in their turn. Have no fear. I will do that if I do not like what they are doing. Have no fear, they will hear from me if they try and do this. They will hear from me, but you are hearing from me now, because you are the government. So whether or not you want to bring in all the NDP, then, cool, go for it. Like that is fine with me. Like that is okay, but I will speak to what you do as a government, because that is the focus. The focus is you have the majority; you are making the decisions; and you are making bad decisions.

* (1950)

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you, and I hear you loud and clear. It will be very interesting to see whether the opposition does support our position or votes against this bill, but I did want to just ask you one more question. That was: did you realize that since we have introduced Bill 36, back in '96, there are over 18,000 people off the welfare rolls and into meaningful jobs? Were you aware of that, as a result of some of the training initiatives and initiatives like Taking Charge! and Opportunities for Employment and the education programs that we have put in place?

Ms. Forrest: I think that is just fabulous. I am just worried about the 17,000 additional people that are on welfare since you have been government. I think it is great that people are out there learning, that they are out there doing, that they are out there being fully human. What I am concerned about is this legislation, Bill 36, all of those other little pieces and little regulations that you seem to think you can put into bills and just slide under the door just as quick as can be is the fact that you are dealing with people on welfare as though they were "other."

Anthropology means very specific things. When we say you are dealing with this as though they were "other," in the old-fashioned world, it would have been they are outside the pale of

humanity, and once you move someone outside the pale of humanity in a cultural sense, then you get the right to say: you know what, you have to jump through that many hoops to get five bucks a day to live on. You have to put up with slumlords. You have to put up with whatever we will dish out, because we are the government and we are power, and the only reason that you can do that is because those people have become "other." They are no longer real to you. They are social problems that you must deal with.

They are not social problems, you know; they are people who are poor. Some people have social problems. Heck, you know what? My uncle, who sits on the National Republican Committee, one of them is an alcoholic, he has a problem. It is a problem that you are not going to deal with because he is in the States, but even if he was here, you still would not deal with it because he has got a job, because he has got money, and if he wants to go to the Betty Ford Foundation, he can afford to.

You know, those are the kinds of things that you write, how you frame words, how you speak about it in the real world out there. Words in a literate society—and we are a written society; we are not an oral tradition society. We are written. When you write something down, it changes how people are seen. I do not know how to make that clear to you. I do not know how to get you to take care, take incredible care because you hurt people.

You do not just make them poorer. You do not just take away opportunities. You hurt them because you damage how they see themselves. You damage how the security guard in Eaton Place is going to deal with them. You damage how the security guards here are going to deal with them. You damage how I am going to deal with them, because I can talk about them as "them." Legislation like this gives me that permission. It gives me permission to say, "I am an us," I am an employed "us." They are "them." They are an "nonemployed them."

Some of them might be drunks. Some of them might beat their wives. Some of them might beat their children, but, you know, that occurs in every economic class. It does not matter, but we get to examine that. We get to put

these people under a microscope. That is so horrendous. We get to not tell them what their rights are because they are other. You can send welfare investigators to someone's home, send them in to knock on the door, have them go in, and they do not have to say it is illegal for me to enter your house unless you give me permission, but it is. But people on welfare do not know that. They do not know that because it is how you write it. It is how you write the words. You damage. We all damage so much because we do not take care. We do not think about consequences.

Right now the Tories are on an election bandwagon. You want to get elected. Fine. That is what you are supposed to want. You are politicians. I have no quarrel with you wanting to go out there and putting up balloons and trying to test your waters. I have a quarrel when you use people to do it. I have a quarrel when you write such spurious pieces of legislation that are only there for balloons, that will hurt some of the people sitting in this room. It might hurt one of your kids. I have a quarrel with this kind of electioneering. I have a quarrel with the harm you do, the real piece-by-piece, take-a-bit-of-their-soul harm that you do.

So electioneer. For heaven's sake, go out and talk to your constituents. Do whatever you need to do to get on with this process. Do not be so scared. Just go out there and let the voters decide, but do not use people who are already, because of many other bills like this, do not make it harder for them, do not take any more from them to build yourselves up, because that is a definition of evil to me. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation, Ms. Forrest.

As agreed upon earlier, Theresa Anne Swedick will now make her presentation. Is there leave to allow Ms. Swedick's interpreter, Mr. Hubert Demers, to use mike No. 14 at the table. [agreed] Ms. Swedick, do you have written copies of your brief for distribution?

Ms. Theresa Anne Swedick (Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf Inc.): [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

I do.

Madam Chairperson: Please proceed with your presentation.

Ms. Swedick: [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

Okay. Thank you. I would like to thank Diane McGifford, the MLA for Osborne, in our area for letting me know about this hearing. Otherwise I would never have known about it. Too often the deaf community is the last one to know or is often left out and therefore cannot participate in the consultation process of any government discussion.

In the future, I think the deaf community should be involved with consultations with you. I am delighted that I am given this chance to give this presentation on behalf of the deaf community.

I feel that the act is very vague for a number of reasons. Dealing with item No. 1, in regard to addictions treatment, I think if you expect deaf applicants or deaf people who are recipients or dependents to attend addiction treatment, there needs to be support services in place such as interpreting services for them.

At the Chemical Withdrawal Unit a deaf person was placed there because of his suicidal tendencies, and they would not provide an interpreter for him all that day as they considered it to be too expensive and therefore only provided services for a few number of hours. There is an interpreter service provided at AFM when the person leaves the AFM. After a period of time, the person is requested to attend AA meetings on a regular basis but no interpreter is provided. I think a solution to that is that interpreter services should be provided on a support basis.

My understanding from what I was told is that there is a long waiting list for anyone wishing to enter addiction treatment programs, and I felt that they should be able to have a program accessible on a first-hand basis.

It certainly will not work if there is a long waiting list to have people access it as it simply penalizes them. In regard to the parenting

support program, I believe the same situation is applicable based on the first one, that there needs to be support services for people to access parent support programs such as interpreting.

In regard to education and training, I think if you expect an applicant or recipient or someone who is dependent to take education and training, then my experience with education and training is that I have had four major educational periods, and it does seem to do nothing for me as employers tend not to hire deaf people. I do not see how I or any other deaf person would want to take more education or training and continue to take it over and over again.

* (2000)

At one point I was planning to take the multimedia course at Robertson career college back in '97. In order to take the course, I would have had to take out a student loan for \$25,000 for the one-year course, and my concern is that if I were to complete the course and receive a certificate or the diploma, who would hire me as a deaf individual, and how would I therefore possibly be able to pay back that loan? Robertson career college could not provide interpreting service, and I had to rely on the vocation program for disabled people, sorry, VRDP, which is limited to that one year.

I felt that I was not on an equal basis with hearing people or what I call hearing, which is nondeaf, and that I could not go to school right away based on the fact that I had to wait to receive funding. I think the solution is that the Province of Manitoba should have funding for interpreting services at any school program, other than Red River, University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg, and the amount of funding should not be restricted.

The Province of Manitoba must set an example by hiring deaf persons and also request large corporations and private sector to hire deaf people as well.

Moving on to the item of the director or the municipality. Too often people are not familiar and know what is best for deaf people. I know of a person who wanted to take a specific course, and yet they would not get support for the

funding, because they did not think it was ideal for the person to be taking that course. Another time, one person was making a decision on behalf of the deaf person; again, it was not ideal for that person. The directors or municipalities do not have knowledge and therefore do not know what is best for deaf people.

I think the resolution is that there must be an education or training in place for directors or municipalities to have knowledge of deaf people and deaf culture and have an understanding of deafness. In order to receive the education and training for these people, they have to hire deaf people to act as consultants and to educate them.

Item 5, monies paid into a special fund, basically is the same as No. 4, as is No. 6, the issue of administrator.

Item 7, for me, is that, overall, I am not sure, in fact, how this act and its amendments will affect the deaf community and how the deaf community fits into it or not. As you are aware, provincial welfare does not consider deaf people as disabled, I believe. If not, now you do. So where does this system fit for deaf people and the deaf community, given that 83 percent of the deaf community are unemployed or under-employed? We want jobs, not workfare. We did not ask to be born deaf or to become deaf, and you cannot force us to become your slaves. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Swedick and Mr. Demers.

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): As the MLA for the constituency which is home to the Winnipeg Community Centre for the Deaf, I really do want to thank Theresa for her presentation, but, as well, I want to congratulate Theresa on her presentation. I have been an elected member of the Assembly since 1995, and I have never been present at any committee when a deaf person has made a presentation.

I was discussing this with my colleague for Burrows, who was elected in 1990, and he says that he has never been present at a committee when a deaf person made a presentation. So, Theresa, you are a real groundbreaker. I think your being here tonight shows real courage, and

I am sure all the committee members share those feelings and really want to congratulate you.

I also have a couple of questions, Theresa. It seems to me the gist of what you are saying is that this legislation would be particularly punitive when it comes to deaf people, because not only may the legislation be punitive in itself, but there simply are no services for deaf people. For example, you discussed addictions and you pointed out the difficulties of deaf people obtaining interpreters when they were dealing with addiction problems. It strikes me that your point is this would be extremely punitive and unfair to people who are deaf.

Ms. Swedick: [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

Yes, that is correct. Often people will wish to go and participate, and some people can do so on an entire basis. Often, sometimes, interpreters will be allowed to come, for example, two hours and yet that is considered to be adequate or fair. I mean, we need to have interpreters in order to access the complete and accurate information. All deaf people who wish to go to counselling or participate in any function need to have the information via an interpreter.

Ms. McGifford: Theresa, I wonder if you could tell us if you were aware of programs that are specifically designed to allow deaf people to make their way off welfare and become employed. If you do know of any programs, if you could comment on how successful they have been.

Ms. Swedick: [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

From '88 till 1990, we had a program through New Careers that brought in 12 deaf individuals as human service workers. Once that one group was completed, they were to continue on and train subsequent groups. But by now we should be, what, on the fourth group; nothing ever happened after that one New Careers program was in place. There has been nothing subsequent to that, and the government said they had no funding and were unable to continue with

that training. I was actually involved with that training program myself and completed it in 1990.

Ms. McGifford: So then you must wonder why, if the government has no funding to prepare deaf people for work, they can bring in this piece of legislation which may or may not leave deaf people in a position where they may be penalized for not working. I notice you do say in your presentation that welfare or social assistance does not consider deaf people as disabled, so presumably the deaf would not be allowed to not work because of being disabled. I realize that is kind of a clumsy question. I hope you get the gist of it.

Ms. Swedick: [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

Well, deaf people are disabled insofar as we cannot become hearing or nondeaf, and so it is a disability when it comes to employment. Employers label us and do not want to hire us. When you go to welfare, and they ask you: are you disabled? You say no, you say yes, because you are not allowed to access the same rights as disabled people are. For us, it becomes a Catch 22. Employers do not want us, but they do not want us receiving assistance either. People have the skills, have the abilities and yet are not able to access employment.

So where do you go? You are not welcome to receive assistance, and yet employers do not want to hire you because they consider it to be an additional expense, et cetera. People do not realize or do not know what to do with us as deaf people, and we are constantly educating them.

Ms. McGifford: Ms. Swedick, do you believe that government has a responsibility in that process, the process of educating employers, so that employers may understand the gifts and skills and creativity and ways of working with the deaf as employees? Do you believe government has a responsibility to provide that kind of link and liaison in education? I gather if you believe government has a responsibility, you believe that government is not fulfilling that responsibility?

* (2010)

Ms. Swedick: [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

Yes. A resounding yes. I think the province is responsible to set an example for other major employers, so I think that, if the government is not employing deaf people as an example to other employers, they are not about to copy and follow suit.

There were deaf people that did work here in the Legislative Building, and yet you will not find them here today.

During the days of Mr. Ed Schreyer, deaf people were being employed here, and they are not here anymore. In all honesty, he was very wonderful and did employ deaf people here on the grounds, in the building.

Ms. McGifford: Well, that should give people a clue as what to do at the next election.

I notice towards the end of your presentation, Theresa, you talk about the fact that deaf people do want to work, and, quite clearly, you state that deaf people did not want to be born deaf, and I gather you say you do not want to work as slaves, which, of course, nobody does. I gather that is a reference to workfare.

I am glad you made the point about people wanting to work, because I agree with you. I think people do want to work; people on social assistance want to work. The reasons that some people do not is because they are either ill, disabled, untrained, children at home, for very good reasons. Of course, there is the odd case of abuse as there is in any program, but I think you speak not only for the deaf community here when you say this, but for everybody.

Thank you again. Congratulations on your work tonight.

Ms. Swedick: [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

Thank you.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I want to thank Ms. Swedick for her presentation and her comments. I want you to know that I have received a letter from you representing your organization, and I certainly plan to respond to that in the very near future.

We announced that we would be doing a separate consultation process in the fall regarding supports for the disabled community. In that consultation process, both visually impaired and hearing impaired will be a part of that process, so I can answer some of the questions that you did ask in your letter today, along with those that are mentally disabled and mentally ill and with other types of disabilities, physically disabled individuals.

We will, over the summer, be developing a process to try to get to everyone that has issues around our employment and income assistance program for the disabled, and I will be very interested in knowing whether you have any personal experience with anyone that has been refused welfare or employment and income assistance, any deaf person, because I am not aware of any. I would certainly want that brought to my attention and the circumstances and the reasons for that happening to be brought to my attention.

I certainly think that the issues that you have raised in your presentation are issues that have to be looked at as we go through the consultation process for disabilities. I want to personally invite you to be a part of that process.

I will be corresponding with you and possibly we could have a meeting. It was our full intention to set up a process to see how we could most effectively reach members of the disability community. I would consider and I always have considered those that are visually impaired or hearing impaired to be part of that disability community and the process for consultation. I wanted you to be aware of that. I will contact you to ensure that you are part of the process and that your issues, not only the ones that were raised today but the ones that you might bring forward as a part of that consultation process, will be heard.

Madam Chairperson: Ms. Swedick, did you have any comments?

Ms. Swedick: [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

Yes. Thank you for the invitation. I will make sure that I will be there and that you will not be able to forget what I have to comment on. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Ms. Swedick, there is another question.

Mr. Martindale: Ms. Swedick, do you have any concerns that perhaps this government is setting up disabled people to be the deserving poor and, therefore, will get even increased benefits to the \$80 a month extra that they get now and that everyone else is the deserving poor and they get hammered?

Floor Comment: Undeserving.

Mr. Martindale: Sorry, undeserving poor.

Ms. Swedick: [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

That is I think a little bit difficult to answer. I think people who have a disability, for example, for myself as a deaf person, if you are on social assistance you need to use a telephone. For us we need to use what is called a teletype phone, which is a keyboard system that works through the phone line. If a person is on social assistance and is very ill and they do not cover the cost of that special telephone, then they have to get up, get dressed, and go to a location that has that in order to phone and make a doctor's appointment or go all the way down to the doctor's and hope they can get fit in.

So, I mean, the point is, I do not think they are asking to be that way. They are not asking to have the additional difficulties.

Mr. Martindale: Would you prefer that disabled people be considered employable? Maybe I should say: would you rather consider that you want to be in the paid workforce and all

you need is some education and training and supports so you can move from welfare to work?

Ms. Swedick: [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

Well, I know that my experience within the deaf community is that people want to be accepted by the government. The government does not accept them. They kind of get shoved off and into social assistance. Myself, I have abilities. My other deaf friends who are here this evening have abilities and want to have employment, but the government as well as employers often do not see us as being talented enough, being able to work. It is 83 percent of the deaf community that is unemployed and underemployed, and I think that is shameful.

It is not that deaf people cannot be employed. I can communicate. I can work with people. I have an interpreter tonight to be able to get my points made. I mean, we are not stupid individuals just because we are deaf. We need to educate people so they can get beyond that barrier and see that we are employable and that we can be part of civilization and citizens.

Ms. Cerilli: Thank you, Theresa. We met at the Centre for the Deaf when Manitoba Housing took over. At that time, when they replaced your security person they did not have someone that could sign either, so I know some of the difficulties that you have been having.

I just wanted to clarify, then, if you are on social allowance right now and you are wanting to get some assistance to find work, what kind of allowance is there available for signing or for other supports for someone who is hearing impaired to find work currently?

Ms. Swedick: [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

Through the EIC departments or what used to be called Manpower, they often do not provide the service there. They wanted to refer us to other organizations, such as Reach and Equality Employment services, et cetera. As a deaf person, we are looking for jobs. We want

to be able to access any place that we think will give us an advantage, give us a foot up, but we were not able to access the normal services. They wanted to be referred to specialized services, such as Reach and Equality or the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities, and yet we feel that we need to have the right to be able to access whatever services we need, and they should be provided with interpreters so that we can access that service.

They also, at the EIC offices, no longer have TTY phone numbers. They no longer provide interpreters when we want to meet with them, so it is as if they just simply want to ignore us and not deal with us and not provide services to members of the deaf community.

Ms. Cerilli: Just to clarify then, let us say you are currently on social allowance. You find yourself a perspective job. You have an interview. How will you get someone who can join you with the interview to sign and who will pay for that?

* (2020)

Ms. Swedick: [American Sign Language used]

[Translation]

Well, normally we go with an interpreter and try and get the EIC offices to pay for the interpreter, which typically, as I have said, they do not want to do. They want to refer us to the Reach and Equality Employment services.

Madam Chairperson: Ms. Swedick and Mr. Demers, thank you very much for your presentation this evening.

The next presenter is Shauna MacKinnon, private citizen. Would Ms. MacKinnon please come forward to make her presentation? Shauna MacKinnon, is she here? Shauna MacKinnon? If not, she will be dropped to the bottom of the list.

The next presenter is Rick Juba of the Juba Neighbourhood Resource Drop-in Centre. Is Rick here? Welcome, Mr. Juba. Do you have written copies for distribution?

Mr. Rick Juba (Juba Neighborhood Resource Drop-in Centre): No, I do not.

Madam Chairperson: Okay. Please proceed.

Mr. Juba: My name is Rick Juba. I am a welfare recipient. I have been on and off welfare for the last 13 years of my life. What I am finding is with the programs that are implemented, I have been through seven of them. There was one put through the hospitality and tourism industry. There was a three months cooks papers, although for the same papers for a decent standing you had to go for a year to Red River. I found my colleagues being cut off of UIC, being cut off of welfare and not having a chance at decent employment.

With the resources to the disabled communities, I am also a dyslexic with Tourette's syndrome. The only thing that I can access right now is a VRS system. Both rehab, I have been in that situation three to four times. In one instance I told the people that I could not handle hot and cold fluctuations in temperature. I am also mildly asthmatic. I could not handle dust. I was sent to a sawmill. When I told them I could not do the work. I was simply put away. This is not a laughing matter. This is a very serious matter, this is happening all around us. These are band-aid solutions to a very vast problem. They are not working.

With a lot of the programs, people are right in the middle of it, but they are getting the enthusiasm picked up. They think they are going to get a job. You think everything is going to be gung-ho and they have to go back on the system. This seems to be the pattern all around us. Then to be called lazy and we do not want to work is a complete lie. I am also a PETAS member and see a lot of enthusiastic people. I see a lot of people that really want to make a difference.

With the workfare program, none of the disabled were asked. None of the advocates were asked. We were simply studied like a pack of animals and being told what to do. This is destroying our dignity. This is destroying human equality. When you strip someone of their pride, their dignity and their self-esteem, what do you have left? An empty shell.

This program will also fuel the genocide that is happening within our First Nations people. This is no common sense. This is forced slavery. Every one has the right to work with dignity. Every one has the right to work in a job that they feel safe and this is a job for them. I was told at the age of 13 that I was functionally unmarketable, that I could not find work. I was also told that the only work I can do, from another vocational rehabilitation counsellor and also someone through SMD, was very minimal skill jobs.

I myself have volunteered for a number of organizations. I am proud to say, as a suicide prevention counsellor, I have saved lives. I have united people. I have made a difference, and I did not do this for the simple fact of money. I did this for the simple fact they are human, and they needed help. Instead of giving us band-aid solutions and not giving us the chance then blaming us for the problem, why do you not deal and give us common-sense solutions, ones that work, instead of ones that do not?

I recently went to study at the University of Manitoba. I think it was a five- or six-year study being put on by an economist. It was the welfare recipient, the working poor, the average to up to rich. Every time the welfare recipient was docked money or being hit, they took a step backwards. Every time the rich got a wee bit ahead, they took a step forward. There was no room inside the gym, it was disastrous. The welfare recipient was against the wall; well, meanwhile the rich now have room. They kept on walking. This is humanity? This is equality? Please, for the sake of the people of Manitoba, do not enforce this bill. They will bring you a lot more harm than it does good. This bill is not packed with common sense, this bill is not packed with anything, this bill is already packed just to make money, and that is it. You do not give a care of the cost to human equality. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Mr. Juba, thank you very much for your presentation. Mr. Juba, there are some questions.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you very much, Mr. Juba, for your presentation, and I do want to indicate that it sounds like you have had a hard row to hoe over the last 18 years.

Mr. Juba: Out of everything that has happened to me, I do not feel bad for my life. I give a lot of thanks for my life. It moulded me to what I am now, if there is anything I owe a lot of thanks to, I guess.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Chairperson, I am pleased to hear that. It sounds to me like the kind of volunteer work and the kind of things that you have given back to the community through your volunteerism have helped make things a little easier, and I do want to commend you for that. You sound very proud of that commitment in helping others. I think that is one of the things that we really believe can help people feel better about themselves when they can give something to someone else too. So I just want to commend you and thank you for your volunteer commitment. I wish you well and success in the future.

Mr. Juba: We will not have volunteers. Most volunteers are basically nonemployed. We will not have volunteers. The situation with health care, foster parents are already praying for money because there is no money. What happens if their intake, because of the bill, rises up by 300 percent? There is a mass problem.

With the schools, there was a great thing in the schools that they did not have enough money for textbooks, so the private companies can come in and subsidize it. Where are these students supposed to go if we do not have money for schools? Where are these children supposed to go if we do not have money? On the street? This is humanity? This is our government?

Mr. Martindale: Madam Chairperson, I would like to ask Mr. Juba if he could tell us approximately how many hours a week of volunteer work do you do.

Mr. Juba: At one point, Sir, when I was helping out places like Beat the Street and other places, I was working anywhere from 60 to 70. At one position I actually slept in the office.

Mr. Martindale: That is quite amazing. I would like to ask you if your friends who might be on social assistance, if they volunteer as well, and do you think it is just some people or most people volunteering?

* (2030)

Mr. Juba: Lots of people, basically, volunteer for all kinds of various reasons. We volunteer to pick up skills. We volunteer to pick up friends. When you have nothing, even volunteerism looks good. Roughly of my friends on social assistance, I am saying roughly about maybe 45 to 55 percent are volunteers and do it faithfully. Beat the Street, other organizations, especially the Society of SOS was all built by volunteers.

They were common-sense solutions to problems. Mr. Martindale, this is not a common-sense solution. This is forced labour; that is all it is. I would appreciate, Mr. Martindale, if you look at me; you do not smile enough. Thank you.

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Juba, you did comment on that once before in your presentation, and I apologize to you, although perhaps it would have been more appropriate for us to have cried when we heard your statement that as an asthmatic you were sent to work in a sawmill. You were making a good point, and perhaps we responded in the wrong manner.

Mr. Juba: This is happening all over the place as not even an asthmatic. I am seeing people with various reasons, they cannot do jobs, are being sent into these jobs. Then when they call up the counsellor or whatever the case may be, they are told they cannot handle the program. This is after two years they are trying to get into the position where they could work. You are simply discarded and kept on going.

I have worked with one person, an individual who was quite suicidal at one time, went for three years going through all kinds of different programs so he could have a shot at a work program. This person's legs were very sore. He was fairly arthritic. They put him in a store. Then when he could not do it, he was told he did not want to work.

This is happening all around you. This is not something to be cried upon. This is not something to be felt sorry for, this is something to be done with. This is something to be solved. You can feel sorry for it all you want, but it is not going to get the problem solved. We must

approach this thing with very common sense and programs that work. If you install someone back their pride, dignity and self-esteem and give them a fair chance, the rest takes care of itself. It is common sense, but there does not seem to be common sense practised in this bill.

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Juba, I find one of the incredible statements that you made in your presentations that you have been through seven different programs designed to try and make the transition from welfare to work. I know one of the concerns about programs that are using people's social allowance to put them into placements in the jobs or the workforce in the private sector is retention, that once the money or the number of weeks are passed and the program is finished and the workplace is supposed to sort of pick up that person on their own payroll on an ongoing basis, that that is when the program stops working. That is when the person often finds themselves back looking for another job and off social allowance.

So I am interested in knowing if that has been any of your experience and if you can tell us a little bit about some of those seven programs that you have been through.

Mr. Juba: One of the programs, I was put as a screen printer. I like art. I am quite good with art. As soon as it came down to the crunch where they had to pay me, instead of the program, I was simply fired. I am dyslexic. One of the reasons was I could not read English and French, but they only had English screen printing there.

In another program I was in, I was put into a store in St. Boniface. It was a full-time position after the program. When the store owner found out he could not hire someone full time, I was fired because I showed up three minutes late.

In another instance, in a restaurant with the hospitality and tourism industry, I was let go one placement because I could not read the writing that the orders were handed to me on, because they were handwritten. All I needed them to do was print it. This was not worth their time. I was discarded.

Employers are not screened. The client has no say. The employer can basically say that he came in to the office and he said this and this, and that is all it takes. The person is kicked off, and they have to go for another two years.

The role of the workers is not adequate. The workers are taking the employer's truth over the role of the applicant all the time. The applicant has no say. I myself, with all my volunteerism, can do counselling, although at my last placement they told me they wanted to have me as a bus boy, and that is all I could ever do. This is not uncommon with most people who go into many, many programs. They are told that you are this way, that you will never grow past this way. There are many of us that prove it wrong constantly on a daily basis, but we are still looked at as a form of we are lazy, we are this, we are that, and we are not.

Ms. Cerilli: I appreciate you describing the job that you had at the printer and at the hospitality program and at the store in St. Boniface. Can you tell me what program that those were through? Which placement program or agency?

Mr. Juba: One was through an organization called WASO. One was through an organization called Vocational Rehab. The other was through hospitality and tourism in Manitoba, and the other one was a government program. If there was a position opening up, it was for people I believe under 25. For full-time employment, they would subsidize. I found especially with the programs for the disabled right now, there is nothing out there. Some of the workers, in their mandate they only have to see you twice a year, so you can keep on going and you can keep on hounding. Nothing is done. When you cut off someone's ability to work, when you cut off all their accessibles to work, and call them lazy and blame them for what the rich are getting as tax breaks, blame them for that money, where is the common sense in that? Where is the dignity? Where is the humanity? There is nothing, especially for the First Nations people. They have taken enough, I am sorry. They have taken enough of the stereotyping and the prejudice, which is complete lies.

If you look around the small rural communities, especially within Manitoba, prejudice

exists, extreme amounts of it. I myself find this appalling, and all this bill is doing is fueling it and fueling it and you want more and you want more. You are going to deal with tons of homeless; you are going to deal with people who are starving on the streets. This is Canada? Or is this the United States? Are we Canadian or are we going to become the other 51st or whatever state? We seem to absorb most of their problems. And how can a government say it has Manitoba's best interest at heart when they are fueling this and pushing this? Also, with the free trade issue costing jobs, with the NAFTA issue costing more jobs, and now the poor are to blame?

There is no dignity in this. There is no nothing in this.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much, Mr. Juba, for your presentation.

Mr. Juba: Thank you.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: The next presenter is Deborah Graham, private citizen.

Welcome, Deborah. Do you have written copies for distribution? Please proceed.

Ms. Deborah Graham (Private Citizen): I am going to beg the Chair to have a little patience with me. I do make some references to Bill 36 as I realize there is a commonality between this and Bill 40, and it is part of my experience.

Okay, 1996 will always remain in my memory as the year that the provincial government launched its assault on welfare rights, education, health care, organized labour and Manitoba Telephone System employees as they privatized MTS. I will remember how the question of workfare brought to mind the work camps of the 1930s. It took the Second World War to lift this cycle of impoverishment. The generations that survived the Depression and the war struggled hard to put into effect a system of welfare rights, unemployment insurance benefits, organized and unorganized labour rights, seniors pensions and medicare. They won these rights in order that our generations and sub-

sequent generations would not have to suffer the same social injustices.

We are not living through a depression, but this government still has a work-camp mentality. In our time, many of us have worked to resist having these social programs slashed by both provincial and federal governments. Over and over again, we have suffered some bitter defeats. We continue to struggle for the same reasons our parents' generations struggled: to leave a legacy of a social safety net and services for our children and generations to come.

* (2040)

In October 1996, I read a presentation regarding Bill 36 to a committee of provincial government and the opposition. At that time, I accused the provincial government of poor bashing. I did that for two reasons. I wanted them to wake up and listen. I also wanted to challenge the government to show more compassion and reason than was inherent in Bill 36. Today, I am not as naive. The hearings on Bill 36 were merely a part of a process. In the minds of the government, Bill 36 was already a fait accompli. Those of us who attended the proceedings viewed the passage of Bill 36 as a horrible breach of social justice.

Before I discuss the more objectionable subsections of Bill 40, I would like to tell this committee of my attempt to break from welfare dependency. Twenty years ago, I suddenly developed the symptoms of schizophrenia. More recently, the diagnosis was changed to schizoaffective disorder. For 20 years, despite ongoing auditory hallucinations, I was expected to prove myself worthy both in job preparation programs and in on-the-job training. None of the programs or jobs led to valued job skills. I did everything but jump through hoops to become more employable. During this period, I had either been overdosed on medications, in a chemical straitjacket, or at a lower dose that allowed me to at least sleep at night and pretend to be normal.

The smart employer does not harass employees. I was surprised how many employers do harass and belittle their employees. I was even more surprised at how many employees

harassed me because I was different. In addition to having to fulfill my job description duties, I often found myself performing an endless variety of irksome or unpleasant duties that would normally be shared by other employees. Again and again, I was told by employers to be grateful to have a position as there were always 10 more unemployed who would be willing to do my job. The onus was on me to prove myself, never on the employer to provide a congenial, safe employment situation or even follow through with employment skills training promises.

I was once placed in a sheltered workshop. I was told that if I wanted more help, I would have to prove myself in the workshop. I was paid 35 cents a day and a bus pass. I became an over-achiever and I was given 55 cents a day. The money for my labour and that of others went mainly to pay the supervisors.

Because of my many failed attempts to become gainfully employed, I was designated as unreliable. I wonder how reliable those who labelled me as such would have been if they were bombarded with hallucinations as they attempted to fulfill their duties. I knew I was not lazy. I brought the employer all the enthusiasm I could muster, along with a strong work ethic.

I had been proud at age 13 to apply and receive my social insurance number. I had fully intended to use it as often and as long as possible. I do not want workfare, I want employment. In order to break my dependency on welfare, I would have to have a salary that would cover the cost of my medications and provide for me more than the subsistence of a welfare cheque. It would have to be employment where I could learn and use valued work skills.

Workfare participants could be forced to work for less than minimum wage in positions formerly performed by salaried employees. This government boasts of having created lower unemployment without mentioning the numbers of underemployed and working poor who are forced, despite all of their efforts, to rely on food banks. Bill 40 is a punitive bill. It punishes both addicts and parents. It provides more sticks than carrots.

When I mentioned that I was going to prepare a presentation for these hearings, I was quickly asked why taxpayers should be expected to pay addicts. In reply, I said that I want Manitoba to remain a compassionate province. In my experience with people having either narcotic or alcohol addictions, I have learned that you cannot simply program an addiction away. These people are not just at risk because of employability issues. They have an illness that if not treated with patience and compassion will lead to their deaths. They may comply and enter a program, but what if they fall down? Will there be a second chance?

They have to see an end in sight, an end to poverty and addiction. If forced off welfare, because they have been unable to comply, there is a good chance that they will die homeless. Addicts that have received treatment will always be potential addicts. They will still carry the emotional baggage that led into addiction as you cannot simply program an addiction away once recovered. You cannot simply program an ex-addict into employability.

Not only does Bill 40 expect to program addiction away, it expects to program parents into parents. Most welfare parents know what is expected of a parent. What they lack on welfare is the economic empowerment to provide adequately for their children. The parenting programs section of this bill reminds me of a project that was tried after aboriginal people were forced onto reserves. They were told: you would become farmers. Admittedly, they were given seeds, but they were not provided with the tools to farm. The winter came and they starved.

People note that their children need adequate housing, nutritious meals, clothing suitable for the season and a loving home environment. It is no longer a secret that we are living in the child poverty capital of Canada. Now, in addition to welfare, families living below the poverty line are living with the threat of their subsistence being taken away.

Subsection 5.8(1) is not only patronizing, it is heavy-handed and bureaucratic. This subsection implies that parents would not provide their children the necessities of life if they had the cash. If it was not for the precious tax

credits given directly to parents, my daughter now an adult, fully employed and married, would have died of hypothermia before I could get a bureaucratic administrator to budge on the issue of a warm winter coat.

I am unimpressed with the slick ads of this government as it promises that workfare would be a hand-up, not a hand-out. I only hope that the taxpaying voters do not fall for this rhetoric. Some people, no matter what you say, will look for the welfare abuser. It is ironic that welfare recipients are viewed as the reason for the tax burdens of the middle class and the working poor. Seldom does a taxpayer blame the large subsidies given to most national corporations that on one hand are downsizing and on the other hand are threatening to relocate if the government fails to create a favourable climate for their continued high profit, a profit that does not trickle down and create a better economic climate for Canadians.

It is demoralizing to see our government toady to the whims of corporations, while continuing to attack welfare recipients. Is it possible that the Gary Filmon government is playing up to those disgruntled taxpayers as he seeks to punish welfare recipients while entering into an election year? It takes no imagination to suggest that this government relies more on punishment than incentives to break welfare dependency. Under workfare, welfare recipients may be required to do community service in return for a welfare cheque.

One can say that Gary Filmon does community service. Gary Filmon is clearly repaid at a rate far higher than minimum wage. Single welfare recipients such as myself will be receiving far less than minimum wage for community service. I strongly suggest that, if Gary Filmon received the going welfare rate for himself and his family, would he still be prepared to continue his community service?

In conclusion, Bill 40 is as punitive as Bill 36 was in its approach to social services. This government is firmly committed to the passage of Bill 40. As was Bill 36, this legislation is fait accompli and, yes, it is another example of poor bashing.

* (2050)

Madam Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Graham.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Ms. Graham, I thank you for your presentation. I listened with interest to the comments you made about your daughter. I understand your daughter is grown now?

Ms. Graham: Yes, my daughter is fully employed. She is a manager for a HMV music store. Actually she did this because I think she saw the life that I was in was a life that she did not choose and she was self-motivating. She did not ever have any assistance of any programs when she went through high school and when she decided to become employed.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I am really pleased to hear that your daughter has succeeded. So it does mean that, even though parents sometimes have a disadvantage of being on welfare, children do succeed, and I want to commend you for the job you must have done parenting.

Ms. Graham: May I say something about my daughter? I had psychiatrists study her because they saw me and they said: what did you do? They realized that, despite my disability, she had a good home environment.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Ms. Graham, are you on the disability program for welfare?

Ms. Graham: I am on the disability program now.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Do you realize then that workfare or learnfare will not apply to you?

Ms. Graham: We have been hearing rumours to the opposite.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I want to assure you, Ms. Graham, that the disability community and those who are on the disability program within government are not going to be impacted at all by the new initiatives that are undertaken through learnfare and workfare.

So I want to reassure you and all disabled Manitobans that that is the case, and that we will be going through an extensive consultation

process to see whether, in fact, the supports that we presently have in place are the right supports for the right reasons, because I have heard lots of comments from different parts of the disability community that the way we are supporting people on social allowance with disabilities is not necessarily appropriate to their disability. So we are going to be doing broad consultation, wanting to ensure that people like you that have had experience with the social allowance system can tell us where the problems are, what the issues are, and we will have to see whether we can improve our program as a result.

So, again, we will make the commitment to you that you will be involved personally in the consultation process. We certainly will invite you to be involved. We will make note of it, and would like to hear your comments and your recommendations for how we might improve the program. Thanks.

Mr. Ashton: Madam Chairperson, I, too, want to credit your brief, and as someone who was part of the fight over MTS, I thought you put a lot of things in perspective. I remember long nights in committee hearings and the work that people put in.

I just want to ask you one question because if there is one thing that frustrates me about some of the mentality we are seeing from the government on the bill, and you pointed out, I think, some of the reasons they are doing this, it is their categorization of poor people in terms of parenting. What really frustrates me is, as an MLA who represents a northern area, there are a lot of people in my constituency who are poor, a lot of people on welfare. I get really frustrated with this categorization suggesting that people are not good parents because they are poor.

I am wondering, given your experience—not just your own experience, by the way, but in terms of others as well—if you, given this opportunity to talk to the minister and others, can maybe outline the fact that there are a lot of really courageous people out there. When I say courageous, the real courage in this society is to be poor and supporting a family, whether one is on social assistance or working poor. I mean, to my mind, there are a lot of real heroes out there. I am wondering if you can outline your experience in terms of, not just your own parenting, but other parenting situations as well.

Ms. Graham: As I said before, when I became ill and different psychiatrists knew that I had a child, they would ask to meet her to see how she was doing, and they were always very impressed. At that time, while I was raising her—from the time she was eight till the time she was 18 was the length of my illness—nobody dared question my parenting, because they would have had to take on the lunch-and-after-four program as well as the schoolteachers.

If there are no more questions.

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Environment): Madam Chairperson, I know I am not a member of this committee, but could I just ask one question for clarification? Is that allowed?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mrs. McIntosh: Thank you very much. I am feeling very moved by what you have accomplished, because I know schizophrenia very well. I know how difficult that must have been for you to raise a child successfully when you had those problems going on.

Just for clarification, I am hoping I heard it correctly, but the question I think that was asked, the commendation from the minister, was not that you successfully raised a child while poor, because I think that is a disadvantage to be poor, obviously, but it is not a disadvantage to effective relationships with children. I am thinking you are responding to having coped with a very serious mental illness and still having been able to function at a high level in terms of parenting. Is that correct?

Ms. Graham: That is correct.

Mrs. McIntosh: May I then encourage you to continue sharing how you were able to do that, particularly in the low periods, with others, so that you can serve as a role model and an assistance to other parents who love their children and wish to raise them, but when mental illness can sometimes be a really hard barrier. You maybe could be of some assistance in helping others do what you have done. Congratulations.

Ms. Graham: Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Did you have any comment?

Ms. Graham: No, I have no comments. I never thought of myself, as a parent, as a schizophrenic. Quite often, more often, I found myself thinking as a parent, as a poor parent, and how can I make ends meet.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much, Ms. Graham. Thank you for attending tonight.

The next presenter is Susan Bruce from the National Anti-Poverty Organization. Do you have written copies for distribution?

Ms. Susan Bruce (National Anti-Poverty Association): What I have and what I am saying are two different things. Just think of me as a politician. Oh, I am sorry. That might be discriminatory. Anyway.

Madam Chairperson: Okay, Ms. Bruce.

Ms. Bruce: Seeing as how I cannot afford 15 copies—the other thing I might add is that, for those of us who are vertically challenged, I realize I am the height of most 12-year-olds, this stand really does not work with my wardrobe or, at least, you know, a good portion of my body. My son is about to come on, and he is of a similar height. If you have a—

An Honourable Member: Do you want to sit down?

Ms. Bruce: Well, no, I want a stepstool, that I can actually—

An Honourable Member: We have stools.

Ms. Bruce: So is there anything for those of us who are a bit more shorter, some kind of stand, because this is for people who are a lot taller.

Mr. Ashton: Well, Madam Chairperson, we do have stools that are used in the Chamber. I am wondering if we cannot get one brought in.

Ms. Bruce: I am sure I am not the only short person who is going to be presenting.

Mr. Ashton: I have the opposite problem. You know, the mikes come this high when I stand up, so I know the feeling.

Madam Chairperson: What I would suggest then, if it is the will of the committee, can we take a five-minute break at this point in time and we will find you a stool. Is it the will of the committee? I think some people need to have a short break? Agreed? [agreed]

The committee recessed at 8:57 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 9:10 p.m.

* (2110)

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. Would the committee please come to order. Our next presenter is Susan Bruce. Would you like to go ahead, Susan?

Ms. Bruce: Yes, I would. Thank you so much for the stool. I really, really, really appreciate it. So does my son—who I hope grows, anyway.

The first thing I would like to address is that this Bill 40 has a fan in the Ku Klux Klan. The 10 points of the Ku Klux Klan, one of them is that they support workfare, and they think workfare is a good program. I think that statement says volumes in and of itself. I was under the impression that Tories were borrowing policy from the Klan but, you know, hey, if it fits, go with it or whatever.

One of the first things I would like to point out is in the press release about work requirements for able-bodied recipients. I quote: community organizations and municipalities will identify projects, then provide direct supervision of those projects such as cleaning up graffiti. This is already done by students. It is a paid job. So if it goes to workfare, somebody will be losing a job. Sidewalk and street cleaning, we also know that this is a paid position. If it is replaced by somebody who is on workfare, where does that person go? EI and then welfare.

Participating in neighbourhood crime projects, there is currently application for a grant to make this a paid position. That will also be bumped. They will go on EI, gone will be that grant, and then we will have—how many is that? Four people on welfare that will be increased to welfare. School patrols, that is crossing guards and is an area that is of a personal concern to me, because the majority of people who are employed in these positions are single moms. Assisting low-income seniors and disabled persons, that is a home care attendant. That is a trained position and a paid position.

So far, look at how many jobs have been replaced by welfare recipients now bumping somebody with a job. I want to put it on the record right now, if I am going to volunteer for a job, Mrs. Mitchelson, I would like it to be either your job or Gary Filmon's.

These are my issues with the bill. Promoting personal responsibility. I have yet to see a parent on social services that does not give their heart and life to make those kids see 18, that does not have a sense of personal responsibility. As for becoming self-sufficient on income assistance, quit making us try and run through hoops, quit dangling a carrot in front of our face and then taking a job away, and you know what, we will get there. What I see in social services again and again are obstacles, and this Bill 40 is another example of obstacles. Those are just some of the problems that I have with the bill.

I would like to go on and tell you that the big problem that I have with—now understand something. I am not new to alcoholics and addicts. It is the Scottish blood in me. You know, I hate to stereotype us Irish and Scottish. We love our booze; I will admit that. I am not an alcoholic myself, but I have friends who are and family that are. I also have family that is not. I am here to tell you, as a member of Al-Anon for the last 16 years, that forcing somebody into a treatment program does not work, and now you are forcing them into a treatment program that the waiting lists are staggering. They are just phenomenal. I have heard this again and again, that there are waiting lists. So that is one of the problems that I have.

But the biggest problem that I have with this is one that "the director or a municipality believes on reasonable grounds has an addiction problem." This is not a doctor that is determining this. This is somebody who does not even know me. Let us say, through my political activism, somebody does not like me. It could be a director of social services. It probably, most likely, is going to be a director of social services. I could be declared an alcoholic. There are no guarantees in this bill that I could not be declared an alcoholic on the whim of a director or a municipality. That is one of the first problems I have with that, and that I should take a treatment program. Okay, waiting lists aside, what about if I take the treatment program, I still have to satisfy the director or the municipality.

One of the things that I am so tired of as a welfare recipient and a single parent is the fact that everywhere I go I have to prove that somehow I am not a whore, that somehow I am not an alcoholic, somehow that I am responsible, that somehow I am constantly having to prove this. The amount of poor-bashing that goes on in this city is ridiculous, and this just adds to it. It adds to that perception. I mean, I could sit here and bury you in paperwork in study after study about people who fall through the cracks, but I do not think you would listen to me anyway. The point is that this just puts yet one more hurdle in my way.

Just before we go on, I would like this committee—as I did speak on Bill 36, and I said at the beginning of my presentation that somebody reassure all the welfare recipients in the room that they will not be audited for speaking here, that they will not be kicked off social services for speaking here, that they are allowed to have a voice here, because that is one of the biggest problems with social services. You have put so much in the hands of the directors and the social workers—and some of them are good, but a lot of them do not really care about us—that you have taken the voice away from people. That has to be addressed as soon as possible, so the people who talk here will not be penalized.

If an applicant or a dependent, you know, I think you know what the bill says, can be denied, reduced, et cetera, et cetera, just because

they have an addiction problem. It does not work. The other thing that I have a problem with, and this I have a problem especially as a parent. I have an obligation to satisfy the director or the municipality that I am participating in a parenting program. It does not say in there that I am participating in a parenting program if I am young. It says an applicant has an obligation. The problem that I have with that is a lot of the parenting programs—I have a child who is special needs. I have a son who has his own set of medical problems, and I have seen every parenting program that has gone down the pipe. Most of them do not work because they are from American men who have never felt a labour pain and have not stayed home with their children, and they wrote their thesis on this. Nobody seems to study the effectiveness of these parenting programs.

I will give you an example of that. One, two, three, magic, oh, yeah, that works. You are sitting here with an ADD child who is freaking out. You look at them go one, two, three, and then magic, they are supposed to change their behaviour. It does not work. Anybody who has spent 24 hours with a three-year-old knows it does not work. So I would like to know that these programs are actually going to come from Canadians and that they are going to come from women who have mothered, because that is the other problem I have with the majority of these parenting programs. They are sexist, they are misogynist, and they do not address the needs of parents. How dare you tell me how to parent. You are employed; I do not tell you how to parent. I would love that chance, too. Just because I am a welfare recipient, you presume I am a bad parent. I am not. I work damn hard for my kids.

When my son three years ago lost his kidney and his spleen in a car accident, I offered to give my kidney and I would have in a New York minute. I love my kids dearly, and I have yet to know a welfare mom who does not love their children dearly. I mean, that kid is going to bear my grandchildren. Of course, I am going to look after him. My main ambition in life actually is not to be employed; it is to be a grandmother. So, anyway, that aside, the other thing that I have a problem with is educational requirements.

* (2120)

Now, the majority of the training programs out there, including Taking Charge!, are make-shift at best. They are not up to professional or provincial standards. You know, I have seen so many training programs, and the jokes around the soup kitchen about them are laughable, because you cannot get a cook's certificate in three months. I might add that I did go to Taking Charge! When I told them of my situation, they sat down and somebody at Taking Charge!—I said I cannot do this because you will not be flexible with me. I was told that they were going to cut me off welfare. I went, I do not think so, and had to sit down and contact Dan Hokke [phonetic], as well as the Minister of Family Services because I was threatened.

I have a problem with having to satisfy a director, and the other problem that I have, as a parent I am speaking to you, is that now I have all of a sudden somebody else in my life who is going to administer a fund for my children. If they do it while I am in the home, I have to hope to God my kids do not eat all of their meal that day so I can get a sandwich. You call that fair? If you take them into a foster home, then, just, you know, please, shoot my mental health because obviously it is gone. Anybody who has a child, I do not think this takes rocket science to know that if you separate me from my children, I go into mourning issues, and then I cannot eat so well. I guess it is not an issue.

The other problem that I have with this is an administrator. I know downsize is a very popular thing, but you have an administrator downsizing a parent. You did not give me this job; God did. For you to sit down and downsize it, I think, is overstepping your boundaries. By putting an administrator there just because I have not taken a training program, just because I have not filled your requirements—I mean, you already have 50 or 60 hoops there—now you are going to add one more, but now it is on the condition that, if I do not go through the hoop, now you are going to cut me off while my children get an administrator. Just what my kids need, yet another bureaucrat in their lives. Those are the definite problems I have with this bill.

The other thing that I would like to add and the other problem that I have is, Mrs. Mitchelson, you asked: do you know of any deaf people who

are not—yes, deaf children, because no children are considered disabled? You still have not amended that. I know, because I have been following. Children are still not considered disabled. I am lucky. I met with you. I got some allowances. I have that wonderful title of "exceptional" put on my file, but I have so many friends out there who have ADHD kids, who have deaf kids, who have kids with cerebral palsy, and they do not have that title. Under this bill, they would have to be put in a position of working.

You know, it is as if I do not have a big enough job as a parent. Now I have to go out and do workfare too, and I have to somehow fit a disabled child in that. Again, another hoop. Really, if I had known that I was going to grow up and have to face this many hoops, I would have trained for a circus performer. It probably would have been easier.

Maybe I seem sarcastic, but after three years I was hoping somebody could offer me some hope. Call me delusional, whatever, but I was hoping that you could come up with something better than a day in the Premier's, of something for the Ku Klux Klan to support. I was hoping better for that. You seem like such a smart woman, and I am sure you are. I was hoping much better than that. I realize that I am poor, and I am an easy target. You know, I was blamed for the deficit. I never had that much money. I do not know how I spent that much money, but I was blamed for the deficit and now you want to get voted back in on my back and on my children's back. I think that is so sad. There are so much easier ways of getting back in.

I am a member of PETAS, People Empowering Themselves Against the System. We are nonpartisan. I do have my issues with the NDP. I am not a Communist, nor am I a card-carrying member of the Liberal Party, and I am not a PC. I am simply a mother. When it comes down to this, that is what I am. This bill does not make sense. You do not have to be a lawyer to know that this bill does not make sense. I could bury you in studies, but you also do not have to be a lawyer to know that workfare does not make sense. I do not want to bump somebody's job. There are two reasons why people work; everyone knows it. One is to sustain themselves financially; the other is for an identity. We volunteer now. The only people I

know of on the welfare rolls who do not volunteer are so scared that if they do volunteer something is going to happen to their cheque, and forcing them is only going to reinforce that fear.

The majority of people I know on welfare are scared so badly that it is unbearable to live with. I think it is an act of courage that they get up every day and that they do live. I understand how much Bill 36 and Bill 40 has taken away people's voices, and that should not be. It really should not be.

The next time you are going to draft a legislation, invite me down for coffee. I do not mind. I will sit there and talk legislation with you. So will the whole PETAS group. We promise we will not use any four-letter words, except "ducky" maybe. Well, that is five. We promise we will not be sarcastic. We will even dress up and put aftershave on if that is what you require, because we would love to sit down and do a consultation. We have never been asked. We could tell you on the street what works and what does not work. We can because we see it. Statistics, they can go either way. We both know that, but we see it. Thank you. That is all I wanted to say. I would like to be a part of that consultation process, because children need to be included.

I would like to remind you and end on this note. When workfare went in in Quebec, there was a woman who was put in that workfare program whose child was disabled with a similar disability that my child has. They made her go into workfare. She lost it. She had to sit down and take this child to a relative so often they refused to take the child, and it was just so she could go to workfare to make a cheque. She tried to drown her child and herself. The child died. She lived. I would like to add that when it went to trial and she was charged with murder, the judge, and thank God for Quebec judges, came in here and said: where is the Minister of Social Services? Get them in here right now. I want the Department of Social Services now. The department of social services came in and they were found to be 50 percent at fault. I do not want to see the same thing happening in Manitoba.

In Ontario, when this went through, a workfare program went through, there was a man, again, a similar disability to my daughter, they had him on CTV. It went all national. They put his child in foster care so he could be on a workfare program. I would like to add, that cost the Ontario government \$100,000 a year.

Quebec and New Brunswick have dumped workfare because it did not work. It costs a lot. Every time you police me, it costs how many bureaucrats? Dan, you can tell me because I know you know. It costs oodles of bureaucrats. I want a job. I do not want to employ—sorry, Dan—a whole raft of people. I already could have a ministry of Susan Bruce with the amount of professionals that are involved with my life. I do not need any more. Thank you.

* (2130)

Madam Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, Ms. Bruce.

Ms. McGifford: I want to make two comments and then quickly ask you a question, Ms. Bruce. You asked the minister for assurance that nobody would be targeted who made a presentation tonight. I just wanted to give you assurance that the NDP certainly would not target anybody or cut anybody who made a presentation tonight. We believe in the freedom of speech. We do not necessarily agree with everybody, with everything that everybody says, but we do believe that people have the right to speak their minds.

The other comment was, as a former director of Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre, I have met a lot of mums on welfare. I agree with you, that almost without exception they are fine mothers. As your MLA I have seen you and your children at public events. I think you are doing a wonderful job. I have been very touched by your mothering, so congratulations on that.

What I wanted to ask you about was addictions services for women. You talked about the staggering waiting lists. I am assuming that you were talking about staggering waiting lists, period. I know that there is a very lengthy waiting list for services for women. You also talked about sexism and misogyny. I mention that because I think women need very specialized services. I think women become addicted for different reasons than men do, and

continue to drink or take narcotics for different reasons, and that services need to be specialized when it comes to women.

I wonder if you are aware of programs that are there especially for women and also allow women to bring their children with them. Is there anything in the community that you are aware of?

Ms. Bruce: No, I am not aware of anything, and I was also speaking of women. I mean, I personally have dated someone who had to be in an addiction program, and if I might be so bold as to say was a woman. I realize that outs me to the world, but that is okay, my daughter would have done it anyway. She keeps no secrets. She could not get in; she could not get in; she could not get in. At one point, she was five minutes late for an appointment and they told her, no, I am sorry, we did have a spot for you, but it is gone. It is a common occurrence. It is a very common occurrence.

The other thing that I would like to add is I have a brother who is a diabetic. He was picked up in Calgary by the police force, who assumed he was drunk. He was not.

I personally have drug reversals. I, at one point, was at a party and somebody gave me some homemade wine. Instantly, I lost all coordination. If anybody had seen me would have assumed I was drunk. After all, I smelt like alcohol, and all I was having was a drug reversal because that happened for the next eight hours. If that had of happened at let us say four hours later, and I ended up having to be in a social worker's office, all of a sudden, I am an addict.

If you are epileptic, you could be deemed an addict just by the way you are looking. Having somebody who is just a director of a municipality deem you an addict, well, they are not doctors. They do not know. They have not done the medical tests. They have not even consulted with the family or the partners. They are just assuming on what? That you come into an office smelling. Like what is this being based on? Nobody seems to be able to tell me what this is being based on.

You know, I have a daughter who is schizophrenic, and sometimes on certain medi-

cations at the age of five, she looked like she was drunk. Some of those medications, they will give her a certain odour in her breath that is rather repugnant, and it could be assumed that she was on drugs. There is nothing to say, and we all know in this room behind me, do we not, that the appeal process sucks in this province because it does. The amount of cases that are lost is stagnating. You go in there, and you say, yes, but I have a case, and this is not fair. Oh, well. Because you know why, and I tell you why the welfare appeal process does not work, how many welfare recipients are on that board? Not very many.

I will go on that board. I have a few volunteers behind me who would also go on that board because not only do we know the system, we have seen the system and we live the dream everyday. We can tell you what works and what does not work. We could tell you what is a case and what is not a case, can we not?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thanks very much, Susan, for your presentation. I want to, at the outset, also indicate that our party certainly would not condone penalizing anyone for speaking publicly. I think you would agree that you did make a public presentation on Bill 36 four or five years ago, and as a result of that presentation, of course, we have had the opportunity to meet. I know you call Dan by first name. I know that Dan has had the ability to ensure that you have access to programming from time to time that you need and support for your children. So I do not think you would consider him one of those bureaucratic directors that does not have the best interests of individuals at heart. So I just wanted to make that comment.

I do not believe you have been penalized in any way as a result of speaking publicly. I can guarantee you that, although you may not agree with some of the things that we are doing, our party and our government and the bureaucracy will not treat you in any way that would be disrespectful. So I wanted to give you my personal commitment. I do want to indicate that I understand, after having met with you and certainly knowing some of the circumstances around your children, that you do an excellent job as a parent. I wanted to commend you for that.

I do want to, though, because I would have thought the member for Osborne (Ms. McGifford) would have known that we did, within the last couple of years, institute some programming for women and their children at the St. Norbert Foundation. There was significant funding that was made available to the St. Norbert Foundation, and women and their children can be admitted for addiction programming and treatment.

I also do want to indicate that, as we made the announcement around addictions, there has been another \$500,000 added to the budget that will be going to AFM and to St. Norbert Foundation for programming. I hear the issues that you raise around women and children, and we will build upon what has happened at St. Norbert Foundation as we move forward. So I just wanted to put that on the record for some clarification.

I could certainly get you some information on that program, if you would like. [interjection] Okay, thanks.

Ms. Bruce: Would you have put that program in if you had not been shamed by the court challenge program on that woman with solvent abuse, and that going to the Supreme Court? For 10 years before that, the Native Addictions on Pritchard had lobbied for a program, and it was not put in play.

I am sorry that it took a tragedy, and I am sorry that it also took you coming rather forcibly and aggressively against somebody who was poor to do that.

So take it easy on my son. No questions about the NDP or the Tories, please.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I do want to indicate to you, Susan, that you are very articulate, and if you should so choose to run for political office, I wish you every success in achieving a seat, possibly becoming the Minister of Family Services or the Premier, as you indicated in your opening comments. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Our next presenter is Tabitha Stephenson, private citizen.

Ms. Bruce: Tabitha Stephenson is my daughter. She just was not feeling well. What she will be

doing is giving a brief next week when she is a bit more up to it, just submitting one.

Joseph Stephenson will be next.

* (2140)

Madam Chairperson: Ms. Bruce, I am just asked here for some clarification. Did you say you will be submitting a written brief from your daughter?

Ms. Bruce: She will be submitting, not me. She is writing it, but we have to wait till she is a bit more stable. Once in a while, she has problems with her sleep, and currently this week she is having problems with her sleep. So, because of it, her schizophrenia is acting up, so once I get her back on her schedule—she loves this, I might add. She spoke on a forum on health and dumbfounded all of the facilitators there. They could not answer her, and they did not expect something like that out of a 13-year-old. So, yes, she will submit something.

Madam Chairperson: Just for your information, this committee so far is only scheduled to meet tomorrow morning.

Ms. Bruce: She is not going to speak. What she is going to do is submit a brief, because we realize that.

Madam Chairperson: She may have to perhaps submit it to the Minister of Family Services if it is coming after this committee has finished its work.

Ms. Bruce: Okay.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you.

The next presenter is Mr. Joseph Stephenson, who is here representing Youth Against Poverty. Mr. Stephenson, please proceed.

Mr. Joseph Stephenson (Youth Against Poverty): My name is Joseph and I am an activist around child poverty issues. My mom is Susan Bruce, so all of you know that by now, who has taught me everything I know about the welfare system and workfare. The only thing I know about workfare is that it screws people up a lot. It screws up a lot of people. If my

mom gets a job, she will be taking someone else's job because there are not enough jobs. My mom is only volunteering. Workfare is not a job, not real jobs and I hope you all realize that. It makes people poorer. I do not think workfare should be introduced at all.

Bill 40 says mothers can be forced into a parenting program. I do not like this parenting program. I love my mom so much I do not want to be separated from her. I do not need an administrator; I need my mother. I might just be a kid but I know what is not fair. This does not seem fair. I hope all of you realize that.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much, Mr. Stephenson.

Mr. Stephenson: You are welcome.

Madam Chairperson: Are there any questions? Well, thank you very much for your presentation. We appreciated you coming out tonight to talk to us.

Our next presenter is Darrall Rankin, the Communist Party of Canada-Manitoba. Is Darrall Rankin here?

Floor Comment: I do not think so.

Madam Chairperson: Darrall Rankin. His name will be dropped to the bottom of the list. The next presenter is Bev Le Blanc, private citizen. Is Bev here?

Floor Comment: She is ill.

Madam Chairperson: Her name then will drop to the bottom of the list. Natalie Encontre, private citizen.

Ms. Natalie Encontre (Private Citizen): Yes, I am here, but my husband is going to go first.

Madam Chairperson: Is there leave of the committee to permit Mr. Encontre to do his presentation now? [agreed] Mr. Encontre, you are welcome to come up and make your presentation. Excuse me, could you use the mike.

Mr. Eric Encontre (Private Citizen): I first got to look at the amendment to Bill 40 this

afternoon, so I had a chance to read it. My wife is involved with PETAS and Susan Bruce and a lot of the other people that are here. So I have not had time to really sort of think about this, but I can tell you a few things from my own personal experience.

I am a 48-year-old father of a two-and-a-half-month-old baby that I am very proud of, and I am finding that I am having to raise my infant and my 10-year-old daughter on social services. It was not a choice I made. I was in an automobile accident in '94. I sustained a head injury. I went to the City of Winnipeg Social Services for help after 10 days of passing in and out of consciousness in a seizure condition with my teeth knocked out. I was in bad shape. Prior to that happening, I worked as a health care worker for Medox, straight Medox. Over the years, I have done all kinds of public work, although I am not a public person.

I find it very difficult to talk to you people, but I would like to tell you a few things about what I perceive this bill to be. I am not a lawyer. I do not know what the implications of the wording of this amendment are. I do not, I really do not. I can tell you that my wife has to go to a program, a WIN program, I think it is, to get something like \$65 a week, which is basically her milk money now, because my wife has hepatitis C and, as a consequence, cannot breast-feed our baby, so she has to give her formula. The formula works out to, I think, about \$10 every four days, and we are given in social services—I do not have my budget in front of me to show you, but it vacillates back and forth. It is really an interesting process.

What I experienced about social services in this province is in the most reluctant way. I was a person who was a victim of an accident, a drunk driver running a light and shearing the front of my van off. I ended up with a head injury. I ended up in the emergency ward at Misericordia Hospital. I got a cursory examination and was shoved out the door at three o'clock in the morning in the middle of the winter without keys to my apartment, without knowing who I was or where to go. Fortunately, a friend of mine found me and took care of me, got my keys back from the Autopac compound halfway across the city. He had to come up with the taxi

fare for that. I ended up living in my apartment on what amounted to a \$75-a-week income from MPIC, because the City of Winnipeg did not investigate my medical records which I signed a waiver for and basically denied me benefits for a two-year period of time. You would think that, in two years time after an accident like this, you would get the medical reports necessary to get the medical treatment going, but the fact of the matter is that I had no such medical care.

It was the City of Winnipeg's judiciary responsibility to take care of me in my head-injured condition. I told them that I was not capable of continuity of consciousness. I could not figure out what happened to me, what I could do about it. I could not take care of very fundamental things like bathing and feeding myself. Needless to say, I was in really bad shape and barely survived it. Now, after a two-year period of time, I ended up going to see—I saw the lawyer and unemployment insurance and on and on. I was run through five levels of the government in this condition to get whatever benefits were supposed to be available. What I discovered after a two-year period of time of trying to live on \$75 a week, which, I might add, was not consistently paid to me because MPIC withheld these funds for a periods as long as five weeks at a time, if you have ever tried to live on \$75 a week, when you have an electrical bill to pay and a telephone bill to pay—I never did pay my rent—you are really pressed to figure out how you are going to give yourself enough nourishment to stay alive.

* (2150)

Okay, so I had a beef with the City of Winnipeg, and I went to their appeal process. It was an absolute kangaroo court. The document that I presented to them, which they sent back to me stamped with their official approval, when I went to the appeal process, I discovered that they had not read it. Not only had they not read it, but they were dealing with an entirely different issue. My social services worker, Bev Richards, who is obviously a burn victim—she is covered with scars from head to toe—had no sympathy for my condition because I am what you call an invisible disability.

So here I am with a lawyer and Autopac agent, and we are sitting in my lawyer's office, and the Autopac agent is going to pick up a chequebook and write a cheque. Name a number, he says. Well, the fact of the matter is, what do I know about it? I did not know the extent of my injuries, neither did the doctors. In fact, I am still waiting for a second neurological report from a Dr. Stanbrook [phonetic], and it is five and a half years ago. We are talking February 1994.

I am suing. I have a lawyer who is suing MPIC for some kind of a settlement, but the fact of the matter is is that what I discovered was that the City of Winnipeg should have referred me, based on medical information, to the province for provincial social assistance.

I went to the province, and the province sent me back to the City of Winnipeg. The City of Winnipeg sent me back to the province, and I went to Legal Aid. I had Mel Holley who was a representative for Legal Aid represent me and had me go to meetings for well over a year, several years, in fact, gathering all of this information up, gathering up all the data, all of the information that I did not know about, because I did not create those documents, and I was not in any condition to read them when I received them.

This huge pile of data gets collected by Mel Holley, and then he, after over a year, a long period of time, turns around and says to me: this is the case that we have. You did not get your benefits from the City of Winnipeg because of their nonreturn policy.

Their nonreturn policy is that if you do not return within a certain period of time you are automatically cut off arbitrarily without any notification by mail, which according to Mel Holley and Gary, the lawyer for Legal Aid at that time, said was essentially illegal, that if you are going to cut somebody off welfare, you bloody well notify them. You cannot get on welfare without a residence. Do you realize that? If you do not have a place to live, you cannot get help. I have seen people walking to the welfare office. Believe me there is nothing I hate worse than walking into the City of Winnipeg welfare

office or the province's welfare office. It is a humiliating, degrading experience, okay?

I went through five years of pandering to all of these professional people that were supposed to help me. I was given a physiotherapy program, Autopac MPIC's job hardening program. I was sent to Physiotherapy Works at Fort Garry Place. Stephanie Roberecki [phonetic] was my therapist. Wonderful therapist. I was in bad shape. I was all hunched over and everything, had terrible posture. I had been eating Tylenol 3s or 222s to the point where it was starting to affect my behaviour, and I was just in a lot of pain. I had a mother dying of cancer. I had my friend Monty Marks [phonetic] that used to live just down the street here that I was taking care of. He is a quadriplegic that I cared for at one time, and we became personal friends.

A whole lot of the people that I was caring for at the time of my accident are dead. I can name some names: Kelly Hosay [phonetic], Monty Marks [phonetic], Paul LaJeune [phonetic], on and on. These are people that I was caring for. I was not getting paid for it. The government was not slipping me a cheque every month to go and help these people and see that they got medical care, proper cleaning, being fed, having their apartment cleaned up. I saw too many people during this last five-year period of time that I knew personally that were dependent totally, 24 hours a day, on government care, the so-called fiduciary responsibility which is supposed to imply the care provided by a benevolent parent. I do not see the Social Services department as being in any way a benevolent parent.

Let me give you another example of what can happen to you. Here I am, I am going to this physiotherapist, and she is doing good work for me. I have to work hard for it. It starts off at five days a week, and I cannot do it. I am in too rough shape. Not only that, I am trying to live on \$75 a week and you cannot go and pump iron and run around a track and do exercises and get massages and heat treatments and all these different kinds of therapies and everything if you are not eating properly. I was riding my mountain bike from where I was living on Furby Avenue to the Fort Garry Hotel there. It was 35

below zero, and I am riding a mountain bike. I was not provided with any transportation.

MPIC provides a wealthy middle class individual with a vehicle as long as you can fork out the money ahead of time for this, right? They will provide it for you. I found out that my MPIC payments were subsidizing people like my doctor. If he got in an accident, he was given a percentage of his income, but I was not because I had a much lower income.

There are lots of things that start to appear to me to be really fishy about what is going on in terms of the administration of social services. I have met a lot of poor people who have gone through a lot of crises similar to mine.

Here I am, I am going to a physiotherapist, I am getting angina, and I am telling her—well, she is an employee of both myself and my lawyer and MPIC. So she writes in a report and one copy goes to MPIC, and the other copy goes to me and my lawyer. This is supposed to satisfy this mutual understanding that we have, but no mention is made of my angina. The pains are getting more difficult. I have MPIC threatening me with noncompliance, that I have no case unless I go and pump iron for these people, right, and I am not in any shape to do it. I am not eating properly, and God knows I have got enough of a burden with all of the other people that I am trying to take care of. It is not working, okay. So what ends up happening is that I have a massive coronary.

Yes, I fired J. D. Hanson [phonetic] and I fired Ms. Roberecki [phonetic], right, because those people were doing absolutely nothing for me. They were wonderful at patronizing me. They came to my door to patronize me. God knows, a fortune has been spent on having bureaucrats, public servants patronize me, and I am not interested in being patronized. I am a very private person, you know.

I have a tremendous respect for the Legislative Assembly for due process in government and law. I like to think that the average Canadian citizen is a moral person, a person with deep sensitivity and concern and commitment, right. Hey, we are all here to do, what, we are here to raise our family so that the future generation

reflects at least some of our values, hopefully. But my experience with the administration of things like this amendment, it is almost farcical to me.

You people really have to talk to the ones that are affected by your policies. I would like to meet the person who wrote the bill. I would like to talk to this person and say: hello, wake up, please talk to me, are you a lawyer, a politician, who are you? Because if it did not affect me directly, like every other citizen, let us say 80 percent of us are doing just bloody great. We have homes and cars. Our kids are getting an education and Canada is going forward, okay. I do not have any complaint with that. My complaint is with the people that are being marginalized in our society and people that have to go through the crap that I have gone through. Believe me, it was not pleasant to try to get an intelligent conversation going with any number of people that I have had to deal with.

I phoned you, Bonnie, a few times and never got connected somehow. I would have liked to have had a conversation with you about how the whole thing works. Because when you are in a situation like me, I have a discontinuity of consciousness, I can sit here and I can talk to you and I can be very eloquent, but the fact of the matter is 10 minutes from now, I will not remember what the hell I said to you, okay. That is my disability, apart from having a heart condition. So what you are getting from me is spontaneous. It is coming off the tip of my tongue. I could go on and on about personal suffering that I have gone through while supposedly under the fiduciary care of social services.

I will give you an example. This is a cute one. My mother is dying of cancer. She has a little bit of money that my father left her to take care of her in her old age. I get in this accident and I am in bad shape; I cannot pay my debts. The funny thing about poverty is that when you are poor, there are people in our society who make a point of preying on you. If you do not think that is true, let me wake you up. I have been physically attacked. I have been robbed. I have had articles stolen, lots of vandalism, no end of harassment, none of which ever occurred to me before I was in that shape, because I am the kind of person that come hell or high water,

law or no law, if you tread too hard on me, I am going to tread right back on you. You know, in that sense, I am an aggressive person. That is why I like to be a private person, because when people invoke my wrath, right, they have a problem on their hands. I have got a streak in me of a scrapper, you know, and I never was in life. My friends, the people who know me, have always seen me as basically being a marshmallow, right, but they have never seen me angry. This whole process makes me very angry.

I listened to most of the people here, like PETAS, for instance, and I think it is funny kind of name, People Empowering Themselves Against the System. What the hell does that really mean? What does it mean to power yourself against the system? We are the system, folks. You and me, we are the system, you know. We pay taxes and we have expectations of our government and our public people, and we want the very best service from them. We want conscience. We want sensitivity and, believe me, the people on the bottom are not getting it.

* (2200)

I constantly heard bureaucrats say to me, oh, you have fallen through the cracks. Well, listen, it is not a crack, it is a canyon, right? It will swallow up anybody who does not have an education, who does not have language skills, who cannot afford a damn stamp to write a letter to their MLA or their Ombudsman, or even knows that there is an Ombudsman.

Have you ever tried to find the appeal board office during an appeal? That was cute. Here I have to go to this appeal and I cannot find it. It is there, but it is not easy to find. It is just one of those little annoying things.

I have to make another point, and I am right in the middle of this, it is not over. My mother passed away. She succumbed to her cancer and she died. She had some money, like I said, that she wanted to leave myself and my four older sisters. Now if you are on social services and you receive some funds—I am not even talking an inheritance; I am talking about your dying mother wants to give you some money before

she dies to help you out with your problems, you have to declare this income.

If you declare your income, let us say you get a windfall, you get a hundred grand or something, it drops in your lap. Okay, well, you do not need to be on welfare anymore do you? You have that kind of money, you should be able to make a start, right? The fact of the matter is that if it is a lot of money, you have a chance. If it is \$10,000, \$20,000, you are at risk because if you declare this money you will be held off welfare during that period of time that you would have had to live on the same income as you have on welfare, with a difference, the difference being you have to pay your own utilities. You have to pay your own gas.

Believe me, if you think that is insignificant, compare the two and you will find out that you are not going to make it. Okay. So I felt terribly threatened. Here I am. I have a new family. My wife is pregnant and I am going to try to go off welfare. Take this \$2,000 that my mother has given me and try to start up with the disabilities that I have and the health problems that my wife has. Forget it. It ain't happening, right? I am not an idiot. I have lived here most of my life. I am not totally naive. I am a very naive person in many respects, but as naive as I am, I went to Africa and did volunteer work in Botswana doing direct-feeding programs and so on. Now I got involved up north in the hydroelectric projects and so on and so forth. I know what is going on as far as it pertains to affecting my life, okay, and my expectations of what living in Manitoba means, but the fact of the matter is that what happened to me was I got some money but it was not a lump sum. A few handy \$10,000. Let us say I have got \$10,000 on my hands, and I am on welfare. Well, what do I do with it?

I will tell you something. Right off the bat, you are going to discover that if you have \$10,000 in your hand there are debts that you have to pay. Obligations of conscience, right? People that have helped you out, that need help, and you are now in a position to do it and it would be immoral not to, so what do you do? Well, you take care of things by priority as you can, right, and, hey, hope that maybe there is something left for you at the other end. That is where I am fine. As a single man I do not have

any trouble doing that. I could give away everything I ever earned in my life for other people and still make it as long as I have got my health and as long as I have can think straight. Okay.

The fact of the matter is that I am not in that position anymore. I cannot function the way I used to. I would like nothing better than to go back into private homes and do hospital staff relief and stuff like that. I loved doing that work. I loved taking care of people who need me and appreciate me. I was getting paid \$7 an hour flat rate and working up to 93 hours a week. That is a hell of a lot of tax money to throw into the system, and then at the other end, when I am at the receiving end of the assistance, what happens to me? Well, it is really interesting.

I moved my family out to Altamont, Manitoba. My wife and I have a disagreement, because my sister asks me to sign a piece of paper saying that she has done her duty to distribute the funds from my mother's estate to myself and my four sisters. So I have to turn around and sign this piece of paper saying that I received such and such an amount of money. Now I have got a dilemma on my hands, because, first of all, if I do not declare it to social services, I have committed welfare fraud, right, and the penalty is, what, up to seven years in jail. Oh, great. I would just love to go to one of our jails for seven years. So I am in a bad way because, on the one hand, I want to feed my family and I want to protect myself from criminal charges; on the other hand, I have not got enough money to do it anymore because I did not get it all in one chunk. It is being declared as one chunk, but I did not get it all in one chunk. So now I am on a shortfall, and I do not have any way of dealing with it.

So what do I do? I buy a computer; I buy two old motorcycles. I take \$6,000 and I buy a building. Get this, I lend a neighbour \$6,000 in cash to buy a building so that he and his wife can run their store out of a building downtown instead of out of the house they are renting. And I think, gee, you know, that is doing something for the community. It is helping these people establish a business that is going to be there for as long as they are going to be there. Can I get that money back? No, I cannot. And I will tell you why I cannot, because I could not declare it.

I could not let anybody know that I had given them \$6,000, and they could not tell anybody either. There was no receipt or anything. There is no paper chase. You cannot find this money, because there is no way of proving that I gave it to them. But it was a contribution to the community, you know. It was a contribution to the municipality. Yes, if the people I was dealing with are honourable, I expect that they will give it back to me.

Okay, so my wife has a crisis of conscience, and she goes to my welfare worker, Rolly Bauche in Morden, and she says to him, my husband received this money, and I am telling you about it. I cannot take it anymore, because she is afraid that she is going to be held responsible for half of this money being on welfare. She understands the welfare system, she is third-generation welfare. I am not. I was a middle-class person. I did not know anything about welfare. What the hell did I know about having to declare your assets? There is not a welfare worker in the entire system that could come into my life, assess my personal properties and help me get rid of it so that I can survive with that. I mean, you do not have the time, the money or the resources to deal with that. It is absolutely absurd to have that kind of a policy.

Not only that, you have a policy that says people are limited to, what, \$800 in their bank account. Well, how the hell do you expect them to get off welfare? If they cannot accumulate more than \$800, they cannot accumulate enough money to do anything about changing the situation. All of you people are realists. All of you people work for a living, and you realize that \$800 is not going to buy you off of welfare, is not going to support you, is not going to put you in an apartment, feed your kids, buy them clothes, deal with your medicine.

You know, let us face it. For five years on \$75 a week for two of those years, I had to go to all of these different professional people within the system that was required of me at my own expense.

Floor Comment: If you want to spend money on lawyers, go ahead.

Mr. Encontre: I have. I went to the appeal board with Mel Holley supposedly representing me, and after a year of accumulating information, he turned around and presented my case back to me which had absolutely nothing to do with the assistance I requested of him, and, guess what? He becomes an investigator for the Ombudsman's office, tweet, tweet, tweet, he is gone, and then I am dealing with Ms. Sherman, who is the Legal Aid lawyer, and she says: gee, Eric, we have only got one page on your file. One page, and, I mean, there was a stack of documents like this, several inches high.

* (2210)

Then I said, well, look, Mel got it all wrong. I do not want a case that goes against my MPIC claim that I am making. I want a case that goes against the City of Winnipeg's nonreturn policy. It is amazing how that just sort of got twisted out of the picture.

Ms. Furtado who is on the committee there for the appeal board said to me that—actually I was having a coronary at the time, so it was put off and it was put off and put off and put off while documentation was being done. I ended up in court having to represent myself against six City of Winnipeg lawyers trying to prevent them from getting access to further medical information because I had signed a waiver saying, look, I am sick, this is what my doctor has to say. Look into it and refer me to the province. Two years later they had not done that. I had a coronary instead. By the grace of God, go I. I am standing here in front of you because I survived.

My story is not any different than any of these other people. I got put in a situation where I could not deal with what was happening around me. I could not deal with windfalls. My mother trying to leave me some money to pay my debts turned out to be an absolute disaster. It in no way helped me. I was not in a position to do anything positive with it. I ended up practically giving it away because I had to get rid of it. I need social assistance right now, and I need it until I get off this damn system. The only way I am going to get off this damn system is when my medical reports are complete, but they are

not yet. It is five and half years, and they are not yet.

I have to get a settlement for the case because I lost all of this income. I am trying to appeal to the Canadian Pension Plan disability program because I am disabled. I cannot function normally. If you want to ask what that is like, just ask my wife. She has had to live with me for the last couple of years, and it has not been easy. It has not been easy for me either. I go on and on. I am talking about my own personal problems with the government of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg and the legal system and the social services administration.

Rolly Bauche from Morden came into the appeal board. My wife was trying to appeal this \$6,000 that they are taking off of our social assistance, 80 bucks a month. I am supposed to be getting \$70 as disability income, you know, so they are taking off \$10 more than I am getting for my disability.

Madam Chairperson: Excuse me, Mr. Encontre, I am sorry to disturb you. I have been reminded that we have some committee business that needs to be dealt with. Earlier we had agreed as a committee that at ten o'clock to revisit the issue of when the committee will rise tonight. I would like to canvass the committee to see what is the will of the committee.

Mr. Ashton: We do have a hearing tomorrow morning, but I think what we might want to do is canvass if there are other presenters tonight who perhaps cannot come back or would prefer to make the presentation tonight. Then I think we could look at it accordingly. Some people may prefer to come back tomorrow, but I know people have been waiting patiently tonight and they may want to continue. I am sorry for interrupting the presentation, but it is just to accommodate everybody.

Floor Comment: I would like to say one thing.

Madam Chairperson: Okay. Apparently I have to finish dealing with this issue first, and then you can make your concluding remarks. I do understand that Mr. Encontre's wife would like to speak tonight as they are both here now. I guess at this point, too, we would canvass the

House to see if there are any other presenters that would not be able to make it back tomorrow that would like to be put on the agenda for this evening. Otherwise, we do have a presentation that starts again tomorrow morning at ten o'clock.

Mr. McAlpine: With due respect to the presenters that are here this evening to present, it was my understanding that the committee was going to rise at 10 p.m. this evening.

An Honourable Member: Revisit. We were going to revisit it.

Mr. McAlpine: Well, I know what was said by the Chair at the outset of the meeting, but it was my understanding that we were going to rise at 10 p.m. when I came on the committee.

The honourable member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) I know is shaking his head. I do not know how the honourable member for Crescentwood can read into my mind. I am saying that this was what I was led to believe, that the committee was going to rise at 10 p.m. If it is the will of the committee to hear this presenter and then deal with this at that time, then I certainly will respect that decision.

Madam Chairperson: Are there any other comments from the committee?

Mr. Faurschou: I am just curious. I would like to ask the Clerk of the committee, were there persons other than the couple at present?

Madam Chairperson: Mr. Tweed, you had a comment or a question?

Hon. Mervin Tweed (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Just a comment. Because of the time restrictions right now, I have another commitment actually at ten o'clock. So if the committee will excuse me, I just want to offer my regrets that I cannot stay.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Might I recommend that we sit till 10:30 and finish up with any presentations that we can hear by 10:30? I know that I am trying to be very attentive and listen very carefully to the presentations. I know I have to

be back at 10 a.m. tomorrow. I also have family responsibilities. So I would recommend, if I can take the prerogative to say, that we will listen till 10:30 and then put any other presenters over until tomorrow morning.

Mr. Ashton: I would just like to know how many presenters have indicated. Apparently there are two, and I believe the presenter was almost finished—you said you were concluding.

Madam Chairperson: We are going to canvass the room right now to see if there were some presenters who needed to make their presentations tonight.

Mr. Faurichou: In that light, I would like to hear from the presenter at the present time as to how long he will be, effectively, because—

Floor Comment: Oh, it will not take me long. I just want to draw a few conclusions.

Mr. Faurichou: Excuse me, specifically?

Floor Comment: I will be finished before 10:30.

Madam Chairperson: While the Clerk is canvassing the room, if Mr. Encontre would please make his concluding remarks. Thank you.

Mr. Encontre: Well, my concluding remarks are that I am here almost by accident, more from my wife's interest than mine. I have a lot of other things on my mind besides the problems that I have expressed to you. I expressed them because my opinions are honest opinions. I am talking about my own personal experience. I am talking about crises that are created in my life, not by acts of God like an accident, a drunk runs a light and hits you. I am talking about the impact that government and government policies had on my personal life. I have had to deal with too many professional people who seem to be fairly self-serving. It is just too long.

You cannot put somebody through that kind of a process. Something has to be done about medical records and testing and so on and so forth to speed up that process, because you kill the very person you are trying to help here.

You are doing the same thing with this amendment process. In my personal opinion, this amendment and the bill previous to it is very poorly thought out. You should be dealing directly with the people concerned. Now you are dealing with people who are poor and uneducated and have disabilities and stuff like this, maybe do not have a very good idea to offer you, right? But I think that if you look hard enough, you will find the right idea. You will find out that there is a right way to deal with everything.

With addiction problems, let me tell you something about addiction problems. People who are addicted to substance abuse are people who are committing suicide. Whether they do it slowly or quickly, it is tantamount to the same thing. We all know the effects of sniffing gasoline. It is not good for you.

* (2220)

The underlying questions as to why the people are doing this in the first place is just simply poverty, disenfranchisement. They have been marginalized. These people are suffering. They do not even know they are human beings because they do not feel like they are being treated like one. I am not saying that our government should embrace everybody with loving arms and whitewash their lives, no. We all have problems, we all make mistakes. But government policy has to in some way reflect what is happening in those people's lives.

I maintain that we would be better off to abolish the entire process and give people a minimum income, a fixed income, and let them pay for whatever services they need themselves. If they need a consultation or they need help, let them pay for it. Believe me, if I have to take money out of my pocket to pay for a service, I am going to demand that that service is good, and I am going to get the best service for my dollar. When I depend on the government policy that is assembled by a bunch of people who, excuse me, but you people are living well, okay. You may all have had problems, you may have had problems in your background, but right now you are living well enough not only to take care of yourselves but to make policy.

I am expecting you people who are policymakers, which are, what, maybe 20 percent of the population is an exaggerated estimate, these people who are in the position to make policy and to affect policy have to take into consideration the impact of those policies on the people at the bottom. There is not any room for people to fall through the cracks, people. This is Canada. If we let people fall through the cracks, what have you really got? You have got a boat that is full of holes and is sinking. You better patch the cracks up.

I have not got the money, the time, the energy or the education to go after the people in this administration who have hurt me personally and directly in my life, who forced me to do things that I did not want to do. Until things like that are addressed on an individual basis, you are failing. This amendment is not going to work because it does not reflect the reality of what you are dealing with. You are not going to get it by asking people like this to come up and talk to you, because they cannot communicate to you what has happened to them because it is extremely difficult to do so. I am good at expressing myself, and I have had a tremendous difficulty trying to communicate some of the suffering that I have gone through and the jeopardy that it has put me under.

That is basically all that I have to say. I do not think that anything that I say is going to affect the legalese of that document. I think that if you are professional people, deem that this is the most equitable process and that is the status quo of our society, then I guess I am just going to have to accept that, as bitter a pill as it is to swallow. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much, Mr. Encontre.

The room has been canvassed, and there has been an indication that there are three speakers who would like to speak tonight. So the committee has to make a decision as to whether or not they want to rise.

Mr. Ashton: I know there are some members who have obligations. We certainly do not have any votes planned from the opposition side, so you know I think we could pair individual members, if that is a concern.

Mr. Faurschou: Madam Chair, I would suggest at this late hour, at this point in time, though, the speakers who come to the podium have some time limit imposed upon them. One hour per presentation, I am afraid we would be making a commitment to one o'clock, and I am afraid I do not believe we are prepared to do that at this time.

I would propose, at maximum length, Madam Chairperson, 15 minutes, including questions.

Madam Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee to allow the three speakers a 10-minute presentation, plus five minutes for questions?

Mr. Ashton: You know, I think of that as more of a guideline. We are trying to accommodate the people I think. If that is the concern, I understand that we do have some time limitations here. So long as it is only to accommodate the people who cannot come.

Madam Chairperson: Will that carry on tomorrow as well? Will the time limits carry on tomorrow?

Mr. McAlpine: No, I think my understanding is that it would only apply for those three who are going to make their presentation this evening.

Mrs. Mitchelson: If I could just comment, Madam Chairperson, I think that I would agree that it would, but I have to indicate that I have to be out of this committee, and I am the minister responsible. I know my honourable colleagues in the New Democratic Party have indicated that they will pair people. I feel a responsibility to hear the presentations, as the minister responsible for sponsoring this bill. I mean, I know we are going to be here tomorrow morning. With no time limits, I am sure that tomorrow morning we are not going to hear all presenters. So there will be other evening opportunities to make presentations, too, for anyone who cannot be here during the day tomorrow.

I do not know when the committee will be called again, and I am sure that the House leaders will make those determinations. You know, we could be here tomorrow evening. We could be here Monday evening, Tuesday evening

of next week. I do not know that. I do not want to limit anyone tonight, but I want to indicate that I have to be gone by 11 p.m.

Mr. McAlpine: Madam Chairperson, I think that as far as the presenters tomorrow, I think we can revisit that tomorrow morning.

An Honourable Member: Let us hear the presenters.

Madam Chairperson: Okay. We will now then proceed to hear from the three presenters. Is it the will of the committee to set eleven o'clock as our dismissal time for the evening? [agreed]

Our next presenter then is Natalie Encontre. Ms. Encontre, do you have written copies for distribution?

Ms. Encontre: No, I do not.

Madam Chairperson: Please proceed.

Ms. Encontre: I have some questions. I do not actually have a presentation, okay.

An Honourable Member: Do you want to use this or not?

Ms. Encontre: No, it is okay, thanks.

One of the problems with social services to begin with is that I hear this key word that they use. It is called the worker's discretion or the worker's jurisdiction. There is no end of trouble that those people can do to people who are on social assistance.

This here is a letter that I got. It was sent to me because my worker did not do her job right. I never met this woman, and this is what she wrote about me to CFS: Our department has concerns for the above named. Her only dependent child would be particularly vulnerable to problems of this nature. There are concerns of the possibility that Natalie continues to experience substance abuse problems. Our history of working with Natalie indicates numerous crises such as many financial shortfalls—I do not know how they can say that—periods of impairment and chemical abuse, volatile temper and mood swings, emotional instability and

erratic behaviour. Natalie has been through periods of treatment and counselling and has had no positive changes in her life. As well, some of the programs that Natalie has attended have not been completed. Natalie is an individual with a good work and education history. She has been on provincial assistance on and off since whenever, okay, and there are some concerns for my parenting ability.

That is what this social assistance worker wrote about me who never met me. To CFS she was going to send this letter. Do you think they would not take my child away? Do you know what they do to people? They take their kids away from them because they do not have the means to support their kids, like it is their fault.

I ask this question at this meeting here, this new welfare system meeting. This is a joke, just like me standing here. I think it is a joke. You know why? Because I am here so you guys can have jobs. I am volunteering here, and I do not know. How come you guys do not get someone like me to be your administrator? What? Because I do not have an education? I will tell you, I have an education that you guys could not get.

* (2230)

This is what I would like to know something to. This has to do with people who are on social assistance. Why is the National Child Benefit supplement known as the NCB taken from families on social assistance who require it the most? For example, a family with one child gets deducted \$50.42, two children \$33.75 and each additional child \$27.50. So if you have three children, you are not entitled to the NCB. Your family loses \$111.67 each month and \$1,440.04 a year. That is how much gets clawed back from us. Do you not think that is kind of a lot? You know, it is divide and conquer.

Now, all of a sudden people who are on welfare raising their kids up are considered less than people who go out and work. I mean, where is the value in this? What happened to the value of the hand that rocks the cradle shapes the nation? I mean, do you think that daycare is for everybody? Do you think everybody can handle it to put their kids in daycare? I mean, if you

just give us the means to live, do you not think that we would find our own way in this world?

I cannot believe you guys are saying stuff like: did you go to the St. Norbert Foundation? Did you go to this other charity organization? Did you go to the food bank? I do not think that people should have to go to those kinds of programs. I think that we should be busy raising our kids up, you know, not busy out here. I have a little baby here. I am standing here why? Do you think I have not better things to do? I would rather be at home raising my baby up.

I am trying to get help so that I can go out and work, but I cannot leave my baby with my husband who has a head injury. I cannot even get the help that I need so that I can go out and work. You put so much trouble on people for what? One sheet like this that you sign, and all of a sudden, you know, you are expected to do all of these different kinds of things. Like just a signature is supposed to get us into so much trouble, you know. Like it is unreal. I do not know, you know, where you guys come from or what the heck is going on.

I mean, I thought the Child Tax Benefit was something that was not supposed to be considered as income, and then all of a sudden they switch the rules. Oh, well, we are just going to look at it from this angle now and all in the name of balancing the budget.

I would like to know who came up with this Bill 40. Who was it? How many people came up with this Bill 40? You know what? I do not have to ask how come your names are not on here. I would be ashamed to put my name on here, too.

Who are the directors? Over and over, it is to satisfy the directors, to satisfy a mandate, and who are they answerable to? They are answerable to the appeal board. What good is that? You go to the appeal board and they patronize you just like you guys are doing to me here right now. Then what is going to happen after the appeal board? You go to Legal Aid. Well, they are not going to represent you either because they are going to say that the likelihood of winning the case is not likely to succeed. So, I mean, of course, why should the government pay to make a case against itself? When you are

poor, you are not considered a citizen. I am not a citizen sitting here. I am a welfare bum. But my opinion is you guys are the welfare bums because I could do your jobs better. Just give me a shot at it. Maybe I do not know, but it seems that way to me, and it is just my opinion, you know.

So what do you guys think about that, that what a worker's opinion of their clients—and we are clients. If you want to serve your client, you should ask your client what their needs are. This is not about welfare people. We are not a society. I mean, after all, the money that you give us, we turn around and spend it and put it all back in the economy anyway. This is about you guys. It is about your consciences here that are on the line, the tremendous responsibility that you guys have for this country, and each and every one of you will pay because what comes around goes around. It is a fact of life. The sun goes up and so does the moon. There is day and there is night, and what you sow is what you reap.

Madam Chairperson: Is that the end of your presentation, Ms. Encontre?

Ms. Encontre: Do you know what? I am here to make myself feel better so that I know that there is a possibility that just maybe some smidgen, something just might change so that you guys can really help your situation. I mean, if you do this to us, what is going to happen with your own family? How do you justify that to people who you know and care about? It could happen to anybody, just one paycheque away. Politics are the way in which you treat people. That is what this is about; it is the way in which you treat people.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much. I think Mr.—

Ms. Encontre: Am I done? Is this 15 minutes yet? I thought I started at 10:30.

Madam Chairperson: We had 10 minutes for the presentation and—

Ms. Encontre: Ten minutes? Am I past my 10 minutes?

Madam Chairperson: –five minutes for questions.

Ms. Encontre: Five minutes? Well, I have had a lot of questions in there. I would like to know if there is going to be some follow-up to this that is going to be something like some documentation that is going to tell me how many people were on the list, how many spoke, what was said and what is going to be done as a result of our time here, or is this volunteer work all for nothing or is that going to cost too much in paper?

Madam Chairperson: The honourable minister, to answer the question.

Mrs. Mitchelson: The reason we have someone sitting back here and the microphones in front of you and us is so that this can all be recorded, and it is recorded in what we call Hansard. If you would like, we can certainly provide a copy of Hansard to you that would give you all of the presentations and all of the comments that have been made at this committee.

Ms. Encontre: Yes, I would sure appreciate that.

Mr. Martindale: I have a brief question for you, but first I believe–

Ms. Encontre: Can I go now?

Mr. Martindale: Please stay at the microphone.

Ms. Encontre: Oh, me? You are talking to me?

Mr. Martindale: Yes. Well, I have to address the Chair first, but then I will address you.

I believe the previous presenter said that the amount of money that you receive for attending the Women and Infant Nutrition Program was \$65 a week.

Floor Comment: No, we all know that is a month.

Mr. Martindale: I believe it is actually \$65 a month. Okay. I just want to make sure that everyone knew that. It is my understanding, the minister can correct me if this is wrong, that

women are eligible for this program from the third trimester of pregnancy until a baby is one year old. My question for you as a presenter is: have you figured out how you are going to feed your child after one year on \$65 a month less?

Ms. Encontre: You are asking me how I am going to feed my child? You know what? You think that makes a difference? I make up for my phone bill. I make up for my rent. I make up for insurance, gas, all kinds of things that come directly out of my food money. I work miracles every month in my home, hook or by crook, somehow, and I mean that. I am not a crook, but, I mean, you might just see me standing out on the street selling newspapers one day if I have to, okay.

Every month, constant crises. Why? Just because I cannot afford to buy my own milk. I have to run to the WIN program to go and get points so that I can get this \$65. I got a letter from welfare saying that I was entitled to \$31 and that I would get an extra \$65, but when it actually came down to it, they deducted the \$31. So, I mean, I was not getting \$90 like I thought I was going to get. I was only getting \$65. So why did they mention the \$31 in the first place? You know, I do not understand this. I do not. It is just politics.

* (2240)

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation. We appreciate your coming.

Our next presenter is Tim Jackson.

Mr. Tim Jackson (People Empowering Themselves Against the System): Thank you, Madam Chairperson, is it?

Madam Chairperson: Yes.

Mr. Jackson: Due to time at hand, I will only be brief. I have been hearing about the workfare. That puts me in mind of the Dark Ages, about the poorhouses. It is kind of interesting that we had an anthropologist here, because she could have commented on the Dark Ages, but when I reflect on the Dark Ages, believe me, I am only

reminded of one of the hardest working members of the community. It is called the blacksmith. From what I hear about this Bill 40, all I see is an illusion that the Tories are trying to make themselves look like blacksmiths even though back then the blacksmiths were known to build things that are solid, strong, and built to last. They were extremely well known for strengthening their communities. When you stop and think about it, if you can imagine what a blacksmith had to go through, the intense heat they had to put up with, and the strength they would have to have just to hammer metal into whatever shape that is needed, you would see. You would get an image right in your mind. The image I am getting from Bill 40 and Bill 36 is a grim one.

My only advice is basically if you are going to look back into the Dark Ages, I would say, bring back the blacksmith and not the poorhouses, because I can definitely tell you the blacksmiths will work a hundred times harder than any one in a poorhouse.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Jackson. Thank you very much for coming and making your presentation.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Our next presenter is Rick Pettigrew. Please proceed, Mr. Pettigrew.

Mr. Rick Pettigrew (Private Citizen): Okay, like the other gentleman said, I will try and make this brief as well. I just heard about this meeting as well as these two bills as of last night, was not impressed, by any means. I have been married for six years, have four kids who are in foster care. They are all part aboriginal, as well as myself. For six years straight, I have been busting my butt trying to get my education, trying to get something beneficial back to my family. That has not been very easy, because I have had a psychologist tell me that in her professional opinion—you have doctors, you have supposed counsellors out there who are supposed to help you and guide you into finding these resources, whether it is food, money, whatever, you name it. The only difference is that I have been through I do not know how many training facilities. I have taken up my

GED, failed it badly, spent seven months in an aboriginal training facility, have been on work experience, have not done all that well.

I have spina bifida in lumbar five of my lower back. I cannot lift, hardly, a darn thing. I have been at a work placement at Pan Am Games warehouse on Taylor Avenue for only one day, the reason being because I have to go see a therapist once or twice a week just to try and get my damn kids back, all on account of my past family history. The thing about it is, I will be perfectly honest, yes, right now, because my wife is separated from me, she took me off her assistance. I am not on any kind of assistance. Right now, I stay with my own family. I do not eat a damn thing. I sleep. I visit my dad during the day. That is it, only because, I have even told my therapist, I do not want to end up like some of those people on the street having to ask for a quarter just for a drink or something to eat, because there is barely anything out there. I went to the intake office just last week to try and get onto assistance, because I have disabilities of my own that apparently I am having a hard time proving.

I asked them: If I get disability, does it do anything? Does it affect my case? No, it does not. We will bug you 20 times a week just to make sure you get a job. Well, I am sorry, but unfortunately even the job market can look very bleak. I have been over the Internet. I have been through human resources. I have been through a lot of places. There is not very much. You can look through the newspaper, and I will tell you right now, you either have to be qualified to have a driver's licence and a damn good driver's abstract, or you have to have a Grade 12. There are not a lot of people who have that capability. I already have it written down on paper that I do not have my Grade 12. I do not qualify for it. I have to wait maybe six months to take up another GED test at Red River College, which at this point I am incapable of doing because I have to put my family first. I have to fight for my kids. Even now, I am still being told that there is even a good chance I may not get my kids back.

Due to all this legislation and speaking to my mother and the rest of my family, by the sounds of it, it even sounds like CFS is telling

me the fact that kids get taken away, they have to be put into hotels because they do not have enough money to even pay foster parents. There are not enough foster parents out there. My kids have had to stay in a hotel for well over two months being raised by someone else aside from me, and yet everyone who is on assistance with kids, they are looked down upon.

I have spoken to social workers, I have spoken to therapists, and they all say, oh, it is not the job that makes the difference, it is the relationship. It is everything that makes the difference.

You need money to feed your kids. You need money to pay your bills and make sure there is a bed to sleep on, a roof over their heads, and you still need your education. You need a whole awful lot of things.

I am sorry, this country is going to hell in a handbasket. It has been mentioned already. Three provinces are currently welfare free. This country complains so much about the poor stealing from the rich. Well, you want to know something? The welfare down in the United States of America is a lot worse, a lot worse. We are heading exactly in that direction.

There is a movie, Armageddon, that goes through total holocaust, chaos. I have got a father who has got one hell of a lot of mental problems. He is not capable of doing anything on his own. He has already been told by my mother, through a meeting my mother went to, that once welfare is abolished he goes into a halfway house. You know what he told her? He would rather kill himself.

It is things like this and people like that that end up paying for every little thing that goes on in this country. You want to know something? With the government you need a Grade 12, college, or university degree for political science. Everyone says you are the guys who run the country, you guys are the brains behind the country. Well, I am telling you, where the hell are they? You sure as hell have not shown me a damn thing since the six years I have been married and for the X number of years we have had welfare for. If you have anything up in this head, it is about time you started using it,

because I will tell you, there are too many people that have really bad physical and mental problems that just cannot do anything. They cannot go out and work. You might as well put them into a bloody asylum, lock them up for the rest of their lives. That is exactly how they feel even right now.

* (2250)

When I went through my intake appointment I was told I would get maybe \$80 to \$100 every two weeks. You think that is livable. What you guys live off of is livable. What we get on our cheques is far from livable. We can go through a number of training facilities. We can talk to counsellors, therapists, whatever. We are not going to get anything. Some of us just do not have the brainpower to get a Grade 12 or, say, even be able to use our brains to gain experience to get out there and work. Some of us, yes, we can work, we are physical bodied, there is nothing wrong with us physically. Mentally, yes, there is.

Some of us just do not have what it takes to get out there and do the jobs, especially with the fact that trade jobs, you need over 10-plus or more years experience to do that. You need to be certified, you need papers to do that, even technical work.

I have got an uncle who is going through Microsoft certified training. Yes, he has got his Grade 12. He still has to do that. You still need papers to prove and to show your experience that you can do the job to begin with. You do not have that, well, you do not have anything. It is hard as hell to get a job these days. For those people who are not able to work, that is not even their fault. Sometimes they are just born like that.

I think the government is highly insensitive. They just do not care. There are a whole bunch of people who would like to see the government do the proper things, but it just never happens. Like I said, right now, I do not have anything for income. Nothing to declare. I live with family. I am lucky if I eat once a day.

I get heck from my therapist for not taking care of myself. How? I do not have the time. I

am busy trying to work with my family to get my family back. There are too many damn problems, and all you guys are worried about is getting people off welfare and for those who cannot work, and aside from pocketing all that money into your pockets, nobody in the government cares. There just is not anybody. It is people especially like myself who have to pay the hardest. Try living either on the street or not having any money in your pocket and having nothing to hope for and going through therapy just to fight for your family, and possibly even being told you will never get them back again. What kind of a future is that? What kind of self-esteem does that give a person? Nothing. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much, Mr. Pettigrew. Thank you very much.

Mr Martindale: Mr. Pettigrew, I would like to assure you that there are people here who care, and after the hearing, I would like to talk to you

and help you to apply for social assistance, and if you are not eligible I would like to know why.

Madam Chairperson: Mr. Pettigrew, did you wish to comment on that or did you just want to talk to Mr. Martindale afterwards, privately?

Mr. Pettigrew: I will probably just talk to him afterwards.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much for coming and making your presentation.

Mr. Pettigrew: Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: I would like to at this time thank all the presenters who made presentations tonight. The Standing Committee on Law Amendments will meet tomorrow at 10 a.m. to continue hearing presenters from the list.

Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 10:54 p.m.