

First Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 30, 2007

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Inkster, on a point of order?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. In considerations for quorum, is there any requirement that the government have members from the front bench present?

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised, the quorum count is 10 including the Speaker, and that's the rules of the House but that's not a point of order.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 209—The Historic Trans-Canada Highway Act

Mr. Speaker: Bill 209, The Historic Trans-Canada Highway Act. Are we dealing with this this morning?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Are we dealing with this this morning?

An Honourable Member: No, we're not.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, we'll move on.

Bill 211—The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), that Bill 211, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, it brings me great pleasure to address Bill 211, a bill that is a long time in coming. I'm glad that it's again on the floor of this Legislature and is being given some debate. It has been introduced before and was introduced by the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) when she served as the education advocate for the Progressive Conservative caucus.

I would also like to note that we have visitors in the gallery from the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba of which several of them are former teachers of mine. I don't know if one should give them credit for who I've become or the blame, but I think I owe it to those who have helped me achieve this greatness, Ms. Monk and Ms. Prendergast. It is just a real humbling experience to stand up, give a speech and have your teachers behind you listening to everything you've said. I hope that they, after I've given my speech, give me the same A that they used to give me when I was their student. *[interjection]* Okay, Mr. Speaker, maybe it was a B. Maybe it was a B that they gave me. *[interjection]* Well, I'm sure it was either a high C or a low B, but it was there somewhere. You know, you just can never lie in front of your teacher. So, okay, it was in there somewhere.

But, again, these are individuals who've had such an amazing impact on our lives as individuals, and I'm sure if we went around this Chamber, all 57 of us could name a teacher who had such an amazing impact on us that set us into a direction. I remember both of these teachers as if it was yesterday. In fact, the way we've aged, it's almost as if it was yesterday. We look as good today as we did then. They've had a real impact.

I would mention another teacher, a colleague of my two teachers up here, Mr. Tom Forrest, who taught us history and did an amazing job in making history and politics come alive. He really stimulated my mind. I can remember the constitutional debates. He actually allowed us to debate him. He allowed us to challenge him, and this would be Elmwood High School. This was grade 11, grade 12, and he encouraged that kind of thing.

I remember Ms. Monk and the way she would teach us. She was outstanding. Ms. Prendergast, a woman who would always greet you with a smile in the hallway, and individuals who made learning such a positive. These are individuals, Ms. Prendergast, Ms. Monk, who did not choose the easy path of teaching. No, they went into a school where there were a lot of difficulties. Elmwood High School at that time was jam-packed. It had a lot of children that came from homes that maybe had difficulty, and I believe they put in this extra effort. They went the

extra mile to educate those of us who did not come from a lot of means, who did not have everything that they wished at their disposal. They chose to become educators in a tough school, but went that extra mile to ensure that any one of us that wanted to move forward, that wanted to get somewhere, would have that opportunity.

When I ran the first time for school trustee, I had in my brochure—this would have been 1995—that I was a graduate of Elmwood High School; I'm proud of that. I would go door-to-door and people would say, oh, you're a graduate of Elmwood High School; so am I. Do you remember so-and-so? Do you remember so-and-so?

A lot of those students that were taught by two of the individuals amongst many at Elmwood High School remember fondly the advantage that they got by individuals who put their life, their heart and their soul into it.

Today they find out, after having worked hard as they did, put in the effort that they did, that they face their retirement years and found out that the promise or what they thought was a promise of a cost-of-living increase adjustment is not there. So the best years of their life, after they've put in blood, sweat and tears through all those years, now, all of a sudden, their years are diminished because what they thought was coming to them isn't coming to them.

What we feel as a Progressive Conservative caucus is that to start the remediation, to start the improving of this situation, besides improving the COLA, is having them represented on the board of TRAF. For those who don't know, it's the Teachers' Retirement—oh. *[interjection]* Allowances Fund. I seem to be half still in Europe, half here. I apologize to this House.

* (10:10)

I think it's important not just that they get a seat on TRAF because the government feels that they can appoint someone or feels that they can be magnanimous enough and give them a seat. It should be something that should be a given. It should be by legislation. They should have a seat on the board, and I believe that Bill 211 does that and does that in a proper fashion.

The bill aims to increase to nine, from seven, the number of members on the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund board. We think that that is a long time in coming. We think that it's appropriate. It's something that should be done. It should require at

least one member to have investment management experience. Again, in light of where the market is going, in light of what's taking place in society, we believe that now is a very good time to be putting that experience on the board and require at least one member to be a retired teacher nominated by the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba.

One of the members from across in his way said, well, it wasn't done in the '90s. Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? In the '90s the teachers also got full COLA. Interestingly enough, it was something that was done. It was after 1999 that the COLA was done away with, so until then it wasn't necessary. Now we find that we have to do it by legislation, whereby the retired teachers actually have a voice on the board, that as decisions are being made—and it's only reasonable that they would have a position on the board. It's not like they're asking for something that isn't coming to them.

To me, I just find all of this to be something that the House should agree with. This should be passed very quickly because none of it is unreasonable. It's not like retired teachers are asking that they have majority members on the board. They're not asking for three members on the board. They are asking for one representative, that they have someone who represents their interest on the board, be able to sit there and advocate for the retired teachers.

It is something that if this speech was happening out in the town square, if we were to have this debate in a school or have the debate out somewhere, you would find that people would look at it and say, well, that's eminently reasonable, that those people who are the most impacted by the board would have a representative on the board. We find this to be only reasonable. We find this to be something that the government clearly should be backing us on. They have the majority. They have the say in this House. We believe that this reasonable proposal should go forward, should be put into legislation, and it's one small step into their mediation of the issue of COLA and what is rightfully something that should be coming to retired teachers. Thank you very much.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, let me start by saying my only regret is that I have only 10 minutes to discuss this piece of legislation.

It was rather interesting listening to the member opposite for many reasons. First of all, talking about his grade for his speech, I'll be the first in the House

to stand up and give him a failing grade. He gets an F for that presentation, Mr. Speaker.

He's talking about being on the doorstep meeting graduates of his high school, and they'd say oh, do you remember so and so, or so and so. He's referring perhaps to the teachers that taught him. Well, I would suspect that more than half the teachers that he'd be referring to were teachers that were cut during the 1990s when they were in office and they were cutting education funding.

It's also appropriate that we'd be having this debate in Halloween season because, again, they can put on masks and pretend to be advocates for the public school system. Along that vein of Halloween, members opposite did more slashing and hacking than Freddy and Jason combined when it came to funding for the education system. I really have a hard time listening to them talk about being advocates for the public school system, let alone advocates for the teachers of Manitoba.

He talked about history and having history lessons, and he doesn't like when I stand up in the House and give history lessons because their version of history is revisionist history. They talk about full COLA when they were in office. Well, Mr. Speaker, they were warned seven, eight times by actuaries that they could not afford to pay full COLA because that is not what the account was designed to do. So what did they do? They fired the actuary. That was their action with respect to how they dealt with teacher pensions.

If the account was managed the way it was designed to be managed, we would not have this problem today. I'm really having problems listening to members pretend to be advocates for teachers, because it was this government that took on the responsibility of the unfunded pension liability.

When I was a teacher advocate with the Evergreen Teachers' Association in Gimli, I was on the floor at the Manitoba Teachers' Society annual general meeting and we were saying to the government, you have an unfunded pension liability, do something about it. Did they do anything? No.

How many times did they open the act? How many times did they open the pension act to make significant changes to the teachers' pension? Zero.

What have we done? Well, we've addressed the unfunded pension liability with \$1.5 billion. We funded—

An Honourable Member: Say that again.

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, \$1.5 billion, for my colleague beside me who apparently didn't hear that figure, \$1.5 billion to fund the teachers' pension liability. We started to pay on a go-forward basis when we came into office in 2000 for the teachers that were retiring or teachers who were entering the system as new entrants. We have opened the act several times to make significant changes, Mr. Speaker, and we are currently awaiting the results of the Teachers' Pension Task Force meeting and some of the very good discussion that's been going on about fair COLA. So, to hear the member stand up and pretend to be advocates for teachers is really disconcerting.

There was an election recently, as we all know, and during the election there was a two-thirds proposal by the members opposite which had been endorsed by RTAM at the time, and, you know, I really have to question, though, the suggestion that there be \$11.7 million as an initial contribution to that resolution and \$1.1 million on an ongoing basis. Well, in their bill they're saying that they should have a member who has investment management experience on the TRAF board. Well, there are people with investment management experience who have told us that \$11.7 million and \$1.1 million on an ongoing basis is off by, oh, \$95 million to deliver on two-thirds COLA as they promised they would do. So their math is wrong, their history is wrong. *[interjection]* They're just wrong. Yes. They are just wrong, Mr. Speaker.

I do not support this resolution, Mr. Speaker. I do not support this piece of legislation for a number of reasons. First of all, the fact that we already have a retired teacher on the TRAF board, and we have done that. We committed to do that at committee hearings when we opened The Teachers' Pensions Act which we have done, as I said, four or five times now. And when we opened the bill at the time, one of the suggestions that came from the committee hearings, is to have a retired teacher on the TRAF board. So we have appointed a retired teacher to the TRAF board.

And, by the way, when we did that, when we opened the legislation at that time, we increased the contribution rates to the teachers' pension fund for the first time in 25 years. I know it was asked for in the 1990s, but what did they do? They ignored it, Mr. Speaker. So for the first time in 25 years, we

increased the contribution to the teachers' pension fund.

Also, we took the advice of the individuals who came to the committee hearings, and we did appoint a retired teacher to the TRAF board. Also, we have met on a regular basis with the representatives of RTAM, and we do have representatives of RTAM sitting at the Teachers' Pension Task Force where they do have a say in the discussions around how do we improve teachers' pensions for active teachers and retired teachers.

Now, the thing about that that I find really interesting, Mr. Speaker, is during Estimates my opposition critic, and I call him a critic because he pretends to be an advocate. He says he's an advocate, but I say he is, indeed, a critic, and he suggested that we didn't even need the Teachers' Pension Task Force. Perhaps he didn't know what the Teachers' Pension Task Force was because it didn't meet when they were in office because they didn't make improvements to the teachers' pension. So I really find it rather interesting that they wear this mask today, and they pretend to be advocates for teachers.

Now, we have been working with the Teachers' Pension Task Force to work toward a fair COLA. There is ongoing work to arrive at a solution that will be sustainable, that will be long-term, that will address the needs of retired teachers in improving COLA and will also be aware of the needs of the active teachers who are contributing to that pension fund, Mr. Speaker. The thing about this bill which really, really bothers me is the fact that members opposite would introduce this piece of legislation without consulting the Manitoba Teachers' Society. They didn't listen in the 1990s. They did not listen in the 1990s to teachers. They don't listen to teachers today, and I find this bill absolutely patronizing for members opposite to bring this into the legislation today and to pretend to be advocates for teachers.

Again, we have made the changes to the Teachers' Pension Task Force. We have made changes to the TRAF board. We are working toward a fair and reasonable COLA, and again, part of that climb to the top of that mountain has been funding the unfunded pension liability because that was the first primary concern for active and many retired teachers, the fact that we had an unfunded pension liability and the integrity and sustainability of the main account, Mr. Speaker.

* (10:20)

So we funded that. We increased the contribution rate for the first time in 25 years. We appointed the retired teacher to the TRAF board. The TRAF board is doing a fantastic job in terms of managing their investments. Returns in 2005 and 2006 were 14.8 percent and 15.6 percent respectively, accumulating a surplus of more than \$300 million at the end of 2006.

The president, at the time, of the Manitoba Teachers Society had said, our members applaud this government's commitment to putting our members' pensions, their futures, on solid ground, and the long-term savings for Manitoba taxpayers that will result from this investment show solid management leadership on behalf of the Manitoba government. That was from Brian Ardern in a press release on March 22, 2007. *[interjection]*

I hear them starting up now. I hear them starting up because they always talk about my union buddies, my teacher union buddies. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be a teacher, and I'm proud to be part of a government that supports teachers, always has supported teachers, always will support teachers, not the patronizing members opposite.

They talked about the rally that RTAM held and how there's a chorus of boos. Yeah, I did see more Tory opposition members out in that as cheerleaders, Mr. Speaker. Suddenly they have become advocates for teachers, and I find that absolutely offensive that they pretend to be teacher advocates. Again, it's appropriate we debate this at Halloween because they're wearing masks, and they're pretending to be advocates for teachers.

They're pretending to be advocates for the education system, but this is a group of people, many who were in office at the time, who cut 242 teachers in one year because of their funding announcements, who continued to cut funding to education. They had zero, zero, minus two, minus two, zero. Of course, when they introduced zero funding announcement, that was actually a cut as well. How is that a cut? Because cost of delivering education did go up. So when they give zero money, that actually translates into a cut.

But we're a government that has always stood for educators, always stood for the education system, always stood for a public education system, and always talked about what is fair and equitable for all. It is fair and equitable for all to have this handled at the teacher Pension Task Force with ongoing negotiations, with a proposal that is fair to active and

retired teachers and that will be sustainable for the future of the pension adjustment account and the main account.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to that proposal, and I look forward to making more significant, positive changes for the cost of living allowance and for the main account for teachers of Manitoba because that's something that we have done and will continue to do, not like members opposite, who, in their tenure, did nothing.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that there aren't more retired teachers here in the gallery. It's unfortunate that this isn't televised so more retired teachers across this great province of ours could hear the insult that this minister certainly has put forward when it comes to treating retired teachers, particularly, with equity and making sure that they are treated fairly with respect to their pensions.

I take offence to the Minister of Education in not taking this seriously and standing in this House and opening his remarks with Halloween and masks. Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very serious issue for some 11,000 retired teachers now in our province, who, by the way, when they entered the pension plan, when they taught, when they were so dedicated in their teaching through their years of service to the educational system in Manitoba, when they were put forward, they said that they were going to get a fair pension and that pension was going to be tied to the cost of living and that was going to be assured by the COLA, by the pension account that they had.

They pay more into that pension account, Mr. Speaker, so that they can get the full COLA. This minister has not treated those teachers fairly. By the way, he says, what did we do when we were in government. Well, I'll tell you what we did. Up until 1999, we paid them COLA. We paid them their increase in their pension. When this government came into power, the first thing they did is they said, no, we're not going to pay COLA. We're not the count. The PAA doesn't have enough money in it. Therefore, we're going to change the accounting systems, and we're not going to pay COLA.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, this year—*[interjection]* Oh, I hear about the actuaries. Oh sure. Isn't that wonderful. Let's talk about the actuaries. They're saying we don't have the funding in the account so we'll just simply not pay them. This year, retired teachers will receive 0.063 percent. By the way, that isn't even enough in some cases to buy a

cup of coffee, and this government is proud of that fact? They stand here and they say how well they're treating retired teachers. Well, it's a fallacy. It's terrible and flippant remarks like this minister makes in this House certainly don't add to the credibility of this government. I was on the steps. I was there when there was a demonstration in front of this Legislature. That minister was there and he had nothing to say. You know what he said, he said, we've taken \$1.5 billion and put into teachers' pension plan.

Mr. Speaker, this is pretty simple economics. You have a liability or you have debt. What they've done, they've taken \$1.5 billion in debt. If you saw The Loans Act just recently passed in this House, there was \$2.3 billion of new debt coming onto the province of Manitoba. I assume that \$1.5 billion of that \$2.3 billion was, in fact, the teachers liability for the pension fund that was put into the pension. It's debt. It's either a liability or it's debt. That does nothing, does absolutely nothing for the retired teachers.

The retired teachers are out there right now saying, we've paid. We've paid a premium to make sure that COLA was in place for the entire life of our pensions. They paid that additional. They paid it. What have they done? They put it in the PAA account. I believe their returns are somewhere around 4 percent to 3.75 percent, 4 percent. Okay, so they put them in the PAA account. In the pension account, they are generating additional dollars. In fact, the minister stood here and said that they were somewhere around, I believe, 12 percent or 14 percent, that they are generating investment income in the pension account and that's fair ball. That's fine, but the PAA account is not being given the same advantage to those investment incomes, Mr. Speaker. If they were, then the PAA account would have sufficient funds in it that they could fund the COLA.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't about education. This isn't about supporting education, and if it was, then this government has also failed on that. In Manitoba right now we spend less on education than any other province. We spend less. They stand there in this House and they say how they're supporting education, and they're not.

We spend more on health care, but the service we get is the worst in the country. They spend a lot on health, the most, the most with the exception of Newfoundland, we spend on health care. We get the

worst health-care service in the country, and that has been proven in studies and reports, Mr. Speaker. And education, we fund education the least amount of any province in this country, and this minister stands up in this House and says how wonderful their government is doing with respect to education. It's not happened.

Not only do they not support education, Mr. Speaker, they don't support the retired teachers.

Now, this legislation is fairly simple, fairly simple: the educators, the retired educators, want the ability to appoint a member on TRAF. Okay, is that pretty simple? The retired teachers want to elect that member that sits on TRAF. That's democracy, Mr. Speaker.

The minister stood and he said, we, and I quote, we appoint a retired teacher on TRAF. They appoint their buddies. They appoint the people who believe what they're selling, Mr. Speaker, and that's wrong. All the retired teachers want is the opportunity to elect their own sitting member on TRAF. Is that too hard to understand? Elections, democracy, their people, their person, placed on the TRAF board. That's pretty simple, isn't it? But they won't accept it. Why won't they accept it? They won't accept it because they're afraid that, in fact, that individual who was elected by TRAF may in fact question their abilities to be able to manage, to manage their fund, whether it be the pension fund or whether it be the COLA fund. Wouldn't it be something to have an individual sitting on that board who actually has the desire to support the teachers, the retired teachers, as opposed to support this government and, heaven forbid, MTS.

Well, let's talk about MTS. I didn't see the president of MTS standing on the steps of the Legislature on October 10. The president was invited, but unfortunately didn't feel that it was the right thing to be there because there's a government retired teachers issue that's here right now, and MTS didn't want to get involved on behalf of the retired teachers. That is wrong, Mr. Speaker, when MTS themselves will not support their retired teachers.

*(10:30)

By the way, MTS better be very careful, Mr. Speaker, because there are a number of school teachers right now in our age category that are going to be retiring in the not-too-distant future. If they're going to be retiring, they'd better recognize that this government is not supporting them. It's not

supporting them on the TRAF board. It's not supporting them when it comes to COLA. It's not supporting them when it comes to their pensions.

These are individuals who have given their total lives to the education of ourselves, our sons, our daughters, our grandsons and our granddaughters. These are people who have put their whole lives, their whole lives, to educate our children. And how are they treated? They're thrown off into a dustbin, Mr. Speaker. They're not given the opportunity to stand up and speak for themselves. They're not given the opportunity to say, I want a representative on that board that's going to look after my pension, that's going to look after my livelihood when it comes to retirement.

Our communities are losing. Not only are the teachers losing, but our communities are losing. If you look at the statistics, if you look at the loss of income that comes with the COLA, we are losing disposable incomes in our communities. Small rural communities who have retired teachers are not being able to generate that disposable income that's necessary not only to sustain their retirement years but also sustain the economies in our communities. Why is it, Mr. Speaker? Because the minister sits there smugly and says, because we're government. We don't have to do it. We're not going to do it, and you can't do anything because MTS, by the way, supports the government.

MTS doesn't support the retired teachers. MTS doesn't support this side of the House when it comes to equity, fairness and an opportunity for people to retain a lifestyle that they deserve to have in the coming years in retirement.

This government is at fault. This government has no plan in place. They put more debt in place. They certainly don't put anything in place to make sure that those people up there are going to have a good retirement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am so disappointed in the comments of this minister and I certainly hope they do translate into the rest of the province when the retired teachers get on their bandwagon and, in fact, do insist that this minister take back a lot of his remarks and treat this seriously, not as some Halloween joke. Thank you.

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to make a few comments for the record on Bill 211. To begin with, I, too, would like to acknowledge our guests in the gallery, certainly. I have some very wonderful experiences at Elmwood

High School as well. That was where I had the opportunity of student teaching, and I know that had it not been for Mrs. Prendergast I probably wouldn't have carried on in my career for the 34 years that I did. I certainly owe her a great debt of gratitude.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the efforts of our government related to teachers' pensions. Certainly over the past number of years since 1999, this government has chosen to open The Teachers' Pensions Act four times to make some very important changes in The Teachers' Pensions Act.

One of the things that we tried very hard as teachers in the 1990s was to have a dialogue with the government and that dialogue was never forthcoming. The Teachers' Pension Task Force during that time never met, and it was the vehicle by which opportunity to make changes and to bring about some positive changes to the pension act could have occurred. Those dialogues, those conversations, never occurred. Certainly the Teachers' Pension Task Force has been meeting on a regular basis which, to me, gives me great optimism for resolving any of the differences and concerns that may currently exist.

The other thing that I remember very distinctly was one of the issues that was very much on teachers' plates at that time was to allow maternity benefits to be bought back by teachers. Manitoba was the last jurisdiction, certainly a huge equity issue that we brought forward many, many times that was never addressed. It was through this government that the maternity-leave benefits were finally addressed, not only for active teachers but also for retired teachers.

The other issue that was on the table at the time was the unfunded liability. Certainly, at that time, it was quite obvious, with the emerging baby boomers retiring, that it was going to have a huge effect on the unfunded liability that the government had. Certainly I have to commend our government's change to add the 1.5 billion in contributions to the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund. This was an issue that was a long-standing issue that was not dealt with, and this government made sure that that change occurred.

I think, from what we have seen over the past number of years, that our government is certainly committed to working with teachers in addressing the concerns with the pension act. I think that, given that the Teachers' Pension Task Force is continuing to meet, this will give an opportunity to bring about some resolution to any of the pension issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand in support of this legislation that has been proposed by my colleague, the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler).

I want to say at the beginning that when a minister responsible for an area stands up in this House, we expect that there be some intelligence and a little bit of seriousness taken when you address an issue like the one that is before us. The flippant and shameful remarks that came from the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) are typical of his attitude towards retired teachers and are typical of the attitude he has to ordinary Manitobans who have requested that we follow up an action with a bill in the House. That is shameful from many perspectives. He is supposed to be the educational leader in this province, and he has just proven to us that he is nothing but a shameful act in this House. His remarks should be distributed throughout the province to retired teachers to show exactly what substance this man has.

Mr. Speaker, I know that that is a personal attack, but I am tired of his personal attacks on people in this House, on ordinary Manitobans in this province, and he deserves what he gets.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me talk about the bill, because that's what we're here for. We're here to talk about the seriousness of the bill. I just heard him make a remark about bullying. Well, if there's any bully in this House, it is the minister.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have a little decorum in here. We're starting to personalize the debate a little too much. Let's be careful with our language.

The honourable Member for Russell has the floor.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, and I acknowledge your caution, of course, but if the member wants to sit in his place and make remarks like that, I will certainly bring them to the attention of Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, we're here to talk about Bill 211. Bill 211 is one which talks about treatment of people who have retired from a profession in a fair way. Retired teachers have been in this House time after time. I'm sure that retired teachers have much better things to do than to come to the Legislature and try to make their case time and time and time again. There hasn't been one demonstration on the steps of

this Legislature. There have been several. Every time we get the same old tired message from this minister. He ignores the issue of the day and goes off on a tangent to talk about unrelated things that don't really have anything to do with treatment of teachers in a fair way.

Mr. Speaker, this is about COLA. This is about giving teachers a voice on the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund. This is about making sure that democracy, in fact, is a working practice, if you like, in this province.

But, Mr. Speaker, this government chooses to isolate people. It chooses to do favours to its friends, as we've seen, and ignore ordinary Manitobans. Last night was another example of it. Last night, we had the experience of a backbencher in the government who, in committee, corrected a minister who was trying to make the point that a category of workers and labourers in this province were going to be included in a bill. That backbencher, the Member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady)—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister for Science, Technology on a point of order.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I don't normally get up on a point of order, but I assume that there should be some relevance of topic. I know that the topic that we're talking about today is the retired teachers' pension act, and I would hope that the member opposite would be relevant to that topic, Sir.

* (10:40)

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, clearly, what I heard was that the Member for Russell was obviously relevant, and what I saw is the Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) was clearly talking to the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) and wasn't paying attention. *[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised—*[interjection]*

Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Minister of Science and Technology, he does not have a point of order.

I would remind all members that, when you're making a speech, to keep it as relevant as you can. I was listening very carefully. I heard him use it as an example of. So it was kind on the borderline, but I would ask members to keep—*[interjection]*

Order. I would ask members to keep their comments relevant and to have respect for one another in this House, please.

* * *

Mr. Derkach: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and if I may further continue. I'm using the example of how this government picks and chooses the people that it wants to support, the groups that it wants to support in our province based on how they support the government.

Last night was a perfect example of that. Mr. Speaker, the minister of highways, infrastructure was trying to make the case that when we are going to be constructing the monuments for the firefighters, the police, the workers in this province, the Member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) put up her hand in committee and said, I want to clarify something. I want to clarify that that third category is not for all workers in Manitoba. It is for union people. That just tells you exactly where this government is coming from.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about Bill 211, we are talking about people who have had to fight for everything that they get by demonstrating, by coming to this Legislature, by trying to meet with government, to ensure that they have some fairness shown in how their pensions are adjusted.

Mr. Speaker, what is wrong with having—

An Honourable Member: I'm the daughter of a retired teacher.

Mr. Derkach: Oh, well now, Mr. Speaker, here we go again. I am a daughter of a retired teacher. Well, there's lots of us who have taught school in this area. Stand up for your teachers, then. Stand up for the people who are sitting in our gallery. Stand up, by supporting this legislation. Make your voice count in this Legislature. That's what this is all about.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 211 gives recognition to the fact that retired teachers have the right to have a voice on the TRAF board. They have a right because they are professionals within that organization, and they should have a voice at the table. But this minister and this government continue to deny that

right. They continue to deny teachers getting a COLA.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the minister goes off on actuaries and the fact that—you know, he puts false statements on the record and he leaves them there. He says, well, we didn't like what the actuary said, so we fired the actuary. Now, he can stretch the truth a bit, but when it's that blatant, even the little children know how foolish this is.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, up until the year 2000, teachers were getting full COLA. Teachers were getting full COLA. Retired teachers got full COLA. Now the minister can talk about, oh, well, we funded the unfunded liability. In other words, what he's saying is they went into debt, and then were able to say, well, we funded the unfunded liability. All you did was create debt in another place. It doesn't take a scientist to know that. It doesn't take a chartered accountant to know that.

But, Mr. Speaker, what've we got today? We've got a situation that is deteriorating because retired teachers have lost about 9 percent, since 2000, of their future income, and their dollars can't buy what they did in 1999.

Why are they singled out as the only group that doesn't get COLA? I ask, what other profession doesn't get COLA? People who retire from this Legislature, are they going to get COLA? I think so. So why should retired teachers not be entitled to that same privilege, that same right, in this province, Mr. Speaker? It is because a government chooses not to do it. It's not because they can't do it. It's because they won't do it.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, they've got the current MTS executive in their pockets, and that's as blatant as it is when we saw the demonstration in October 2007. The president of the Teachers' Society refused to come, advised probably by the minister to stay away. *[interjection]* Oh, I don't have to put words in the minister's mouth for sure, but I also heard the words of the former president of the MTS who tried to support where the minister was going. He tried to mimic the minister's direction, but people know better. People know better.

Mr. Speaker, this government has just chosen to isolate this group of retired people, retired teachers in this province and not give them the same access that they rightfully deserve to representation and to a full COLA, and today they brag about giving

0.63 percent of 1 percent to COLA for this year. That is shameful, nothing but shameful.

When we have a Premier stand in this House and tell the province how well the province is doing economically, and then on the other hand have the minister say, but we can't afford COLA, something doesn't equate, something does not equate.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for this minister, this government to stand in its place, stand up for retired teachers, support this legislation. If he can't support this legislation, make sure the teachers get a full COLA each and every year. Thank you.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the previous two members because I can see why, during the 1990s, this group wanted to remove history, wanted to cut teachers' pay.

The members opposite may not know this, but what happens is in the 1990s when you cut pay, when you force teachers to take unpaid days of leave, when you remove PD, what that means is that all the nine teachers on this side, the teachers who were teachers who are now MLAs on this side knew what happened in the 1990s. So I understand why the Member for Russell wanted to remove history from the curriculum because what he wanted to do is to make sure that people didn't understand the past. The member opposite may not know, but your retirement is based on your income.

So in the 1990s when the former government, where he was Minister of Education, cut teachers' wages, gave unpaid leave days, forced people to take cuts in their retirement permanently, he was doing damage not just for those 10 years but forever. So, although he may be conjuring up story time instead of private members' time, he should know the reality.

The other thing is he knows that MTS was at the door. They were at the door regularly. I was at the door holding protests. I was holding protests out there. I was holding protests in the gallery because of cuts to education, cuts to teachers, cuts to everything. When you look at government, and I know the member opposite was in the government that did a lot of political decisions, and lots of political decisions versus long-term forever decisions, I'm proud to be part of a government that makes long-term permanent solutions.

So the member opposite said there is no difference between liability and debt. Well, I can tell you something. If we contribute \$1.5 billion to TRAF, which we have done, that money is managed

by TRAF. Now the interesting part, that the member opposite might not understand, so I'll explain it slowly so he can understand it, is this: TRAF has earned over 4 percent, in fact it's earned 7 percent, 8 percent, 10 percent, and 14 percent.

Well, I'll tell you something, Mr. Speaker, a pension plan when it's in deficit and has actuarial warnings, and I know the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) doesn't understand numbers because he asked unbelievable questions in Question Period, but here's what it is. If a pension is in deficit, that means it doesn't have enough money to pay the current obligations. So when you have actuaries and accountants and people who are in the business world that say, you know, you have a deficit. You can't afford to pay current pensions. You shouldn't be paying current pensions. You are in trouble. You can't pay COLA, and you make decisions on election years, like in 1999, to pay full COLA. That is a political decision, and it's based on politics, not on finances.

* (10:50)

So, what we have done is that we've moved the \$1.5 billion into TRAF. Now, that money will earn income, and when you earn an income, then you're not in deficit. You can be in surplus. When you're in surplus, then you can pay reasonable pensions, but if you are in deficit, you haven't contributed for 40 years, you don't contribute for current employees, you didn't contribute for past employees, half the money is sitting there and no money is earning interest.

What we've done is we've transferred \$1.5 billion into TRAF. And then what's interesting—and the people opposite don't understand the difference between doing it forever and making a permanent solution that doesn't involve politics, that is done because you've done the systemic things to make fundamental changes to make forever difference.

So what we did was we moved the \$1.5 billion over. The pension now can actually have, and I hope the members opposite are listening because they're chattering and they're not listening to the long-term solution. You move \$1.5 billion over. The money earns real interest. So what happens is the pension moves from deficit where you have actuaries and people who understand economics say, don't pay this. Put real money in.

We moved \$1.5 billion in. The money will earn real income. If it has anything to do with the future as in the past, what'll happen is real money will be transferred. The pension has an opportunity to pay for surplus. Now, I know that it took a little bit of time to make up for 42 years of non-funding. I know that. So what we've done is we've moved the money over. The money has finally all been moved over. The money is now earning interest, and I know people don't understand that you should do things forever and make things done correctly, but now the pension is fully funded.

We've made up for the years that the Conservatives were in power. We've made up for the fact that a Conservative government stopped putting money into the pension plan, and we moved it over. When people opposite say that doesn't help the retired teachers, here's what happens. If the pension is in surplus, the actuaries will say, oh, you can pay pension and COLA and other things, but if you're in deficit, you can't make payments.

Now, I know that the members opposite don't like to hear the reality of it, but this is a long-term, permanent solution. When I look at it, I look at my own instance where I had pay cuts. I had a collective agreement that the members opposite and the former Minister of Education from Russell rolled back a collective agreement. That meant that any teachers that retired during that time actually had less pension forever, forever, regardless of COLA.

The other thing that's interesting is they talk about retired teachers be fair. Well, here's what's happened. We appointed Mr. Terry Clifford on the TRAF board, and the interesting part was that this is a member who had been a member of MTS, who was a member of TRAF. You know, that gives people a voice. The important part was that, for all the years, for all the years that the members opposite were in government, there wasn't a retired teacher there. So the interesting part is, and the Member for Brandon West can stand around getting a huge pension from the—and double-dipping and triple-dipping, but the truth is that we care about—

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Brandon West on a point of order.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, I believe that it's not in the good graces of this House to have this member talk about my pensions in other areas. I don't think he's cognizant of that. I don't think he understands it.

I don't think he knows what actually is my pension, and if he wishes to talk about my pension then perhaps we should talk about his investments.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Science, Technology, on the same point of order?

Mr. Rondeau: No, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised, the honourable member does not have a point of order. It's a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Rondeau: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I must have hit a nerve over there when I talked about fully indexed pensions at double the rate of teachers.

But, Mr. Speaker, I look at where you want to make decisions, and I think it's very important to make conscientious decisions that are long term, that are sound by actuaries and financial advisers, that are approved by actuaries and financial advisers, and when the members opposite say that there's no difference between debt and liability, I'll explain one final thing. If the government borrows some money at, say, 4.5 percent, and they invest that money at, say, 9 percent, then what happens is that there's a positive profit or a gain, and it's an actuarial gain of the difference between what is earned by the investment and what it costs for a loan. That means that they can create a surplus.

I know that the members opposite didn't increase the contributions in the fund, did not pay for teachers who were employed, which we started in 1999—all the contributions of new employees went in—did not fill up the deficit that was mentioned eight times—eight times the deficit was mentioned and not addressed—did not increase the pension contributions of new teachers although it was said multiple times they needed to do that, nor did they do anything that would be putting the pension on a sound financial footing. What they did was politically manipulate the pension plan, politically manipulate COLA against the advice of the actuaries, the bankers, the accountants.

So, Mr. Speaker, we've taken some steps. As a government, we believe that it's necessary not to do just the politically right thing but the long-term thing.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, in addressing Bill 210—or 211, I'm sorry—I think it's a fairly simple and straightforward bill. This has been an issue that has been before the government for years now. It's a simple request. It's a bill which we

support. It's a bill which the government should support.

Mr. Speaker, it's a no-brainer. This is something that should be passed, and one has to question why it is the government doesn't see the value of passing simple legislation of this nature that can really make a difference. They don't want to acknowledge there is a difference between the Retired Teachers' Association electing and having an individual put on, as opposed to a minister who appoints the person on.

I listened very patiently to the current speaker and the speaker before in terms of looking for why it is that they would not support that aspect that's before us today. Why not allow a legislative mandate that ensures that the Retired Teachers' Association does have the opportunity to elect, to get someone elected into this particular position, Mr. Speaker?

For years that has been before the Chamber. The government has had the opportunity now that has been afforded by the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) to do the honourable thing. I suspect it has more to do with pride. This government has just too much pride to acknowledge when a good idea hits them in the head, that they cannot and they will not take the action that's necessary to make the system that much better.

Mr. Speaker, I sat in the committee when we had hundreds of retired teachers ask and literally beg for the government to recognize the value of retired teachers, and they just turned a blind eye. Then, at the end of the day, as opposed to bringing it in, in terms of legislation, they say, well, we will appoint someone.

Well, that's not good enough. This legislation takes it the next step, and we look to the government, the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) to do the right thing and allow this legislation to be voted upon so it can go to committee, so retired teachers will be able to speak on it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (11:00)

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

Point of Order

Mr. Lamoureux On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have no desire to have the bill remain in my name. My preference is to see the bill voted on so it goes to committee.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Order. The time being 11 a.m., when this matter is before the House the debate will remain open.

Now we will move on to Resolutions, as agreement of the House, as being 11 a.m., and we're dealing with Resolution 9.

Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet, on a point of order?

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if there might be leave of the House to vote on this particular bill. To have a vote.

Mr. Speaker: Order. As per the agreement of the House, we can't have a recorded vote issued today. We would have to hold it off until Thursday, but if the House wants to have a voice vote, that's entirely up to the House.

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is the House willing to have a voice vote on the bill?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: There is no agreement, so now we will move on to Resolutions.

Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Russell, on a point of order?

Mr. Derkach: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I guess it's noteworthy that, on a point of order, when we've asked for a recorded vote—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach:—that the government has—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House has spoken and it's not up for a debate. Points of order should not be used for the means of debate in the House. So the honourable member does not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: We'll now move on to Resolutions and we're dealing with Resolution 9, Provincial Diabetes Strategy. The honourable member—

Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Arthur-Virden, on a point of order?

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Just a point of order, Mr. Speaker, if there's no vote to be taken on it, verbally or recorded today, I wonder if we could have leave to have this bill then moved to committee.

Mr. Speaker: Order. No bill can be moved into committee unless we've had Second Reading of that bill. That's right in our rules of the House, so the honourable member does not have a point of order.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 9—Provincial Diabetes Strategy

Mr. Speaker: Okay, we're dealing with Resolution 9, Provincial Diabetes Strategy.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen):

WHEREAS November 14 was World Diabetes Day, and the Canadian Diabetes Association has made November Diabetes Awareness Month; and

WHEREAS in 2001 the total number of Manitobans living with diabetes exceeded 63,000, with more than 6,000 new cases diagnosed each year since 2001; and

WHEREAS age is a factor in the development of diabetes and the aging population will result in a higher incidence of people living with type 2 diabetes; and

WHEREAS the rate of First Nations people living with type 2 diabetes has reached epidemic levels, being approximately two times the rate for all Manitobans, with about one in two First Nations females aged 50 and up living with type 2 diabetes, which is about four times the rate of all Manitoban women ages 50 years and older, and

WHEREAS the provincial government has recognized the devastation diabetes has wrought on many communities, particularly First Nations and

elderly, as well as the accompanying strains on the health-care system; and

WHEREAS the provincial government is working in partnership with Aboriginal organizations to address the unique health-care challenges and to create meaningful preventative strategies; and

WHEREAS the provincial government applauds northern communities involved with the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, which is designed to promote healthy living and reduce the prevalence of diseases like diabetes, among others; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has recognized the chronic nature of diabetes and the necessity of formulating an integrated healthy living approach to properly prevent, care and control diabetes; and

WHEREAS the provincial government launched the Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative in 2006, which provides support to communities for the creation of chronic disease prevention programs relevant to the unique needs of people across the province; and

WHEREAS the provincial government's strategy incorporates the Regional Diabetes Program Framework, the Risk Factor and Complication Assessment (RFCA) and the Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative (CDPI); and

WHEREAS Norway House and Garden Hill now both have dialysis units, making Manitoba the only province in Canada to have this service on reserves; and

WHEREAS the need for such services on many other reserves in Manitoba and across the country is growing rapidly; and

WHEREAS the provincial and federal governments have provided funding for the Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative to help fight chronic disease in Manitoba that further supplements previous Manitoba Health and Healthy Living initiatives that focus on early detection, changes in disease patterns and improved health outcomes.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to continue to support public education in the area of healthy living and diabetes prevention throughout the province of Manitoba as part of its comprehensive preventative disease initiative; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba encourage the provincial government to consider promoting further partnerships with the federal government and First Nations communities and to consider expanding these services in northern and remote communities in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Member for Interlake, seconded by the honourable Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen),

WHEREAS—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: It is my pleasure to put forward this resolution.

When I was first elected in 1999 I found that my initial focus was on issues of infrastructure, farming, water issues, wildlife and so forth. So when I was asked to join the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force, I most heartily agreed because it would give me an opportunity to learn more about health issues, education, youth and so forth. Indeed, it was a very learning experience. We travelled across the province with the Member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald), who was the Minister of Healthy Living at the time and now our Health Minister of course; members for St. Norbert and Minto. The Leader of the Liberal Party from River Heights was with us, as well as members for Turtle Mountain and Morris.

Those were the elected members, but I want to take just one moment, Mr. Speaker, to make mention of a member of our staff who was with us throughout this process, who unfortunately is no longer with us. Her name was Annalea Mitchell. She was the one who worked with us on this report. She just passed away a few short months ago. I really think that all of us should take our hats off to the work that Annalea did with the committee and in preparation of the report. She was a wonderful resource for us, for the people of Manitoba, and she is sorely missed by one and all.

* (11:10)

Of course, our mandate on the committee was to focus on a range of issues, whether it be healthy eating or the promotion of physical activity, smoking cessation—which is something that I am currently undergoing myself—of course injury prevention, Mr. Speaker, and that includes suicide. One thing that we learned was that this was the, I think, the highest cause of death amongst young people. We also left it open for them and we had good discussions on alcohol abuse, of course, drug problems, as a form of

injury to young people as well. So, it was a wonderful learning experience for me, for all of us, I'm sure, and was instrumental in the formation of this resolution before the house today.

Some of the findings of the task force were very interesting. For myself, in particular, when I learned, for example, that rural Manitobans are actually unhealthier, or less healthy than our counterparts in urban Manitoba, this was a great surprise to me. I thought that with the healthy lifestyle that so many of us out in rural Manitoba live that we would be ahead of the game, but one of our findings was that was actually not the case. Of course, well, I'll talk about that a little bit later about some of the methods that we have to apply to reverse that.

Another very important finding of the committee was that this generation of children will live shorter lives than their parents. I think that's fundamental, Mr. Speaker, that for the first time in history, you know, the lifespan of the human race is getting shorter instead of longer. Up until now, that was not the case, but given the onset of the fast-food diet, the sedentary lifestyle that many of our children live today as a result of the technology explosion, the fact that we have satellite TV with hundreds of stations to watch, that computers are easily accessible, now we have the Internet and so forth, the result is that children are spending too much time in these practices as opposed to going out, exercising, spending time outdoors and so forth. So, this was news to me, as well.

Certainly, diabetes, and the onset of type 2 diabetes in particular as a result of this lifestyle, is a topic before us and worthy of a resolution. I would strongly recommend and hope that members opposite would agree with me on this front and at the end of the day that we can all pass this resolution in the spirit of non-partisanship and co-operation.

Now, one of the third findings of the task force was that type 2 diabetes is particularly prevalent on our First Nations communities. Myself, I have eight First Nation communities in the Interlake constituency as well as a number of northern affairs communities, a lot of poor rural communities. So, this is an issue that is very, very important to me.

Now, how do we go about reversing this? Well, I think we have to start reverting back to a more traditional lifestyle and, you know, that includes a lot of things, such as hunting. Hunting season is upon us today. The archery season, of course, is under way, Mr. Speaker. The muzzle-loading season and soon, with November 12 fast approaching, the rifle season

for white-tail will be upon us. I encourage all members to take part in this activity to harvest natural foods unpolluted by growth hormones and so forth.

The members opposite are laughing. They find this amusing. I guess they don't practise this themselves, but going out and exercising, breathing the fresh air, getting up early and so forth, walking miles and miles, nothing could be healthier for you. I would recommend you try it. And if you don't want to do the hunting side of it, go out and pick berries. Pick mushrooms. *Pidpenky* are up in the bush right now, a prime time to do this type of harvesting. These are things that we have forgotten how to do. We have forgotten how to do. A lot of us don't grow gardens anymore. A lot of us don't can anymore. A lot of us don't know how to smoke fish or smoke meat, and I do. I have smoked fish for years and years, and one of the finest things in my life I ever tasted was smoked rainbow trout, taken out of Newman Lake, just next to Lake Athapapuskow, truly a culinary experience and something that is unique, I think, to people who go out and experience the outdoors to the fullest.

I remember when we were in Ste. Anne, and I don't have that much time, but I'll give you an example. When we were in Ste. Anne, we had a delegation of school children that came up before us and I asked them, how many of you can say that you have killed and plucked a chicken or have gone out and picked berries or mushrooms or have actually fired a rifle, and none of them had, Mr. Speaker. So, obviously, we've got ground to make up in promoting traditional lifestyles.

This government has accomplished a lot in the resolution. It was mentioned about Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative and so forth. Our expansion of dialysis services to First Nations communities such as Garden Hill and the area that that community serves is a first in Canada. We are looking to Berens River to do the same thing and also to bring dialysis services to the Percy E. Moore Hospital in the community of Hodgson, Mr. Speaker, which will serve Peguis First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation, Kinonjeoshtegon, as well as the people in the surrounding areas because diabetes is not unique to First Nations people.

The northern food program, I know my colleague from Flin Flon will speak on that and some of the success stories that we've experienced.

I want to hear other speakers, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for the opportunity to put this resolution

forward, and I urge all members of the House to unite in passing this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to be here this morning to speak about the resolution brought forward by the Member for Interlake. I listened carefully to his comments regarding hunting and such. It was difficult at times trying to tie it all in, I think, to the resolution. I hope he doesn't have a Dick Cheney moment at all when he's out hunting, this particular hunting season that he is careful, careful with whom he aims at and what he aims at and that he has a licence for all those things that he shoots. I know in the past there have been questions about whether or not the member actually gets licences for some of those hunting episodes he goes on.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Interlake, on a point of order.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Mr. Speaker, I just want to say I resent the implication from the member opposite that I would hunt without a licence. That's completely untrue. I did say, in this House in times past, that I have killed bears in defence of my property, which is allowed. Many farmers opposite would agree with me that that's an acceptable practice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Interlake, first of all, points of order should not be raised for the purpose of debate. The honourable member does not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: It was barely a protest point, let alone a point of order, Mr. Speaker, but I certainly wouldn't want to cast aspersions on the Member for Interlake. I'm sure those five bears that were shot was just a coincidence or bad timing. I like to stand up for all of God's creatures, and so I wanted to ensure that those bears at the Interlake had a fair shot, so to speak, when the Member for Interlake is there.

*(11:20)

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, to the resolution at hand, you know, there is actually a lot within this resolution that we would agree with, that we think is important. Perhaps, when I read the resolution, I thought that there was probably more that I objected with that was missing than what was actually in the resolution. A lot of what was put on paper I think was fine, that we wouldn't object to, but there was also a lot that simply wasn't there in the context of this resolution.

We've seen, unfortunately, the history of this government is that they bring forward resolutions or they bring forward other points in different legislative matters and they exclude a lot of the problems in a particular issue and then they try to pass the resolution. If it does pass, then they say, well, see, our work here is done and obviously everybody agrees with us, and so you now have no right to criticize it or raise any other issues.

The problem here, of course, is there are a lot of problems that are happening with the diabetes strategy or not happening in the province that aren't mentioned in the resolution. I don't believe that the member would consider it a friendly amendment to put some of those within the context of his resolution. If he did, though, perhaps we could have that discussion.

I raise a number of different points. One is regarding the issue—and I've raised this in the Legislature before on behalf of constituents of mine and I'd say on behalf of constituents of all the members of this House regarding, for example, insulin pumps for diabetes, those who have type 1 diabetes.

Members of this House will be eager to know that other provinces, including that great soon-to-be-Conservative province of Saskatchewan, have passed legislation that allows for insulin pumps for children who have type 1 diabetes. Ontario has such legislation. I also believe that there's a Maritime province that has the legislation that provides funding for children under the age of 18 who need and who desire to have that sort of help with their particular type 1 diabetes problem.

That's missing from this particular resolution. I've raised it with the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) in Estimates and other places. She's always said they're not opposed to it, that they might consider it, but it's missing from the resolution. Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Member for Interlake

(Mr. Nevakshonoff) would like to amend his resolution to include that particular provision.

I also know that there's scant mention of providing treatment for those in southern Manitoba. I know that the Member for Interlake represents a northern constituency, so I don't begrudge that fact, that he'd want to have specific inclusion of the northern part of Manitoba, but to exclude an entire part of the province, to exclude all those areas south of Winnipeg I think is a mistake. Again, it sometimes shows that this is a government that has sort of cut the map off at the Trans-Canada, and now everything that happens below the Trans-Canada Highway isn't relevant to them in the province of Manitoba.

I'm reminded actually of a quote. I was reminded of it the last few days when the Member for The Pas (Mr. Lathlin), the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, I believe, the Member for The Pas, who in 1997 or 1998 in this House said that if we don't spend one nickel on roads in southern Manitoba in the five years that we would be in government, those people wouldn't suffer. That's a direct quote from the Member for The Pas, the member who's the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, to say that they didn't want to spend even a nickel on roads in southern Manitoba. That's a demonstration, I think, Mr. Speaker, of the fact that this is a government that isn't concerned about what's happening in southern Manitoba whether it relates to the diabetes strategy or whether it relates to roads.

I was very, very disappointed to hear that particular comment from the minister. It was reminded to me by some of the council members in my area who said, do you remember when this particular minister said that they wouldn't be spending a nickel on the roads in southern Manitoba? They believed, actually, that they fulfilled that promise. That's one promise that was actually fulfilled by the NDP government, because there's been scant resources put into those roads in southern Manitoba.

But on the particular issue of diabetes, it's important that this resolution either be amended or be changed to ensure that it includes all the areas of Manitoba that are suffering from this particular disease. We know that there are different rates of incidence whether it's from the reserves in Manitoba or northern parts of Manitoba or southern parts, that there are different rates of incidence, but it doesn't mean, Mr. Speaker, that there isn't a need for a strategy throughout all of Manitoba, that all

Manitobans should be included in that strategy. So there's an omission here when it comes to that.

Also, when we look at issues related to the drug formulary, and I've raised this issue in the House in the context of Question Period about the need to have an updated drug formulary. We've seen here in Manitoba that the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) hasn't allowed or hasn't instructed the committee who's in charge and who's responsible for ensuring that new drugs get put onto the formulary in a timely manner to save all Manitobans money.

There are many who are suffering with diabetes who could benefit from having and ensuring this committee would meet regularly to have new and improved or cheaper drugs put onto the formulary, yet the Minister of Health hasn't allowed or hasn't instructed that committee to improve and to put new drugs onto the formulary since March of this year. Last time I looked, which was a couple of days ago, every other province in Canada had had a meeting sooner than we've had here in Manitoba. Every other province in Canada had put new drugs onto the formulary, allowed generic drugs.

Well, the Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan) is shaking her head in a negative fashion. If she has counter information to what I'm putting on the record, if she believes that the drug formulary committee has met, then I encourage her to stand up and tell me when they've met.

But, I believe, in fact, in looking at the updated information, that the committee hasn't met in Manitoba since March and every other province is ahead of us. So, there again, this is something that could be included, perhaps, as a friendly amendment to the resolution to ensure that the issue of insulin pumps, to ensure that regular meetings of the drug formulary be put into the resolution.

I see that the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) is nodding in agreement. Perhaps he believes these things should be included. He recognizes that his government, in fact, has missed some things when it comes to diabetes. I think that's a positive step that the Member for Interlake recognizes that there are holes and that there are gaps in their particular strategy. Certainly, after I'm finished speaking, I would entertain the member to come forward here, and we'll work on those changes and those resolutions to have an amendment put forward here and perhaps get it passed and create policy. The member might be happy to create a new policy for the government with this particular

resolution by funding insulin pumps for those who are under the age of 18 and perhaps even adults in the province of Manitoba.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, whether it's the drug formulary, whether it's gaps in the policy as it relates to the insulin pumps, we see that there are holes and there are omissions in this particular resolution. It's not so much what's in the resolution that there is opposition to. I don't think there is much to oppose that's in the resolution, it's what's missing from the resolution. So, perhaps with a few additions, this particular resolution, and maybe others, could move forward.

I know that there are many other speakers. I see that my time is short, but I do look forward to hearing from the comments from the members opposite as well as my colleagues on this of the House in terms of how this resolution can be changed, to be strengthened and perhaps to be proceeded on today or another day before the end of the session. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): I was listening with rapt attention to the Member for Steinbach as he was talking about insulin pumps. It's something I found quite interesting.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to put a few words on record regarding diabetes and the strategies we have for fighting it. My concern about it, particularly in northern Manitoba where type 2 diabetes, particularly, is rampant, the strategy always is education and healthy living. Type 2 diabetes, we know, can be combated by physical activity, healthy eating and healthy weight loss.

Having said that, we also know that in northern Manitoba many of our people are living in conditions that are not conducive necessarily to those three elements I just mentioned. In some of the more isolated and remote communities where people do not have jobs or unemployment is huge, I do not know the percentage, but it wouldn't surprise me, Mr. Speaker, if some of the more isolated communities unemployment reaches 90 percent. When you're on a fixed income, when you're living on social assistance and you go to the store, and there may only be one store, and you find a quart of milk—I'm still using the old fashion term, I should say a litre of milk or perhaps two litres of milk—and the price tag runs, say, around \$12 for that, you realize if you're on social assistance, you can't afford the healthy food. There should be other strategies to deal with getting

that food to people, including transportation strategies. But it is an issue; it is a lifestyle issue.

I remember a number of years ago I was invited to a meeting for NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority, and the expert there was pointing out that if diabetes continued at the rate it was continuing, if the graph continued to climb up exponentially almost then after 20 years you'd be spending all our money on combating diabetes. Of course, we know that there are many other issues, not just diabetes. So it is something that's getting out of hand. It's getting away from us. It's going to be hugely expensive. It is related to some factors that we can control.

It's very easy for us to say traditional foods; people should eat more pickerel, more fish, more trout, more northern pike, jackfish, berries, mushrooms—

An Honourable Member: A balanced diet.

* (11:30)

Mr. Jennissen: A balanced diet, as the honourable member says.

It's hard to do on very little money, and the other thing I think we have to be aware of that it's not as easy as it was in the past. I mean, people do like to do traditional living, and I certainly would recommend it. For example, a fishing, hunting, or trapping lifestyle is a very interesting lifestyle. I know that personally because when I taught at Frontier Collegiate Institute for 20-some years, for 20 years, I was involved with a trapline, a 60-square-mile trapline. I was very much involved with teaching Aboriginal kids how to set traps, and I must admit that even the kids that didn't know much about it probably knew more about it than I did, but I did learn an awful lot about the trapping lifestyle and traditional lifestyles of the north.

It's easy to say, fix it, but it's hard to do. It is true that the traditional foods were much healthier. I particularly recall a meeting we had in Nelson House going back, probably, some 25 years with Archbishop Sutton at the time. We were listening to a group of elders, and one elderly lady, I think she was probably close to 100 years old, was explaining, via a translator, interpreter, that 80 years earlier, or 90 years earlier, perhaps even, when people lived entirely off the land, people had a lot more energy, and she was trying to explain this. They would live on, I guess it was sometimes pemmican or moose meat or deer or rabbit, but the energy that people had was tremendous compared to what they had now.

She was comparing how she would work the trapline years ago compared to one of her—I think it was her great-granddaughter who could only handle a third of that same trapline because she simply didn't have that drive, well, that energy. I think it was largely due to the type of foods consumed.

Diabetes is a scourge in northern Manitoba. It's something we have to deal with. There are no easy fixes, but certainly, unemployment is an issue. If people had more money, they could buy more nutritious foods. Transportation links are important, and that's why I find it somewhat disturbing when the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) suggested that road money should go south rather than stay in the north. It's already tough enough to make a living there as it is.

Also, I believe there has been an erosion of traditional values, traditional cultures, as well as language, and people don't think in the old terms any more of how, for example, smoking the meat and fish and so on. They've adopted modern technology and modern methods, and they don't always suit a healthy lifestyle in the north.

I would like to actually switch for a moment, Mr. Speaker, if I may, to the human dimension of when type 2 diabetes becomes type 1 diabetes and you have to have dialysis and you have to stay alive via dialysis. I'd like to just mention two people that I know very well among many, many others who have this kind of problem and who have to have dialysis at a regular basis, usually three times a week.

I mention the first one, Joyce Bear from Pukatawagan, Mathias Colomb First Nation. When Joyce Bear needed dialysis, she would have to be flown out of Pukatawagan, I think it was twice a week, preferably three times a week, but it's a small community. It's not always easy to get in there, particularly, when the season changes in the fall or in the spring. The airport could be fogged in or simply inaccessible for whatever reason, and so this person's life is basically in jeopardy. It's very difficult.

Later on, when she decided to move to the Peter Ballantyne First Nation in Saskatchewan and made arrangements for taxis or local drivers to pick her up to take her to the hospital in Flin Flon for dialysis, the drivers couldn't be relied upon at all times. Sometimes they didn't show up so her life was endangered.

I tried, as much as possible, to deal with the medical people, Mr. Speaker, although I know very

little about that area. Perhaps we could have dialysis in Pukatawagan and for a whole variety of reasons, working with the renal failure people, we couldn't do this because we needed a certain type of water. We needed a certain type of training, a certain type of nurses. It was unfortunate because we could have used a dialysis unit not only in Pukatawagan but many, many other northern communities.

I would like to point out, though, that in Flin Flon, we have doubled our dialysis capacity, and that is a good thing because the second story I'd like to talk about briefly is my good friend, Robert Brightnose, from Cranberry Portage who also has type 1 diabetes, needs dialysis regularly. I remember in the past, sometimes there wouldn't be room in Flin Flon, and he was actually physically moved to Dauphin where there's more accessibility to the dialysis units there. That has been solved to a great degree because we have doubled, as I said before, the dialysis capacity in the Flin Flon General Hospital.

It's a complex issue and, as I pointed out before, transportation plays a role in it. If we did have the roads in northern Manitoba where people—and, again, I will use Pukatawagan—could drive their vehicle to, say, Flin Flon or The Pas, they could buy healthy foods at a relatively cheap price. But that is not the case.

Furthermore, in northern Manitoba, when you deal with winter roads, we have to realize that very often, or not often, but it has happened frequently in the last 20 years, that we can't complete the roads, perhaps due to global warming; I'm not sure what all the factors are. But, if the winter road isn't completed, then again, getting food to those communities in large quantities, particularly milk and so on, and also diesel fuel and building material, becomes very difficult and prices rise. When every ounce of milk has to be flown in, every ounce of liquid milk, you know the price is going to rise.

It's always mystified me that we have one price for liquor across this province, but not one price for milk. It's very, very expensive in northern Manitoba, the whole variety of reasons for this, and we have to deal with that.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about our northern food program which tries to address some of these issues, but, unfortunately, it seems that my preamble has gotten a little lengthy, and I can't get to that. The light's flashing, so I will leave that to one of my colleagues. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I, too, want to put just a few comments on the record regarding this resolution. Certainly, this is a disease that is rampant in the province of Manitoba, and I think all of us here would know of friends and others who have diabetes and certainly have been affected by it.

I just found it interesting that the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff), in some of his comments, and I'm not sure whether he was using this as a balanced diet debate, but when he was referencing to the fact that he was out hunting, I'm assuming that this is something that he uses in order to balance the diet that he is on. I know that over a period of years he has also informed this House and this Chamber about the fact that he is an avid hunter. So I'm glad that he is still on that same page and is continuing to keep us updated on that.

The Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) also made a few comments regarding the diet of people, and I certainly would agree with that. On the other hand, though, Mr. Speaker, I would also submit to you that the diet that people have is something that they do generally by choice. I think that they choose the foods that they eat. As speaking on a personal note, I know that there are some foods that I enjoy more than others, and some are healthier than others, but I think it's a conscious effort that we need to make in order to have a balanced diet and this, of course, is something that's going to assist us in our own health.

Now, some statistics regarding the province of Manitoba that I found rather interesting is that the disease is reaching epidemic proportions and, sad to say, but this is particularly true within the Aboriginal communities. Then, the other added part is that more than 67,000 Manitobans are living with diabetes, according to the Canadian Diabetic Association. Every day, 16 Manitobans are diagnosed with diabetes, compared to the national average of 11. So, we see that in the province of Manitoba, this is increasing daily and certainly we need to do something in order to address this issue.

Diabetics can result in a reduced quality of life and the increased likelihood of complications such as heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, blindness and amputation. Approximately 80 percent of people with diabetes will die as a result of heart disease or a stroke.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting, but I went to, it was actually an anniversary, on Sunday. A number of friends were out there, so I went, as the member of

the Legislature, and brought greetings. But the comment that I wanted to reference at this point, is the fact that I talked to two people who had had bypass surgery, and they indicated very clearly this was a result of them being diabetics. So when I read this statistic, I found it interesting that certainly this is taking place, and also the fact that I just, on Sunday, met two people who had bypass surgery as a result of being diabetics.

The other thing is that Canadian adults with diabetes are twice as likely to die prematurely, compared to persons without diabetes. For example, a Canadian with diabetes is four times as likely to die at age 35 than a 35-year-old without diabetes. The life expectancy for people with type 1 diabetes may be shortened by as much as 15 years. The life expectancy for people with type 2 diabetes may be shortened by five to 10 years.

(11:40)

So, Mr. Speaker, some of these statistics are alarming, and I think that people, by and large, when they're going through life do not realize the importance of maintaining their own health. Now, again, as I have indicated, that this is something that people do as a result of what they choose and, again, the foods that they eat are the choices that they make.

The Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) referenced some of the issues, and one of those was the insulin pumps, and as he indicated, he said, other provinces, including Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Ontario, have shown leadership in providing coverage for insulin pumps, particularly for children. And insulin pumps are an effective way to manage type 1 diabetes. I know that we have indicated this to the minister, have lobbied on behalf of Manitobans who are diabetic and, of course, at this point in time, the minister is noncommittal whereas I know that she's also referenced the fact that if it was her child who would be needing it she would want it covered. So, Mr. Speaker, I think that part of this resolution is that we want to continue to encourage the minister to provide insulin pumps for those in Manitoba who need them. We would encourage the government to look at some of these aspects of improving the lives of Manitobans and perhaps somewhat more effective than a feel-good resolution like this one that we are debating today. Can we, as a result of this resolution and debating it here, increase or rather better the lives of Manitobans as we see it today?

I know that Brandon has been struggling with the dialysis part of it. I want to also indicate that in

Boundary Trails Health Centre, the area that I represent, the regional health clinic or rather the hospital that is within my area, does have dialysis available and, in fact, it is being utilized on a daily basis. I am told that people come after hours to use dialysis because of the many who need this in order to assist them in being able to maintain a normal life. And certainly we are very pleased that we have this facility, and that they are able to do it. On the other hand, though, there are many, and I recognize also the fact that there are many up north who do not have access to dialysis.

So it is something that, as a province, as we continue to look at trying to better the lives of Manitobans, we need to make this available for all people. Of course, the other area that we look at is if you're going to have some of these in place, you need to have the doctors who are able to manage and to run these machines. And I know that within the province of Manitoba there are a number of areas where there are doctor shortages, and so this has been a real concern to them.

As I indicated at the outset, Mr. Speaker, in this resolution, I guess, what we see more than anything else is that there is more talk than there is action. And, as I indicated, it is estimated that 16 Manitobans will be newly diagnosed with diabetes today and every day, and the national average is 11, so with a resolution something like this we need to look at ways of curbing those numbers. We need to be able to deal with them and at least get down to the point where we are at or below the national average. But, instead of taking real action to combat this disease before it devastates the health of an entire generation, the NDP introduced this fluffy resolution that we are debating today.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that, as we debate this resolution, are we actually going to better the lives of Manitobans and especially those 67,000 today who are afflicted with this disease? We challenge the government to take real action, to move ahead, and as I indicated at the outset, we need to encourage the government to introduce the insulin pumps and to bring these forward so that those who need them and those who want them do have access to them.

So, again, I want to thank the member for bringing this resolution forward and for having this opportunity to just put a few comments on record.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport): It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to the resolution presented by the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) and supported by the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen). I believe that these two members are very well aware and only too aware of the sad circumstances that exist in some of our communities in the province of Manitoba with respect to the whole illness of diabetes and the regrettable numbers of people that have this illness. Oftentimes, of course, the illness carries through to the requirement by many people to receive dialysis treatment.

As the members have pointed out, both sides of the House, Mr. Speaker, diabetes is at epidemic levels currently in our province in the First Nations communities throughout the province of Manitoba. I can say with confidence that, for one example, in the Island Lake area of this province we have roughly a population of 10,000 people living in Wasagamack, Red Sucker Lake, Garden Hill and St. Theresa Point. In the community of Garden Hill alone, we have 3,500 people, and 100 percent of these people in that community are affected by diabetes whether or not they suffer from the illness or not. However, they may have a mother, a father, a brother, and it's regrettable that I have lost many friends from those areas of this province who have succumbed to the illness relating to diabetes, complications caused by that illness.

So I'm glad that we are raising awareness. In fact, it's an accomplishment, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, that we can have such a dialogue in this Chamber because it would have been unheard of a few years ago, because the numbers of people suffering from diabetes weren't as great as they are in this day and age, as they were back then. In addition, we have introduced I believe some very worthy prevention efforts through the departments of Health and Healthy Living. Treatment is an important component, obviously, for the prevention of diabetes, and we believe that outdoor activities are very important in ensuring that we have healthy Manitobans.

I would like to say, as well, Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the words that were spoken by the members across the way, that diet is often by choice. Well, I wish that were the case in many of our communities. Unfortunately, people are not afforded that opportunity to have a diet by choice, and many times, because of the poor economic

circumstances of a given community and the high cost of living in some of these communities and the living conditions where we have 18 people living in one two-bedroom house, as an example, the choices for a healthy diet are not there.

Also, what was raised by the Member for Flin Flon is something very important to note, and that is the traditional lifestyles of Aboriginal people, particularly, Mr. Speaker, and First Nations has slowly disappeared over the last few years, where foods of the wild are no longer there for people to eat as they once were, and it's been replaced by fast food, tin foods, canned foods, and that has led to the problem that we're experiencing currently in many of our communities.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're committed to expanding the success of what we did in Garden Hill and Norway House, and that is to proceed with the development of dialysis-treatment facilities in some of the more remote locations of our province to First Nations communities, and, particularly, in this case, in the last election campaign we identified two communities where the numbers of people suffering from diabetes and related illnesses requiring dialysis treatment include, of course, Peguis, Fisher River and Berens River. As a result, we will be beginning and commencing the work of building these dialysis facilities in those two communities, Peguis and Berens River.

* (11:50)

Most members in this House will agree that when we brought about the initiative at Garden Hill, this was the first of its kind in Canada. No other location has ever been identified and such work has never been done. The position that this government took is that we can no longer play the jurisdictional game of, because these people are First Nations people, it's a reserve issue, therefore making it a federal issue. Our government said, these people are also fellow Manitobans and we must pay attention to what their requirements are.

Ordinarily, in the past, the practice has been people requiring dialysis treatment had to be relocated from their communities and had to relocate to places like Winnipeg or some other place where the facilities were nearby. That caused further problems, Mr. Speaker. Taking people from their home communities and their home lands to a foreign location like Winnipeg. What happens there is then, when we talk about 10 people, you multiply that with family members by at least five, so the numbers go

up tremendously, maybe 50, 60 people are affected by the illness of five people. So, regrettably, we've had the experience of having to deal with that situation as well, in the city of Winnipeg where people have had to relocate.

I would urge members, Mr. Speaker, not to play politics with this issue but, in fact, to see the human requirement by our fellow Manitobans. We have a lot of work to do collectively. It doesn't matter what party we're a part of. It doesn't matter who's in government in this province. The situation is that we have deplorable living conditions being experienced by our fellow Manitobans. The cost of living by some communities where this is predominant is aggravated by the fact that the loss of traditional livelihoods is no longer there.

So, I would urge members, Mr. Speaker, to support the resolution by my colleague, the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff), and seconded by the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen). I do appreciate the remarks made by fellow members in this Chamber and I look forward to the unanimous support of this resolution by all members.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba Liberal Party supports further education related to diabetes and we support a much better working relationship with the Province, First Nations and the federal government. These are good and needed. However, there is much more that needs to be done in relation to diabetes. First, we need to note that the resolution using statistics from 2001. It is sad that the MLA for Interlake is not providing more recent statistics. This shows the sad state of information related to diabetes. Indeed once, in committee, the then-Minister of Health had to apologize because the information he had was so out of date. It is time to have an up-to-date information.

Second, we note that right from the start, this government has had problems with the diabetes strategy and its implementation. The first minister of health, the MLA for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) said that Manitoba had the best strategy, but failed to implement it. The second minister of health, the former MLA for Fort Rouge had to start all over again.

Diabetes is an epidemic. We agree with the use of the term "epidemic levels" when talking about diabetes. Diabetes should be treated as an epidemic. We need a much more significant strategy than just education. This resolution is lacking in not providing more details and more specifics. Co-operation among

the provinces, First Nations and the federal government is badly needed and is not being done as effectively as it needs to be.

The wording of the resolution emphasizes how badly the NDP have failed in this area and the need for improvement. We agree the NDP have failed and that there is a big need for improvement. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba Liberal Party supports the resolution.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand very briefly to speak to this resolution. I have to say that the resolution really is fluff and stuff. It's motherhood and apple pie. When you look at the resolution that's put forward right now, it'd be very difficult not to speak in favour of it. But, quite frankly, I still don't understand how plucking a prairie chicken and picking mushrooms and berries is really part of the strategy, the NDP strategy, for this very serious disease of diabetes.

I just simply very briefly, Mr. Speaker, would like to place on the record that, in fact, the strategy that has been placed before us or the NDP has placed before us is in fact an abject failure. We recognize that in Manitoba we have a much higher incidence of diabetes than in any other province or than other provinces in the country. If that's the case, we have the highest incidence. We don't have a real serious solid strategy put forward to, in fact, deal with prevention, deal with other ways of being able to prevent this particular disease.

I do want to speak very briefly on dialysis. As we all know, diabetes has a direct relationship on affecting the kidneys. As a treatment, Mr. Speaker, we do have dialysis in my own community of Brandon. However, even at that the NDP failed miserably. Those people who were affected by kidney disease in the summer—the dialysis unit in the city of Brandon was reduced from three sections to two—and those people who unfortunately needed the evening dialysis were forced to either go in the morning or the afternoon. The reason they did that is because there was a lack of nurses.

It shouldn't come as a surprise to either the RHA or this government, the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), that, in fact, in the summertime people do take vacations, and there was no strategy put in place to make sure that there were replacement nurses for that dialysis unit. There were people who were put at danger, at risk. There were a lot of people on dialysis who, in fact, do have other jobs who are in the agricultural profession. There are people on dialysis

who have to travel long distances from rural areas into Brandon in order to get their dialysis.

If that's part of the strategy as they say, this government is failing not only the diabetes strategy but they are failing constituents in my area in southwestern Manitoba when it comes to dialysis. So I'd just like to put that on the record and I wish their strategy would be improved as opposed to just simply fluff and stuff.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): In the few minutes we have remaining, Mr. Speaker, I would like to put some comments on the record with regard to this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at this resolution and who it's been sponsored by, the fact that it's a government backbencher who is sponsoring this resolution, the term hypocrisy comes to mind. The reason I say that is if the government is serious about dealing with the issues of diabetes and dialysis in this province, then it is incumbent upon backbenchers in this government to have some influence on the ministers of the government to ensure that in fact those areas are addressed.

But instead, what do they do? They come into the House with a resolution, Mr. Speaker. Now, if this is a deficiency, if this is a deficiency on the part of government in terms of how it's addressing the issues of diabetes across this province, there are two Cabinet ministers who are Aboriginal in this government who should be raising that at the Cabinet table, and there wouldn't be a need for a resolution like this. This is a resolution that should be coming from the backbenchers or from the opposition, I should say, in order to encourage the government to do something about the sorry state of the conditions of people living with diabetes and people who can't have access to dialysis in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I just want to mention that in the community of Russell, there was a dialysis unit promised eight years ago by this government. It has never ever come to fruition. This government likes to make announcements; they like to make promises, but they never fulfil them. So we had to send our patients from Waywayseecappo, from all the other constituency areas in my region to Brandon. When these people went to Brandon they were cut off because the sections went from three to two in Brandon, and those people who were working then could not access dialysis in the evenings and had to either quit their jobs or had to take a leave of absence from their jobs to be able to get treatment.

Mr. Speaker, now we have a resolution before the House that is saying that the government is doing what it can but needs to do more. Well, I say to the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) that perhaps he should talk to his colleagues in government—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Russell will have seven minutes remaining.

The hour being 12, we will recess and reconvene at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 30, 2007

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