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DEBATES
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PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 3, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I would seek leave to proceed directly to Bill 232.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement for us to go directly to Bill 232, The Employment and Income Assistance Amendment Act (Restricting Assistance—Outstanding Warrants)? [*Agreed*]

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 232—The Employment and Income Assistance Amendment Act (Restricting Assistance—Outstanding Warrants)

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member for Russell (Mr. Derkach), that Bill 232, The Employment and Income Assistance Amendment Act (Restricting Assistance—Outstanding Warrants), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, it's our hope as Progressive Conservatives that this legislation will move through the House quickly this morning so that we can get it onto committee and start to hear public input and get it into law and working for all Manitobans.

I can tell you that since the legislation was introduced, I've had more response to this particular bill which would prevent those with serious

outstanding warrants for offences such as sexual offences, violent offences, predator offences, restrict them from receiving welfare. And the premise of the bill is to ensure that there are no taxpayers' funds going to individuals who are essentially evading the law and not dealing with serious offences.

The bill itself would require that the indictable offences that would fall under the act would be prescribed. They'd be listed in the act as a result of the fact that, of course, indictable offences are notified and indicated in the Criminal Code, which is not a bill before this Legislature, and so we would determine which offences this would apply to. And obviously it wouldn't apply to every indictable offence but the most serious of indictable offences.

And there would also be provisions for some exclusions. There is no intent to harm a third party involvement. I note that there are other exclusions in a British Columbia act that had some similar effect for pregnant women, for example, so that the fetus would not be harmed as a result—essentially being a third party to the act of the individual who has an outstanding warrant for a serious offence that falls under the legislation.

I refer to the British Columbia act and—that is already in place in that province. They've done some constitutional testing on it. There's already been some court cases that have discussed the constitutionality of legislation like this and we believe it would pass the test. They believe, in British Columbia, it would pass the test and that some of the concerns that were maybe raised earlier in the decade have already been addressed constitutionally through the legislation.

I know that the government had sent some mixed messages regarding this particular bill. At one point, I think, some thought it would be a self-reporting mechanism. That is not what this bill is proposing to bring forward. We do not believe that it should simply be an individual who is applying for welfare self disclosing whether or not they have an outstanding warrant for a serious indictable offence because, obviously, that might not elicit the results that we would hope because it's unlikely that the individuals who have those sort of serious offences

would self disclose in the numbers we would hope to see.

And so this would require some active work on behalf of the government to ensure that if an individual does have a serious indictable offence, that that notification would be brought to the—those who are responsible for welfare payments and they would then be discontinued from that taxpayer entitlement. They would no longer be entitled to taxpayer-funded welfare if they were avoiding and evading the law for a very serious indictable offence.

I've had discussion with individuals in the—law enforcement, those representing police in the city of Winnipeg. They believe this is good legislation, that it's doable legislation. I've had discussions with those who are in the legal profession. They indicate to me that there would be a significant number of people who would be captured under legislation like this, and when I mean captured I don't mean in the physical sense. I mean that they would be subject to this legislation because they have serious outstanding warrants.

Ultimately, I don't know how many people would come forward and deal with their warrants as a result of no longer being able to get welfare. I'm sure that there would be some who would find this as a trigger, but I also know that regardless if it resulted in the vast majority of people being captured under the act coming in and dealing with their warrants, at the very least it would prevent taxpayers—those scarce taxpayer dollars that we often talk about in this House going to individuals who are causing and who have caused and have been accused of causing the most harm in society.

The vast majority of those who have outstanding warrants would be people who are just not coming to court, not showing up when they're supposed to be showing up for—to deal with the charges against them, and that is why they simply need to come in.

Some might say, well, they haven't been convicted of the crime but—that's true, the offence that would trigger the warrant, they would still be innocent of, but the very fact that they have a warrant for their arrest means that they have not come forward and dealt something and of that they are not necessarily innocent. If you don't show up in court when you're supposed to show up in court, you then have, in fact, breached the law by not being where you're supposed to be.

You may still have a right and you would have a right to say that you're innocent on the offence that you're charged with, but the very fact that you haven't come to court when you're supposed to is actionable, and that is what this action would be relied upon.

I can tell you that I have heard from more people on this act than on any other act that I've introduced. There have been surveys on-line. I believe on the *Free Press* site there were 5,000 or so who responded to a survey with 93 percent saying that they were in favour. I've done talk shows this last week across the country from Alberta and into Toronto. There is widespread support for this type of legislation. I believe, in Manitoba, there's widespread support.

*(10:10)

Unfortunately, when I asked the question a couple of days ago, while the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) indicated he was going to look at it, his colleague and his predecessor, the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), chirped from his seat that this was terrible legislation, that it was awful legislation and that he didn't support it.

And so, we'll see. I suspect that there are probably two positions. One is the official position in this House, and in the public, where the government is going to indicate that they support the—or that they were going to look at the legislation. They're going to review it. They're going to talk to their officials.

But I would be very surprised if the government doesn't do what it always does and try to stall this legislation and not let it go to committee today, because they would know that there are some in their caucus—as expressed by the member for Kildonan—who truly believe that people who have these very serious offences who have done harm to society stood—should still get taxpayer-funded welfare. We've seen it in other cases where Manitoba Public Insurance is paying out benefits to individuals who have stolen vehicles and, in many cases, harmed others. We have seen it with this Minister of Justice where he has defended giving high-risk offenders a special treats; Slurpees and baseball tickets and those sorts of things. So we know that this government has within it a mentality to treat criminals who've caused harm to our society in a certain way by giving them things that the taxpayers would say they shouldn't be entitled to.

This is an opportunity for them to prove me wrong, and I hope that they prove me wrong. I hope, today—and we're going to give lots of opportunity for all NDP members to speak today. I have spoken to my own caucus. I can assure all the members there was unanimous support for this legislation within my own caucus. We'll find out where the support is from the government as they speak to this bill this morning. We'll find out whether or not they really believe that taxpayers' money shouldn't be going into the pockets of those who are evading the law, who are invading law enforcement.

The police have indicated to me that they support the legislation. The public has indicated to me that they support the legislation. I've talked to many people across the country who have indicated to me that they support the legislation. We'll find out if the NDP truly believe that taxpayers' dollars, dear taxpayers' dollars, shouldn't be going into the pockets of molesters of our children, of violent offenders, of those who have caused or been accused of causing the most heinous crimes in our society. We'll find out whether their yes is their no—yes is their yes, or their no is their no, today, here in the House.

If they decide not to pass this legislation, despite the fact that it's already—part of it is already in place in other jurisdictions; it's been shown to be constitutional—that they will be doing that only because they, in their heart of hearts, believe that taxpayers' dollars could be going and should be going to those who are evading the law for serious, serious crimes.

So I look forward over the next hour to hearing the comments from the NDP, and we'll find out at the end of the day whether or not they're going to stand with the police, the public and law-abiding citizens, or whether or not they'll stand with those who are causing the most harm to our society. Thank you very much.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand and speak about Bill 232 this morning.

And, frankly, I'm going to ignore some of the member for Steinbach's partisan comments, because I think a private members' hour is a good chance to debate ideas and debate bills that have been brought forward. And, frankly, Mr. Speaker, the member for Steinbach should be recognized for bringing forward a bill which I do believe contributes to the public debate. And we're always willing to look at new ideas and new strategies to improve public safety, to

improve public confidence in the administration of justice.

And the bill that the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) is bringing forward is another way that we think we can use a public system to enforce a public good. And, as the member knows, there's other advancements that have been made in this province, even in the past couple of years, to use our public systems to make a positive public good.

And I can also speak about MPI, about Manitoba Public Insurance. Of course, as the member knows, we can now use the MPI system to withhold licences for those individuals who haven't paid their fines. We can now have MPI withhold licences for individuals who choose not to make their support payments.

So, Mr. Speaker, I can say that I actually agree it is logical to look at expanding to other public systems the ability to get a public good. And, certainly, this bill is something that bears serious consideration, but serious consideration not just on the floor this Legislature, but serious consideration with all of the other stakeholders who would be involved.

So we agree with the general intent of this legislation, but we need to get more advice and more direction from the individuals who actually work in the justice system to improve our justice system. And that means getting the input, not of a police officer here or there, but formal input from the Winnipeg Police Service, formal input from the RCMP, formal input from the Prosecutions Service, of course, and others in the system, to come up with a plan that truly will work for all Manitobans. It doesn't just sound good but will actually serve the purpose of protecting Manitobans.

And, certainly, police have the responsibility to serve warrants. They are, first and foremost, individuals from whom I want to get more advice. We want to know what actions think we should take on this matter. We'll listen closely to what they tell us. And I expect, actually, that the Winnipeg Police Service and the RCMP and other municipal police services are going to have a whole host of ideas, perhaps using other public systems to get a public good. And I think—I can agree with the member for Steinbach that decreasing the number of individuals out there with an outstanding warrant is a public good.

But there are some other considerations that have been quietly told to me by some police officers

which is why I think it's important to make sure that we have a more official position put forward from law enforcement in Manitoba.

In some cases, actually having someone have to provide their address and be available under the Employment and Income Assistance system, can actually assist the police in locating those individuals in serving warrants, and in some cases, even apprehending those individuals. So, there is a public good to be had but I also want to listen to what the police have to say about an impact it may have on their ability to take steps to protect our public safety.

I do want to speak briefly about the bill in British Columbia and the member has spoken about that bill. It's relatively new. I believe it's either just come into force or it is about to come into force.

The member could have simply copied the British Columbia law but I give him credit, he didn't. He actually proposed a law different from British Columbia and I agree with the member for Steinbach, that the provisions in that bill, which provide for self disclosure by individuals that they don't have warrants, actually does create a potential problem. And if somebody is not dealing with outstanding warrants, I think I share with the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) some concern that the B.C. approach of self-disclosure probably doesn't make the most sense.

So again, I give the member for Steinbach some credit on not simply parroting what British Columbia has done but, as I believe I said at Estimates, and I've said in this House, I give him recognition for bringing this forward.

Of course, we want to make sure that the social assistance system is not abused. It's important to put on the record that people who are incarcerated, who are in federal jail or our provincial jails, are not eligible for social assistance. And that is, I think, something that gives people confidence.

On the other hand, we want to make sure that if an individual is cut off social assistance, as the bill proposes, that it's not just a fetus that is protected, that it is children and other dependents who aren't affected by an outstanding warrant of father, mother, or caregiver. And I think we need to think through that a little bit more.

I know in British Columbia they put some provisions in place to try and deal with that. I think we need to think that through a little bit more because employment and income assistance is

intended to be the source of income of last resort. And I think everybody in this House would share some concern that if it's children who are being affected, those children, even though their parent or their guardian may have done something illegal and should come and have to answer for their warrant, the children haven't done anything wrong. I think we need to focus on that a bit more.

That doesn't mean that something along these lines should not go forward, but I think it's something we need to consider more carefully.

There's some other provisions, or other aspects that we need to think out a little bit more. It's one thing, I would believe, for a Manitoba Public Insurance official to tell people that they have outstanding fines, and therefore, can't renew their driver's licence. I believe it would escalate things for an individual sitting at the Employment and Income Assistance desk to tell somebody who may potentially have committed a very serious offence, that there is, indeed, a warrant out for that person's arrest and they can't give them social assistance. I would want to speak to individuals in the Employment and Income Assistance system to make sure that any safety concerns are preserved. I would think the member opposite would agree that that would be a reasonable step to take before moving ahead on a bill such as this.

* (10:20)

So, those are some outstanding questions which, again, don't take away from the basic idea, which is that we can, and we should, continue to improve our use of public systems to enforce a public good.

So on the record, Mr. Speaker, I'm taking this idea very seriously. My department is taking the idea very seriously, and, indeed, our government is taking this issue very seriously. It could stand alone. It could be part of a greater and more robust strategy on tackling a public good, which I think we can all agree is, in fact, the case.

So, again, I recognize the member opposite for bringing this forward. I do think there are a lot of questions that need to be answered. And I'm a little bit surprised to hear the member opposite insisting that this must be determined within the next 39 minutes, because I do note, as I look at the Order Paper, Mr. Speaker, that there are not one, but four pieces of legislation which have been introduced to this House some time ago, on which the member

for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) has been briefed by myself and my department some time ago.

I'm not sure why, Mr.—why the member for Steinbach wouldn't have the same enthusiasm, for example, at moving ahead Bill 7, which is now adjourned and standing in his name. I'm not sure why he wouldn't want to move ahead with Bill 14, The Body Armour and Fortified Vehicle Control Act, which is adjourned and standing in his name. I'm not sure why Bill 28, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act, which is also standing in his name, why he wouldn't have wanted to put some brief words on that bill and send it forward, and I'm also not certain why the member for Steinbach would have adjourned debate on Bill 30, The Strengthened Enforcement of Family Support Payments and Miscellaneous Amendments Act (Various Acts Amended), to make sure that our maintenance enforcement program works as well as possible.

So the member needs to know that I'm taking this matter very seriously. I will not have a full response from the Winnipeg Police Service, the RCMP, the Employment and Income Assistance Program and the other stakeholders in the next 38 minutes, but we will continue to work on this and improve our system.

So recognition is due to the member for Steinbach, but I think we need to understand there has to be some due diligence done, and, frankly, it may result in stronger and better measures being brought forward.

So I thank the member for Steinbach for bringing this forward and, certainly, for the chance to speak on this today, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm feeling kind of badly. I'm a little bit depressed. I'm a little—I'm kind of kicking myself because I actually allowed myself to believe—I actually allowed myself to believe—that the member for Steinbach was serious about this. I actually led myself to believe—I let myself get sucked into thinking that the member for Steinbach was actually serious about doing something tangible to help people in Manitoba, to move this forward. I see the logic of this. I thought it was something we could work together on in this House.

He wants to pass—*[interjection]* From his seat, he's chirping to pass. Mr. Speaker, they won't get up and speak to it. They, you know, they want us to—the

member thinks he—the member thinks it's somehow helpful to just walk in here on a Thursday morning, throw something on the table and say, let's do it. You know, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) just went through a list of bills, a list of bills that they could very easily support us on that would actually do something positive in terms of protecting Manitoba's citizens. And they've been on the Order Paper there for quite some time, and members opposite just stand them and say, let's shove them to the back.

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill, and I want to give the member for Steinbach some credit for bringing this forward, and I was totally prepared to say that until I heard him speak just ahead of us, in which he made no—no attempt to sell the bill on the merits of the bill. All he talked about was the political wedge issue that he wants to put on the table. That's his motivation. That's his motivation. These are issues that are bigger than partisan politics. They're bigger than partisan politics. I have constituents in my riding who depend on us in this Legislature to take these issues seriously. We all do, not to just play little knee-jerk political politics with it, like the member for Steinbach has done today.

So I want to say that I'm fundamentally disappointed with what I heard come from the member of—from Steinbach, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Justice put—just put a very important point on the table that the member for Steinbach did not even come close to addressing. Let me—*[interjection]* He wants another crack at it. He messed up so badly on his first speech, he wants to get up and speak to this again.

Mr. Speaker, if we pass this today, the member for Steinbach won't get a chance to do that, so he has to get his story straight across there.

The point that the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) has to think about—one of many points that we need to think about on this, and the Minister of Justice was very reasonable. He was very clear that this is an act—this is a measure that we should consider, that we should do some investigation on, that we should ask some important questions on, ask some questions to people like the Winnipeg Police Service, the RCMP. I'm sure the member from Steinbach did talk to them, Mr. Speaker, and he wants us to trust—after what he just said—he wants us to trust him reporting back to us.

I mean, we have an obligation in this House to do our homework. We have to do that. In the next 34 minutes the minister—the Minister of Justice can't

sit down and speak with the RCMP on this. They can't speak to the Winnipeg City police. They can't speak to the people directly involved with this who can give us some good advice and then have a plan that we can move forward on. All of us together in this Chamber can move forward on that, but not under the circumstances that the member for Steinbach has left us in. The member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) is playing politics.

Mr. Speaker, we—[*interjection*] The issue that the member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) has to deal with is that as it stands, as it looks in this proposal right now, we would make kids of people incarcerated pay dearly for the sins of their parents. How does the member, you know, the member for Steinbach—[*interjection*] Oh, the member from Steinbach now is all indignant and he's saying no, no, no. Why didn't he address that when he had a chance just minutes ago in this House, just minutes ago, Mr. Speaker?

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member for Steinbach, on a point of order.

Mr. Goertzen: It's important, and I know *Beauschene's* cites the fact that accurate records be put on to—in the record here in the Legislature. I did specifically indicate that innocent third parties, there was an exclusionary provision within the bill, so whether it was a pregnant mother, or somebody who is a dependent, that they would not, under this scheme, be punished as a result of it. If the minister hasn't actually read the bill, perhaps he should let somebody else debate who has read the bill.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised, I remind members that points of orders are not to be used for debate and the point of order raised is—it's a dispute over the facts and it is not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Struthers: Well, again, the member for Steinbach missed his opportunity to make those points, and it's pretty obvious he doesn't have a point to be made and it's pretty obvious that that's at least one point that I don't think the member has thought through. It's a very good case to be made why we have to consider this. I commend the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) who has said very clearly to the member for Steinbach and everybody else in this Chamber that he would consider this, and the member for—the Minister of Justice very clearly said

that he was glad that the member brought this forward.

Mr. Speaker, I'm interested in all of us working together to do things that protect citizens of Manitoba. The other day I was privileged to stand in this House and do a member's statement dealing with the Citizens on Patrol group in Dauphin who have put a lot of time, a lot of energy and, in many cases, their own funds to offer a service in Dauphin that, I think, is absolutely invaluable. People who get up in the middle of the night and drive around in our community of Dauphin, who act as the eyes and the ears of the RCMP, who work in a co-ordinated way with the RCMP, who assist the RCMP, and all the credit in the world to the RCMP, and the liaison that—in the detachment in Dauphin who work with these citizens, who provide, I think, a very good service, who provide a way in which we can prevent crime in our town of Dauphin. I'm very interested in working with, in a co-ordinated way, even with members across to collaborate in such a way that we can work together to prevent crime in the first place.

* (10:30)

It's my assumption that every single member of this Legislature is interested in preventing crime. That's, I think, the best way to deal with what we see happening in many of our communities.

Now, I'm going to assume that the member for Steinbach and others are interested in working with us on that. I'm going to assume at some point that the bills that the Minister of Justice has talked about moving forward will, indeed, move forward. They would just move forward.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the—I think we have to understand what the exact implications are going to be for kids of people who are incarcerated. Now, I'm not convinced that the member for Steinbach has a handle on that. I'm not convinced of that at all.

I would be more assured if we take our time, have our Minister of Justice and others in the system look at this, understand what those implications are and not just act in a knee-jerk way, like members opposite seem to want to do. I want to be able to think these things through and put together an approach that makes good, collaborative, co-operative sense and will be effective, Mr. Speaker.

I also think that the Minister of Justice was very correct in putting on the record that there's a concern this side of the House and the other side of the House in terms of welfare fraud, and I think he was very

correct in making it very clear that there are safeguards within our system to prevent that from happening. He pointed out, quite rightly, that the—that people who are incarcerated currently are not eligible to receive social assistance payments. He pointed out—I think he pointed out that the departments have put people in place to make sure that everything is on the up and up.

So, Mr. Speaker, when you see that kind of willingness on this side of the House to co-operate and to look at these measures and to take them seriously, I think if we don't come together and do that as a Legislature, then we lose an opportunity.

I think that our minister has been very clear. He's been very clear that we're interested in considering this for all the right reasons—not the political motivation—but all the right reasons to do the right thing, not just for those who are incarcerated, but the taxpayer out there who, I think, probably wants us to take these way more seriously than what I saw come from across the way.

So, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to a co-operative approach in this Legislature on all sides and commend our minister for making that very clear to everybody in this Chamber here this morning.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Good morning, Mr. Speaker, and thank you.

It's my pleasure to rise to address the legislation this morning put forward by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen). I note that up till now, anyways, he's the only member opposite who has bothered to rise to speak to this bill, which strikes me as somewhat odd because members opposite claim to be the paragons of virtue when it comes to justice issues and yet, here they have their own justice bill before us this morning, and they're all mute.

So, obviously, they haven't given this much thought yet or they don't care or what have you. But, I just find it somewhat strange when a member opposite actually introduces legislation which they don't have as much opportunity to do so as compared to the government, so when one of them actually gets up on his feet, brings something forward, you would expect other members in his caucus would rise to speak in support of that. And yet, it seems they are mute. It seems—well, they're not mute entirely; they like to speak from a sitting position which doesn't—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member for Steinbach, on a point of order.

Mr. Goertzen: I listened closely to the member for the Interlake. He indicates that members on this side don't want to speak because we're in favour of the bill, and they don't seem to want to put up further speakers.

I'd ask unanimous consent of the House to move to a vote on this bill. Could we have unanimous consent of the House to move to a vote on this bill, so we can get this to committee and get this law in action, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member has requested the Speaker to ask if the House is ready for the question. Is the House ready for the vote on this bill?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No? That has been denied, so we will continue.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake, to continue his debate.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now we go from the—they say the sublime to the ridiculous. Here they bring a bill forward and now they don't want to debate it.

Not only do they not want to debate it themselves—they all remain mute from a standing position—but now they don't even want us to debate it on the other side of the House. And, you know, that's rather frivolous of them, to think that legislation should be passed in such a manner, that they should just throw something out there and that it should just automatically be passed without any debate, without any proper consultation.

It's really beyond the pale and I shudder to think what the situation would be if they were actually in government, if they wanted to conduct themselves in such a dictatorial style where people are not even allowed to get up to speak to a bill.

That frightens me, I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that that is how they would chose to conduct themselves. Thankfully, it's a happy occurrence that they're not in government, so we will adhere to the

principles of democracy, debate of which is a big part of it, and we will debate this proposed motion.

And let's talk about the merits of the bill, and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) alluded to it just a few moments ago where, you know, we have to look at all aspects of a bill proposed such as this, and I'm sitting here thinking, well, if I were a murderer or something, would I be going to the welfare office to collect welfare. Like, you know, criminals, maybe some of them aren't the most intelligent people in the world and they've resorted to crime as the result of that, but you'd have to be pretty stupid to be going to collect welfare if there was a warrant out for your arrest for murder or something. So you have to wonder whether this is redundant or superfluous.

So that's the first point but, even more importantly, if criminals are actually that stupid that they would go to the welfare office to collect welfare even though there was a warrant for their arrest out, well, I would think, hey, if they're that dumb then maybe we should set up a little sting operation there. We should have police officers actually staking out the welfare offices, so that when these criminals who have warrants out for their arrest for murder or something, when they come to collect their welfare, that would be a good point of arrest, wouldn't it? Makes sense to me, you know.

So that's a possibility. That's all I'm saying. That's a possibility. It's out there. It's worthy of consideration and before we rush into something like the member—members opposite propose, rushing into it without any debate whatsoever, not only without any debate from themselves because none of them seem interested in debating it, but none of us can even debate this legislation. It should just go to closure, and closure is something that they're familiar with.

I recall the MTS scenario where they refused to recognize speakers on our side of the House, even though I believe our former Premier Gary Doer was on his feet waiting to be recognized by the Speaker to speak on a very important bill, and their—they refused to recognize him, and that's how they did business while they were in office.

* (10:40)

So they're not going to invoke closure on us today. We will debate this and if there are opinions from the police, whether it be the Winnipeg police or the RCMP, I think that we should solicit that, that we should actually have input from the people who are

in charge of enforcing the law before we ram something through, something that might potentially inhibit their ability to arrest these dangerous criminals at the welfare office when they come in to collect their welfare.

So, you know, these are points that are worthy of debate, and I'm sadly, sadly disappointed that members opposite don't see that process as worthy. And so we will proceed on this in that regard.

Now, social assistance. We have to make sure that the innocents are not impacted when we debate issues regarding social assistance, and I think of young children, dependent children. Those are people at risk who should not be punished because of the actions of their parents.

And, you know, I wonder what else the member opposite has in mind in regard to social assistance recipients. And I recall another debate years ago about workfare, where the members opposite, conservatives in general across the land, always look at poor people as pariahs on society. They think that the poorer people are the people who need to be punished, and they imposed—or they wanted to impose workfare on people on social assistance.

And this was—it'd be just before I was elected, and I was interested about this issue. So I phoned the welfare office and I asked, okay, a young, single male, for example. How much money would a young, single male get for welfare? And they said in the neighbourhood of \$450 a month; but, of that, 250 or 275 dollars would be clawed back to pay for their housing costs, which would leave them in the neighbourhood of \$150 a month welfare that members opposite wanted them to go out and work a minimum of 30 hours a week—120 hours or so a month—to collect \$150 in welfare in their pocket. That's what they wanted to do. Right? Now, who's going to do that? Obviously, nobody, but the idea from their perspective was to push people off welfare.

And that would have created more crime. If you don't give that person enough money to shelter himself, to at least be able to sustain himself, to eat, what's going to happen? The next thing you know, they're on the street. The next thing you know, they're looking for a gun or a knife, and the worst-case scenario is innocent people could die as a result of that.

Now those individuals are incarcerated. Now those individuals—or, well, hopefully, they're

incarcerated—at a cost of 60 to 70 thousand dollars in, say, Headingley, or if they're in Stony Mountain, which they probably will be, now you're talking \$100,000 a year to maintain that one prisoner in Stony Mountain as opposed to giving him that \$175 a month to at least feed himself.

So that's how members opposite view social assistance. We know that the poor are their enemies. It's always been the case. They've always catered to the richest people in society, the wealthy presidents and CEOs of corporations. That's where their interests lie. The poor are the enemy and social assistance is something that is anathema to them. They have no interest in support programs that look after young—

An Honourable Member: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: —and I could go into—there's a long list. I've got—

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member for Steinbach, on a point of order.

Mr. Goertzen: I would ask, Mr. Speaker—the member opposite is suggesting that we have no concern for those who are poor.

For his information, I grew up in a family with a single mother. We grew up in social assistance housing because my father died when I was young.

I wonder if he could withdraw that comment.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Yes, Mr. Speaker, this is the third time the member, who already has had an opportunity to speak, has risen to interrupt the member from Interlake in debate.

That's not a point of order. He had his chance to speak. Let him allow the member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) and other members of this House to speak on this bill. If he really cares about this issue, he'll allow us to debate this bill without interruption, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I make my ruling, I want to remind members that points of orders are to be raised to point out to the Speaker a breach of a rule or a departure from our practices of the House. It should not be used for a means of debating, and the

honourable member's time had just expired at that moment so we will entertain the next speaker.

* * *

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): It's my pleasure to stand in the House today and put some thoughts on the record about Bill 232, resisting assistance and outstanding warrants. And I listened with interest to the member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) speak about some of the policies of the Conservative government and I must say that workfare was something that I was opposed to. Looking at asking people to work for a dollar an hour is really quite appalling when you think about it, Mr. Speaker. So I did listen with interest and I found it a concept that I hope we never move towards in this government and I hope the government on the other side also doesn't look towards that kind of system.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that this bill seeks to amend The Employment and Income Assistance Act to enforce Criminal Code warrants for prescribed indictable offences by withholding, denying, reducing, or suspending social assistance payments for persons with outstanding warrants, and I commend the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) for bringing this forward as it's something that we can look at on this side of the House. I don't think it's something that we want to pass immediately because I don't think enough study has gone into this particular bill to look at the kinds of outstanding issues there are in regards to the bill.

I think we need to do some more consultation. In particular, we need to talk to members of the Winnipeg Police Service, members of the RCMP, members of the Prosecutions branch to see how this particular plan could be put in place, whether it could be effective, what types of impacts it would have on other individuals who are, although they may not have outstanding warrants, who may be children or may be spouses of these individuals who do have outstanding warrants.

So I do have some concerns about the bill that has been put forward. As I heard the minister for Justice say, it was something he would be willing to take a look at. But I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that it's not something right now that we're willing to pass and I definitely wouldn't be willing to vote in favour of it.

As I did mention, Mr. Speaker, we do commend the member for Steinbach in bringing this bill forward in that it allows us to have public debate. It allows us to take a look at a policy that, perhaps,

there is some ability to implement in the future. We're always willing to look at new ideas. We're always looking to see how we can improve public safety and how we can improve the administration of justice. And I think when you take a look at some of the new legislation that we've put forward, I think that is obvious when we look at some of the legislation that is before the House and that our Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) has put forward.

When I look at one of the pieces of legislation that is going to allow us to have gangs listed as the gangs that would automatically be able to be prosecuted rather than having to prove that individual's part of a gang, I think that that's a very favourable piece of legislation and I congratulate our minister for Justice for bringing that forward.

In terms of this particular piece of legislation, we do agree with the intent of the legislation, but as I said, it's clear we need to look at what options are available and what is the best direction for Manitoba. For instance, in British Columbia, they recently enacted legislation that relies on social assistance recipients to disclose on application or thereafter that they are the subject of an outstanding warrant, and anybody who fails to disclose an outstanding warrant will have committed welfare fraud. And I know that, Mr. Speaker, welfare fraud is something that individuals here in Manitoba are concerned about and that we are concerned about. We do not want to see the social assistance system be abused, and I know Manitobans feel the same way.

* (10:50)

We do want to see that system be in place. We know that individuals do need that system in place here in Manitoba, and we want to make sure that its integrity is maintained. Currently, people who are incarcerated are not eligible to receive social assistance payments, and that's something we have to keep in mind. I don't think many Manitobans are aware of that.

The EI program has policy and processes in place to prevent and reduce program abuse, and it employs actually, Mr. Speaker, 13 staff whose job it is to investigate issues that relate to abuse of the program. In terms of this particular legislation, as I mentioned, we want to make sure that children and dependents receive the support that they need and that children are not penalized in terms of crimes that their parents have committed. It is through no fault of the children that their parents are involved in criminal activity. And I would be—I think it would be

a very sad day if we saw children, their existence be in some way hampered because their parents have been involved in criminal activity and because they have outstanding warrants as a result of that.

In particular, Mr. Speaker, our government has placed enhanced risk assessment techniques in probation that place Manitoba at the forefront of effective probation practices in Canada. And that means focussing our energy and our resources where they should be, and that is on the worst offenders. And, in particular, I think of our auto theft strategy which has been very effective. When we look at the numbers in the past in terms of how effective it has been, when we look at the numbers that we have currently, we in Manitoba have been very successful. Our auto theft suppression strategy is working. According to MPI, auto theft is at its lowest point in 17 years.

It's down 75 percent since 2004. There were 6,706 less auto theft claims in 2009 than there were in 2004. And I think, Mr. Speaker, this speaks to the effectiveness of having a plan and moving forward with that plan and involving a number of people in that plan. And our auto theft suppression strategy has worked because it's looked at individuals having immobilizers in their cars and looked at also concentrating on those individuals who pose the most risk for society and monitoring those individuals through placing ankle immobilizers on them, in terms of where they can go and also monitoring their—ensure that they are actually in the house when they're supposed to be and checking on them.

So I think that that's something, Mr. Speaker. When we look at our auto theft suppression, we know that that's been effective, and we have been doing other things as well. We have the gang response and suppression plan and the Winnipeg police strategy to intensively monitor high-risk offenders. And we have a—put in place an analyst in a support position to the Winnipeg Police Service and also three new staff to the Province's Criminal Organization and High Risk Offender Unit. And these have been helpful in terms of enabling gang response and suppression plan to be in place.

Our auto theft strategy as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, includes intensive community supervision by probation workers, strict enforcement by the Winnipeg Police Service and its stolen auto unit, swift action in court through specialized Crown attorneys, compulsory vehicle immobilizers and

programming for young offenders. And in terms of that programming we have specialized programs that we have here in Manitoba. We have programs like Spotlight, which works with the highest risk gang youth and their families by providing supervision and services to help youth to deal with substance abuse, to help them stay in school or to help them to find a job.

Our Turnabout program is the only provincial initiative of its kind in Canada that provides help and consequences for young people who are in conflict with the law, but are too young to be subject to the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, I do congratulate the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) in terms of bringing this bill forward. But I don't think at this point enough thought has gone into some of the surrounding issues that would have an effect on individuals who may not be the individuals who have the outstanding warrant, but may be related to those individuals. So in that regard, I could not vote for this bill.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, as I begin my speech I'd just like to point out that we're in the rather unusual situation in this House, where, normally, we go back and forth with speakers, but in this session the opposition seems to have some new House strategy where they don't put up speakers on private members' bills and I don't think they believe in democracy or in public debate or having a discussion about even their own bill. They'd rather sit there and heckle us while we speak. In fact, I can hardly hear myself talking because there's so much chatter coming from the other side.

Notwithstanding our reservations about the lack of speakers from the other side, the member from Steinbach should be commended for bringing forth a bill which contributes to public debate, a debate that they don't even want to take part in, I would point out.

We are always willing to look at new ideas and strategies to improve public safety and the administration of justice, and we want to get the input of the Winnipeg Police Service, of the RCMP, of Prosecutions, and others, in order to come up with a plan that works for Manitoba and protects Manitobans.

And we all want to make sure that social assistance is not abused. And, so, currently, people who are incarcerated are not eligible to receive social

assistance payments, and the Employment and Income Assistance program has policy and processes in place to prevent and reduce program abuse and employs 13 investigative staff. So we already do take precautions to make sure that EIA is not abused. We also want to ensure that children and dependents receive the support that they need. Children should not be penalized for the crimes of their parents.

Now, we do have many programs that do concentrate on high-risk offenders. For example, the Criminal Organization and High Risk Offender Unit was established in October 2000 and specializes in the supervision of high-risk offenders including gang members.

And we support GRASP, which is an acronym. It stands for Gang Response and Suppression Plan, the Winnipeg Police strategy to intensively monitor high-risk offenders. Our support adds an analyst and a support position to the Winnipeg Police and three new staff to the province's criminal organization and high-risk offenders unit.

Our auto theft strategy includes intensive community supervision by probation workers, strict enforcement by the Winnipeg Police Service and its stolen auto unit, swift action in court through specialized Crown attorneys, compulsory vehicle immobilizers and programming for youth offenders.

And I would point out that this—these strategies have been very successful. For example, our auto theft suppression strategy is working. According to Manitoba Public Insurance, auto theft is at its lowest point in 17 years and is down 75 percent since 2004. There were 6,706 less auto theft claims in 2009 than there were in 2004, and I think this is probably one of the reasons why MPI has had rate reductions for several years in a row, because we know that auto theft claims are very expensive to the system. I seem to recall, and I'm just going by memory here so this may not be totally accurate, but I think the claims were in the range of about \$20 million a year for stolen autos. So if you reduce the rate by 75 percent, you're saving a lot of money, and those savings are passed on to the people that pay premiums for auto insurance.

Another very successful law that we introduced, which has been copied by other provinces, and the opposition critic for Justice will be aware of that, and it's The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, and we have used it 430 times to shut down crack houses or drug dens or sniff houses or

prostitution houses, and we've made 122 arrests and seized over \$2 million in illegal drugs.

And this is a law that I'm constantly promoting. For example, I just recently attended a new residents' association meeting, the Faraday Residents' Association, and I said that I would make sure that everybody in that geographic neighbourhood would get a brochure in their mailbox telling them about The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act and the phone number that they can call, so that if there are alleged drug houses in their neighbourhood or other properties where illegal activities are taking place, those houses can be shut down.

And I would like to commend the organizers of the Faraday Residents' Association for doing a good job, for bringing—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Burrows will have five minutes—order—will have five minutes remaining.

The hour now being 11 a.m., we will now move on to resolutions.

* (11:00)

RESOLUTIONS

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on House business?

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, on House business, Mr. Speaker.

In accordance with rule 31(9), I'd like to announce that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on Youth for Christ Centre: Supporting Winnipeg's Youth, sponsored by the honourable member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler).

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with rule 31(9), it has been announced that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on Youth for Christ: Supporting Winnipeg's Youth, sponsored by—it will be sponsored by the honourable member for Springfield.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, we'll now deal with resolutions.

Res. 14—Putting Manitobans First

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I move, seconded by the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik), that,

WHEREAS a 2003 report by the Manitoba Pension Commission included a number of recommendations for reforms to The Pension Benefits Act; and

WHEREAS only one of the recommendations outlined in the 2003 Pension Commission's report was implemented as a result of legislation that was passed in 2005; and

WHEREAS the provincial government waited until 2010 to prepare regulations to implement other components of the bill; and

WHEREAS the Minister of Labour's rationale for waiting five long years after the legislation passed to implement the 2005 legislation was the complexity of the implementation; and

WHEREAS the current provincial government wastes no time implementing technically complicated legislation that provides a benefit to its party or members, including changes to the balanced budget legislation in 2008, 2009, and recently announced changes for 2010; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has passed and implemented other pieces of legislation in recent years that have resulted in a benefit to its party, including Bill 37 that was brought forward in 2008, introducing a new vote tax that was indexed to inflation; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has been sure to protect its own funding, and yet the Manitoba Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund is not indexed to inflation, reducing the income security for thousands of Manitobans; and

WHEREAS Manitobans deserve a government that is interested in serving all Manitobans, rather than a government that is fixated on its own interests.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to apply the same level of zeal for passing and implementing legislation that protects the interests of pensioners and everyday Manitobans, as it does for passing and implementing legislation that serves its own interests.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), seconded by the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik),

WHEREAS a 2003 report—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Dyck: First of all, the title of this, Putting Manitobans First, I'm sure is something that all the members opposite would want to support because I know that they continually say that they're putting Manitobans first, and so this resolution speaks very specifically to that, and so I would seek at the end of the day to have unanimous consent to pass this resolution. But before that—I ask for that question and the support from the members opposite, there's a few comments that I do want to put in support of this resolution on the record.

I am pleased to rise and put a few words on the record today about the private member's resolution which deals with the reversed priorities of this NDP government. This resolution follows on recent delays of the NDP government to fully implement much-needed pension reform in Manitoba. And as I indicated at the outset, I expect that at the end of it that we will have unanimous consent to be able to move this forward.

In 2003, the Manitoba Pension Commission included a number of recommendations to reform the pension system in Manitoba by amending and adapting The Pension Benefits Act. So far, only one of these recommendations has been implemented. It took the NDP five years to come up with regulations to move a little closer to implementing further recommendations of the Manitoba Pension Commission.

Also in the resolution, the Manitoba Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund is not indexed to inflation, putting income security for thousands of teachers at risk. Why is that? Why would they single out the teachers?

And I just want to refer to a clipping that I picked up, this was June 1st in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, and it says: Nurses negotiate indexed pensions. About 9,000 nurses—and 37,000 provincial health-care employees overall—will receive indexed pensions beginning in 2018, as a result of a tentative deal negotiated between the province and the Manitoba Nurses Union. And then it goes on further to say: Earlier this year, the government talked tough about its upcoming talks with public sector unions, saying its goal was to negotiate zero per cent pay increases over each of the next two years. The government is also currently in talks with about 13,500 civil servants. However, it goes on to say that the Canadian Taxpayers Association said Monday that the nurses' "Cadillac" pension deal along with

other goodies in the contract, such as a two per cent up-front lump-sum payment and larger increases in the contract's third year, belie the government's tough talk.

So what happened to the tough talk that this government had? It's called, it's a magical shell game with empty tax—which will empty taxpayers' pockets under every shell.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that they can negotiate a deal and they're working on negotiating a deal with the nurses, but when it comes to retired teachers, that somehow they just don't have the same will. And I remember distinctly the many times that we've had the retired teachers sitting in the gallery. I remember also where they met up front and they were lobbying government to look at them in a positive way, because these are people as well, who took early retirement in many cases. And when I think back of my tenure on the school board where incentives were given for early retirement, and they were under the impression and the opinion that, certainly, they would be receiving COLA, and that has not happened.

Overall pension reform, which affects almost every Manitoban, be it immediately or by the time one retires, has been on the back burner for the better part of this millennium. At the same time, the NDP government has been rushing through bills, such as the BITSA bill or Bill 31 that serve their own interests by protecting their salaries rather than serving all Manitobans.

The Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Howard) cited the complexity of legislation as one of the reasons in delaying this bill and the pension reform. Now, the complexity of the bill that she was referring to—and if you refer and you look at Bill 31 and you see this document, I don't understand where one is more complex than the other, and, yet, though, this BITSA bill is arguably one of the most complex bills before the House and it is being rushed through in less than two months. So why is this taking place? Well, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that it's to protect the 19 salaries within the government—within the Cabinet.

This is not the first or only time the NDP has rushed to protect their own interests. Bill 37 was brought forward, a new vote tax, in 2008, which serves the party in power the most. They rushed that one through in order to be able to get the dollars that they wanted. Now, I recognize the fact that—apparently, according to the member for Selkirk (Mr.

Dewar), I believe it is, that they could accept my resolution here if we hadn't put this part in about them accepting the vote tax, because he says they haven't accepted it. I would suggest that they withdraw the bill if they're not going to accept the vote tax. But they're leaving it there, and it's going to be indexed as well. This just shows how the priorities of this NDP government are mixed up. Laws serving their own interests are rushed through while it takes years to implement laws that would bring much-needed pension reform to everyone in the province.

I, therefore, urge all members of the Legislature to support my resolution in this matter. Manitobans should be put first, not the party currently in power, nor any political party for that matter. It's time for this NDP to reverse its me-first policy and to prioritize the laws and regulations it enacts according to their importance for all Manitobans. There's no shame in admitting that your priorities were mixed up, especially if you get it right the second time. In fact, it takes great strength of character to do that.

* (11:10)

So I look forward to all the MLAs supporting this important resolution, and as I indicated, this is a—the—although the pension reform was a complex issue, as the labour of minister has indicated, the ones that were moved through and moved through rather hastily, such as Bill 31, are also very, very complex pieces of legislation. And it looks now as though the government of the day is looking at putting this through with—within two months. And so I would suggest that there be more debate on that, and I would encourage others to support this, as well.

So with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to present this resolution to the House and, again, I seek the unanimous consent of all members.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today to speak to this resolution, and I believe that the member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) is an honourable member. I know we say that about all members in this House, but I really believe it of the member for Pembina, and I know that he strives to work for his constituents and to work for all Manitobans.

It's unfortunate that he was put up to put this resolution forward because the resolution is patently wrong, Mr. Speaker. The—we have been working on

the issues of pensions and pension reform since taking office and, in fact, the pension regulations that have recently, finally, passed are in place as of May 1st. So when he talks about that we haven't brought in these regulations, that we haven't acted on the recommendations, he's patently, patently wrong, and that is—and that's unfortunate because I know it's not like him to be inaccurate in this House.

I do want to take the opportunity, though, to just speak to the issue of priorities for a moment and the issue of putting Manitobans first. And I wanted to reflect for the House on what, to date, we've heard from the opposition about who goes first in their Manitoba.

And I'm going to start with just quoting their one-man strategy committee, the member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) on who they would put first in their Manitoba. And, perhaps, for this exercise, Mr. Speaker, it's going to be easier for me to talk about who wouldn't go first because the list of who would go first is very, very small in their vision of Manitoba.

But we know from the member for Carman that farmers don't go first. We know that rural Manitobans don't come first. We know that Aboriginal people certainly don't come first. We know that people needing health care don't come first in their vision of Manitoba and, in fact, my honourable critic just reinforced that message when he spoke against the agreement with the Manitoba Nurses' Union that's currently for ratification, when he spoke against improving pensions for nurses.

It's no surprise to me that they wouldn't put nurses first because, certainly, we saw when they were in office what they did to nurses; they fired 1,500 of them. They cut the training classes for nurses and for doctors. Every day when somebody in this House on that side gets up to ask: Where is my doctor? Where are my nurses? I want to say them: Look to the front row. Look to your own front row, because they are the ones that cut the training classes for nurses and doctors when they were in office. And they are the ones who, election after election after election, have promised not one additional nurse or doctor. So, nurses and doctors don't come first in their Manitoba.

Who else doesn't come first? Well, we have heard in this House criticism of our move to build a ramp at the front door to the Legislature. We've heard in this House criticism that really people with disabilities are happy to come in the backdoor to the

Legislature. So that's clear that they don't come first. We've heard in this Legislature criticism of our efforts to raise public awareness of the capabilities of people with disabilities. We've heard that just this session.

We've heard in this House, this session, that we shouldn't make child-care centres secure. So, certainly, the security of children, that's not first on their list.

We have heard in this House from their leader that raising the minimum wage is no more than political candy to minimum wage earners. So minimum wage earners—they are not on the list of who comes first in the vision of Manitoba put forward by the opposition.

Who else isn't first? Well, injured workers certainly don't come first or any workers, frankly, for that matter who might get injured. When we increased the budget this year that they voted against, and increased resources for Workplace Safety and Health officers, what did the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) say about that move? What did he say in the *Brandon Sun* editorial? Did he say: We support Workplace Safety and Health; even though we didn't do it, we think it's great that the government has increased inspections ten-fold since they've taken office.

No. He said that adding Workplace Safety and Health officers was unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy.

So who else doesn't come first in their Manitoba? Well, today, Mr. Speaker, there is an opportunity to talk about pensions. Today would have been a great opportunity for members opposite to bring forward a private member's resolution supporting an expansion of the Canada Pension Plan, or an expansion of Old Age Security or an expansion of the Guaranteed Income Supplement, all debates that are happening right now in this country about how we better support seniors who are living in poverty and who are at most vulnerable. They could have brought forward a resolution like that, and we could have talked about that, and we might have been able to support that, with their help.

But, no, the member opposite gets one chance to bring one private member's resolution to this floor, and the one that he decides to bring isn't only wrong, but it's incredibly, incredibly partisan and it's full of political pot shots that, really, I know, are beneath his honour.

So, let's talk a little about what we are doing on pensions just for the information of all honourable members. I should say, you know, when you look at the list of who doesn't come first in their Manitoba, I have some advice for them for their slogan for the next campaign. I think the slogan that would best represent their positions is, All Manitobans Left Behind, because that best typifies what their position in who comes first in their version of Manitoba.

Let's talk about what they did in office on pensions. Well, they had 11 years, Mr. Speaker. How many amendments do you think they made to The Pension Benefits Act?

Some Honourable Members: How many?

Ms. Howard: Well, they made three, in 11 years. They made three, two of which were housekeeping matters. They did not take any step to overhaul The Pension Benefits Act. They didn't take any steps to modernize it. No, that was left to us to do in office and we have acted on that.

Beyond that, Mr. Speaker, they, as an employer who had a responsibility to fund pensions for their own employees, shirked that responsibility completely. And not only did they shirk that responsibility, they hid the fact that they shirked that responsibility from Manitobans. They didn't pay the pension liability for their employees, and they kept it off the books, even though they were warned by the Auditor General not to do that. Even though they were told that it didn't accurately portray the financial position of the Province, that's what they did.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, if we hadn't acted in our first budget to fund that pension liability, it would be on track to reach \$8 billion by the end of their so-called plan. And I am only left to speculate what their neglect of that unfunded pension liability could have led to. I think, frankly, we would not be remiss in believing that their ignoring of that unfunded pension liability was really their attempt to set up a crisis in pension funding, in public pension funding, that would then justify them cutting pensions. And today we've heard that they're not in favour of enhancing pensions for nurses, so I'm absolutely positive that they would have led to a pension crisis that would have resulted in reduced pension funding for workers in this province.

In our first budget, Mr. Speaker, the current Premier (Mr. Selinger) who was then the Finance Minister, announced a long-term plan to pay down

that pension liability. From that point on, the government would fully fund its pension liability for new government workers. Everybody that was hired would be fully funded in terms of their pension. And we began paying down that unfunded pension liability that had grown unchecked in this province for almost 30 years. By budget 2008, we were in a position to start funding our full share of service pension contributions for all government employees. And I know that that's not, perhaps, the sexiest, hottest accomplishment of this government, but it's a very important accomplishment for those thousands of men and women who rely on those pensions.

So, with those words, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the members opposite that I appreciate their interest in pensions. I appreciate their support for the work that we have been doing to strengthen pensions in this province. I hope that that kind of support continues, and I hope that they take some time in their caucus meetings to really reflect on who comes first in their vision of Manitobans because, right now, as it has been since the founding of their party, that group of people that they would put first is very, very small indeed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (11:20)

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, as the member from Pembina has put forward I consider to be a very reasonable resolution that should, in fact, be endorsed and supported by all members of this House.

It's obvious by the last speaker, the Minister of Labour, that she doesn't really understand what it was that the member from Pembina was trying to put forward and trying to achieve in this House.

It's a novel idea where we should, in fact, put Manitobans first, particularly those Manitobans who are achieving what they've set out to achieve over a lifetime of labour, working for any numbers of years—could be 30, 35 or 40 years, Mr. Speaker. They invest in their retirement. They invest in their old age. They would like to, in fact, make sure that they have the financial ability to enjoy the fruits of their labour, whether it be here in Manitoba or whether it to be in other locations across the country in their retirement, whether it be travel, whether it be at the cottages, whether it be the lake.

And it's those individuals, Mr. Speaker, that the member from Pembina speaks of. Yet this government, unfortunately, has put themselves above

the people that they should actually be looking after, and that's the retirees that—the current retirees, as well as the future retirees in this province.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

As I say, it's a novel idea that they should, in fact, think of someone else other than themselves. As was mentioned by the member from Pembina, it seems that legislation—complex legislation; very, very complicated legislation—can be put forward, can be drafted, can be put forward in this House and voted on by the majority of the government of the day, complex legislation that any of the members other than, perhaps, the Finance Minister—and that's probably debatable, as well—have had a chance to look at the BITSA bill. It is extremely complicated. And it's taking a budget that's put forward, one that's certainly not acceptable by most Manitobans, but a budget none the least, that's put forward and then implemented by a BITSA bill—that very complicated, can be done fairly quickly by this government.

But a piece of legislation that's going to assist retirees and soon-to-be retirees, it takes some five years to be able to be drafted and vetted and put forward in this House. I find that very strange, actually, that a government that seems to think that they are fairly responsible can't, in fact, put forward budget—or pension legislation in less time than five years.

Pensioners really depend on this government in order to achieve what they would like to achieve in later years, and I guess what the member from Pembina was trying to say is, treat all pensioners equally. We recognize that there's an organization out there called RTAM, which is the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba, who, in fact, asked their government, the government of the day, the NDP government, to, in fact, just simply commit to what was promised to them in the past. And, unfortunately, the minister responsible at the time decided to throw those individuals, the retired teachers, under the bus and not allow them to achieve what it is that was actually promised to them over the years.

Now, the retired teachers felt that they were being unjustly treated in itself is bad enough, but when you treat a different organization, a different group of retirees in a different fashion, in a better fashion and not one other group, then there seems to be some animosity that builds with those types of relationships. And that's what the government did;

they pitted retiree against retiree. And, quite frankly, well, we'll probably have to make some explanations of that in the not-too-distant future.

So the RTAM group would like to be treated equally, but it seems they aren't going to achieve that equal treatment from the hands of this government.

The government of the day has the ability to look after themselves quite well, actually. There was a change in Bill 31 that I think most people recognize now is an opportunity just simply retain more of their ministerial salaries than they're due under previous balanced budget legislation. But that legislation went through or will obviously go through. They do have the majority and the Bill 31 will, in fact, be coming to the floor of this House at some point in time in the future, and I suspect that they will, in fact, looked after themselves.

They will make sure that instead of taking a 40 percent reduction in their salaries, as was required under previous balanced budget legislation, they will, in fact, change it so that they'll only get the 20 percent reduction. And they'll change it so that they don't have to balance budget at all which, again, is something that we don't agree on. We believe that this government should, in fact, have better opportunity to be more efficient in their expenditures than simply what they're proposing right now.

The pension legislation that was—the recommendations that came forward in 2005 that haven't been dealt with, should also treat retirees with some respect. In Saskatchewan—well, first of all I'll try to give pension 101 to the individuals who really don't understand it all that well.

There's two types of pension. There's a defined contribution pension and there's a defined benefit pension. Civil servants, the superannuants and the teachers, and the CUPE, that this government obviously is looking after, to a point, they have a defined benefit pension so they know what it is that they're going to receive on an annual basis or a monthly basis going forward for their retirement.

But there're others in the private sector who have what's known as the defined contribution pension and that's pretty simple. It's where the individual contributes into a pension plan and the employer contributes a like amount but it's a defined contribution. It doesn't give any defined benefit that's going to go forward for any length of time after and then you can take that defined contribution and then at retirement you can put it into a RIF or a—other type

of investment facility. And what happens is some of those retirees, who, really, know more about investments than a lot of the members opposite, would like to have the opportunity to take those defined contributions and utilize them themselves and administer them themselves.

Saskatchewan actually does that, where they then allow the individual—because they have faith and trust in those people. It's actually their money, not the government's money, but they actually have faith and trust in those individuals that they have, through their own labour, contributed and accumulated a fund that they could now go and administer that fund the way they would wish to have it.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Now, they can purchase that motor home that they want to purchase and travel into the southern U.S. or they could purchase that cottage or they could assist their children if they wish to. So they would have the ability to manage the money themselves, and other jurisdictions have allowed that to happen, where the individual actually is seen as being competent in looking after their own finances.

Wow, isn't that a novel idea, too, where Big Brother, big government, socialist government doesn't have to look after all of the finances of individuals. But, unfortunately, that doesn't happen in this case, Mr. Speaker, because this province doesn't see that happening, and they won't allow those individuals to utilize their own retirement funds the way they would like to.

But what they will allow is ministers not to take the proper deduction. They will allow a vote tax that's indexed, unlike the RTAM pensions that they wouldn't allow indexation on. They will allow the nurses to index their pension in 2015, but they won't allow RTAM to index their pensions now, or past, or in the future. So there's an inconsistency. Not only an inconsistency, Mr. Speaker, but, unfortunately, a treatment that is not equal for all.

And I know the labour—the Minister of Labour (Ms. Howard) is a very competent individual. And I've—have a lot of respect for her, and I do know that she does and wants to be fair to all individuals but, unfortunately, in this particular case, she's not being fair to all individuals. And I wish that she would, in fact, put the turbo charger, Mr. Speaker, on the pension recommendations so that those people in our province who deserve to be treated fairly—and put

those people first, put Manitobans first. Don't put their own conditions first beyond—before Manitobans in general.

So thank you. I do congratulate the member from Pembina for putting Manitobans first, always. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (11:30)

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Once again, I find myself rising to a resolution that I think is—has some underlying, you know, genuine concern from the members opposite with regards to pensions, and I applaud them for that and I do acknowledge the fact that I think that they do have a sincere concern when it comes to this issue.

But once again, I think, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing a resolution that, first of all, is, from what I can read and what I gather from it, is incredibly partisan and unnecessarily so. You know, we're seeing parts of this resolution that specifically mention, you know, things that aren't relevant to the resolution itself but to the end of being partisan, and the members opposite don't seem to mind doing that to create the debate that they've wanted to create in this House, and now we're having it so.

The other problem I see here, Mr. Speaker, is that we are dealing with a resolution that is actually addressing several things that this government has already addressed and that we've been working towards. I think my colleagues on the other side of the House are again—they're behind the times. They're always one step behind. And this is something that this government, from its very beginning, from 1999 when we were first elected—you know, we recognized that there was an issue and that there was an issue with pensions. And as soon as we were elected, one of our first things that we did was to start to address this issue.

Now, I'm not saying that we've addressed the issue completely, but I do think that we've started the process. We've done quite well to the point where we're at, and what we're seeing now is that there's—we're continuing to move on it. This isn't something that we've stalled on. Where there was recommendations, we're continuing to work on those recommendations. So to—for the members opposite to come to us and to say that, you know, we're stalled on this, I think the exact opposite is true and that this government is marching forward on the recommendations and, you know, benefiting pensions, all kinds of pensions, all along the way.

So we recognized first thing that this was an issue, as I said, Mr. Speaker, in 1999. And in our first budget, the decisive action was taken to deal with the unfunded pension liability, which was sort of this growing problem that was just hanging out there and that the members opposite didn't want to deal with, you know, for their term in office in the '90s, and they didn't deal with it. They left it as a—the member—or sorry, the Minister for Labour (Ms. Howard) mentioned, you know, they left it as this growing problem and I believe, you know, for the reason to, you know, create this issue where the pension would be unfunded and pensions would be cut and who knows where from there. So I think that it was politically motivated and, again, we see a politically motivated resolution coming forward again.

So—but what we did, of course, as I said, Mr. Speaker, in 2002 we launched the first comprehensive review of The Pension Benefits Act in almost 20 years. So we took the bull by the horns in this case and we launched this review and we went out—we put out for public consultation. The amendments that were proposed by the pension commissioner's review were put out to the public, and we tried to—we started to the process of addressing this issue. And because of these recommendations, there's been several, you know, several positive steps that have been taking—taken with regards to pensions in this province.

For instance, in 2005 we shored up the health employees' pension plan. We increased the government contribution by almost 22 million.

We, in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009, we took action to shore up the university pension plans by providing more flexibility to those pensioners.

In 2007, we implemented regulations to improve flexibility for defined contribution pension plans, and these are regulations, Mr. Speaker, I might add, that are just now being implemented by the federal government and Ontario. So again, Manitoba is ahead of the curve and the members opposite are stuck in a holding pattern.

In 2007, we invested 1.5 billion to address the unfunded pension liability for the teachers' pension fund. The member from Brandon West was happy to talk about the teachers' pension fund, but he didn't want to mention the substantial funds that this government has invested in that area. In 2008, we amended legislation to improve cost of living increases for teacher pensions, again, taking the bull

by the horns, addressing this issue and working towards a positive solution.

And as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we're not—we haven't stalled out by any means on this, on these kind of issues.

In 2000–Budget 2010 we're investing a new pension fund for child-care workers. And this, you know, I just came out of a by-election, Mr. Speaker. I was on the doorsteps. I was speaking with thousands of my constituents. And child care is an issue and specifically, how to deal with child-care workers and their pensions is an issue and is something that we need to concentrate on.

This government has shown leadership in this and again, we're moving forward on it. It's an ongoing process. And, you know, the members opposite don't want to acknowledge that in their partisan resolution. So I just want to—just as a few examples of what this government has done and then to, maybe, just look back again at what could have been done in the 1990s but wasn't.

The Conservatives were in office, and they virtually ignored the pension issue. There was next to no work at all done on the pension issue. There was just three amendments during that time and two of which were actually just general housekeeping matters, Mr. Speaker. And they didn't modernize. They could have worked towards modernizing The Pension Benefits Act, but instead that job was left to us. And, again, we did that when we came in in 1999.

The—there was warnings at the time from the Auditor General, from others saying the unfunded pension liability was a huge issue and was a growing problem in this province, and it needed to be dealt with. And, in fact, if we hadn't acted in our first budget, the unfunded pension liability was on track to reach \$8 billion by the end of the Conservatives so-called debt reduction plan. This is a huge amount of money that would have been almost insurmountable if left unattended. But, of course, this government went ahead and started working on these, on this issue.

This is something here in the province that it was a long-term issue. No, it wasn't that it just snuck up. It existed for years, and it grew, actually over three decades to \$2.7 billion. So this was something that we needed to deal with. What we would do is we decided we would fully fund this pension liability for new government workers. We began paying down

the unfunded pension liability that had grown almost, that had grown unchecked for almost 30 years. And by Budget 2008 the Province was in a position to fund its full share of the current service pension contributions for all government employees.

So this is a huge, huge step in the right direction. And, you know, and members opposite again, I'm not standing here saying that the members opposite don't have a concern with regards to pension issues. I do believe that there is an underlying issue. But when the member from Brandon West stands up and saying that we don't understand this issue or that there's parts of this issue that we don't get, I think it's the other way around. And I think that if they were to look at the full picture and not just look at the partisan, you know, sort of wedge kind of debate that they want to have, and they want to actually solve the issue and work towards a better situation for all pensioners in Manitoba, I think that they would see that this government has done very, very positive work and is continuing to do that work.

So I—with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I hope that the debate does continue. I do hope that the members opposite will be, you know, are ready to stand up and continue to talk about this. It doesn't—I don't know if they're ready to speak right now. Maybe I should keep going so that they have a bit of chance to get in position. But at this point, you know, I'm sure there's somebody from this side of the House that's willing to talk about these important issues, because we do feel that pension issues are important. And, of course, myself being a newcomer to this Chamber, this is an opportunity for me to speak about it. But I know members on our side have been speaking about this, some—since 1999 some—before—since before 1999 and the members opposite again want to turn this into a political debate. We want to actually talk about what's most beneficial for pensioners in Manitoba.

And so with those few words, I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

* (11:40)

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): I was eagerly waiting—one of the members of the opposition to speak to this resolution. Unfortunately it's clear they don't support my good friend from Pembina. I'll be eager to add some comments to the record. Obvious, the Liberals don't care about pensions. They're not willing to participate in this debate. I guess they've got other matters dealing with nomination meetings and the party falling apart and other things. I know

they got other things they have to worry about, but it's unfortunate that they ignoring an opportunity to enter into the debate about I think a very important issue, and that, of course, is pensions.

And, as my colleagues have mentioned, you know, when the Conservatives were in office, they did, for their 11 years in office, they virtually ignored the pension issue. And they've—there was—they only made a couple of amendments, basically housekeeping. They ignored the job of modernizing The Pension Benefits Act, and the biggest thing they did is that they allowed the unfunded pension liability to grow and grow and grow despite the recommendations and the warnings, the repeated warnings, of the Auditor General, and it was something that we did in our first budget. In fact, if we did not act on it then, the unfunded liability was on track to reach \$8 billion by the end of the decade.

So it was—I was pleased that our government took that action. And, so, I know that the member has spoken a lot about pensions and I think the—of course, our minister has. I want to refer to some of the other items that the member put forward in his resolution, in some of his WHEREASes. He talked in here about—one of his WHEREASes, he talks about a so-called vote tax. And I've read the budget, this year's budget, of course, and previous years' budget, and I have the budget papers with me. I also have information related to our government's action when it comes to tax reductions—oh, and I'll get into that as well later on in my comments. And I don't see anywhere, anywhere in any of the documents that I've read, about the fiscal—the revenue and measures taken by our government, and there was not one line in any of these documents that referred to a so-called vote tax.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

So I always thought—I know the member is an honourable man, and certainly respect him, but I would have thought that you'd have a responsibility, Mr. Acting Speaker, to, at least, when you reference a so-called vote tax in your resolution, in one of your WHEREASes, that, in fact, there was such a thing. And there was no such a thing in any of the documents. As I said, I referenced that.

I also—he makes—in one of his—another WHEREAS he talks about the balanced budget legislation, and I want to refer to that as well as I—but I first want to talk a little bit about some of the tax cuts that we have brought in since we've formed government. People need to realize that we have

reduced taxes on an annual basis of \$1.1 billion in this province. We've had—in terms of the personal income tax, we've lowered the top tax rate from 18.1 to 17.4 percent. We've lowered the middle rate from 16.6 to 12.75. We have increased the basic tax credit up by 57 percent. We've increased the spousal tax credit by 86 percent. We've increased the eligible dependent tax credit by 86 percent. We have increased the threshold for the top tax bracket up by 13 percent. We brought in a tuition fee income tax rebate which is now up to \$2,500 per year. We brought in a personal caregiver tax credit which is now over a thousand dollars per year. That adds up to \$455 million annually in personal income tax breaks that we brought in. Again, as I said, I don't see any mention about any vote tax in any of this. I'll talk about our property tax increases. We've eliminated—we're the first government, I think, in Manitoba's history to eliminate—completely eliminate a tax, and that is the residential education support levy.

You know, these Conservatives, they talk big. They talk big about their tax breaks, you know, and they go on and they go out there and they talk big. They—you know, they take every opportunity that they can get and they are the big tax cutters, they say. They are the big tax cutters, but when they were in government the complete opposite was the truth. We are the ones that have eliminated the tax, and we've eliminated—completely eliminated that support levy.

We've eliminated—or we have increased the education property tax credit from \$250 to 650. I'll remind members that it was 325, I believe, when the Filmon government was in power— [interjection] Well, it was. It was down to 250 because they, in fact, lowered it down to 250. That was a tax increase of \$75 per property owner. That's what the Filmon government did.

And we, on the other hand, have gone from 250 to \$650, which is 160 percent increase. I know this is very interesting, the last thing that we've done, and that is on the farmland school taxes, we— [interjection] Well, I don't know what they did. Probably nothing, I'm just assuming that's the case. But we brought in a 75 percent rebate on that.

That adds up to—in terms of property tax reductions—\$268 million annually.

Well, let's talk about business. These are the guys, you know, the great titans of industry over here. You hear them every day, you know—the captains of commerce. You hear this every day from

these guys—they know how to run business. They know how to run—you know, they are the big, as I said, the big titans of industry over here. You know, they brought in payrolls and so on. They met payrolls, you know.

Well, let's talk about what they've done—some of things that we have done, I should say. The small business tax rate was 8 percent when we came into government; it's zero today. It is zero by the end of the year, excuse me. By the end of this year, it'll be zero—from 8 percent to zero.

And I heard one of their members say, well, you know, that doesn't really amount to much. Well, why don't they call for it to be increased then? They don't. They understand that this is an important fiscal member—fiscal measure that we brought in, which is probably one of the reasons why we have the lowest unemployment rate in the nation.

The small-business income threshold—we've doubled it from 200,000 to 400,000. Well, my colleague from Pembina says, people—our population's going down. Well, what is the truth? Is our population increasing, yes or no? Yes, it is increasing. Do we have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada, yes or no? Yes, we do. You know, so the member yesterday and their fearmongering about the business climate in this province is completely wrong. As I said, we've completely—we've eliminated that tax.

And get to another one: general corporate income tax rate. We've decreased that from 17 to 12 percent. We've—again, another tax, general—capital tax on manufacturing: We've eliminated that. The general tax—general capital tax: We've reduced that and we're going to eliminate that next year.

We've increased the payroll tax exemption—well, the health and education levy, also known as the payroll tax. When the Filmon government was in power, they said they would completely eliminate it, which they did not—which they did not. We have taken action. We've taken, as I said, we've increased the threshold up by 25 percent, brought in a tax credit for research and development, brought in a tax credit for film and video tax credit.

You know, we've—when you add that up, it's over \$1.1 billion annually that we have brought in in tax cuts for Manitobans. Again, we are the ones that actually act when it comes to tax relief.

And so the so-called measure in here where he talks about—again, I've outlined most of our tax

measures that we brought in since forming government. I don't see any mention of a vote tax in any of this. I don't see any—again, I read the budget—there's no such thing in this province as a vote tax.

Now the members go around, you know, they're out there in their coffee shops and wherever they go and, you know, and they're trying to fool Manitobans, to trick Manitobans into believing that there is a vote tax.

But, as I said, I've outlined the majority—and there's some more—there's some more tax measures that are in this year's budget. I know we'll be talking about that, and other members will be talking about that, but there is no mention at all of a vote tax in any of the documents that I read.

And I just think, Mr. Acting Speaker, that in conclusion, I think when we bring forward a resolution that there should be some basis of fact behind that. Thank you.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Deputy Government House Leader): I beg the indulgence of the House on House business.

I would like to announce that, if necessary, the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet at 10 a.m. on Friday, June 4th, to consider Bill 31, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

* (11:50)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Saran): Okay. I would like to announce that, if necessary, the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet at 10 a.m. on Friday, June 4th, to consider Bill 31, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I thank you for the opportunity to talk to the resolution this morning. Before I do get started though, Mr. Acting Speaker, I do want to welcome to the Chamber students from MacGregor Collegiate and the exchange group from Kingston, Ontario. So I just want to welcome those students to the Chamber this morning. I certainly hope that you have a great day here at the Legislature and around Winnipeg, so enjoy your visit.

I do want to commend the member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) for bringing forward this particular

legislation. I think it's a very timely piece of resolution that he's bringing forward this time as well. Because, as we know, this NDP government have brought forward Bill 31, which is, in essence, a bill that would protect the salaries of the 19 ministers on that side of the House. And it's very timely because that bill is the bill that we've been debating over the last few weeks here in the Chamber and it's the bill that the NDP government want to push through here in this particular session, and we finally did get that bill to committee last night. It's the first committee we had on any legislation so far this session and, obviously, it signals to everyone in Manitoba what the priorities are for the NDP government, and the priorities are that the ministers want to save their salary. So, as a result, they're pushing forward Bill 31 to change the balanced budget legislation here in the province of Manitoba, and, you know, as part of that, we get interesting—interested groups come to committee to express their views on what the NDP government is trying to do here in Manitoba.

My colleague from Pembina quite rightly pointed out in his resolution this morning that there should be fair and equitable pensions for all Manitobans, and the government should not be selecting certain individuals or certain groups out in terms of their pension. So what the resolution is saying to the government is, you know, let's be serious with all Manitobans, all those Manitobans that have spent years in the public service that are owed a reasonable and fair pension.

Now, it's pretty clear in signal—in Bill 31 is their interest in protecting their salaries, but where is the real zest or their zeal for looking after working Manitobans? And that's simply what the member for Pembina is trying to point out today.

And, as a classic example, I want to point out a submission that was brought forward by Richard Benoit last night. Richard Benoit is the president of the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba. And the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba have had some tremendous issues with their pension in the last few years, and I just want to quote from his letter that he submitted to the committee last night: RTAM feels that this legislation serves to alleviate the challenges faced by Cabinet members while not dealing with the COLA problem faced by RTAM members. Bill 45, passed in 2008, has still not fixed our COLA problems.

And we have historical facts in terms of what retired teachers have received in terms of cost of living. Up until 1999, retired teachers received a full cost of living. After 1999, when the government changed, full cost of living was not made available to retired teachers. There's clearly inequity in the system here, and this is what the retired teachers come to committee for. We had a number of retired teachers coming to the committee saying, where is the equity? We know the ministers over there are trying to protect their salaries. They're trying to protect their incomes. But why don't they spend the time trying to protect the income of retired teachers who have put many years into public service and teaching our young kids here in the province of Manitoba? That is what the retired teachers are saying.

It's the responsibility of this government to stand up for Manitobans and the retired public service people that are working here in the province of Manitoba and those that have retired. That's why I wanted to speak this morning on the resolution brought forward by the member for Pembina. I certainly hope the government will support this resolution because I think it's a very worthwhile resolution. Thank you very much.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): You know, I'm pleased to rise in this Chamber today. I know there's many members from this side of the House that would like to speak to this, and I know it would be easy for me not to do so, but it's the right thing to do. It would be easy for me not to do so because I know I'm going to be subject to all kinds of infantile name-calling that I've been subject to for the last couple of years by members opposite. They've created this little name for me and it's akin to childish games in the playground, of course, and they keep chirping from their seat about it. But I have to comment on what was said by the Education critic, because here he is talking about the Retired Teachers' Association and what happened with their pension.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Well—and it's interesting that the member from Russell is chirping about this as well, because when he was Education Minister he received three letters in a row saying if you keep paying out full COLA, then this is not sustainable. And what did he do? He ignored it. He ignored it, Mr. Speaker, like they ignored every opportunity to improve pensions in the province of Manitoba. He ignored it like they

ignored every opportunity to improve the education system in the province of Manitoba. And what do they do? I guess he ignored those letters because he was too busy having them go through—having people from the department go through all the books and make sure the books didn't have demonic references or sexual connotations or anything like that in the textbooks. He was too busy plotting to introduce Bill 72 to strip teachers of all their collective bargaining rights.

So for them to stand up and talk about pension and income for teachers, I have to take no lessons from members opposite. In fact, the member from Pembina, he was on a committee. He was on a committee, and what were the terms of reference for that committee, Mr. Speaker? The terms of reference were: Teachers are overpaid; we have to cut their salaries by a third. Well, we're not going to cut the salaries of teachers that are already in the system, but, you know, we should look at how much teachers are compensated and cut their salaries by a third for those entering into the profession. Well, that wouldn't have affected too many people because they weren't hiring any teachers. In fact, they had 284 teachers laid off in one month alone because of their pathetic funding record on education.

So, yes, there's many people who would like to stand up and speak about pensions, because we've done more for pensions in this province in our tenure than they will do in a lifetime if they are in government over the next hundred years. We've done more in 10 years and we'll continue to do what's best for Manitobans. We'll do what's best for all Manitobans.

Now, the critic is holding up the table with all the cost of living adjustments. Well, we have to remind the critic of all the mistakes that were made by the previous administration in ignoring the problem, creating a new problem that we had to fix, and we had to do so in a balanced way.

Now, the members opposite were going to guarantee two-thirds COLA. They were going to—they promised the world to the teachers, but teachers know better, because we know how they treated teachers in the '90s. We know how they would treat

the education system today because we heard their own leader say, well, we don't need to increase funding because enrolment's flat or declining. Well, hello, it doesn't work that way. But they don't understand education, they never have, they never will, and that's showed by the complete disdain that they have for the teaching profession. It's shown by the complete disdain that they have for the public school system. And members opposite, they were only going to put in \$10 million more to fund the—schools of excellence, I believe, was their priority. They were going to fund schools of excellence.

So, I don't need a lecture from members opposite about how we fund education, first of all, about how we resource education with our teachers, and how we address the issues of teacher pension.

We had opened up the act five times in seven years, including efforts to improve the cost of living allowance. Members opposite would gladly have passed off the burden of responsibility on active teachers and had active teachers increase their pension contributions by \$3,000 because of the historic errors that were made by ignoring warnings from the actuary.

Sometimes they stand up in the House and say, the actuary said—the actuary said: How come you're not listening to the actuary? They ignored the actuary for nine years. Nine warnings by the actuary saying, hey, if you don't do something about this, it's not sustainable. There is no way that the cost of living allowance can be maintained and it's not going to be sustainable in the future. But they ignored that altogether. Why? Because they ignored every opportunity to reform pensions. They ignored every opportunity to improve the education system. In fact, they cut teachers, they cut nurses, they cut doctors, and they are the hack-and-slash party of the 1990s.

And I'm glad that I'm on this side of this House today, Mr. Speaker, where we will—

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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 3, 2010

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