

First Session - Fortieth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 14, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Good morning, colleagues. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): I wonder if there is leave of the House to proceed to Bill 219, The Election Advertising Integrity Act, for the first half-hour of private members' hour, and then to be followed by 220—Bill 220, The Voter Identification Act, for the second half-hour, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to call Bill 219 for the first half-hour of private members' hour, and to be followed by the Bill 220 for the second half-hour? *[Agreed]*

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 219—The Election Advertising Integrity Act (Elections Finances Act Amended)

Mr. Speaker: We'll now call Bill 219, The Election Advertising Integrity Act (Elections Finances Act Amended).

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), that Bill 219, The Election Advertising Integrity Act (Elections Finances Act Amended), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of the House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: This bill would, in essence, require that during an election a political party, through their

central advertising in electronic form, so generally radio and television, the party leader would have to approve the content of that ad in a verbal way on the ad.

Many members opposite might have familiarity with what happens in the United States. They have a similar type of provision for many of their states and for federal advertising. The experience there, Mr. Speaker, has been generally positive in the sense that government or the party advertising, the tone and the tenor of that advertising has improved.

They do have a slightly different system, and they have what's known as super PACs, political action committees, which can do advertising on behalf of parties. And those third-party advertisements, if you will, aren't subject to the same types of requirements for advertising. So that's a bit of a loophole in their system, but it doesn't impact the super PAC advertising, but the experience, generally, has been that for the mainline party advertising, it has improved the tone and tenor of the advertising.

And this, certainly, does come up in relation, partially, to the last provincial election where we did see advertising that was extremely attack-orientated. Many constituents—and I'm sure members opposite would have had the same experience, voters would have been telling them that they were concerned about the advertising, that it didn't reflect the truth; that it was simply personal attacks on individuals—and they would have heard those same sorts of concerns. This would require—and, of course, the common theme in all of those ads, Mr. Speaker, was that the party leader for the NDP, I'll use the example, was never on the ad. And he wasn't on the ad, one would presume, because they didn't want to be associated with the content of the ad. And my feeling is that if a leader of a party doesn't want to be associated with the content of the ad, they should consider not placing that ad, and, certainly, having to put themselves on the ad and saying that they approve the message or some other type of narrative would improve election advertising.

And, you know, we had a discussion at Elections Manitoba—with Elections Manitoba yesterday, at the Legislative Affairs Committee, about voter turnout,

and one of the things that the deputy electoral officer mentioned was that of those who didn't vote in the last election—there were far many than any of us were comfortable with—55 per cent were essentially considered disconnected voters. They didn't vote because—didn't feel it would make a difference; they weren't happy with any of the political parties; were disenchanted with the system. And I think part of that certainly plays into the advertising, and, you know, when it comes to negative advertising in particular, it's often strategic to reduce the number of people who vote to drive down votes.

So, yesterday, the Premier (Mr. Selinger), I'll assume it was with good intentions, talked about the need to try to get voter turnout up at elections, and so I'm trying to do him a favour; I'm trying to help him out by suggesting that this particular bill could be one measure to help increase voter turnout by improving how elections are run.

Now, I suspect—and I don't know who will be responding on behalf of the government, whether it's the Attorney General (Mr. Swan) or the House leader—I'm sure it will be one of them or maybe both of them; no doubt they have their bullets and their speaking notes already done up and they're ready to try to list off a litany of different political parties who've done different things. I want to say, and I'll hope that they can tear—rip up their speaking points and come up with different points. I have said already in the media on this issue, I don't think that any particular political party is completely innocent in this, and I'm not going to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that any political party is innocent in this. I do think that what happened in the last provincial election took it to a new level in Manitoba, and it's one of the reasons I think we need to be concerned.

But if the members opposite, either the House leader or the Attorney General, are going to stand up and try to suggest that this bill shouldn't be considered because maybe other political parties at different levels have participated in certain kinds of advertising, I would say they are wasting their time, because that's not the intention of what I'm saying, nor am I suggesting that anybody is without fault. But I do think that we certainly have to be concerned about what happened in the provincial election, in the last election, that we all have to strive to do a little better and to look at reasons why individuals aren't voting, to look at reasons why there is general skepticism among the public when it comes to politics and, sometimes, politicians.

I don't pretend for a second, and I—maybe the Attorney General and the House leader can strike this from their speaking points, too—I don't intend this is going to be a magic bullet, that this is the only thing that needs to be done to improve both the perception and operation of politics—of course not. I don't think when we bring forward ideas or legislation, that they ever are intended to be a complete cure-all for whatever situation that we're trying to address. But I do think it's a step forward, and I do think it's a positive step forward, Mr. Speaker, and it certainly is something that we need to be leaders on and take the lead on, and I think our caucus has taken a brave step forward by saying that we are willing to be one group who would participate in this type of legislation, and I hope to hear the support from other parties. If they want to simply stand up and point at all sorts of other parties and point at all sorts of other examples, I think that would do a disservice to them. I'm trying to, in a bipartisan way, here at the last day of—presumably the last day of session. I don't want to spoil any surprise. One never knows how these things might go, but here on the last day of session, I'm trying—likely, I'm trying to bring forward an idea that I think all of us as politicians in the craft of politics should look at and should consider.

*(10:10)

And I also recognize that it might bring forward a broader discussion. I mean, perhaps the Attorney General or the House leader for the government have different ideas. They might say, well, the goal is laudable but maybe the mechanism is—could be slightly different. Well, I'm open to those discussions, Mr. Speaker. I think the spirit of this bill would say that I'm open to those discussions.

If there are different ways to try to achieve the same goal, I've never said that my way is the only way, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly willing to sit down with government. We could bring this to a committee, pass it on to committee. Perhaps in the summer have individuals come forward, bring presentations, maybe those who are familiar with the operation of elections or how this experience has worked in other jurisdictions, I'm certainly open to that as well.

So I hope that the government ministers who speak to this will do so in a way that's respectful, that's reflective, that doesn't just simply speak to the points that somebody in Cabinet Communications has drawn up for them, that it actually is a

meaningful discussion, that it's not about throwing rockets and hand grenades over to the other side of the House because, in fact, that's exactly what I'm trying to—that was perhaps a bit of a vivid description, Mr. Speaker; I can tell from your reaction.

But I—the idea, of course, is with this legislation is to ensure that advertising during an election motivates people to vote, that it's honest, that it is with integrity, and that it's not something that political leaders are trying to run from, that they in fact do endorse.

So I look forward to hearing the opinions, the honest and thought-out opinions of the members opposite, not just simply political barbs and rhetoric. I know both the House leader and the Attorney General will probably have put some thought into this, and they wouldn't want to just demean the bill by doing exactly what it is the bill is trying to prevent, Mr. Speaker, to prevent those kinds of attacks, to prevent those kinds of things happening in politics. So I look forward to their comments, and again, I'm certainly open to different ideas in terms of how we can deal with the situation and perhaps we can have this discussion at a committee and with others who can make presentations about how to achieve the laudable goal of improving politics for everybody and, in turn, improving those who come out and participate in the political process. Thank you very much.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to get up today to debate this bill. I'm not going to demean it, but I am going to debate it, and I'm—I can assure the member from Steinbach that my speaking notes are in my own hand. I have written them out myself and thought of them myself; I do have that capacity.

I looked at this bill and I just guess I want to start by talking about what the current law states because I wouldn't want to leave the impression that there is no provision in the current law for parties to put clearly on their advertising where that advertising is coming from, and so the current law—and fortunately, I've got the plain-language version of it because we just went through the process of rewriting The Elections Finances Act in plain language, so it's even easier to understand.

Part 61 of the act talks about authorization of advertising, and it's very clear who shall authorize advertising. So advertising should not be placed, it

says clearly, you must not publish, print, or distribute advertising unless it is authorized by the person listed opposite in column 2. So some of those people who authorize ads: the party's financial officer; the candidate's official agent; the candidate can authorize, but only if the advertising is used before the candidate's official agent is appointed; the party's financial officer in the year of a set-date election; the constituency association's financial officer at other times; the contestant, if it's a leadership contestant; the contestant's official agent can authorize; or the contestant, but only if that advertising is used before the contestant's official agent is appointed.

The act goes on to say that the authorization must be displayed or announced, must be printed on the advertisement if the advertisement is printed material, or announced or shown with the advertisement if the advertisement appears on radio or television or another electronic medium. It's also goes on to be clear about when you require that authorization; so, you require it during an election period, you require it outside of an election period in the year of a set-day election and you require it during a leadership contest period.

So, certainly, in the advertising that I've ever seen, I think, during an election or in the period leading up to a set-date election, I don't think I've ever been left to wonder where that advertising came from. I think it's clear at the end what party has authorized it. So I don't think that it's—there's more required than that for voters to understand where an ad is coming from.

I mean the member opposite did talk about the inspiration for this amendment, being the American political system, where essentially you can say whatever you like in the ad, true or not, as long as somebody pops up at the end saying, I approve this message. I'm not sure that that improves upon the current situation that we have in Manitoba and in most provinces, I think all provinces in the country, where we do have clear rules for authorization of ads.

Now, this was—the election that we just went through was a very competitive election. There is no doubt about that and I don't think that's anything that any of us need to be defensive about or worried about. We want competitive elections. We want there to be strong competition between parties. We want the voters to have a choice between different ideas and different plans and different ways to get there, and communicating with voters, advertising is part of

that. This is the age that we live in and we all make use of different forms of advertising, be they the pamphlets that we put in people's mailboxes outlining who we are as candidates and what we plan to do, or the ads that we see on television or hear on the radio. And I—there was advertising in this election that very clearly laid out the difference between the parties that were seeking to form government and very clearly laid out for Manitobans the choice that they were about to make.

And I know the member opposite didn't want me to talk about any of the ads that they may have run or any of the things that may have been engaged in. But I think it's important to note some of the advertising that we saw in the lead up to the election and question how factual some of it may have been. I remember, for many, many days we heard petitions and we saw billboards and different ads putting this claim on the record that somehow every Manitoban was going to have to pay more than \$10,000 on their hydro bills if this bipole line went forward. So I don't know where that number was coming from. I remember seeing that billboard. I never remember seeing it authorized by—on the billboard. I never remember seeing an authorization by the political party it was coming from. Maybe it was there. I don't know.

But even after we sat in a committee, and I didn't know where that number came from so I thought I'd ask someone who might know, which would be the CEO of Hydro whose, you know, thoughts on this and whose ability to do math, as an accountant, I would trust. And he was very clear that there was no basis in reality for that number. That he had tried in many, many ways to compute how they might get there and he could not get to that number, that, in his opinion, that number was simply wrong. And I thought after that committee, okay, you know, I'll give them the benefit of the doubt. They had a number. They've been told it's wrong. Surely, they will not want to continue to have false advertising out there. Surely they subscribe to a higher principle than that. But you know that happened, Mr. Speaker, after they were told they were wrong? All they did was up the volume on what they were saying, as if saying something a little bit louder would make it true.

But that, Mr. Speaker, I don't think is the worst example that I have seen in this province of advertising that not only could maybe be seen as inaccurate—charitably, could be described as inaccurate—but really, I think, more accurately would

be described as scurrilous. And I'm talking about advertising that went out as fliers into constituencies, I suppose, where the opposition thought they stood a good chance of winning, that essentially claimed that the MLAs who were representing those constituencies were on the side of pedophiles. And I can't think of actually a more offensive claim for a political party to make, a more American-like strategy for a political party to employ than that one, but that is a tactic that was used.

* (10:20)

And then, during the election we saw what I think was probably one of the most disturbing leaflets that I've seen during an election, and this is the one where on the front page of it you had the picture of a young child with a man's hand over her mouth. And I think the point of that was a discussion about crime, but clearly the cover of that was meant to provoke fear. And I remember at the time that there was a discussion in the media about children seeing that, parents not wanting their children to see that particular piece of political advertising, because they were afraid that their children would be frightened by it. And I think, you know, the fact that parents have to be worried about whether or not their children see a pamphlet coming from an opposition candidate, because their children might be frightened by the pictures—I think that, Mr. Speaker, is the worst example, frankly, of advertising that we saw in this election.

So when—you know, when we were looking at the kind of communications that we wanted to do with Manitobans, knowing that a great deal of inaccurate information had been put out by the opposition, that, you know, what we fought about is, well, we want to be factual and we want to lay out a clear choice. And so, our advertising was based on the facts, Mr. Speaker, because we believe, you know, quoting Tommy Douglas, one of the founders of our parties, that when the opposition lies about you, what you should do is tell the truth about them.

And so, that's what we did in this election. It is true that they all stood and supported a motion that would have taken a half a billion dollars out of the budget in one year; that, they all supported. And we know what the results of that would have been. The results of that would have been deep cuts to health care, deep cuts to education, cuts that we had seen previously come to pass the last time they were in government, in the 1990s. We know, Mr. Speaker, it is true, that there is on the other side a history of

privatization of Crown assets. That is the truth. They did sell the Manitoba Telephone System. They promised not to, and they did do that. They do have an ideological belief that selling Crown assets to the private sector is the best way to go. They had candidates in this last election—the candidate that they ran in Seine River, who, days before becoming a candidate, went in the media and talked about that he believed that MPI should be privatized. That happened. That is the truth. We also saw them speak out repeatedly against water regulations, against environmental protections, only to try a desperate flip-flop at the last minute in the hope, I suppose, to communicate to voters that they actually were in favour of Lake Winnipeg and water safety.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think I understand there's some hurt feelings on the other side about the election that we went through, but I think that Americanizing our political system is not the solution to soothe those hurt feelings that are left over from the last election. Thank you.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Just briefly want to put a few words on the record in regard to the Bill 219, Election Advertising Integrity Act, and I think the intent of this bill is very noble. It would address some of the concerns that we've had with the negative advertising that's come from the NDP, particularly, in this last election. It would require radio and television advertisements to have the leaders sign off on the ad, Mr. Speaker.

I know that the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) mentioned the fact that the CEOs do authorize the election signage, but that's a different thing. Just to be clear, the CFO signs off on the expenditure of the advertising. What this is, how this is different, it would be the leader of the party signing off on the message, authorizing the message, not the 'expenditures.' So that, I think, is an important thing to remember. It's clearly not just paying for the advertising, it's actually committing to signing that advertising, Mr. Speaker, and, therefore, endorsing what that message says.

So that's clearly something different. I think when you put your name on something that is not truthful, Mr. Speaker, you'd have second thoughts before you did that. And, in fact, I guess, if the government is saying that all of the advertising that they put out during the last election was honestly truthful, they would have no problem—they would have no problem—in putting their leader's signature on it. They didn't do that, and we're hearing now they

don't want to do that. So, what that tells me is they don't want to be authorizing something they know to be untrue, because, inherently, people do not want to sign onto things that aren't true, I believe. I believe, I have some faith in people and I really don't think that people want to put their names on things that aren't true.

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe that this would actually encourage people to be more truthful in the advertising and, certainly, examine the content before their name goes on it. I think it does go a long way into our 'reputation' as politicians on all—and all parties, all sides, and I see no problem with looking at something like this.

I know the members on the other side did put some very negative untruthful advertising out there last time, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't even bear going into the number of things that they put on the record and all of the advertising that was out there, but, certainly, it was very personal. There was personal attacks and I think that that goes way beyond what we're doing here when you have to go into personal attacks on people, what people wear. I think that's just unbelievable. I don't think that has anything to do with the political process and why we're running as elected officials.

So I think that this would just add some integrity, and if they feel that every single piece of advertising that they put out there is absolutely one hundred per cent true, they'll have no problem in supporting this. I'd like to see this resolution—or this private member's bill go to committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): It's my pleasure to put a few words on the record this morning regarding this important piece of legislation, and I'm eager to continue to talk about the issue of putting your name on the—voter identification, the important thing about advertising in the campaign, Mr. Speaker.

We know that advertising is a very important part of the electoral process, Mr. Speaker, and all of us do a lot of advertising, whether it's through signs or we may, in fact, run—we run radio ads; we may, in fact, do ads on—in our newspapers; and we may, in fact, do different things to help us promote our parties. And all of us, we're—we find that it's an important part of what we do and an important part of what we do as electoral party and as we communicate our message to our constituent. And that is why we—The Elections Act already requires

our political parties include information in their ads indicating the party is responsible for the content of the ad.

And we've seen this in the American system, Mr. Speaker, where, you know, at the end of the ad they'll say, I'm Barack Obama and I approve this message, or, I'm Bill Clinton and I approve this message. We know that these campaigns are among the most negative, they're among the most dishonest campaigns in the world. And so we know that requiring a candidate or a leader of a political party to put these ads or these notices, these comments on the ads really hasn't had a lot of impact down there.

And we're finding that it's regrettable that these ads, the attack ads are becoming more and more personal, Mr. Speaker. We're seeing some of the actions of the Republican political operative come into Manitoba and it's regrettable. I must say, over the years I've been in this Chamber and the number of elections that I've been involved with, they seem that they're getting—the ads are getting more and more personal and it's regrettable that that's the case.

Mr. Speaker, we heard last night, those of us who attended the committee with the acting chief electoral officer, that, you know, she realizes that there—in fact, there are some potential downside for voters if this bill was to become law. So I think we'll—we are concerned about stricter voter identification provisions which would impact seniors, would impact in long-term facilities and, in particular, we're concerned about how this would impact upon rural voters. We're concerned about how this would impact about Aboriginal people living on reserve and, of course, we're concerned about how this would impact upon students living away from home. And a survey that was conducted—

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

As previously agreed, at the start of the private members' hour, we would have half an hour for Bill 219 and now proceed with the second half-hour for Bill 220 consideration.

* (10:30)

**Bill 220—The Voter Identification Act
(Elections Act Amended)**

Mr. Speaker: And we'll now consider Bill 220, The Voter Identification Act (Elections Act Amended).

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Disappointed that the last bill didn't pass, so I'll try again. Don't want to be dissuaded.

So, I move, seconded by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), that Bill 220, The Voter Identification Act (Elections Act Amended), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: This bill would bring the requirement for voter identification in line with what is already in place federally and in civic elections. What it would do is it would require an individual who is voting on election day to produce either photo ID—one piece of photo ID issued by the government—or two other pieces of identification that didn't have a photo but did have their address, Mr. Speaker.

I suspect most Manitobans actually believe right now that they do have to produce identification when they vote. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I'll admit when I voted—and I'll even tell you who I voted for, if you want to know—but when I voted in the last provincial election, I immediately took out my wallet, produced the photo identification. The people at the polling booth said they knew who I was, but I showed them the ID because it was my assumption that I had to produce identification. And, in fact, I know, looking around me at individuals who were preparing to vote, many of them were taking out their wallets, getting their ID ready, because that would certainly be their experience during the federal election, that they had to do that, and it would have been their more recent experience in a civic election that predated our provincial election.

So, I think that the assumption among Manitobans is already that you need to produce identification to vote, but that's not the reality, Mr. Speaker. Under our system, if your name is on the voters list, you can simply go—and we had this discussion with Elections Manitoba last night in committee—you can simply go on elections day and say, I am John Smith, I live at such-and-such an address, and I'm ready to vote. And you get your ballot and you go. And if, half an hour later, the real John Smith shows up and wants to vote, well, he's out of luck because somebody else has come and said that they are him.

In fact, it goes even further than that because some might say, well, there must be restrictions to get you onto the voters list; so there has to be some

sort of identification before you can even get on the voters list. Well, that's not true either, Mr. Speaker. I found out—I've known for a while, but, you know, confirmed yesterday at the committee on elections, one can actually phone to get themselves on the voters list. This is a more common practice outside the city of Winnipeg, although I know of instances where it did happen in the city of Winnipeg, despite, apparently, rules to prevent that. You can phone to get your name on the voters list, so, of course, you're not producing ID, because you're on the phone with somebody from your returning office. You get a name on the voters list and then, on election day, you can show up and not produce any identification.

So, really, through the entire system of voting, there are ways to get on the voters list with no ID, and then, to vote with no ID, Mr. Speaker. You can tell how open that is to potential voter fraud. I'd love to live in a world where I believed it didn't happen. I'd love to live in a world where I believed that this sort of thing never occurred.

But, I don't believe that. I do believe that there are instances where these sorts of things do happen. And, I understand now why the federal government and civic campaigns have gone to a system of requiring identification if you're going to have to—or if you're going to vote, Mr. Speaker.

I didn't get a sense yesterday, in talking with officials from Elections Manitoba, they would be opposed to this idea. There were some questions about whether or not it would take a little bit longer to vote. But, again, I think most people are prepared to bring their identification long before they even show up at the polling station. I know in the federal election, there were certainly instances, Mr. Speaker, of some delay, but certainly not massive delay.

In fact, we had the Premier (Mr. Selinger), yesterday, wanting to promote online voting. He seemed to think that that was an efficient thing to do and, yet, when we looked at the federal NDP leadership race, Mr. Speaker, it took 12 hours to get that vote done when it was online, because apparently they had somebody from overseas hacking into their system. So—[interjection] I can guarantee—I can almost guarantee the member, our voting system will be much quicker than 12 hours.

But certainly, when the minister speaks about delays and whether or not this is something to be concerned with, I think that when you look at the federal system or the civic system it's not a wide

concern and it's not something that was fraught with difficulty.

So, in speaking with, again, the elections deputy electoral officer yesterday, I don't think there was significant concerns. There was certainly agreement that we have to have a balloting system that has integrity, Mr. Speaker, and one that ensures that those men and women who did fight for the privilege for us to vote, and we often speak about that in this House and we all mean that with great sincerity—that those who did fight to give us the privilege to vote, that we ensure that that vote means something: that that vote is going to be secure; that it is not going to be open to any type of manipulation or fraud. And I think this is a very reasonable, reasonable measure.

When we talk about the many things in life we do that require identification these days, many of them are very basic things in our life. Of course, you know, we know if one's travelling that's a requirement these days, Mr. Speaker, for a variety of different reasons. When certain products are bought, there's a requirement for identification. This is not some sort of abstract or difficult hurdle to pass. In fact, there's even some provisions built into the legislation where if a person absolutely has no ID that if there is somebody who is on the voters list who does have identification, they can vouch for that individual. So it's not as though there is—if in those very rare cases where an individual wouldn't have identification, there is still a way for them, with some sort of validation, to get on to the voters list or get on to getting a ballot so that they can vote.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the objection would be from the government. You know, some might talk about this would reduce voter turnout, and I suspect that might be one of the things that Cabinet Communications had written down in the talking points that they're supposed to put forward on this bill. Well, we had that discussion yesterday with Elections Manitoba, as well, and it was indicated that there are many reasons why people don't vote, but the—by far, the largest reason isn't because of our hurdle with identification or how difficult it is to vote; by far, the largest reason is a disassociation with politics and politicians. That didn't seem to be a concern to the government half an hour ago when they rejected a bill that might address that. But certainly, voter identification is not going to drive down voter turnout. I would point to the federal election, where they do require identification, they actually had a higher turnout than we did in the provincial election. So, I guess I could argue based

on facts alone that maybe it actually increases voter turnout. Maybe people recognize that providing identification is something that brings value to one's vote, that brings value to the voting system, and maybe it increases participation as opposed to decreasing participation.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that for a number of different reasons this is a common-sense approach. It is not a strong barrier. The vast majority of people, I think, already expect that they're going to have to bring identification. Identification is done for many common and routine things in our life already. There is no evidence that it would impact voter turnout. In fact, there might be evidence that it would improve voter turnout, if we look at the federal system that uses this form of identification. There still is a mechanism in those very, very rare cases where an individual doesn't have identification to still allow them to vote. And I think, ultimately, we owe it to those who have fought for our democratic system to ensure that the vote means something—that it is not open to abuse, which it certainly is now when you can get on the voters list with no identification.

When you can show up to vote with no identification, it doesn't take somebody who has a degree in political science to see all the problems that that could bring. So my hope, Mr. Speaker, is that the Government House Leader (Ms. Howard) will take this in the spirit that it's given, see it as a good reform to strengthen the democratic system, and move this bill on to committee. Thank you.

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I just want to say that it's a pleasure to stand up and put some words on the record. Of course, I got to hear what the member opposite said. I got to say I don't agree with much of what he said, but there's a few points that I do agree with.

* (10:40)

You know, I do want to be able to say, though, that I want to tell a bit of a story. We know that in the last provincial election overall voter turnout went down overall. But in a place like Point Douglas where there is a high rate of people who typically don't vote—I represent an area with a very high Aboriginal population. I represent an area that has a lot of single parents. I represent an area, because of the demographic, a lot of young people. So when a place like Point Douglas, where you would look at it in terms of the demographics, people would say, well, that's a common area where people will not

vote. And, clearly, myself and the member opposite represent, you know, different parts of Manitoba.

But what I do want to be able to say is that in Point Douglas in the last election, that we were actually able to increase voter turnout by over 20 per cent. Eleven hundred brand new voters did come and, you know, Mr. Speaker, I want to put on record my good friend Pat. Pat is an elder, grew up in Manitoba, contributed greatly to the province of Manitoba, but for a big part of his life he wasn't allowed to vote because the laws wouldn't let him do it. He's a First Nations person. He wasn't allowed to go to the polls the majority of his life. His life started on a trajectory where he was told he wasn't allowed to do it based on his race.

So after that he doesn't just automatically turn on people, well, now you're allowed to vote so then all of a sudden they go to the polls. Pat Campbell [*phonetic*] is somebody, because of the voter requirements, when he wanted to go vote in the federal election, in the by-election, for somebody like me, wasn't allowed to vote. He didn't have the proper ID. He's a—you know, Pat now has unfortunately passed away in his late 80s.

In the provincial election, though, we were able to go see Pat and he was able to go to the polls. He had—now he was able to vote. So for the very first time in his life, in his late 80s, got to go to the polls and actually cast his vote. Now I think that that is huge. I think that one person not allowed to vote is one too many. And when we look at someone like Pat Campbell [*phonetic*], I can assure the members opposite that he had nothing to do with robo-call scandals or any of those types of things. He had nothing to do with past, you know, histories in terms of challenges around elections. He had nothing to do with those kinds of things. But he did have the opportunity to go and vote in the provincial election, which I think is absolutely huge.

Dan Lett wrote an article, interviewed a lady in Point Douglas. She's a low-income senior and, you know, she can't write cheques, big cheques to political parties. She can't engage in that way, but she can contribute to her community by volunteering. And we all know in the Chamber here that many seniors, the way in which they contribute—particularly lower income seniors—and get their sense of contribution and their sense of generosity, is through volunteering. And so when Dan Lett was asking this senior, this low-income senior, how she was participating in the election, she said her job was

to go around and go and talk to other low-income seniors, and talk to them about the importance of voting, many who have never voted before. And her job was to go around and talk to them about the issues and give them the supports they need to go to the voter poll. Well, when Dan asked her, what was the number one challenge that you faced trying to get low-income seniors to the poll? She said voter ID. It was always difficult. It was always tough because they didn't have the proper identification. Now, that was during a federal election. So there were many people that tried to go to the polls and they were turned down, or they were asked—they had to go over here. So she struggled with that. So there was a lot of low-income seniors that can live their lives every day with a certain piece of ID, but when it comes to an election, can't vote.

Well, once again, if we don't have low-income seniors being able to allow—to go and participate in democracy and do those types of things, you know, that has a big impact on the overall health and well-being of a community.

There's also another young man, 19 years old, everything about him, everything about this young man—young, 19-year-old, Aboriginal, grew up on social assistance his entire life—everything about him in terms of the perspective says, he is not a voter. He's young, Aboriginal, low-income. Well, in the Point Douglas election he took the time to come out and vote. He took the time to come and do that. Now, we were fortunate that our Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) travelled the province talking about the prebudget consultation, so bringing people together. So this young man, after he casted his vote, started to participate. That was his engagement in terms of active citizenship. So, Minister of Finance came, talked about the prebudget. There were many people there. People got to go up to the microphone, share their—express their thoughts and ideas, things that our government should be looking at, things that we should be doing. And here's this young guy, gets up, goes to the microphone and talks to the Minister of Finance. And he has his issues and he has his concerns, and he actually feels like he has the right to participate in that. And why? Because he took the time to vote.

So there is a ripple effect that happens. It's not simply people cast their vote and that's it. It is actually an engagement process into active citizenship. It is an engagement process to getting people involved. He was able to do that because he had one piece of ID. He was able to go and vote with

his one piece of ID, and that was great. So he got to go and he got to share with our Minister of Finance, and at that point, his voice became as strong as any other voice in the province of Manitoba. And we need to hear those types of voices. We need to hear the voice of people like Pat Campbell [*phonetic*]; people like Elaine [*phonetic*], who's trying to get low-income seniors; people like Chris [*phonetic*], who wanted to come out and express his views, and he continues to be an active young man in our community, trying to do good work.

Now, I would get to go and visit adult education sites—majority of them are people that are just trying to turn their lives around, who have grown up in the face of hardship and challenge and those types of sites—those types of challenges in their life. And I would go and talk to these adults, majority of them, if not all of them, are parents; a lot of single parents, a lot of single mothers.

And the question I would always get asked was, why should we vote, Kevin? Why should we do that? What does that mean? You know, and there's lots of different ways in which you can do that. And I—the No. 1 thing that I would always tell them, it was always important to vote because you want people to listen to your views. You want people to understand that, you know, when you actually take the time to go and do that—and I would always tell them, the No. 1 thing you want to do when you go vote—take your son, take your daughter. Let them see you do it. Let them see you actually do that, you know, because then that'll instill those types of values in their children.

Now imagine this, Mr. Speaker, a single mother bringing her two or three kids, going to the poll—I could tell you right now, their confidence is probably down; they're probably not feeling that good about it; it's something that's foreign to them. You know, it's a very hard thing to do, and they go in there to cast their vote with their children and because of extra ID, they're told they're not allowed to do it. They're saying, no, you're not allowed to vote; sorry, you can't do it.

Well, I think we would have massive struggles to not only get them to come back, but also their children would be able to see that. Well, look, when we actually look at this bill, it does nothing to talk about innovativeness or creativity to get our most vulnerable people.

Every single day when we talk about democracy, what do we hear about? How do we engage more

young people? How do we engage Aboriginal people? How do we engage a group of people who typically don't go to the polls? How do we do that?

Well, there's nothing in the bill that actually talks about that group of people. I mean, we all recognize that's where our biggest challenge is: How do we actually get people to participate? All of these people I talked about have nothing to do with any type of vote rigging or scandals or all those kinds of things. All they want to be able to do is find ways—all of us in this House, how do we find ways to get our most disenfranchised people to the polls, to go and do that? Because we all need to recognize government services and resources only work when a community is engaged, when people are actually engaged in their community, when they're out working hard and they're out volunteering and they're out doing those things; people like Chris [*phonetic*], and people like Pat, and people like Elaine [*phonetic*]. That's when government services work best. That's why it's so important that that first touch of democracy—that people are allowed to vote.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): And I just have to say that I was honoured to have been asked to second this bill today, and I want to congratulate the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) for bringing this bill forward. This is something that all members of this Legislature should support.

I want to give you just an example of something that happened during the election when I was out with our campaign team, canvassing in the Charleswood area of my riding one evening. And this is after the advanced polls had opened and people had started to vote, and I came across this one gentleman at a door in the Charleswood area and—of my riding, and he said, well, you know, I actually have already voted and—but—or I just voted this morning, but I voted for the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger). And I thought, well, no, this is clearly in my riding, it's not in her riding. So, we investigated that, and what we found out after going through several envelopes and the whole process was that he, in fact, had voted in the wrong constituency. And so, we politely asked him if he'd go back and vote again in my constituency, and, luckily, he took the time out of his day to vote again. I said, you know, look at this way, there's not many people that get a chance to vote twice in the same election, so.

* (10:50)

But I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it was alarming to me, because I happened to come across this gentleman throughout the course of my canvass. And what happened was—[*interjection*] No. No, but—no. So what happened was the—what happened here is that he didn't have to necessarily show his ID and show where he lived and they didn't necessarily know where he was to vote. And that was a significant problem, and that's exactly why we should have to show identification when we go to vote. And I should just clarify that, in fact, the gentleman, they did take his ballot out of Charleswood, and he—and they destroyed that ballot, and then they issued him another ballot in Tuxedo to vote in that constituency.

And Elections Manitoba is very much aware of this, because we brought this to their attention. We were very concerned about what was going on during that time. They investigated this, and they even found that it was happening in other areas, that there were significant issues with how this was—this particular thing was being managed. And this is exactly why, Mr. Speaker, that this bill that the member for Steinbach has brought forward is a very important piece of legislation, and it absolutely should be implemented to avoid that kind of confusion that took place at that time. And I would suggest that members opposite—it probably happened in their areas, but, you know what, they maybe didn't have a chance to recognize that and—in their areas. But it is a significant issue. It was brought to the attention of Elections Manitoba right away.

This could have been avoided if this type of legislation was already in place in the province of Manitoba. And so, I think for that reason I would encourage members opposite to also support this legislation, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): I'm trill—still trying to digest what I just heard. I will maybe try to clarify with the member later, but that—what I seem to have heard is that she encouraged someone who had already voted to vote again, and then she seemed to try to suggest to us that there was somehow a possibility that the poll clerk knew exactly which ballot belonged to that person, could identify the ballots, and went in and pulled out the ballot that belonged to that person. So there's very many, many things troubling in the admission that we just heard from across the way, I would say. So I think it's something that may bear some further scrutiny down the road, frankly.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I've never been so proud in this Legislature, as I was just now listening to my colleague from Point Douglas. I think that the work that he has done in his constituency, a constituency which is among the most disenfranchised in the province, the work that he's done with the people there, to not only get them to vote, but, as he was saying, that after they vote to keep them engaged in the political process. To help them not only to become voters, but to be more engaged citizens, I mean, that is a very good example to all of us, I think, about what we should be trying to do. We should be trying to encourage more voting. We should be trying to encourage people to get involved. We shouldn't try to be setting up unnecessary roadblocks to them coming out to vote, which is what I'm afraid this change does exactly.

We did, of course, last night, have—and I note we've got many people in the gallery joining us today and—who I know also take their right and their opportunity to vote very seriously, and I'm sure they're paying a lot of attention to this debate. And we want everybody to be able to vote.

I think—I've heard stories, as has been mentioned here—I heard one just the other night of the federal system where you do require ID to vote, about a woman whose 88-year-old mother who had voted in previous elections, who had lived in the same place for 50 years, went to the polls to vote, was asked for ID. She didn't have the right kind of ID and so she was turned away from that polling station. Now, she was someone who had voted previously, was in reasonable enough health that she could go get her ID. Thankfully, she was in an urban constituency. She didn't have to get another ride to go, whatever, 30 or 40 kilometres back to where she lived to get her ID and then come back to the polls. But that is the kind of risk that we run when we put up more and more barriers to people—for people to be able to vote.

And we did last night have a meeting where we listened to the CEO of Elections Manitoba and we—she did—was asked this question about identification. And I want to very clearly put what she said on the record, because I a bit concerned that members opposite may have been a little bit fast and loose with what she said.

What she said about identification—the fact that in Manitoba you don't require identification to go and vote at the poll, she saw that as a benefit. What she said is, the benefits of not having ID could be it's

convenient for voters. The possibility for disenfranchisement of voters is less, because in advance if you go without an ID you still an opportunity to vote. You can come the next day or you can go on election day to vote. But on election day if you reach the voting place, say, for example, in a rural area which is far from you, there's a significant distance involved in your travel, if you don't have ID then you lose your opportunity to vote. And, also, it makes the process go faster; showing ID may add some time.

The provinces which have required ID, yes, may add a level of credibility to the process and more security, but it's a balance. It's a balance between a trade-off, between convenience and accessibility and avoiding disenfranchisement if the voter does not come with ID. So I can't believe that we would want to, in this House, disenfranchise voters. I do not understand the motivation for that whatsoever.

I think that we do have—and the other thing that she said last night that I thought was interesting was that the enumeration system that we have is based on trust. We go when enumerators come to your door, and many of us have been enumerated. They ask you, are you a Manitoba—have you lived in Manitoba for six months? Are you a Canadian citizen? Are you over 18? You answer yes to that, they put you on the list.

The road we were going down last night, Mr. Speaker, with the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), leads me to believe that, really, where we're going is requiring identification at the door in order to be enumerated to get on the voters list which, frankly, would be, you know, tantamount to requiring people to register in order to vote, which is what they do in the United States. And we know that in the United States we have very low turnout, and that turnout is even lower among those people who are the most disenfranchised people, who are poor. For example, we've talked about people who are seniors here wanting to be able to vote and that adding a requirement for ID for everybody to vote can put another unnecessary barrier in front of them.

You know, it's very—I think this all comes down to how you view voting; you view voting as a privilege or you view it as a right. We on this side of the House view it as a right, Mr. Speaker, and a right of everyone, whether or not you happen to have the exact correct government-issued ID or if you are—can be counted on to be honest about your eligibility to vote and your ability to go and do that. I don't know

if this just speaks to the sort of cynicism that is prevalent on the other side, that they believe that there are massive amounts of people running around Manitoba voting without ID because they can and voting in places where they shouldn't and voting a few times. We've heard that they encourage that kind of behaviour.

But I don't share that view of Manitobans. I think Manitobans are honest. I think they are engaged in the political system, in the electoral process. I think our job as legislators and as candidates and as people who participate in democracy is to encourage more people to vote, not to make it harder to vote. And that's what I think this bill would do to make it harder for the people who we most want to participate in a political system, because government has the greatest effects on their lives. We would make it most difficult for them to participate, and that's not something that—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

When this matter's again before the House, the honourable Minister of Family Services and Labour will have three minutes remaining.

* (11:00)

RESOLUTIONS

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 11 a.m., it's time for private member's resolution, and the resolution we have under consideration this morning is the one, Provincial Government Fails Manitoba Youth.

But before I get to that, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

House Business

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on House business.

Mr. Speaker: On House business.

Mrs. Taillieu: Yes, in accordance with rule 31(9), I would like to announce that the private member's resolution that will be considered on the next sitting Thursday is the resolution on organ and tissue donation, sponsored by the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson).

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that, in accordance with rule 31(9), that the private member's resolution that will be considered on the next sitting Thursday is the resolution on organ and tissue donation, sponsored by the honourable member for River East.

We'll now proceed a private member's resolution and, as I've indicated, the resolution under consideration today is titled Provincial Government Fails Manitoba Youth.

Res. 13—Provincial Government Fails Manitoba Youth

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I move, seconded by the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen), the Provincial Government Fails Manitoba Youth:

WHEREAS many Manitoba children and youth are struggling under this provincial government, which has seen Winnipeg, once again, lead the nation in becoming home to over 43,000 children living in poverty; and

WHEREAS Manitoba students performed very poorly compared to other provinces on both the Program for International Student Assessment tests in reading, mathematics, and science and the 2010 Pan-Canadian Assessment Program's math, science, and reading tests; and

WHEREAS, according to Statistics Canada, Manitoba has the lowest participation rate in post-secondary education in Canada; and

WHEREAS, according to Statistics Canada, Manitoba had the highest youth violent crime rate in Canada in 2010; and

WHEREAS teen pregnancy and youth suicide remain tremendous challenges in Manitoba.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba acknowledge that the provincial government has failed to improve the lives of some of Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens by not making children and youth a priority.

Mr. Speaker: Been moved by the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, seconded by the honourable member for Morden-Winkler:

WHEREAS many Manitoba—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Ewasko: Manitoba children and youth are struggling under this NDP government, Mr. Speaker, whether it's the education system, the health-care system or, most tragically, the family services system.

This government has failed to make children's—Manitoba's children and youth a priority, and the results are devastating. We see rates of youth suicide that are tragically high, especially in our Aboriginal communities. We see long wait times for pediatric health-care services. We see continued youth involvement in gangs, often paired with addictions to alcohol, illegal drugs, and prescription narcotics. Once again, Manitoba is the child poverty capital of Canada, and Manitoba's high school graduation rate is perpetually one of the worst in the country.

It is clear the NDP approach isn't working, not to mention the number of young people who simply leave Manitoba to find better opportunities elsewhere. Part of the problem is this government's ad hoc, unco-ordinated approach to youth. You can't just promise a few dollars here and there in a number of poorly planned programs without any evaluation or follow-up. To keep youth in Manitoba, there simply has to be cutting-edge job opportunities available, something that can't happen under a government that stifles business and hampers innovation.

But creating opportunities for youth starts much earlier than that. The coalition of community-based youth-serving agencies, a consortium of youth organizations in the city of Winnipeg, has outlined several problems facing youth in Manitoba, including hunger, poverty, domestic violence, peer violation or bullying, peer pressure for illegal activities, gangs, gang influences, inadequate clothing, inadequate care and attention at home, disadvantages like FAS or learning disabilities, lack of parenting and a lack of direction. These are some of the issues that the current NDP government has failed to address in a meaningful way.

Since 2001, according to Statistics Canada, Manitoba has led the nation with highest or second highest high school dropout rates. In 2009, Manitoba's high school dropout rate was 14.1 per cent, second only to Québec, which was 14.7. Is this progress, Mr. Speaker?

According to Stats Canada, since 2001, Manitoba has had amongst the lowest high school graduation rate in Canada. In 2009-2010, Manitoba's graduation rate was 73.9 per cent among 18- to 19-year-olds, the third lowest in the country. In 2009-2010, only 15.9 per cent of the 18- to 19-year-olds in Manitoba who had not yet graduated from high school were enrolled in classes.

We see that the average for students being tested in Manitoba are clearly below even some less-resource countries, such as Slovakia and Estonia. The Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) has blamed Manitoba's poor results on our multilingual province and our changing demographics, but if this were true, Mr. Speaker, you would see the same thing in BC and in Ontario. Manitoba is falling behind, both in comparison to other provinces and to where we were 10 years ago. It's unbelievable that—but—that the minister attributes our students' poor results to changing demographics. We have excellent teachers in this province. We need to figure out why our students aren't achieving, at least, at the national average or better.

In Estimates, Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of sitting in and sending some questions over to the Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy (Ms. Selby), and what the minister ended up doing was giving me a history lesson. She constantly talked about the '90s; she reiterated the 1999 year, I don't even know how many times. The fact is that this government has 12 years and there has not been much progress made for youth and child opportunities whatsoever.

In 2007, Manitoba had the lowest post-secondary graduation rate in Canada. Manitoba has the second lowest participation rate in post-secondary education in Canada as of now. Manitoba's tuition rebate plan has been described as ineffective by many Manitoba business leaders and university students.

Here's what some of them had to say, and I quote—Dave Angus, president of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, said: It's really just a band-aid. Attracting and keeping youth runs much deeper than rebating tuition. Youth are moving to areas where there are jobs—good jobs, high paying jobs and opportunities for advancement.

Former Canadian Federation of Independent Business Manitoba director Shannon Martin, said: Tax rebates are better if they are aimed at broader numbers of taxpayers, not just a small group of young people.

Mr. Speaker, Aboriginal youth in Manitoba face particularly difficult challenges. Findings reported by this government's own Education Department found many Aboriginal children are far behind non-Aboriginal children when they even begin school. They're behind before they even get started, and all

this, too often, leads to their falling further behind as they proceed through primary school, putting them at greater risk of dropping out of school altogether.

The NDP has said that they are working on improving graduation rates, especially among Manitoba's Aboriginal community. However, according to a FIPPA response, the government is not tracking the graduation rates of Aboriginal students. Some have estimated that it is low as 50 per cent, but at—that's estimated, not verified. How can they work on improving the graduation rate for this targeted group of students without having targets or any yardsticks? We also know that the majority of children in care are Aboriginal children.

Between 2003 and 2009, nearly 40 per cent of Manitoba children lived in poverty for at least one year. Currently in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, 43,000 children live in poverty. Manitoba's—Manitobans have the largest child poverty rate at 17 per cent. Manitoba's child poverty rate is almost three points higher than the Canadian rate of 14.2. Sixteen—68 per cent of Aboriginal children six and under, are living in poverty.

A 2011 Food Banks Canada report showed that over 55,575 Manitobans accessed food banks in the month of March alone; an increase of over 37 per cent since March of 2008. Of the individuals who were helped, 50.4 per cent were children under the age of 18, which is significantly higher than 38 per cent national average.

The NDP isn't serious about getting people off welfare and into jobs. We have a government that has no issue fun—finding millions to waste on any number of projects, from a western route for the bipole project, to make sure their NDP friends have cushy jobs. But when it comes to investing in programs designated to get people off of welfare into work, they've shown that they won't spend the money they allot to them. This is yet another case of NDP mismanagement of an issue important to Manitobans.

* (11:10)

Since 2004, Manitoba has led the nation with the highest number of youth in remand custody. The number of youth in remand has grown by 17 per cent from 2004-2005 to 2008-2009 in Manitoba. Winnipeg Police officers are increasing—are increasingly dealing with gun calls. Constable Scott Taylor has said that police often have to deal with youth who are like child soldiers on the street. Taylor

asserts that they are the most dangerous criminal we have because they are not aware of the potential of—for destruction that guns have. That came from the *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 2nd, 2012.

Gang involvement, drugs and youth violence are some of the most serious issues that face our province. Left unaddressed, youth criminals will become adult criminals with greater ability to victimize innocent Manitobans. Just last week, an 18-year-old young woman who was found guilty of murder when she was 12 was back before the courts on violent robbery charges. Kids have becoming increasingly more violent. There is a growing crisis in Manitoba of lost potential, which will have an impact not only on these kids themselves, but on the future prosperity of the province.

I'd like to spend a few seconds speaking on youth addictions. Youth addiction in Manitoba is a particularly troubling problem and one that is current—that this current NDP government has done little to address. According to the report issued by Addictions Foundation, approximately 27 per cent of high school students meet the criteria for alcohol dependency. Alcohol isn't the only problem and, of course, many students are also using crystal meth, ecstasy, stimulants and other prescriptions to get high. Unfortunately, it's clear that this current NDP government has no comprehensive strategy for preventing and treating youth addictions. In fact, two years ago the NDP government suspended its support for the school-based program offered by the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. Fortunately, following public outcry, some of that funding has been reinstated, Mr. Speaker, but many schools are still struggling to implement much-needed addiction services for their students.

Education, Family Services, Justice, Health, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, in nearly every major government department, there are examples of ways that this NDP government has fallen short and failed to make children and youth a priority. The NDP's solution is more bureaucracy. They haven't been able to make real inroads on addressing these issues so they created a new department, Children and Youth Opportunities. That's the ultimate admission of failure that what they are doing wasn't working, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): It's a pleasure to stand up today and be able to talk about what our

government's doing to create opportunities for children, youth and families in Manitoba. As members know, I've been able to travel the province of Manitoba and literally talk to thousands of people from all different backgrounds: young people, parents, stakeholder groups, all of these different people. And what I found was, Mr. Speaker, many of the people that came out, came and talked about this initiative or how we're doing this project or how we're working in this—with the government in this way. A lot of those projects, I think almost every single one of them didn't exist in the 1990s; none of them did.

And so, you know, I do want to be able to say I did learn a lot from what Manitobans had to say, and we all understand there is work to do. There is always a lot of work to do when it comes to children, youth and families and supporting them, and we understand that, without question.

Now, what our government's doing inside this building, we have the only legislative body in the whole country on what we call Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet where we have a co-ordination approach on how we maximize the services and resources of government here in this building, the only one in the country, the first of its kind.

The second thing is we understand that to maximize the potential of children and youth, we can't do it alone. So a big part of what we do is we support organizations out in the community, front-line services. We create partnerships. Good example would be the Winnipeg Foundation, nursing—Nourishing Potential. We want to work closely with them, a lot of non-profit organizations, a lot of community-based organizations, Mr. Speaker.

So we understand not only do we have to have a co-ordinated approach here in this building, but we also have to make sure that we're working in partnership with many organizations out in the community throughout the province of Manitoba to maximize that potential that maximizes services and resources.

Often, it's the government of Manitoba—often is the one who provides the initial support, financial support. Then you see the federal government come on, then you see private sector people come on, and then you're able to start to maximize that. Often, it's our government that is creating those partnerships for the past 12 years.

Now, what we've done is we have said we want to be able to enhance that; we want to be able to enhance that in this building; we want to be able to enhance those types of partnerships in the community. And people all throughout the province of Manitoba, thousands of citizens, are really excited about a brand new department called Children and Youth Opportunities, Mr. Speaker. They're excited because they know for the past 12 years we haven't been led. We don't have to look at other jurisdictions throughout the province of—throughout the other provinces. We want to lead, and so what we often do is we are the ones—a good example would be—is the PAX. PAX, as we know, the PAX program, coming from the states, 30, 40 years of study have been done on it. It decreases behaviour—disruptive behaviour in the classroom of grade 1 students. We did a pilot project in Seine River School Division, and teachers and parents and principals said, look, this is a fantastic program. For every dollar you invest, you get \$37 back in it. Short-term results are remarkable, concentration skills go—academic achievement, by doing this simple activity every day in grade 1.

Now, long-term results we know from 40-year study say, look, it decreases addictions, it decreases crime, there's strong connections to mental health in terms of mental health promotion. And *The National* did a story on it, because we're the first in the country to do it. It's now in over 200 schools throughout the province.

Because, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to children and youth, we are seen as leaders in the country; it doesn't stop there. We understand to support children we have to support them even before they're born. That's why we're seen as leaders in early childhood development. Our Healthy Baby Prenatal Benefit supports some of our most vulnerable future mothers if not pregnant mothers. Over 4,000 gets touched every year on that. There's 110 sites for that. Over the past 12 years, tens of thousands of parents—or mothers have been touched by that program.

Now, one of the things that we do, and I know members opposite participated in this, we make sure that we measure, we evaluate, we research, we collect data on these types of programs. What we found on the Healthy Baby program is that parents—our most vulnerable parents, actually, it increases prenatal care. Preterm births go down, healthy baby weight goes up, increase to breastfeeding; all of those things happen. And we know that, but what we do with that is we measure it and then we make it

public. We go out and we travel the province through regional forums, and members opposite came and got to sit on that, and we talk about the programs that are working, we also talk about our gaps. Because we understand the best way to maximize that is to make sure that we are sharing information, that we are disseminating information, that we can look where our gaps are, and work together on all sides of the House with all of our partners.

We have parent-child coalitions all throughout the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, where we bring people together with experience and expertise. And we have stakeholders, like school divisions and early childhood educators, Head Start programs in First Nations, coming together to talk about how we maximize the services and resources in a way to support children before they go into school. So, we can measure, regionally, which children are struggling with literacy, language, and numeracy, but we can also target our resources with our partners that we have created over the past 12 years to make sure that we're doing everything we possibly can to maximize that potential of that child.

Now, I've got to also say, without question, we're making record investments inside of the classroom to support children in the classroom, but we're also making record investments outside of the classroom. We understand to build strong, resilient communities, it's making sure that young people have something positive to belong to outside of the classroom. So a good example would be Lighthouses starting. Over a million young people have visited Lighthouses programs all throughout the province. It's safe places for young people to go and participate and play. The other thing about Lighthouses, it provides a grant to many of these organizations, many of these communities, and often those grants lead to other partners who are now making investments.

Now, what I want to say about after-school program is that what it does is it builds the talents of young people. So we invest in mentorship opportunities. Over 10,000 young people will have summer employment opportunities—internships, mentorship programs, all summer. This summer alone, 10,000—over 25,000 children will be in enrichment programs often targeted to our most vulnerable areas of Manitoba, without question.

Now, we've invested into drama and after-school arts and mentorship and all those types of things, to the point—in one of our most vulnerable communities

in Manitoba, Sagkeeng First Nation, Mr. Speaker. We've made investments and partnerships with that community over the past 12 years, and you know what happened? Right on national TV, based on their talent, they are recognized as the most talented three gentlemen in that competition all throughout the country. That doesn't happen without making record investments supporting children. And I commend the member, because he stood up and he gave a member statement, and we saw the three young men here, and I was able to go to the friendship centre—the friendship centres didn't have funding in the '90s; they were cut. One of the things we did was we reinvested that, and where did they have the celebration for those three young men? At the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, where we reinstated.

* (11:20)

Now, when I said proudly, and I was glad the member opposite made a member statement for those three young guys, we watched them here. They were looking down, waving at us, and I told the people at the friendship centre, I look forward to the day when many of us in this Chamber—we're sitting up there and looking down on those three young men when they're making decisions here in this Manitoba Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

Well, we understand the importance of how we build stronger communities. We understand that we have to do it in partnership with others. And we've been able to create all sorts of partnerships. One of the most recent is the Winnipeg Jets True North Foundation, investing now over \$1.5 million to support communities. We want to continue to build these partnerships. We want to continue to have a co-ordinated approach. One of the things that we know is that there's a lot that we can do to make sure young people have something positive to belong to, that everyone deserves that. The other thing we want to make sure is that every young person, whether they're really rich or really poor, come from backgrounds of poverty, that they will have a sense of contribution in their communities. That's why over 10,000 young people will have opportunities this summer to work and have meaningful connections in their communities.

We also want to make sure that we are building the talents and gifts of the children of Manitoba, to the point where we are winning national competitions in some of our most vulnerable communities, Mr. Speaker. When we make these types of investments with partnerships, with people

in the community, we realize that we will have strong, resilient children; strong, resilient families; and strong, resilient communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to stand this morning in the House and to speak on this important resolution, and I would want to begin by just reiterating that children and youth are struggling under this NDP government, and the evidence of that is everywhere. As my colleague has already accurately pointed out, it goes into many different areas within our system, whether it's the education system, it's evident in the health-care system, it's evident in the family services system. But this government has failed to make youth and children in Manitoba a priority, and it's not for lack of spending money.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few minutes this morning just to talk about—from the perspective of education, how it is that it's not the same thing to simply throw money at a problem and to actually address it systematically and comprehensively, and try to understand something in order to move in a new direction and take us forward and put us on a new path where youth can have opportunity and have a place in the future. It's clear to us that the NDP approach is not working and I want to take a few minutes to highlight areas pertaining to education where this is, again, revealed.

And I want to begin, Mr. Speaker, by just speaking briefly about—it was interesting to me that there's a recently published report in Ontario and it's the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services.

Many of the—my colleagues in the House will know this as the Drummond report, and in the executive summary, it's revealed how clearly the Manitoba situation and education parallels that of Ontario, and there's a place here in the executive summary where it states, and I'll quote: The government's challenge is to restrain education spending while protecting scholastic progress. The education sector should stay the course on its agenda of three key goals: improving student achievement, closing student achievement gaps, and increasing confidence in the publicly funded education system. End quote.

And, Mr. Speaker, I say it's interesting how closely that situation parallels our own because it's exactly in the area of student achievement that we

are sadly lacking in the province of Manitoba. And the evidence continues to pile up and it's indisputable that we have a long way to go in this province to close that gap between regions and to catch up and get our students back on track when it comes to things as fundamental as math and science and reading. And we all understand and we all acknowledge that these are the key building blocks for students that if we don't in the primary school, if we do not in the middle school, if we do not in the high school insist on these things and constantly work to improve and to measure success and to explore new ideas and look at best practice wherever it's found, whether that's in other jurisdictions of Canada or internationally, if we don't do these things and attend to the situation we will not solve this problem. And I'm here to remind my colleagues that we do have a problem when it comes to student achievement in this province.

Just before I go to that, though, I do want to make clear, just as my colleague pointed out, that we do have a problem with—in Manitoba even with respect to high school dropout rates and in 2009 our dropout rate was 14.1 per cent. That's the second highest in Canada. So we talk about failing students, failing youth, what an incredible statistic that reveals the extent to which we are doing that in the education system. Have we seen a clear and comprehensive solution formulated by this government to directly address that problem? No we have not. They've indicated that there's a lot of reasons for that. They've tried to disguise the extent to which that figure actually exists, but we haven't seen the leadership needed to actually say this is a problem and here is our plan to deal with it.

And I think in many respects when it comes to education and other areas of this government's record, what is clearly lacking, Mr. Speaker, is exactly that ownership and that clear leadership that is so necessary, saying here's the problem, here is our method to get at that problem and here's the way we're going to measure to know if we're actually getting there, and that is simply accountability. It's that sense of saying we are charged with this huge and serious responsibility, here is how we're going to go about exercising that responsibility. Have we seen that kind of leadership? We have not.

It's interesting to me that when I read through the departmental Estimates for Education, the overarching goals No. 3 is to significantly increase achievement needs of those students who have been

historically less successful. The No. 4 goal is to continue to increase the overall provincial graduation rate and, yet, according to Statistics Canada, since 2001 Manitoba has had among the lowest high school graduation rates in Canada at 73.9 per cent among 18 and 19 year olds. This is the third lowest in the country. So, Mr. Speaker, we have problems related to high school dropout rates. We have problems relating to graduation rates.

But I want to take a few minutes and just unpack, again, the extent to which we have significant and structural problems dealing with student achievement. We've heard discussion in this Chamber and at Estimates many times in this session about the council of education ministers of Canada PCAP scores, and I think it bears repeating in this context, Mr. Speaker, that these are tests that are not based on particular curriculum, but they focus on learning outcomes. They test how well students can apply their knowledge to real life situations. So it is very troubling that in 2010 those PCAP test results show Manitoba students ranked second last in math, second last in science and last in reading. And these results, in and of themselves, they're only one set of measurements.

But now compare those to the OECD 2009 program for international student assessment scores where Manitoba has slipped dramatically over the last 10 years. In reading we were fifth in 2000 and now in 2009 we're ninth. In science we were sixth in 2006, in 2009 we're eighth, and Mr. Speaker, in math in 2009—or I should say 2003—Manitoba ranked fifth and now in 2009 we rank ninth, and so there is no other conclusion that we can draw than that more needs to be done.

More needs to be done to meet the challenges that definitely face our students in the primary, middle years and high school years. And I want to make clear for the record that this is in no way—reading these test scores is in no way, shape or form, an indictment of our hard-working teachers in this province.

*(11:30)

My colleague the MLA for the Lac du Bonnet area, myself—we are teachers. We were in the public school for years. We know our colleagues there work very hard each and every day. They go beyond what is expected of them, to help students, to help them be successful. But they are limited in what they can do if they do not have the support of this minister and of the department saying, here is the problem, here is

the solution, here is how we're going to get at it. And, Mr. Speaker, this is a much different thing than throwing money at the problem.

WISE Math, a group of university math professors, has come out and expressed concerns about the quality of math education in our province. And they've done it well and they've done it comprehensively and they've consulted. And they said, basically, what's needed is a return to the place of what place skills occupies in math education. And this minister has met with the WISE Math group and says, I'm listening to them, and the minister admits in Estimates that balance is needed.

And yet, when the new report card format comes out, there is no indication that skills has become an area that will be measured all across Manitoba. There is no mention of skills and accuracy or procedural fluency; instead we say, mental math. This minister is not listening. Her knee-jerk reaction is to apply 1.8 million bucks in new funding to literacy and numeracy, but there isn't any quantifiable sense of the—which she says, this is going to go for this reason and it's going to help in this way.

So, Mr. Speaker, to sum up, I think it's simply the case that this government has yet to indicate that they can have a flexible approach, that they show ingenuity, that they look at best practice. They can get out there and make a difference for our students to make them successful. We're looking forward for them to do that, and we'll be there to make sure they do that.

Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James): I think to suggest that the provincial government is not making children and youth a priority is quite remarkable. We have numerous programs in multiple departments to ensure that we have a system in place that supports the growth of our children. And one of the things that I'm so pleased about with our government is that we tend to look at the big picture, the whole picture. We don't look at one issue that one child has and look at it on its own.

So whether we have the Department of Education or Healthy Living, Justice, Housing, Family Services—they tend to look at their own part of the puzzle in relationship to the other parts of the puzzle. We also have the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. Again, we have multiple departments that work together to ensure that everyone at the table understands what their piece of the puzzle is and what the impact is on those children.

And we've dedicated an entire department to Children and Youth Opportunities, so I don't think that we're a government that's not taking this seriously. And we're very concerned and interested in investing in our young people, because it truly is an investment in ourselves. Again, as I've said, we look at the whole picture; it's not just about responding to a child in peril.

We recognize that supporting our children happens at birth and, truly, it happens before birth. By addressing the needs of family and pregnant women before the birth of a child and immediately after—and that, you know, comes. And I've experienced this myself after having a child, whether it's a nurse coming to my home to visit or the excellent midwifery care that I had.

We also have supports and programs in place to assist family in the early years, and this could come in the form of housing or daycare supports to ensure that those basic needs are met, because a child is not going to be able to thrive if they don't have those needs.

Through the school years, elementary and secondary school, we have passed legislation to keep kids in high school until they're 18. And today there is an announcement that's going to be made about the reduced class size for elementary school kids.

Post-secondary education: We're making it more affordable for anyone to access and to participate, and the participation rate has actually increased over the past year. And all of these things are in place when things are going well, but what happens when they're not going well? When something is holding a child back, we try to diagnose it early, and whether we're talking about diagnosing a health issue as early as possible, for example, with FASD, we've invested a huge amount of money to try and find ways to address it early and to help children cope with it. And we're actually considered one of the leaders in FASD diagnosis.

Keeping our kids busy and out of trouble after school, if someone has gotten into a little bit of trouble, as another one of our MLAs and ministers mentioned, we have 71 Lighthouse programs in our province. It's a safe, fun place for kids to play.

And, if there's an addictions issue, especially related to parents, which, of course, is going to affect the child, we have programs in place to support adults so that a consistent, stable home environment is a possibility.

And when things really don't go well, when we have a child or a youth who is involved in criminal activity, we have some really super programs. And, I think the thing to keep in mind, although I keep using the word "programs" and "systems," that's what we have. This is what we do; we create something that people can access to improve their lives. We can't dictate what people are going to do, but we can provide a system that is going to be useful, helpful, beneficial, and hope that we can help them get back on track.

And, again, if you have a youth that's made a mistake, is involved in criminal activity, we have something called the Spotlight program which focuses on the highest gang youth risk children, and their families, by providing supervision and services to help them deal with substance abuse and to stay in school. And, again, I like the fact that what we're doing isn't just focusing on a child; we're involving the family members as well.

Bright Futures, which is a fantastic program we've invested in, where community-based groups work with schools to provide students with supports like tutoring, family involvement, mentoring, and career options. Again, becoming involved with the community—it's not just that we're imposing something; we're working with the community to help get the best benefit possible.

We also have the Turnabout program. It's the only initiative of its kind in Canada and it provides help and consequences for young people who get in conflict with the law.

This is just a sampling of some of the things that we do. And for someone to make the remark that we're not serious about it, I think it's a little bit ridiculous. And while we can provide excellent programs and supports, we can't predict when people are going to make poor choices. I think, as a new MLA and a backbencher, I find it a little disappointing when I hear members opposite accuse a minister, for example, of being responsible for a death or—it's akin to saying that the Speaker of the House is at fault for the behaviour of the members of this Legislature. His system, that he has in place, is to remind us that there are certain expectations placed upon us and that we need to live up to those expectations. And when we don't, there's a system in place that we have to follow to rectify it.

This is the kind of thing that we try and do. We can't force people to behave properly; we can't force parents to not snap and hurt a child, but when

something happens, we have a system in place that we can help that child, whether it's from the very beginning—and hopefully we would catch things at the very beginning—or later on in life.

My previous work experience was in adult literacy and I dealt with quite a few young people that had been through some criminal situations and were struggling to get their lives back on track. And, very often, these kids were great kids that made some really stupid choices. And I suspect that everyone in this room has made a stupid choice at one point or another, and has regretted it. But, with the right supports in place, you can carry on and then make good choices, and that is what we aim to do.

I feel very proud, actually, of the approach that our government is taking on this and has taken for quite a long time. Because we look at issues not as separate—departments don't work independently of one another—there's always a relationship. And I've seen that relationship here in this House, when our ministers sit with a member opposite, in the loge or at the back of the room, and have very earnest conversations about what needs to change.

And, I think that while we always aim to make the best choices possible, and invest in programs that are going to be beneficial and have an excellent return for people, sometimes adjustments need to be made, and we're open to that. But, I think that what we put in place is something that works holistically with the other departments, and makes the system that a child goes through—there are places in that system to identify when something happens early on, and then we can address that issue.

At the end of day, I think that these programs are very important. I think they're well thought out and they're designed to ensure that our children and young people get the best start possible, and we are very committed to that.

* (11:40)

So I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I rise today to put a few comments on the record regarding the resolution that was brought forward by my colleague and, Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I'd like to indicate that I do support this resolution and I would hope that all members would think that this is a resolution worthy of supporting.

Mr. Speaker, I, at the outset, want to congratulate the new Minister responsible for Children and Youth Opportunities, and I listened very carefully to what he had to say. And I think all of the goals and all of the objectives and the passion and the enthusiasm that he has for his responsibilities are those that I hope will continue to be there as he strives to make life better for children and youth in this province.

But one thing I would like to correct for the record, and I know the member wasn't around at the time, but all members of the House should be aware that under the former Filmon government we created the Children and Youth Secretariat and that was in place. The name has changed under the government today, but there was a Children and Youth Secretariat that implemented programs in a co-ordinated fashion and, Mr. Speaker, in those days, there was a committee of Cabinet that sat and discussed interdepartmental initiatives that needed to be looked at. There was some new projects that were created as a result of government departments working together.

So, Mr. Speaker, if the government today talks about Manitoba being a leader, we were a leader before they came into government because the Children and Youth Secretariat was there and the Cabinet committee was there that looked at these issues. So I would hope that the minister would maybe share with his colleagues and not try to reinvent history because the history is clear.

And some of the programs that we created back in the '90s are still here today and I have to commend the government for expanding some of those programs that—like BabyFirst and EarlyStart. Those were programs that were created, are still working, have been expanded and, obviously, the government has seen fit to continue those, Mr. Speaker. But we can't ignore the facts and the reality that we have almost 10,000 children in care in our child and family services system today.

Mr. Speaker, we have one of the highest youth crime rates across the country. We are the child poverty capital across the country. We are seeing that we have the second highest high school dropout rates across the country. These are facts that can't be ignored and these are facts that exist after 12 years of NDP government. So when the government stands up and pats itself on the back saying they're doing a great job, they just need to look at the overall picture

and see where youth are failing today in our province and say what we're doing isn't good enough.

And it's great to pay lip service and it's great to talk about all the wonderful programs, but I would like this government to seriously look at measuring the outcomes and if the outcomes are positive, Mr. Speaker, why are we seeing a deterioration in the youth in our province? It's great to talk the good talk, and I'm hoping that the new minister, rather than just talking the talk, will actually walk the walk. And I have confidence that he understands the community, that he understands the issues and that he will take his responsibilities very seriously.

But I would like to see in our province of Manitoba some of the measurements that measure our children change and improve, and we are seeing deterioration, not improvement. And so I would hope that members opposite would look seriously at this resolution, would support this resolution and commit themselves today to trying to reverse the statistics that are going in the wrong direction, Mr. Speaker, and seeing children in our province not improving—the status of our children across the board not improving, but getting worse.

So, Mr. Speaker, the government today should look at how we're measured as a province and strive every day to make things better in this province. And some of the programs they've put into place are working, but they need to measure outcomes. And the outcomes are not showing that things are getting better; they're showing that things are getting worse in Manitoba. And I would like this government to take that seriously and try to make sure that programs that are put in place are measured. If, in fact, they're not working, government has to have the courage to get rid of those programs and try something new.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage them to support this resolution. Thank you.

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to be here to get to speak on this issue. I always have a difficult time whenever I get to speak on something like this, because there's so many things that I would like to talk about in this area, having spent 20 years before this in this field of working with children and youth.

I think, being new in government, only in government could somebody suggest that the creation of a Children and Youth Opportunities Department proves that we don't consider youth

important. I think there's nowhere else in the world that anyone would even venture to make a statement like that, and I think our Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Mr. Chief) did an excellent job of describing the many initiatives and things that we are doing in this field, working in every area. And the member from St. James looked at more of the global perspective and how all of the initiatives, Mr. Speaker, work together, whether it's housing or antipoverty initiatives that we're involved in, all sorts of areas that we're working in.

The member who came before me, the MLA for Burrows, back in the '90s happened to be the critic for Child and Family Services. One of the things that he did was keep busy on that; it was a 24-7 job in the '90s working on those issues that continued to come up. And he kept headlines, and I could spend my 10 minutes, Mr. Speaker, just listing the headlines. I won't; it's already in *Hansard*.

But I don't have to just mention the headlines. The ones that come to mind are the ones about foster kids being warehoused in hotels again: Tory warehousing of kids grows and grows; Pay foster parents, not hotels.

And I know about it because I lived it. I was a foster parent at the time in the '90s and I know what it was like for those foster parents trying to survive during those cuts. And not only did they cut the foster parents and put those kids into hotels, they also cut the association so that there was less ability to fight back. I don't know if anyone on either side remember that, but I remember it because I was a foster parent trying to survive in a system back then that clearly did not consider youth a priority. And I don't know if it was the Cabinet committee that the member was speaking of that made those decisions around those cuts, but I know the effects.

And I also—that was when I first started. I had left a field of corporate business, actually, to go into working with kids, and so I tried a number of different things, and after those cuts made it impossible for me to survive in that, I ended up working in those hotels. And I noticed a line from one of the—or from a critic saying—the past MLA from Burrows saying that kids were as young as six in those hotels. Well, he was inaccurate in that: there was babies in those hotels. And when I would leave my 72-hour shifts, they would pull them off me, the next worker that came in, and we would try to figure out how on earth to take care of those kids stuck in hotels. We started carrying suitcases full of toys to

bring there, because there was nothing provided. We were taking them down often to restaurants to eat all the time, and it was shocking.

So, it's—this bill—when we are working so consistently for the last number of years, improving and putting in programs that actually work—and is there more to do? Of course there's more to do. There's always more to do, but the commitment is absolutely clear. The programs didn't exist that the minister was mentioning on our side of the House. They didn't exist in the '90s. Lighthouses weren't there; Neighbourhoods Alive! didn't exist. All kinds of programs that are now in place just weren't present at all.

* (11:50)

So there's another area that I also want to mention, just because it comes up a lot from the member from River Heights, and that is the number of children in care. And we don't want children in care. There's no question. We would love to have a system where we could make all the families instantly, miraculously healthy. And we are working, always, to help those families change their lives when they are ready to do so. We are always doing that. And can we do more? Yes.

But we sure don't want a system, Mr. Speaker, where our minister is deciding how many kids come into care based on the opposition complaining about how many kids are in care. Because you have to keep those kids safe. So that child has to be first. So that has—decision has to be made on whether or not that child needs to be brought into a safe environment, not on what those numbers are exactly. And I can't stress how important I think that is.

And the issue, of course, is so complex, and—that, and there's so many areas affected. And I know many social workers and youth care workers and support workers and teachers and EAs and—who have just done such a tremendous amount of work, and community people. And I guess I'd like to speak a little bit to the work. I'm not sure that people realize the effects of abuse and neglect on a child and how your life is affected forever, Mr. Speaker, from that.

And I have a quote that I'd like to read into the record here, and it says this: Society reaps what it sows in nurturing its children. Whether abuse of a child is physical, psychological or sexual, it sets off a ripple of hormonal changes that wire the child's brain to cope with a malevolent world. It predisposes the child's brain to cope—sorry, the child to have a

biological basis for fear, though he may act and pretend otherwise.

Early abuse moulds the brain to be more irritable, impulsive, hypervigilant, suspicious, paranoid, and prone to be swamped by flight or fight reactions that the rational mind may be unable to control. The brain is programmed to a state of defensive adaptation, enhancing survival in a world of constant danger, but at a terrible price. To a brain so tuned, Eden itself would seem to hold its share of dangers. Building a secure, stable relationship may later require enormous personal growth and transformation. Early childhood abuse and neglect sets off hormonal changes that lead individuals into social isolation, hostility, depression, addiction and heightened risk for the development of extreme obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease.

That's from Dr. Martin Teicher, an MD and Ph.D. from Harvard, and I read it just as an understanding of the complexity of what is happening in these people's lives, and that it's not a simple solution. And I worked for years, where we worked with those kids, and we did all kinds of work, Mr. Speaker, around trying to help them heal from those effects, and trying to help them learn new ways of coping. And we went through 'autobiotographies'—autobiographies with them and worked through that.

So it's not like a momentary, quick fix, Mr. Speaker, to people that have experienced this kind of life. It takes a lot of hard work. And our government is committed to doing that work. And it's the reason that I'm here, is that this is a government that we clearly see wants to work with the community, wants to work in our education system, wants to work in our housing system, wants to work in our child and family system, wants to create an anti-poverty initiative that will really get to the roots of these issues and help change them so that we don't have that kind of experience.

I think it would also be, and nobody on the opposite side ever mentions this, but if the federal government would jump in there and maybe take on some of their responsibilities with First Nations communities, Mr. Speaker, I just can't say enough how important that is. And we can only hope—*[interjection]* Yes, that they will be able to do that soon.

And I'd like to speak a little bit about the FASD that the member from St. James mentioned and the tremendous work that goes into that. And she talked

about early diagnosis, and it's absolutely key and essential that we continue to be a leader in that field, because those kids' lives are changed by what we do and how quickly we can diagnose that. And it's not true that you can't do anything at all to help those kids; that is just not true. But they do need structure and they do need people who can repeat over and over what's expected of them. And we're doing that work here in Manitoba, so I would just like to stress that.

And I'm just disturbed by the bill—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I want to congratulate the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) for putting forward this resolution, and it speaks to Manitoba's NDP government failing youth in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

And we know that there are a number of shortcomings with this government with regard to social programs and supports for families who are at risk. Not mentioned, Mr. Speaker, were the young people who simply leave Manitoba to find better opportunities elsewhere. Part of the problem is this government has ad hoc, unco-ordinated approaches to youth. And we see more and more young people leaving the province, because they just don't feel that they're valued and that their education is going to actually be complete.

With the strike in Brandon University, with the number of young people who are finding it a challenge just to get an education in Manitoba, I think, you know, Manitoba has a lot to offer, but we have so many challenges under this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, the coalition of community-based youth servicing agencies, a consortium of youth organizations in the city of Winnipeg, have outlined several problems facing youth in Manitoba, including hunger, poverty, domestic violence, peer violence or bullying, inadequate care and attention at home, illegal activities, gangs, FASD or learning disabilities, lack of parenting, and lack of direction.

If this government was actually doing what it says it has been doing, then we wouldn't be seeing record number of children in care, record number of children having babies, record number of children addicted to drugs and alcohol. We wouldn't see this

Minister of Healthy Living (Mr. Rondeau) cutting programs of support in rural schools so that they then have to try to figure out how to deal with these on their own.

This government should be ashamed of what they're putting on the record. This member for Burrows (Ms. Wight) indicated, the PST increase for pedicures, oh, well, only the rich are using those anyways, or something along that lines. The member for Burrows has also put on the record that children in hotels were outrageous when we were in government. Mr. Speaker, under Mr. Doer, this government actually saw an increase in children in care and children in hotel. So again, they don't know their record, and I think that they should be ashamed.

And I support this resolution, and I encourage the government to as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): I'm very pleased to put a few correct pieces of information on the record.

I'm pleased to have a co-ordinated strategy in this government among multiple departments on FASD prevention, and, you know, Mr. Speaker, that was not present when the Conservatives were in power. In fact, they didn't know it; they didn't have any programs; they ignored it. Because that's the Conservative way.

I remind the member that the federal Conservatives just cut \$3 million of gang prevention programs, and, of course, their federal cousins, they support them. Why? Because they believe in cutting programs. They've done it historically. In fact, to accurately state the record, during the 1990s, they cut AFM from 10.5 to 9.6 million dollars. That's a fact; look it up on *Hansard*, it's there.

I'd also like to take note of what's happened in the '90s. The '90s, young people left the province. We had a declining population. I'm pleased under this government, it increased the population—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Minister of Healthy Living will have eight minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, the House is recessed 'til 1:30 p.m. this afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 14, 2012

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