

Second 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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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, July 4, 2013

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, everyone. Please be seated.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to proceed directly to Bill 203, The Participation of Manitoba in the New West Partnership Act, that's sponsored by the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon).

Mr. Speaker: First off, I need to call—

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

**DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS—
PUBLIC BILLS**

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to proceed directly to Bill 203? [*Agreed*]

We'll now call Bill 203, The Participation of Manitoba in the New West Partnership Act, standing in the name of the honourable Minister of Local Government, who has one minute remaining.

**Bill 203—The Participation of Manitoba
in the New West Partnership Act**

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): Well, Mr. Speaker, and I know I have just a short time remaining, but I want to just say that Manitoba is really and truly pleased to be a partner in the west in many, many ways.

First of all, tragically, the flood that's happened in Calgary—I know that the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) and other departments have been helping, in a concrete way, our western partners, and we're pleased to, in any way, shape or form that we can, help Alberta and help the great city of Calgary and others in Alberta, to be there, standing by them, side by side, working with them in a way that will truly

show our partnership and how we care about the provinces in western Canada.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we also belong to NASCO. NASCO's an organization that deals with a trade corridor. Of course, we have CentrePort being the northern hub of that transportation corridor—that we're a partner with Saskatchewan and other provinces on NASCO.

So, with that, Mr. Speaker, we are part of the west, and we're proud to be.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): My pleasure to rise and put a few words on record regarding Bill 203, partnership—the New West Partnership, and New West Partnership act, brought forward by my colleague from Emerson. Certainly appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on record regarding this.

Certainly, we are a trading province, without a doubt, and it is important that we maintain a very active role in trading. But trading starts at your doorstep. It is not just something you do halfway across the world, though certainly we want to participate in trading markets halfway across the world and have made many efforts to do so through various trade agreements and also through trade delegations in the past. However, if you do not have a good working relationship with those at your doorstep, you will not succeed in the trade business.

And certainly we are looking to move forward in areas like the—Churchill, in exports and also at CentrePort, and we will depend heavily on not only our own products to go through those marketplaces, but our neighbours mark—products to go through those marketplaces. Certainly the—probably the greatest potential out of the Port of Churchill actually is potash export. The seasonality and the ability to move it very quickly and cheaply to that market from Saskatchewan would certainly increase the volume of that port significantly. But you need to have a good working relationship with your neighbours before you can move forward on things like that, and we—this is just part of the picture of having a good working relationship with your neighbours, but to ignore even part of the picture can cause a lot of grief. It's like living next door to a neighbour and fighting over the back fence and yet expecting him to

look after your front boulevard—something that, certainly, city dwellers probably are very familiar with. You can't expect co-operation on one side of the ledger without having some co-operation on the other side of the ledger, as well. And so certainly I would encourage a rethink as to what we do.

I know we're past the initial deadline for the New West Partnership, but it would certainly be to our advantage to go to the members of the New West Partnership and talk to them about whether or not we can participate even after the fact.

Certainly nature has kind of put some artificial divisions in the country of Canada. We are in the west despite the fact that may—occasionally we may be in the east in certain leagues and other situations. We are in the west of Canada and we need to work very closely with our western neighbours. We have a lot of common interests with them, even things like water drainage issues, which we certainly need to get their co-operation on if we're going to deal with our flood problems.

And if we're going to deal with the water quality issues of Lake Winnipeg, we need really serious co-operation from our western neighbours. And to ask for their co-operation on one side without having participated with them in other issues is certainly a very short-sighted view of the future.

So I would certainly encourage this government to rethink where they are on the New West Partnership. It may be a case of wanting to trade-off gains in one area of—that may—they may see as a small advantage to Manitoba, but we have to remember our responsibility is to the greater good. We're here for the benefit of all Manitobans, not just for specific groups of Manitoba, and that is often the case in trade negotiations of any type, and this is one form of trade negotiation.

Certainly, buying groups that—that this actually represents a significant part of the New West Partnership has been to the advantage of people for many hundreds of years. It is the basis, in many cases, of co-operatives, and certainly Manitoba has led the way in co-operatives across Canada, having more commercial co-operatives almost than any other province in the country with possible exception of Québec which has a lot as well. But we learned how to work with our neighbours in that regard. Let's make the neighbourhood a little bigger and talk about what the advantage is to western Canada and how we might move forward on that.

Mentioned briefly CentrePort, and there's great opportunities in CentrePort once we get a few glitches out of the way in the short term, and providing it is a opportunity would depend a lot on other provinces and other jurisdictions using it, as well. It is not just a trade hub for Manitoba, it is a trade hub that would include western Canada and actually several US states as well, if it was handled right.

And Churchill does—as I mentioned earlier, does provide a great deal of opportunity. The port seems to be getting an extended season and that's certainly to everyone's advantage, and we can certainly work with that. But we need the products that, actually, the port can handle easily and there are many that can do that. But they—it's—currently we're looking at bulk products, whether they be things like potash that I mentioned earlier or other agricultural products of which western Canada is rich, and we certainly want access to export markets to take advantage of them.

We know that many places in the world are looking for high-quality agricultural products that we can supply, not only from Manitoba, but from other places in western Canada. For many of the other jurisdictions in western Canada, they have all looked for many, many years to the ports out of BC which are getting more and more overloaded, and certainly we can provide another opportunity for them that can be very competitive, and if as long as you're going east, certainly Hudson's Bay has an advantage in terms of distance.

Now, the New West Partnership not only improves trade between BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan with the rest of the—west of the world, but it also puts in place common procurement and R & D, research and development, co-operation which—the innovation of these three provinces will drive towards reducing costs.

*(10:10)

And I'm not sure that everyone here is actually familiar with the fact that Saskatchewan and Alberta, in particular, have put significant dollars into research and development in a number of sectors, including a large portion of the agricultural research money. And as we see research money from other sources reduced and depend more and more on private and what limited public dollars now in place, it is even more important that we learn how to share and take advantage of each other's research capabilities. And the research that's done in Saskatchewan and Alberta, in particular, actually

applies in Manitoba's situation in many crops as well. So there's certainly advantages to looking at that in the future.

Mr. Speaker, we depend—Manitoba depends on interprovincial trade more than any other province, and 43 per cent of our trade is with new west partner members, so we encourage these ties even more in the future. And of course we've been hearing lately about a western power grid and, certainly, to be part of this western power grid—

An Honourable Member: Our idea, 30 years ago.

Mr. Wishart: Yes, as is pointed out, it's an old idea that has circled around again.

But, certainly, to be part of a western power grid, you need to have a good relationship with those that are part of that grid as well, not just on the issue of power, though if you offer to give it to them for low enough price I'm sure they will buy it from you, but that does not—that's not a trading relationship that's built on respect, Mr. Speaker.

That's a trading relationship that they taking advantage of you and so it's often built on greed. We want trading relationships that are built on mutual respect and so that we can benefit and they can benefit and everyone ends up a winner in a situation like that.

And that's certainly the types of trading relationships that you always look for because they are, in the long term, far more sustainable than ones that are just flash in the pan. We may actually end up selling them power at a price that they can't simply refuse, but that doesn't develop a long-term relationship. And even though you may hooked up to them, they—when their opportunities come along they will follow their opportunities and leave you without the benefits that you had hoped to achieve in the long term. That's the kind of hydro export situation we seem to be having in the US where it works to their advantage but it's somewhat questionable whether we are getting a good return on our investment on hydro sold into the US.

So, certainly, I would encourage this government to have another look at their relationship. You can't change geography; you're going to have a neighbour. You need to work with that neighbour. You need to have a good business relationship with that neighbour into the future. You need to take advantage of their export opportunities; you can tie into them as well.

Certainly Manitoba, in terms of the oil industry, depends a great deal on Saskatchewan and even Alberta to hook into pipelines, to get services, to get the crews that are in place. Even though many of them are actually Manitoba employees, the well drilling outfits very often are Alberta- or Saskatchewan-based. So we are, in fact, tied so closely with our neighbours that we simply can't avoid the reality of working together with them now and into the future.

So, Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the opportunity to have put a few words on record. I would certainly encourage the province of Manitoba to have another look at the New West Partnership. I think there's still opportunity there, even though the formal deadline has passed, if we show strong enough interest. I think it's to our advantage as Manitoba as a whole. There are always in trade deals are some sectors that maybe benefit more than others, but you must stand back and look at the overall advantage to the province of Manitoba.

So, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Yes, good morning. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak for a few moments on this issue that's being discussed this morning concerning the New West Partnership.

And I would begin by saying, Mr. Speaker, that certainly, as I've reviewed Hansard and I've listened to the comments of members opposite, there does seem to be a lack of acknowledgement, if you will, or awareness, perhaps, of the incredible work that's going on among western provinces already and for lo these many years, in fact.

And certainly I would suggest that this bill doesn't offer anything of any substance, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the work that is indeed going on among the partnerships—

An Honourable Member: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Riding Mountain.

Point of Order

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm—raising on a point of order.

The member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) has said on a number of occasions across the floor to get—to come out of the closet. Now, it's quite clear about a week and a half ago that he had said it and it

was evident on both sides of the House. It was very clear what he was saying. He did—he had indicated to a member opposite: When are you going to come out of the closet?

Now, we have before us a situation where this government is bringing forward a bullying bill, and I believe that many of us are very sensitive to a number of factors or issues with regard to that bill. I have a niece that is gay. She's tried to commit suicide twice. And I don't take comments like that lightly. It makes my skin crawl. So, he may be joking, but that is not a joke and I take great offence to that.

I raised this with my daughter who is 17, and she says she couldn't believe it, because if you said something like that in school, you would've been hauled over the carpet and made to apologize and to respond better.

And, you know, the member opposite obviously doesn't feel that this is a serious issue. The member for Kildonan continues to raise—make that point not realizing and not understanding the significance of what he is putting on the record. *[interjection]* You did not. He's saying he said socialist. He did not say socialist. He didn't, and it's—we heard it on this side of the House. There was—Mr. Speaker, the point is, is the comments that he's using, to come out of the closet, is something that is very concerning and has very negative connotations.

And the members opposite in the front row who are pushing for equality and awareness, I believe they should know better and they should be directing and encouraging that member to watch his words.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a joke. This is a very serious matter, and I take great offence, as my family does, to comments that are being made by this member who feels that he's above the protocol within this House. And I am upset—I am very discouraged by a government who'd—says one thing and does another.

So shame on this minister, and I expect an apology, as my niece and other Manitobans, who are dealing with family issues and trying to move forward, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health, on the same point of order.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order.

I would suggest that the timing of the member raising this issue seems a bit peculiar to me, but I

would not consider that to be an issue in terms of the discourse.

What I'd like to say to the member opposite is that I can only say to her that I suggest that—*[interjection]* Why don't you let me speak and hear what I have to say? Because what I'm endeavouring to do for the member for Riding Mountain (Mrs. Rowat), who is much better at talking than she has ever been at listening, is to say to her that I would like to empathize about the journey that she and her family must be on in dealing with the matters concerning her niece.

I can say to the member that I would not be surprised if every member of this House has not been on a journey with a loved one who has, indeed, struggled with who they are and in the context of the world in which we live—the world, Mr. Speaker, where we find that some people, for whatever reasons—reasons that they may believe to be good reasons, coming from the context of their cultural upbringing, coming from the context of their religious foundations, struggle with trying to understand those that are trying to figure out who they are, whether they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, what have you.

And so I want to say to the member that I, too, have a loved one that has been on this journey. I have a loved one who's gay, who's HIV positive, and we're struggling with all kinds of things, literally life and death.

As a teacher, I know I met students who were looking at themselves in the mirror and feeling that they didn't fit in and struggled with a place to go and sought for people to understand.

And so what I want to say to the member is I'm sorry for the struggle she has gone through and I thank God that her loved one is living today and that she has the support of the member for Riding Mountain.

* (10:20)

What I also want to say to the member is that I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that you—and to you, through you, that you can review Hansard to see if the comments are offending.

I can say to the member that I heard the words uttered in the House, I'm not sure they're captured on the record. And what I clearly said, and I will say this hurt and I will say this to the member from my

heart, is that a member in the House did indeed make a reference to coming out of the closet as a socialist.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is what I heard, but I would look to your good counsel in reviewing that. Again the member likes to talk but she doesn't like to listen.

And I will also say to the member and to all members of this House that I believe in the heat of battle that we all do need to choose our words carefully. I would say this to my own members and I would most certainly say this to members on the other side of the House.

There are turns of phrase that are chosen and I believe the member for Riding Mountain (Mrs. Rowat) would know well when she was called to order and accused of making racist comments in the House, for which she apologized. I know she understands that there are times when things come out of people's mouths that they regret and they would amend.

And so I will say to the member and I will say to all members of this House, as we go forward into very serious, emotional debate on the matters at hand that we must all be careful about the words that we choose.

I believe that to be true, Mr. Speaker. In this context I do not believe the member has a point of order. I would respectfully ask you to review the Hansard and see if that's true. But I would also suggest that there's probably no way better to honour this particular issue than to take Bill 18 to committee and pass it unanimously.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Riding Mountain, I thank all honourable members for their advice on this matter.

As I've often said in this House, I believe because this is our workplace and I very strongly believe in a respectful workplace and this is just one facet of our entire workday, I also make sure that this a respectful workplace for all of us. And I want to make sure that members feel comfortable in expressing their views here openly and in a respectful manner.

Having said that, I reference the comments, or listened to the comments that the member for Riding Mountain made about comments that may have been expressed last week. It would have been more appropriate had those comments been called to order at that particular point in time because I cannot now

take steps to deal with matters that happened a week ago. And it would have been more appropriate to deal with them.

But the member also referenced that the member for Riding Mountain referenced that there were comments that were perhaps made here this morning in this Chamber and I want to advise all honourable members of the Assembly that I'm going to take this matter under advisement and to review Hansard to determine whether or not the comments that were attributable to another member of the Assembly are indeed shown on Hansard.

And I also commit to members here that I will take the steps necessary should I find that there were comments that were attributable to another member that were perhaps disrespectful.

But I will take this matter under advisement and if necessary I will report back to the House on this point of order raised by the honourable member.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Now we'll return to the debate. The honourable Minister of Health had the floor.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And as I was saying earlier that this particular bill in my view and the view of a number of others doesn't offer any particular substance in the context of the really significant work that is going on across sectors with the western provinces.

And I would begin by echoing the remarks of my honourable colleague who was speaking of the kind of work that is going on right now, among western provinces in particular, Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the incredible and devastating flood in the city of Calgary. There is no legislation in the world that can be as powerful as the coming together of jurisdictions in this regard across sectors.

The moment that those waters hit so devastatingly in Calgary, the relationships that had been forged among western provinces, among Premiers, among ministers, among departments, immediately kicked into gear, irrespective of any agreements or partnerships or MOUs or any such matters. It was a call to action, Mr. Speaker, that happened as a result of relationships that have been built, regardless of political stripes. And we know that expertise from Manitoba was readily offered to the individuals that are suffering so greatly in Calgary from our Emergency Measures Organization. We know that those that have dealt

with flood protection, flood mitigation and, indeed, recovery, have been offering expertise to the Province of Alberta.

And I can say, Mr. Speaker, that almost immediately afterwards, we—the event itself, I had a conversation with the Minister of Health in Alberta who called on the offer of our Premier (Mr. Selinger) to have experts from Manitoba concerning public health inspection and, indeed, concerning the psychosocial elements that are a result of the very real emotional concerns that develop when individuals have lost material possessions, have lost homes and, God forbid, have lost loved ones. And so, Manitoba has offered and is providing, as I mentioned before, public health inspectors and mental health workers, ranging from psychology, psychiatry, registered psychiatric nurses, to community counsellors, that have real expertise in supporting those that are going through the psychosocial aftermath.

So, my main point, I would say—*[interjection]* thank you so much—I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that, notwithstanding pieces of paper and documents, western provinces can work together, and can work together in the most extraordinary of ways.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I'd like to take a moment to speak about the importance of the work that's going on among western provinces in the health sector. And I can tell you that there is a lot of work going on that certainly predates any New West Partnership or any other kind of agreement, particularly in the area of procurement. We know that Manitoba participates in bulk purchase of health-care supplies in order to do all that we can to protect Manitobans, the taxpayers of Manitoba, in getting the best possible deal. And we are involved in bulk purchase with western provinces through the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. Four western jurisdictions have contracted with a single group purchasing organization, Mr. Deputy Speaker, called HealthPRO, to make sure that we leverage the provinces' combined expenditure in the acquisition of hospital-use drugs.

It's very important to note, also, that Manitoba and Saskatchewan were leaders in the country in developing a protocol to do Joint Oncology Drug Review. We know that all Canadians want to have access to the best possible medications in their battles against cancer, and we want to ensure that not only are we providing access to those drugs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we're also getting the best

possible deal. And so, in 2010, established by the provincial and territorial ministers of health, the group designed to review these drugs to bring consistency and clarity to the assessment of new cancer drugs by looking very closely at the clinical evidence, and also the cost-effectiveness. Saskatchewan and Manitoba led the way in establishing this Joint Oncology Drug Review. Western provinces joined onto this and, indeed, it's now become a national entity that is certainly demonstrating that we can get even better value while providing even better care. And this work is happening and growing in its intensity and its excellence for the benefit of western Canadians and, indeed, all Canadians.

I also want to say that as a result of the Council of the Federation, our first ministers establishing a couple of groups to look at the work that's going on on a national level when it comes to health care. They established these groups, Mr. Deputy Speaker, regrettably because the federal government were not, indeed, engaging with the provinces in trying to have a national dialogue.

In fact, as I was saying earlier, the Joint Oncology Drug Review was established because we could not seem to get the federal government to engage in any meaningful way in a national pharmaceutical strategy, which is still, arguably, the single most important move that our country could make in order to bend the cost curve for health care. This was said at an event put on by the business council just a few weeks back.

* (10:30)

But in any event, the Health Innovation Working Group was established, led by premiers Ghiz and Wall, to have the provinces working together to put forward their best possible ideas and innovations in providing better care at better value to provide for healthier Canadians. The western provinces in particular, I would say with the greatest humility, Mr. Speaker, have offered a number of very real and doable initiatives.

We know that Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia were looking very, very closely at the initiative brought forward by Manitoba, and that is the issue of our hospital home teams, wherein we are enabling frail, elderly individuals who, like all Manitobans, want to stay in their family homes just as long as they possibly can, of course, want to do that safely. So by having doctors going to make house calls along with nurse practitioners, registered

nurses, licensed practical nurses, we've been able to maintain these individuals in their homes rather than having to make unnecessary and uncomfortable trips to emergency rooms or to be in hospital beds.

We've seen incredible successes. The data is very, very compelling in this regard, and we know that Alberta and Saskatchewan and BC are looking very closely at this initiative in addition to the breadth and the depth of our Home Care program.

We know Manitoba, of course, is the leader in the nation when it comes to home care. Other jurisdictions treaded down the primrose path of the privatization of home care which has turned out to be a bust in almost every regard, and so these provinces in the west are looking at Manitoba. Indeed, provinces across the country are looking to Manitoba to look at the models so we can best support individuals, not just our seniors, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but indeed those that are on their palliative journey that want to take this journey at home.

And so I would say to the members opposite that while I can embrace their attitude about collaboration and working together, I would suggest that in the context of this document on the New West Partnership, there's nothing compelling here that isn't already happening and already happening above and beyond.

The Agreement on Internal Trade is indeed leading the way for developing these kinds of co-operative relationships, Mr. Speaker. I want to commend my colleagues for the work that they're doing and say that I stand committed to ensure that all Canadians are getting the best health care possible through collaboration.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Honourable Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade—or, I'm sorry, energy, mines and—Innovation, Energy and Mines. Sorry, a little tired this morning.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): Yes, on—further on the point of order raised by the member for Riding Mountain earlier—or new point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: New point of order.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, on a new point of order.

If the words I uttered, not—from my chair is offensive to any members of the Chamber, I apologize for that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We thank the honourable minister for his words.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I'm pleased to rise today to put a few words on the record with respect to Bill 203, The Participation of Manitoba in the New West Partnership Act, and I want to thank the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) for bringing in this very important piece of legislation into the Chamber for us to debate. And I would encourage all members of this House to support this piece of legislation. It's very, very important that we do everything we can in our power to ensure that Manitoba is placed at an advantage when it comes to trade with other provinces, trade with other countries, and this is a specific piece of legislation that will help that.

And so I'm not sure why members opposite seem to be talking this piece of legislation out, because it's obviously something that should be passed on to committee and should be—we should have presenters come in and have people give their stories about, you know, from their business perspective, or just ordinary Manitobans who just want to give their perspective on this specific bill. And it is something that is within the power of this Legislature and the power of members opposite to pass this off into committee. And so I would encourage members opposite to support this very important bill.

As we know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the New West Partnership focuses on trade and international co-operation, it focuses on innovation and it focuses on procurements. And the New West Partnership acts to remove barriers to trade and investment and labour mobility across the provinces. And we know already what has happened as a result of the partnership that is—already exists between BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan in this New West Partnership, and all of the things that they've been able to take advantage of as a—as provinces working together—and the importance of provinces working together to help their own communities.

And for us not to be a part of that, I think, is an extremely unfortunate thing. We have been left out—we're acting as—and as a result of the inaction of members opposite and the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of our province and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), when it comes to an—when it comes to procurements and when it comes to free trade—and we know that members opposite, probably the reason that they're not—that they are opposed to this, our

joining the New West Partnership, because they have a problem with free trade. We know that the NDP traditionally has opposed free trade, and we know from past experience that free trade has actually helped our economies grow. And these—and I'm sure that that's partially why they're voting against it.

Of course, one of the other issues that comes forward with this is accountability, and it forces all the provinces to be more accountable to the people of their province and to ensure that the provinces are working together in the best interest of their own communities. And I think that we know that members opposite—there are two other bills, private members' bills before the Legislature, as we speak, that have to do with accountability, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we know that members opposite have already spoken out those bills. We know that they have a problem with accountability. They don't want to be accountable to Manitobans.

And we see that day in and day out as we sit through committee hearings here in the Manitoba Legislature on Bill 20. We see Manitobans coming forward and talking about the PST increase and how upset they are this government has stripped Manitobans of their democratic right to have a vote on this PST increase. And all Manitobans want is for this government to be accountable and the way that they could be accountable is by holding a referendum, which is, of course, the existing law here in Manitoba. And so that's all Manitobans want. But we know that members opposite have a serious problem with being accountable—with accountability itself. And so, we know—getting back to the New West Partnership—that that's probably another reason, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why members opposite are opposed to this piece of legislation, because they are afraid of the very accountability that all Manitobans are asking them—asking of them.

And so, with those few words, I know that there are members that want to say—have a say on this, but I will just close by saying that I would encourage all members to take a long, hard look at this piece of legislation. It's very important for our economy here in Manitoba. It's very important that we develop a stronger relationship with our western partners, with Saskatchewan, with BC, with Alberta, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's extremely important that we become a part of this, that we grow our economy and we do everything we possibly can to grow our economy.

And so with those few words, I thank you, and I will encourage all members of this House to pass this

piece of legislation. I want to thank again the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) for bringing it forward.

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): I'm very pleased to rise and speak on this particular bill that—intentions, I think, must have been good, because they are talking about trade, but the bill has a lot of flaws that does not make sense for us to keep supporting this, because we—some things we are already doing. There is no sense in redefining and limiting things that have a broader scope.

* (10:40)

And a very quick reference to the member from Tuxedo when she said we are opposed to free trade. I would like to correct her. We are not opposed to free trade. What we are opposed to are, what I would say, a lot of progressive people are opposed to, the free trades with countries of societies that do not respect the rights of equality of life for workers.

What happened in Bangladesh, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is an example of trying to make the business so dominant of money making that they don't care for the quality of life of people; 15 years old, being given 16 hours work every day, without any break, and giving less than 10 cents an hour. It is below human dignity.

We are against that. We are not against free trade. In fact, I would like to say this very boldly. Since my joining here, we have been working on international trade relationships with several countries. And I would not hesitate to say, if we had to do, we would join free-trade movements with responsible countries. We have had this in our Throne Speech of supporting BRICS nations with Manitoba. And I think we are already progressing reasonably well in—on that front.

So to look at this agreement which says, let's have a western partnership, I would say, since their own connotation, it sends a signal that we are going to cut out and we be only western and not really care for a pan-Canadian approach for trade.

We already have, in 2009, passed the labour mobility legislation that is with AIT, Agreement on Internal Trade, which allows us to exchange our labour force from one province to other provinces, throughout Canada. We don't have to really go and say, we only limit opportunities in Manitoba, to be given only to the provinces west of us—Ontario, Québec, Nova Scotia. You know, we have the whole country. Canada is a small country, Mr. Deputy

Speaker. We have only 30-some-odd million population here, and we have to work together to build the country together and our province together.

So I would say that as the intentions are right, but the language and the approach is something that is not going to benefit us at all. So I would say that looking at the partnership word is a very, very responsible thing.

Like some of our colleagues have mentioned, when there is a flood in Alberta, we are working with them; we are working in partnership. We don't have to sign an agreement to like each other. We don't have to sign an agreement to go and help each other. So the idea is to be—have that mentality, we have to have that attitude, and we have to have that culture of partnership. But to sign an agreement and follow nothing is not going to be worth the exercise. Intentions have to be seen, how we do, how we work with western and eastern Canadians to help each other.

One of the things that was mentioned was about the—member from Portage la Prairie used to talk about, the Churchill and CentrePort. And yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must say that these are some of the—these are the two assets we have, which we can really make, not only up to the Canadians but even to Americans.

And I do, as some of you may know, sit in the Economic Development Committee of the Midwestern Legislative Council. And we have talked several times about how we participate, even with the Midwestern states in the US, to work with us on co-operative attitudes so that they don't have to duplicate. One of the delegates I remember in—from Wisconsin said that we have to really see how we can utilize your Red River Community College facilities to train some of the people that we need to be trained, and we don't have to install another institute.

And I think the minister here from enterprise, trade and training doing a great job in developing the apprentice trade training. And that is what, I think, we don't have to limit, only to say we will do it. Red River College is only available to students who are from Manitoba. I wish, I hope, it expands the horizon; we can train as many people from the neighbouring states, neighbouring provinces, that work together.

I also remember some long time back—I think it was 15 years back, when there was a crisis in Québec

on the hydro. We had to send our people from here to Québec to help them because they are experts in, you know, fixing lines when it is very cold, and that was a special training. We had our people here go to Québec, help Québec residents by, you know, solving the problem.

So, idea should be to see how we make things work rather than make things limited and rather than expand it, if we limit—I don't think that's something that I'm very excited about it, but I would say the idea is to, yes, build together and build free trade with countries that are behaving responsible. I mean long—everyone knows how much China has come along, how much even India, frankly speaking, that I was born in and today, even today there are practices in that country that I don't like.

But free trade agreements make that thing happen, that people are now open; they see reality, do—you can go. The system is open. You can find out if the child labour is exploited, if there are deliveries which are not given to the labour standard. They are improving.

But I think that we cannot really say that our limit is only to work with—and I'm very proud to say that Saskatchewan, Brad Wall, who is the premier, has done a great job in building relations with India. Potash export is going on, and they are competing in a lot of senses, but I would think that we have now demonstrated a partnership with him that he likes.

He's going to sign a deal with us to buy our energy, and I think the minister has signed a deal with him to say that we will work together on some of the common issues between Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

So, we already have that. So why do we have to go and redefine it, which is working? Why fix something that's not broken? So I would say that Manitoba-Saskatchewan relationship is unique, and I congratulate Brad Wall for leading that province to say today, if you go—because we are doing a lot of work as you might know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the Food Development Centre in Portage la Prairie, that is one of the best assets I would say Manitoba has to export the technology to the farmers in the whole world, and I think that we took—the Premier last time, Rosann Wowchuk, myself, we went to several places in India and we started working with the farmers there to say they can get help from us to save their fruits and vegetables that rot in the field by processing.

So we have that kind of culture. We have that kind of resources. We have that kind of attitude. We can build relations throughout the world.

Section 41, something that I must respectfully disagree with, however. Friends, here, let's not limit Churchill only to western. Churchill is the port that whole Canadian system would use if we can look at the route which goes 12 hours, you know, faster. And it's much more economical to do as long as we look at that icebreaker which Russians are expert in, and we may, one day, build—port of Churchill will be the alternative to the east and west grid of shipping, right in the centre, right in Manitoba, and that will bring a huge amount of international trade into our province. [*interjection*] Exactly, exactly right.

I think that we have tremendous amount of opportunity and I envision, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one day in my lifetime that Manitoba will showcase the best of international trade, best of value that we have been doing in building relationship with entire world. And we will be shipping goods right from the port of Churchill to the whole world, and we will be applauded because a lot of people will move here. We have resources; we have mines; we have river system. We have everything we need to build our province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a pleasure to be in the House this morning to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 203, The Participation of Manitoba in the New West Partnership Act.

*(10:50)

And I want to thank the previous speaker who talked about the record that we have in building relationships, not just with other jurisdictions here in the 'prov'—in the—our country, here in Canada, but also, you know, with other organizations in the world, other countries in the world.

And I know that he has played an important role in regards to our relationship with India and I want to thank him for that, because he has been on a couple of trips with the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and it's those kinds of relationships that he has with his country of origin that is important to us as a party.

We believe, on this side of the House, that we are a diverse caucus that represents the demographics of our province and the demographics of the countries that we need to continue to work with,

because that is how we can build relationships and that's how we can build our economy here in the province of Manitoba, and continue to have an opportunity to have good things happening here for our businesses and for our small businesses.

And also, if those businesses are doing well, that is a benefit to our economy here in Manitoba and it's a benefit to all of our families here in the province and it also provides opportunities for young people to have jobs.

And so, I want to thank him for the work that he has done with our Premier in regards to all kinds of issues that are important to us as a province.

The—we continue to have, of course, excellent relationships with Saskatchewan and other western provinces, and we are already in discussions about the participation in the New West Partnership. So I agree with the previous speaker that I—we don't believe that this has to be redefined. We have a long 'standing' tradition in our government of working with other jurisdictions intersectorally, working with other countries—not just in regards to free trade, not just in regards to barriers around working together.

And one of those examples, Mr. Speaker—Deputy Speaker, is the math protocol that we worked on in the Department of Education. And that protocol was under the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol and it was a match curricula from kindergarten to grade 12, and that curricula was changed through a western protocol in 2008.

And it's interesting that because there were concerns raised about math curricula, that was has happened is we are one of the first jurisdictions that was involved in signing off on that protocol to actually reverse some changes that were made to that protocol in 2008.

And, you know, so it's interesting that this bill before us says that, you know—that we have to be involved in a New West Partnership act, but, you know, sometimes those partnerships and those protocols aren't in the best interests of our communities and of our learners. And this particular protocol we realized needed changes.

And I'm very pleased to say that recently, in the last few weeks, I announced what those changes were going to be, and, you know, we are going to be implementing the changes to the math curriculum and it's because of the work that we have done here in the Province of Manitoba with our education partners.

And we were very, very pleased to be able to work, of course, with the professors from WISE Math; we also worked with the Manitoba association of math teachers; we also worked with the Manitoba education professors; and we worked with a team of divisional math curriculum consultants; and, of course, we worked with the superintendents of our school divisions. And it was tough work over the last two years.

We got all of the education partners and stakeholders together in a math forum, there was extensive consultation with our community partners in regards to how those changes, what those changes would look like. And, you know, it's those—that kind of working together with people and with our partners in regards to what is in the best interests of our youngest learners, and our youngest learners now are going to have a math curriculum that is going to meet the needs of their learning in their academia in regards to literacy and numeracy.

And so, of course, that is very, very important to us in regards to making sure that we are continuing to look at our education for our youngest learners, make sure that we are moving them along from grade to grade and ensuring that they have the best one-on-one curriculum and the best one-on-one time with their teachers so that they can succeed.

I have to tell you that, you know, we have been a leader, leading driver of labour mobility here in Manitoba. In 2009 we were the first province to pass the labour mobility legislation and we continue to advance the AIT with legislative amendments. And federal, provincial and territorial trade ministers recently approved amendments which will now allow for the full labour mobility for financial services occupations this year. And ministers have also endorsed an action plan to simplify the corporate registration and reporting processes to government and they are continuing to discuss options to strengthen and improve the person-to-government process in the AIT's dispute resolution chapter.

So we continue to have excellent relationships with our—with Saskatchewan and other western provinces and we will continue to do work with them as we move forward. Well, maybe we don't have a great relationship with them if it comes to football. We would like to do better in our—in football, you know, but we're working on that. Thanks to the new stadium, I think, you know, that's really going to help us out tremendously in regards to that file, but, you

know, and if it wasn't for us we wouldn't have that new stadium, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But we will continue to work with them and we will continue to work with, you know, our other jurisdictional leaders in regards to labour mobility efforts.

You know, we were the first province to proclaim the labour mobility legislation. We have implemented full labour mobility for, as I said, financial services and we will 'contin'—we also are very pleased with our exports to western provinces.

Our exports to western provinces—excuse me—account for 43 per cent of the total interprovincial exports and that demonstrates a strong western 'im'—integration and that also demonstrates the work that we have done with our western jurisdictions in regards to making sure that we have the opportunity to do that kind of trade, because that benefits us as a province and benefits all of our—many of our communities.

And we will continue to do this. We will always be looking for opportunities that will deliver benefits to our province because we know that that is an economic driver. In fact, in 2011 we held our second ever joint Cabinet meeting with Saskatchewan and, you know, that had never been done until we got into government and we realized the importance of having the opportunity to sit down face to face, one on one with the Cabinet ministers in Saskatchewan to look at the kinds of things that we can do together that not just benefits Manitoba, but it benefits Saskatchewan as well.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

And we all know that partnership and working together is very, very important in regards to how, you know, we can make opportunities happen here in western Canada. And it's that kind of work that I know our ministers will continue to do because it's important to us.

We can also discuss Aboriginal education. We can 'discu'—we will continue to dis—we are a leader in Aboriginal education, we'll continue to be. We will also discuss trade opportunities with our western partners and, of course, we also will discuss streamlining transportation regulations because we know how man—how much of our goods are transported across Canada on our highways. And this is very, very important to us not just here in Manitoba, but with our western partners because we need to continue to work together to ensure—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): In the unlimited time I have available to myself this morning, Mr. Speaker, I'll be—

* (11:00)

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

The hour being 11 a.m., it's time for private member's resolution, and the resolution we are considering this morning is the one sponsored by the honourable member for River East, and the title of the resolution is Support for Manitoba Families with Autism.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 21—Support for Manitoba Families with Autism

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I move, seconded by the member for Riding Mountain (Mrs. Rowat), that

WHEREAS the provincial government broke a commitment to support families of children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to necessary treatment such as applied behavioural analysis, also known as ABA services; and

WHEREAS the provincial government did not follow its own policy statement on autism services, which notes the importance of early intervention for children with autism; and

WHEREAS the preschool waiting list for ABA services has reached its highest level ever with at least 56 children waiting for services; and

WHEREAS the preschool waiting list is expected to exceed 70 children by September, 2013, despite commitments to reduce the list and provide timely access to services; and

WHEREAS the provincial government policy of eliminating ABA services in schools by grade 5 has caused many children in Manitoba to age out of the window for this very effective ABA treatment because of a lack of access; and

WHEREAS many more children are expected to age out of receiving ABA services because of a lack of available treatment spaces; and

WHEREAS waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable, as no child should be denied access to or age out of eligibility for ABA services.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba acknowledge that the Minister of Family Services and Labour and her predecessors have not provided proper supports to Manitoba families with autism; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to immediately request that the Minister of Family Services and Labour provide the necessary supports to Manitoba families seeking any form of autism treatment.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for River East, seconded by the honourable member for Riding Mountain,

WHEREAS the provincial government broke a commitment to support families of children with—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, and again I rise in this House and I am pleased to have had the opportunity to bring this resolution forward. It isn't the first resolution on autism. It isn't the first time we've raised the issue of autism supports in this province of Manitoba with this government. And we've had many, many meetings with families of children with autism that have significant concerns on the direction that this government is taking, especially when they've promised and indicated that early intervention is the way to go when treating children with special needs.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that ABA is scientifically proven—ABA autism therapy treatment is scientifically proven to help individual children get off to a better start to life and reach their full potential. And this government talks the good talk about providing those supports and services, but doesn't necessarily walk the walk.

And we're not saying that ABA therapy is the only treatment for autism, and parents and families do have choices to make and they do make alternative choices that they feel are in the best interests of their children and that's great. That's fine and we encourage families to make those choices, but those that have chosen ABA therapy,

Mr. Speaker, expect the government to live up to their commitments.

And the resolution is very self-explanatory and it's very clear that the government's priorities are not necessarily on providing the supports for ABA therapy to those families. We know that there are many families that will experience no supports and that their children will age out of the ability to even enter treatment. And we do know that they're aging out of the program, and the supports that are necessary for them to continue along their education won't be there and won't be available.

But, Mr. Speaker, we know that the government has made some choices that we would not 'agreemlit'—agree with. They've making—made a choice to accept a vote tax—a vote tax that will allow every member on the government side of the House, all 37 members, to put \$5,000 to line their pockets of their own political party at the expense of the supports and services that are so badly needed for children with disabilities in our province, and that is shameful.

We know what our choice is and our choice is clear on this side of the House. We will not take that vote tax. We will not put the coffers of our own political party ahead of children and families that need supports and services in Manitoba. It's clear that there is a difference between them and us when it comes to the supports, and the difference is that they choose \$5,000 to line their political party's pockets, each one of them.

They could say today, Mr. Speaker, we will refuse that money. We will put that money into supports and services for children with autism, and we're hoping that members on the government side of the House today will rise in their places and admit that they've made a mistake, that the priorities of their political party should not come before the priorities of families that need the kinds of supports that parents and families need with children with autism.

So we're asking today, Mr. Speaker, for them to rethink their misplaced priorities and put the money where it can help families most. Thank you.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): I want to start my comments on this resolution by talking about some stories of young people and families of people who live with autism spectrum disorder and how their lives are

changed by the kinds of interventions that they've received.

And one I want to start with is a story about a young man who worked for government and was one of our team that went to the Olympics and the Paralympics to represent the province of Manitoba in the village where all the provinces and Canada—the Canadian government had booths set up to promote the province to welcome people to the Olympics and Paralympics. And I'm very proud that Manitoba was, I think, the only province outside of the host province that kept their full pavilion operational through both the Olympics and the Paralympics, that treated both those events as equally significant and important events.

I got to go to the Paralympic part of the event and part of that was meeting the team that had served really as the face and the welcoming voices to people from all over the world who were there on behalf of Manitoba. And one of these was a young man who lived with autism spectrum disorder, and part of his struggle in life had been really with social interaction, which isn't uncommon for many children and young adults who do have autism, and so this was a young man who had come from a place where he struggled with social interaction to now, where his job was being the face of Manitoba to the world, and he was doing an incredible job. His team, the team that worked with him, told me what a good job that he was doing, what a welcoming person that he was. He was also, you know, one of the only members of the team who was able to keep all of the electronic equipment functioning that was necessary.

And then, just by pure happenstance, the way that it sometimes happens in our country, I went to another event during that time period when I was attending the Paralympics and met a friend of his family who told me the story of him as a young child, and the struggle of his parents and the commitment of his mother to advocate for him to get the kind of educational services and other services that led to him being able to do this work now. And so it was clear to me that the commitment of his family having access to education resources, but then also having access to a job and a purpose and a position of—really a position of—not authority—but being the face of Manitoba to the world, that having those expectations put on him helped him to develop and helped him to do things that probably his family and many of his teachers may have at one time thought impossible.

* (11:10)

The other thing that I'm reminded of when we talk about this issue, is a meeting that I had with staff and families who are part of an organization that ensures that children who struggle with communication get help through technology, through devices that help them to communicate and through training of how to use those devices. And one of the parents who came to talk to me told the—of the tremendous effect that having access to this technology had had on her daughter who also had autism spectrum disorder, and she told of the tremendous change in behaviour once her daughter could communicate, could use this technology and had training to communicate her frustrations, her needs, her wants, her desires and how tremendously her behaviour had changed and was easier and that she was an—in many respects, an easier child to parent after having this technology.

But she also told a story which really affected me, and she told the story of the first time—I'm not going to get unparliamentary—but the first time that her emerging teenage daughter swore at her using this technology. And I guess we all probably have that moment as a parent when our child expresses that frustration. But for the parent of a child whom she thought would never be able to communicate in that way, even having your kid call you a bad name was something to celebrate. And when she related that, it was a very human moment but it gave me a great insight into the difference that it made by helping to make that technology available. So those kinds of examples are just some of the things that governments and organizations can do, and families can do, to help improve the lives of children with autism.

Our government has an investment across government of over \$30 million to help kids, families and adults who live with autism spectrum disorder. These are programs like the ABA program that we talked about much in this House. There's funding in that program of approximately \$70,000 per child. It is one of the most generous funding provided across the country. When I did a scan of other provinces that provide autism support, it looks to me like this is—Manitoba's the only province in western Canada that provides specific ABA programming to children with autism.

We also invest in things like support for children who have autism who are in child care through our inclusion support program, over \$2 million invested

to support children who are in child-care centres who live with autism, to make sure that they have specially trained child care and child development experts working with them.

We know that we've seen an increase in the support to the ABA program since 2008 of almost 35 per cent, and that's allowed about 40 per cent more children to be served in that program. We also know, and I think we'll hear later in this hour, of some of the investments we make in education but also some of the investments we make in outreach services, and we recently expanded these services to provide more services outside Winnipeg. And these are people that go out and work with families who have a child who's been diagnosed with ASD, help them—help to connect them to child development services, help to connect them to other kinds of services and help to offer them training and information so they can do as good a job as they can do as parents of a child with special needs.

Now something that is being experienced, I would say, across North America, is both a growing awareness of the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder but with that an increased number of children who are being diagnosed, and that is presenting a challenge to all provinces who provide these kinds of services. And when I looked at other provinces who provide ABA services, all of us are looking for ways to provide the services that kids need and all of us are dealing with issues of wait lists. And I know how frustrating and troubling it is to a family who's waiting for that kind of service. I understand that.

And so what we need to do is to make sure that we are getting the right kind of service to kids with the highest need, when it can be of most benefit to them. That, I believe, is a responsible way to use the resources that have been allocated to support children with autism, and we continue to work with people who have clinical expertise, people who have educational expertise, and we also continue to work with parents and families of children who live with autism about how we can make sure that our programs do exactly this, that we take the resources that are provided and that we make sure they're going where they can make the most difference, and that is the challenge for the future.

I think also as we look forward and we look at the other things that we need to do to improve the lives of all people living with autism. We know there's also a tremendous need for children who are

moving from childhood to adulthood, youth who are in that transition period, and how we can ensure that we're providing the right kind of programming so that they can build their independence and they can become more independent adults. And that is also certainly a focus for the work that we're doing.

We also know that we need to provide better training and better tools for parents. One of the frustrations of parents of all children with special needs is navigating the system, finding all of the programs and supports that their children are eligible for and be connected to those. And we've had some good discussions in this House about what we need to do to make that information more available to parents, and that's also—that's something that we're working with our partners, like St. Amant Centre, to make sure that we can do.

So, there is no doubt that this government has invested in services for parents and families and children and adults with autism, and we've protected those investments even when other governments are cutting those investments. And I would reflect on decisions that the federal government has made to cut organizations who serve people with disabilities by 35 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Several organizations in our province who are struggling with these kinds of cuts, who are seeing their budget—can you imagine, for a not-for-profit organization to face a budget cut of 35 per cent? For many of these organizations, it's going to mean that they have a great deal of difficulty functioning at all in the future, and I think that is an example of a decision that's been taken in times of economic uncertainty that I wouldn't agree with. I wouldn't agree with making those kinds of deep cuts to organizations that serve people with disabilities, and that's not the path that we are on. The path that we are on is to use the resources that have been provided as effectively and efficiently as possible and make sure they can get to the kids where they're going to make the most difference.

So we'll continue to make those investments, not only in my department, but in the Education Department, in the Health Department, in Early Childhood Development, because we know that they make a difference for those kids who live with autism spectrum disorder. We know that they help support those families, and they know that they lead to independent adults who can be the face of Manitoba to the world. Thank you.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): It's a pleasure to rise this morning to put some words on

the record with regard to the autism private members' resolution put forward by the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson). I believe this is a very important issue, and there appears to be more and more children born and diagnosed with autism. And I think we, as a society, have to become more educated in how to provide supports for families and others who are dealing with autism in their families, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier in debate, I think in question period one day, I'd asked the minister a question with regard to autism, and the minister responded in the dialogue. I received a letter—or an email, from the mother, Angela Loepky, who is the mother of Hannah. And her comments, again, are always so strong and so aware of what we need to do as a society to encourage and educate. And what Angela said was that, we, as ABA families, would argue that we can set the bar way higher than ensuring that us as parents are solely responsible for our children having a good life, and into adulthood. We would argue that we would pray that we can educate our educators, caregivers, family, friends and society in how to interact with our children so the responsibility does not lie with us.

And I believe that the debate this session—we've had a couple of resolutions, we've had questions, we've had people in the gallery, I've done a grievance on the issue—I think the more we can educate Manitobans about the significant need for supports, I think we will be better as a society, and definitely within Manitoba in providing supports.

Now, we know that during the election, there was a report that was put out by the government called Thrive! It talked about providing awareness, providing funding, reducing wait times for treatment, whether it be ABA or Floortime or whatever the services are that parents want for their children. And we know that it went nowhere. And so, we, on this side of the House, are really pushing this government to stand by its record, by its commitment to ensure that children don't age out of programs that they are currently in. We know that those programs help kids. We know that the people that are providing those services are doing great work and that they are ensuring that these children who have autism spectrum disorder are, you know, improving, and being sociably, intellectually, physically more engaged in their families and their community and their schools. And we need to continue to do that.

* (11:20)

So I believe that there are choices that this government has to make with regard to providing those supports and resources that they promised during the election. And I believe that the vote tax is one area that I believe that this minister and this government, could look at eliminating from their pockets, and put it into programs such as what families that have children with autism could use. And this would be, in many ways, improving the quality of life for so many Manitobans, Mr. Speaker. And I believe that the government has a responsibility to 'priorize' and to ensure that the needs of Manitobans come first, not the needs of the members in this House.

We're talking about building awareness, and I've been doing some research on other jurisdictions. And it was interesting, there was an article with regard to first responders getting tips on how to deal with autism. Because first responders are often in contact with children and families who have autism more than the general public. And what is happening in the United States is, paramedics or first responders are actually being encouraged and asked to attend workshops on how to respond to children or adults with autism, and how best to present when they've been called by a family, or by the general public, when there's a concern. And patience when giving instructions, and sensitivity to noise and touch issues, are vital when responding to emergencies involving people with autism.

And we know that when we can respond to children and adults with autism in a professional way, we are, you know, providing supports that can only help individuals with autism adapt and continue on in a positive way.

We know that there are a number of issues with regard to programming and services for children that have autism. The wait-lists are, as I said, unacceptable. We know that services in child care, education, health are necessary and significant, and we need to ensure that those supports are in place, because we do not want to see increases in services through other means and negative ways, like police services or justice system. We want to ensure that we provide the basis of support for those young people so that they can move on independently, in a lot of ways, and communicate effectively within society.

So, you know, I believe that the government—we have their ear, but we do believe—that families have said that they believe the government is hearing but they're not listening. So we will continue to push. We

will continue to indicate to the government that this is a very, very important issue. It affects so many Manitobans. We have over 80 families that are currently waiting for services through ABA. We also know that there are in excess of a hundred for floor times. So we know that the needs are there. We know that the government has a responsibility to ensure that every child is given the opportunity to succeed and flourish and experience life with full optimism and full supports.

So I believe that—I support the resolution put forward by the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), and I encourage the government to support it as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): It's obviously a pleasure for me to put a few words on the record today in regards to our province's working relationship with the Manitoba Families for Effective Autism Treatment, and the relationship that we have had with them over many years.

And I want to thank the member from River East who is—brought this PMR forward. You know, we believe that providing services for families with autism is important. We have had a long-standing relationship with the parents on MFEAT and, of course, Gerry Mercier is one of the individuals that I have had an opportunity to be in meetings with. And many of the parents that have been representatives of the executive of MFEAT are passionate parents, passionate about their children because they love them and they want the best for them. And I want to congratulate them for their advocacy that they have done on behalf of the families here in the province of Manitoba, and I can proudly say that our government has worked with them from the very beginning and we will continue to work with MFEAT in regards to providing programs and services for their children just like we do with all other parents who have children with exceptionalities. Because we believe that that's our job in government is to fund our public education system appropriately and ensure that all of our young people have an opportunity to succeed in our public education system.

We have worked very hard in regards to providing programs and services and funding for autism pro—excuse me—autism programs. You know, have we done enough? You know, when you look at all of the other jurisdictions in Canada and you look at their contributions in regards to programming for children with autism and you look at what they have done in regards to providing services, we are proud

of our record here in the province of Manitoba in regards to providing funding to St. Amant and to—for services and programs. We have funding for autism in the early learning program, the preschool. ABA has increased by 36 per cent and the number of children that have been served by the program has grown 42 per cent. We know that early intervention, just like all children, early intervention is absolutely critical and that's why we have a program where we can provide programs for children at the earliest stage because all of the research in regards to autism says that the earliest intervention possible, that's when there are really good results.

The funding for the St. Amant school-age program has grown by 13 per cent and the number of children served by the program has grown by 35 per cent. And, of course, you know, we will continue to look at these programs and work—our—my department works with the Minister of Labour and Family Services Department in an intersectoral way so that we can look at providing programs to young people, as the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Howard) said, from early ages right on to when they are in the public education system, the K-to-12 system, and when they transition out because we want them to participate in our society and we want them to be able to participate in our economy.

In June 2011 we launched a five-year strategy called Thrive! to support Manitobans affected by the autism spectrum disorders and we supported this with an initial investment of a—of \$1 million, and that million dollars provides a range of services and supports for students and for parents. And, of course, everyone knows how important the applied behavioural analysis program is for young people with autism because, once again, the early 'intervenson' services are critical. Once they have received that diagnosis they get excess—assessed and then they receive the diagnosis and then programs have to be put into place. And we also need to provide more services, quite frankly, for rural and northern outreach for families because we have families not just here in Winnipeg, but families that are struggling with their young people with autism.

So we also have done work specifically in our public education system specifically around ASD-specific school supports. Annually we invest \$22 million to support students that have the autism spectrum disorder. And, of course, funding for schools has increased at, or above, the rate of economic growth for the past 14 years. And that is an

increase of 57 per cent or more than \$440 million since 1999.

* (11:30)

And when you have funding that school divisions can rely on in regards to providing programs and services in this—in their schools, this also benefits young children who are having challenges and who are having difficulties. It provides them with the opportunity to provide programs and services.

Since 2008, we have provided a school-aged ABA programming support for students with ASD completing a preschool ABA program. So they have the preschool program and they come into the education system, and we provide support that consists up to three school years of level 3 equivalent funding. And that is granted to school divisions that agree to partner with the St. Amant autism program, and that way, we are providing programming that is based on ABA for a student that has the autism spectrum disorder.

We know how important having professionals in the system that are familiar with the program—that is important to young people with autism—and we will continue to provide programs and services for them.

Since 2010, because of meetings that we had with MFEAT, we were, you know, we've had consistent meetings with them all throughout my tenure as minister. And I know the previous Minister of Education had many meetings as well with the Manitoba Families for Effective Autism Treatment, and we will continue to work with them. And just since 2010, we have provided \$200,000 annually to St. Amant, and that is to provide consultative support and training to schools and to families so that more young people can be provided with ABA services. And Manitoba provides up to eight years of publicly funded ABA services through the St. Amant autism programs.

And I have to tell you, this far exceeds the commitment by other jurisdictions here in Canada, far exceeds, including Saskatchewan. And I think it's fair to say publicly today that Saskatchewan does not provide any ABA-specific funding at all, absolutely none. And I think that that speaks to our record in regards to providing services for children with autism spectrum disorder. I think that speaks to our commitment to providing all learners with appropriate education. And I think it is without question something, you know, that we are going to

absolutely continue to work with MFEAT in regards to these services and these programs.

As the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Howard) said, we're very proud of our record in regards to providing programs and services. Have we done enough? Is there more to do? Yes, there—when, you know, when you're in the Department of Education and the Department of Family Services, there is always more to do because we are providing programs and services for some of our youngest learners and some of our young people that are really requiring support.

So we will continue to work with MFEAT and St. Amant in regards to providing programs and services for young people with autism. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the resolution on autism brought forward by the member from River East. You know, there's obviously a system here where the applied behaviour analysis services does create a benefit to autism children and it creates it early. And it has to be there early, soon after diagnosis.

And I've often heard, especially the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief), talk about early interventions in various things, yet we have children with autism on waiting lists in this—for ABA services, and we have nine children who have been denied access to ABA services and 20 more set to age out in September. The 80 families waiting for these services at the present time in the province of Manitoba—and the minister can put forward—the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) can put forward all the rhetoric and talk about how valuable the AB services are, but these people are still waiting. And there's a critical timeline on them, which is being ignored by this government at the present time.

They talk about how proud they are. Well, maybe if they had the full service in place, they'd have something to be proud of. But right at the moment they have nothing to be proud of. I think they need to strive a little bit more to provide these services.

You know, this is—the lack of funding for these services, the lack of staffing for these services, is at the same time as this NDP government is taking a vote tax, \$5,000 for each one of the sitting members in this House. That \$5,000 for each member through a vote tax certainly would be a start toward providing the services that are needed in the autism spectrum

disorder. Also, right now, as of July the 1st, the NDP are collecting an illegal 1 per cent more on the PST. That amounts to about \$5 million a week. It wouldn't take very much of that designated to help with autism spectrum disorder to offset some of the costs that are associated with these programs.

It's so important, as I said before, to have early intervention in these type of programs, to be there early to help these families. As they age out, as they get older, the services—the effects of the services—they're less responsive to them, and I think it should be an absolute priority of this government. They talk about into the future they're going to have these things in place; they're going to have this, they're going to have that. They made promises before the last election that so far haven't been kept, in this file, and maybe it's time that they learned how to keep their promises. There's an awful lot of broken promises from before the election and this is just another one of a very long list that is impacting families in Manitoba, and impacting them very negatively.

I know there are quite a number of people in the House that wish to speak to this bill, and I just wanted to put a few thoughts on the record about where the funding could come from to improve this program, and definitely the vote tax is one place, that if that money went into a program like this, it would be much better spent than, in fact, being the operating budget of a political party in this province.

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): It's a pleasure to stand up and put a few words on the record for the private member's resolution on autism.

I—of course, I'd like to start off by saying that this year I was actually invited to the 25th annual autism conference that was put on by the Autism Society of Manitoba. As we know, it's a volunteer organization that advocates for the needs of persons with autism spectrum disorder, in a variety of areas—of course, health, education, employment. And I was actually invited by Sandra McKay, who is the long-standing, long-term executive director of ASM, and I was—when I was asked, I felt quite honoured to be able to go there.

* (11:40)

And I got to say, you know, often we recognize some of the challenges and some of the hardships that families face, and when I got to go there, there were some families there. There was an incredible

amount of educators, and a lot of early childhood educators. In fact, I think that if you combined educators and early childhood educators, there's probably over 90 per cent, and I think some of the things that I had saw when I was there was—first off, it was great to bump into some of my former colleagues.

I worked at River East Transcona School Division with many educators that spent time and worked every single day to improve the academic achievement, the social achievement for young people with autism. They're incredibly dedicated, so it was wonderful to go back and see all those people.

But one of the great things that I thought, it was wonderful to see so many people come together, like-minded people that we're going to have a day of professional development, a day of training, and the opportunity to network with one another and share thoughts and ideas and learn from one another. In fact, the conference featured a lady by the name of Linda Hodgdon, and she's a speech and language pathologist from Michigan and I know that her keynote was very engaging.

But one of the things that I found while I was there, as it started, was the stories that were being shared. The majority of stories, in fact, all the stories, were stories of success. And I think that people, families and people who work with young people with autism every day, I think we recognize the, not only their incredible commitment and dedication, but the incredible hard work it takes.

And sometimes after a period of time you wonder to yourself, are you making a big difference, the kinds of differences you want to make, and I think when people get the opportunity to come back and share with one another they start to realize exactly why they're doing this work with these young people and these families.

I know Thrive!, our five-year plan, builds on a foundation that's very similar to the foundation that the Autism Society of Manitoba is dedicated to doing, of course, raise public awareness as—and let as many people know about the services and resources out there. But engaging the community is also—that's when services and resources work best, advocating for the needs, you know, to foster and encourage integration of people and families and all people that are living and dealing with autism.

And I think a very important piece is a supportive network, an ability to bring people

together, resources not only for young people that are living with autism, but also for their families and to continue to act as—and build in as many resources as possible.

I want to share a few thoughts. I think that one of the things that we know about autism is how important the early years is: early intervention, early childhood development. And I was able to be part of an event yesterday—starting early, starting strong—a provincial dialogue on early childhood development, and I know that there were advocates there for people who work and, you know, build relationships and provide resources for young people living with autism every day. And, you know, one of the things that we have in place here in the government is we have parent-child coalitions that are set up all throughout the province. In fact, the member from La Verendrye and the member from Lac du Bonnet sat with me at the parent-child coalition in north west Manitoba and we talked about the challenges that region faced. We talked about services needed. But what was great is we brought lots of different kinds of people together. There was trustees, there was a member from the business community, obviously, three sitting politicians from the Manitoba Legislature, advocates, all talking about how we can support children at the early years and how we can support families, and we shared a lot of great ideas and thoughts.

And one of the events that I got to go to as the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities through—shared through the parent-child coalitions, was something called Wiggle, Giggle & Munch and it's based on sound research, sound evaluation, great data, and what is it?

Well, the wiggles is about physical activity and anyone who works with a young person with autism will tell you how important play becomes, social interaction, letting people's body move and how developmental, how important that is for young people. They actually learn an incredible amount. In fact, there was an academic from the University of Winnipeg that spoke yesterday at this launch and talked about how important play is.

Now, what is the giggles? Well, the giggles is about literacy, and we understand that the investments we make in early childhood development, every dollar we invest we get \$17 return. But there's a reason, Mr. Speaker, that, at your age—of course, you're probably somewhere around the age of 39, 40 years old—there's a reason

why you remember a lot of your—there's a reason why you remember a lot of those nursery rhymes from when you were a child. You know, we remember them because at that stage in our life is by far the most developmental stage, and the things that we're going to learn, going to learn the most. And so providing programs that build on literacy, numeracy, language skills at that level is incredibly important, particularly young people that have struggles, like young people that are dealing with autism.

And then, of course, the—one is munch, which talks about nutrition and how important nutrition is.

And so, what was great about that is there was young people there with autism and it was just wonderful to see them play. It was wonderful to see the social interaction. I got to hear from the Minister of Family Services and Labour (Ms. Howard) and, you know, how challenging that could be for families.

One of the other things that I know we're investing in is—I know the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) talked about in-classroom supports, but we invest a lot for young people and their families out of the classroom and one is the Optimal Health Early Years Sports Club, where young people with autism can not only build on their skills and talents, but they can also build a strong sense of belonging for themselves and for their families. This is a volunteer-based organization and program. There is incredible targeted recruitment, so young people that need this service the most get the service—great supervision, unbelievable training, you know, and the great thing about the supervision and mentorship, it's one on one, so there's a lot of opportunity to build those skills, build that sense of belonging.

There is—we have early years, and I want to spend a quick minute, you know—a minute talking about how important summer camp is. You know, there's a concept called summer learning loss that a young—for a student that finishes school in June and doesn't get the opportunity to go do anything through the summer for whatever challenge that they face and then they go back to school in September, they're actually going to be academically worse off when they go to September, simply because they haven't had the opportunity to do a lot of activity throughout the summer. So one of the things that we do at the early years level is invest in a camp program for children that are 6 to 12 years old. It's in its ninth year—great mentorship once again, great skill development for these young people, builds on the

idea of play. Young people getting to continue to learn every single day, but making sure we remove every single barrier that would hinder participation for any challenge a young person faces.

And we've seen remarkable results from this. In fact, there's a young man by the name of Arthur [*phonetic*] who I got to work with over the years who was involved in programs and services that were directed to young people with autism. And Arthur [*phonetic*], I could tell you, is a young person that has every reason in the world to not excel or achieve. He has incredible struggles and incredible challenges.

But because of the services and resources that we provide in partnership with families, in partnership with experts, with advocates, with non-profit organizations for Arthur [*phonetic*], he is somebody that I've been able to see and work with who—someone who struggled now has a strong sense of belonging in his community. He's using the skills that he had learned that were taught to him through these programs. He is now doing that for young people. He is somebody that is getting an incredible sense of contribution in his community.

And that was all—that all happened because of the partnerships we have created that provided Arthur not with just one program but multiple programs to build on his skills and talents and gave him choice, gave him lots of opportunities. And that is very clear when it comes to supports we need to provide to young people with autism.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Well, Mr. Speaker, and I'm very pleased to put a few comments on the record today, and certainly appreciate all the things that have been brought to the table by my colleagues and members opposite in this discussion today. And I appreciate the member from River East for bringing this resolution to the table for this very important discussion.

And as mentioned by my colleague, the Minister of Education, when I was in this role of—in the role of Minister of Education, there was certainly one thing that we've seen consistently through time, and that is that the parents of children with autism are tremendous advocates and incredibly passionate for their children, as we would hope all parents would be about all children. But I can assure you that these are very passionate people who are tremendous

advocates for their children, and we have told them to keep holding us to—our feet to the fire and keep challenging us to do more.

* (11:50)

And, certainly, I do recall at one of the meetings that I had probably about six years ago, we were told that there was an individual who'd actually moved to Manitoba because we're doing more for children with autism than any other jurisdiction in the country, Mr. Speaker, and that was something I was very proud of.

But I know that we need to do more, and I know that the way we do that is working with the community to address their concerns and working with the community to continue to act in the best interests of their children. And while we have been nationally recognized for our initiatives, Mr. Speaker, we've already invested 800 per cent more in autism services since 1999, and we recognize, as I said, that there is more that we can do to support families with children with autism.

Now, since 2008, funding for autism Early Learning Program preschool ABA has increased by 36 per cent, and the number of children served by the program has grown by 42 per cent. And funding for the St. Amant age program has increased by 13 per cent and the number of children served by the program grown by 35 per cent. Funding for autism Outreach Services preschool program has increased by 17 per cent. So there's a lot more that we have done and, certainly, there's a lot more that we need to do.

Now I know I did hear the member from River East stand up and say that there are things that are fundamentally different about our parties, and, yes, that is true; there certainly are. But one of the things that I will recognize, during the 1990s when they were cutting funding to the schools, I did notice that many of the programs that did support children with special needs were not cut, and I appreciate that.

Of course, the main programs in our schools were being cut, but they did continue to support children with special needs and I do respect that.

We have continued to provide a number of different supports, including the autism specialists, to deliver outreach services to preschool children in central Manitoba and the Interlake, and it provides families to access to developmental play-based interventions which were previously only available in Winnipeg.

And, certainly, as somebody from the Interlake area, somebody from rural Manitoba, I do know that there is a great quality of life to be enjoyed in rural Manitoba, but it's also a challenge sometimes to deliver the services and very specialized services in rural Manitoba. So I was very happy to know that we have the outreach co-ordinator services being provided in the Interlake region and other parts of rural Manitoba.

Now in June of 2011, as has been said—and it's worth repeating—we launched the five-year strategy called Thrive! and this is to support Manitobans who are affected by autism spectrum disorders and supported with an initial investment of \$1 million. It offers a range of services and supports for students and parents that include ABA or applied behaviour analysis to provide more children with early intervention services once they are diagnosed. It includes rural and northern outreach services for families, as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, with the outreach services that we are now providing.

It's an initiative that will bring parents together in supportive group environment to share information about raising a child with autism spectrum disorder, and, certainly, Mr. Speaker, a lot of the programs that we do support and a lot of the interventions that we do provide and a lot of the initiatives that we undertake when it comes to the groups like MFEAT, it is because of their advocacy and because of their support network that these programs are successful.

The initiative and the range of services provide—also provides an expert behavioural consultation for the next school year for children with autism spectrum disorder who have completed the school-age ABA program.

Now, we've restructured the ABA programming at St. Amant, and this is to provide a more flexible service model in response to the unique needs of children and their families and has increased the number of ABA spaces. And, Mr. Speaker, I certainly had the opportunity on a couple of occasions in my former role as Education Minister to visit the St. Amant Centre and to see these programs first-hand and the impact that it has on the quality of life for these children with autism spectrum disorder.

Now, these are some of the things we've done but we know that we have more to do, and I will grant that. And over the next five years, we'll work very closely with the autism spectrum disorder community and advocacy groups like MFEAT to

develop the priorities and the options that address the needs of children, youth and adults who are afflicted or suffering from autism or affected—pardon me—by autism spectrum disorder, and a big part of that is improving the diagnostic services, Mr. Speaker. Identifying those with ASD is critical to understanding what the best path would be for those individuals and what supports are the most essential to support that individual and the community around that individual and the family of that individual. And this will accommodate all eligible children waiting for ABA programs.

Thrive! scholarship, Mr. Speaker, we know that parents with children with ASD, as I said—tremendous advocates, incredible advocates and very loving and caring parents, very supportive of their children—they want the best for their children, and so do we. And having a scholarship for those to move on to post-secondary education is wonderful support for those individuals, ASD.

Online resources for families: Service providers and professionals—and professions will be provided to enhance the supports that are available for children and adults with ASD; a pilot project to develop independent life skills for young adults with ASD; introducing an autism support worker certificate program.

We know that a lot of the programs are very much dependent on the human capital that's invested in these programs, and we know that we need to have the appropriate support and training for individuals to provide the best possible environment for those individuals, and a certificate program for support workers is a critical step to that, Mr. Speaker; launching the ASD-specific adult services for the first time, including life skills networks, as well as education and employment programs.

Now, I guess I could start by talking about some of the supports that we're providing in schools, as well, Mr. Speaker, and the in-school supports for students for special needs. No child who needs special-needs funding is going without funding.

If there are students who come into the division during the school year who are eligible for special-needs funding, the division will receive it. Special-needs funding grant decisions are based on student need. And we fund on a student-specific basis, in accordance with criteria which is the same for all school divisions.

Annual funding for specials needs students is 53 per cent more, or \$65 million more, than it was in 1999. In fact, just to put that in context, our investment in—increased investment in special-needs funding of \$65 million, I believe, is about three times the amount of the entire investment in the education system by the Conservatives in the 1990s. So, I think it really speaks volumes to our commitment to support children with special needs in our communities.

And as I said—*[interjection]*—I know I—I hear the member opposite is taking exception to this. And I do know that during the 1990s, when education funding was being cut, they did have specific funding that was geared to support children with special needs. And I respect that. Though they were cutting everything else, they did support funding for children with special needs. Because it is a very prescriptive funding formula. And at least children with special needs were provided with certain supports in the 1990s when the rest of the system was being attacked.

But we've increased special-needs funding in every budget since forming government. We put in place legislation requiring all school divisions to provide appropriate educational programs, Mr. Speaker, for students with special needs.

And I was very pleased to be the minister responsible to bring in that piece of legislation, to ensure that children with special needs were being provided the appropriate educational programming within the school divisions that they reside in.

So I see that my time is about to expire, but with those few words, again, I appreciate the member from River East bringing this particular resolution to the fore for debate today. Thank you.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm pleased to be able to speak to this resolution because I think we all agree that every child deserves the support they need to succeed in our schools and in our society, and we're committed to making Manitoba a leader in education and to provide all the tools to children and to educators to assist them in that development.

You know, some days we don't agree on a lot on all sides of this House, but I think we do agree that for reasons that are really beyond the knowledge of any of us, there are, indeed, more children that are now being diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

And I think we can all agree that for those children, for their parents, for their communities, there are certainly some challenges.

And you know, different governments across this country make some very different choices when it comes to supporting children, their parents, and educators—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) will have nine minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, July 4, 2013

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