

Second Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

Vol. LX No. 30A – 10 a.m., Thursday, April 24, 2008

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 24, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Mr. Speaker: Bill 200, The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act. Are we dealing with that this morning?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No.

Bill 203, The Liquor Control Amendment Act (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Prevention). Are we dealing with that?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No.

Bill 204, The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act. Are we dealing with that?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. Okay.

Bill 205, The Elections Amendment and Elections Finances Amendment Act. Are we dealing with that?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No.

Bill 206, The Elections Amendment Act. Are we dealing with that?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No.

Bill 207, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act. Are we dealing with that?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No.

Bill 209, The Personal Health Information Amendment Act.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No.

Bill 212—The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen), that Bill 212, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la pension de retraite des enseignants, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Schuler: I know that the House is sort of getting a sense of déjà vu. This bill has been introduced, I believe, now for the third time. We feel that it is a very important bill and should be considered and passed by this House and moved on by committee today.

Basically what the bill does is that it increases to nine from seven the number of members on the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund or TRAF board. It requires at least one member to have investment management experience, requires at least one member to be a retired teacher nominated by the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba, something we feel is imminently reasonable. This does not cost any money. This does not unbalance any board. What it does is it gives recognition to retired teachers that just because they've retired that they don't know what's in their best interest or what's in the best interest of their pension. I know we have a government right now, a fairly father-knows-best type of machismo government that feels that when you retire you don't have the ability to know what's good for your own pension. We disagree with that.

We happen to think that retired teachers who have done amazing work throughout their career educating us at this point in time—and I think they've done a very good job—that they too have a lot of input on the TRAF board and should have a lot of input on their pension.

We believe that this would go some way in, again, recognizing teachers for the contributions they've made and for the contributions they continue to make to our province and to our nation, and we believe that this would be a really good first step for the government, in particular this minister, to start healing some of the rifts and the problems that the

government and this minister have had with retired teachers.

We know that the last time meaningful COLA was extended to retired teachers was in 1999, and the first thing that the Doer government did is they slashed that, and we believe that that is really unfortunate. It's the dark days under this minister, the Member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson), that we have seen that actually take place. So putting a retired teacher chosen by them—and I want to repeat that for the House. We would like to see a retired teacher chosen by retired teachers to be their voice on the board.

It is an imminently reasonable bill. I know that members of this House are waiting to let it pass today, and I am convinced the government won't talk it out today. I am convinced there will be members in this House that will put a few comments on the record, allow this to go on to committee, and I know the minister is going to stand up to his caucus and is going to say, we will not have an NDP member talk this bill out at the end and effectively kill it. This time, third time is lucky for retired teachers. We're going to stand on their side. We're going to give them a voice on their pensions. We're going to let this bill through, and I give strong recommendation to this House that we debate this this morning and then move it on to committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): I rise to speak against this bill. First and foremost, I would like to correct some of the information that the member had put on the record. For the member to suggest that it was our government that slashed the COLA is inaccurate, because, actually, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite when his party was in office had received eight consecutive actuarial warnings saying that the COLA account was not sustainable. He'd received eight consecutive warnings that said if you continue to pay full COLA, it is not sustainable. So, with that advice, the members opposite chose to do nothing, as they did throughout their term in office in the 1990s with respect to the teachers' pension allowances.

So for them to stand up now in the House to talk about the possibility of COLA adjustments, and to do so is rather disingenuous because they were told many, many times by the actuary that this was not a sustainable account.

* (10:10)

What the member is suggesting with respect to this particular bill is to change the structure of the TRAF board. What the member neglected to do, however, is talk to the Manitoba Teachers' Society. I understand he has not talked to them about this bill, which I think is pretty irresponsible when you consider that the Manitoba Teachers' Society are part of the stakeholders in the pension fund and they should've been included in this discussion. Perhaps he did, as he's brought it to the floor a second or third time, but, I know, when he first introduced the bill he did not consult the Manitoba Teachers' Society, and that's pretty irresponsible when you consider that active teachers are currently the plan members who are paying into the fund.

For the member to suggest that this government has not listened to retired teachers is wrong. I have met with the Retired Teachers' Association on a number of occasions. The Retired Teachers' Association asked for a retired teacher to be on the TRAF board; we put a retired teacher on the TRAF board. The Retired Teachers' Association asked to be fully engaged in the Teachers' Pension Task Force; retired teachers were fully engaged in the Teachers' Pension Task Force.

What the member fails to mention, though, is that earlier on, he even suggested we didn't need a Teachers' Pension Task Force. What do we need a Teachers' Pension Task Force for?, he said, and we should eliminate that. Well, quite frankly, it's the Teachers' Pension Task Force that makes recommendations to TRAF and government with respect to improvements to be made to the teachers' pension. Now, it's no surprise that he would suggest we don't need one because, in the 1990s, they never used the Teachers' Pension Task Force. There were very few things that occurred in the 1990s to improve the teachers' pensions. *[interjection]*

Now, I hear the member chirping about COLA. I hear him saying they didn't need it because it was COLA. Well, they ignored teachers' requests on the ability to buy back a pension from maternity leave. They ignored the teachers' requests to increase the contribution rate. They ignored the teachers' requests to fund the unfunded liability. They ignored the actuarial warnings around COLA. So, lah-de-dah, everything's happy, everything's fine, we don't need to do anything, and that was their attitude.

Well, quite frankly, that attitude has come to haunt the pension fund with respect to the COLA issue. So, for them to ignore it and to stand up in this

House and suggest that they are the champions of retired teachers, I find that quite disingenuous and quite galling as a teacher who has been on this side of the House now for five years with 10 other teachers on this caucus, who have stood up for the rights of teachers since they've been in office.

Members opposite came in with a bill that stripped teachers of all their bargaining rights, and now they're saying they're the champions of teachers. Members opposite cut over 700 teachers from the public school system with their pathetic funding announcements, and now they say they're the champions of teachers.

So, Mr. Speaker, I do not need advice from members opposite about what is best for teachers, both active and retired, in this province. We are working through the Teachers' Pension Task Force with all the stakeholders to find a solution to a fair COLA for retired teachers. All plan members should have a say in this matter and that is the position of this government, that retired teachers and active teachers should be a part of that dialogue.

When you look at our record and what we have done with respect to improvements to the pension act, we've opened it four times in our tenure; we'll open it again as we look to make improvements to the teachers' pension, Mr. Speaker. I know members opposite were criticizing us for funding the unfunded liability; \$1.5 billion is a significant commitment to the integrity of the main account, which is a main concern for active teachers on the MTS AGM floor, where I was standing up in the 1990s saying we need government to act on the unfunded liability. But did they listen to us then? No. Are they listening to teachers now? No, they're not even asking teachers for advice. They pick one item and profess to be the champions of the retired teachers.

Now, as the champions of the retired teachers that they claim to be, during the election, members opposite proposed a two-thirds COLA, but said, we can do that, we can do it for \$12 million. Well, the map on that particular issue, Mr. Speaker, is off by approximately 120. So, for members opposite to suggest that they have the solution with respect to COLA is wrong. For members opposite to suggest that we need to change the structure of a board to address this issue, quite frankly, that's not necessary. We do have retired teachers engaged in the discussion with the Teachers' Pension Task Force.

Mr. Speaker, our record is quite clear. With all the improvements that we made, it was the first time

in 25 years that we've seen an increase in the contribution rates to teachers' pension funds, and that was under our government. We addressed the contributions of new entrants on a go-forward basis as of the year 2000, and the returns on investment were 14.8 percent in 2005, 15.6 percent in 2006 and an accumulated surplus of \$300 million. Yet members opposite recently had on their Web site that the TRAF fund was in trouble, which is pretty irresponsible to try and gain political points with retired teachers by fearmongering that the TRAF fund was in trouble.

You know, it's rather interesting now that the members opposite had expressed so much interest in Manitoba's teachers because we've been working hard for our teachers from day one, as I said, repealing that draconian legislation, Bill 72, and members opposite are also interested in hearing some details, perhaps, of the education system. They might want to know how our unprecedented and significant investment in the education system has been supporting teachers, but members opposite, I know, won't care because their take during the election was \$10 million for elite schools and, Mr. Speaker, we don't fund on elitism. We fund on equality of educational opportunity throughout this province. We've done so with a \$53.5-million announcement this year, and we've done so in a way that's been manageable and affordable with the taxpayers as well.

Members opposite, they ignored the education system. They ignored teachers the entire time they were in office. They ignored the profound needs of many of our children in our school system, and for them to stand up and pretend to be the champions once again, Mr. Speaker, I don't buy it. Nobody on this side of the House buys it. Teachers throughout the province of Manitoba don't buy it. That dog don't hunt, as the First Minister likes to say, and as we would say in Gimli, that fish don't swim.

The members opposite are not known to be friendly to education. The members opposite, quite frankly, were extremely hard on the education system and, quite frankly, it's the reason that I am in this House today. I turned to politics to do something on behalf of teachers in the province of Manitoba because of what members opposite were doing to teachers in the province of Manitoba during the 1990s.

So, Mr. Speaker, once again, members opposite have introduced a bill that is not necessary, and it's

simply not consistent with their particular record as it comes to defending the rights of teachers in this province of Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): After that, that dissertation given by the Minister of Education, I certainly hope he doesn't give up his teaching credentials because he might well need them in the not too distant future.

Mr. Speaker, there were a number of issues that the minister dealt with which, unfortunately, were red herrings in this whole debate, and this particular bill that's before the House is very simple. It's about equality. It's about fairness. It's about the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba, RTAM, having the right to choose their member to sit on the pension fund board.

Now, is that too difficult for the minister to understand? We can go into a whole bunch of different issues about MTS and all the rest, which, by the way, the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler), who I'd congratulate wholeheartedly for putting forward this bill so that we can instil some fairness and equity into the system, that, again I repeat, the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba, be given the right to choose a member of their choosing: an individual who would share their concerns; an individual who understands the issues that are before the RTAM. That choice would then be able to sit on the pension fund board. Now that's pretty simple. Obviously, it's too simple because the members on the other side really don't grasp the urgency that's necessary to have this group recognized as an official member on the board.

Now there is a member on the board. There is a retired teacher that does sit on the board, but that retired teacher is chosen, is appointed by, is chosen by the government. Now that in itself is wrong, Mr. Speaker, and that has to be fixed. It has to be corrected, and it can be corrected very simply by having the members on the other side support this piece of legislation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) had suggested that, weren't we terrible people prior to 1999, when in fact, we gave retired teachers, some 11,000 people, who gave their dedicated hearts and souls to the education industry of this province, that we gave them what was absolutely guaranteed in their pension contract was COLA, cost of living allowance. Okay, it was there,

and prior to 1999 the government, with a sense of fairness, with a sense of understanding that these teachers have worked their lives, have paid for this particular fund, we gave them full COLA. When the cost of living went up, their pensions increased because that was a guarantee that was given to them.

* (10:20)

In 1999, after this government was elected, that fairness and that equity and that right was thrown out the window. There was no consultation. There was no suggestion that there was going to be some difficulties. There was no understanding that maybe we could have an increase into the pensionability of the current teachers, to be able to fund that. No, Mr. Speaker, it was simply a matter of a stroke of a pen and they threw the retired teachers to the wolves. There's 11,000 retired teachers out there and I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, 0.63 percent of an increase this year in their pensions is not acceptable. It's not acceptable to them; it shouldn't be acceptable to this government.

This government, unfortunately, has put people in a desperate need and that has to lie at their feet. Minister of Education suggested we didn't talk to MTS. MTS was consulted. Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) talked to them, but what we did do is we talked to the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba. We've talked to them an awful lot. It's a matter of sitting down and understanding the situation and seeing what their real needs are, Mr. Speaker. We sat, we talked.

This Minister of Education did none of those. You know what he did? He bullied them. There's a report called the Sale report. When they talked about the Sale report, there were some good things in the report that the Retired Teachers Association of Manitoba would have liked to accepted, but the Minister of Education said, you will do what we tell you to do. You will take what we force you to take, and you'll be happy doing it. Well, RTAM is not terribly happy about doing it. As a matter of fact, they're quite upset and angry that the minister wouldn't negotiate, wouldn't talk about fairness. What he did, Mr. Speaker, is he bullied them. And bullying doesn't work very well with the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba.

So I would just like to put on the record that this bill is one of fairness and equity. It's simply saying, let our member sit on that board and take our position to the pension fund, not the position of an appointee by this government.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): I'd like to thank the Member for Brandon West for that very, very entertaining discussion. I think it's entertaining because I believe that it's important to know history. I believe that it's important to put information into context.

I also was a teacher in the 1990s. It's interesting when the member opposite shouts about fairness and equity and discussion because I can remember when I was a teacher working in Frontier School Division. Not only did we have our wages frozen, but we had them rolled back. After we negotiated in good faith, a government, a Conservative government which is represented by the member opposite, not only rolled back our wages, not only cut all professional development, not only cut real wages, not only gave us Filmon Fridays which affected pension long term, but also did it without any consultation. In fact, my first political acts were holding protests in front of this building against members opposite when they were minister of Education because they had not even discussed the rollback of wages, the freezing of wages, the rollback of budgets to the different school boards. You know, Filmon Fridays. No discussion, just imposition.

So, look at Bill 22 and when you're looking at pensions—I know the member opposite is very confused about finances. I know he doesn't quite get the finances of investments, but I'll tell you what we've been able to do. What we've been able to do is the following: we've given real wage increases to teachers and we've bargained in good faith; No. 2, we've actually increased the amount of money that current teachers are putting into the pension plan and, as a government, we're matching it. We're actually paying the pension contributions for teachers that are currently employed. Those are things that never happened between 1963 and 1999. I'm pleased that we did that.

I'm also pleased, Mr. Speaker, that there was called an unfunded liability. Members opposite used to have all sorts of debt, but they never put it on the books. They never put it in front of the people of Manitoba and they never put real money in it. So, although we would owe in the long term: we would have pension debts; we would owe debts for Centra Gas; we would owe debts for a lot of the capital projects; they never put it on the books. They pretended that it didn't exist.

They talk about debt. Well, they didn't have a lot of the debt and liabilities on the books. I'm pleased we put it on the books. I'm pleased that we're paying it down. I'm very, very excited at the fact that we moved \$1.5 billion into the finance of the TRAF board. Rather than having a big black hole that didn't have funding in it, what it meant was we moved \$1.5 billion that should have been paid over 40 years and wasn't by the former Conservative government, et cetera. So the former Conservative government was told by the actuary, they're the financial experts, that they had an unfunded liability and they should put money there. They couldn't do additional COLA because there was no money there. There was no way to pay additional COLA. They'd been warned eight times that there was no way to continue to fund the COLA when they had this huge unfunded liability and no money to pay it.

So what we did was we took action. We moved \$1.5 billion into TRAF, where what it now is earning is approximately 10 percent interest. So, instead of being a liability, we put money there. The \$1.5 billion we moved in there, the current money that's going from contributions from new teachers, from the government and from the teachers, are going in there. It's returning 10 percent return on investment. That means the funds are growing. That means that the funding is self-sufficient. That means the value of the TRAF fund, teachers' retirement fund, is growing, which means that there's security for the pensioners. There's security for future COLAs. That means that there's security for the whole system.

I'm pleased that we put it in front of the public that we were going to borrow money, put it in there. What's interesting, Mr. Speaker, is we're borrowing the money between 4 percent and 5 percent. So we're paying 4 percent to 5 percent interest on the \$1.5 billion we borrowed and put on the books. In addition, the fund is earning 10 percent. So I know the member opposite might be confused at this, but that means we're about 5 to 5.5 percent ahead. So the return on investment from the fund is about 10 percent. The cost of borrowing is about 4.5 percent. So that means we make 5.5 percent profit, or ahead 5.5 percent. This means that the fund is getting stronger. This means there's real cash value inside of TRAF. This means a very, very good thing.

So what would happen if it was a Conservative government, I believe what would happen is they would have let the pension fund continue to grow. It would have made sure that this liability, sorry, would

continue to grow. They wouldn't have put money there. They would have increased the pension liability as it was projected to grow to \$8.5 billion. Then what they would have said is, oh, lo and behold, we have a crisis. We didn't do anything to do with this pension liability. We didn't predict the future. We didn't understand the finances. We don't know what actuaries actually say, because we don't read the reports. Then they would say, we're in crisis, what do we have to do?

Well, Mr. Speaker, what they would have done is they would have taken all the retired teachers and said, not only do you not get COLA, you don't even get your basic pension. That's what they did as far as the teachers' pay. That's what they did in the benefits in the 1990s. I believe that's what they would have done to future pensioners. I am pleased to say that as a government we filled the pension liability. I'm pleased that contributions are being made by current teachers. I'm pleased that the government is contributing their share for the first time in 40 years. I'm pleased that we're treating all groups fairly. We're opening discussions fairly and we're moving it forward.

So, Mr. Speaker, I look at the former government and the former Minister of Education, as he sits there. I don't know how he can sit there and criticize our actions when he received eight actuarial warnings that he needed to do something and took no action. I think it's really passing strange that they were told eight times that they had to fund the unfunded liability of \$1.5 billion and did nothing.

*(10:30)

I look at increasing the current contribution rate for teachers, matching it. That's a good thing. I look at the return on investment in TRAF at 14.8 and 15.6 in years 2000, 2005 and then 2006. I think of the surplus that's growing in TRAF. I see that as a positive picture. I look at it the other way, it was pure politics and not true financial management. I'm proud that we are taking the prudent, financial, positive view of taking long-term benefits, taking a long-term financial-appropriate track and working with people up front, not saying one thing and doing another, as was done throughout the '90s.

I do have to say one thing to the members opposite. I thank you for doing that because that was one of my major reasons for running in Assiniboia against the former Minister of Education. I ran because of the treatment of teachers. I'm pleased to see you got me politically involved because,

generally, before that I wasn't. I'm pleased I was involved because now we can make positive decisions for Manitobans and in the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I'm pleased today to add some comments with regard to Bill 212, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act. Mr. Speaker, this is the third time this bill has been introduced in order to try to impress upon the government that retired teachers are being treated unfairly by this government. Retired teachers are the scapegoat of this government when it comes to fairness, and retired teachers have tried to impress upon this government why it is that they, like members who will retire on the other side of the House and on this side of the House, will receive full COLA when they retire. Retired teachers should also have that same privilege extended to them.

Up until 1999, Mr. Speaker, retired teachers received full COLA. It's only since this government has taken office that full COLA has not been extended to retired teachers. How is it fair that every civil servant in Manitoba, every retiring MLA in Manitoba, every other person who retires from an industry in Manitoba will receive COLA but, yet, retired teachers are not entitled to that same benefit? How is that fair?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I just listened to the former speaker on this bill. You almost have to laugh at the silly logic, or the attempted logic that he puts on record. You would think that, having been an educated teacher who was in the system, this individual would have a far better argument than he was putting forward this morning. Not only was he silly and goofy in terms of the logic that he was trying to put on the record but, in fact, he didn't even address the issue of why he was against COLA. He didn't address the issue of why retired teachers should not have COLA; he didn't address the fact that retired teachers are being treated unfairly. He ignored all of that and went on some angle that had nothing to do with COLA and with the fair treatment of retired teachers.

Mr. Speaker, let's put our attention to the task at hand. Let's address the issues that are before the House and what is before the House is Bill 212 that speaks about fairness to teachers, speaks about offering teachers respect and a full COLA as they deserve. They don't deserve any less than any retiring member in this Legislature, any retiring civil servant, any retiring person in this province from an industry.

They deserve that same respect and that same treatment. They go to the store, whether it's the grocery store, the clothing store, the gasoline bar, with the same dollars that all of us do but that is not true anymore because, although inflation is taken into account for every other individual in society, retired teachers are not given that privilege. Why?

Why is it that these people are treated so unfairly? Why is it that this sector of our society is not given their dues? Mr. Speaker, it is an unfairness, and something that members opposite should be ashamed. Yes, we have former teachers sitting in the Legislature on the other side of the House who should be standing up and speaking for those who have retired in their former occupation.

I hear the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford) chirping from her chair, but does she really know what she's talking about? Does she really believe that retired teachers should not be treated fairly? Is that what she's saying from her seat? Does she believe that retired teachers should be treated as second-class citizens in our province, Mr. Speaker? That is really the attitude that this government has undertaken with regard to retired teachers. They feel that retired teachers are somehow less, or worth less, than those who are going to be retiring from other sectors in our society in Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, that is appalling, that is unfair. This government has become so arrogant that it no longer has the compassion that a government should have for the people within its society.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, it's going to cost money to give teachers their full COLA. It cost money right up until 1999 to give retiring teachers their full COLA but that is what they paid into. The reason they paid into a retirement fund was that they were expecting that they would be treated fairly and would be treated like any other sector of our society.

I want to ask this government: They believe that they are the people who stand up for teachers. I would hope that they feel that they are people who will stand up for retiring teachers. But why is it that they will not allow full representation of retired teachers on the TRAF board? What is it that is not allowing them to recognize the fact that retired teachers could contribute very positively to the TRAF board?

Mr. Speaker, we could go on and on but other members within this Chamber need to stand up and put their remarks on the record. We want to see this bill passed, so therefore, I'm going to cut my remarks

short so that indeed this bill has an opportunity to be passed into the next stage of passage of a bill in this Legislature.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to take the opportunity to put a few words on record regarding teacher's pensions. I'm very proud to be part of a government that supports teachers, active as well as retired teachers. I must say that I'm very honoured to be standing here because I am a former teacher. I've taught both in rural Manitoba and Steinbach as well as in the city of Winnipeg. I have to say that during my career I have spent a lot of time involved in my profession and being active with the Manitoba Teachers' Society and the Winnipeg Teachers' Association, trying to bring forward improvements to student's as well as teacher's lives.

I have a pin here that is a reminder of Jan Spielman who was the president of the Manitoba Teachers' Society when I was active on the Manitoba Teachers' Society provincial executive. A teacher's working conditions is a student's learning environment. I certainly worked very hard with my colleagues on the provincial executive to make sure that education in Manitoba moved ahead. That was, I have to say, was quite often at odds with the government of the 1990s. I can say, as my colleague from Assiniboia said as well, that one of the reasons that he is here in government right now as I am, is as a result of the kinds of things that occurred during the 1990s and that got me involved with my associations and working very hard to put our issues forward.

One of the things that I recall during the 1990s is that as a provincial executive of the Teachers' Society, we tried very hard to have a dialogue with the government of that time. On many occasions and time and time again, we tried to bring forward the opportunity of having the Pension Task Force meet to discuss the issues that we are now currently discussing. I can say that in the 1990s it was a wall against which we were running each time we brought the issue forward of trying to talk about pensions and the issues that lay ahead. Certainly, one of the things that the Pension Task Force needed to do was not look at just what is currently happening but to look at the future.

I have to say, one of the issues that made it so easy for the former government to provide those full cost of living adjustments was the fact that there

were seven active teachers for every retired teacher in the province at that time. That certainly makes a huge difference into whether or not a plan can afford to pay the cost of living adjustment. Currently, we are 1.4 active teachers for every retired teacher in the province. That certainly is part of the dilemma that we are looking at.

*(10:40)

So I'm really proud to be standing here supporting a government that has now started listening to both retired and active teachers in terms of the pension plan and trying to do what is best for the future of the pension plan.

I know that this government has met many times with the Retired Teachers' Association, with the Manitoba Teachers' Society and there certainly has been a dialogue through the Pension Task Force now that was not there in the 1990s. Had that been there in the 1990s perhaps we wouldn't be talking about these things right now because they would have been dealt with much sooner.

Our government has done quite a number of things and one of the things that has happened is that the names that RTAM brought forward to the government did result in a retired teacher being placed on the TRAF board, which was certainly something that they had been wishing and our government stepped to the plate and moved on.

Our government has met with RTAM, has informed them that we're prepared to move forward on the recommendations of the task force. It's a plan that is looking at putting \$130 million in additional funds into the plan. It seems to me that I recall during the election campaign that RTAM seemed to be quite in support of a two-thirds COLA solution.

This is an issue that has been around for a long time. Certainly one of the things that is quite clear is that the actuarials have been stating for a very long time that our pension needed to be addressed, and, back in the 1990s when we were part of the provincial executive, I know that the issue that we took forward is that we needed to talk to the government and look at what was into the future with our pension plan. Certainly, when there are seven teachers contributing into TRAF, that provides a lot more resources for one retired teacher as it does for one and a quarter teachers providing for one retired teacher.

The other thing that I really feel that the government has gone a long way to addressing is the

fact that, in July, \$1.5 billion was contributed to the Teachers' Retirement Allowance Fund in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of TRAF. One of the things that I can recall in the '90s, we kept saying to the government at the time, is that their pension liability was somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$75 million a year for pensions but that was going to escalate to \$250 million in about 10, 15 years time when the baby boomers started retiring. Certainly, that's the wave that we are seeing right now, is the huge number of teachers that are choosing to retire.

So I have to say that, as a government, I'm really proud of the fact that we have taken many steps to improve the pension situation that was always at the top of teachers' agendas. Many of the retired teachers were activists in MTS at that time. So \$1.5 billion to the TRAF fund is certainly very, very important. It takes care of 75 percent of the unfunded liability. TRAF has been very well managed and the returns have been exceptional and I'm sure that 75 percent will look closer to 100 percent in a number of years.

The other thing that we chose to do, back in the year 2000, was starting to match the contribution of new entrants so that now we have eight years' worth of teachers whose contributions were matched by our government as well.

So, as I conclude, I really have to say that the efforts that I can recall being part of back in the 1990s to deal with this pension issue were unheeded and I am so pleased to be part of a government now that is very seriously looking at this issue and is working together with the Teachers' Society and RTAM to find solutions for this and I am sure that we will be successful down the road because not only the retired teachers, but also the active teachers now need to be assured that their pension plan is secure and that is what we are attempting to do. Thank you.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise this morning and participate in debate of Bill 212, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act, which was brought to the Assembly by the honourable Member for Springfield, and I would like at this point in time to congratulate and thank him for his efforts to do so.

This bill is very, very important to those that have retired from the profession of teaching, that their interests be represented by someone that has walked the walk along beside them. I don't see why the government members would not support this bill, many of whom have a teaching profession in their

background and recognize how vitally important it is to have someone that truly understands, that has, in fact, first-hand knowledge of what the teaching profession is and to bring those interests forward regarding the pension plan.

I look forward. We have only a few minutes left in debate this morning, but I do believe that there should be unanimous support for this bill because it shows respect for those that have contributed to our province in an outstanding manner through their profession.

The same as the honourable Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau), it was the teachers and the involvement with education that brought me to the Legislative Assembly. I truly believe that education is the most important department of government. I will get arguments from some of my colleagues, and I'm certain others across the way, but education has proven out that, through education, persons live a longer, healthier life. So that impacts on health. Persons with an education are less likely to come in conflict with the law. Also, with an education, persons are far less likely to be dependent upon the family services and the social supports that we have from government.

So I truly believe that education does have that impact, and it's true education can, indeed, make the greatest of differences in people's lives, and so I trust that the government members will support this bill because it is very important to recognize the contributions of teachers and to allow for them to participate and manage their pension fund. Thank you.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Manitobans should be very, very wary when a Conservative politician stands in this House and speaks about education. They should be very nervous, especially when the Conservatives come forward with a resolution dealing with education. They should be very nervous. Part of what I want to do this morning, Mr. Speaker, is, as much as I can from my place here in the Manitoba Legislature, assure Manitobans and students and parents and teachers, whether they be active teachers or whether they are retired teachers, that it isn't quite as bad as what they might think it is seeing the Conservatives this morning putting forward a resolution, because there are essentially two categories in which the Conservatives fall when it comes to dealing with education matters.

* (10:50)

On the one side, when they stand in the House, the category can be described as an all-out attack. On the other side, the other category can be described as feigning support. I'm certain that what we are dealing with here today with Bill 212 isn't so much an all-out attack on teachers. It's not that category. It's the category of feigning support for retired teachers, feigning support for current teachers, feigning support for the education, the public education, public schools here in our province of Manitoba. I'm certain that I'm correct in assuming that this isn't an all-out attack, because, over the 13 years that I've been in this Legislature, I've seen some all-out Conservative party, Conservative government attacks on teachers, on students, on parents, on our public schools, whether they be rural, urban or northern public schools. I've seen those attacks. I've seen what they've done. I remember the debate over Bill 72 in this House, Mr. Speaker. I remember the mean-spirited approach that the Conservative government, the Filmon government took in those days in dealing with, and I mean dealing with, teachers, as opposed to working with teachers is what they're feigning here today.

Mr. Speaker, not only did I see a tax on teachers, I saw from the very same people across the way, I saw their response to teachers who protested the attack that they were under. I saw the response to teachers who came to this building to democratically, freely express their opinions on Bill 72 and a whole other number of measures attacked that that previous government came up with. I'm sure every member of this House remembers that response, including the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) who has brought forward Bill 212. When teachers responded to the attacks that that government, that Conservative government, made on the teaching profession, their answer was—and I'm sure everybody remembers this—real teachers are in the classroom. Real teachers are in the classroom is the response that they got from the minister of the day.

You know what was also very troubling, I thought at that time, when that statement was made about real teachers being in the classroom, as opposed to expressing their opinions freely and democratically here at the Manitoba Legislature which is supposed to be open to all of the people of Manitoba, we saw the gut reaction from those people who were colleagues of that particular minister of the day. It wasn't like, when the statement was made, that they kind of wilted, or recoiled, or expressed horror. They cheered her on. I remember it as clear

as day. I was here. I remember the cheering that went on when she stood up for her government, saying that real teachers should be in the classroom. That was Linda McIntosh.

Absolutely, and it wasn't like they didn't have opportunities over the 11 long, mean years of their reign of error. It's not that they—[interjection]—the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) actually co-chaired a task force that went around the province, who could have come back and said to legislators, we've been to Manitoba—[interjection]—we've been to northern Manitoba—[interjection]—I hope so.

The question is: Did they learn anything when they went to northern Manitoba? They could have come back to the Legislature and they could have said, we're going to have a problem with teacher pensions in this province if we don't act.

The Member for Pembina had a chance to do that. The Member for Pembina could have recommended to his colleagues that they take it seriously. Mr. Speaker, we just heard from a former Minister of Education, the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach). He could have taken the steps that our ministers have taken in terms of funding the teacher pension, funding that liability. Since 1963, it wasn't done. It took our government to do it. He could have done it—[interjection]—the Russell MLA, when he was Minister of Education, had every opportunity to do that. He chose not to; he made the wrong decision and now he's standing up in the Legislature feigning support for our teachers, our retired teachers, feigning support for our public schools, feigning support for the kids, the students that are depending on us to make good decisions here in this Manitoba Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, eight times—not once, not twice, not a little hint here or a little hint there—eight times that government was told that there was a problem in TRAF, that there was a problem with the actuarial soundness of the pension. Eight times they were told something had to be done. Not once, not twice, but eight times that government ignored that good advice, and now they stand up here today and pretend like they're supporting retired teachers. Why didn't you support them when you had a chance? Why didn't you support these very same retired teachers when they were active teachers? That would have been a good thing to do but, no, now you're standing up, now you're standing up pretending like you're all in favour of retired teachers and putting forward this.

I want to note, Mr. Speaker, that this Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) who brought forward Bill 212 doesn't even talk about two-thirds support, doesn't talk about money, doesn't talk about anything like that. He takes the one little area, one area, that he thinks he can get his toe in on the issue. It's all politics. That's what it's about. That's okay, he's a politician. I don't mind that. I'm a politician, too. But he has his toe in this area. He has his toe in this whole issue, and that's it.

What he doesn't say, either he's ignoring or maybe he doesn't know, but the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba gave our minister a list of acceptable appointees. Our minister had the courage, had the foresight, to take one of those names and appoint it to the very body that the Member for Springfield is trying to deal with, with Bill 212.

I'll give the Tories some credit. It doesn't fall into the category of an all-out attack, which is their usual response. It falls into that category of feigning support for a group of people that they didn't have the courage or the foresight to support when they had the chance in those 11 long years of government when they did have the chance to do something about this.

Mr. Speaker, I'm in favour of doing things that support public schools, in favour of doing things that support teachers, both current and retired, so I'm not going to support this bill.

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): I, too, was a teacher, like the members for Assiniboia, Gimli, Rossmere and others, and I, too, remember the cutbacks of the 1990s.

An Honourable Member: The hackers and slashers.

Mr. Jennissen: My honourable colleague says, the hackers and the slashers. I do remember the Filmon Fridays, the lack of consultation, and the centralizing of power away from the classroom and away from teachers. So, I guess, we're a little bit curious to see the Member for Springfield suddenly becoming the champion of the RTAM group.

The Tories had their chance. They didn't seem to be the friends of teachers. If I recall correctly, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps my memory is a little faded over the years, but I do believe, what I recall, that the Tory governments were always at war with teachers and with nurses. I don't ever remember there being any peace. That certainly isn't the case of this particular government.

But, as I said before, if the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) wants to be the champion of retired teachers, that is very nice of him. There are a number of retired teachers on the benches of the government side. They know what's good for teachers and they will certainly stand up, both for active and for retired teachers.

Let's take a look at what some of my honourable colleagues have already mentioned earlier. First of all, our position, our government's position, is the Teachers' Pension Task Force, which is made up of teacher pension stakeholders, including this government, has recommended a plan that would give retired teachers up to two-thirds COLA over the next 10 years. This, to me, seems like a reasonable plan. MTS has consented to this plan, has agreed that this is a good plan. We want to follow through with this plan. It's kind of interesting to find out that, during the election campaign, RTAM seemed to be onside with this plan. They seemed to agree that this was a very good plan, indeed, two-thirds COLA over 10 years.

Now we know that actuarial analysts estimated that providing two-thirds COLA would cost somewhere between \$100 million and \$130 million over the next 10 years. What the Tories would have provided under their idea, under their plan, would have been about a fifth of that. So that didn't seem like a very good deal for teachers.

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

Point of Order

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

Mr. Schuler: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could you canvass the House to see if there is leave to send this bill to committee?

Mr. Speaker: No, that's against the rules, because we haven't got to second reading, we haven't completed second reading.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Flin Flon has the floor.

Mr. Jennissen: Mr. Speaker, we made a \$1.5-billion contribution to the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund, TRAF, in 2007. That has to be a major step forward. That didn't happen under a Tory government.

*(11:00)

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

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 4—Midwifery Training

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 11 a.m., we will now do resolutions. I am going to call forward Resolution 4, Midwifery Training.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I move, seconded by the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat), that

WHEREAS the NDP government has broken its 2007 provincial election promise to enhance midwifery training in Manitoba even though midwives throughout history have been community experts in providing knowledge, skill, guidance and support to women through pregnancy, labour and birth; and

WHEREAS the World Health Organization recognizes midwives internationally as specialists in normal childbirth; and

WHEREAS the Progressive Conservative government passed The Midwifery Act in 1997 thereby enshrining the right to practise midwifery in Manitoba in law and establishing midwifery as a regulated profession through creation of the Manitoba College of Midwives; and

WHEREAS the demand for midwives in Manitoba far outstrips the services which the current supply of midwives is able to provide; and

WHEREAS according to the Manitoba Midwifery Action Group in the regional health authorities that offer midwifery care more than 50 percent of the women are turned away due to the shortage of midwives; and

WHEREAS there are less than three dozen practising midwives in Manitoba and only six of Manitoba's eleven regional health authorities offer midwifery services; and

WHEREAS the only institutional-based midwifery training program available in Manitoba is the Aboriginal Midwifery Education Program through the University College of the North; and

WHEREAS our province needs a university- or college-based midwifery training program in southern Manitoba; and

WHEREAS this NDP government cancelled a midwifery program developed for the University of Manitoba in 1999; and

WHEREAS this NDP government has done little to increase the supply of midwives in Manitoba even though the Society of Gynecologists and Obstetricians foresees 34 percent of its members retiring within the next five years.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider creating a university- or college-based midwifery program in Winnipeg; and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider acknowledging the need to do more to meet the growing demands for midwifery and to consider providing women with greater choice in the type of care they would like throughout their pregnancy, labour and birth.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Member for Charleswood, (Mrs. Driedger), seconded by the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat)

WHEREAS the NDP—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mrs. Driedger: I will try as quickly as I can to put comments on the record in such a short period of time. We have been pressing this government to do something about midwifery for quite some time. We have a severe shortage of midwives in Manitoba. According to the experts out there, they're saying we need 200 in order to meet the needs of Manitobans. At this stage, we only have somewhere in three dozen range and that is not nearly enough to meet the needs of Manitobans.

All of the work for midwifery was done in the '90s. The frontline workers, the midwives that were out there, the educators in this area, all the stakeholders came together and they did all of the hard legwork in the '90s. It came to fruition through legislation that was passed in 1999. From there came the development of a program at the University of Manitoba. That program was put together by, again, the experts. That program was approved by the senate of University of Manitoba. Then when this government came into government, they shelved that program, and it is sitting there, fully developed,

collecting dust. They had an opportunity for almost 10 years now to bring that forward if they truly believed and embraced midwifery in Manitoba. Instead, they haven't done anything to it.

Mr. Speaker, I did ask the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford), probably in Estimates last year, why she didn't move this program forward, and the Minister of Advanced Education said it was because they didn't have enough money. Well, that is a lame excuse. We know that, because no government in Manitoba history has ever had the kind of money that this government has had, and it's a matter of whether or not they believed in midwifery and embraced it rather than using a lame excuse that there was no money. They had the money if they wanted to do it.

It's interesting, over the last number of years that this government has been in government, the number of times they've tried to take credit for everything about midwifery is pretty astounding and pretty offensive when they have done nothing to embrace it until they've been pushed, and they've totally ignored the work of the front-line people that have been the ones pushing this issue. They have continued to ignore the pleas of front-line workers.

A report on maternity care in Manitoba was presented to this government a number of years ago and front-line workers were so distressed that nothing was happening, despite the distressing information that was in that document, that two years after this government had received it, these front-line workers leaked a report to us saying that maternity care in Manitoba was in crisis, and it's the front-line workers, Mr. Speaker, that have been saying that.

We have been their messenger bringing their message forward, and we have tried very, very hard to get this minister to act on that report. Instead, what this minister did when that report came out, this leaked report that talked about the horrible statistics in Manitoba with low birth rates, with still rates, with teen pregnancies, this government sat on information that should have alarmed them, and they did nothing with it. That's why nurses came forward to us and said, you've got to get this government to do something.

What did this government do when we leaked that report? They had a knee-jerk reaction. That was a ministerial task force that put that report together, that talked about the shortage of midwives and the seriousness of it.

What did this minister do when a ministerial report came to her, a task force report? She struck another ministerial task force to look at the work of the first task force and promised that last fall that work and recommendations would have been done. Where is that? They didn't even start meeting till a short while ago.

We asked the minister in February for a progress report on where all of this was, and the minister couldn't be bothered to respond until this week, knowing that this resolution was being brought forward. Knowing that there's growing concern out there, I'm surprised she didn't react a lot sooner, and it became, in my view, government playing politics with the issue, that instead of taking this issue and working with it and embracing it and doing what was right for Manitobans, they played politics with this issue all along.

They want to build a birthing centre in south Winnipeg. Where are they going to get the midwives to do that? We can't train them here. We have a training program in the north that this government has so mismanaged, a wonderful program, but because we don't have enough midwives to mentor those students, they can't train the number of students they said they were going to train. They were going to take in 10 students at the beginning and five students every year after. They can't do that now. They've only taken in their first group, and because of a lack of midwives to mentor these students, there is no more intake until 2010.

This government should have known that, because we don't have enough midwives in Manitoba. You don't have to be a neurosurgeon to figure out these numbers, that it just won't work with what this government was doing. So what this government has done is they've played politics with this whole issue and put forward a lot of rhetoric and a lot of talk and very little action that is substantive to fix the issue.

*(11:10)

That program at the University of Manitoba, I'm told by the front lines, is a very, very good program, and it could have easily been brought in a long time ago. Instead of doing that they didn't do it. They seem to be dragging their heels on this whole issue, and what I don't understand is why they don't want to listen to midwives and to mothers and fathers.

I attended an event this winter and it was a blistering cold night, and we filled a theatre, all of us

that were there. It was so cold. All of these moms came with babies bundled up, and dads came. They came to watch a Ricki Lake movie about the birth of a child through midwifery. They had a panel to talk about it. They also launched a card, which I'm sure the minister must be getting, since that night, talking about Manitoba's need for more midwives and the fact that over 50 percent of families that want a midwife can't get one. That, in fact, they are turned away.

Half of the RHAs in Manitoba don't have midwives. They don't seem to want to have a midwifery program in their regions. So only six out of the 11 health authorities even have midwives available in their region. This speaks to the lack of leadership, I believe, from this government that has not taken this issue seriously and moved it along. I hope that they, at some point, look at this and realize they have to do more. But it seems a shame that they ignore this for so long and allow it to build into such a problem.

I don't know what the minister doesn't understand about front-line workers, nurses, midwives, doctors who are saying that maternity care in Manitoba is in crisis. I'm the messenger, but this government likes to shoot the messenger more often than they like to do the right thing and listen to the experts. I have been a target of that by this government where the messenger is often shot by this government for trying to bring to their attention some of the red flags that are out there.

We've certainly seen a lot of people that have been affected by this government when they bring forward an issue and we want to bring forward what is a crisis out there. When front-line people are telling us it's a crisis and what this government does is they shoot the messenger instead and then they turn it all into politics rather than doing the right thing. In this case, the right thing would have been to listen to the midwives, to listen to the families, to listen to the parents and move forward a long time ago. But, I guess as they said, when's the next best time to plant a tree? If the government hasn't done it for almost 10 years, I guess, we still have an opportunity to try to move this forward.

The NDP will say that our resolution has errors in it. Mr. Speaker, that resolution has absolutely no errors in it. That information has all been vetted with the communities. That information is well known and accurate to everybody on the front lines. I just encourage this government to take this resolution,

approve it today, move forward without playing any more politics with this and set up an education training program in southern Manitoba. In the meantime, in order to get more midwives, buy some seats in other provinces so that we can get more midwives trained here in Manitoba to service the people that want that program.

So I urge the minister to pay close attention to what this resolution says and to move forward and do the right thing.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I appreciate the opportunity to stand in the House today to speak in concert with the opposition, all members of the House, about the importance of midwifery for our moms, our babies and our families.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask for the opportunity, because we do support a number of the ideas the member has put forward, there are regrettably some inaccuracies, and as the member opposite says herself, the playing of politics in certain issues is not to be applauded, and to that end, in making this a non-partisan thoughtful discourse on the subject of midwifery, I would propose some friendly amendments to the resolution to come forward for the consideration of the House.

Mr. Speaker: I have to interject here for a second because our normal practices, our normal practice in Manitoba has been when an amendment is moved for resolution, that the Speaker would take it under advisement, and then the debate would continue on the resolution as is. But if the House is willing to listen to the honourable minister's, as you call it, friendly amendment, and then if the House decides to adopt it, I will allow that. Otherwise, I will take it under advisement.

So is the House willing to—because she has the right to move it, but what happens after, then I decide. If it's a friendly amendment that the House agrees to, I will allow the House to adopt it. Otherwise, I will take it under advisement, and we will continue with the debate as is on that resolution. Is that clear?

Okay, so we will allow the Minister of Health to move her amendment to the resolution, if she wishes.

Ms. Oswald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Therefore, I move, seconded by the Member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard), that the following

changes and adaptations be made to the resolution, to change the first WHEREAS so that it now reads:

WHEREAS midwives throughout history have been community experts in providing knowledge, skill, guidance and support to women through pregnancy, labour and birth;

And to amend the third WHEREAS so that it now reads:

WHEREAS The Midwifery Act was passed in 1997 and proclaimed in 2000, thereby enshrining the right to practise midwifery in Manitoba in law and establishing midwifery as a regulated profession through the creation of the Manitoba College of Midwives;

To delete the ninth WHEREAS, which reads:

WHEREAS this NDP government cancelled a midwifery program developed for the University of Manitoba in 1999;

Because it's just factually inaccurate.

To replace the tenth WHEREAS with the following:

WHEREAS the number of funded midwife positions has grown from zero in 2000 to 34 today in urban, rural and northern Manitoba;

I can provide copies of the amendments as appropriate.

Mr. Speaker: What is the will of the House? Is it the will of the House to adopt the amendment?

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, I really want to see this program move forward.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I need to be able to hear this, please.

Mrs. Driedger: I received these amendments at 11 o'clock when I walked in the door, and that's the first time. This minister has had my letter since February, didn't respond to it until this week, and, in fact, now I walked in the door and I'm handed some amendments.

I think there are some of them that, if we have a chance to look at them and have a chance to see what this government has done, we may be able to move forward with them, but this minister has just put forward an inaccuracy in one of her amendments.

Mr. Speaker: All I am asking of the House—I don't want to get into a debate here. All I am asking for, is

there leave of the House to adopt the amendment?
Yes or no?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No, okay. There is no will to move it.

So if the honourable Minister of Health is moving an amendment, then I will make a ruling on that amendment. If you move it as amendment to the resolution then I will make my ruling. But the willingness of the House to adopt the amendment has been denied.

Or the minister can speak to the resolution as is.

Ms. Oswald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will continue in the name of non-partisan discourse on this really important subject to move those amendments for clarification purposes and allow you to make your ruling, and then seek my opportunity to continue my speech after your ruling.

Mr. Speaker: There seems to be a slight separation here. It might benefit the House if we recess for five minutes and let the minister and the mover of the motion go to the loge and discuss this, in five minutes, and then we can come back and deal with it. I think that would be the best, for now.

So is there a willingness of the House to recess for five minutes? *[Agreed]*

Okay, the House will recess for five minutes.

* (11:20)

The House recessed at 11:20 a.m.

The House resumed at 11:27 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

I need to hear this, please.

Ms. Oswald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've had a meeting of the minds and have come to a compromise, as I understand it. If I can re-insert the No. 9 WHEREAS, but have it read as follows:

WHEREAS a midwifery program was proposed for the University of Manitoba in 1999.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Order. So, with adding that resolve, is the House in agreement of adopting the amendment? *[Agreed]*

It has been agreed to, so we will now speak to the resolution as amended, and the honourable Minister of Health has the floor.

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, hearing the sounds of children in the gallery today, really it's what a lot of us work for, Mr. Speaker, and that is to have representation from all people of Manitoba. There was a time, once upon a time, when we wouldn't have heard such sounds and we wouldn't have had such debates about the importance of maternal care. So while some people may find it a little bit jarring to hear that sound this morning, I think it's musical. I thank the member opposite for bringing this issue forward because it is indeed a very important one to the people of Manitoba.

Members across the House may have issues about when it's time to be partisan and when it's not time to be partisan, and I know, Mr. Speaker, that great things have been achieved from all sides of the House, when we can come together, you know, in unison in our thinking. I know that the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), for example, came to me some months ago, maybe over a year ago, with a passionate concept and with a very thoughtful constituent, speaking on the issue of colorectal cancer screening, in partnership, also, with the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson). Through, really, non-partisan discussions I think that we were able to work together—no backbiting—to come forward to be the second province in Canada to announce a colorectal cancer screening program and, in fact, the first province in Canada to actually have that program on the ground.

* (11:30)

I concur that there are times for partisan jousting and there are times for not. I acknowledge all members of the House for making these amendments so that we can speak together to support this amendment—this resolution, pardon me, Mr. Speaker—as amended.

We know that we recognized the importance of midwifery back in 2000 in proclaiming the act that members opposite brought forward in 1997. We know that midwives in Manitoba are real heroes. They're in very high demand. We know that they are, indeed, being asked to perform their duties as expertly as they do in all regions of the province.

We know that they are bringing care closer to home in places like The Pas, in southeastern Manitoba where in these regions up to 30 percent of

births are, indeed, tended by midwives. They've come to us, all members of the House, saying we're working hard. They're doing a great job but they need more help and that's exactly what we've committed to do.

In the last election, of course, we came forward, committing to expand midwifery support and education. We're still not quite into the first year of our mandate, and we know we have work to do. The number of women receiving care by midwives has, in fact, doubled since 2000, and we anticipate with our spectacular population growth in Manitoba that that's going to grow to be even larger.

Since 2000, Mr. Speaker, over 5,000 babies have been delivered by midwives in Manitoba. One of the things that doesn't often get told is that, where some families may choose in those final days and weeks not to pursue a delivery with a midwife for whatever reasons, the credit needs to be given for the midwives who have been on that journey with expectant mothers and their families.

I know that was certainly the case in my family two and a half years ago—is it that long already?—where a final decision to have what we might define as a traditional birth was the way that my family went but, having a friend and a confidante that was a midwife that was able to, quite literally, be there at all hours of the night in those frightening times and in the very bright light of day in the not-so-frightening times, being able to offer good counsel to a new expectant mom, it's something really that it is impossible to put a dollar sign on.

So I want to salute the midwives of Manitoba and want to commit to them today, as we did during the election, that we're going to work very diligently to expand their opportunities, to expand their ranks so that they don't have to do that thing that they wish not to do, and that is to turn an inquiring mother away.

We know that planning is underway for a new, south-end birthing centre that will be, certainly, led and directed by the voices and the thoughts of midwives, and we are going to ensure that we work diligently with them. We know that we've taken very strong advice from the midwife community about developing and partnering and funding prior learning and experience assessments, particularly in the case of internationally educated midwives, Mr. Speaker. We need to do more to help them help each other in building our ranks.

We have taken some additional time today in making these amendments so I'll leave my remarks at that but, to say to all members of this House and to say to the midwives we have present in the gallery today and to midwives that, frankly, were too busy to come today but are supporting the families of Manitoba, we really appreciate the work that you're doing, that we are committed to work and expand education and supports because it's right for our families to have choices, and it's right to midwives to have that support. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to stand and speak on my colleague's resolution and the amended resolution that will, I hope, be voted on before the end of the hour this morning.

Mr. Speaker, I just would like to, at the outset, welcome those in the gallery, the moms and the children from the Manitoba Midwifery Action Group who really deserve the credit for pushing and moving the issue of midwifery and the need for more midwives in the province of Manitoba. I understand that some travelled from outside the city in not great conditions today to be here with us, so I just want to say thanks to you. As a result of some of your hard work and efforts, we are seeing a resolution that I hope spurs the government on to making the kinds of changes that need to be made and to move the midwifery program forward.

I just want to start by saying that, at the turn of the century, my grandmother on my mother's side, a teacher, came out to marry a man just outside of Brandon in Chater, Manitoba, where my family had homesteaded. She was the midwife for the area at the time. We know that there were no doctors available in some of those rural communities. She travelled many times in the middle of winter by horse and buggy to homes to deliver babies. I remember listening to her and hearing her stories about how difficult conditions were at the time.

We certainly would never want to go back to those kinds of conditions, I wouldn't even want to go back to the days when I had children and raised my family. In those days, just some 30 years ago or so, we all had obstetricians and specialists that we went to and we saw during our pregnancy and usually they were the ones that delivered our children.

Things have changed in the last generation. I have a daughter that delivered her first baby just 2 years ago now. She searched long and hard for a

midwife to support her and to help her. Women today don't go to obstetricians when they become pregnant. Very often they choose their family doctor as the primary physician of care and would like the support of a midwife to help through that process of pregnancy, labour, delivery and aftercare. Midwives certainly do provide that very positive option for families today. Very much more so are the men involved in the whole process of pregnancy, labour, delivery and certainly, in aftercare.

She went to the doctor. She went to our local River East Health Access Centre and asked whether a midwife might be available for her. To her dismay and to her family's dismay, her husband also, there was no midwife available to support them through that very important and special time in their lives.

It really made me think. Over a decade ago, all of the work was put in place to move forward on a midwifery program that would try to serve the needs of young families. To my dismay today, some 11 years later, we still don't see much of an option or an opportunity for many families to have that option available to them. I would think when the groundwork and the legwork was done over a decade ago, that we should have moved forward much more significantly and had an opportunity for more families to have access and availability of midwives when they need them. That's what families are choosing today. That's what families are wanting.

I would hope that the government would take the issue extremely seriously and move forward in a very aggressive way. I would say from the year 2000 to the year 2008 we have 34 midwives in the province of Manitoba. The government would say, well that's significant, in the year 2000 we didn't have any, today we have 34. Well, 34 to me certainly is not enough to deal with the families that are in need of midwifery support.

There is a lot more work to do. I'm hopeful that this resolution that's on the table will spur the government to move a little more aggressively to try to get the support services in place for families.

I would just like to say also, Mr. Speaker, that it was a delight for me to become a grandmother for the very first time, just two years ago in June.

* (11:40)

There was another disturbing instance that happened for my daughter, her husband and our family when she delivered her baby in the St. Boniface Hospital. The birthing process was

absolutely marvellous, a great experience for her and her husband, and we had an expectant grandmother sitting in the waiting room waiting anxiously to find out whether we had a healthy, happy baby and what sex that baby might be, because it was their choice not to know ahead of time whether it was a boy or a girl. We have a wonderful, almost two-year-old granddaughter who is just—and for any of you that aren't grandparents in this room, you will know, some day *[interjection]* No. Many of you are new parents, but I just wanted to say to you that there is that very, very special feeling that no one can ever explain to you and how precious and how important it is to see that next generation of life be born into your family. It's something that, unless you've experienced, you will never know the kind of feeling grandparents do have at the birth, especially of their first grandchild.

But the birthing room and the support services for my daughter and her family were great. The only problem was that after delivery she had to be placed in a two-bed room with another woman for the night before she could go home the next day. As a result of that, her husband was not able to stay with her as they had wished so that he could be part of that first-night process. It was because they wouldn't allow a male to stay in a room where there were two women occupying that room. As a result, and I suppose it was a blessing for me, I had the opportunity to stay with my daughter for that first night.

But you know, it was really sad to know, when you have families today, that really, really both husband and wife want to be a part of the birthing process in such a significant way that they're not able to as a result of not having adequate facilities in our health institutions to make that happen. So what was a great experience for me, certainly wasn't a great experience for them as a family. I had a very frustrated son-in-law as a result of that.

So I just, at this point in time, would like to say to the government, let's get on with it. Let's listen to the petition campaign, the cards that were started and have been filled out by many that say we need more mid-wives in the province of Manitoba. Many, many families who are wanting that option and that choice are being denied today. Let's make it happen and let's make it happen as quickly as possible.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, I'd like to advise the House that we'll

be sitting in Estimates tomorrow morning, Friday, April 25. Mr. Speaker, would you please canvass the House to see if there's agreement to change the Estimates sequence so that in the Committee Room 254, the Estimates of Infrastructure and Transportation are set aside, with the Estimates for the Department of Justice to be considered on Thursday, Friday and Monday.

Also, in Room 255, the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives are set aside, with the Department of Finance to be considered for Thursday, Friday and Monday.

Mr. Speaker: To advise the House that the House will be sitting in Estimates tomorrow morning, Friday, April 25. Also, is there agreement to change the Estimates sequence so that in Committee Room 254 the Estimates of Infrastructure and Transportation are set aside with the Estimates for the Department of Justice to be considered on Thursday, Friday and Monday? Also, in Room 255, the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives are set aside, with the Department of Finance to be considered for Thursday, Friday and Monday.

Is there agreement? [*Agreed*]

* * *

Mr. Speaker: We will resume the debate on the resolution.

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to the very important issue of midwifery. I want to thank the members of the opposition for agreeing to some amendments that make it possible for us to have a reasoned discussion about this resolution.

Certainly, the acceptance of midwifery and the funding of midwifery and the availability of midwifery to women and families in the province has been a very, very long struggle. I want to just speak for a moment personally about my involvement in that struggle. I, as most people, I think, born in the '70s, was born in a hospital. As I grew up and became a young woman, I certainly had no idea that there was any other option but hospital birth with doctors and specialists available. It really wasn't until I became involved in the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women and met midwives who were practising and who were practising at a time when certainly the legal status of that practice was a question.

They were practising at a time, I think, with great courage and at a time when midwifery was not funded. To have a midwife meant that either you had to find some way to pay her or that midwives provided that service really as a labour of love to women. So, by meeting midwives and talking to them and understanding their perspective of putting women at the centre of the birth experience and looking at birth as a normal part of life, not as a disease, not as a sickness, not as something that necessarily required great medical intervention, it was a tremendous education for me. Certainly I just want to briefly mention one of the midwives that helped me come to that understanding. It's a woman named Meghan Moon who lived in Brandon when I lived there who I recently had the chance to reconnect with, and who is now one of the teachers and mentors in the Aboriginal Midwifery Education Program and is working in the north with the community, working in the north with the Aboriginal community on how to make midwifery services more available.

I think it's important. I think other members have commented that really no government has led the fight for midwifery care in this province. It has always been the community that's led that fight. It's always been midwives that have led that fight and the women that they helped and the families that they have helped that led that fight. I am proud that we have funded midwives in this province. Certainly I was happy the former government put forward a bill that allowed for midwifery and I am very proud that our government has midwives.

Is that to say there are enough? No, I don't think anybody in the House would say that there's yet enough, that the job is yet done in providing midwifery services. I am very proud of our Aboriginal midwifery training program which has been internationally recognized. I know that today there are people in the gallery, I don't know if they're still here, who fought very hard for the establishment of that program.

I think when you are born in a city, when you're born in a capital city like Winnipeg, when you're born in any city, you become accustomed to getting your needs met first. You, without question, believe that you can go to university in the same city in which you were born and live at home with your family in order to save costs. You take for granted that you can get the kind of medical care that you need in the same city that you live, that receiving medical care will not mean a long drive and staying

away from home. I think when you live in cities you take for granted that you will be able to have your children in the same city where you live, in the same city where hopefully you have an extended family who can share in the celebration of that event and who can help support you through that.

But that is not the experience in the north, Mr. Speaker. The experience in the north for many women is that they have to leave their home communities, often weeks before they're scheduled or hoping to give birth. They have to move to cities like Thompson, they have to come to cities like Winnipeg. Often they have to do that alone and wait to have their child far away from the people that they love.

I think the opportunity and the effort to ensure that we have midwives in the north, that we have trained Aboriginal midwives who are available to provide services to those communities, mean that we are going to hopefully repatriate birth to the communities where women live. I think that's a tremendously important goal for our government and tremendously difficult to meet.

I also just want to recognize for a moment women and midwives like Darlene Birch who also is part of the Aboriginal Midwifery Education Program. Yes, absolutely. She was recently recognized in the planning and the events and a booklet that was put out by the Status of women on International Women's Day that talked about the women that inspire all of us, the women who have worked tirelessly for justice for other women who have often worked without acclaim, without glory, often without pay to make the lives of all women better.

* (11:50)

I also want to speak for a moment about the innovations that our government has committed to and is following through on. One of those, of course, being the first ever birthing centre in this province. I was very privileged to be working as the executive director at the Women's Health Clinic during the time that that proposal came together, was very privileged to be part of those discussions. I have to say, in that time and it continues on, both the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and Manitoba Health were extremely willing and eager partners at the table to have those discussions. They both have played a very important role in moving forward that project.

All projects and everything the government does they start from a vision. They start from a dream. Often they start from a vision that comes from the community and as you move through, you make changes to that dream. You make changes to that vision so that you can come at the end of the day with a project and a facility that is going to work for women, that is going to work for children in our province. I look forward to cutting the ribbon at that birth centre and I know it's going to happen. I know it's going to happen. I have no doubt about that.

I was also pleased to be part of the consultations about the new women's hospital that the government has committed to building. In those consultations we heard yet again from women how important the birth experience is. That's a point that was also driven home to me when I attended, as the MLA for Charleswood did, the evening where we watched the film *The Business of Being Born*, and heard again from women, woman after woman after woman, the importance of having a positive birth experience.

So I just want to say in conclusion that I expect and I hope that the community of midwives and women will continue to advocate for the needs of women and I know that they will continue to find a willing and open partner in this government. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this resolution as amended and to provide from a Liberal perspective the reasons that we support the midwifery program, college- or university-based program, that can move forward and help in the care of mothers and children before, during, and after the delivery process.

Midwives have historically played a very important role with mothers and with young children in making sure that there is a good transition, women becoming mothers, and through the pregnancy, at the time of delivery, and then particularly in the weeks and days and months after delivery in making sure that the children get off to a really strong start.

So it makes sense to support this resolution from our perspective and it makes sense that we are moving forward in including midwives more and more. It's a larger but integral part of the whole health-care team. Midwives have played an important role and one of the reasons why it makes sense to have a university- or college-based midwifery program is the ability to have the program linked closely to other health-care programs.

There are many times when deliveries can occur in the community but the ability to do that clearly is dependent on identifying when a delivery is high-risk and being able to deal with that with a health-care team and make sure that risks are minimized and benefits are maximized for mothers and for children.

It makes sense at a stressful time in a woman's life when they're having a child to do that in the most comforting and convenient atmosphere that they can have. It makes sense to have people around them who they've developed a good relationship with, midwives, and it makes sense to support, thus this resolution and move this province forward in a responsible way and make sure that this midwifery program moves forward.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. We're pleased to support this resolution and hope that it will get unanimous support in the Legislature.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I just want to put a few comments on the record in regard to the motion that's been brought forward by the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

I know I have a number of constituents in my area that have asked for midwifery services and certainly been very supportive of that. I had one constituent that actually came to the city of Winnipeg, took out a residence within the city limits in order to obtain those services. Once those services were established, then she moved back to the rural area. We find that unfortunate that they have to play the game in rural Manitoba in order to get those services provided. When I heard about it, I was outraged and disgusted that we in rural Manitoba are often overlooked. Those services are very important to us in rural Manitoba in order to have those options available for us.

We know that stress has been placed on rural Manitoba doctors and nurses, and this is some way some of that stress can be relieved. Unfortunately, what we have found as a result of that, a number of doctors have, in fact, been overworked. A number of our children are now born in Winnipeg. They've lost that opportunity. We also have St. Laurent, one of our most heavily populated Métis residences in my constituency in St. Laurent. A number of those people there like the midwifery services which, unfortunately, are not available to them in a timely manner as well.

So, we know that it's very important. We know it's a service that's required and certainly encourage all members of the House to see this motion does,

indeed, pass and make sure that all those services are available to all Manitobans in a very timely way.

Mr. Speaker, we know, as we move forward on all resolutions as they come forward in the House, that any must be brought forward in a timely manner. I'm glad our member from this side of the House, the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), saw fit to take the amendments that made this motion that much better. We know that, in fact, this motion should be carried here in the House today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the members opposite for this resolution. It's something we will support, and I will personally support because of the beautiful experience my family, my friends and many, many generations ago, including one or two generations ago, they were all attended to by midwives.

However, I'd like to call the attention of the honourable Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), when she mentioned that she was a messenger and she was often shot; here, we shoot messengers, please don't say that. It is not at all comparable to what's happening in the old country right now. Mr. Speaker, the visitor you attended to two weeks ago, who's an opposition member from the old country, members of his party are being killed because they're opposing the bad governments, they are opposing graft and corruption because they are the advocates for the marginalized people of that country.

Having said that, I'm very happy with our government because this is the government that put the first Midwifery Education Program in the north where it's much-needed. I believe this government will continue to support the midwives. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is the resolution on midwifery training, as amended.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the resolution, as amended? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Chomiak: Insofar as it's 15 seconds to 12, would you perhaps call it 12 o'clock?

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it 12 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 24, 2008

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