

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

**Official Report**  
**(Hansard)**

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Thirty-Ninth Legislature**

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Tuesday, June 3, 2008**

**The House met at 10 a.m.**

*PRAYER*

**ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**House Business**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Speaker, I believe, if you canvass the House, there would be leave to do a short debate on Bill 231 and then we'll move to Bill 233, which is The Jordan's Principle Implementation Act.

**Mr. Speaker:** Just for clarification, the honourable Member for River Heights had mentioned 231.

**Mr. Gerrard:** 232 and then 233.

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay, 232 and then 233. Is there agreement of the House? [*Agreed*]

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade):** Yes, that's been agreed.

**Introduction of Guests**

**Mr. Speaker:** Before we proceed, I just want to draw attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us from Keewatin Tribal Council, Grand Chief Arnold Ouskan, and we have MKO Grand Chief Sidney Garrioch.

Also in the public gallery from Morris School we have 50 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Candy Burton. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu).

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you all here today.

**SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS**

**Bill 232—The Public Schools Amendment Act  
(Anaphylaxis Policies)**

**Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale):** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady), that Bill 232, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Anaphylaxis Policies); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques (politiques

sur l'anaphylaxie), now be read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Selby:** I think this is a really important issue and I'm very proud that the anaphylactic network of Manitoba brought this issue to me and asked me to move forward on it. I met with the group, led by one of my constituents, Krista Wiebe, pretty soon after last year's election. She has a young son with life-threatening allergies and has told me the difficulty of every day when she drops her young son off at nursery school or day care or even to play with a friend, how she always wonders, is this going to be the day that she's going to get the call that he's come in contact with a nut product and has had to use his EpiPen and is rushed to the hospital and perhaps something even worse, being that it's an anaphylactic allergy.

Ms. Wiebe and her husband met with me and talked about the fact that their son is going to be starting school soon, and they're even more concerned that, as he's on his own and learning to be independent, what will that mean when it comes to his allergies. I have to say that before they talked to me about this problem, of course, I recognized that an anaphylactic allergy is a serious situation, but I have to say, having three children with no allergies, it didn't really hit me how worrisome this must be for a parent, especially when that child is starting to go out on their own, whether it's to school or to friends' houses or to sleepovers, and that sort of thing.

The school that my children go to has a really good anaphylaxis policy in place. It's a school that doesn't allow peanuts, although we all know occasionally that sort of stuff gets through, but the teachers are really careful about checking everything in the kids' lunches and reading the packages, and making sure that us, as parents, know if we've accidentally packed something that has a trace of peanuts, because it can happen ever so easily. I know that the teachers at my children's school are well trained to respond to these kinds of situations and to recognize the signs that a child may be going into anaphylactic reaction.

So I sort of reassured Ms. Wiebe that, don't worry, your son is going to be in safe hands and teachers know what they're doing and most schools are pretty comfortable with this. But through different stories that the folks at the network told me about, they didn't feel that was consistent right across the board. They had some concern that some schools may not be as careful as other schools and that, in some cases perhaps, not everybody is as well informed as they should be as to how serious this situation is.

Now, I know, from a parent's point of view, when we hear about peanut bans and we hear about kids with food allergies, those of us who don't have children with allergies, we think, well, this just means it's going to be more difficult; I can't make a peanut butter sandwich, which is going to be a lot quicker to make, or I've got to remember to read all the labels.

Well, Ms. Wiebe and her husband made it very clear that they're not looking for a ban. This bill is not about banning anything. For one thing, there are so many different allergies, it would be impossible to ban every allergy, particularly food allergies that children in the school may be facing. But they're also concerned that banning is not the answer because it can give people a false sense of security. If you're quite confident that your child cannot possibly come into contact with peanuts, well, maybe you won't worry about educating them on the safety of avoiding it, or perhaps one day you might not pack their EpiPen with them, and that, definitely, is not a good situation.

So, instead of talking about banning any particular product, Ms. Wiebe talks about educating. Educating teachers to be aware of what the situation looks like when someone may be going into it. Educating caregivers and teachers about the importance of having that EpiPen nearby. It might not be suitable for all children to carry their EpiPen, depending on different behavioural situations, but that EpiPen can't be locked away in a cupboard somewhere. It's time is of an essence and we need to understand that that needs to be close.

This bill will not ban anything, but it will provide clarity. It will make people more aware of the situation. It will also make consistency so that parents across Manitoba, no matter what their child is facing, whether it's a milk allergy, a fish allergy or a nut allergy, will know that when their child goes to school, they are in good, capable hands and are in

safe practices, at least as safe as they would have at home.

\* (10:10)

I can't imagine how difficult it would be to drop off your child every day with a life-threatening allergy. I have a couple of friends who have one daughter with a nut allergy and one daughter with a milk allergy. I don't know what they cook in their house. I think it must be awfully complicated to do the groceries. I do know that they don't come to our house for dinner, because I don't quite feel safe enough in deciding what to cook when we've got the nut and the milk allergies. When we go to their house, it's kind of rude, but we don't bring anything as a hostess gift because, again, they don't like to bring anything into their home.

Just a couple of years ago, I found out that I have an anaphylactic allergy. I spoke with my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Wiebe about this and the fact that it made me really more aware of what it must be like to have a child with an allergy.

Sometimes an allergy can just come on. We had a particularly bad wasp season a couple of years ago. I got stung; the first time in my life I had been stung. I broke out in hives. Subsequent testing went on to realize that I have an anaphylactic allergy to wasps now and I carry an EpiPen.

I have to tell you, in that end of August time when the wasps are really wild and kind of aggressive out there, it makes me a little nervous; that is only and probably one-tenth of the nervousness I would feel if it was my child I was thinking about.

I really hope that everybody in the House supports this bill. I think it's a non-partisan important bill that can only ensure the safety of our children, the safety possibly of somebody that you know and love. As I said, it's not about a ban which is something that people sometimes get concerned about; they don't want to start banning this product and banning that product.

In the case of nuts, many schools have chosen to be nut-free, because it is one of the more dangerous allergies and the one that is one of the more-sensitive ones. Children with nut allergies don't even necessarily have to come in contact with peanuts. They may just breathe in the air. They may sit close to someone who had a peanut butter sandwich earlier.

This goes into the education. It's not just about educating the teachers of what an allergy means; it also is about educating the parents of children who don't have allergies. It's about educating children who don't have allergies.

I know at my school, every year at the beginning of the year, they talk about kids who may have different medical conditions, and the fact that this isn't something you tease somebody about. This isn't something that you make fun of somebody; this is something that you respect and understand that this child may need to have an insulin needle with them and may be diabetic. This child may carry an EpiPen, and it's not something to feel bad about.

The other thing they do in my children's school, which I'm happy to say that—should this bill pass—all children in Manitoba will get this sort of education, is they inform the children on how to recognize some of the signs. They have a little girl in their class who is diabetic, for instance. The kids know that, if she is starting to look tired, they are supposed to tell the teacher. They also know that they have some friends in class with peanut allergies.

I'll tell you, one day—and I'm very careful about trying to pack things that definitely don't have peanuts in them—I bought a new kind of granola bar or some kind of wrapped good. I hadn't bought that brand before and I guess I didn't read the package closely enough. The girls took it to school. Their teacher went through their snacks and, thankfully, at my children's school, the teachers do go through the snacks before they eat it and noticed trace of peanuts. Well, they didn't open that. They took it home, and I got a very long lecture from my daughters about packing a product that had a trace of peanuts.

I think that's another thing that this bill can do. As we're educating teachers who are educating their students, that's how the parents get educated.

I sat down and had a very stern lesson on: never buy that again; make sure you don't pack it; and why would you buy it without reading it. I have never bought that product again. I have learned my lesson. I was trying to be a conscientious parent and still slipped up, but thankfully, I had my daughters there to put me in my place.

I think that that's what we're talking about here, not expecting that no child will ever have a reaction. Let's hope that it doesn't happen at school. Let's hope that we are able to do that but, should something happen and should something go terribly wrong, I'd

like to know that every child in Manitoba can be safely assured and that their parents can feel safe, when they drop them off, that their child is in safe hands with people who know exactly what to do, should the worst situation ever happen.

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** I thank the Member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) for her comments.

I too have run into that situation myself where I've sent my kids to school and have had a very stern lecture from my kids. It's amazing what you can learn from your own children about what's actually in packaged products. They seem to know more than we do oftentimes and it's very important.

I do know very close friends of ours who did not realize that their son, in fact, had allergies; it was a peanut allergy which is, I think, one of the worst that you can have with respect to this. She got that alarming call from school, which is every parent's worst nightmare, when you're called out of the House or called away from work, and it's the school on the line. The ambulance was there and they had to rush him to the hospital.

I guess, because he came in contact with—I don't know if it was peanut butter or something at school that they were not aware that he was in fact allergic to. So they rushed him to the hospital. It was a very, very close call, and they were very, very lucky in the end that he did survive that. But now it absolutely alters the lives of these children or the lives of the families involved.

Allergies can be very, very serious. So a bill such as this is obviously one that we would support. The one thing about it, though, is I just sort of wonder because I know I do have a letter from ministers of Education, Family Services, and Health in the past. This is dated back to 2002, and it is with respect to anaphylaxis policy. It is made out to the superintendents of schools, students' services administrators, principals of independent schools, provincial child-care co-ordinators and licensed child-care facilities. I think I'll just read this out.

It says: As you may be aware, there has been a steady increase in the number of children diagnosed with life-threatening allergies—anaphylaxis. According to findings by the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, the estimated risk of anaphylaxis in the general population is 1 percent to 2 percent. Children can have potentially fatal

reactions to a host of allergens while attending community programs away from their parents.

In response to these findings, Mr. Speaker, the ministers responsible for the implementation of the Unified Referral and Intake System, Education, Training and Youth; Family Services and Housing; and Health are expecting that school divisions and licensed child-care facilities develop and implement local policies regarding life-threatening allergies. Policies should be aligned with the recommended anaphylaxis policy framework contained in the URIS policy and procedure manual dated June 1999.

It is the expectation of the departments that school divisions, child-care facilities and regional health authorities will work together to respond to the needs of children in their communities. It is anticipated that local policies will be in place by June 2004. To support school divisions and licensed child-care facilities in this endeavour, the ministries have established the position of anaphylaxis policy development facilitator who is a registered nurse, who was hired for a two-year term at the time to assist school divisions and licensed child-care facilities in developing these local policies.

This was signed by—again, this was in 2002—the Minister of Education, Training and Youth, the honourable Member for Brandon East at the time; Mr. Tim Sale, the Family Services and Housing Minister; and the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), who was the Minister of Health at the time. That was signed back in 2002 with a plan to help deal with this.

I think what's unfortunate is that obviously this was not dealt with back then. It's been seen as being a very serious issue for a long time, and I think obviously the fact that we need to bring forward this bill, it's unfortunate that it has to go to this stage.

But I think the Member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) has done a very good service for her constituents, for indeed all of us in Manitoba who have come in contact with this ourselves, with our constituents, with our family members, with loved ones. So I want to commend her for coming forward with this bill as it was something that was obviously seen by her own government back in 2002 as a very serious issue in Manitoba that, unfortunately, very little was done or followed up on at the time. So, very rightly, the Member for Southdale is bringing this bill forward, and we want to thank her for that and certainly are supportive of this, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster):** Mr. Speaker, I would move, seconded by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), that debate be adjourned.

*Motion agreed to.*

\* (10:20)

### **Bill 233—The Jordan's Principle Implementation Act**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster that Bill 233, The Jordan's Principle Implementation Act; Loi sur la mise en oeuvre du principe de Jordan, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, the story of Jordan Anderson, who was from Norway House, has been a remarkable story. Jordan was born in 1999. At the age of about three he was ready to go home from the Children's Hospital. He had multiple medical issues, but even though he was ready to go home, there was bickering between the federal and the provincial government over who was to pay for what, including the price of a showerhead, and, as a result, Jordan Anderson never got to go home. He died, sadly, in February of 2005.

Mr. Speaker, Jordan's story has been immortalized in the words of Trudy Lavallee, who wrote his story up in a pediatric journal, and she called for the implementation of Jordan's Principle, the principle that children should have the right to timely access to the health and social services they need regardless of the jurisdictional disputes, that children should be looked after first and given the services they need first and then governments can argue afterwards.

Mr. Speaker, that is a principle that we are trying to implement today. It's a very important principle. It is a principle which has been supported last December by a resolution passed unanimously in the House of Commons. It is a principle which is being increasingly supported by people across Canada because it is being realized that there are huge numbers of children in First Nations communities who are not getting the services that they should be getting.

Jordan's Principle is fundamentally about equality. It is about equality of services: that it shouldn't matter whether you're on a First Nations community, a reserve or whether you're in a

community nearby, that the services should be similar. We shouldn't have, in today's world, the kind of discriminatory situation which exists for so many children right now.

I would like to pay tribute to Trudy Lavallee, who is in the gallery, and I would like to pay tribute to former Grand Chief Dennis White Bird, and the reason is that Trudy Lavallee and Dennis White Bird went down to the Children's Hospital from time to time while Jordan was waiting to go back to his community of Norway House. They were able to visit with Jordan because they felt that he needed somebody there to visit with him.

Dennis White Bird, I believe, was the Grand Chief at that time and what a gesture that he made then. There is no doubt that Jordan should have been able to go home. There is no doubt that there are children now, perhaps as many as 2,500 in Manitoba, who are not getting the services they need because of this argument over jurisdictional disputes and because children in too many First Nations communities are not getting the quality of services that they should be getting.

I'd like to recognize also Cindy Blackstock, who is in the gallery today. She's the executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. She has travelled all the way from Ottawa because she believes this is so important that we act today to pass this on from second reading to committee stage so this bill can be moved forward and we can implement Jordan's Principle.

Cindy Blackstock had a major role in helping to organize the effort which led to the successful passage of the resolution last December in the House of Commons unanimously supporting Jordan's Principle.

This bill would implement Jordan's Principle and provide not only the legal rights for all children in Manitoba to get the services they need, but also the process for making sure it is getting implemented. We need, of course, the service delivery model that will allow us to be sure that the services are being delivered. Doreen Demast and Don Schackel presented last week at the conference on Jordan's Principle from Wednesday to Friday, and Don spoke and Doreen spoke eloquently at that conference about a model that they have already presented to federal and provincial governments which could be implemented.

For many of these children, it is not a huge expense. For some of them, it is. Some of them have very complex medical conditions, but others, it is much more simpler at making sure that children with disabilities are provided the kinds of services that they need.

We need to move to a supporting model where the services are provided in the home and the community, as they should be, wherever a child is in our wonderful province of Manitoba. The service delivery model that has been developed would probably cost about \$4,200 per child, about \$10 million for federal and provincial governments. If it could be divided, \$5 million each, or \$2,100 per child from the Province, and considering that when these services are not provided in this fashion, we end up often with huge hospital and other expenses, provincial expenses, that it is an investment which is worth making for these children federally and provincially.

The will needs to be there. There has been enough talking. I first raised the issue and my concerns about Jordan's Principle in December 2005 in this Legislature. At that time, the government said, oh, we support the rights of the child being first. But two-and-a-half years later, there are still discussions. There are still talks. It's time to end the lip-service. It's time to implement Jordan's Principle and make sure that the rights of children in Manitoba are there, they're enforceable legally, and that we move quickly for the service delivery model to actually make sure that it is there and that the services are provided and delivered when they are needed and where they are needed.

Today will determine, given the wonderful support of many people who have come out, often travelling long distances, not only from Ottawa but from northern Manitoba to emphasize the importance of supporting and passing Jordan's Principle.

We will see today whether the NDP government is ready to stand up and move this forward. It's been two and a half years of talk. It's time to end the talk. It's time to move this. Move it to committee and let's allow people to present and move this forward.

Last week at the Premiers' Conference, the Premier (Mr. Doer) is on record as supporting Jordan's Principle. Publicly, the Premier has said he supports Jordan's Principle. That's enough. It's time to pass Bill 233 and make sure Jordan's Principle is implemented. Thank you.

\* (10:30)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I remind our guests in the gallery that there is to be no participation and that includes applauding.

**Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living):** I'd like to welcome all the guests to the Manitoba Legislature, their building. I hope that the people in the gallery realize that we have come out numerous times in support of Jordan's Principle. The Premier (Mr. Doer), the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh), the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), and myself, as well as all of my caucus members, we've come forward and we've said we support Jordan's Principle.

We were the first province to approach the federal government and say let's talk. Let's start working on a solution together. Let's work with our First Nations communities. Let's work cross-jurisdiction, and let's work out a solution so that children dealing with medical, complex needs are getting the services that they require. There is no dispute about the services that are required to support these children and the importance of them being in their home communities surrounded by their loved ones.

It's really a tragedy what happened to Jordan and everybody will acknowledge that, but what we need to do is we need to learn; we need to learn about what happened and what are the solutions and how do we work together. What we're trying to do now is breaking new ground, very important ground, and we continue to need to collaborate with all three parties. First Nations communities, provincial government, and the federal government need to sit at the table and resolve this.

Before we go forward, though, we need to make sure that we have a dispute mechanism, that there's a way to ensure that the responsible government pays the bills. We need to ensure that those services are being provided. We have been encouraged recently by the federal government's comments, but up till that point, we have spent numbers of hours trying to engage the federal government in looking at a solution with us.

There have been a number of correspondences that have gone back and forth, but I'm excited and I'm hopeful, based on a meeting that federal and provincial officials held yesterday here in the province where they spoke about how we move forward. I agree. There's been lots of talking. It's now

time for action. We need to sit at the table, come up with resolutions about how we move forward. Part of that is looking at the dispute mechanism. Part of that looks at how do we define medically complex needs.

Mr. Speaker, another piece that needs to happen is how do we work cross-departmentally, not only cross-jurisdictionally but cross-departmentally, and ensure that we're providing those services in a co-ordinated approach. We have set new grounds in this province.

People are familiar with the story of Norway House and the 37 children who have been receiving services from that community. That community used the Northern Flood Agreement to fund services for their children. They saw it as a priority, and we need to celebrate that and congratulate them on that initiative that they did to provide those supports so children could remain in their homes, wrapped around with the supports that they needed to grow and to be nurtured by their families and their community and flourish.

Well, I'm proud to say that all three parties came together. We have INAC, we have Health Canada and the Province of Manitoba all contributing \$75,000 for a four-month pilot project. What we're going to do is we're going to provide those necessary services while we work with all the partners, provincially, federally, and the local First Nation, and look at how do we define these services and how do we ensure the quality of services that these children require.

Now, at the end of these four months, we hope that we will have a system developed that will continue but not only for Norway House. I'm hoping that, through this initiative, we're able to develop a template for Jordan's Principle that won't only be applied around Manitoba but will be seen across Canada as something that should be modelled after.

I've had the opportunity of speaking with western Health ministers and listening to them about where are they at with Jordan's Principle. As far as jurisdictions, we have taken it the furthest because of our ongoing relationships with our First Nations communities and our undying commitment to engage the federal government in having a resolution. I know that we continue to have a lot of work to do, but I'm confident, with all three parties sitting at the table together, that we're going to be able to take those actions that are so desperately needed and will do the memory of Jordan in a very positive way. We can learn from this.

The members across are chipping about pass the bill. Well, let me talk to you about the bill. I've spoken about actions. It's not a law we need, we need actions. Bill 233 talks about provincial jurisdiction. What we need to do is we need mechanisms that engage all partners. That's what we need to do. We need to ensure that people are taking the necessary actions. Is a law going to ensure that the federal government sits at the table with the First Nations communities and the Province? I say, you know, maybe there are other ways that we can engage them. We've seen Minister Clement come out and talk about how he supports Jordan's Principle and how he's prepared to work with Manitoba on finding a resolution as quickly as possible to ensure that First Nations children acquire the health and social services needs that they need around medically complex issues.

You know, I think we also have to look at the actions that have been taken, the actions that have been taken by First Nations communities that continue to advocate for Jordan's Principle. I've had the opportunity of being at the Aboriginal Health Summit, which was hosted here by our Premier (Mr. Doer), where people talked eloquently about the needs, the desires to have a resolution, and I carry that spirit with me every day as we talk about Jordan's Principle, as we talk about Aboriginal health needs across this country and specifically around Manitoba.

I've had the privilege of going to Norway House, of travelling to many east-side communities. We have a lot of work to do, but I'm confident, as we sit with all of our partners, First Nations, federal government, cross departments, that we can come up with that solution and that we can ensure that the quality of services for children diagnosed with complex medical needs are addressed. I think that we've made some progress with Norway House and more recently with the federal government's support of working with us. I know that there's a lot more work to do, but as I've stated, and I'll restate, I'm confident that together we can come up with a solution that meets everyone's needs and ensures that the responsible government pays the bills and, most importantly, the priority of this government is to ensure that the children receive the service that they require. Thank you.

**Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm pleased to put a few words on the record in support of Bill 233, The Jordan's Principle Implementation Act, and I want to thank the Member

for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), for bringing it forward. I also want to thank and welcome all of the guests in the gallery who felt passionate enough about this issue to come forward and spend a good part of the morning with us today to show their support for a bill that I think should become law. We support the Member for River Heights in bringing this forward.

Mr. Speaker, Jordan's Principle states that when a jurisdictional dispute arises over who is responsible for services for a First Nation child, the government with initial contact pays for the services without delay. If that government feels it is entitled to compensation from another level of government as a result of jurisdictional responsibility, they can seek to be reimbursed from that after the fact. Well, Mr. Speaker, Jordan was a boy from Norway House who was born in 1999 with a rare muscular disorder. As a result of this condition, Jordan was forced to spend the first two years of his life in hospital, and he was in a wheelchair on a ventilator and unable to speak.

As a mother, I would know that I would want to be near my son. I would want my son to be with his family. I would believe that it would be the most important healing for not only the child but for the family to be near your loved one when they're ill.

\*(10:40)

Following his second birthday, Jordan's condition improved and he became eligible for placement in a family home. The family would have been thrilled and excited; the community would have been thrilled and excited to have Jordan coming home. However, this possibility never materialized.

Manitoba and the federal government disputed costs associated with his move into his family care. They even argued over the cost of things that would have been minimal, things that would have improved his quality of life, like a \$30 shower head. Jordan died at the age of four, never having lived in his family home. The tragedy captured significant public and political attention and precipitated numerous demands for reform with an emphasis on care of first approach.

In December, 2007, Mr. Speaker, the federal government unanimously passed a private member's bill, supporting Jordan's Principle. Nearly 1,500 Canadian organizations have signed a declaration in support of Jordan's Principle; yet, despite that Jordan was from Norway House, the Manitoba government has not yet moved to formally implement a policy to

protect against a similar tragedy occurring again, again.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the leadership that MKO has shown on this issue. I want to thank them for the meetings that they have precipitated on this issue and educating me on the Jordan's Principle and the need for it. I want to congratulate the chief for Norway House in being passionate and pushing forward on this issue and ensuring that this issue stays front and centre.

In 1993, Awasis, a Child and Family Services agency for First Nations in northern Manitoba, became involved in examining the plight of northern First Nations children with lifelong, complex, medical needs. In 1994, MKO developed a steering committee to create a model that allowed First Nation families with disabilities to receive services. The model was presented to all levels of government and was not moved on.

From that came an 18-month agreement that was signed by Awasis for the establishment of children with lifelong, complex, medical needs. This pilot project took a total of 19 cases. They were brought forward, but the project was ended in 2001.

The minister spoke briefly about a pilot that is being introduced. I think, Mr. Speaker, a pilot was introduced, a pilot worked. I think that we need to bring in legislation and ensure that progress continues, because there are children that are looking for leadership from this government and are looking for the supports that they need to stay in their communities.

One of the major consequences that arise out of the government's failure to implement Jordan's Principle is that it leaves some Aboriginal families with no choice but to be placed in foster care. At least that way, these families believe that their children's medical needs are hopefully met and paid for.

Mr. Speaker, I find that extremely difficult, as a parent, to hear that families have to make that extremely tough and heartbreaking decision to put their children in care, so that their medical and social needs are being taken care of.

This is a huge problem. It breaks up families, places needless and enormous stress on an already overburdened Child and Family Services system and costs much more money than it would cost if Jordan's Principle was fully implemented. In fact,

some First Nations people have said that the result is similar to that of the old residential school system.

A recent report in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* said that the bickering of governments over the needs of children amounts to discrimination, pure and simple. Others have said that the practice is illegal and a clear contravention of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the United Nations Convention on the rights of children. In fact, the United Nations Convention on the rights of children is cited right in the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) has introduced legislation to make safety the first priority when making decisions about a child in care, but what about children who are in care? Surely, their right of access to medical and social services is integral in their safety. It is estimated that there are close to 1,000 First Nations children with severe disabilities who may not receive the services that they need.

Mr. Speaker, we need this bill to move forward. This side of the House support this bill, and I hope that the NDP government will join in supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill 233, The Jordan's Principle Implementation Act.

This bill establishes the right of children to have timely access to quality health care and social services regardless of jurisdictional disputes. It also recognizes the right of parents and guardians to receive information about the services for their children.

The background to this, as I think people here know, including visitors in the public gallery today, is very tragic because this principle is named after an individual, as we heard from the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard). Jordan Anderson was a member of Norway House Cree Nation, born there on October 22, 1999, with complex medical needs. In order for Jordan to receive services, his family had to place him in care under a voluntary placement agreement.

Mr. Speaker, in 2001 doctors decided that Jordan could be released from hospital provided that he remained close to the Health Sciences Centre. A medical foster home was located. The federal and provincial governments could not decide who would pay for Jordan's foster home care. Jordan passed away on February 2, 2005, in a Winnipeg hospital.

On May 18, 2007, the House of Commons unanimously voted for the Jordan's Principle bill to put children first, funding arrangements second.

We support Jordan's Principle. However making Jordan's Principle a reality in Manitoba requires a dispute mechanism to make sure that the federal and provincial governments can agree to immediately fund services on an interim basis, knowing that the responsible level of government will eventually be made to pay its bills, but there are problems with Bill 233.

A bill such as this will be very difficult to enforce when the core problem involves three levels of government, the federal, provincial and First Nations. This bill only applies to the provincial government and its agencies so we can have no effect, and it can have no effect on the federal government. This law is not the best instrument to be used in dealing with issues such as those underlying Jordan's Principle as resolution of the issues requires the commitment of three levels of government and only one of those can be influenced by a provincial or federal law.

Now, we have been taking action, and I'd like to put on the record what our government has been doing. We are encouraged by the federal government's sudden announcement to support the children in Norway House but have largely been disappointed by the foot dragging of the federal government when it comes to our work on the larger issue of Jordan's Principle.

For the past year when Manitoba officials have been greeted with delays by the federal government, our ministers of Family Services and Housing, Health and Healthy Living have written their federal counterparts requesting meetings to keep the process moving. For example, on November 20, 2007, Minister Mackintosh or, I should say, the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh) wrote the federal Minister Strahl, requesting a meeting. Strahl didn't respond.

On January 16, 2008, the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) and the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) in Manitoba wrote federal Minister Strahl reiterating the request to meet on Jordan's Principle. Strahl's office said, Minister Strahl is not available to meet with you at this time, and encouraged them to continue the very discussions with officials that had gone nowhere. Though it has taken almost a year, we are beginning to see progress in our negotiations with the federal government as

they have finally responded to our request for a meeting. Federal and provincial deputy ministers will be meeting to discuss Jordan's Principle on June 2. In June 2007, senior federal and provincial officials from Manitoba met in Winnipeg and agreed on a process to move ahead with discussions.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I've been in on some of this because I was substituting for our Minister of Family Services and Housing in a meeting in his office about a year ago, perhaps it was this one I referred to, with a representative of the federal government, Mr. Bruinooge.

On June 13, 2007, Manitoba became the first province to secure agreement from the federal government on a joint process to make Jordan's Principle a reality, and this was outlined in a *Winnipeg Free Press* article on October 23, 2007, quote: This summer the province and the federal government formed a joint committee to find a way to sort out the jurisdictional battles over who pays for the services of Aboriginal kids with disabilities.

Each level of government was to identify a lead official and then begin a process to establish protocols to implement Jordan's Principle. Within nine days Manitoba named its representative to the federal-provincial group on Jordan's Principle. Unfortunately, almost a year after negotiating this agreement last June, Health Canada, the lead federal department, has yet to assign a representative to move ahead on this most urgent issue.

\* (10:50)

After the June meeting, the Province was told that Health Canada wanted to wait until the work of the Intergovernmental Committee on First Nations Health subcommittee on disabilities was finished before meeting again on Jordan's Principle. This subcommittee finished its work earlier this year and although some follow-up is required, it is clearly at a stage where we can advance on Jordan's Principle.

This lack of action on the part of the federal officials is concerning considering that in December 2007 the Canadian Parliament unanimously adopted a private member's motion endorsing Jordan's Principle. In addition, in January 2008, the federal minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the minister of Health Canada issued a related joint statement which spoke out in support of motion 296, Jordan's Principle. The statement said: This government believes that the health and safety of all

children must always triumph over any issues of jurisdiction.

Unfortunately, Manitoba has seen little concrete action to date to support this statement from the federal government. Federal foot-dragging on this file stands in direct contradiction with the resolution in support of Jordan's Principle that was passed unanimously by all parties in Parliament on December 12, 2007. Also, the joint statement by federal minister Strahl and Clement, quote: "The health and safety of all children must always triumph over any issues of jurisdiction," and that was from a joint Health Canada, INAC press release December 12, 2007.

On May 8, 2008, the Auditor General of Canada noted that the federal government funding of First Nations child welfare agencies was inadequate. Her report on First Nations child welfare agencies found that, and I quote: The funding Indian and Northern Affairs Canada provides to First Nations child welfare agencies for operating child welfare services is not based on the actual cost of delivering those services. The formula dates from 1988. The use of the formula has led to inequalities—*[interjection]* Well, the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) asks what I think. Well, I think I can understand the frustrations of First Nations people, some of whom are here today, including in the Speaker's Gallery, when negotiating with the federal government. The Province of Manitoba shares a similar frustration because we have been at the table. We have named our representatives. We want to resolve this issue so that there's a funding formula in place, and the federal government is dragging its feet. We are there. We are at the table. I'm sure that First Nations people are there and at the table and willing to participate in this so that there's an end result that is going to benefit children.

That's where I stand on this. I'm happy to share my personal opinion—*[interjection]* Well, as I said, this bill is not going to solve these problems because it only applies to the provincial government. What we really need is a federal-provincial agreement that includes First Nations people so that we can get on with this and resolve it once and for all. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to make sure that members of the Chamber and members that have taken the time to come down here this morning are very clear in terms of what it is that we're attempting to do. I appreciate

the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) I know who also wanted to be able to speak on this issue, in particular in regard to the service models.

What we need to establish and make sure it's very clear is that the Conservative opposition, the Liberal Party both support the principle, the Jordan's Principle. In Ottawa, back in December of 2007, all political parties inside that legislative Chamber supported in the form of a resolution.

Here we are, the first time that I'm aware of, as a Legislature. We can take it one step further and pass a law supporting Jordan's Principle. The only stumbling block that we've run into is the minds of the New Democratic Party, Mr. Speaker. If the New Democrats truly believe in Jordan's Principle, they will allow this bill to be voted on today and allow it to be able to go into committee where members such as the people that are in the public gallery will be able to come forward and make presentation on what is a very important issue.

Let there be no doubt that politicians of all political stripes talk about the importance of children in the province of Manitoba. There is only today two parties inside this Chamber that are actually doing more than just talking. The Liberals and the Conservatives want to see this bill go to committee which would enable public presentation on a critically important issue. It's only the New Democrats, only the New Democrats that will not allow this bill to go to committee.

I say to the members of this New Democratic Party, shame. Shame on you for not recognizing a good piece of legislation. You have an opportunity here to allow this bill to go to committee. You can do something good for the children of our province. We're not talking about one or two or 10 or 20 or a hundred. We're talking a thousand-plus children that need legislation of this nature in order to protect their interests, Mr. Speaker, and that's what we're asking this government to do, is to acknowledge the importance of our children, not just give platitudes.

I listened to the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross). I only wish she would be listening to what else is being said inside this Chamber, or the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), Mr. Speaker. If it was an important enough issue to speak on, surely to goodness it should have been an important enough issue to, at the very least, listen to what other people have to say on this very important piece of legislation.

The essence, Mr. Speaker, is fairly simple. We have a child, back in 1999, that's in a hospital, that's unable to go back to his home environment in Norway House. Why? Not because we couldn't provide the health-care services. Because two levels of government couldn't figure out who's going to cover the cost.

I don't want to hear about the pathetic argument in terms of the service delivery model has to be established. There are examples of that, Mr. Speaker, that are there today. If the political will is there to stand up for our children, the service delivery model would be there. That's a copout of an excuse. The issue is, do you care about the children?

Let's get back to Jordan. He stayed in the hospital as opposed to going back into his community because of bafflegab, Mr. Speaker. Because the governments couldn't get their act together. Because of their failure, we have a child that died in a hospital as opposed to passing away in his home environment where he had the loving care of his community and guardians and so forth, parents and so on.

That's the sad story. We need to prevent stories of that nature from occurring in the future. That's what this bill is hoping to accomplish. You listen to, whether it's the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) or the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), Mr. Speaker, and you quickly understand why it is that things kind of get clogged up in talk. All they want to do is talk and talk: Well, we're negotiating here; we need to bring all the partners together.

This has nothing to do with that. We have the opportunity inside this Legislature by allowing this bill to be voted on and going to committee. There is nothing that prevents this bill from becoming law on June 12, with the exception of the New Democratic caucus.

I'm going to conclude my remarks because I'm hoping to see this bill pass, Mr. Speaker, and if it means that the government has more speakers, let's give the leave that will allow it to ultimately be passed into committee. For the sake of our children, I'm going to plead to the New Democratic caucus. It's time to put the children first in the province of Manitoba. I'm done in terms of hearing about the talk and talk. Action speaks louder than words. I ask and beg the government to allow this bill to go to committee. Thank you.

**Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to put a few words on record regarding Jordan's Principle. I, too, wish to welcome the many guests that we have in our gallery today, some of whom came a fair distance to be here today.

Jordan's Principle is an important issue and one that we support. There is nothing more dire than the illness of a child, and I can't imagine the stress and anxiety that parents and families go through when a child is critically ill.

Having friends whose child was struck with cancer, I have a small sense of what families go through when their child is sick, the desperation and the fear, and my friends lived in Winnipeg and had easy access and constant contact with their child. The process of dealing with the cancer took years. The treatments and the monitoring went—

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

\* (11:00)

The hour being 11 a.m.—

#### Point of Order

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

**Mr. Lamoureux:** On a point of order. The Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) is accusing of cheap partisan politics and saying that he, too, would like to be able to speak to this particular bill. In order to support what the Member for Thompson is talking about, we would be prepared to give leave to allow ongoing debate on this bill so that ultimately it could be passed if there's leave of the Chamber.

**Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs):** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I was somewhat frustrated because the member talked about talk and some of us would like to talk to this. Indeed, this will be coming up.

This is the way we deal with matters in private members' hour. This will be scheduled again, I believe, on Thursday. I think we should all agree we will debate this matter again. I feel very passionately about Jordan's Principle and I do wish to speak to it.

We have another motion coming up on housing. I feel passionate about the housing needs in our First Nations communities. My comment was about the member opposite trying to turn what I believe should be a consensus issue of all members of this House

into a partisan issue, because it's about time that we all took the politics out and put the interests of First Nations children first. That's something I fought for my entire political career, so I really resent the comments from the member opposite.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I wasn't clear on the honourable member's request from Inkster because, if you ask—[interjection] Order.

If you're asking for leave, it's usually directed to the issue and ask for leave, not debated or postamble or preamble. So I'm not clear if the honourable member was asking leave for me to put it to the House or not.

**Mr. Lamoureux:** I was asking actually if we could have leave to allow debate to continue on this bill.

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay, so, advice to all members in the future, if you're rising for leave, request to the Speaker for leave for the issue, not to debate because it gets very confusing for the Speaker. So the request is that I put the question to the House for leave. Is there leave to continue debate, because it's 11 o'clock and the House business at 11 o'clock, we usually go to resolutions. So what the member is requesting is leave to continue debate on the bill. Is there leave?

**Some Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Mr. Speaker:** No? It's been denied.

**Mr. Ashton:** Looking ahead to Thursday, I wonder if there might be leave to have this bill called first at private members' business on Thursday.

**Mr. Speaker:** For the advice of the honourable Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, that request will have to be proposed on Thursday because that's when we will be dealing with private members' bills again.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Speaker:** Right now, it's past 11 a.m. and our schedule says that we now move to resolutions. We will move to Resolution 13, National Housing Strategy.

## RESOLUTIONS

### Res. 13—National Housing Strategy

**Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona):** I move, seconded by the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) that

WHEREAS affordable housing is a basic human and social right of every individual; and

WHEREAS homelessness is a major social issue with reverberations on physical and mental health and well-being; and

WHEREAS rising costs of living have led to a significant housing need among not only low-income individuals and families, but also many middle-income individuals, students and young professionals; and

WHEREAS the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI) is a joint effort between the provincial government, the federal government and the City of Winnipeg to address homelessness, declining housing stock and the revitalization of Winnipeg's older neighbourhoods; and

WHEREAS since 2000, the WHHI partnership has committed over \$99 million to repair, rehabilitate or construct over 4,000 housing units as well as assist those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; and

WHEREAS a part of the provincial government's four-pillar, low-income housing strategy is HOMEWORKS!, a project which it has invested \$188 million in to prioritize inner-city revitalization with a focus on housing for refugees and immigrants, older Manitobans, the homeless, Aboriginals living in urban areas, and northern Manitobans; and

WHEREAS in 2007 the Throne Speech, a commitment was made under the Foundations pillar of the low-income housing strategy—

Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I made an error, an oversight, and forgot to indicate one clause. Perhaps I can start on the fifth WHEREAS.

WHEREAS since 2000, the WHHI partnership has committed over \$99 million to repair, rehabilitate, or construct over 4,000 housing units as well as assist those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; and

WHEREAS a part of the provincial government's four-pillar, low-income housing strategy is HOMEWORKS!, a project which has invested \$188 million into prioritized inner-city revitalization with a focus on housing for refugees and immigrants, older Manitobans, the homeless, Aboriginals living in urban areas, and northern Manitobans; and

WHEREAS HOMEWORKS! allocates a minimum of \$42 million to Een Dah Aung, Our Home, a program for Aboriginal off-reserve housing, and \$6 million to extend neighbourhood housing assistance for three years to support community-driven revitalization efforts in the designated neighbourhoods under the Neighbourhoods Alive! program; and

WHEREAS in the 2007 Throne Speech, a commitment was made under the Foundations pillar of the low-income housing strategy to construct new, affordable housing in urban centres across the province and to revitalize over 13,000 existing public housing units; and

WHEREAS, under the authority of Bill 21, 238 new housing units in the Spence and North Portage neighbourhoods were recently announced under the newly enacted Housing Development and Rehabilitation Fund which will direct MHRC profits from suburban developments towards revitalizing the inner-city neighbourhoods; and

WHEREAS the federal government has consistently cut back its housing policies and devolved responsibilities to provincial governments, resulting in higher rates of homelessness; and

WHEREAS provincial and territorial senior housing officials consider the lack of long-term, federal housing funding a top priority and continue to pressure the federal government to increase funding levels to address the need for new, affordable housing throughout the country; and

WHEREAS, despite the efforts of the provincial government, there is still clearly a great need for more affordable housing for lower-income Manitobans.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba support the efforts of the provincial government in continuing to construct supportive and affordable housing across the province and in revitalizing the existing units in order to help meet the demand for affordable housing for low-income Manitobans; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge the provincial government to work with other provinces to strongly urge the federal government to increase funding levels to address the very urgent need for new and affordable housing throughout the country.

**Mr. Speaker:** It's been moved by the honourable Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), seconded by the honourable Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale),

WHEREAS affordable housing—dispense?

**Some Honourable Members:** Dispense.

**Mr. Speaker:** Dispense.

**Mr. Reid:** This private member's resolution requests that this Legislative Assembly support the efforts of the provincial government in continuing to construct supportive and affordable housing across the province, and also in revitalizing existing housing units to help meet the demand for affordable housing for low-income Manitobans.

This PMR also requests that this Assembly urge the provincial government to work with other provinces to strongly urge the federal government to increase funding levels to address the very urgent need for new and affordable housing throughout our country. This resolution is not about assigning blame but is about all governments in Canada taking responsibility for social housing and homelessness by developing adequate and permanent housing programs, Mr. Speaker. Affordable housing is a basic human and social right of every individual living in our country

\* (11:10)

Homelessness is a major social issue and how it affects individuals' both physical and mental health and general well-being cannot be overstated, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, some four million Canadians are in need of quality, affordable housing and many of those are in Manitoba. In Manitoba, while I openly admit that there is still much work to do, we have committed to and have made improvements to the affordable housing stock in our province and have taken steps by helping low-income Manitobans pay for housing.

*Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Speaker, in the Chair*

In Manitoba, the latest numbers indicate that the poverty rate for Manitoba children living in single-mother families has plummeted some 63 percent from 1999 until 2006, the biggest reduction in Canada according to Statistics Canada.

The total number of Manitobans living in poverty also fell just under 15 percent from 1999 to 2006, and the current level now is some 11.4 percent. Still, Madam Acting Speaker, there is more work to do.

The number of children living in poverty overall dropped by 36 percent since 1999 when 19.3 percent of children lived in poverty versus today's 12.4 percent. Again, more work to do.

There has been much good progress made, but we still have more work to do. It is my sincere wish that no child in our province or in fact in our country should have to live in poverty, and so we continue to work towards those ends.

To this end, our provincial government has introduced an anti-poverty strategy that includes Rewarding Work, Family Choices and HOUSINGFirst, programs that substantially increase education and training funding, increase the minimum wage, plus other measures to ensure that everyone can take advantage of our strong and growing economy.

Good housing and a good job are the two best anti-poverty measures that any government can work towards. Our Rewarding Work program supports these efforts by helping people find meaningful employment and, since 1999, the number of Manitobans on welfare has dropped by some 12,500 people or some 18 percent. Since our Rewarding Work program commenced in 2007, the number of Manitobans on welfare has decreased a further 1,200 persons.

Perhaps since I have limited time today, I will encourage and leave it to others, perhaps my colleague, the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) and perhaps other members of this Chamber, to explain the details of our Rewarding Work program and our BUILDINGFoundations programs.

One of the greatest tragedies that we see in our society today is the deplorable state of housing in some of our First Nations communities. I've had and taken the opportunity to travel with many of my caucus colleagues to our northern communities as recently as this spring, and I observed what any family living in many of southern communities would be shocked to observe. The state of housing that our First Nations brothers and sisters and their families must endure, in some of the harshest weather conditions in our province, I think requires significant work towards addressing that particular condition.

This is not to say that all of our northern housing is in need because, in my observation, there are many areas with adequate housing in the sense of general condition of the housing stock.

I want to put into context some of my observations, as well, with respect to our local Winnipeg homelessness services and talk about the good work of one in particular, a community agency we have right here in the community of Winnipeg. On March 12 of this year, I and several of my caucus colleagues, including our Cabinet colleagues and including our Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh), had the opportunity to visit and tour Siloam Mission. We spoke with the Manitobans, men and women, who use the mission facilities, and I had the pleasure of meeting afterwards with staff for an informal sharing of information and advice.

I was very impressed with the work of Siloam Mission and the complete range of services that they offer to some of our most vulnerable Manitobans, being those who find themselves homeless for a variety of reasons. Siloam Mission offers sleeping accommodations for over a hundred Manitobans year-round and makes best efforts to accommodate others in special circumstances like our very cold winter months.

The in-house kitchen facilities provide hot meals for those in need. Also, there is a clothing service that both accepts clothing donations from Manitobans and distributes the gently used clothing to Siloam residents. In addition to the spotless, secure, sleeping quarters, Siloam offers support services for personal hygiene, job finding and is currently working on expanding its pre-employment and training support services to encourage our homeless Manitobans to take early steps to becoming self-supporting, independent Manitobans.

Included in the mission, I note a constructive recreation area where Siloam Mission residents engage in activities, such as painting and other forms of art that both express themselves and create. I was very impressed with the quality of the art which is a credit to both the talent of the individuals and to the Siloam guidance. Despite the state of mental and physical disabilities challenging many of Siloam residents, these individuals demonstrate that they possess very serious, artistic-impression skills, worthy of wide public support.

I would like to personally thank Miss Vicki Olatundun, the human resources manager for Siloam, whom I met on a previous visit. Miss Olatundun is passionate about Siloam Mission and its mandate, especially for those who use the services offered by the mission.

Homelessness for our less fortunate Canadians is society's responsibility. To this end, both our federal and provincial governments must make best efforts to ensure that all Canadians have adequate, affordable and supportive housing.

In 2005, I believe it was the then-federal government budget was amended to include an investment in affordable housing. This occurred during a minority Parliament which demonstrates that, even in minority parliaments, good things can happen. Unfortunately, this federal housing program is due to end in March of 2009. At this point in time, the federal government has not publicly expressed an intention to either extend the budget for social housing program, or to make an investment in social housing on a permanent partnership arrangement with the various provinces and territories.

While various provincial ministers of housing have expressed an interest in extending the program, including our own Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh), there have not been any PT meetings on social housing since 2005. The next provincial-territorial meetings are scheduled for August of next year, 2009, after the expiry of the current federal program.

This dire need for a provincial investment in social housing cannot wait and should not be allowed to expire by disinterested governments. I believe that society can and should make investments in affordable, supportive housing, or suffer the long-term consequences of societal unrest and, perhaps, other dire consequences. We cannot and we must not cocoon ourselves in pockets of security and affordability as this failure of policy, I believe, will lead to larger and more serious societal problems.

The Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative is a joint effort between the provincial government, the federal government and the City of Winnipeg. It is to address the homelessness and declining housing stock and the revitalization of Winnipeg's older neighbourhoods. I know many of us have some of these neighbourhoods in our own constituencies. I have portions that, as a part of my own community, need investments, both public and private, to rejuvenate the quality and condition of this housing stock.

Since 2000, this three-way partnership has invested some \$99 million to rehabilitate and repair or construct over 4,000 housing units as well as assist those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This is a good first step.

It is estimated that some 300,000 Canadians will experience homelessness annually for which a permanent national housing strategy is urgently needed. Many of those homeless, as I indicated, are here in Manitoba. It does not appear to be a priority, unfortunately, of our federal government, both current and past, to make investments in public affordable housing as the current program was an initiative of the federal opposition NDP—*[interjection]*

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick):** Order.

**Mr. Reid:** —and their insistence on inclusion in the federal budget.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick):** The member's time has expired.

**Mr. Reid:** Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker, for my opportunity to add comment.

**Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa):** Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I, too, would like to put some words on the record regarding the government's private member's resolution regarding national housing strategy.

I would first like to put on the record that it's rather interesting that the current government is going to be standing up on a resolution such as this, when it continually is on the record as passing the buck, blaming the federal government and asking for more federal dollars.

\* (11:20)

Their record on housing has not been positive, Madam Acting Speaker, and there are a number of examples, very recent examples, of scandals, misappropriated funds, housing units that are allowed to fall into such disarray that they are infiltrated with mould, bedbugs and ants. Under this government's watch, the Housing portfolio is in a mess.

I found it rather interesting the member opposite, near the end of his remarks, was indicating the federal government is not there for Housing initiatives. I find that rather interesting because I came across an announcement that was made in 2005, and it said: community pilot project to address housing needs in Grand Rapids area. I've been following that because I thought it was rather interesting that this government had big plans, big ideas. The pilot was supposed to bridge jurisdictions to address housing needs on and off reserve, and also, would talk about examining the existing

housing stock and the ultimate goal being the creation of longer term vision with skill training and capacity building. All sounds great, Madam Acting Speaker, however, that has pretty much fizzled.

Speaking to John Morrisseau and Nellie Morrisseau, elders within that community have said that the community is only seeing one-bedroom, single-family homes being built. Morrisseau has indicated, and these are his words, there's been a misuse of funds because the project does not relate to the need that there is in that community, Madam Acting Speaker.

So, you know, this, to me, seems to be the story of government. There seem to be announcements, like the one in 2005, and, what I find is, when an individual calls and indicates that it does not relate to the need that is there, obviously, this government is throwing dollars, building homes that are not meeting the needs of the community. These homes are one-bedroom homes. What we're hearing, and I know the government is hearing, is that a lot of communities in the north on First Nations have overcrowding in their homes. There is more than one child or family member. They're larger families that are living in these homes. There's overcrowding in two or three-bedroom homes, Madam Acting Speaker, so for them to be building one-bedroom, single-family homes in a community that is needing this government to pay attention to the needs of that community, in that providing a safe and a welcoming home are obviously being left to the wayside. So, for the government to be talking about responsible management of the Housing portfolio, I find it, you know, extremely ignorant to the needs of the communities, not only in the north, but in the south.

But I'll speak to the critic area that I represent in Northern Affairs, and meeting with different groups and individuals, different families in these communities, meeting with individuals like Reg Meade, who have indicated that housing is a simple problem to rectify: build housing that reflects the needs of the community. Manitoba is saying that they don't have enough funding.

Well, Madam Acting Speaker, build what the people need. A local approach is needed in helping ensure that the housing stock is taken care of. I believe Wabowden is an excellent example, and it should be looked at as an example that should be followed by this government. They do their own simple housing repairs, like fixing doorbells and ensuring that the house is getting the attention that it

needs. I believe that, you know, the president of NACC has a great idea. Engage the local community and let them do what is needed for those homes.

In meeting with the City of Thompson recently, comments made were that there's a real challenge with affordable housing in that city. Comments made by one of the councillors were the Province has policies related to housing that aren't suitable for the north. Funding for up to \$500,000 is available, but it costs a hundred thousand dollars to pour the slab. So there has to be better discussion, better dialogue with the communities. Another comment made by the councillors from the City of Thompson was a lot of announcements are made, but the programs aren't working.

So, Madam Acting Speaker, I think that the government needs to provide supports for the municipalities and the communities, both on and off reserve, and acknowledge the differences that these communities are sharing

MKO has put forward a proposal for an off-reserve housing management committee with the Province of Manitoba, MKO, SCO and the Métis Federation. Their mandate is to promote the construction of new homes, the repair and modernization of existing homes and improvement of homes and living conditions through effective application of the off-reserve housing trust and private-public sector initiatives and communities in Manitoba.

They believe that this will be achieved by facilitating the delivery, administration and effective usage of off-reserve housing resources, both physical and human.

Madam Acting Speaker, they've provided terms of reference. They provide rules and procedures. They've indicated that they want to be a part of the solution, and I believe that this type of a strategy or a policy is something that the government needs to be paying attention to.

I'm hearing from these organizations that they are not being listened to and that their ideas are not being considered as valuable, and I believe that these individuals do know what's best for their communities when it comes to off-reserve housing. I believe that they have put forward a strategy that I think needs to be considered by this government. So I think that this resolution has provided me an opportunity to put things on the record with regard to the challenges that are facing communities. I do

know that in the communities that I represent the housing stock is not to the standard that Manitobans deserve or should be living in. On my street alone, Madam Acting Speaker, I have three low-rental homes on my street and I do know that it is known that this housing stock has a lot of repairs that are required. I believe that these individuals who are living in these homes are doing the best they can with what they have, and I believe that these homes are not the only homes in Manitoba that are facing major repairs and need this government to pay attention to it.

I guess, in closing, Madam Acting Speaker, we have seen this government, NDP government, being incapable of managing the Housing portfolio, and under their watch, money has gone missing, mismanaged, misspent and homes are substandard in terms of health and safety and the issues of homelessness have not been improved or resolved. It's time for this government to stop passing the buck, stop blaming Ottawa and start taking responsibility for providing affordable, accessible and safe housing for low-income Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

**Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington):** I'm pleased to say a few words in support of the private member's bill of my esteemed colleague, the MLA for Transcona (Mr. Reid), and I'm also pleased to share with you the wonderful experience I had last Friday when I was asked to speak on behalf of the provincial government at the housing announcement. The Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation is building 10 single-family affordable homes in the Centennial neighbourhood, which happens to be in my constituency. Madam Acting Speaker, the homes to be built on Alexander Avenue and Pacific Avenue will be for sale to low- to moderate-income first-time homebuyers who are eligible to receive homebuyer down payment assistance or HDP.

*Mr. Speaker in the Chair*

I inquired from Menno Peters, the general manager of WHRC how people could apply for new houses in the area and he told me, because of the assistance from the Province, the federal and city governments, eligible first-time homebuyers will be provided the down payment. So, in effect, if the cost of the housing is \$140, for them the cost, because of the assistance, will be about 85,000 and it will be paid through the regular monthly mortgage. And that is, indeed, truly affordable. For someone who had—it's everyone's dream to be in his or her own home no

matter how modest the structure is, and these homes are small by the standards that some members of this Chamber might consider, but they're decent, they're brand new, and they're affordable, and it would be a mansion for first-time, low-income home buyers.

\* (11:30)

There's so much joy and pride to be owning a home, especially if it's their first home, and so I could see the joy from the faces of the community leaders who were there last Friday because they were instrumental in putting through this plan. It didn't take overnight for them to come up with this project and they had to go through several channels from the three levels of government, but what fulfilment and what a joy for them that finally this project came into fruition, and for now, 10 families, maybe new to the area or they may be existing renters from the area, will be able to own their first home.

This government is really keen in assisting low-income Manitobans in finding not only their first homes but also in getting employment so they could afford the mortgage required for their new homes. The Rewarding Work program is a good housing and good—good housing and a good job are the two best anti-poverty measures in the Rewarding Work. Since 2007, when the Rewarding Work was announced—the Rewarding Work started in 2007—is a four-year strategy to help low-income working families and move more people from welfare to work. Again, whatever work so long it's honest; there's dignity in whatever kind of honest work, and Rewarding Work is exactly what this is all about.

The program includes the only provincial child-benefit program in western Canada. It increased earning exemptions for 4,200 Manitobans on assistance. Mr. Speaker, it also provides new training and education programs for up to 1,100 welfare recipients. It also has a new job seekers allowance to help single, non-disabled adults and childless couples participating in an employment plan. Also 27.6 million was committed last year and an additional 4.3 million investment was announced this month, and it will help persons with disabilities, single parents and other low-income people, by providing support in three key areas including more assistance with the cost of housing.

Some of the measures relating to housing include increasing shelter rates for non-disabled single adults on assistance from \$271 to \$285 per month. Along with couples without children, they will receive up to \$35 a month directly from the

Manitoba Shelter Benefit for a total increase of \$49 per month or 18 percent.

Regarding rooming houses, the rooming house rates—assistance was increased by \$84 per month from 236 to 285 per month, plus an additional \$35 directly from the Manitoba Shelter Benefit, a total of 36 percent increase.

Introducing the Rewarding Work rent allowance, a new \$50 per month benefit helps non-disabled single adults and couples without children pay their rent after they leave assistance for work. Others who leave assistance can receive Manitoba Shelter Benefits. The benefit will be provided for up to one year, and eligible recipients will receive it in the month that they leave welfare.

Research shows that having a stable place to live provides an important foundation for health, success and work, and the first 10 families in the Pacific and Alexander avenues under the new program in that community will feel this sense or this realization of stability once they move to their new homes.

A part of the provincial government's four-pillar low-income housing strategy is HOUSINGFirst, a project which has invested \$188 million to prioritize inner-city revitalization with a focus on housing for refugees and immigrants, older Manitobans, the homeless, Aboriginals living in urban areas, and northern Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, when I was doing the house-to-house campaigning last year, over a good number of home-owners I spoke to, when I was telling them about the programs of the government, agreed with me that of all the three parties, they depend or they consider the NDP as the party who will advocate for their needs, especially when it comes to housing and housing assistance. True enough, when I joined the caucus, I learned from our meetings and our announcements that indeed housing for low-income Manitobans is a priority of this government among other things.

HOUSINGFirst allocates a minimum of \$42 million for Aboriginal off-reserve housing and \$6 million to extend neighbourhood housing assistance for three years to support community-driven revitalization efforts in the designated neighbourhoods under the Neighbourhoods Alive! program. As the latest phase of our strategy, we announced today that we will be building, rehabilitating and repairing 1,366 housing units, and

Neighbourhoods Alive! expanded its operation. It's not only in Winnipeg but also in the rural areas.

We are proud that significant investments will be made in the housing for Aboriginal Manitobans in both urban communities and the north. This investment will also provide for a complete overhaul of our existing social housing. Manitobans deserve decent and safe housing.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

**Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose):** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and put a few words on the record regarding the National Housing Strategy resolution.

This once again appears to be a resolution that has the NDP government written all over it. It passes the buck and blames the federal government and asks for more federal money, totally ignoring the fact that fully very close to 40 percent of our budget in this province comes from the federal government, some of it uncommitted that they are allowed to spend anywhere they wish, and some of it in transfer payments that are directed toward housing. We think it's high time that this government showed some leadership and some accountability and accepted responsibility for their housing record.

That federal transfer and equalization payment, when we really stop and think about it at near 40 percent, literally pays for very close to the whole health expenditure in this province, which allows this province to use any of their other incomes, any of their other revenues to pay for all the other departments. That's a substantial amount of money that comes off the budget cost.

The NDP continue to blow their horn with announcements about meetings and consultations and how much money they're putting into this or that or something else, but never see the results. They're not results oriented. They don't check. If the money goes out, it's got to be better. We spent this; we spent that; then it's just got to improve when you spend the money.

\* (11:40)

My own constituency, I have a small 55 plus, I believe it's a 12-unit, at Crane River. That 55-plus facility is not handicapped accessible, really makes a lot of sense. In Neepawa, the—

**An Honourable Member:** When was it built?

**Mr. Briese:** A few years ago. The Yellowhead Manor in Neepawa is a 55-unit, 55 plus that has been outdated. There's been a movement to try and get it upgraded to accommodate people a little better. There are singles apartments and they're all full at the moment but some of them are full of 18- and 20-year-olds. Anybody that comes along manages to get in there. For the last three years, four years, they lobbied there about the wheelchair ramp which was—the concrete was breaking up.

So, lo and behold, they finally allocated money to repair the wheelchair ramp, repaired it, and immediately had to close it because nobody had bothered to check to see that it was at the right angles and they put it in too steep and it wasn't acceptable. Another several months passed and they finally came in and did get it at the right level and it's now open after two or three years.

That's the kind of thing we see, and I'm told by the people that are involved with the board at the Yellowhead Manor that every time they seem to get some kind of a working relationship with Manitoba Housing staff, the staff changes and they have to start all over again. The staff that is responsible there is based in Portage, and there's so much movement among staff, they can't develop a working relationship with the staff that they need to help them along when they need some work done in the complex.

This is, as I said earlier, very typical, passing the buck, we're blaming the feds, when there are all sorts of money coming into the province from the feds. Some of it that is the Province has the right to spend in any direction they want.

We continue to see a shortage of, as I was mentioning, the maintenance and infrastructure commitment and budget from the Province, not necessarily from the feds. In 2004, the Auditor General said, due to insufficient budget allocations, the condition of current housing stock in Manitoba Housing Authority is placed at risk. So the NDP government has put the housing stock at risk by frittering away money intended for maintenance and improvement, not investing in maintaining housing stocks we already have. Mr. Speaker, every time we turn around, there's another announcement and basically announcements that seem to head nowhere.

In August, 2006, a leaked briefing note revealed that an external firm would be hired to probe the management practices of Manitoba Housing Authority and the Manitoba Housing and Renewal

Corporation. By the way, I worked somewhat with both those organizations back when I was involved with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, and we had day-long conferences and all these wonderful things were going to happen. A year later, or two years later, we'd ask whatever became of that. Well, it had never got off the ground, and that seems to be the way the whole operation runs.

At that time, it was estimated that a review would take about six months to complete. Of course, the government had to extend the time lines for that review. It was finally released before Christmas last year, just before Christmas, so that no one would notice that they'd released it. In total, that report cost \$881,000, just about \$882,000. In my view that probably would have helped a little bit more being spent in the housing. The report made a number of findings, including:

There's overwhelming evidence of significant staff morale issues;

There's no long-term housing policy or strategy;

Poor inspection of maintenance processes contributing to deterioration of public housing stock;

In housing projects with higher vacancy rates, the Manitoba Housing Authority is competing with other social housing programs for tenants;

There's currently no preventative maintenance program in place, and that's what I referred to earlier; Mr. Speaker, it appears that there's still no preventative maintenance program in place;

The province's public housing stock is rapidly aging, with no plan in place to deal with it;

Building modernization and improvement inspections are currently being performed by individuals who may not possess the necessary skills for the task. Once again, I refer back to the wheelchair ramp at the Yellowhead Manor;

There's an overall departmental funding shortfall compared to budgeted requirements. Once again, apparently from what I hear on the other side of the House, it's the feds' fault;

When a unit becomes vacant, it takes a maintenance group approximately one month to make it ready for new occupancy;

Housing stock is relatively old and its condition has been deteriorating for some time without significant action;

There's an alarming disconnect between staff and management, and that's what I referred to when I said their staff turnover disconnect the people that are on the board in Neepawa that look after that facility. Every time they find out who they're suppose to be dealing with, the position changes and then they have to start at square one again;

There are four conflicting collective agreements, and that means some workers get paid more than others for, roughly, the same job.

The report made 52 recommendations for improvement. It appears that very few of them have been implemented.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's an understatement to say that this Department of Housing is in a total mess. The whole gist of this resolution appears to be to take the mess that this government is making of housing and pass the blame on to the federal government. I think it's high time they took responsibility for their own actions. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing):** Mr. Speaker, the issue at hand here is one that goes way beyond any local or partisan interest. What's before the Legislature this morning is a vital matter of national concern, and that is the expiry of most of the housing agreements that the federal government has been participating in over the last number of years.

This is a matter, Mr. Speaker, as I say, that goes beyond any partisan politics in this country. The provinces, whether they have incumbent administrations that are Conservative, Liberal, New Democratic or other, are terribly concerned and are united in sending a unison of demand to Ottawa, that we need, in this country, a national housing strategy. We need a robust strategy and we need assurances, on a timely basis, that the agreements will continue after March of 2009.

Not only is this a non-partisan matter that affects all of the provinces and territories of this country, and regarding which all are united in their approach, but I also note the involvement of many other organizations in the country that are concerned about the future of housing.

Most notably, this morning, I just want to note the role of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities that, of course, represents the elected officials at the municipal level. In a document that was produced called *Sustaining the Momentum: Recommendations*

*for a National Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness*, the FCM states the following: Since 2001, Canada's municipal, provincial, territorial and federal governments have worked together with private sector builders, landlords and community organizations on this issue. They have learned valuable lessons, strengthened their expertise, and achieved modest results. In the past five years, some 27,000 assisted housing units have been added to the existing 600,000 built under pre-1994 programs. A strong foundation has been laid. Now it is time to build on this foundation.

\* (11:50)

They go on to say this: The main impediment to expanding these efforts is the scheduled expiry of all federal social housing funding programs in March 2009. This will mean the termination of \$2 billion in funding available in the '07-09 period. At the same time, ongoing federal subsidies for existing social housing are already expiring, and in the next 10 years, annual spending on assisted housing will decline by an additional \$500 million.

Mr. Speaker, this is a concern, though, most importantly, to low-income, vulnerable Canadians. As members of this House know, in 1994, the federal government got out of the business of low-income housing supports. What we saw was devastation for some older neighbourhoods. In particular, for example, in some parts of Winnipeg, we saw a bottoming out of property values, Manitobans selling their property, sometimes giving them away for the cost of tax arrears.

Finally, in 2001, the federal government recognized that it was a terrible error to get out of social housing. It recognized as well, though, that there was a substantial leveraging of assistance from municipal and provincial governments as a result of the federal involvement. In other words, this is not about blaming Ottawa. This is not about saying that this is all Ottawa's responsibility. They have a role; they have a very important role. The cost of social housing is great, and we need the capacity of the national government to partner with provincial and local governments for affordable housing for low-income Canadians.

Now we look, for example, at the components of the strategy, if we can call it that, that is currently in place. Perhaps I should refer to what's in place as several housing initiatives that are supported by the federal government. In 1973, for example, the RRAP program, the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance

Program was commenced, and in December of '06 it was renewed with the \$256 million. That agreement expires in March of 2009.

That program has, on average, renovated 20,000 homes a year and, indeed, in Manitoba last year, the department advises that we've been able to renovate 722 homes. That's not just about renovation, though. It's about allowing homes for lower-income Manitobans to remain on the market; in other words, to allow them to continue to provide shelter and not be so run down that they are no longer available.

We cost-shared that program with the federal government. It's a vitally important program for many, many Manitobans and it must continue. Indeed, I would argue that that program should be made available to more Manitobans. There have been concerns about the very high threshold in terms of income and, as well, the way the program is available for certain projects.

In 2001, as I said, the Affordable Housing Initiative began and \$1 billion was committed to that to '07-08. Then in '06 we had the three trust funds from Ottawa distributed to the provinces and territories worth \$1.4 billion. Officially, those funds were earmarked to be available for three years.

In Manitoba here, with the HOMEWorks! initiative, those dollars, as a result of our partnership, can continue into 2010, but, Mr. Speaker, there is no indication whatsoever of any commitment beyond officially March '09 from Ottawa of contributions to making or constructing more affordable units. With HOMEWorks!, we have 104.5 million over three years. Last year, commitments were made in respect of, I'm advised, 316 new home constructions.

The other area is the homelessness partnering strategy. That runs, again, until March of '09. It's been estimated there are 150,000 homeless in Canada. I think they're one of the most visible indications of the housing problems that we experience here in this country. So, in December of '06, \$270 million over two years was committed, but, Mr. Speaker, it's critical that there be a commitment to extending that program beyond March of 2009.

We need sustainable funding for the existing social housing portfolio. These funds will be diminishing and will threaten the existing social housing stock that is out there, often stock that is managed by nonprofit organizations. Now it's the view of the provinces and territories, of the FCM and others, that the federal government must reinvest its

savings from the expiry of subsidy agreements to preserve the existing social housing assets, which have an estimated \$100-billion replacement value.

Then we come to the issue of the dire need for housing on reserve and off reserve for Aboriginal Canadians. Yes, indeed, we have a trust fund, Mr. Speaker, but I understand that Minister Solberg is not interested in specifying Aboriginal off-reserve housing amounts. But for on-reserve housing, it is not just a national but an international disgrace. Kelowna looked at this. The Assembly of First Nations has looked at this and significant investments are needed. For all those reasons, we should all be united in demanding that the federal government send an early signal that it is prepared to extend these agreements and have a national housing strategy for the benefit of all Canadians.

**Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris):** Mr. Speaker, I did want to put a few words on the record about the resolution brought forward by the member. We do know that the Housing portfolio under the NDP has been quite blatantly mismanaged since they took office in 1999.

We do know that the Social Housing Agreement that was signed between the federal government and the provincial government allotted funds that were to be for the maintenance and improvement of social housing stock, and that was to last until the year 2031. What we saw under the former member for Fort Rouge was, in around 2002-2003, there was some peculiar accounting in the Department of Housing and income assistance. It's peculiar because at that particular time it didn't appear that the money was being spent for the maintenance and improvement of the housing stock. For years after that, there was a decrease in the amount of monies, in fact, to the point where, now, the government is finding that they don't have enough money to maintain the maintenance and the infrastructure of the social housing stock here in Manitoba, and it's primarily due to their mismanagement of the funds that were provided from the federal government.

Now we do see at this point unprecedented amounts of money coming from the federal government, millions and billions of dollars more, Mr. Speaker. Yet they still always want to point the finger at Ottawa and blame Ottawa for their inability to manage not only the Department of Housing and the social housing stock in this province, but it just seems that across every portfolio they want to blame the federal government. It just seems to be, blame

Ottawa. It's some kind of mantra that they've developed.

We could speak about the Aiyawin Corporation where \$2 million, again, it went to this organization. The money was misspent on—I guess you would call it nepotism, where money was given to family members to do projects that were not completed. There were board members that drew large amounts of money out of the Aiyawin stock of money, even

though they were to be volunteers. We saw that this government let that go on. They let it go on for some time. In fact, nothing was improving there and they weren't doing anything about it.

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

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

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 3, 2008

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