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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 28, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade, on House business?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Pursuant to rule 31(8), I am announcing the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable Member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun). The title of the resolution is Affordable Seniors Housing.

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be the one put forward by the honourable Member for Rossmere, and the title of the resolution is Affordable Seniors Housing.

* * *

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I think, if you canvass the House, it would be okay to, with leave, go directly to Bill 205. I believe there would be leave to go straight to 205.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for us to go directly to 205? [*Agreed*]

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 205—The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I would move, seconded by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), that Bill 205, The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I think the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) put it best when I heard him say the word "again." Yes, this is indeed another bill that is before us, and it is being brought back because I think the New Democrats have overlooked good ideas. This is one of those ideas

that can really make a difference in the province of Manitoba. As much as possible, we would ask that the government, as opposed to talking the bill out, allow the bill to go to committee where we can actually hear representations from the public.

I can tell members opposite that if, in fact, they did see it in their wisdom to allow the bill to go to committee, a vast majority of Manitobans would support this particular idea. This idea has the support from the Conservative official opposition. In fact, it was a number of years ago that Jack Reimer brought forward a resolution talking about the issue of milk. I must say—and Raven Thundersky, who is with us in the public gallery, first raised the issue with me a number of years ago. I believe it was over at the McDonald's restaurant where she came by and kind of explained her thoughts on this particular bill.

Mr. Speaker, it was really a pleasure for me, on behalf of the Liberal Party, to sponsor Bill 205. I think that the government is underestimating when a Manitoban brings forward an idea and tries to get support for that bill to pass, or at least to be heard, the government is doing a disservice by continuously not allowing an idea such as this to advance to the next level.

So I guess the strongest appeal that I would give to the government today is, as opposed to talking the bill out, allow the bill to go to committee stage. What has the government got to lose by allowing it to go to committee where members of the public would be afforded the opportunity to express what their thoughts are in terms of having a set price for milk. We need to realize that in Manitoba today, no matter where you are in the province, you will pay the same price for a bottle of beer. Yet, on the other hand, when it comes to milk, the milk price fluctuates. There is a minimum price, but it fluctuates, and it fluctuates greatly.

A few years ago I received an e-mail from northern Manitoba which commented in terms of some of the costs for milk. Berens River was \$9.99 for a four-litre 2 percent; Norway House, \$4.95 for a four-litre; Sherridon, \$5.05 for a four-litre; Crane River, \$4.75; Dallas-Red Rose, \$4.49 to \$5 for four-litres; Barrows, \$7; Pelican Rapids, \$6.50; Island Lakes, \$12.14. Whether it's Thompson, Flin Flon, you will find that the price of milk is considerably

higher in areas that I would suggest to you, quite often, where there is more of a social need to ensure that our children are in fact drinking milk. Quite often it is for the families that can least afford it that we're really trying to make milk that much more affordable.

There are a number of food categories that would be wonderful to see at a substantially cheaper price than they actually are, but this is an area in terms of milk that the government can play a leading role in saying that, you know, the children in Manitoba, no matter where they happen to live, are going to be having the opportunity to afford milk. There is great social benefit, there are great health benefits, and we need to realize that.

Manitoba regional longitude health survey was done a number of years ago, and I thought it was interesting. I want just to read parts of that survey outcome in which it indicated that half of all adults reported that they worry that their food supply will run out before there is money to buy more. A third ate cheaper foods or ate the same foods for several days in a row because there was not enough money or food. Twenty-nine percent have skipped meals or have even eaten less than they should because there was not enough money for the food. Twenty-two percent have gone hungry because there was not enough food in the House. A third indicated that they or family members in their household had received food from a relative because there was not enough money for food. Over half ran out of money to pay bills or did not have enough money to buy clothes or other necessities. Nearly half of all the adults were dependent on the income of family members, and the same percentage reported that other people not living with them relied on their household for income. Overall, 46 percent of adults have found it difficult to manage on the income they have available.

* (10:10)

Mr. Speaker, quite often, I would argue, if there is a substitute that is substantially less in cost, that substitute is what is chosen over milk, the reason being it has become a cost issue.

I could go all the way back—I can recall Sharon Carstairs back in the late '80s talking about the importance of milk. I don't know if it was the '88 or the '90 campaign where she was arguing that it's just not right that a two litre of Coca Cola is cheaper than milk when milk is what is necessary for children for a multitude of different health reasons.

I do believe that this is an issue that has been there for so many years, yet I don't quite understand the arguments and the logic being used to oppose this bill or doing something on this very important issue. Where there is a political will there is a way. Let there be no doubt that the Manitoba Liberal Party believes that this is something that can and should be done. That is the reason why we have introduced this bill in the past and will continue to do so into the future, if the government continues to ignore this very important issue.

We even had one incident where the Member for Wellington stood up and indicated: Well, they could always eat cheese. I think it was Cheez Whiz was the suggestion. You know, I think there is a lot of misinformation that is out there, that we need to deal with this issue in a more serious fashion. That is why I suspect, if the government was to open its collective mind to the idea of having the bill at least advance to the committee stage, we would then allow many individuals, in particular social advocates, to be able to come before the committee and express their thoughts and their ideas on the issue.

The Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) will no doubt stand up and she'll gloat at, wonders as to why it is that we don't necessarily need to go in this direction, and she will talk about some of the things this government has been able to do, but, at the bottom line, and this is the absolute bottom line, and that is, we set one price for a bottle of beer, and we can do the same thing for milk across the province of Manitoba.

Manitobans as a whole support this initiative. I do not understand why the government continues to stonewall this issue. I believe that many Manitobans are prepared to make this more of an issue going into elections. Even though the NDP might like to believe that they own northern Manitoba because of their previous elections, you know, Mr. Speaker, I think it's that sort of arrogance and taking the voter for granted that ultimately is going to lead to the demise of the New Democrats, because you do see others that are reaching out and coming up with ideas that can really make a difference. We're talking about the children in the north and in many communities that need to see strong leadership coming from the government. The government, time and time again, has set themselves up for failure in dealing with good policy ideas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, I want to put on the record that this government cares about the health of all Manitobans. We invest significantly with our community partners around healthy food initiatives.

The member speaks about our commitment. He's voted time and time again against our budgets, which make those investments to the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative. This year alone there was \$400,000 that was placed for food security that will add to the work we've already done. We have a comprehensive approach that we're utilizing to promote and encourage the access of healthy foods across Manitoba and the support for traditional foods.

We can start with our prenatal benefit where supports are provided for women who are pregnant in First Nations communities and across Manitoba to be subsidized for milk. We also have the Healthy Baby program where we provide, again, supports for the purchasing of milk products for mothers and for young infants up to six months old.

This is just the beginning. This is our support in Manitoba. A baby is a baby is a baby. By starting these initiatives early on it can make a difference.

The Northern Healthy Foods Initiative is an interdepartmental initiative led by Aboriginal and Northern Affairs. It includes Manitoba Agriculture Rural Initiatives as well as Healthy Living. But the most important partner in all of the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative is our community partners, Four Arrows Regional Health Authority, the Bayline Regional Round Table, the Northern Association of Community Councils, and Frontier School Division. With these partners we have made a difference.

We can talk about how we have increased the local production of food for local consumption, the information that's being shared about nutritional foods, implementing strategies to lower the costs of healthy foods, as well as providing funding to these community groups to help leverage different initiatives. There are some strong examples about what we've been able to accomplish. Community gardens is one of them. We now have community members who are raising goats and chickens for the first time. We continue to work with our partners as we go forward, and we can see the impact and the community pride that has happened for these initiatives.

There are also other aspects that are happening, such as the freezers program, the canning programs

that are happening. There is a community pride that is happening, and, through that, the support for healthy foods. We have the school nutrition program which was a recommendation from Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures task force. Working with dieticians across Manitoba and Canada, we were able to come up with a *Manitoba School Nutrition Handbook* which provides information to parents and to youth around healthy foods.

As well, through the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba, there is a variety of supports that are provided for nourishment programs. We have a great example in Garden Hill. This is where they provide traditional foods for a lunch program, moose stew, pickerel. Also, in Garden Hill, it has to be mentioned about the initiative the community has taken. The principal of the school has passed a no-junk food policy in her school, which is embraced by parents and children alike.

We also have recently announced the program called Healthy Buddies. This is an exciting initiative that is happening in two First Nations communities and 18 other schools across Manitoba. We're piloting this program. This program is going to have older students mentoring younger students. Not only will it provide them with information about healthy living, but will, and, most importantly, provide those leadership skills which will help the individuals become the future leaders. Nutrition is an important component of the Healthy Buddies program, and I'm confident that as we go forward we will be able to ensure that that information and education is provided.

*(10:20)

I was very fortunate in the last year that I met a vice-president from the Northern store. He agreed, along with two First Nations communities, to have a pilot project at Lac Brochet and Tadoule Lake. What they did over the winter roads is they hauled in 50 healthy foods. In order to do that, though, band and council had to make a commitment and support the reduction of unhealthy foods off the trucks to support the long shelf life of the healthy food. The leadership of both of those communities embraced this idea. They see the value and the importance of it. We will look and see what happens as this year goes forward on the successfulness of this program.

I need to assure the members that our commitment to providing healthy foods does not waiver. We are continuing with the programs and the policies, as well as the important research about how

do we provide these products to First Nations communities.

We also have provided financial assistance through the clawback of the national child tax benefit. This puts more money into Manitobans' pockets in order for them to purchase more healthy foods. I know that as I've travelled through the north people talk about the pride in their communities. They talk about a future that they embrace. They talk about their interests in healthy communities. When we have those conversations, we talk holistically. We talk spiritual well-being, the physical well-being, the emotional well-being. Often, when I'm meeting with the leadership in the communities and they talk about that they feel and believe their community is healthy, I will say, so what is happening in your community? What makes your community different than others? They will talk about their commitment to traditional eating, eating off the land, and see that as an important aspect of their healthy living initiative.

So we need to make sure, as policy makers and as leaders in the province of Manitoba, when we are talking about healthy food, that we respect the traditions of the First Nations people, and that we support that and we encourage it to the best of our ability.

I know there is the Aboriginal food guide that has been developed that highlights the traditional foods, which is extremely important.

So, with those few words, I hope that this can clear up members opposites' question about the commitment of this government to the health of all Manitobans and our commitment to ensuring that healthy foods are available across Manitoba.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to put a few words on the record with regard to Bill 205, The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act. I want to congratulate the Member for Inkster for his gumption to continue to bring this bill forward. I think it's an excellent bill, and I think it plays an integral part in what would be considered a healthy foods strategy.

In 2004, Jack Reimer, a former member of this Legislature, had brought in a resolution to engage government in the debate about milk pricing and the significance of milk to families for nutritional purposes. I think that was a good segue for the Member for Inkster to bring in I think what probably, as the former Member for Southdale indicated, has

actually created some teeth to what his resolution spoke to.

The bill actually provides a strong support for a strategy for healthy foods in northern Manitoba. I think studies have shown that the cost of fresh fruits and vegetables and milk in remote northern communities are a key factor in the issues facing Aboriginal communities in the area of poor nutrition and leading directly to problems dealing with dental health and diabetes and other chronic illnesses.

We recently completed the Estimates on Northern Affairs, and the Minister responsible for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson) and I had a good dialogue on the challenges and some of the positive things that have come out of some initiatives, but there are still a lot of weaknesses, still a lot of areas of opportunity to strengthen awareness as well as deficiencies in a healthy foods initiative for northern Manitoba.

So I think what the Member for Inkster has done here is brought forward a piece of legislation that I think has a natural fit into what is needed within the whole strategy for healthy foods.

Prevention is hampered by a lack of awareness. I think that deficiency of vitamin D found in milk and dairy products, either through pregnancy or young childhood, is something that really needs to be addressed. I think that we, as legislators, have an opportunity here to support a piece of legislation that will require the Manitoba Milk Prices Review Commission to establish a fixed price for at least one type of fluid milk that is to be charged by retailers throughout the province. I think that is a good step forward.

I know in 2006 when we had a debate on this same issue, the Member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) said that there is no solution. In June 2006, that was her statement. Well, I disagree. I think that setting milk prices is part of the solution and something that can be done rather quickly in support of this bill.

I also know that the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) in 2006—representing a significant amount of these communities that are looking for some leadership—this member said, it always shakes me when I go and look into the Northern store up north and I find racks and racks of junk food but not so much milk, and the milk that is there is very high priced. That has to change so we have to look at things.

Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, if he just looks a little bit to his right and little bit behind him, he'll see—oh left, I'm sorry—just behind him, there's a member that is actually working very hard at developing a solution to that very serious issue.

So I think the government has had an opportunity since 1999 to look at this opportunity, this opportunity to control milk pricing in northern Manitoba. I think they've failed so far, Mr. Speaker. The significance of having milk available in the north speaks to the health of children, the health of families, the health of mothers who are wanting to bring healthy children into the world.

I do know that a survey by dental health of many preschoolers in northern Manitoba, have shown that tooth decay that is prevalent in some northern communities is worse than most underdeveloped countries in the world. So we have a very serious issue. We need some preventative actions in the area of milk supply to the north. I think that what the member provided was an excellent solution to the strategy.

I also would like to put on the record that access to remote communities and the east-side development is something that would also provide a solution to some of the cost factors. Several communities in northern Manitoba and on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, face substantial isolation issues due to lack of access, including the lack of an all-weather road. So I think that our position on the east-side transmission line for Manitoba Hydro is a positive step forward also in a strategy for providing access to goods and services to northern Manitoba. I believe that the NDP's insistence on not running this bipole line shows an unwillingness to work on a proactive development of the east-side communities and, ultimately, ties directly to the well-being of individuals living in northern Manitoba.

So I believe that what the Member for Inkster has done is brought forward an excellent bill. I think it provides one piece to the puzzle for Northern Healthy Foods. It provides to the health and well-being of many Manitobans and I support his bill and I look forward to it going to committee. Thank you.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise this morning to address the private members' bill put forward by the Member for Inkster. I commend him in the sense that I am sure his heart is in the right place in trying to improve the health of northern Manitobans, as I'm sure he wants

to improve the health of all Manitobans. So he should be credited with that objective, and I do take my hat off to him in that regard.

* (10:30)

But I think we have to look at the whole issue from a much broader perspective. I would begin looking at it from a market perspective. I think what he's suggesting here today almost takes us back to the days of Pierre Elliott Trudeau when he tried to impose wage and price controls on all of Canada, and that wasn't a very successful venture. Trying to impose prices on the sale of milk is a much more complex issue than just fixing a price because, of course, milk has to be transported up into northern Manitoba and there are private companies involved in the transport of milk.

So, are we going to extend this to imposing freight rates on these truckers and, somehow, trying to force them to transport milk up into the north? Because we do, frankly, live in a market economy—*[interjection]* The Muppet peanut gallery is fired up already. I'm glad to see that they're all awake here.

But, yes, to impose these types of mechanisms is going to have the effect of—quite frankly, the trucking companies are going to stop hauling it unless you're going to force them to move this or that type of product as opposed to letting the market dictate these matters. So, as well intentioned as it is, I have to say that it's probably not going to work because companies will do what they want to and haul what they want to, and trying to legislate that is a slippery slope.

Now, I am anxiously awaiting the member of the Liberal Party to get up and speak to this issue because, well, he has spoken in the past here, and I think I will quote the Member for River Heights, who must be in disagreement with his Member for Inkster because, in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on March 14, 2002, the Member for River Heights stated that the issue, quote: isn't as simple as forcing a price regulation on milk distributors. I think one has to be careful because suppliers may make less milk available because it's not cost-effective for them, he said.

The Member for River Heights further said that the best solution he can think of is to, quote: improve road access to the north. There it is, Mr. Speaker. I think that speaks volumes, and I would agree with that mindset in improving road access to the north. That makes a lot more sense, I think, than trying to

dictate prices to the marketplace, and this is something that this government has done. We have invested considerable dollars in expanding our road network to the north, in contrast to what the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) would do, and his position is clear.

Our position was that we felt that northern Manitobans were entitled to good roads as much as people in southern Manitoba were entitled to.

The previous government's position was that 4 percent of the population of Manitoba lives in northern Manitoba; therefore, only 4 percent of the highways capital budget should be spent in northern Manitoba, which encompasses probably 80 percent of the land mass of our province. Yet, that's how much money that members opposite did spend while they were in office. The current leader of the Conservative Party has reiterated that position, I believe, during the last election campaign. So, we know where they stand in that regard.

Our government has increased the capital budget up to 25 percent on roads in the north. So, we're taking the advice of the Liberal leader in expanding the road network. We've spent a lot of money on the winter roads system and, in recognition of global warming, we have taken the initiative in trying to move a lot of the winter roads, where possible, off of water, off of rivers and off of lakes so that we can improve safety as well.

Anybody who's travelled winter roads and has had to drive their vehicle onto lakes, and I have for many years because I lived in Norway House when my mother and father ran the hotel, the Playgreen Inn—I remember as a little boy having to travel across that 60 miles north of Grand Rapids across Lake Winnipeg and you hit frost boils in the ice. Sometimes you break through and splash into a foot of water. Believe me, that's terrifying for a young child, as I recall. I was nine or 10 years old at the time. But the threat is real and every year, unfortunately, it seems that lives are lost on these types of crossings. So, to try and move off of water onto land where possible, definitely a step in the right direction.

Now the Member for Inkster, I quote again, was making reference to meetings that he was holding in McDonald's, of all places, and that's his personal choice and that's a legitimate food chain, but I think there was a movie made about somebody who ate nothing but that product. The bottom line is that I think government has to focus on healthy eating

habits more so than fast foods. I think that is probably the root of the problem here.

When you look at the traditional diets of Aboriginal people, 40 to 50 years ago there was virtually no diabetes amongst them when they ate the natural foods. When they ate traditional foods, pickerel or moose stew or what have you, they lived quite comfortably and lived long and healthy lives. It was only when the white man's diet came to them that they started to experience these difficulties. So I think there should be a lot of focus on that and on things such as growing your own food for example.

Here I want to acknowledge the works of the former MLA for The Pas, the former Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, the Honourable Oscar Lathlin, who is no longer with us. His efforts on behalf of his people in the north, I think, deserve honourable mention here because he recognized the issues that his people faced up north and thought that gardening, growing vegetables and so forth would have been a worthy venture, and he undertook those actions. So I really think that we have to take our hats off to the late Oscar Lathlin in this regard.

There are a number of things we've done. Mention of the dairy producers was made and dairy producers have developed a milk product that does not require refrigeration. It can be held on the shelf for many, many—[interjection] not powdered milk; it's a liquid product and that's a good alternative.

The Member for Inkster was speaking disparagingly of goats a few minutes ago, mocking the fact that we were trying to introduce this animal to the north, and that again is a false perception because goat milk is as healthy if not healthier than milk from cows. So again the Member for Inkster, well intentioned as he is, is somewhat ignorant of the realities up in northern Manitoba. Keeping these animals which are very hardy, which are very adaptable, much more so than cattle, I think, is forward thinking, and the Member for Inkster is missing the boat once again in regard to that.

I would like to make brief mention of the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures task force, of which I was a member. We travelled across northern Manitoba and learned a very valuable thing: that youth today, because of their sedentary lifestyle, because of the consumption of fast foods and so forth will live shorter lives. So we really have to focus on healthy living.

I see my time is up, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning.

* (10:40)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on a bill which is—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: I rise to speak on this bill which is an important initiative to improve the health of people in northern Manitoba and to provide a strong signal that we believe in healthy children, healthy mothers in the north.

You know, the Member for Interlake is right that I initially approached this with some caution, but talking with people like Orville Woodford and Raven Thundersky and many others, visiting, as we did, northern communities like Manto Sipi, and seeing that a jug, a four-litre container of milk cost \$10 there, where it cost \$4 at that time in Winnipeg. This was terrible because what's happening is that children in that community are not getting the milk. They're having pop or other drinks. The young children, the mothers in the communities are not getting the milk and the calcium that they need. This is having a very significant impact on health, we suspect, a major reason for the big problem of dental caries in northern Manitoba. All this could be improved by the provision of an equitable price of milk for people in the north.

The NDP have clearly shown where their priority is for the last 10 years. They want the equitable provision of liquor in the north, and they don't care about the equitable provision of milk. For 10 years the NDP has stood strongly behind their effort to subsidize the transportation of beer, wine, gin, vodka and rum for people in all the communities in the north, but they don't care a whit about making sure that there are equitable prices of milk for people in northern Manitoba.

You know, the Minister of Healthy Living got up and said she cares about the health of all Manitobans, and that must be why she's subsidizing alcoholic beverages for northerners and continues to discriminate against people in the north when it comes to providing equitable, fair costs for milk for people in communities like Poplar River, Manto Sipi, Churchill, Pukatawagan. I heard at one point the price in Pukatawagan had gone to \$22 for a four-litre container of milk. That is the approach of this

government: high-cost milk, low-cost liquor. That's the signal they've been sending for 10 years, pounding the table, low-cost liquor and high-cost milk, the mantra of the NDP government.

The Minister of Healthy Living said a baby is a baby is a baby, but babies in northern Manitoba are being discriminated against by this government, because the Minister of Healthy Living and her NDP colleagues will not raise a finger to get equitable, fair milk prices to northern mothers and babies. This is clearly not fair. It is not appropriate in a food and nutrition and health conscious society, which we thought we lived in, but, of course, we're in Manitoba, and the government subsidizes alcohol and makes sure that there's very high cost for milk for many people in this province.

The government could have said, oh, we're going to make sure that healthy food is available. The government could have done a variety of things if they didn't support this bill. They could've had a pilot project in one community to make sure that at least one community in the north had equitable milk pricing and then look at the difference in health care. We argue that all northerners should have equitable costs, fair costs for milk, but this government didn't even do anything.

They could have tried to see what measures will actually reduce dental caries, but they have done very, very little in this area. Sadly, and, by and large, the communities in the north continue to have very high incidents of dental caries, and that is a high cost.

It is odd, Mr. Speaker, that this government is ready to spend, through one of its Crown corporations, millions and millions of dollars a year to make sure there is a subsidized price for alcohol in northern Manitoba, but won't spend a penny to make sure there is a fair and equitable price for milk. We know where this government's priority is. They can talk all they want but their actions speak loud, loud and clear.

One of the reasons I suggested some time ago that there be a much better road access was that it would provide better and lower cost for all foods, but the fact is, the sad reality is, whereas I was hoping and planning that we should have road access to all the northern communities year round, there is hardly a community in 10 years, hardly a new community which didn't have all-round road access, which now has all-round road access. One, two, you can probably name them on the fingers of one hand.

[interjection] You could. Others could, but you haven't done very much. There are many, many communities which still don't have road access which should have had road access.

Therefore, this is the kind of measure we need for people in northern Manitoba. It's time for the NDP to stop talking and start—let this bill move to a vote so there can be public input. Even if you don't support it, let the people of Manitoba come to committee stage to talk about why this is so important. You have refused time and time again to even listen to people from Manitoba at committee stage. You have blocked this going to committee stage so that people of Manitoba can say their piece, can have their input. Are you going to do this again? We will be watching. The people of Manitoba will be watching. Are you going to block the ability of people in Manitoba to come at committee stage to present their views, or are you going to talk it out and block this bill from going forward so it will die, and the people of northern Manitoba will know they're not being supported.

In Liberal view, there needs to be fair and equitable pricing for milk in this province. In 10 years, the NDP government hasn't moved a finger in this direction. It's time we, as a province and the people of this province, stand up strongly and forcefully and say we need a change, we need fair and equitable pricing for people, for babies, for mothers all over this province.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Just a reminder to our guests in the gallery, there's to be no participation by our guests. That also includes applauding. So just letting our guests in the gallery be aware of our rules in the House.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): I'm very pleased to put a few words on the private members' Bill 205. Why I'm pleased to do this is, unlike the members from the Liberal party, I actually lived in the north, and I worked in the north for 19 years. I've been to communities like Lac Brochet, Brochet, Tadoule. Actually, at one point, I'd been to every single northern community except Granville Lake. I'm pleased because of that because I've had the experience of working, travelling, and living up north.

Now, I have to commend the Liberals for talking about the health of northern people, and I really do commend you for bringing forward Bill 205 because you're talking about the health of northern people. I

think it's commendable because I know nothing was done when the Member for River Heights was a Cabinet minister under the Liberal government.

* (10:50)

I lived up north and I was there and I actually wrote a part of a petition on changing the way—They used to have a Food Mail Program, and what it would include is if you wanted to get boxed food from the city and mail it up, there was a subsidy, which was useless when you talked about fruit or vegetables or milk. One of my first political acts was to go get signatures to change the Food Mail Program to bring it into the 1980s, or '70s or '60s. During that time period, the member was a Cabinet minister in the Liberal government. We sent petitions over there, saying, please let's get fruit, milk and vegetables, as well as food shipped up there, change their mail program, bring it up to the 1960s, maybe. No, the federal Liberal government and other federal governments didn't. I think that it's commendable that we're looking at just one situation. It's not just milk. It's milk, it's fruit and vegetables. It's a healthy diet.

So, although, Bill 205 is talking about milk and milk is an issue; it's not the issue. The issue is a healthy diet, affordable food. Because I was in Brochet, and I'll tell you the story in Brochet. I went there and I was going to have a community meeting. So I went to the store and I bought a litre of milk, some coffee, some food, some cookies and stuff, and I handed the person a \$20 bill. I was waiting for my change and the person at the Northern was waiting for more money. I was shocked that it was well over \$20 for those three items. What I learned there is that it's not just milk. It's the price of food of all sorts. It was scary to see the cost.

I can remember, in 1981, when I first went to Norway House, and we used to have a game where we'd go into the store and try to identify what the vegetable was, because it was so unrecognizable. It was so old, it was so decrepit. You couldn't get decent vegetables. You couldn't get any fruit. If you got fruit, you were lucky just to get apples or oranges.

So I think what we need to do is have a healthy diet. I look forward to the day when all people can afford to have a decent diet of food. Although milk is a start, it's not the answer for everything. I look at what I've done in my department. I know that myself, the Minister of Ag, have gone through the Food Development Centre and looking at coming up with

an ultra-high temperature of milk which can have a six-month shelf life, which we can manufacture in Manitoba using Manitoba milk. We use Manitoba packaging and technology and ship it up north so that you have affordable milk year-round. Well, that's something that our government is doing now.

I know that ultra-high temperature was available for short shelf life when the member was minister of science for the federal government. I'm pleased that our government has taken this technology and moving it forward so we can produce milk that has a shelf life, it doesn't have to be refrigerated, has a shelf life for six to eight months, so that people can move it up and can afford it. The reality is that these companies, northwest companies, and private companies, have to move all their food up, whether it's fruit, vegetables, et cetera, and they need options. It's an option on a healthy diet, not just milk.

I would like to let the member know, both members know, that we need to come up with a shelf life for veggies. One of the concerns I have is that if you're trying to get fruits and other vegetables, you have to look at options. I'm pleased that this government is looking at gardens and greenhouses. I was a member of the Frontier School Division, working on special projects, working in places like Berens River, Wabowden, Norway House, et cetera, which actually got greenhouses. I can tell you that the greenhouse project that was started in the '80s is still running through Berens River, et cetera, to this day, and people are really proud of local vegetables. They're proud of their greenhouses. They're proud of what they are producing. Garden Hill wasn't called Garden Hill for any reason, there were gardens there, and people grew vegetables and food, and we need to get back to those days, because you can grow them. If you start the vegetable, et cetera, inside the greenhouse, you can take it out and you can have fresh, wonderful vegetables.

I'm pleased that, as a government, in the Healthy Food initiative, we are putting up greenhouses where people can start this. There is local enterprise, local economies started, and I'm happy to inform the members, who might not have been to Berens River before, or other centres, that these small gardens now sell to the Northern stores, which is positive. I don't think that that is the answer; that is one small step.

The ultra-high temperature milk is another step. Other steps are making sure that people have freezers. Why? Because if people have freezers, then

they can store healthy food, and that becomes important. So, it becomes interesting discussion.

Now, to let the member know, when I was Minister of Healthy Living, we did not close off First Nations. I was pleased that this government made the decision to have baby programs, the Healthy Baby program, go across the province. The support program for young mothers—across the province. I'm pleased that we had a vaccine program—across the province. I'm pleased that all the young child programs and the early childhood support programs went across the province.

It was not something that we stopped at the borders. You know, Mr. Speaker, that's something that was unique to our government. It was something that we started and I'm proud of, because we don't think that we need to have big circles around communities. We think a Manitoban, all Manitobans deserve a good, healthy lifestyle.

I also look at other things on costs. I'm pleased that we increased support cost to families in the north. I'm also pleased that we're starting to talk about traditional foods. Again, when I was in Norway House, I learned a great deal. I know I went hunting out in the bush with local people who taught me a great deal about how they survived, and I was pleased to learn how healthy they were—less diabetes, less high blood pressure, less cholesterol. Those are the types of things that we have to get back to.

So, it is not just milk. Diseases like diabetes were virtually unknown 35 years ago. They've reached near epidemic levels, and we need to reverse that. We don't reverse that by just having milk. It's having vegetables; it's having a balanced diet.

So, I commend the member for bringing forward the bill because I think that affordable food for all Manitobans is an issue. I know that I've been working very, very hard to get better than 60-phase electricity in a lot of communities so that people can have freezers. I know that we've been working to do a lot of things, but it has got to be a package. Although it's a very good concept to have milk affordable, I think we need to have milk affordable, vegetables affordable, fruit affordable, meat and fish. All of those things have to be affordable, not just the north, all across our province, because the minute that we exclude someone, then we're not a fair and balanced society, and we need to be a fair and balanced society.

So, I like the member opposite. If you want to come to the Food Development Centre, see our new UHT milk processing thing which will be shipped to the north, I'd like to invite you. It's very good; it's very tasty. I encourage you to come. I think it's a great thing, and I think it's a good step. Do I think it's the only step? No. I think it is a step.

So I commend the members for bringing Bill 205 forward—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to just put a few words on the record regarding this bill. I think some of my colleagues have already mentioned that the Leader of the Liberal Party is out of step with the Member for Inkster.

As we know, the Liberal Party, they often have two positions on different things, and when the Liberal leader comes to Selkirk, he is opposed to the floodway, but when he's here in the Chamber speaking about the issue of the floodway, Mr. Speaker, he in fact speaks in favour of the floodway. That's typical of the Liberal leader. Well, they have two positions on the same issue. At least when they had three members in their caucus, at least they had someone who could make a decision. They could make a decision—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Selkirk will have nine minutes remaining.

* (11:00)

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 4—Day Cares—Early Childhood Family Support

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 11 a.m., we will now move on to resolutions, and we'll deal with Resolution No. 4, Day Cares—Early Childhood Family Support.

Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale): I move, seconded by the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale),

WHEREAS Manitoba's child-care program is held as one of the best in Canada; and

WHEREAS access to quality child care has a direct impact on the economic stability of many families; and

WHEREAS the Province of Manitoba has approved funding for over 9,000 child-care spaces, an increase of over 40 percent since 1999, and has introduced a capital program for the expansion and construction of child-care facilities; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has reduced the child-care fees for low-income families, leaving Manitoba with the second-lowest child-care fees in the country; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has trained and supported over 900 child-care workers since 1999, including up to 180 who will graduate this year, and increased child-care workers' wages by over 40 percent since 1999; and

WHEREAS in budget 2008 the provincial government announced a new five-year, 12-point child-care plan called Family Choices which includes funding to create 2,500 child-care spaces in the first two years, a new \$1-million training and recruitment fund for early childhood educators, and increased operating grants to allow for a 6 percent salary increase over 2008 and 2009; and

WHEREAS the provincial government will not retract the Universal Child Care Benefit from families who are receiving employment and income assistance, which will provide an estimated \$10 million to families in need each year; and

WHEREAS the provincial government continues to invest in child-care funding and spaces as an economic stimulus, providing returns in job creation and social capacity building; and

WHEREAS the federal government has recently admitted difficulty in fulfilling its commitment to create 25,000 child-care spaces across Canada each year.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly support the provincial government in urging the federal government to, at minimum, create the promised child-care spaces, or to provide provinces with the necessary funding to create sufficient child-care spaces themselves.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Member for Southdale, seconded by the honourable Member for Burrows,

WHEREAS—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Ms. Selby: Mr. Speaker, there are many reasons why I'm proud to be part of this government, but it is our record in child care that perhaps makes me the most proud.

I remember quite well when the federal Conservative government killed the plans for a national day-care program. They cut \$125 million out of the child-care budget but at the same time promised to create 125,000 new spaces. Their program was supposed to offer choice.

Well, I remember when I got that cheque from the federal government. At the time, I had three five-year-old children and they each received a cheque for \$100. I'm not exactly sure what my choice was supposed to be. Three hundred dollars a month was not going to replace either my or my husband's salary, and it certainly didn't cover my day-care cost at the time.

I only got that cheque for one month. My children turned six the next month, and I got a letter from the federal government telling me that I was no longer eligible for that money. What message was the federal government trying to send me? That six-year-old kids no longer need day care?—because I'm not comfortable with that. I think it's important for my children to have supervision. Or perhaps they only want one of us to work when the children are in school. Well, my husband works for the 6 o'clock news. I'm pretty sure his boss is not willing to change that to the 2 o'clock news, although, to be fair, we didn't actually ask. I was hosting *Breakfast Television* at the time. Now yes, I guess we could have started at 10 and called it Brunch TV but it sort of didn't work amongst the other workers as well. My point is that the federal government offered no choice whatsoever with that plan.

In September of 2007 it seems they've agreed. The federal government suggested that the Conservative plan to create those spaces might not be feasible and that the government's admitted they're having difficulty committing and creating those 25,000 child-care spaces across Canada each year that they had committed to do.

Well, luckily, here, in Manitoba, the NDP government has backfilled the investments that have been taken away by the federal government. This government will not retract the universal child-care benefit from families who are receiving employment

and income assistance, and will provide an estimated \$10 million to families in need each year.

This government, since 1999, has doubled funding for child care and allotted funding for over 9,000 spaces. We've increased that by 40 percent more spaces.

We have the lowest fees outside of Québec, and we've got regulated, maintained maximum fees, which are really important to parents who are trying to budget. If you know how much day care is going to cost you through the entire year, it's easy to figure out where that's going to fit into your budget.

Now, sometimes we hear people say that, okay, we have the second lowest fees across Canada, that Québec's are lower. You hear people rave about Québec's system and, there are many, many good things about the Québec child-care system. But one of the things that's not so good about it is the way it's distributed. I remember the time when I was living in Québec, they had, at that time it was \$5-a-day day care. It's gone up to, I believe, \$7 a day now. But my sister had four children under the age of 12. She was a single mom who was going back to school to try to better her family, and not getting any support from her ex-husband. She could not get \$5-a-day day care at the time. There were no spaces for \$5-a-day day care left. She could get day care at full price, but she couldn't find a space for the \$5 a day.

Yet, at the same time, families in Québec who were making \$200,000 or more were in the \$5-a-day program. It wasn't being adjusted to family need. It was just sort of being used as whoever got there first.

Well, in Manitoba, Family Choices means support for those who need it. Low-income families pay less, and those of us, like myself and my husband who can afford to pay more, do, but still within a capped maximum of the day.

The federal government admits that they're having trouble fulfilling their commitment. Well, perhaps they should just give us the money, because we can get the job done.

Family Choices program includes 6,500 more child-care spaces, which is a 28 percent increase. In the first year of Family Choices alone, in 2008, we saw funding for 2,350 more child-care spaces. It also included the conversion of 10 schools with surplus space into child-care centres. So instead of closing schools and leaving communities with no school access, we actually—the communities benefit by having both their local school, but, also, child-care

spaces, and it results in 343 more spaces in 2008 alone; 2008 will see an increase of 3 percent of the wages to those fine people who work day in and day out in our day cares. Anyone who's a parent or an aunt or an uncle or friends with small children knows that they have a very difficult job.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Madam Deputy Speaker, we'll see a 20 percent increase to the remuneration over five years, including a pension plan. This is something that I'm particularly excited about because, as we see, there's still predominantly women working in our day cares, although, a few men making that choice. I'm glad to see that as well. But the pension plan is such an essential tool for women to have a stable future and for retention as well. When you're looking at what job should I do and should I stick with this career, challenging as it may be at times, knowing that there's a pension plan gives people stability for the future.

I also think one of the most important things that Family Choices will do is to put in the centralized on-line wait list to ensure an accurate account of families seeking spaces and to guarantee straight forward registration of it. Why is this so important—so important that I'm losing my words—because when parents look for day care, one of the things you do, and I admit, I'm guilty of this when I looked for day care a few years ago. I phoned several day cares in the area and put my children's name on all of the lists. Well, they got into a day care and, I didn't remember to call back all the day cares and tell them that I didn't need to be on that list anymore. So we get a false sense of day-care lists of parents who may have put their name in for a few times and found a day care, and never took their name off the list. That won't happen with this centralized list. We'll know exactly which parents have found day care and we won't have to have the names on several lists.

I also hear day cares sometimes talking about their lists, and even in my area I've heard exorbitant numbers of people waiting—and parents get nervous when they hear these large numbers that day cares use. But a funny thing happened in Southdale, not a while back, at the same time as day cares were telling us that there were hundreds of people on the wait lists and parents were nervous, I noticed at my children's school, three of our local day cares were advertising that they had spots, that they had open spaces. In fact, they had already gone through all

their list, and at the end of calling all those lists—it was supposedly hundreds of people—they still had eight spaces at one day care, four spaces at another and two at another that were open. So I think it will help us better co-ordinate not only the need for parents, but also the need for communities of where we need day care.

* (11:10)

There's so much to say about day care, but I know that I'm going to run out of time in the next few minutes so I just want to say how important I think it is, the wage increases, to our day-care workers, and to know that they are very well paid across the province and we're doing more for them all the time.

The other thing we're doing is making sure that we recruit and retain those workers including helping more and more graduate. I'm going to be at the Red River College day-care graduation coming up, I believe, next month. I will see about 180 new workers. They will be coming into the child-care program and we know that 94 percent of those people stick with working in day cares so it's a good retention policy.

Investments for 2008 and 2009 are \$7.75 million all going towards making a stronger economy for our province as well. We're just asking the federal government to keep their promise. Our record shows that we support day care, support real choice for families and understand that day care is an essential tool for keeping our economy going. If the federal government is having trouble making their promise, in fulfilling their promise, then perhaps they could just make sure that the provinces have enough money to continue in the progress that we're going.

We're moving forward with day care. We've done a lot so far but we know there's still more to be done. I'm excited to see that my children are in a licensed day care where they're stimulated and having fun and when I pick them up at the end of the day, they don't want to come home because they're having such a good time there. I hope that's a reflection on the day-care workers and not on the fact that there are chores to do when they get home at night.

Either way I also know that I see a lot of really interesting, caring people working in their day care. It's a wonderful opportunity both for children and for families, whether they have the choice to both work, or whether they are working because they need to

both be working, or whether they're working because they have a career that is stimulating and they enjoy it and want to continue with that.

So I would just ask that the federal government keep their commitment to creating child-care spaces and if they're having trouble, Madam Deputy Speaker, if they're having trouble keeping their commitment, if they could support the provinces who are doing so much to keep day care going.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Madam Deputy Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak to this resolution when we talk about day cares and early childhood educators and the problems associated with day cares and getting spaces in day cares for parents and children.

I want to just speak first of all about some of the day cares in my own constituency. I had the opportunity to meet with several of them and I know the troubles that they are facing stem mainly with lack of staff to fill the spaces. The government takes a lot of credit and a lot of pride in announcing more funding and more spaces but, inevitably, it boils down to can they actually find the people to fill those spaces so that they can operate that day care at full capacity, Madam Deputy Speaker.

What I do hear from some of the day cares is, yes, they hear about the announcements and, yes, they hear about the funding, but they still are unable to find the level of people that they need to keep their day cares open on a regular basis. Part of that stems from the fact that the people that are trained in early childhood education often do, after a certain period of time, find that is a stepping stone to move on to higher paying jobs in the education field. I hear that time and time again from day cares who have employed people and then they have chosen to move on to another career.

I do also want to commend some of the day cares for doing a lot of fundraising on their own when the government has not, when the NDP have not fulfilled their commitments to funding and have actually secured buildings, have put all the infrastructure in place and have actually been able to create that day care in communities where there is a need, and this government has failed to uphold their commitments.

I noted that the Member for Southdale did talk about day cares in schools and, interestingly, I just had a conversation by e-mail last evening with a person that has been actively seeking, through the

St. James school division, to have a day care located in the Phoenix School in Headingley. She was told that this was being looked on favourably, but now it's stalled and it doesn't appear to be happening. So she's wondering what the commitment is by this government when they keep announcing that there'll be more funding, there'll be more spaces and, yet, there really is not that level of commitment in reality as what they like to claim, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would just like to also say that when this government talks about all the announcements of funding and all the things that they're putting into child care, what they really need to remember is what makes that possible for them to do that? That is the 40 percent of the entire provincial budget that comes to this province from federal transfer payments, Madam Deputy Speaker. So out of the budget, approximately \$4 billion comes from the federal government. That is what allows this government to make the announcements that they do make in child care.

But that's never enough; it's always a hand out to the federal government. Instead of trying to address child care as a priority for this government, they try and blame the federal government by not giving them enough money. Madam Deputy Speaker, \$4 billion every year comes from the federal government in transfer payments. Is it not their priority then? If they feel so strongly that they need to do more in child care, they have the opportunity. They have the opportunity because they have \$4 billion they get from the federal government. Like I said, that is never enough for this government. They always have their hand out for more.

I'll just also say, maybe, perhaps this government might like to lead by example. Maybe they should think about the fact that we have a brand-new Hydro building downtown, but I'd like to ask them: Have they made provision for child-care spaces in that state-of-the-art building? Have they made room for day care, for children, for people of employees that are going to work in that building? This is state-of-the-art building, brand-new, brand-new design, so I'd like to ask this government, why haven't they provided for child care within this environment? If they want to lead by example, why haven't they done that?

So, instead of trying to always blame the federal government for not giving them enough money, they should take responsibility upon themselves and if they want to make child care a priority, which, by the

way, Pat Wedge does not think that they are making child care a priority. So if they want to make child care a priority, they have \$4 billion, of which, if the Member for Southdale wants to lobby the Premier for more money, maybe she should do that, or maybe there are other members that feel they want to do that. Instead of trying to shuffle it to the federal government with more hands out, perhaps they should look at the priorities within the money that they're already receiving.

Now, I do want to say this government has made some strides in child care. They have done some positive things in child care. I recognize that. I think we all recognize that because we recognize the need for child care within the of Manitoba, and we know that parents have difficulties sometimes with getting child-care spaces, places for their children.

*(11:20)

But we know that the reason they can't get these spaces is because many of these day cares are operating at not capacity because they don't have the qualified workers. I note that, I think that there's, approximately, 35 percent of child-care centres are operating with a licensing exemption because of lack of staff, and that's significant, Madam Deputy Speaker, because if you're operating with an exemption, it really means that all the people employed in the child-care centre are not specifically designated qualified to be looking after the children in that centre. But, I think, because there's such a need for care of children that day cares are granted this exemption so that parents don't find themselves on the doorstep of the day care and being told, I'm sorry, we can't take your child this morning. We don't have the staff in place, so, I'm sorry, we can't accept your child. You will have to find alternative care.

That, I think, to Manitobans, is unacceptable.

So, I know my time is short, but I just want to suggest to the Member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) that if she is looking for more money from the federal government, she needs to remind herself that \$40 billion comes from the federal government to the province of Manitoba. Manitoba, if they made priority, if they—

An Honourable Member: Four billion.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm sorry, \$4 billion. Oh, I said \$40 million; I meant \$4 billion. All the more money is coming to the province of Manitoba.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mrs. Taillieu: Yes, I know that the NDP's quite sensitive to the fact that they do receive billions and billions of dollars from the federal government. Yet, I would like to suggest, perhaps they make this their priority, and I suggest to the Member for Southdale that she lobby the Premier to make child care a priority with this government within the context of the billions of dollars coming every year from federal transfer payments. Thank you very much.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Deputy Speaker, it's a pleasure to take part in this debate, and I commend the MLA for Southdale for an excellent resolution. I would point out to members opposite, the THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED clause, which says that the Legislative Assembly support the provincial government in urging the federal government to, at minimum, create the promised child-care spaces, or to provide provinces with the necessary funding to create sufficient child-care spaces themselves.

So, contrary to what the Member for Morris said, we're not asking the federal government necessarily for more money, what we're saying is create the spaces that you promised or give the provinces the money that you promised. If the federal government can't create the spaces, give the provinces the money, and we will do it. That's what the resolution is saying.

Perhaps the federal government is taking their inspiration from the previous Conservative government in Manitoba. I'm not sure whether the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) was the Minister of Family Services at the time that the cuts started because they started in 1993, and that's the year that she went into Cabinet, so might have been in the budget of her predecessor, but, in any case, she was part of that government, and in April 1993, a number of changes took effect. So, under her government, parents who received subsidy were required to pay an additional \$1.40 per day per child toward the cost of care.

What did our government do? We reduced the cost for parents per day. Tory's increase it; we reduce it.

What about the number of subsidies? Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, they were capped at 9,600. That was because they were reducing funding for child care. In fact, there were two major cuts. One of them was for \$4 million and the other was for

\$6 million. So what do Conservatives do in government regarding child care? They reduce the budget. What do we do? We increase the budget.

So perhaps the federal Conservatives were taking their lead from their provincial counterparts when they were in office in Manitoba in the 1990s, because they made a promise—in fact, I don't think there's very much difference here between the federal Liberals and the federal Conservatives. They both make promises and then they don't keep them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I don't need to remind the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) about this because he will remember the red book. In fact, he probably went door-to-door with David Walker and other candidates campaigning on the red book and promised to bring in a national child-care program. I think they repeated that promise in every federal election after that and then, near the end of their mandate, I remember I happened to be in Vancouver when there was a federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting and the minister responsible at the federal level, I can't remember his name, but he was a famous hockey player, a goalie—

Some Honourable Members: Ken Dryden.

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Dryden was the federal minister, and the child-care coalition people from across Canada were there, and they were very hopeful that finally they were going to get a national child-care program, but it didn't go through.

An Honourable Member: Why?

Mr. Martindale: I don't remember the reasons, but the federal government couldn't deliver on it. At that time there was still a majority Liberal government. They could have delivered it, but they couldn't. Instead, what they did was they signed agreements with individual provinces, and they signed an agreement with Manitoba. We were the first one to sign on, and we were hoping that good things would happen, that finally we would get federal participation in a child-care program, albeit not as good as it might have been, because they were going to do it one off at a time, one province at a time. Then what happened? Unfortunately, the government was defeated.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

We lost what might have been a good opportunity, especially had the federal Conservatives continued the agreements that were put in place by their predecessors. What happened? They cancelled

the agreement with Manitoba and other provinces. Instead, they promised to create 125,000 child-care spaces across Canada. Now that sounds like a good promise to me. That was in 2006. One year later, in September 2007, the federal government suggested that their plan to create these spaces might not be feasible.

Then, more recently, they admitted difficulty in fulfilling their commitment to create 25,000 spaces. The current Conservative federal government has cancelled the early learning and child-care agreements introduced by the previous federal Liberals, as I mentioned.

Now, going back to the time when the Member for River East was in Cabinet and part of a provincial Conservative government, operating grants were reduced by 4 percent in day-care centres and family day-care homes. The licensing of new day-care spaces was frozen. Well, not only did they freeze it, but they said to people, if you want to get a licence you have to promise never to apply for a subsidy. Licensing was later allowed to proceed for those groups and individuals who signed an acknowledgement indicating that they understood that the provincial government will not provide grants or subsidy support for the facility. You can have a licence, but you have to promise not to apply for a subsidy. The length of time parents could receive subsidy while seeking employment was reduced from eight weeks twice a year to two weeks twice a year. So what did the Conservatives do? They reduced the job-search time. What have we done? We've put it back up to eight weeks. They reduce, we increase. They tear down, we build.

And it goes on. There is more. In the '94-95 annual report, they said that there would be an underexpenditure of \$6.4 million. Well, basically, that was a cut, and so there was going to be underutilization. That was their expression for how to explain this, because this is actually from the minister's briefing book of the day—a very interesting document. It says that the underutilization of subsidy cases may be the result of a number of factors, including economic factors, unemployment and use of less-expensive, unlicensed care situations. Well, that's interesting, because basically they are saying, parents go and find whatever unlicensed care you can find.

We know that that is not nearly as good as having a licensed system where you have standards for staff, you have standards for the space in terms of

windows and number of square feet and the ratios of staff to children, whereas unlicensed care, there are no standards. People can do whatever they want, have as many children as they want. There are many, many advantages to our licensed system and, in fact, I think Manitoba was the first province in Canada to have a child day-care standards act in 1984.

Now, we have done many other things which I would like to read into the record, because we do have a good record. For example, since 1999 the government has doubled funding for child care and allocated funding for over 9,000 spaces, an increase of over 40 percent. Provincial funding in Manitoba has reduced the child-care fees for low-income families, which I mentioned before. Conservatives increase them, we reduce them, resulting in our province having the second-lowest child-care fees in Canada. We have trained, and support, over 900 early childhood educators since 1999, including 180 who will graduate this year. Manitoba has the third-highest child-care worker wages of any province. Mr Speaker, we have increased early childhood educators' wages by over 40 percent since 1999. There are now 1,300 more child-care workers in Manitoba than in 2004.

* (11:30)

April 28, 2008, we announced our new 12-point child-care agenda called Family Choices, which will increase funding by a further 84 percent, or 92 million, and will bring more accessible, quality and low-fee child care to more families in Manitoba. Family Choices includes: 6,500 more funded child-care spaces, which is a 28 percent increase, so, as you can see, we are constantly expanding, not contracting; nursery school spaces for 1,300 more children, which is a 33 percent increase; a Family Choices Building Fund which will include funding for the construction of up to 35 more program sites, capital to prioritize converting surplus school space into day-care centres.

Now, this is one of the things that I heard from child-care centres in Burrows, and that was the need for a capital fund over and above money that people might get from the Community Places program. When I was at the minister's table in the minister's office one year, I suggested in the budget that we start a capital fund, and indeed we have. I believe it began at \$1 million a year.

So we are proud of our record in child care. We are constantly making improvements, and we hope

that the federal government will come on board and deliver on their promise to create more spaces.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I, too, wanted to put a few words on the record in regard to this resolution. There's a couple of things that come to mind.

First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, it's just to acknowledge the efforts and the passion of a special group of people that care deeply about our children and want to make sure that our children are provided the care that is, put simply, very amazing. I'm talking about the child-care workers that, day in and day out, take care of a good portion of Manitoba's young children. I don't think enough could be said to express—and I suspect it would be unanimous amongst all MLAs—the efforts that these child-care workers and professionals put in for our children. It is deeply appreciated.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, I look at some of the comments from the Member for Burrows when he was referring to public day care versus private. The Member for Burrows needs to be aware that as much as we want to enhance and ensure that the public day-care system is healthy and viable and expanding in order to meet the need, one of the things, when we talk about that private care, is quite often—more often than maybe we think—is that it's grandparents and other family members that provide care, and the type of care that they provide is equal to the public system that we have in many different ways. I don't want to underestimate the expression of appreciation to those individuals that also provide a very valuable role to us. Quite often, I know that very few of them are paid anything that would remotely come across as being justified for the type of care that they're paying. I just want to make a point of that: that not all people that provide care are, in fact, receiving any monetary benefit.

But suffice to say that, I think through time, we have seen the great value of providing public day care and I think that this is something that most, if not all, are committed to ensuring is going to be there well into the future. When I say to ensure it's going to be there, we're talking about an expansion. We need more day care, and there is no doubt about that. In fact, again, if I go back to what the Member for Burrows was talking about when he made reference to the former federal government, that being of Paul Martin and, in particular, Ken Dryden and his efforts in coming up with a very tangible plan that Canadians could get behind. Members, including of

the New Democratic Party, from across the country were very supportive of what it is that the federal Liberal Party had come up with: it was very ambitious; it set specific targets and goals; in essence, it was a direct response, in a favourable way, as to what's being suggested inside this resolution.

What happened, at the end of the day, it was Jack Layton and individuals like Judy Wasylycia-Leis and Bill Blaikie that killed that initiative. That's the reality—oh, I'm sorry—the honourable Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie), Mr. Speaker, that killed that initiative. Members need to be aware of that, that it's not just New Democrats that come up with these ideas. In fact, I would argue that if it wasn't for the New Democratic Party of Canada, that this resolution would be absolutely and totally redundant at this point in time.

Another issue that I thought the Member for Morris highlighted, and I couldn't believe it, to be honest, when the Member for Morris said that we have this wonderful, new Manitoba Hydro building and she inferred that there wasn't any day care being provided within that building, I right away went out and made a quick call and asked if I could get confirmation if, in fact, that is the case. I thought maybe the Member for Morris was wrong but, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Morris is right on, and I think she was right on in terms of raising the issue inside this Legislature, because we do expect leadership from the government.

You know, its one thing to introduce a resolution of this nature. It's another thing—because in essence what you're doing is you're looking to Ottawa and saying bring us more, give us more, you know. It's something which this Premier has done very well at, on his hands and knees and begging for money, begging for things from Ottawa, and, quite often, it can be justified. But, Mr. Speaker, that's what this resolution is doing.

When it comes to the issue of demonstrating leadership, what does the government do? It drops the ball. Manitoba Hydro, our largest corporation, brand-new facility, we're going around touting it as the building of the future and it doesn't incorporate anything in for child care. Do they not think that the employees, the hundreds of employees that are going to be working in that building, have any child-care requirements, Mr. Speaker? I think not. I believe that there is a need for child care.

So, here we have an opportunity for the government of the day, through a corporation, to demonstrate leadership. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there are many private corporations that are out there in our communities that do provide for child care. I would even suggest that there is more private involvement in the members who introduced this resolution in the day cares that she has had open in her constituency, or the private sector was more aware and more sensitive to the need of day care than this government was, in terms of the Manitoba Hydro building and the hundreds of individuals that require day-care services.

So I would suggest to you that the government of the day should not be crowing in terms of how wonderful they are when they make mistakes of this nature, as opposed to focussing on trying to pat themselves on the back and asking for more money, or trying to embarrass a political party in Ottawa, that they should be more focussed on what is actually taking place within the province of Manitoba.

I wonder if the Member for Southdale, or any of the members, had asked the question in regard to Manitoba Hydro, whether or not that building was going to accommodate day-care spaces, Mr. Speaker. I hope, and I suspect not, because, had that been the case, I'm sure that someone from within the NDP caucus would've said something. I would've thought it would've been a no-brainer, much like when the Member for Morris raised the issue, I just assumed that it was done. I applaud the Member for Morris in bringing up what I think is a fairly significant situation, and that is that the government does need to follow through on strong initiatives. Day care is very important to Manitobans, to all Manitobans.

* (11:40)

We're talking about our children, and where there is a need, I think government has an obligation to meet that need to the very best of its ability. But, as opposed to being focussed on trying to just assume credit and blame others, as what I believe that this resolution is really trying to do, they should be reflecting on some of the things that have occurred, maybe, in the past, and there is room for a lot of improvement.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the continual growth in day-care spaces, as I'm sure that we will see, and would support initiatives that would do that, including the initiative that the federal Liberals had brought down a couple of years ago which the federal NDP ultimately voted against, which led to

the demise, unfortunately, but hopefully another Liberal administration in the future, or possibly, doubtfully, but possibly even an NDP administration in the future might be able to bring in or, for that matter, even a Conservative administration. Thank you.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Well, the Member for Inkster should have prefaced his comments with, once upon a time, when he talks about the previous commitment of the federal Liberal Party to child care.

I do give credit to Ken Dryden. I was the first provincial minister in the history of this country to sign the national child care agreement. He was a tremendous partner, and we put together a very good agreement, not only for children in Manitoba but for children across Canada. It is, in fact, the federal government now in place in Ottawa who cancelled the deal. This would have provided quality child care to children from coast to coast to coast. It would have made sure that children in remote areas were receiving the quality child care that they deserve as children in downtown Winnipeg are receiving, Mr. Speaker.

I was really quite shocked at the response of members opposite when their critic for the day, the Member for Morris, responded to the cancelling of the deal by saying that replacing a national child care agreement, with all the components that it had, with a child benefit of \$100 a month, was good for nannies. That was the response from members opposite, that it was good for people who could afford nannies. Now, what she maybe didn't understand at the time or didn't want to put on the record is that this was actually a taxable benefit. So really, it's a scheme in which \$100 arrives in the household, and then it's taxed back at income tax time. As the Member for Southdale pointed out, she was the beneficiary, her family was the beneficiary for one month when her children turned six.

We in Manitoba were the first, and are still one of few provinces that provide after-school care and before-school care for children who are six to 12, because we believe it's important that children are taken care of from the time that they are born until they are six. We believe that parents also deserve to have that service. And incidentally, because of the investment we've made in child care, we've reduced the numbers of single mothers on social services by, I believe it's 60 percent. So when you invest in the community by investing in the children, you invest in

everyone, and this makes it, along with several of the other initiatives that we've brought on, much easier for people to live to be contributing to the community. People are going back to school. People are getting part-time jobs. They're able to turn part-time jobs into full-time jobs, Mr. Speaker. So the fact that this federal initiative was cancelled is a real dark day in the history of Canada. But we in Manitoba carried on, and we have backfilled everything that the federal government took away from the children of Manitoba.

I think it's also important to note that when the federal Tories cancelled the agreement, they went to private businesses and they said, private businesses will take care of child care. And the private businesses said, no, we won't take care of child care. If we wanted to, we would be in the child-care business, but we have other businesses that we're running.

Nonetheless, the minister of the day went to the private businesses and promised the people of Canada, the children of Canada, that they would create 125,000 spaces, and they even gave a time frame for it. When that time frame was up, the question was: How many spaces have been created? Not one space had been created, Mr. Speaker, through the federal child tax benefit scheme. Not one.

I remember the then-Minister of Human Resources, Monte Solberg, having the gall to get up in the House of Commons on Parliament Hill and claim the spaces we had created, through the provincial government here in Manitoba, as his own. That was a new low, even for them, Mr. Speaker. That was a new low. So, we know that their plan has failed. We also know that they have come to the provinces and said, gee, can you help us now? We know that cancelling the deal has done nothing for child care; we know that the child tax benefit has done nothing for child care, but, somehow, we have to save face.

So they came to the provinces, and because we have a commitment to child care that is bigger than the sort of political bickering that can go on, we said, yes, we will work with you. We have worked to create spaces, to create employment opportunities, to create educational opportunities, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that I think about is when the women of North Point Douglas came to me when I was minister and said: We want to work our way out of poverty; will you be our partner? I said, of course I

will. Together, we worked with the group that was then called SISTARS. Today, they're called Eagle Wing. And we put together a made-in-Manitoba solution for the women of Point Douglas. They told us that they could not leave their community to go to Red River College, or even to go to Higgins Avenue, because they needed to be there to take care of the kids.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we did is we created a child-care centre in that area that was also the teaching centre, and we had our first intake, I believe, it was of 18 women in the area. I think there was one young man, as well. I'm very happy to say that I attended their graduation dinner some two years later. They had a 94 percent rate of graduation, Mr. Speaker, which, in any course, is an amazing statistic. But, when you look at the challenges that those women and those many single-parent families faced, and you see their achievement, and I understand that the second intake has graduated, and that they're now working with the third intake. When you work with community really for the benefit of the community, you see tremendous results, and I understand that the graduates are all working in the child-care field or in a field that is dealing with the care of children.

So, I want to congratulate the women of North Point Douglas for their vision, and for their ability to really make that vision happen, and to say what an honour it was to work with them, in the capacity of minister, and what an honour it is to work with them to this day in the many initiatives around their community.

I remember the Member for Morris who, very interestingly, didn't ask one question about the people she represents in the area of Morris during the current flood, Mr. Speaker. That was very telling. But, I remember the Member for Morris talking about—*[interjection]*

An Honourable Member: She asked more questions than almost anybody.

Ms. Melnick: She did not ask questions about the people in the area.

Talking about Pat Wedge, and I remember working with Pat Wedge when we were negotiating this deal. Pat Wedge was very, very pleased with this deal, and Pat Wedge was absolutely heartbroken when this agreement was cancelled by the federal government. So, Pat Wedge is someone who I have a lot of respect for, and I know her heart is in the right

place when she is working on behalf of Manitoban children but also early childhood educators, and her dedication is unsurpassed.

Our record, which has shown investments every year, our latest investment for the 2008-2009 budget of an additional 7.75 million, Mr. Speaker, is more than has been dedicated to child care ever in the past. Of course, we know members opposite proudly stood to vote against this just a few weeks ago in this House. So, that shows what their commitment to child care is.

* (11:50)

But another record of their commitment is that during the 1990s they actually cut funding to child care. So they cut funding from the budgets that existed, but they also lapsed a lot of money that had been dedicated to child care. So money that was on the table that was in the budget went back into general revenue because they couldn't see the point in investing in the young children in our province.

I think it's important to recognize the dual positions of members opposite. The lack of substance in the comments from the Member for Morris clearly show that, but even more to the point are the seemingly two positions that members opposite have. I understand they have written to the minister calling for more spaces here in Manitoba, but, on the other hand, they have supported the cancelling of the deal in Ottawa.

So, again, which is it? You can't have it both ways. You can't have the sort of partnership that is needed across this country for regulated not-for-profit child-care spaces and call for them at a local level without going to your own federal counterparts and saying, look, kids need this. It's good for the economy, it's good for education, it's good for our children, it's good for our families, it's good for the communities, and then not be supportive of what's happening here in the House.

But, you know, members opposite might put someone else up to speak this out, Mr. Speaker. I hope that they will speak in a way that shows a real commitment and not the kind of flip-flop, back-and-forth messages of convenience that we've seen in the past. Thank you.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to put a few comments on the record regarding this resolution.

It's unfortunate that we have a resolution worded in this way because I think there are many, many resolutions that could have come forward on child care that all members of this Legislature could have supported. But when I listen to the comments that have been made by members of the government benches that just pat themselves on the back for the wonderful job that they have done but blame everyone else—and, I mean, this government has a history and a pattern of blaming the federal government, blaming the previous government in the province of Manitoba for everything and just patting themselves on the back for the wonderful job that they've done.

Mr. Speaker, at the outset I do want to indicate, and I have said this to the minister and other members of the government before, that there has been some good work done in child care by this government, and I will give credit where credit is due. It's important that we don't criticize absolutely everything that a government does, because no government does everything right or does everything wrong. There have been some positive initiatives on the child-care side, and I have recognized that and have put it on the public record before, and I will put it on the public record again, but there isn't any government that's perfect.

When I look at this resolution it appears to me that this government is just patting itself on the back and saying, look how wonderful we are and how bad everyone else is. Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had a history lesson today from many members opposite, and, you know, not once when they were talking about the investment in child care that they have made and the decisions that were made in the '90s did they indicate that there were unprecedented cuts in the 1990s in transfer payments from the federal government—some \$250 million a year cut from the budgets of the Province of Manitoba. There were difficult decisions that had to be made, and we take responsibility for those decisions that were made.

Not once did they mention, Mr. Speaker, when there were increases in several of the last budgets that have been presented in this province for child care, that this government has unprecedented revenues coming to this province in the way of transfer payments that have never been seen in the history of the province before. And, yes, there should be additional support for child care from this government, and we're pleased to see that some of the money that came in additional transfer payments went into child care.

But I find it unbelievable that some of the negative comments that have been put on the record about the federal government today, especially from the former minister—I find it, well, a bit ironic maybe. We have a government today in Manitoba that receives 40 percent of its budget from transfers from Ottawa. Yet they continue to go cap in hand to the federal government once again and ask for more. Provinces to the west of us and taxpayers to the west of our province are paying taxes to Ottawa so that Ottawa can hand Manitoba more money. Yet, Mr. Speaker, 40 percent isn't enough. We've got a government today that is standing up and saying, give us more. You that live in Saskatchewan, you that live in Alberta, you that live in British Columbia, pay more taxes because we need more. We can't stand on our own two feet and we don't want to stand on our own two feet. We're proud as Manitobans to say, give us more, we can't manage, we can't do things on our own. I find it unconscionable that we have this kind of a resolution and the comments that have been put on the record today by members of this government.

There could have been a resolution on the Order Paper today that we all could have supported. There could have been a resolution that talked about commending those that work in the child-care system for their commitment, encouraging those that get trained as early childhood educators to remain in the child-care system because our children need that. We could have stood in this House unanimously and supported a resolution that congratulated the early-childhood educator system and those that work in that system today.

But what do we see, Mr. Speaker? What do we have on the Order Paper today? We have a resolution that plays once again the blame game. Blame everyone else for all of the issues that we face in child care, but we don't want to have to find all of the solutions to the problems here in Manitoba. It's your fault, Ottawa, it's your fault, former government, but we don't accept any responsibility for doing what we need to do to try to enhance the child-care system here in the province of Manitoba. I have some difficulty in a government that looks at themselves as perfectionists, that don't look at ways that they can change and make things better in this province, that nowhere in here, in this resolution, do we see anything that's congratulating those that work within the system, that those that provide the kind of support across the board for children, in families that need affordable child care so that they can be

productive members of society. We don't see anything here that speaks to congratulating anyone except a government that wants to pat themselves on the back and think that they have done it all.

There is more to do. I think, collectively, if we put our heads together, we can and we will ensure that the child-care system is better in Manitoba. But, Mr. Speaker, I would have preferred to have seen a resolution today on the Order Paper that looked at congratulating the real people in the real child-care

system that we have in the province of Manitoba. It would have been something that I would have been proud to stand up and support. But I cannot stand in my place today and support a government—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for River East will have two minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 28, 2009

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