

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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

Vol. LXII No. 58A - 10 a.m., Tuesday, June 8, 2010

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 8, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): It is my duty to inform the House that Mr. Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the honourable Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

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

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe if you canvass the House, you'd find leave to go directly to Bill 201.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Just prior to that, I would like to call orders of the day, private members' business.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe if you canvass the House, that you would find there would be agreement to go directly to Bill 201.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is there agreement from the House to go directly to Bill 201? *[Agreed]*

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 201—The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that Bill 201, The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act; Loi sur l'inclusion sociale et la lutte contre la pauvreté, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to speak to this bill which provides for the development by the Legislature of a plan—a detailed plan to address poverty and social inclusion and improve the situation in Winnipeg and indeed in—all over Manitoba.

I'd like to thank those who have come and are sitting in the gallery to listen and to support good policy in this province. I think I would also like to appeal to all members to support this measure. I think that there can be no argument that this approach is badly needed. I believe if this were come to a vote that we would see support from probably virtually every member in this House, and I think that the government should let this go to a vote for that reason.

What has happened in the last 11 years? We have seen that there has been an abysmal failure of the policy of addressing poverty issues in this province, that we—there can be no more damning record than that of the food banks, where the number of people who have had to use food banks has gone up and up and up. And in the last year, province wide, it went from 40,000 up to 48,000 people, half of those being children.

And the food banks are important because they are a marker of those who are desperate for food, those who don't have money for food, those who are often starving without access to food banks, and those who come to food banks as a last resort. And so the numbers indicate the number of people who don't have the basic ability, the basic funding, the basic resources to look after their food needs and it has been going up and up.

And why has this happened? Well, there has been a failure to address and reduce poverty in Manitoba and this failure is having a lot of consequences, of which I will talk about quite a bit, but in terms of the problems, the housing crisis, in terms of the problems of the gangs and the crime. These are reflections of the fact that there are people who are desperate who don't have enough food and are—instead of taking productive options, are being forced to take options that often they would never choose under normal circumstances.

Let us take the marker—and I mentioned the food banks. I will mention the report—recent report by the Manitoba Ombudsman, and the Manitoba Ombudsman is crying out for change in this report because there's a recognition that the system that the NDP have been operating with for the last 11 years is hopelessly flawed. It needs an overhaul. It doesn't need tinkering. It needs major change and some of the problems are as simple as treating people with dignity who have to come—who are forced to come and get social assistance.

Some of the change that the Ombudsman is talking about and has seen is the need for better openness and transparency about what people's benefits really are, that all too often people have not been told adequately about what they are eligible to receive. This government and the staff are being told, don't tell people frankly about their benefits; cover them up, hide them.

It is a sad and sorry symptom, a sad and sorry tale of what has been going on under this government and it needs to change.

*(10:10)

The situation and the crisis in housing is a direct result of the inadequate support for housing under social assistance. And there can be no argument here because the government has kept the support for housing virtually flat at a time when rental costs are going up, and it is creating huge problems in Winnipeg, indeed, around Manitoba. And the result is that there is a crisis in housing at the moment and it is of the government's causing because they have not done what should be their job.

And we see this in the food banks, as well, because the government has kept the rates virtually flat for the support of housing, under social assistance, that people are being forced to use their food budgets to pay for their housing, their rental supports, because they can't possibly do it without. And the shortage of foods means that they're starving and they're forced to go to the Winnipeg Harvest.

So I plead with members here to support this measure because we need it. It is good policy. Forget about who it comes from. Let's put this in the place because it is needed by people in Manitoba. And there are many people in Manitoba who should have the changes that we can produce, as an all-party group, in terms of planning and reducing poverty much more effectively than it's been done for the last 11 years. Thank you.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I'm pleased to rise and put some comments on the record in regards to Bill 201, The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act, that has been introduced by the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

I'm pleased to speak and to support the member for River Heights in his efforts to keep the whole issue of poverty in front of this Legislature and ask for concrete solutions that, maybe, could come about as a result of people setting aside their partisan agendas and working together to try to eradicate poverty in our province.

And it's a lofty goal, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I know that not any one of us in this Legislature has all of the answers. But, certainly, by putting our heads together and working with the community, we should be able to find some concrete solutions to some of the issues that are facing some of the most vulnerable people in our Manitoba society.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, poverty does span across demographics and across all regions of the province. And I know that the bill that the member for River Heights has brought forward is well intentioned and it is significantly—it is a significant visionary statement and targets really are important if we hope to achieve a goal. But we need a plan for how to achieve those targets and we need some concrete action. And all we've seen from this NDP government is that they have—they happen to be very big on talk but very short on substantive action.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we've seen the number of people in Manitoba who rely on employment and income assistance on the rise; up nearly 9 percent over the last year. We know that child poverty is still a devastating problem in many communities and within many sectors of our population. Much more can be done to help people achieve financial independence and to fulfill their true potential.

The current NDP government has a policy of hiking minimum wage on a regular basis rather than adopting sustainable effective policies to lift low-income Manitobans above the poverty line. And one of the best ways to make a substantial difference in the lives of low-income Manitobans would be to significantly raise the basic personal exemption. By taking those Manitobans who are at the bottom of the income ladder, off of the tax rolls altogether, we can actually leave more money in their pockets than we do by raising the minimum wage.

In fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, raising the minimum wage creates an incentive for employers to simply eliminate those minimum wage jobs altogether. That leaves unskilled or inexperienced labour without the hope of ever finding employment. It prohibits these Manitobans from sharing in the dignity of work.

Raising the basic personal exemption is better for business and it's better for low-income Manitobans. It needs to be raised substantially, though. The token increases that have been announced by this NDP government just aren't going to cut it for low-income Manitobans, Madam Deputy Speaker.

And income assistance must be available to individuals as a hand up until they can get back on their feet. We need an Employment and Income Assistance system that is fair and that is sustainable. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, while other provinces have been able to help more and more people become independent of social assistance, the number of people in Manitoba who need assistance has increased to over 61,000 people.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the best way to help people get off assistance is to provide them with affordable housing, with child care, with education and with access to good jobs. Training is a very important part of this picture, and there are many people on social assistance that would benefit from training programs that will get them into quality jobs and off of social assistance for good.

Madam Deputy Speaker, every year, the Social Planning Council distributes its child poverty report card. The report card is a valuable evaluation of child poverty in our province. It's a way of knowing how families in our province are faring, relative to other provinces and to Canada as a whole.

In 2009, Manitoba regained its title as the child poverty capital of Canada, with almost one in five Manitoba children living in poverty. And this is the track record of an NDP government that has been in power for 11 years and talks the talk about poverty and child poverty but, obviously, hasn't put in place any concrete action that would see things change, Madam Deputy Speaker. We're getting worse, not better, under an NDP government.

And, according to the Social Planning Council, we have the dubious distinction of being the child poverty capital of the country in nine out of the last

20 years. But, really, Madam Deputy Speaker, what matters most is that child poverty continues to exist at all. The fact that the Child and Family Poverty Report Card still needs to be published means that the job is far from done.

And poverty is a reality for thousands of Manitoba families, and particularly for children. The situation is far worse when one considers that the published child poverty rates for our province usually do not include First Nations communities, of which there are many and where poverty is often widespread. It means, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it's time to look at new ways of eradicating poverty and helping individuals to fulfil their potential and to achieve independence.

Ultimately, governments that pat themselves on the back and talk about what a good job they're doing, those kinds of platitudes do nothing, Madam Deputy Speaker, to help impoverished families. What is needed is a vision for a future without child poverty, along with leadership, innovation and, most of all, meaningful, serious action, not just lip-service. And I would encourage all members of the House to look at this piece of legislation very seriously. And I would encourage the government to move this bill on to committee.

And it's going to take more than legislators to deal with the issue of poverty and child poverty in our province. There are many experts out there. There are many people that are living within poverty that have suggestions and ideas, and can contribute to the bigger picture vision that all of us need to be putting our heads together around.

* (10:20)

And if this bill could be passed today in the Legislature to committee, and we could hear from those experts that understand the issues and the needs of some of the most vulnerable in our community, and we could hear first-hand from some of those that are living in poverty what needs to happen, if we could get to that public hearing process and get this bill into committee maybe, just maybe, we could all put our heads together, work with the community, with the people that have some understanding and some expertise and those that have their stories to tell and set aside our partisan politics and make a commitment as legislators to work together with the community, with the expertise that is available, Madam Deputy Speaker, we may be able to make a significant difference.

So I would encourage members on the government side of the House to stand in their place today, put some positive comments on the record, be visionaries and look towards what we all collectively might be able to do. Let's get this bill to committee. Let's hear from the public, and let's move on trying to find a way to eradicate poverty and child poverty in the future.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): It's rather opportune that I rise to speak on Bill 201, The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act following the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson).

The member for River Heights was a member of a federal government that in 1988—sorry—1989 passed a resolution, I believe, unanimously in the House of Commons to eliminate child poverty. His government not only did not work towards achieving that goal but actually made it worse, and that began with the federal budget of 1995, which said that as of April 1st, 1996, the Canada Assistance Plan would be eliminated, and so that act was totally repealed. That was a very significant piece of social welfare legislation that guaranteed certain things to all Canadians, and when that was eliminated it meant that provinces could do whatever they want.

It also resulted in a huge reduction of transfer payments from the federal government to Manitoba, both for health, post-secondary education and social programs. And, going by memory, I believe, in the first year Manitoba lost about \$110 million and, in the second year, I believe, the total was about 240 million accumulatively over two years, and the result was that the provincial government, and the Minister of Family Services at the time was none other than the member for River Heights, immediately cut welfare rates in Manitoba significantly, significant cuts to welfare rates.

Point of Order

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a point of order.

Mr. Gerrard: Just a—here I think—

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, are you rising on a point of order?

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I am rising on a point of order.

Madam Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the honourable member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: I think when you said that the minister for River Heights was the one responsible for welfare in Manitoba, that you actually meant the member for River East.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Just on the point of order, this is not a point of order. This is a dispute over the facts.

Mr. Martindale: I apologize to the member for River Heights. I did not intend to mix him up with the member for River East. In fact, I did intend to say that it was the member for River East who was the Minister of Family Services in 1995, and in 1996 significantly reduced welfare benefits to Manitobans.

Our government is taking decisive action to reduce poverty in Manitoba and we have a made-in-Manitoba vision that is focussed on meeting the needs of Manitobans, while also creating an environment where people have reason to hope and an environment where people have options and the support they need to make their lives better.

Manitoba recognizes that poverty is a complex problem that requires a multifaceted approach to investments and measuring success. So not only are we doing things to assist people who receive social assistance as their main source of income, but we are also making great strides in areas such as providing more child-care spaces, more housing units and a great number of items, some of which I will enumerate and some of which my colleagues will enumerate.

According to every recent statistical measure on poverty, the poverty rate in Manitoba has been declining since 1999. The latest figures show that we have cut the child-poverty rate in half since 2000, lifting 28,000 children out of poverty. Manitoba's incidence of child poverty is third lowest in Canada after Québec and Alberta, and the source of this is Low Income in Canada: 2000-2007, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Now, those who are listening attentively to the debate today might be interested in asking the question: Well, why has child poverty been reduced substantially in Manitoba? And that is a good and a valid question.

And the main reason is that we ended the clawback of the National Child Benefit. Now, the National Child Benefit was something that the federal government brought in. It was a good idea. It

was targeted at low-income families. But what did the federal government do? Well, they said, we're going to give this money, but there's no restrictions on what the provincial governments can do with it. And so in every province, except two, the provincial governments clawed the money back from individuals and put it into programming instead.

And, indeed, that's what happened in Manitoba. Instead of low-income people benefiting directly from the money, the provincial government clawed it back. So what did we do? Well, when we were elected in 1999, we began to end the clawback, first for children from zero to six and then children from six to 12 and then children from 12 to 18, and the result was a huge infusion of income into low-income families, particularly of benefit to single mothers.

So, for example, according to Statistics Canada, the rate of single mothers on low incomes has declined from 43.8 percent in 1999 to 23.5 percent in 2006, an improvement of 46 percent. Manitoba has the second most-improved poverty rate for single mothers and the third best for children. From 2006 to 2007, our overall poverty rate improved more than any other province outside Newfoundland and Labrador.

Using the federal government's market basket measure of poverty, Manitoba had the third-lowest overall rate in Canada, and that source is also Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

The most recent statistics from Human Resources and Social Development Canada indicate that Manitoba reduced poverty more than any other province outside Newfoundland.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Manitoba, supports our work to revitalize communities, and here's a quote from their State of the City 2009 report, entitled, *It Takes All Day to be Poor*, CCPA Manitoba, December 9th, 2009. And they said, quote: Lord Selkirk Park is transforming into a community of hope thanks to the collaborative hard work of community organizations, the provincial government, schools and individuals living in the neighbourhood.

And I might add that the same thing is happening at Gilbert Park, which is in Burrows constituency. So our government is spending money to rehabilitate every unit in Gilbert Park.

And instead of giving a contract to a private contractor, the government went into a partnership

with North End Community Renewal Corporation, and we hired people who were either on welfare or on Employment Insurance and who either lived in Gilbert Park or the surrounding neighbourhood to do the work, and they're doing a splendid job.

I had a tour there. I was so impressed, I said I think I'm going to buy all you guys coffee. They didn't really believe me, but the next morning I showed up with coffee for about 25 workers, and doughnuts. I would have preferred muffins but my family said just buy them doughnuts. So I bought them doughnuts and they were very appreciative.

And the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) also had a tour of Gilbert Park and he was equally impressed.

And not only are they doing the dry walling and the taping and the painting and the insulating and installing high-efficiency furnaces, but they are doing the millwork. They are actually building all the cupboards on site and doing a beautiful job. And this is one of—another example of where our government is creating hope, because these people now have jobs, they have pride, they have income and they have skills, and some of them have already left and gone to work for private contractors.

And, interestingly, I received no phone calls of complaint about the worker—work that the people that were hired in the neighbourhood are doing, but they actually had to hire a private contractor to finish the work, and I'm getting complaints—guess what?—about the private contractor and their shoddy work. I guess they were in a hurry. They wanted to finish the project quickly and so the workmanship was not as good. But I'm proud of the local people who are doing a great job.

*(10:30)

We have also increased the minimum wage. So, on October 1st, 2009, the minimum wage was increased by 25 cents to \$9 an hour, and this October 1st, 2010, it will be increased by another 50 cents to \$9.50 an hour.

Our government has increased the minimum wage every year since 2001. The minimum wage has increased by nearly 60 percent, or \$3.50, since 1999, while inflation has increased by 22.2 percent. And I think it's important that not only are we trying to help people who are on social assistance but we're trying to help people who are low income and working, and we're doing that in a number of ways.

We're also trying to reduce the welfare wall so that it pays better to be working than it does to be on social assistance and we've done this by extending benefits to people after they leave welfare, and other provisions, which I don't have time to go into but I'm hoping that at least one of my colleagues will do that because these are very good measures that do make it better to work than to be on social assistance. And we are doing that bridging to help people to achieve that kind of independence, and our record has actually been quite good because somewhere in the notes here it says that 500 people have benefited from the Rewarding Work program and gotten off social assistance.

So I will now yield the floor to my colleagues to add to this debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable Minister for Culture, Heritage—the honourable member for Inkster.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Deputy Speaker, it's with pleasure that I stand to—rise to speak to this bill and, in fact, being the seconder to the bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think that the member from River East said it best in terms of at times it's necessary to think in terms of a visionary process that will ultimately deal with the real issue that are facing hundreds, if not thousands, of families in Manitoba, and that is the issue of poverty.

I listened very closely to what it is that the member from Burrows was saying and must admit somewhat disappointed in terms of the references back to the '90s. I do appreciate through the years there have been different governments of all different types of political stripes; some have taken actions that have given us reason to feel very optimistic and have hope. Sometimes actions don't necessarily provide that.

At the end of the day what we're hoping to be able to do is to have a unique piece of legislation pass through this Legislature, ultimately to go to a committee that would have a real impact in the province of Manitoba. And that's what I—what it is that I was hoping that we would be debating today, a policy issue that could have an impact—a positive impact—and the children, in particular, of our province. And I would appeal to future speakers on the government benches to try to talk about that vision and how we might be able to make good difference.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the—we all know the provincial Ombudsman came out with a report and the Ombudsman's office is a apolitical office—it's truly independent. It did a report on the issue of income to individuals in the province of Manitoba that are very dependent on income assistance, and it's very important that members try to get a very good understanding of exactly what it is is being said.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are a number of different stakeholders throughout the province of Manitoba that believe that the issue had to be addressed to the degree in which they joined forces in appeal to the provincial auditor. And if you take a look at the individual organizations, all of these individual organizations are apolitical in their nature and are just trying to do what they believe, as an organization, as a non-profit group, the best interest in serving, in many cases, the clientele that they're having to deal with on a day-in and day-out basis.

The Canadian Mental Health Association, Winnipeg region, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Manitoba division, the Centre of Aboriginal Human Resource Development, the Community Financial Counselling Services, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba Inc., Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities, the Resource Assistance for Youth, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, west cultural—or I'm sorry—West Central Women's Resource Centre, Winnipeg Harvest, Wolseley Family Place in the Women's Health Clinic; all of these organizations, Madam Deputy Speaker, saw fit to recognize that we need to get the—more than just the political parties involved in the discussion, that they wanted to see something coming out of the provincial Ombudsman. And the provincial Ombudsman, I think, did a fabulous job in providing to this Legislature a report. And I would suggest that members need to reflect on the report.

There's one recommendation within the report that I want to highlight because I think that that is a very, very important recommendation. And it's not to take away from other recommendations, but it's one that really struck me, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that is recommendation No. 34. And I quote from the report itself: It is recommended that the department determine whether participants are required to use benefits allocated for basic necessities to supplement benefits allocated for rent, and if so, how frequently and to what extent does this occur.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think there has been, for many years, a general feeling from many

individuals that are recipients, and many advocates of those recipients, that we do not allow for enough money to flow through to individuals that are genuinely trying to provide for family. And, as a result, what ends up happening is that individuals will take out of money allocated for food, as an example, and shift it over into other categories, whether its clothing or rent subsidy. And, as a direct result, there is a growing dependency on other non-profit social institutions.

The other day I was talking about Winnipeg Harvest and how wonderful and blessed we are to the degree in which we have organizations like Winnipeg Harvest that, many years ago, saw the need and saw how important it was to ensure that we have food for all Manitobans. And, you know, it was a number of years ago—I believe it was close to 25 years, or in and around 25 years, and I could be wrong on that, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it's been around for quite awhile as an organization. And what I have found is that, over the years, we have grown more and more dependent on Winnipeg Harvest in providing what many would argue, including myself, a basic standard of food allowance to Manitobans that are in need.

I have had the opportunity to have feedback from individuals that work for an organization like Winnipeg Harvest. And I suspect that if we were to canvass those workers, that you would find that most would be quite happy to be doing something else, Madam Deputy Speaker. Because they recognize that there is a need for us to provide food and it would be wonderful that, you know, all Manitobans did not have to go to a food bank in order to be able to provide food for their family. And I think that's a very, very serious issue.

And what we do is, because we're not allowing for the types of allowances that are necessary in order to cover some of those very basics such as shelter, we are compromising many individuals that have come upon hard times, for whatever reason. And, believe it or not, hard times could fall upon anyone inside this Chamber. And we like to think that our system of having a very strong social conscience, that, given the wealth that we have as a country, that we have as a province, that there should be no one in this province that is dependent on having to go indefinitely on—to food banks, or should have to go, you know, on—with hands out and on their knees, looking for hand-outs. We have the internal wealth.

* (10:40)

The bill that's being suggested, Madam Deputy Speaker, establishes goals, and I would think that politicians of all political stripes, would see the merit in terms of supporting this bill. At the very least, let's allow the bill to go to committee. I'm sure that, based on just the number of interest groups or stakeholders that went before the Ombudsman, I would think that there would be many stakeholders that would welcome the opportunity to come to the Manitoba Legislature in a standing committee and give their ideas and their thoughts about the legislation. I can assure you that the Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party would have no objection whatsoever to amendments. You know, it's the principle is what it is that we're fighting for, and we would ask the government to recognize the value, give the respect to the stakeholders, allow them to come to the Legislature and have this debate inside committee. Open the doors and allow Manitobans to have input on this bill, and that's what we're asking of the government to do today.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I hope, for the sake of our children, for the sake of those that are on low income that, as opposed to talking out the bill, that the government would recognize the value of good, healthy policy discussion for what it is, allow the bill to go to committee, allow Manitobans, then, to have direct input into this whole issue, which is an important policy issue for the province and the future of our province.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Deputy Speaker: With us today in the gallery is 40 grade 9 students from Grant Park High School who are under the direction of Ms. Elena Wiens. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister for Advanced Education and Literacy (Ms. McGifford).

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

* * *

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for introducing Bill 201, The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act. I am pleased to add a few words to those spoken by my colleague, the

member from Burrows, and the rest of my colleagues who will be speaking after me.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please allow me to briefly give you my personal story of how I came to appreciate and have come to a decision to be part of a party that champions the underprivileged members of society, the very people who will be benefiting from this—the many programs of—that will eradicate poverty.

My family and I arrived in Winnipeg in June of 1982. So it will be 28 years this month that we've been residents of Winnipeg, and I consider it a great privilege and am very grateful for the opportunity of being a resident of Manitoba. We have had the chance to move out of Manitoba if we would—if we had opted to do that, but, personally, I stayed firm and decided to stay here, and I'm glad that I did.

Sometime in 1983 or 1984, I was in one of the homes of a relative, and there was a party in—at that home at that time, and there were many visitors. And there was one lady, a visitor from Portage la Prairie—I found out that she was a nurse and had been in this place for—since maybe the early '70s, if not the late '60s. And I found her statement very—I objected to the statements that she was making at that time because she was saying, here in Manitoba, the government is no good because the government cares for single mothers; the government provides social assistance to First Nations and Aboriginals; the government cares for the mentally disabled.

Being new to Canada then, I was intrigued by that statement, yet I fully laud and applauded what was happening in the community.

I lived very close to a house, at that time, in the West End section of the city—to a house where, in that particular house, several mentally challenged or disabled individuals are being cared for. And I found out the government is supporting or giving support so these disabled individuals will be properly cared for. And I am taking the bus to work and, in my bus ride, I befriended a young male person who had Down syndrome. He had mental challenges, but still able to do some work and is quite a good conversationalist, so we take the bus every day and became friends. And I found out she—he was working at one of the stores, department stores, and getting paid and getting some—whatever skill he has, is being used. And I thought that was amazing.

Back home, I know of someone who lived closed to us. He was mentally challenged, and the

family who—he belongs to a family but, unfortunately, he was left to fend for himself. He was not cared for, not fed. He's free to roam the community, and the poor guy is not fed so—and people know that he's not being cared for, and people—and vicious, nasty people—would throw bread or food on the ground and the poor guy would get that food and eat it with all the soil.

And I thought, when I learned that people here are being cared for despite their disabilities, mental challenges, I really thought whatever government is doing that, this kind of society is the best society if they're caring for those kinds of individuals.

And then this lady continued to harangue in his statements, the fact that single mothers are cared for, and to her that's kind of supporting this kind of lifestyle. And they are given assistance to have a decent home—house—and they have allowance and they're encouraged to go to schools. And I said these are really very good work this government is doing.

And also I know of some people there who are residents of housing projects, and I did visit one family in their place, and I thought it's a decent house that they're in. And, in that particular conversation, when that woman was saying, oh, they're—this government is giving money to these Aboriginals who are lazy, who are drunkards, and good for nothing.

I don't know much about Aboriginal people except that they were the first inhabitants of this province and of the country, for that matter. Even though I don't know that woman, I told her—and, oh, she even added, I detest that my taxes are going to these kinds of people; the single mothers, the Aboriginals, these lazy—I don't know what else she mentioned. She used these words.

*(10:50)

At that point, although I'm a very quiet person, I had to speak up, and I told her, you know, I've been here over a year. I paid my taxes. I work hard. I don't mind that my taxes will go to people, like the single mothers, those disabled and the—those Aboriginals because, first, I don't know exactly what their situation is, but I'm sure they need help; that's why they're being given help. And if it means more taxes will be taken from me, I'll gladly pay more taxes if that's the case because she was even saying, oh, our taxes are high because of—it goes to these kinds of people, and I told her, you know, I don't mind even paying more taxes. I'm a poor person, I work hard,

but I don't mind sharing my taxes for such things if it goes to those kinds of people.

And after that conversation, I thought long and hard. What kind of government are we in? And upon inquiry, I found out it was NDP government. Then it was led by Howard Pawley. I didn't take any membership yet for the party but, from then on, I have told myself, members of my family, and the friends that I know that, should there be an election, I will support this party. Now, back to—that's my brief story, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Frank Whitehead (The Pas): I rise today to put a few words on this bill, proposed bill, and I want to talk about the many initiatives that this government has undertaken over the years to address the issues of poverty. Poverty—for example, in First Nations—is of major concern to everyone, all levels of governments, the different institutions that are working for all humanitarian projects. We're all involved some way to help reduce or to eliminate or to eradicate poverty.

But poverty's something that I know all too well and what it looks like in First Nations communities. I've been to all the First Nations in Manitoba, and most in western Canada as well. I've seen poverty and I've also known what it feels like and what it looks like in my home community, and in my home, as well, when I was a child. I know what those hunger pangs are. I know what it was like to go to bed hungry and to wake up hungry and I know what it's like to watch sporting events from the sidelines because I couldn't afford equipment to play hockey or play baseball or play soccer. I know what it's like to be poor and I'm not the only one. All my friends I grew up with were in the same predicament I was in.

But it's because of those life challenges that motivated our community—for example, our leaders—to embark on an ambitious journey to eliminate poverty in our community. But that's something that we knew that couldn't be done by ourselves alone. We needed partnership. We needed others to join us in this ambitious goal and one of those partners that have stuck with us over the years is the NDP party and the NDP government.

This is something I've always admired of the NDP government, to consider going beyond jurisdictional boundaries and to help others who are less fortunate and this is what this government does

and I am proud to be part of this government that addresses issues like that to help people, communities, move away from the—from poverty.

I'm proud to be part of a committee that addresses poverty reduction, and you will remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in the Speech from the Throne we committed to establishing a Premier's Advisory Council on Poverty and Education this year, 2010, to co-ordinate the efforts of all sectors in the community and bring forward new ideas and approaches. On May 21, 2009, we announced ALL Aboard, our poverty reduction strategy. Engaging the community is a key element of our poverty strategy. Based on consultations with 560 organizations and individuals, 15 key indicators have been implemented, and these organizations and individuals will continue to play a prominent role in guiding our future work.

Consultations will continue to ensure the strategy reflects the realities of low-income Manitobans. ALL Aboard is based on the principles of safe, affordable housing and supportive communities. Education, jobs and income support, strong healthy communities and accessible and co-ordinated services, these are the same principles that we believed in when we first embarked on the ambitious goal to eliminate strategy—the poverty in our community. With the help of this government, of this party, we were able to move forward in a progressive manner to the point where no one in our community goes to bed hungry or wakes up hungry. That's the power that we have through engaging the community and the government to do the good works that needs to be done.

The Province will introduce a series of measures in 2011 to gauge progress under the four pillars of ALL Aboard poverty reduction strategy, which will be based on advice received from stakeholders and will form the basis of the annual report to the public to demonstrate progress on poverty reduction and social inclusion. We are doing good works. We are not finished with the process and the strategy. We need to continue these good works so that we can have the strategies in place, to set in place a foundation that we can build our communities and further eliminate poverty at all levels.

I want to say that I've seen, I have seen the—what these kind of good works can do for individuals. It was my pleasure to be part of an organization under the NDP government to take the unemployed unemployables and put them through training, put

them through work experience and guide them into their proper direction where they need to go to further enhance their life skills, to further enhance their education. This is what we've done over the years.

And I must say that there is one individual that always makes me proud of what can be done when we work together like that. This person who came in to the program, I'm talking about unemployed unemployables, people who do not have the skill level to go into the work force, or nor the education, nor the training, to go into the work force. But this person came through our program, which was supported by this government at the time and excelled in her programs, in her studies and graduated from that program, Madam Deputy Speaker. This lady now is the executive secretary of UCN in The Pas.

And I have many other stories like that to tell. That's what can happen—

* (11:00)

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) will have two minutes remaining.

The time is now 11 o'clock and time for private member's resolution.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 15—Fertility Treatments

Madam Deputy Speaker: The resolution for consideration this morning is the resolution on Fertility Treatments, brought forward by the honourable member for Southdale.

Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale): I move, seconded by the member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun),

WHEREAS involuntary infertility affects up to one in six couples in Manitoba and an infertility diagnosis can mean a life crisis for couples who want to have a child; and

WHEREAS this challenging journey is deepened due to the high costs of infertility treatments; and

WHEREAS this provincial government strives to meet the health needs of a diverse populations; and

WHEREAS supporting fertility treatments for women wanting to have children advances gender equity and helps bridge socioeconomic gaps by

making motherhood more accessible for everyone, while also helping our population grow; and

WHEREAS this provincial government has made prenatal and maternal care a priority through a number of its initiatives and programs; and

WHEREAS this provincial government already covers all examinations and tests required to determine the reasons for infertility as well as corrective surgery if that will relieve the cause of infertility; and

WHEREAS this provincial government believes providing support to those seeking fertility treatments by refundable tax credits is important.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba support the concept of providing credits through the income tax program for Manitoba families pursuing fertility treatments.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is it the will of the House to consider the resolution as printed? *[Agreed]*

WHEREAS involuntary infertility affects up to one in six couples in Manitoba and an infertility diagnosis can mean a life crisis for couples who want to have a child; and

WHEREAS this challenging journey is deepened due to the high costs of infertility treatments; and

WHEREAS this provincial government strives to meet the health needs of diverse populations; and

WHEREAS supporting fertility treatments for women wanting to have children advances gender equity and helps bridge socioeconomic gaps by making motherhood more accessible for everyone, while also helping our population grow; and

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WHEREAS this provincial government believes providing support to those seeking fertility treatments by refundable tax credits is important.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba support the concept of

providing credits through the income tax program for Manitoba families pursuing fertility treatments.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) and seconded by the honourable member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun), that

WHEREAS involuntary infertility—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

Ms. Selby: June 8th is a really important day to Manitobans, to women in Manitoba, but especially for me, and I say that because—call it coincidence or call it something bigger, but today my dear friend Jamie is in a hospital in Montréal having a scheduled C-section for a baby that has been long waited for, and I find it remarkable that today in Manitoba we're discussing fertility treatment when I have stood beside my friend and held her hand and talked her through many, many, days of pain and suffering as she tried to have a family, and today her dream comes true. I spoke with Jamie last night on the phone and she was, as expected, nervous, excited, terrified.

One in six families are affected by infertility across Canada, and that's probably the numbers we know about. We know that for many families they try to have a child and perhaps when it doesn't happen end that journey and don't continue. The reason why they end can be many reasons. Sometimes it can be a very painful process to have a child and to not have it come true. Sometimes it can be a financial barrier, and that is why I'm so proud that our government will help families to get through this most difficult thing. This private member's resolution calls on the Legislative Assembly to support a new fertility tax credit to aid Manitoba families pursuing fertility treatments.

My dear friend Jamie's journey began about 12 years ago when she found out she couldn't get pregnant, and it was her greatest dream to have a child, her most precious dream to be a mother, to give birth to a child. She did eventually conceive Luc who is five years old today. With his blueberry eyes and his blond hair, he's a remarkable child I have no doubt will leave his mark on this world. And Jamie has become an incredible mother like I knew she would be after being such a good friend.

I went with her one time to her fertility treatment. She lives in Montréal. I went to the clinic with her in Montréal, and I was supposed to be her rock. I went in so that I could hold her hand as she went through one of her early treatments before Luc was conceived. But instead of being her supportive friend and the rock that I was supposed to be—I got into the room and faced the doctor and I'm the one who started to cry, because I had seen how much Jamie had been through and the losses she had faced trying to have a family. And instead of being her rock and supporting her, I cried and begged the doctor to please help her have a family.

And she has. She has Luc, and now, sometime this morning, she'll have a second son. And so if I'm checking my BlackBerry even more often than I normally do, that's why, because I'm very excited to hear when this new young man makes his way into the world today, and I know how long he's been wished for.

It's easy for people, maybe, who haven't faced this, either in their own life or watched somebody go through it, to sort of dismiss it as selfish to want to have your own child, or perhaps to think, well, there's other children in the world; why don't they just adopt? But it's really, I think, impossible to judge how someone feels when they're in that place until you either go through it yourself or see somebody going through the pain of wanting this most secret and most personal desire in your life, and to try to fill it with something else just isn't there.

And for those of us who are lucky enough to have children and to not have to face the difficulty of losing a child, of having a pregnancy not come to the end when it was so, so waited for, can only see that helping families go through this and trying to provide the support we can is the most important thing we can do for them, because, of course, you know, those of us in the House here, many of us stand here because of medical intervention, because a doctor or a surgeon has helped us with a condition, an illness, performed some sort of treatment to allow us to be here, and fertility is no different.

A tax credit is a great step towards helping Manitobans who might not be able to consider getting fertility treatment have it. Of course, it's not the cure for infertility, and we know that some families will still suffer the pain of not being able to conceive or perhaps not being able to maintain that pregnancy due to other factors. But we know that the

financial barrier won't be the reason that they can't try to have this most precious dream.

Here in Manitoba, we're doing what we can to make fertility treatments more accessible. Examinations and tests are already covered to determine the reason for infertility, as well as the corrective surgery if that can relieve the cause of infertility.

But this just goes one step further. It goes one step further to help people feel—and face this most precious, precious thing in their life. And I'm a little bit at loss for words, as my body is here but my heart and my mind are in a Montréal hospital right now wondering if our young baby has been born into this world yet.

Our government has made prenatal and maternal care a priority through a number of initiatives and programs, things like the new women's hospital which will be right across from the Children's Hospital. And doesn't that make sense, because when your baby is born, if something should be wrong and you need to leave the baby in a—in prenatal intensive care, you really don't want to be too far from that child. And if mom's not well and baby's not well, we want to keep them as close together as possible.

Budget 2010, this government included the fertility treatment tax credit, which is a refundable personal income tax credit equal to 40 percent of fertility treatments and related prescription costs. And we know that those prescription costs can be huge. I have seen my friend and the amount of prescriptions that she's had to take over the last few years in trying to conceive now her second son. It shouldn't be a barrier to having a family.

Making fertility treatments more accessible to women and families regardless of their financial ability is important for the future of Manitoba. It grows our population and offers women support and choice.

As promised in 2009, our Throne Speech, we followed through in the commitment to bring the new tax credit to women, and Manitoba is the only—the second province in Canada to bring a fertility tax credit to help women and their families. As I mentioned, my friend Jamie is in Québec right now. Québec, of course, was the first province to do so, and I think that's a great reason of why 5-year-old Luc, today, will have a brother, because of Québec's fertility tax treatment. And I don't think there's

anyone more excited to see this baby born than young Luc.

* (11:10)

We know that mothers who, perhaps, have been able to afford to have one round of fertility treatment and, perhaps, were lucky enough to conceive are now considering the chance of maybe having a second child. And anyone who has siblings knows what that will mean for the child, for the family, for the future.

This tax credit will support hundreds of Manitobans. It will access some of the best medical options in the country.

When you combine this credit with the existing federal medical-expense credit of 15 percent, Manitobans could see up to 60 percent—66 percent of their fertility expenses reimbursed through the income tax system. And that will make a huge difference for families in Manitoba.

And so, although I can't say that I've personally gone through this pain, I have seen it first-hand, and I have seen the joy of having a baby that was so longed for, a miracle baby that was so unexpected.

And so today, in Manitoba on June 8th, I hope this will be supported by the whole House so that all women and families can feel the joy that my friend Jamie and her husband J.L. will be feeling this morning in Montréal. Thank you.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I'm pleased to rise today and say a few words about this resolution from the member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) and to acknowledge that infertility can be a heartbreaking experience for many couples.

Two friends of mine have gone through this struggle so I am acutely aware of how difficult this can be for some families. For many couples, starting a family is absolutely the biggest dream they have and it can come as an incredible surprise to discover that because of infertility, it may not be possible. And this is devastating for some families, there's absolutely no doubt about that.

New technology and innovations mean that, through fertility treatments like drug therapies or in vitro fertilization, the hope of having biological children and creating a family can become a reality. However, I think a lot of families have found that fertility treatments are often very, very expensive and very stressful, as some couples have to go through multiple rounds of in vitro fertilization, with

costs often rising to the tens of thousands of dollars, and there aren't a lot of people that necessarily can afford that. So many couples who are facing infertility are not able to try the drug therapies, in vitro fertilization or other fertility treatments because of the prohibitive costs. It is not unusual, I know, for families to take out loans, to take out—to remortgage their house or to do any number of things like this in order to fulfil their dream. So we know that this is very, very expensive. And what we can do with a tax credit here in Manitoba, which is something that we do support, I think will go a long way in helping a lot of families.

It is estimated that one in six couples struggle with some form of infertility and yet they often find little support in the community around them. So I think this is going to be, you know, another step in the way that we can show support for these families.

And, you know, we know that infertility has a number of effects, both emotional and physical, for the couple and their families. You know, parents that—or people that want to become parents very, very desperately and don't have that opportunity certainly go through this incredible loss of not having a parenting experience. Grandparents, or potential grandparents, again, have their emotional turmoil to deal with too because they don't have that opportunity for a grandparent experience. You know, sometimes, because of the stress this puts on couples in trying for years and years to have a child, you know, you know that there can be difficulties in personal relationships. Loss of work productivity is another aspect to the issue of infertility. Depression would not be out of line in expecting some of the—you know, dismay at not being able to have a child can lead to depression and, certainly, the emotional stress that comes along with that would be very impacting.

So it is something that, I think, in looking at all of that, there is no difficulty for us in supporting this tax credit for families. And, I think, as they go through the process of working through all of this, and there are more opportunities out there to talk about fertility treatments, we can hopefully help individuals feel supported by their community as they strive to start a family.

The financial costs, as I have mentioned, can be very, very prohibitive and we know that fertility treatments are not covered by most private insurance plans. So this is very, very critical to have a tax credit like this in this province because I've been

made aware that a single round of in vitro fertilization can cost anywhere between 8,000 to 12,000 dollars per treatment cycle, and that is quite a significant cost for any family. And if you have families that are coming from outside of Winnipeg, you can also add all of the costs of travel and local accommodation, loss of work. So this is certainly a financially burdensome issue for a lot of families.

What we find a little bit disconcerting is that the government has not moved to implement the tax credit as soon as they can. Instead, what they've done is delayed it till the fall. And we've been hearing from a number of people in the province that are very concerned that the government is dragging their heels on this. We have seen the government very aggressively move forward on Bill 31 to protect their own Cabinet ministers' salaries, and yet, for something like this, while they're talking about the significance of it, we don't see the tax credit kick in until much later this year.

Now, while we, on this side of the House, are supportive of the tax credit, we do take issue with one of the WHEREASes in the resolution. And one of the clauses states that this government has made prenatal and maternal care a priority, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is just absolutely wrong, and for that reason, for the one WHEREAS we cannot support this resolution. While we support in vitro fertilization tax credit—no doubt about that—what they've done is they have inserted a clause here that is absolutely wrong and, because of that, we are not comfortable to support this resolution at all.

And I just want to give some examples of how inadequate that statement is. Now, whether the member is naive and didn't realize this was going on, or didn't do her homework or, again, is buying into the Minister of Health's spin about maternity care in this province, that particular WHEREAS, I think, is very, very disconcerting. And to throw it into this resolution makes this—makes it difficult for us to pass this resolution.

So I'd like to go back to 2005, when this government received a report on the state of maternity care in Manitoba. The report identified what it called troubling trends in maternal care outcomes. And, in fact, people on the front lines of health care—midwives, nurses, obstetricians, gynecologists—everybody that was involved in putting together that report said that maternity care in

Manitoba was in crisis; and that was coming from the front lines.

It showed that Manitoba had the highest teen pregnancy rate of all the Canadian provinces; the highest stillbirth rate of all the Canadian provinces; the second highest preterm birth rate of all the Canadian provinces; and the second highest rate of neonatal deaths of all the Canadian provinces; the highest rate of post-neonatal deaths of all the Canadian provinces; the highest rate of neonatal hospital readmissions of all the Canadian provinces, and the highest rate of maternal hospital readmissions of all the Canadian provinces.

With that happening in this province we would have expected action from this minister. Instead, despite the fact that this was a ministerial task force, the government sat on that report and it gathered dust for two years. That report was then leaked to us in 2007. The knee-jerk reaction from this Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), rather than embracing her own report, commissioned another task force to look at this issue again. When you have statistics like that, you don't commission another task force and then study the whole issue again—and the numbers have not been improving.

So for the government to try to say that they have made maternal care in this province a priority is really quite a farce because we are not seeing that outcomes in this province are getting any better. In fact there are some very, very disconcerting regional disparities, as well, and very troubling.

* (11:20)

So, you know, when this minister talks about, you know, maternity care being in the province, again it's just part of the—maternity care being a priority for them as a government, that is nothing more than just spin, again, and, you know, I don't understand why the government would not have taken some very serious action on the report that came out. It had some very, very troubling outcomes, and we are still struggling with very high rates of teen pregnancies, stillbirths, neonatal and post-natal deaths.

And this government has done very little. They've dragged their heels on the whole issue of those reports. They have dragged their heels on implementing midwifery. They've fumbled on the introduction of the midwifery training program in the north, so for them to stand in the House and try to

tell Manitobans that they're doing a better job and it's a priority for them is an absolute farce.

And, so, while we support the notion of a tax credit, I think the government's got a whole lot more work to do to address this issue of the very, very serious lack of good maternal health outcomes in this province, and, for that reason, Madam Deputy Speaker, we're unable to support this resolution.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): It's my pleasure to stand today in the House and speak in support of this private member's resolution.

You heard from the member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) and even to some extent from the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) about why supporting this resolution is so important. I don't think hearing the story of a personal journey of an individual—an individual who's having a baby today—it can be understated. This is such an important and precious gift to families, and I could not possibly say it better than the member for Southdale who has outlined how transformative fertility treatment can be in the lives of Canadians.

I also was very pleased to hear from the member from Charleswood that her party supports the tax credit, for all the good reasons that she gave, in fact, not just the financial assistance that it will provide to members that are struggling but her I think very eloquent acknowledgement of what it means to the grandparents or the would-be grandparents and what it can mean to the mental health of a woman and to a couple about this, and I really support that.

She, you know, can't resist making a snarky comment—that's standard operating procedure—about the delay in implementing the tax credit. The Conservatives didn't touch this issue with a 10-foot pole in their time in government and, in fact, when the Pharmacare formulary was declared, they actually removed the coverage of fertility drugs, which is a stain and a blight on their record that ever shall be thus in the history of fertility treatment. That—she didn't mention that. She talked about a couple of months before an implementation of a tax credit—only the second in Canada—Madam Deputy Speaker, but doesn't really mention the fact that they actually slipped the car into reverse when it comes to fertility treatment.

I also, you know, feel quite dismayed that we can have what I would call an overarching agreement about how important this tax credit is for families in Manitoba—again, second only in the nation to offer

this tax credit—but, in a desperate plea to remain the internal contrarian, that the member would stand up and say, well, we can't vote for this really important resolution because of our record on maternal care.

It's poppycock, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is always more work to do when it comes to providing the best possible care for patients, but even the maternal-newborn report that she cites so selectively says on page 4: just as it's getting warmed up. It reminds Manitobans that the Tories disbanded the Maternal and Child Health Directorate in 1994, made critical cuts to the health-care system, and the report that she herself cites says, and I quote: fewer nurses were available to assist women during labour and childbirth, reducing the opportunity for one-on-one 'intrapartum' nursing care during this time.

I think the record speaks for itself, but let's not stop there, Madam Deputy Speaker. Let's go to Statistics Canada and note that Manitoba's infant mortality rate actually got worse during the '90s, from 6.4 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1991 to 8.4 in 1999, while at the same time nationally, the infant mortality rate was improving 6.4 to 5.3 nationally.

Now, we have worked very hard to bring this back down to 7.3, but there is still more work to do, which is why we're investing over a million dollars to implement the recommendations from the Maternal and Child and Health Services Task Force. It's also worthwhile to note, and the member opposite, in her excuse-making to not support this resolution, she doesn't make mention of the 2009 Public Health Agency of Canada report, stating that Manitoba is actually performing better than average on key maternal health indicators, such as Manitoba having the lowest proportion of mothers who have to travel to give birth, at 22.2 percent; the national average is 25.6. This means that 77.8 percent of Manitoba women did not have to travel to give birth.

Manitoba has a lower rate of preterm births than the Canadian average at 5.4 versus 6.2 percent nationally. Manitoba has a lower rate of babies being readmitted to hospitals within one month of birth, 3.2 percent in Manitoba versus 3.6 nationally.

More moms are being contacted at home by a health-care provider to offer supports after giving birth, 98.5 percent in Manitoba versus 93.3 nationally. And this was done sooner after discharge from hospital than in the rest of Canada, within 3.6 days of discharge in Manitoba versus 4.4 nationally.

And, of course, Manitoba mothers are the best judges of maternal health. A national survey found that 92.4 percent of Manitoba moms rate their babies' health as excellent or very good, about the same as the national average of 92.8.

And you can hear the members opposite becoming a little bit uncomfortable with this because they realize that the house of cards on which they've built this opposition to this resolution is crumbling before their very eyes. It's not that difficult to stand up and say, we support a very good idea that's going to be great for families in Manitoba, and we support the fact that, not me, but the Public Health Agency of Canada, under the watch of the Conservative federal Tories, says that Manitoba is performing even better than ever. Infant mortality rate in Manitoba went up in the '90s; it's going down now.

You're making excuses, member for Charleswood. Madam Deputy Speaker, I encourage the members across the way to look at the facts, to realize that the only report that she cites says that the loss of nurses during the '90s was a detriment to the care of babies, and I suggest that they should get their head on straights and support this resolution.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Prior to recognizing the honourable member for Minnedosa, I just want to remind all honourable members that we do have loges if they wish to have a conversation. They should feel free to do that and to take advantage of the loges.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to put some comments and a few words on the record with regard to the resolution that was put forward by the member for Southdale (Ms. Selby).

It's unfortunate that the shrill presentation that was presented by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) was very disconcerting because what it does is takes away from the debate here. It takes away from the reasons why this resolution was not put together and not presented in a way that can be supported by all members in this House.

When you make a resolution as political as this member has done, it takes away from the very significant importance of fertility tax credits—or infertility tax credits—and the need for this government to pay attention to, you know, trends that need to be addressed by this government and often are ignored or forgotten or buried within this government's bureaucracy.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to share a few things on the record with regard to this resolution. Many couples look at having a family as one of the key pieces of the puzzle in their relationship building and in their marriage. And when you learn that this is not possible through natural processes, it's a devastating surprise and very, very disheartening for families.

* (11:30)

Fertility treatments are often expensive and stressful. Some couples go through multiple rounds of treatments, and the costs tend to rise in the tens of thousands of dollars. And this doesn't all only include or justify financial costs; it also talks to the emotional costs that families have to deal with when they're trying to start a family. Many couples who are facing infertility are not able to try drug therapies or in vitro fertilization or other fertility treatments because of the prohibitive costs, and I believe that it—that this is something that is very significant.

I support the fertility treatment tax credit—the infertility treatment tax credit that the Province has put forward. What I do not support is the government's shameless promotion of the way that they've presented this. They've given false hope to so many families, Madam Deputy Speaker, by saying that this is going to be available without really being clear that it is not available until near the end of this fiscal year.

I have two specific families that I'm going to read into the record who have written some very heart-wrenching stories, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I think the government should be aware that this is a very concerning situation, when you go out there and promote something in a budget that is not going to be available for families well into the year. And I believe that when you bring a resolution like this forward again, it brings up debate and discussion, and I think some things have to be put on the record to set the record straight.

My first piece of correspondence was from Michelle Budiwski, and she's from the Rivers area, and her letter, or her e-mail, goes as follows:

In 1994, at the age of 20, I gave birth to my son who was conceived naturally. I never really gave any thought to fertility issues that—in it the least. In 2000, when my son was six years old, I became pregnant while living in Thompson, Manitoba. Although I was using intrauterine device for birth control, the doctors were unconcerned at its effects on my

pregnancy. After 10 weeks of constant trips to the doctor's office with bleeding and low blood pressure, they finally were able to schedule an ultrasound appointment for me, at which time they discovered that the pregnancy was ectopic and I was admitted immediately to Thompson General Hospital and underwent surgery to remove the pregnancy from my Fallopian tube. While they were able to save my tubes, the scar tissue from the IUD infection and surgery itself left both of my tubes 100 percent blocked at the top of my uterus, leaving me unable to conceive.

In 2004, my husband and I decided that we would like to try for a child and, as we were living in Cranberry Portage and the only fertility clinic in the province was in Winnipeg, this task was very complicated. Time off work for both travel and treatments, drug costs and the procedures itself, we found ourselves out of pocket over \$18,000, not including lost wages. Thankfully, we were successful and my daughter was born in July, 2005. As we had no embryos remaining for the procedure and could not afford another IVF treatment, we knew that our family would stop there with two children.

In 2008, my husband passed away, and the thought of more children seemed a remote possibility. Thankfully, we were able to move on from his loss, and I met and married a wonderful man in February, 2010. As he has no biological children, we discussed the possibility of IVF before our marriage and met with the clinic to discuss our options before our wedding, knowing it would be a huge financial and emotional trial. My age has also reached the peak of the success rates for IVF, as the chances for success begin to decline dramatically after 35. I turned 35 in November, 2009.

Our wedding was in February and when the Province announced a new tax credit for fertility treatment for 2010, we took that as a sign and scheduled our treatment for the next cycle. In April, 2010, we went through IVF and a total out-of-pocket cost of over \$15,000, not including lost income and travel, although I now live closer to Winnipeg, in Rivers. Our treatment, unfortunately, did not result in a pregnancy, but we were fortunate to have 11 frozen embryos waiting for us to try another transfer. We were planning doing this at the end of the summer.

When the details of the 2010 infertility tax credit were announced in May, we were devastated. Not that we aren't thrilled that couples in the future will have these benefits, but if we would have known that

the government would not cover the entire 2010 tax year with a 2010 tax credit, we would have deferred our treatment until after the October 1st start date in order to qualify for this benefit, as I am sure many of it not—many, if not all, of the other couples undergoing treatment between January and October would.

The trial of infertility is emotionally draining, physically exhausting and affects entire families. Having the government of Manitoba finally step in to offer some relief on the financial aspects is thrilling, but the October 1st start date to this credit is devastating to those of us who are amassing debt and struggling to finance just a hope of having a child of their own. I'm begging the NDP and all Manitoba legislatures to reconsider the start date for the infertility tax credit in 2010 and having it cover the entire year from January to December. After all, we pay taxes for all 12 months. Why should a credit only be accessible for three?

And this was from one family that I think share a very important message to the government.

Another individual, another family, Harley and Susan Smith of Brandon, also shared their concerns: At 35 years of age, I found my mate and we were married shortly after and planning a family. After six months of trying, we wasted no time in going to the doctor in Brandon to see if anything was wrong. For six months we tried fertility drugs to increase ovulation. Then I had two surgeries to ensure my tubes were open. In the meantime, we made appointment with—in Winnipeg to get things going with them. Again, more tests were required, only to hear we have unexplained infertility. At age 37 we are now going—giving some options which involve a lot more money. We were hopeful about the IUI treatment but, unfortunately, \$8,000 later, not including travel and time out for work, we were not successful.

Madam Deputy Speaker, her letter continues on but, ultimately, she's saying, we pay taxes for the entire year, so why would coverage only go for three months? We appeal to the provincial government to adjust the start date of the 2010 infertility tax credit to January 2010.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm giving two examples of individuals, families, who are heartbroken by this government's insensitive way of announcing a tax credit, not keeping in mind that families are going through a very stressful period of time trying to be successful in having a child. The

costs are so prohibitive, so very, very expensive, and families who have to travel to receive these treatments face added expenses.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm encouraging the government to review the debate that's being presented today, to have a conscience and understand the significance of their decision to have the fertility treatment only come into play from October on. I believe that this was a very serious oversight, and I believe that Manitobans such as the Smith family of Brandon and the Budiwski family from Rivers deserve to be heard and deserve to have their position taken seriously and for government to revisit their policy and implement the fertility program as of January 2010.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am very happy to also join in supporting this resolution today and, speaking as a mother of four, grandmother of six, so I have a deep, deep appreciation for the joys of having a family surrounding one. And Thanksgiving is always a time for our family to express that thanks and always very grateful if my family is in all around my table.

So—I have also lost a baby, so I also appreciate the grief of—regardless of how many children you might have, you never, ever get past the grief of losing one.

So I am surprised at the reluctance of the member for Minnedosa as this resolution is, in some spirit, as—is in the same spirit as hers in recognizing October, a month of awareness for the loss of children during pregnancy or childbirth. So I'm expecting that all members of this House would keep the politics out and support the resolution, support the resolution out of respect for those families that are suffering from problems with fertility.

* (11:40)

I'd like to also take this minute to thank the member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) that—for her heartfelt presentation. I can certainly relate to her tears in the doctor's office. As a social worker in acute care having to cover in intensive care with babies in incubators, it was always easy to find the social worker; she'll be the one in tears over there begging the doctor to save this baby.

So I believe that—well, I know that the infertility diagnosis can be very, extremely painful on a woman and her family, and its treatment is a costly

endeavour ranging in the thousands of dollars. So I think that because our government believes that beyond the cost of medical treatment itself additional financial barriers should not stand in the way of women seeking to have children, it should also not stand in the way of having this resolution supported because of some political irritation.

We know that infertility affects one in six families, and we believe that supporting fertility treatments for women wanting to have children advances gender equity and helps bridge socio-economic gaps by making motherhood more accessible for everyone. A tax credit will be a great step towards helping Manitobans who want to have a family but can't, and it isn't just good for these families, but it helps grow our population.

This government has taken several steps toward making fertility treatments more accessible. It already covers all examinations and tests required to determine the reasons for infertility, as well as corrective surgery if it can relieve the cause of infertility.

This government has made overall prenatal and maternal care a priority through a number of its initiatives and programs, announcing a new era for maternal care with a new women's hospital at Health Sciences Centre and a new birth centre in south Winnipeg—I'm sure the member from Southdale is happy about that too—an expanded maternity ward at St. Boniface Hospital and investing over \$1 million to start implementing the recommendations made by the maternal and child health services task force.

In Budget 2010, this government included the fertility treatment tax credit, a refundable personal income tax credit equal to 40 percent of fertility treatment and related prescription drug costs. Supporting the government in its attempts to make fertility treatments more accessible to women and families regardless of their financial abilities is important for the future of all Manitobans.

We're moving forward on our maternal election commitments to build a new era of maternal care across Manitoba. Midwifery is one of the most significant investments we've made to improve care for moms and babies and has been establishing publicly funded midwifery. Over 70 percent of midwifery clients are from populations at risk, and these moms and babies are seeing lower rates for preterm, stillbirth and low birth weight.

Mr. Doug Martindale, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

According to 2009 Public Health Agency of Canada report, Manitoba is performing better than average on key maternal health indicators. Manitoba has the lowest proportion of mothers who have to travel to give birth at 22.2 percent—national average is 25.6—and this means that 77.8 percent of Manitoba women did not have to travel to give birth. Manitoba has a lower rate of preterm births than the Canadian average, 5.4 percent of births in Manitoba versus 6.2 nationally. Manitoba has a lower rate of babies being readmitted to hospitals within one month of birth: 3.2 percent of births in Manitoba, 3.6 nationally. More moms are being contacted at home by a health-care provider to offer supports after giving birth, 98.5 percent in Manitoba versus 93.3 nationally, and this was done sooner after discharge from hospital than in the rest of Canada, within 3.6 days of discharge in Manitoba versus 4.4 days nationally. And I know I'm repeating a lot of what has been said by our Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), but I think it deserves being repeated. Manitoba moms are the best judges of maternal health. A national survey found that 92.4 percent of Manitoba moms rate their baby's health as excellent or very good.

So I just want to wrap up that—with a couple of examples. Christine Nesbitt [*phonetic*], a new mother who went through the IVF process, said that with this tax credit our government made a huge, huge leap in the right direction and that the tax credit has made her able to think about trying for a second child, something that previously she would have felt was out of her reach.

And as our member from Southdale stated, her friend is enjoying that same—exact same privilege right now. Paula Chorney, with the Manitoba chapter of the Infertility Awareness Association of Canada best: that this tax credit will support hundreds of Manitobans, access the best medical options available and help their dreams become a reality. Manitoba news release May 17, 2010.

I, again, encourage all members to support this resolution. And particularly the gender aspect of it, I expect support from my colleagues on the other side. So thank you very much.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Well, Mr. Acting Speaker, I want to talk to this resolution. In the Liberal Party we certainly support the concept of providing credits through the income tax program for Manitoba families who need fertility treatments. And I want to make sure that's on the record.

This is something which is reasonable and which is certainly a positive move, and this we support. And I want to say that, you know, it—fertility treatments have been a real boon to many couples who are having trouble with infertility and not being able to have children, and being able to have the fertility treatment approaches so that they can have children is something that I would hope and expect that all members here would support. I think that one could consider, you know, going further than that, but I think at least that this is a minimum and reasonable step.

The second point that I want to talk specifically to is the claim in this resolution that the provincial government has made prenatal and maternal care a priority because, clearly, when one examines the record, that if they've made this a priority, they've made it—a mess of it because the rates of death around the prenatal period are higher. In fact, there was a recent report which shows that Canada as a whole is lagging, and Manitoba is lagging most if not all the rest of Canada. And so we are behind. We are not where we should be.

In terms of approaches to prenatal and maternal care, we continue to have higher rates of teen pregnancy than other provinces, and the record here in terms of actual outcomes and performance certainly doesn't match this claim. And either the government has made this a priority and kept a lot of it silent and then, you know, not performed and not produced the results that we should have or the government has not made it a priority. And, you know, the government can speak to which it is, but either way it's not very good in terms of track record, and we certainly would not accept this claim based on the evidence and the performance and the outcomes. Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker.

* (11:50)

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I'm quite happy to put a few words on the record in regard to this resolution in regard to fertility treatments.

Certainly I know that it is an issue with families that are trying to conceive and have not been able to do that. I have some personal experience within my own family, with two separate families within my family circle that have experienced this. And I know that it is very traumatic and very depressing, and can certainly appreciate what families are going through when they're unable to conceive and, certainly, the negative aspects around that when it comes to the financing of these procedures, because, as has been

outlined by many speakers before me, these are significant barriers to receiving the fertility treatments that couples need to go through in order to conceive. That often requires travelling to other places and staying at other places for lengths of time and can be very upsetting with having to be in a place where you don't have your typical family support networks around you.

So we do support the general idea of this resolution, in that the tax credit to families that are seeking the fertility treatments is something that is supported and, certainly, we feel very strongly about that. I think that we've all spoken very succinctly on that and said that we support that part of the resolution.

I believe that the portion of the resolution that politicizes this resolution—I believe that the part about this resolution that politicizes it is the one WHEREAS where the government has talked about that they claim that they've made prenatal and maternal care a priority throughout a number of initiatives and, unfortunately, the record speaks for itself.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And if we go back to 2005 when the government received a report on the state of maternal care in Manitoba, the report identified what it called troubling trends in maternal care outcomes including highest teen pregnancy rates in all of Canada, highest stillbirth rates in all of Canada, the second highest prenatal birth rate of all the Canadian provinces, the second highest rate of neonatal death of all the Canadian provinces, the highest rate of post-neonatal death of all the Canadian provinces, the highest rate of neonatal hospital readmissions in all of Canada and the highest rate of maternal hospital readmissions of all the Canadian provinces. And furthermore, the report said that there were troubling regional disparities in access to maternal and newborn health services.

This really sounds like quite a critical crisis in terms of maternal care, Madam Deputy Speaker, so to claim that there's been a priority for maternal care, I don't think we can claim that that is true here in Manitoba. And I think that that statement in itself is something that is wrong, and, unfortunately, it is in the resolution. So in order to find a way to support this resolution, because, as I said, we do support the idea of the resolution and the tax credit for childless couples, I'm wondering if we could seek leave of the House to determine whether the government would

entertain removing that one WHEREAS clause from the resolution, and that way, we could all support this resolution, because I feel that that is the one clause in the resolution that we don't support even though we support the rest of it.

So if the government is willing to just remove that one particular clause, if there's leave to do that, then we can support that—the resolution.

So I'm wondering if there is leave, if the government would entertain a—the notion that we could remove just that one WHEREAS clause from the resolution and, therefore, support this resolution.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is there leave of the House to delete the fifth WHEREAS clause in the resolution?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Deputy Speaker: No. No leave has been granted.

Mrs. Taillieu: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Unfortunately, the government has decided to defeat their own resolution then, because, you know, really, I mean, there's a very good resolution on the table before us which we're debating, and we have said that we support the notion of the tax credit for childless couples recognizing the difficulties that many couples go through when they need to seek help in fertility treatments. We recognize that and we support that notion.

But what we can't support is the politicizing of the resolution by a government that wants to pat itself on the back by claiming that they've made maternal care a priority, which they have not, Madam Deputy Speaker. For all of the things that I have mentioned, I mean, there was a report that they shamelessly hid from the public and didn't bring out all of the inadequacies in the maternal health care in our province, and that's just wrong. That's just wrong.

We're trying to find a solution here. We're trying to work with the other side to try and find a solution, but we—you know, they—we—I know would like to pass this resolution, but we've offered them the opportunity to find a way to do that. But they have chosen to, instead, defeat their own resolution, which is quite unfortunate and, I think, quite—I don't know what I would call that. It's quite unusual. They want this passed.

I know they'd like to make an announcement that they passed this resolution. I know they'd like to make another announcement and another photo op and another announcement in October or when they bring this in, and it's really unfortunate that they wouldn't want to have provided in this resolution that it be brought into effect immediately. But that doesn't seem to be the way. I guess that's just, you know, delaying another press release and another photo op for some time down in the future.

But let the record say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we, on this side of the House, have all spoke in favour of the intent of this resolution. The intent—we support the idea that there is—tax credit should be made available to childless couples and couples seeking fertility treatments, because we know that this can be a very trying time, a very difficult time for these couples, and we know that these treatments can be very, very expensive and prohibitive to many people. And it's something that, I guess, personally, I believe that any couple that would want to experience the joy of having children should be allowed anything that can be provided so that they can have that opportunity.

And, as I said, we would be quite willing to—if we could just see ourselves clear to—or the government could see their way clear to remove one statement from this resolution, which would make it quite acceptable. I don't think that it would deter, in any way, from their notion to pass this resolution. I don't think it would take away from the resolution in any way. I think it would actually make it better because it could be, then, passed in this House, and we've offered that opportunity to the government. It's just unfortunate they, by the looks of it—maybe there's only one person over there that's saying no, that they don't want to entertain this. I think I only heard one no when leave was asked for. So, there's certainly, perhaps, more people over there that would be willing to pass this resolution, but I think it was the member, herself, that brought it forward—that the one that said no, she didn't want to pass the resolution today.

So I really don't understand why the member from Southdale wouldn't want to entertain this friendly amendment, if you want to put it that way, remove this one single clause and have this resolution pass—

* (12:00)

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Point of Order

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Charleswood, are you up on a point of order?

Mrs. Driedger: Yes, I am, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Charleswood, on a point of order.

Mrs. Driedger: Madam Deputy Speaker, I think, in keeping with the intent of the resolution, I would like to indicate, and as we've all spoken, we are in favour of the tax credit being offered in Manitoba and we don't have any problem with that. We've all indicated that.

I think what ended up happening was the member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) put in a particular

clause within the resolution that is something that we cannot, any of us, accept.

But I wonder if she would be willing to remove that one particular clause and, as we have with another member—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We have already dealt with this issue. This is not a point of order, and the time being 12 noon, the honourable member should not have been recognized because the time is 12 noon.

* * *

Madam Deputy Speaker: So I do want to tell the House that the hour being 12 noon, this House is now recessed until 1:30.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 8, 2010

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