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PROCEEDINGS

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Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 10, 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.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Madam Deputy Speaker, in accordance with rule 31(9), I would like to announce that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on improving the standing committee on public affairs, sponsored by the honourable member for Russell (Mr. Derkach). *[interjection]* public—Oh, Public Accounts.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hawranik: Sorry.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It has been announced, in accordance with rule 31(9), that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on Improving the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, sponsored by the honourable member for Russell.

Mr. Hawranik: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would seek leave that we move directly to resume second reading debate on Bill 204.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is there agreement to resume debate on the proposed motion for Bill 204, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, standing in the honourable—the name of the

honourable member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), who has nine minutes remaining?

Is there leave to move to Bill 204? *[Agreed]*

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS— PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 204—The Child and Family Services Amendment Act

Madam Deputy Speaker: So we will resume debate on Bill 204, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable member for Selkirk, who has nine minutes remaining. Is there leave for it to remain in his name? *[Agreed]*

The floor is open for debate.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): This appears to be another morning in this House when the Conservatives don't want to speak to one of their bills, but that's fine. We'll be prepared to talk about this.

So, certainly, I think it's a good morning to speak about how the child welfare system works and how it is that foster parents, a very respected group of people who are prepared to open their homes to children, receive their mandate in Manitoba. As I think all members of this House should be aware, there are a couple of different ways that foster parents become involved. In some cases, there's a temporary order where a child is apprehended from a family or from an extended family and placed with foster parents. There may also be situations where there's a permanent order granted and the state effectively becomes the guardian of the child, and in many cases the child is placed with foster parents pending, we hope, a successful adoption.

This government certainly has a great deal of respect for foster parents and the work that they do to keep children safe, to open up their homes to children. They play a very important role. That's why our government has been quite prepared to provide funding for foster parent groups, to increase the financial support and other supports that we give to families who are prepared to open up their homes and help our child welfare system.

And we've demonstrated that commitment every year that we've been in government, as opposed to when the Conservatives were in power in this province. Support for foster parents—financial support was slashed. Other supports became non-existent. And, not surprisingly, Madam Deputy Speaker, foster parents left that system and weren't prepared to step up the way that they are today.

This bill talks about some of these issues, but, at the same time, Madam Deputy Speaker, it opens up a number of questions.

Everything that we've done in this province over the past decade has moved to putting the safety of children first. Vulnerable children who come into the child protection system require security, the best that we're able to provide, and our focus is on the safety, the protection, the best interests of these children.

Everyone agrees that agencies need to be able to act quickly when there's a family situation that has broken down or an extended family situation that has been broken down. We need our social workers to be able to move quickly to remove children in situations where there's neglect, where there's danger, and I really don't think there's anybody in this House that can argue with that objective.

But that's not a simple—there's not a simple solution when it's a foster placement that breaks down. And I would suggest most strongly that agencies also need to be able to act quickly when a placement breaks down, when the child provides information or evidence to their social worker or to some other person—whether it's a doctor, whether it's a guidance counsellor or a teacher—when that child provides information that gives a social worker reason to believe that there is a difficulty with a foster placement—which does happen, these are children with a lot of challenges, it's not easy being a foster parent—but those situations happen, we need to continue to support our child welfare system and support our social workers to be able to move quickly. When a placement breaks down, we don't want to delay the agency, whichever agency it may be, from taking the actions they need to keep kids safe. And existing process for agencies and for social workers to remove children is very clear and it allows for quick action when necessary.

* (10:10)

So, as I've said, that process is very clear, and I should note at the outset of my comments that child protection is certainly a complex issue. In Manitoba,

we have a lot of vulnerable children that require protection. Any changes to legislation or regulation requires careful analysis that children aren't put at risk, so that agencies can go ahead and do their work to support those children.

Of course, our laws protect the dedicated foster families who provide care to Manitoba's children, and I'd highlight, again, in the 1990s, foster parents saw their support slashed. They saw their financial compensation cut. They didn't have the support of their provincial government.

I'm proud to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that, over the past decade, foster parents in Manitoba know that they have a provincial government that respects their work and supports them. Any time a child is removed from one of those placements—whether it's protection concerns or not—foster parents are provided with very clear instructions and very clear information as to what their options are.

There's already safeguards in place. These include provisions such as section 51 of The Child and Family Services Act, the Foster Parent Appeals Regulation, as well as the provincial standard called Removing Foster Children, which sets out the rules and the information when such an occurrence happens.

Section 51 of The Child and Family Services Act sets out very clearly the steps, the mechanisms for foster parents to address placement changes for children that they are caring for. And it gives foster parents the chance to challenge a decision about the removal of a foster child and even gives them the possibility of an appeal.

It sets out steps that ensure due process for the foster parent and keeps the best interests and the safety of the child in the forefront, which, frankly, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the way it should be. It's important to remember, though, that parents of apprehended children are also given the opportunity to have their wishes heard at every step of the way in court, anything regarding guardianship or placement.

The process required for removing or changing the placement of a child from a foster home in Manitoba is thorough and clear, and I can't say strongly enough, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the prime factor in that decision-making process is the safety and best interests of the child or children involved. But our legislation is thorough regarding the rights of the foster parents and, of course, with initiatives we've had, I'm very proud of our

government's effort to encourage more people to step up and open their homes to children who need assistance.

We can certainly talk about our government's record because it's not just words, it's actions by this government. We've invested an initial allocation of over \$48 million in new funding to implement the Changes for Children initiative, hiring more front-line staff so we have social workers out in the field able to deal with situations, to help families in crisis, to help families where their relationship has broken down, to protect children where those family situations or foster placements have broken down to make sure that we get the children into a place of safety.

Our overhaul of our child welfare system has been recognized, not just in Manitoba, but in other jurisdictions. Example of that is the Children's Advocate in Saskatchewan who looked to Manitoba for leadership when it came to solving issues in child welfare. Page 62 of that report from February 2009, the Children's Advocate in Saskatchewan says: The Manitoba example shows this issue can be solved. There just needs to be the collective political administrative will to do so. And, in fact, that was a call for Saskatchewan to move towards the Manitoba model where we have structures in place, but we also make the investments and we put in the work needed to build a better system.

Certainly in Manitoba we've made a shift towards better prevention services to assist families in crisis, in the first place, yet at the same time making sure that safety is the paramount consideration. We've adopted a new risk assessment tool developed as part of the new prevention model, and training for front-line workers began last year. And, as training is completed, the risk assessment model is now being implemented across the province in all agencies.

And we didn't just do it on our own. We consulted over 600 child welfare workers working out in the field, as well as experts to create this new service, and our program is based on proven programs, not just in Canada but across North America, to find the best practices in prevention-focussed approaches.

Changes for Children, of course, is our action plan to strengthen the commitment to child welfare. Our goal is to keep building a child and family service system, first of all, that recognizes there are many vulnerable children in this province who need

assistance and need protection. Our goal is to keep moving towards a child and family service system that recognizes and supports the rights of children to develop within safe and healthy families in communities, recognizing that First Nations and Métis people have a unique story to tell and have a unique identity and authority and, also, rights and responsibilities to honour and care for their children.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we move in the right direction. We respect foster parents. They know that this government is on their side when it comes to supporting them financially, when it comes to supporting them with services in the field, but we also believe the safety of children has to be the paramount consideration and we'll continue to make investments. We'll continue to take action. We'll continue to provide training. We will continue to do what we need to do to build a stronger and better child welfare system in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to talk for a few minutes about Bill 204, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, and I'd like to begin by talking about some of the comments that have been made by members of the NDP on this bill.

In the—speaking on this bill on May the 6th, the Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Mackintosh) said at that time that there was a fundamental breakdown which led to the Gage Guimond tragedy. He was talking about a fundamental breakdown in the system. He said the system failed Gage Guimond.

But what is striking, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that only a few days before the minister spoke those words and said there was a breakdown, only a few days before, on April the 27th, the minister had word—he knew from the Children's Advocate that there wasn't just a breakdown, that the system was now in chaos. So it's remarkable that the minister could say, yes, there was a breakdown, as if everything was fixed up, but he did not acknowledge that the system was now in chaos under his watch.

The system wasn't just broken now; the system was in chaos. The system was volatile. There were caseloads far too high. People weren't able to do their jobs properly because this government has so badly managed things. There were problems throughout the system. There were many children who had died where the investigations weren't proceeding rapidly.

There were huge problems just about wherever you look because of the way that this government was managing the system.

The minister went on to say this: What this bill does is set out what are—what essentially now is set out in standards. So the minister was saying that, as I read this, that, in fact, what this bill said he has put in place as standards.

Now, we have some reason to be dubious about that, that is for sure. We'd like the information. We would like the minister to actually table not only the standards but the evidence that this is actually happening, because on our side, on the Liberal Party's side, we are continuing to get calls and some of those calls relate to this sort of problems which still doesn't seem to be handling—handled as well as it might—as well as to many other problems.

We are getting the calls which suggest to us that the system is in chaos, and it is good that we have had a Children's Advocate report which says that from her perspective, because it matches our perspective, and is consistent with what we are hearing.

I—in the minister's remarks, he said specifically: It's very important that there not be a built-in delay. And the MLA for Minto (Mr. Swan) took up the same thread. He said: We couldn't put this process in place; we couldn't do what the minister says is now set out in standards because we need to act quickly.

* (10:20)

And I would ask, and I think it's a fair question, what this bill says is that you should write down what your assessment is and what you're planning to do. This is not, you know, not something like writing a thesis. Right? This is not like writing a book. This is when you make decisions; you know, write down the reasons for your decisions.

As a physician, you know, it's long been standard practice to take medical notes and assess the situation, and write down what your plan is. You know, if we—if physicians didn't do that, you know, we're likely to be taken to the College of Physicians and Surgeons and questioned about our medical capabilities and our medical practice. And, certainly, one would expect—I mean, yes, one should act quickly, but one also should be able to write down, you know, what you think of the situation and what your plan is. I mean, I don't understand what the problem here is. This does not mean some huge, humongous, unnecessary, long delay. This is just

writing down what you see of the situation and what you're planning to do.

And I would have thought—as the minister himself said—this is now set out in standards. Okay, well, all right, why are we having a problem with what is set out in standards, and then the minister and the MLA for Minto saying, oh, well, we couldn't do what's in standards because it might cause a delay because it takes too long to write things down? Now, it's not very credible when the minister is saying this, and it's not very credible when the MLA for Minto says: We can't write things down. Surely—as the minister himself says—this is now set out in standards. So you may not need the bill, but you shouldn't be arguing that it can't be done because there's—it puts in a delay. That doesn't make any sense. *[interjection]* You guys don't make any sense. That's why your system is in chaos.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to remind all honourable members to put your comments through the Chair. Thank you.

The honourable member for River Heights has the floor.

Mr. Gerrard: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker—and when there is an operation, when there is an emergency, there is a duty to make sure that notes are taken and things are written down as to what happened. I've been through, and I've looked at such notes in the emergency room, operating procedures and so on. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) doesn't have much of a leg to stand on in what he's trying to claim.

Now, I want to talk specifically next about the MLA for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) and the MLA for Burrows says: Since we formed government things have greatly changed.

As the Children's Advocate, you know, has said, now, after 11 years, things are in chaos. You know, there is a problem. They have greatly changed. We've gone from, you know, a system which, arguably, had problems, but is now chaotic.

I want to talk to one of the comments from the MLA for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau), who talks about making decisions in tough economic times, and the MLA for Assiniboia and the government may be making decisions, but those decisions, sadly, have led to a system which is in chaos. And this is a question not just of setting standards, but of actually looking at outcomes. We need to have the evidence

that, in fact, that the outcomes for children are improving.

And the MLA for Minto (Mr. Swan) has been talking about improving prevention. Well, the bottom line is if you improve prevention, your outcome should be fewer children in care, and either something is wrong with the prevention or it's going to the wrong people or—I'm not sure what's happening, but we're getting a lot more children in care, and maybe there are problems sometimes with doing assessments and doing planning.

I don't know the answer, but I do know that this government has a system which is in chaos and a system which part of the problem is that we don't have enough information on outcomes and those areas—

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

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): I'm pleased to rise today to speak to this private members' bill, and I think I'll pick up where my colleague from Minto had left off.

But I think before I pick up at that point, I think it's certainly worth repeating one of the quotes that the member from Minto had put on the record, and that was the recognition from Saskatchewan's Children's Advocate that Manitoba's received for the work that we have been doing. The Saskatchewan's Children's Advocate said that Manitoba is a leader when it comes to solving the issues of child welfare. And the quote says: The Manitoba example shows that this issue can be solved—or I think, and I'm digressing from the quote here, but the key part of the quote is: There just needs to be the collective political and administrative will to do so—the collective political and administrative will. In other words, we need to work together to ensure that we are all working towards that same goal of safety for our most vulnerable and safety for our children.

Now, my colleague from Minto also put on the record that we've made a significant investment in the child welfare system. He talked about the \$48 million in funding to implement recommendations. He talked about hiring more front-line staff and he talked about 150 new workload relief positions that were added as a result of that investment.

Well, what else have we been able to accomplish with that investment? Well, certainly, if you look at

the strategy that has been implemented under Changes for Children, the Changes for Children action plan is there to strengthen our commitment to child welfare, and, as I said yesterday during the MUPI, I believe that all honourable members are committed to strengthening the child welfare system here in Manitoba, and our goal is to develop a child and family service system that recognizes and supports the rights of children to develop within safe and healthy families and communities and recognizes that First Nations and Métis people have unique authority, rights and responsibilities to honour and care for their children.

It is a collective political will that we need to make this happen, and it is a collective political will of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, which I referred to yesterday during the MUPI, having so many departments working together from prenatal benefit through to 28 years of age in the definition of youth looking at the needs of our young people here in Manitoba and doing everything we can to provide a safe environment for young people in Manitoba, doing everything we can to provide opportunities for young people in Manitoba, training opportunities. The objectives of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet are objectives that have been—and the structure—that has been recognized nationally for doing what we are doing here in Manitoba.

And when you look at Budget 2010, we continue to support the multiyear plan to enact the external review recommendations and strengthen foster care. Now, the external review that has been undertaken has—we have seen work completed or almost complete on 81 percent of the recommendations from the external review.

I think a key is prevention and early intervention, and that's certainly something that we've been working towards, creating a new risk assessment tool that's being tested as part of the new prevention model. The new tool and prevention model will be implemented province-wide this year. Consulted over 600 child welfare workers and outside experts to create this new service, and our program is based on several proven programs across North America, including Alberta which is recognized as the leader in prevention-focussed approaches. So I think it's critical that we put a lot of resources at the front end and look at prevention and intervention strategies, and that is certainly something that we are committed to doing.

* (10:30)

Better foster care is another pillar of our strategy on Changes for Children, and the Circle of Care campaign has surpassed our expectations, recruiting over 2,200 new foster beds to the system, including more than 200 new emergency beds and 65 specialized beds. Our recruitment campaign is now focussing on recruiting foster families that can care for larger sibling groups and special needs youth.

And I have to commend the people in this province who have stepped up and become part of this challenge and part of better foster care for Manitoba. I know that it takes very special people to provide that opportunity for children at risk and children with special needs who otherwise will not have those opportunities afforded to them in their current situations.

And I, again, speaking of—speaking to the FASD situation in the province where, in 1999, there was \$10,000 funding for FASD strategies, and here, under our government, it's \$1.3 million in funding for resources to support young people who are suffering from the effects of FASD.

Now, foster rates have increased 21 percent since 2007, and we've also created a new category for foster care rates for remote communities with no road access in 2000. When you consider the high needs in some of these areas, to come up with better strategies to support those in need in these remote areas, we saw the need to provide more resources to do so and we've done that.

Also, implementing a no-children-in-hotels policy and—unless for approved exceptional circumstances, no children will be in hotels, and an average of less than one child per week has been placed in a hotel by January of 2010.

Strengthening the work force—now, this is something that's near and dear to me as an educator and certainly in my role as minister of—responsible for the apprenticeship and training branch—the need to continue to provide educational opportunities, the need to continue to look at labour market needs, the need to look at new training for child welfare. With more 6,000 participants in 2008, and when you consider the topics that people involved in the system are faced with, there is a tremendous need for specialized training.

I know that when I was teaching, it wasn't a requirement under our certification program to have specific training in special needs students and special

needs education. And back in the day, we used to call it mainstreaming, which that title, of course, is no longer acceptable. It's appropriate educational programming and, of course, our government introduced changes to the teachers' certification which would require teachers to take six credit hours, I believe, of specialized training for students with special needs.

Now, how that relates to the foster care system is that the training that has been provided for the new child welfare training model includes FASD training. It includes facets of child abuse investigation and interviewing. It includes non-violent crisis intervention, suicide prevention, risk assessment in the new standards.

So this is an important part of the puzzle. It wasn't only recognized that we needed more people in the system; we needed more people in the system who had an understanding of the various issues that some of the children in care and children at risk might be facing and that they needed to be provided for and supported in a number of different ways. And the training that these participants participated in was extremely helpful for that purpose.

Now, when you look at what's happening under the authorities, each authority has hired an FASD specialist to develop specialized programming and supports—a critical piece in the child care components: new standards on emergency safety plans that will address admissions and discharge issues as well as shorten the length of stays of children in emergency placements; introducing more training for emergency care workers that will help families and children in need of protection; building on the Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy and the sexual exploitation strategy called Tracia's Trust by enhancing integration and co-ordination of youth services led by Healthy Child Manitoba and the Child and Adolescent Health Services.

And between '06 and '09, more than 2,200 new foster placements—nearly nine times the original goal of 300—were recruited, and we commend the hard work of front-line workers, agencies, authorities and, again, especially the people who have stepped up and who have taken on this new role as foster parents in addressing the needs of the foster system—foster child-care system.

And we did see an increase of 800 children in care in 2000 alone, and I know that the members opposite point to that and say that this is not right—that the numbers growing is not something that we

should be pointing to. But what it tells me is that when you take—make a commitment to put safety first—and there's obviously a need to have more spaces, that we've been very active in recruiting and addressing those needs and making sure that there are spaces available because safety is the main concern. So we'll continue to work hard to deliver on that.

And our foster care recruitment campaign is focusing on recruiting foster families, as I said, that can look after groups of siblings and children with special needs. So we're really targeting our energies on trying to address the multiple needs of the system and to try and act in the best interest of our children, obviously. And when it comes to siblings, they can be the strongest support, in the fact that sometimes siblings have had to be separated from one another is not the best solution. So, by recruiting foster families that can work with siblings, we'll see more positive results from that initiative, as well.

With those few words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Madam Deputy Speaker, and I just want to thank the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) for bringing this Bill 204 forward. Essentially, this bill calls for recommendation No. 47 of the Gage Guimond section 4 review to become law.

Members opposite have already stated that they would implement the recommendations of the review, all of the recommendations, including No. 47, Madam Deputy Speaker. We've got a system, a child and family services system, in chaos in our province. They've said that they would implement all of the recommendations of that review, including this, which is all this bill calls for.

So let's get on with it. Let's not waste any more time. Let's pass this bill. Thank you very much.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to speak a little bit to the bill that the honourable member for River East has brought forward and other members have spoken to.

One of the concerns that's been well laid out, I think, by the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) and the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson), is the concern with how this bill would interact with a bill that was passed by this House that very clearly said that the safety of children would be the primary

consideration when it came to child welfare decisions.

And my understanding of the bill is that the idea here is that when a child is to be apprehended from a foster family situation that first a plan should be written, a decision should be written, and that should be given to the caregivers before that takes place. And I am concerned that that flies in the face of the notion that safety should be the first consideration. So, that's our—that's one of our concerns with the current bill.

And I listened attentively to the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) as he talked about his experience as a physician and I thought, in my mind, you know, I don't know if he ever practised emergency medicine, but I can't imagine that he would suggest that the right kind of system in an ER is a system where, if somebody comes in suffering from a heart attack or someone comes in bleeding, that the first thing the doctor would do is write out a treatment plan and submit it for approval before he would take action. I can't imagine that would be his approach to medicine and I can't imagine that would be his training in medicine.

So I think that our concern really with the bill is that safety continue to be the primary concern when child-welfare decisions are made. That's why we brought in legislation to put the safety of children first. I had believed that that was a principle that was supported by members opposite. And, certainly, we don't want to delay agencies from taking the actions that they need to do to keep kids safe.

I think those people who work in child welfare and have to make those decisions and have to take those actions, I think—I don't know if there are people in this House who've worked in the child-welfare system. I've never worked in it but I know people who have and I've sat, certainly, with family members. I've sat with parents who've had their children's—apprehended and talked to them about that situation, the pain it's caused and, also, their attempts to put together a life that would allow them to have their children back. And I've certainly spoken, many times, to children who've been taken into care, who've lived their lives and grown up in care, about the impact that that has had on them.

But I do think that we all should pause, occasionally, to pay tribute to those front-line workers, to those people that have to do that work, in a system that is increasingly under tremendous, tremendous public scrutiny, as it should be. I think

it's a concern of all of ours that the welfare of children is something that is taken seriously in this province.

* (10:40)

My colleagues have spoken about the provisions in the act that allow for mechanisms for foster parents to address placement changes of children. And, I also want to, for a moment, speak about the tremendous contribution that foster families make to our society and to the welfare of children. And we have taken many steps to support the work that they have done by supporting organizations that support the work that family-foster families do, by increasing the rates that foster families receive to take care of those kids. And we've seen the result of that increased support for foster families in increased number of people willing to become foster families.

And I can't imagine, you know, when you make that commitment to take a child into your home and look after them knowing that, in all likelihood, this is a temporary placement, I can't imagine the pain that occurs when that child is removed from the home for whatever reason. So I know it is a very difficult situation that foster families find themselves in when that happens and certainly we want to do what we can to support those families so they can continue to care for children.

But I think, you know, in any situation where you have many competing interests you have to define what comes first. And we've been very clear that safety is the overriding interest—that safety of those children is the overriding interest and that's something that I hoped that we all supported.

I want to talk for a moment about some of the changes that have been happening in the child welfare system and, you know, yesterday, Madam Deputy Speaker, we were criticized once again for spending money on those changes, for spending money on the child welfare system. There are some problems that do require money. That is just the hard and fast reality. It does cost money to add more workers to the system so that caseloads can go down and the burden of high caseloads has been a historical issue within the child welfare system. Certainly, through many governments, that's been an issue and adding more staff has allowed those caseloads to start to come down so that those front-line staff have a better chance at managing the cases that they have.

I also want to—I referenced earlier the tremendous public scrutiny that the system has been under. We've heard from the Auditor General on the changes that have been made and she has both publicly spoken and, I think, privately spoken about how impressed she has been with the response of the system to that public scrutiny and the changes that were required and the progress that they've made.

We know that the system has come under the scrutiny of the Ombudsman and the office of the Children's Advocate. So there's been a lot of advice and there's been a lot of action taken on reforming and overhauling the child welfare system.

We also continue to fund that system and those changes. I'm very proud to have supported our last budget that provided more funding for the child welfare system. I think that, as often as we speak in this House about the need to do things better, when we have an opportunity to actually vote in favour of the money that it takes to do things better, it's important to do that. So I'm proud that I have been consistent in not only supporting changes to the child welfare system but supporting the money that it takes to make those changes.

I also want to talk—I just spoke earlier about foster care. I want to put on the record some of the results from the very focussed work that our minister and our government, and the foster care families, and the foster care family association have been doing to encourage more people to become foster parents.

The Circle of Care campaign surpassed expectations. It's recruited over 2,200 new foster beds to the system, which is an incredible number, Madam Deputy Speaker, including more than 200 new emergency beds and 65 specialized beds. That foster care recruitment campaign is now focussing on recruiting foster families who can care for larger sibling groups and special needs youth. That remains an issue in the system, when you take into care a large sibling group, you very much want to do what you can to keep those siblings together, and so that is when, occasionally, hotel rooms are used.

But I would say that the progress that has been made in getting children out of hotels and into foster care is astonishing, so that, very much now, when we're talking about children in hotels, that is a last resort. It is definitely an exception and we're down below—almost below a single digit number as an average of children per week being put into hotels.

There's also been an emphasis on strengthening—not only adding to the work force of child protection workers, but strengthening that work force and some of the ways that that has been done is in new child welfare training, and that training has included training on things like fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, child abuse investigation, non-violent crisis intervention, suicide prevention, risk assessment, and understanding the new standards of child welfare.

I also want to say that when we talk about the welfare of children and youth, we look beyond just the child welfare system. We look at other initiatives that have been undertaken. We look at things like the youth suicide prevention strategy that is ongoing, that has benefited from the work of countless community organizations and crisis counsellors and interveners. We also have to look at the work of the sexual exploitation strategy and I have—some of my colleagues have been able to sit with that coalition who are working on helping children who have been victimized in the sex trade, who are entering the sex trade, talking about the long-term and the short-term solutions to getting those kids out of harm's way and they do tremendous work and we have been very, very pleased to support them in the work that they have done.

So there is no question that work in improving the child welfare system has to be ongoing, but there should be no question, and I was under the impression there was no question in this House that the top priority, the guiding principle in working to improve the child welfare system should be the safety of those children, and I think that this bill runs the risk of taking a step backwards when it comes to understanding that as the primary principle. That's not to say that, you know, there isn't some aspects of this bill that should be considered and that should be talked about, absolutely, but I do think we've taken those steps forward—

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

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I want to commend the member from River East for bringing this bill forward. This bill would require family service agencies to provide a written decision to foster families whenever a decision is made to move that child from a foster family and there's been no child protection concerns.

Now, the member—the Minister of Labour that—who just spoke said that she felt that this bill actually was a step backward and I have to disagree entirely

with that. This is a recommendation—this is a recommendation that came from the Children's Advocate along with several other recommendations. It's a bill that makes a lot of sense. It puts the child interests first and provides reasons to the foster family and I think, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it's shameful that people on the opposite side stand up and just take this opportunity to pat themselves on the back, when, in fact, children are dying in a system in chaos in this province.

The member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) said there needed to be a collective political will. On this side, we have the will to pass this bill. Why is there no will from that government to pass this bill? This bill is perfect. It should be—it's one of the recommendations, it should be passed on to the committee. Let's pass this bill now. Thank you very much.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): I'm a bit—I've never heard anything said that is perfect in this Legislature. I—you know, the member talked about patting on the back. A bill may be very good. A bill may be useful, but to call a bill perfect, I think, is a bit over the top which, unfortunately, members opposite do on a consistent basis.

Now, I want to commend the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) because I think there's no doubt that the member for River East, with her experience and her sensitivity, is sincere and is concerned, as are all members of this Chamber, in the implementation of the bill and legislation. So I don't think any of us should cast aspersions upon anyone else with respect to their sincerity or their attempt to do the right thing.

* (10:50)

But I want to point out something to members opposite as an example which reflects on what we just heard in this House, and one of the examples is the privacy legislation that was brought in by the former government, which we supported, and was very, very good legislation. It wasn't perfect. It was very good legislation. And what happened is that within the medical system and the social services system—but I know in the medical system, there was almost a freeze in terms of the staff. They did not know what to do. So, quite literally, nurses would not brief doctors about a patient's condition when they were in a cubicle. They'd have to go somewhere else. They were concerned about another patient at the next bed overhearing the conversation and

feeling that they would be in contravention of the legislation.

That's called unintended consequences, and unintended consequences happen on every piece of legislation that we do in this Chamber, and you have to reflect very carefully on legislation, which is why we spend a lot of time dealing with the ins and the outs of legislation. And one of the very serious issues is unintended consequences. And we're afraid, on this particular bill, the unintended consequences may prove to be more of a problem than the actual legislating of this into law.

Think about it, we're here every day making laws. We know how this place works. We— you know, people out there, we've often heard the opposition say, you've broken the law. You know, what is breaking the law? There's criminal law. There's civil law. There's— you know, what is breaking the law? But out there, they don't know that. The front-line workers don't necessarily know that. And when they get something from on high, which presumably is us, and they get some legislation, they are very affected. They are very concerned about what that means. And we don't actually do that good a job of communicating to them what that means.

Now the recommendation for this type of work has been and will be put into standards, and I understand, already, the southern authority has adopted or is in the process of adopting the standards. To take it one step further and to put it into a direct law at this point would be what I think would result in unintended consequences.

Now, I want to deal with a few issues that have come up during the course of this debate. If there's a court order, or if there is some issue between the caregiver and the child, the worker has to function immediately. And it's not, you know—the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), you know, for all of his training, sometimes I don't think has a complete appreciation of the reality out there. And I think the Labour Minister made the good point about when you come to an ER and you're bleeding and they don't write out your treatment plan before they treat you, they actually treat you and then they do the treatment plan. And I think that's the fallacy of the Liberal leader's argument. In fact, most of the Liberal's stuff we see is usually—you've got to have words and laws. It's like the old adage, and I'm not going to get into it too much, but the old adage: A definition of a Liberal is someone's drowning and the

Liberals throw a rope, but it only goes halfway. But, you know, I don't want to really—I said I wouldn't be critical, but the member for River Heights has missed the point of what it's like to be a front-line worker and to deal with this. So it's not that the government is not aware of the recommendation, but there are unintended consequences.

And I—now, I want to take a step back and talk about some personal involvement in the system. And members should know that it's not exactly a easy task out there and crisis situations are pretty tough. Anyone who's had to drag someone out of a crack house, anyone who's had to physically restrain a psychotic kid, anyone who's had to take kids in off the street when they couldn't find a foster or a placement—and that all happened to me when I was in opposition. I did all of that when I was in opposition: couldn't find placements; had to drag kids out of crack places; had to take people into my home.

That's a—you know, I don't want to get into too much the political, but there was issues with foster association having its funding cut. They were issues with recommendations of the previous government by the Children's Advocate being rejected. So let's not all pretend that we're perfect. Let's not all pretend that we're holier than thou. Let's all say that we have a system that we really want to see happen and see improve.

This afternoon in the Legislature we're going to have a ceremony at 12 o'clock. The ceremony at 12 o'clock is going to deal with the survivors of residential schools. It's—you know, I give credit to the Prime Minister for making the apology. I think we have to admit that there's been a significant structural, social breakdown and tragedy that's occurring in many First Nations communities. There are a lot of difficulties and a lot of problems.

Now, I want to flip back to one of the fallacious arguments again made by the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard). The member for River Heights would say, well, you know, the NDP government isn't dealing well with cancer because there are more cancer cases now than there was in 1900. You know, just to use a broad stat. Of course, there's more cancer cases now than in 1900, because, in 1900, the causes of death were infectious diseases: tuberculosis, smallpox, typhus, et cetera. There's not even a comparison. I've looked at stats. I mean, the number of cancer deaths was way down. Why? Because cancer is a disease of demographics. We all

know, especially men over 50, I must add, in this House, that at age 50 you ought to be having regular prostate examinations because we know the longer you live, the higher your chance of getting cancer.

Most deaths at the turn of the century were children. They didn't live to develop cancers. That's the fallacy of statistics, and the statistical argument, there are more kids in care. Is that a failing of the system or is that an improvement in the system? Or is it just an admission that we have problems, and we have to deal with it? I'm not making a judgment, but to use that statistic and to use that particular item as a failure in the system, is not a—not only intellectual or logical, but it's not a socially accurate statement.

And the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) ought to know better. He studied stats; I didn't. But on a very obvious basis, I think you have to recognize that we're tackling problems that maybe we've never really dealt with before. And that's our job. Our job's to try to do the best for the people of Manitoba. And if we get it wrong, we try to improve, and certainly we have listened to the recommendations of the report. It is a matter in progress.

When the former government was in power, I remember how many times they changed the system. They completely centralized without any notification or knowledge. Was that the right decision or the wrong decision? I don't know, but I don't—you know, I think we criticized the member, but I don't think we went over the top. I don't think we went over the top and talked about deaths to the extent that we're seeing here.

All I'm saying is that we are entering a new and a, I think, a more enlightened and a more responsive child-care system. And I think, when I've known how many studies have taken place in Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, on child and family services, it is a complete review of the entire systems across the board.

So I think that members ought to be careful—

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

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Madam Deputy Speaker, I hope the members of the opposition aren't saying I shouldn't have my opportunity to add my comments on this bill because I believe I have some

comments that are pertinent to the situation, and I would like to add my comments to Bill 204—
[interjection]

Apparently, they don't want to hear my comments, Madam Deputy Speaker, with respect to Bill 204, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act. I listened very carefully to the comments that were made by members opposite and by my own colleagues with respect to the proposal, the contents that were contained within this bill. And I have, in my own personal life, had the occasion to encounter folks living within my own community that worked in social services, acting as social workers within my community, and we have had many opportunities for discussions with respect to—

* (11:00)

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. When this bill is next before the House, the honourable member for Transcona will have nine minutes remaining. The bill will also remain standing in the name of the honourable member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), who has nine minutes remaining.

The time is now 11 o'clock and time for private members' resolutions.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 16—Youth for Christ Centre: Supporting Winnipeg's Youth

Madam Deputy Speaker: The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Youth for Christ Centre: Supporting Winnipeg's Youth, brought forward by the honourable member for Springfield.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Madam Deputy Speaker, would you please canvass the House to see if there is leave for me to bring forward a revised version of my private member's resolution for consideration and debate this morning.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is there leave from the House for the honourable member for Springfield to bring forward a revised resolution? [Agreed]

Mr. Schuler: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Springfield, that

WHEREAS both the City of Winnipeg and the Government of Canada have supported the Youth—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Just to—I—just going to re-recognize you to start again.

Mr. Schuler: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), that

WHEREAS both the City of Winnipeg and the Government of Canada have supported the Youth for Christ Youth Centre of Excellence; and

WHEREAS Youth for Christ has a history of providing needed and highly accessed services for teens in Winnipeg and across Manitoba; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has provided funding to the Youth for Christ for various programs across Manitoba; and

WHEREAS recreational facilities and programs aimed at creating good role models for youth are a valuable tool for limiting gang recruitment and encouraging interests in education; and

WHEREAS membership in a gang encourages criminal behaviour and is harmful both to the youth who join gangs and to the city as a whole; and

WHEREAS a Youth for Christ Youth Centre for-of Excellence will offer an alternative to gangs and criminal activity for vulnerable inner-city youth and will also rejuvenate downtown Winnipeg with its proposed building on the vacant land at Higgins and Main.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge that the provincial government applaud the Youth for Christ Youth Centre of Excellence and recognize this important initiative that offers an alternative to gang activity and an opportunity to revitalize Winnipeg's downtown.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Springfield, and seconded by the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), that

WHEREAS both the City of Winnipeg and the Government—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Schuler: Madam Deputy Speaker, it's with great pleasure that I rise today to speak to this private member's resolution on an organization that I have great respect for, and I know this Chamber and those who have dealings with youth have a great respect for the kind of work that they do.

I have had the opportunity to attend most of their banquets and am always impressed by the calibre of the individuals that attend. There are amazing individuals that come forward and bring speeches

and presentations at their banquets, and I'm—I always leave amazed at the kind of testimonies that are giving—given to—by—to the dinner by individuals who have really sunk to the depths of despair, of criminal activity, basically see no other way out, and then look for help. And they go to organizations like Youth for Christ and other organizations, and they seek help.

Youth for Christ has decided that one of the things that they should be doing is, rather than just waiting for individuals to hit bottom, is to try to give inner-city youth and youth that are vulnerable an opportunity to go into a facility, to go somewhere where they're in a protected environment, where there are good role models, where they are free of pressure to get involved in any kind of criminal activity, to participate in any kind of alcohol or drugs, to have an environment where they can participate in activities, and have done an amazing job at their Elmwood facility. And for those of us who have visited that facility—in fact, I grew up just down the street, on Talbot and Watt, so I know the old fire hall well. And, in fact, I was there just a while ago, and I found out that the observation tower is now a climbing wall and I thought, you know, isn't that just amazing. They've really taken something that—a lot of areas have ripped down these old fire halls, and they've turned it into a real positive facility. They do a great job at the facility in Elmwood.

What they realized was is that there was a bit of a divide between the inner city and Elmwood and a lot of the youth in the inner city didn't feel comfortable crossing over the river, and, you know, maybe we don't understand quite why that would be, but young people indicated that they had some difficulty moving over the river into Elmwood to use the facilities.

So they decided they would look for a new facility in the inner city. They came upon a corner that I'd have to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, I questioned the corner. It's a pretty forlorn place. It certainly is in the centre of an area that needs a lot of services and they see—they have a vision. They see a place where they could put a facility down where young people who otherwise might be on the streets would have a place to go and, again, without any kind of pressure, without any kind of being coerced or pushed or any kind of gang or criminal activity, can go into this building and participate maybe in skateboarding, participate in some kind of an activity or program. They run really good dance programs

out of there and they offer these services to these youth for no cost basically, and it's amazing how much money has been raised by the City of Winnipeg and surrounding areas for this project, and I am pleased that the—that all members in this House seem to be in agreement with this resolution because we want to say to them publicly that this is something we would like to see.

You know, we have a lot of different organizations, and I'd like to, for instance, mention Teen Challenge opened their facility on the weekend, and there was a testimony in which a young guy got up and he said, on this very bay where the new Teen Challenge building is, he used to come and do drug deals and do all kinds of things that are unspeakable, that he hit the depths of his life on that bay, and basically Teen Challenge has now turned around and claimed that particular piece of real estate and has reached out to those individuals, and we would like to congratulate Teen Challenge and Steve Paulson and the board of directors and the staff and the volunteers who do an amazing job reaching out to individuals who have really hit the bottom, and, like I say, the testimony on Sunday was just amazing, and I'd like to paraphrase Steve Paulson who said, the only time they ever use the word "write-off" is when they speak about cars, not about young people.

We talk about Manitoba Sports Federation. Jeff Hnatiuk, the executive director, had a vision that he would put his building really in a tougher area and he's going to build—they're ripping down the old part right now and they're going to put up a really nice sports facility. Again, they want to reach out to the schools. They want to reach out to the students in that area, doing an amazing job, and that's where—Youth for Christ fits right into that, that kind of thinking that we put buildings not in the suburbs. We don't just put buildings in the nice areas. We actually find corners, and if you've driven by Higgins and Main, that is not the nicest corner, and I actually purposely drove there several times and I parked my car and I looked at it and I looked around and it's going to be a tough corner, and I would say to them they're going to be challenged because there is going to be vandalism and there is going to be trouble around that building. But they are committed to keep that building up. They are going to maintain it at their own cost and they're going to have a centre that is a beacon, that is a life for young people who walk up and down those streets, who are troubled, who have perhaps taken the wrong turn, as some of us might've in this Chamber. You know, we've also

faced our challenges, and that's what youth are faced with. They're faced with challenges and often don't make the right decision, and this centre at the corner of Higgins and Main, we would like it to be a beacon. We want it to be a safe haven. We would like to see it some place where young people, who actually have a lot of idle time on their hands, have a place to go, and perhaps there will be a first-class skate park and there's going to be all kinds of facilities for young people to go to.

We should stand up as 57 members of this Legislature and say, right on, we support this. We support what you're doing. This is a great project, you know, keep it going, and, you know, sometimes it has to be public partner partnership, and we have in the resolution that all three levels of government at some point in time have supported Youth for Christ, and I say that's wonderful, as they should, as they should be helping the Manitoba Sports Federation and all of those kinds of things so that—you know, we had a resolution just before this dealing with a child and family services.

You know, we've got to reach out to children because—you know what?—they are the true victims when it comes to violence and crime and what's going on in the household and often are on the street not because they want to be, but because there's nothing for them at home.

* (11:10)

So what we do is we build institutions. We build places for them to go that they can be safe, that they can see hope, that they have something to do with their time. For those of us who have teenagers, we know how active they are. We know how active their minds are, and if you don't have them focussed on something positive—you know, I was raised that idle hands are a tool of the devil and, you know, now having my own teenagers, I'd have to say there's an awful lot of truth with that.

We want to make sure that our young people are not idle and are not then tempted to get involved in something that they shouldn't be. So to this PMR, I would suggest it to this House. It would be a wonderful thing if we could pass this by 12 o'clock and congratulate an organization that does wonderful work in our city and our province, that reaches out and helps our young people, whether they're in need or whether they've gotten into some kind of difficulty. They give them a venue where they can go and in safety and with no pressure, with nobody trying to push them into something that is not good

for them, that they can go and take part and participate in activities of their choosing. So I recommend this private member's resolution in the strongest of words to this Chamber, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors): I'd like to thank the member opposite for this resolution and I guess what I'm standing today on is not just the Minister of Healthy Living but also minister responsible for youth and youth programs in the province.

And I'd like to echo what the member opposite said but also enhance it because I think it's not just supporting any one group. I sort of agree with him when I say we need to support all groups that are trying to make a difference in our community. We have to support all individuals who are trying to make a difference in our community, support the lives of young people, whether it's mentoring and where we want to go.

I know my department has a great theme. It's teams versus gangs, and I think that's a very positive approach. And I think our government realizes it's necessary to make facilities committed to crime prevention and also making—help making youth make alternative healthy choices to gangs, revitalize the downtown, have young people make appropriate transitions, decide to go to school, get educations and actually have bright futures.

And so I think that this resolution starts to touch on part of it and then we have to, as an entire Chamber of 57, move forward in a vision and a vision where every child has a future, a vision where every youth feels that they are supported by the community and has the supports and actions to keep healthy and also, as a former teacher who took kids on many trips, I realize that busy kids are good kids. Busy kids who are supported and nurtured and have the support generally end up in the right frame of mind and with a positive future.

And I think we need to have a society that invests in the future and I would hope that the member—members opposite, in fact, all members of the Chamber, would hope support some of these initiatives. I'm pleased to be part of a government that supported various Youth for Christ projects, but I'm also part—proud to be part of a government that spent about \$60 million to improve recreational centres throughout the province. We actually even have a \$2.9-million commitment to the new soccer complex in south Winnipeg. I know we're making a

fourplex hockey complex in west Winnipeg, and these are all partnerships that provide activity for kids.

Again, we've announced \$500,000 to hire seven recreational directors to expand recreational opportunities for youth in inner city and other Neighbourhoods Alive! communities. We have five additional Lighthouses for now a total of 65 Lighthouses where kids can go, participate with their peers in wonderful activities in a safe, fun place to go. We have almost 150,000 visits to Lighthouses in 2008-2009 and since its foundation, we've had about three-quarters of a million visits.

We also have worked in other areas and I'd like to comment about some of the other programs that we believe are essential and were part of a budget, a budget that this government put forward to invest in the future, to invest in youth. Career options for students with disabilities: It's a wonderful program that provides students and youth with disabilities an opportunity to gain new skills through full-time summer employment, part-time employments in various government departments; 51 kids were involved, and that's a positive step.

Manitoba Youth Job Centres, this is an interesting one because there's 40 offices located throughout the province. It provides summer employment opportunities to local students, operates services that match youth to local jobs, develop job search skills, promotes work experience. There was 1,668 registered, almost 14,000 students assisted and, directly, 1,774 employed.

Manitoba has also a program called STEP, which is a referral point for students and youth seeking temporary employment in the provincial government, related organizations and private sector businesses participating in provincial government employment programs. There was 7,694 registered and 1,747 employed.

We also have an Aboriginal Youth Internship Program which has done very, very well. We have the After School Arts Enrichment program, which has also been doing very well. I'd also like to commend the Canadian Red Cross, which is doing water safety and swimming programs around the province now, and I'm pleased we're investing in that. And that's been very, very good because there's less drownings now, and we're getting kids to learn how to swim and know about PFDs and even canoe and kayak courses.

I'm pleased that we were able to work with Frontier Games, which involves about a thousand kids that are involved for years. I think it's the 35th year of Frontier Games, which brings 42 communities in the North together to participate in many activities and actually keeps kids busy, and it's huge competitiveness.

The brighter futures fund, I'm pleased to work with the post-secondary minister to work on brighter futures fund. This is a budget of a million dollars, 1,809 participants and it enables community organizations and partner schools to implement programming, to improve high school graduation, increase access to and retention post-secondary education for disadvantaged, under-represented and low-income people. This is a wonderful program which gets kids to look about the future, and that's positive.

We also have a Careers in the Arts Mentorship Program, with 61 people assisted. We have the Conservation Green Team. This is—hires youth to improve the appearance of provincial parks, wildlife management areas, campgrounds, et cetera. That has 308 people employed. The Hometown Green Team has about a \$760,000 budget with 545 people employed for—in funding to municipal governments, non-profit organizations in rural Manitoba to hire youth on a number of community development projects.

The Manitoba innovation grants for citizenship education is talking about providing 20 grants of a thousand dollars each to schools to assist them in implementing innovative youth citizenship projects, which makes kids more aware of their roles and responsibilities in community. Our northern Aboriginal internship program's been wonderful.

Partners with Youth is—again, it's a non-profit, community-based organization that works with institutions and training agencies in rural Manitoba deliver projects that will improve participants' general employability and prepare them for future training and job search, and that's almost 300 people assisted.

And I have another seven pages, but I'm not going to go through all of the pages.

We also have Youth NOW, which I'm particularly impressed with. It provides youth, ages 18 to 29 receiving income assistance or are facing multiple barriers to employment, an opportunity to

participate in project-based training and employment initiatives; 642 kids and young people assisted.

And the final one I'll talk about today is the Urban Green Team. This is a great program. It provides grant funding to Winnipeg non-profit organizations to enable them to hire Winnipeg youth to work on a variety of community development projects that will improve their neighbourhoods. Scholarships are also available and there's 718 people employed, a budget of almost \$2 million.

These are just an example—and there's also programs with the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Clubs and many others. WASAC, which is the Winnipeg Aboriginal sports council, is also a great program which keeps kids busy.

* (11:20)

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, the whole point is is that we do want to have partnerships with many organizations, with many individuals, with any groups that are looking at creating focus, support, mentorship for young people. I think our government's committed to it. We put forward budgets—and I have to sadly say that we continue to support it. I wish the members opposite would support these because they are good budgets that support the future. And I would hope that, you know, even in the next speech, where you'd like to say that you're committed to community partnerships in investing in the youth and this part of our budget would be absolutely wonderful, because I know that this side of the House continues to vote for those budgets. And we believe in investing in youth and we believe in creating a positive future with partners. And we would hope that the members opposite would see the light, work with us to develop these partnerships and vote for the budget which makes these investments, which are crucial for young people's future. Thank you very much.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Madam Deputy Speaker, good morning to you and to other members of this House.

I want to thank my colleague and my friend from Springfield for bringing forward this resolution and for being passionate on these issues, not only in the House here, but in his community and throughout Manitoba. So passionate, in fact, was he in his speech that he wasn't able to do all the things that I know he had meant to do, and one of them was to read into the record the board of directors for Youth for Christ.

And so on his behalf I'd like to do that. The chairperson of the organization is Robert Reimer; the vice-president is Todd Sellick; the secretary is Kim Dyck; and members at large are Michael Easton, Ben Kelly, Larry Wilson, Doug Buhler; and the executive director is John Courtney. And so we wanted to put those into the record officially and to thank each of them for the work that they do each and every day on behalf of young people in the province of Manitoba.

I—it's a great pleasure to rise and to speak this morning on this resolution. I have my own history with the organization. I had the opportunity in my early twenties, longer ago than I wish to admit, to volunteer for the Youth for Christ in Steinbach, under the direction, then and still, of Jim Harms, and it was a great opportunity for me. And I often say that I gained more from that experience than I think that I actually gave to those who I met and became friends with, the young people at that time.

And I suspect that for many volunteers, whether it's Youth for Christ or Teen Challenge or the many other organizations that we have in Manitoba, that is probably a common scenario for those who are volunteering with the organizations. But I had the opportunity to meet and befriend many young people who were going through difficult times who would come to Backstage, as it is called in Steinbach, and to try to talk to them about different life scenarios and choices.

And I partially did that because of some of the experiences that I had. I've mentioned in this House before that when my father passed away, at a young age, my mother was left to raise two children and we grew up in government-subsidized housing. We were fortunate to have that housing at the time, but there were some difficult challenges that came along with that upbringing. We did not have a lot of resources but we were fortunate to have a strong family. But there are many young people who don't have those sort of stable adults in their life and don't get that same sort of support. And so one of the ways that I felt that I could give back and to help was to volunteer with Youth for Christ at that time.

Not all of the decisions that I made as a teenager are decisions that I was proud of but I was glad to be able to—later on in my life—to try to work with individuals and young people at Youth for Christ then. So I'm very, very honoured to be able to speak in support of the resolution and the project—the specific project that is going to be built in Winnipeg

to help many at-risk youth and to help them in making good decisions in their life.

And it is worth noting that there are, as the previous speaker said, many other organizations that do good work as well, Teen Challenge, who I've had the opportunity to not only donate a car to—and there'll be a future car coming when this one gets a little bit closer to its life expectancy, to its due date—but to also to go to their graduations—

An Honourable Member: Should be donating it now.

Mr. Goertzen: —and to see—and perhaps I should donate it sooner, as my friend from Springfield says—but to see the work that they do, the residential drug treatment. And I think all members know that one of the reasons that we have the type of crime rate that we do in Manitoba is because of the addiction rate that we have. And it's been stated by experts in law enforcement that 80 percent of the crime that happens in the province of Manitoba is a result of drug addiction or drug activity.

And so one of the greatest ways to attack that, at its root's cause, is to ensure that there are drug treatment facilities, and Teen Challenge—who are represented here by Steve Paulson and others in the gallery who do great, great work, and one of the greatest testaments, I think, to their organization, Youth for Christ, is so many of the individuals who benefit from the organization later become volunteers or work in the program themselves, and there probably is no greater way to talk about how important a project is than when those who benefited from the program then turn around and become part of the program later on in their life.

We know that there are many organizations in Winnipeg that do this work and that do good work, and we want to support them. If there was one disappointment that I could take away from the previous speaker's comments, the Minister for Healthy Living (Mr. Rondeau), and this is a—I want to make this a non-partisan debate, it was simply that he sort of listed off a litany of programs that the government had created, and I think one of the failings of many governments, not just one particular stripe—so I want to, again, raise this above the issue of partisan discourse—is that governments sometimes are too quick to try to create something new of their own because they want to cut the ribbon and have some sort of announcement, and they don't do a good enough job of looking at what's already happening in

the communities and to find those organizations that have a proven track record.

We're talking about one of those organizations today in Youth for Christ. There have been comments made about Teen Challenge, and there's many other organizations, some that are interfaith, some that are non-faith-based at all, who do good work in the community, and if we could identify those organizations more clearly and the work that they do and come alongside them in terms of giving them resources and encouraging them to do more of the good work that they do, as opposed to always trying to start up a new program, always trying to have our stamp as government officials on something and say, well, this is what we did; this is what we started.

Why wouldn't we look at what's already happening and where good work is happening and then come alongside and support that? And I think that is what really was the motivation behind the City of Winnipeg, Mayor Katz and the federal government in supporting this particular project for Youth for Christ. They said here's an organization that has a proven track record; they know what they're doing in terms of helping at-risk youth, and so why wouldn't we just simply come alongside and help them and let them do what they do best?

We don't need to start up something entirely new in terms of a government program. We can already just support what is going well, and that is, I think, efficient. It makes sense and it certainly is going to benefit young people.

It's one of the examples and one of the things that I saw when I recently visited the mayor and some of his staff in Minneapolis. They did a very good job, and, in fact, they won an award for it in identifying organizations in the city of Minneapolis that were doing work in high-risk areas with high-risk youth, and they found those organizations, brought them into a room and said, okay, let's do sort of an inventory of the work that you are doing with young people, list that out, determine where those needs are most needed in different areas and then let's support that as a city, as a government. We can, then, come alongside and give you funding for that, and then we don't have to create something new. And it has shown at its initial stages some very, very good success. So we need to continue to work with organizations that are already doing this very, very good work.

So I want to—I know there are other speakers and I don't want to prevent anybody from having the opportunity to say their words on the record this morning before we move this resolution and before we pass it, but let me just say to all of those who are involved, whether it's Youth for Christ or Teen Challenge or other organizations, I know that you—that they don't do the work because they want thanks, and I know that they don't do the work because they were hoping for a resolution in the Legislature. I'm sure they appreciate it, but that's not why they got involved in the kind of work that they do. They have a heart for youth. They wanted to make a difference in the life of young people. That is their reward.

But, from us to you, to all of those who are here today and those who aren't here today, we do truly appreciate the work that you're doing in the lives of young people. You may not always get the thanks each and every day, but please know that we in the Legislature and many Manitobans and those who have benefited do thank you for your work.

* (11:30)

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): It gives me great pleasure to stand and put a few words on the record with regard to this particular resolution. I suspect that my friend the member from Springfield was trying to engineer this as a wedge issue in this House. I fully suspect that, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that members often—opposite—portray our party, when they engage politically, as a group that would be unsupportive or unsympathetic to a Christian organization like this.

And for that reason, you know, I'm sorry to disappoint the member from Springfield because, Madam Deputy Speaker, those of us on this side of this House, if members had actually been voting for budgets and supporting the dollars that this government has invested in Youth for Christ over the years, they would have realized that this government is very supportive of initiatives that are undertaken by Youth for Christ and, in fact, have been funding Youth for Christ at levels unprecedented in their history in this province.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I'm also, you know, very pleased to be able to put on the record during this debate, you know, the—a bit of the genesis and a bit of the history of the New Democratic Party and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, its predecessor, Mr. Acting Speaker, because this party was bravely

founded on—by men of the cloth, on—with Christian principles and with the idea of social justice, and not the gospel of wealth, with the idea of being—creating a brotherhood of a community—brotherhood of man and community on this—in this world and not survival of the fittest. Our—the founders of our party, men like Stanley Knowles; a Baptist minister from—who graduated from my own alma mater of Brandon University; Canada's greatest Canadian, our greatest Canadian, Tommy Douglas, another man of the cloth, founder of the New Democratic Party, who is the father of modern-day Medicare in Canada, the Canadian public health system, which means that nobody is left behind.

And I note, Mr. Acting Speaker, that the party opposite, the Conservative party, regressive Conservative party, generally oppose, in fact, fought tooth and nail at the time to prevent public health care from taking root in Canada. And they continue to vote against and not support public health care, broadly speaking, as they do not support affordable housing, as they do not vote for a single nickel that this government has invested in Youth for Christ over the last 10 years. In fact, they've opposed every dollar that has been invested in Youth for Christ by this government over the last few years.

So, you know, I know that the member for Springfield probably thought this was going to be a good wedge issue for his party, and I'm sorry to disappoint him on this. But it does give us the opportunity to provide the member and the public with not only a bit of a history lesson, but a bit of a reality check in terms of the relative policies adhered to by those on the government side of the House, where I stand proudly, and on the opposition side of the House, where politics seems to trump caring for Manitobans with alarming regularity.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I spoke about the founders of our party, Tommy Douglas, Stanley Knowles, numerous others—J.S. Woodsworth, who was a great missionary worker in the city of Winnipeg, amongst the dispossessed and the poor.

In my own caucus today, I'm proud to be joined by Reverend—I can't say his name. The member from Elmwood is a man of cloth, a practising reverend; the MLA from Burrows is a preacher. You know, Mr. Acting Speaker, we have people who walk the walk, talk the talk, in their personal lives, when they bring their resolutions to this Chamber and to do the work in their—in this Chamber for—on behalf of all Manitobans. And I'm very proud to be part of a

government that engages, acts and invests in a way that supports organizations like Youth for Christ.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, this government, of course, is in full favour of the resolution. This government, of course, supports those who are trying to make a difference in our community and in the lives of young people. This government supports Youth for Christ as a means of providing an alternative to inner-city youth who are often faced with pressures to join—pressures of joining a gang. This government has been the government that's been budgeting for investments in Youth for Christ over the last 10 years. This is the government, over the last 10 years, that's been investing real dollars in real programs, in real infrastructure for Youth for Christ over the last 10 years.

And the members opposite, the member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) and his colleagues have been voting against every single nickel. They've opposed every single nickel that this government has invested in Youth for Christ, and in fact, Mr. Acting Speaker, I—they will be opposing and have opposed the current budget which, in fact, provides the money for the youth centre the member is even referring to in his resolution.

So, you know, there's a word for that—you know, there's a word for that that I can't use in the House, but again, Mr. Acting Speaker, it speaks volumes to the character and the integrity and the sincerity and the veracity of anything that members opposite bring to this—into this Chamber, and, you know, that stands on its own as a fact.

Our government, of course, realizes the necessity for such facilities as is being developed by Youth for Christ and is committed fully to crime prevention, helping our youth make alternative healthy choices to the gang lifestyle and to revitalizing the downtown core so that there's a safer and more vibrant community for its residents.

And I'll speak to a couple of other issues that members opposite have chosen to stand and vote against and not support and refuse to provide dollars to build—things like the Red River campus in the Exchange District, Mr. Acting Speaker, which is helping to revitalize the area for young people and for the city of Winnipeg and more broadly for us all, in terms of stimulating economic development. Members opposite voted against the money for that project. They voted against the proposal for that project, just as they're voting against the money for the Youth for Christ centre downtown and voted

against every nickel for the Youth for Christ centres throughout the province, including my home community of Brandon, over the last number of years.

We've got a very interesting—you know, words are one thing and deeds are another, and members opposite are quite good with the words, not quite so good with the deeds; you know, walking the walk and voting to provide resources for institutions like Youth for Christ, and voting to provide dollars through budgets for their programming. Members opposite just can't seem to get around to being able to do that. They're fine to talk about it, but when the time comes to get up and vote and provide the dollars, members opposite say, no, we'll talk the talk, but we're not interested in walking the walk. We're interested in rhetoric and not in action.

And, in fact, the motion, which, you know, as I state, was no doubt designed to be a wedge issue or wedge matter is not, Mr. Acting Speaker, but what it does do is allow us, on the government side of the House, to point out the diversion from reality that members hope to, I suppose, portray by this resolution made, look, we support you; we support Youth for Christ a hundred percent. Well, you voted against every single budget. You voted against every single nickel and that means you voted against every single program, members opposite, and I'm proud to stand with a government that takes quite a contrary view. We are, in fact, supportive in words and deeds and with dollars.

Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I'm very pleased to rise today and put a few words on the record with respect to this resolution. And I want to thank the member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) and for bringing this forward today. And I believe we—although I'm not sure after that last speech, Mr. Acting Speaker, but I believe we all—this will pass today with unanimous support in this House. And I think that that's the important thing today.

The important thing is not to politicize this issue. There's time for politics, Mr. Acting Speaker. There's time for debate in politics in this Chamber, but this is not the time for that, and I would hope that members opposite would understand that this is not the time.

* (11:40)

Mr. Acting Speaker, I want to commend Youth for Christ organization, who has done so much in, you know, for youth in our province, and I know that

Youth for Christ was founded by a Canadian in 1946 and the organization goes way back in our community, and they've done so many things for young people to take them off the streets in our communities and make sure that they are offered hope and opportunity for the future and that they're not caught up in gang activity and so on.

And, so, I think it's wonderful that—you know, certainly Youth for Christ has played a leadership role in our community and I want to commend them for doing that. And, of course, there are other faith-based organizations who have taken leadership roles as well in our communities. And, I know in our—the Jewish community within my constituency, the Jewish Federation, and other organizations have also played a role in bringing forward various programs for children to ensure that they are offered that opportunity that I believe every child in our community, regardless of their race or background or what have you, Mr. Acting Speaker, every child deserves a chance in this province and should have a chance in society. And that's what organizations like Youth for Christ offer to those most vulnerable in our society, children. And I want to commend them again for everything that they have done to offer the hope and opportunity for those people.

And, certainly, I know that this Youth Centre of Excellence will offer an alternative to gangs and criminal activity for youth in our inner city, and it's very important that we try and offer that hope and opportunity for young people.

And, so, I, again, just want to commend Youth for Christ. I want to also commend all the organizations that take a leadership role in our community to ensure that hope and opportunity is offered to every single child.

So I want to thank you very much, Mr. Acting Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to stand in support of this resolution today and I look forward to its passage.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): This private member's resolution on the Youth for Christ centre resolves that the Legislative Assembly urge the provincial government to applaud the Youth for Christ Youth Centre of Excellence and recognize this important initiative that offers an alternative to gang activity and an opportunity to revitalize Winnipeg's downtown.

This government is in favour of this resolution so we will be voting for it, and we support anyone

trying to make a difference in our community and in the lives of young people. This government supports Youth for Christ as a means for providing an alternative to inner-city youth who are often faced with the pressure of joining a gang. Our government realizes the necessity of such facilities and is committed to crime prevention, helping our youth make alternative healthy choices to the gang lifestyle and revitalizing the downtown core so it is a safer and more vibrant community for its residents.

A good parallel would be what was originally the North End Wellness Centre, but at the official opening, it was named Win Gardner Place, and that was after the mother of a former member of the Legislature, John Loewen, and he was instrumental in raising about \$2 million from the private sector in addition to government funding. And there were a number of partners in that beautiful facility on McGregor Street, including the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and SPLASH Child Care Centre, the North End Community Renewal Corporation, and the YMCA of Winnipeg. And, so, I think that's a good parallel. One happens to be in the North End; the other one is going to be built downtown.

And, in both cases, people came together in partnership with—in the case of the Youth for Christ centre, a level of government; in the case of the North End Wellness Centre, now Win Gardner Place, with a number of government and non-government social service agencies. And I'm sure that the Youth for Christ centre is going to be a success on the same level that Win Gardner Place is. In fact, when they opened, they thought they would serve 150 children a day, but now they're already up to 300 children a day, and seniors are using the facility for a walking club and also for breakfast and lunch together.

So it's good to see that the government investment, in this case, and the private sector investment, is being used because in 1995, the North End YM-YWCA building was closed, as you well know because of your connections with a former leader in training at the North End Y. And it was very sad that, at that time, government didn't step up to the plate, even though they were asked to, weren't willing to put any money into it. In fact, the City of Winnipeg didn't want to put any money into it until John Loewen convinced them to invest \$250,000, to his credit. I'm always willing to give credit where credit is due, even though Mr. Loewen is a former member of the PC caucus, but he did a great job for the North End Wellness Centre.

And so it was when our government was elected in 1999 that, in 2000, we pledged a million dollars. Ultimately, I think we contributed 1.5 million for Win Gardner Place, and we're very happy that it is open, and, indeed, I think it's an excellent example of prevention, of giving kids something to do, of keeping them off the street, plus all the other programs and facilities that are operated there.

So the Youth for Christ centre, Youth Centre of Excellence is made possible through funding under the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Stimulus Fund. Funding will go to the construction of an approximately 50,000-square-foot facility at Higgins Avenue and Main Street. This project will give youth an alternative to negative activities through providing space for recreational sports and performing arts. And they really have a pretty impressive list of things that are going to happen there including: an indoor skate park; a performing arts studio; a youth fitness centre; a climbing wall; a gymnasium for floor hockey, volleyball, basketball and soccer; a youth drop-in centre; a job skills and training centre; a multipurpose theatre; a counselling centre; and an off-campus classroom school.

So, obviously, a lot of thought and care has been taken into what is going to go into the facility. And I think Youth for Christ is an organization that needs to be commended because they do have a track record, both in Winnipeg and Brandon and I think, maybe, Portage la Prairie. And I know that, in Winnipeg, they've had a very successful skateboard park in the Exchange District and they operate in Elmwood. And they have certainly been very good at identifying the things that youth want to do and programs that will attract them. And this is just another example of that, and I presume that, you know, they're building on their experience and things that have already proven successful, and putting those things into the new facility. This space will include many positive activities and provide a support system for youth experiencing challenges in life, and will go a long way in assisting youth to overcome difficult situations and make healthy choices in life.

We have already provided \$150,000 in support for various projects by Youth for Christ across Manitoba. In June 2007, Manitoba and the feds announced \$900,000 in homeless funding for Uturn-3, a Brandon-area Youth for Christ project to provide transitional housing and skills development to youth in need. This included \$479,000 through the Canada-Manitoba Affordable Housing Program

Agreement. In February 2004, we announced the Environmental Youth Corps funding. Youth for Christ Winnipeg was provided 510,000 for a project which involved up to 10 youth in the Samson's Wilderness Adventure Team program, cleaning and planting trees in Elmwood, creating a vermicompost site and participating in activities raising awareness about the environment.

And I think I will conclude there, Mr. Acting Speaker, in case other members want to take part in this debate and add their comments to the record.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Minister of Conservation): And, as we've already indicated, the government—the members on the government side intend to support this resolution, and I'm not standing to talk the clock out. I just wanted to put on the record that I've always been an admirer of the work of Youth for Christ, particularly in—over the years, in Elmwood, both as a federal MP for that area for many, many years and as the MLA for that area now. I'm well aware of the good work that they do and certainly just wanted to put that observation on the record.

* (11:50)

There are many good things that happen in our community, Mr. Acting Speaker, as a result of faith-based organizations. Youth for Christ is certainly one of them, and work with youth is very, very important. I know that the honourable member from Burrows and myself are both former directors of a North End community ministry in which we had youth programming there. And it may be hard for members to imagine at this time but there was a time when I—in an after-school program, I played floor hockey for an hour and a half in a dusty old basement that—with young people and kept me in shape, I must say.

So youth programming is very, very important. It's important for young people to have a place to go. It's important for them to have constructive activities. It's important for them to have options. It's important for them to be exposed to people who want to lead them in the right direction, away from gang activity, away from criminal activity, and to give them the kind of personal support that they sometimes need in their life.

So I'm very pleased to rise and speak in support of this particular resolution and as many others have already acknowledged, the government has over the years supported the activities of Youth for Christ and the work they do in our community, and passing this resolution is just another stage in that particular reality of support for that organization and the work that they do.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, obviously, everyone who's spoken to the resolution has spoken in support and I do, too. However, perhaps at this time, if there's no further debaters, that perhaps we could vote on the resolution at this point.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Altemeyer): Is the House—is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Point of order, Mr. Acting Speaker, I imagine that if you canvass the House, you might find agreement to call it 12 o'clock.

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Altemeyer): Is it the will of the House to call it 12 noon? *[Agreed]*

The hour being 12 noon, this House stands in recess until 1:30 this afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 10, 2010

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