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DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 3, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: 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, 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

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, is there leave of the House to proceed to Bill 215, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act?

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement? [*Agreed*]

We'll go directly to Bill 215, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 215—The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), that Bill 215, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act, be now read a second time and be referred to the committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise in the House today and to speak to Bill 215, recognizing the importance of universal hearing screening for newborn babies in Manitoba. All parents should have the option of having their newborn screened if they so desire, and it shouldn't matter where you live in Manitoba.

Universal hearing screening on newborns is a quick and gentle procedure. A newborn can be tested within hours of birth, and the test only takes minutes to perform. Mr. Speaker, the universal hearing test is so quick it could easily be done along with the other

tests Manitoba currently screens newborns for, such as PKU, congenital hypothyroidism and congenital adrenal hyperplasia.

Mr. Speaker, I want to, first, thank the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for bringing this bill forward in parts, earlier through past sessions. I believe that the member has, you know, raised this issue, and I think that we know that this is an important issue on this side of the House from both opposition parties. And I believe that we need the government to pay attention to this bill and to move this bill forward.

We have enhanced Bill 215 to include a number of points that would provide a uniform process to ensure that data is collected and that there are some benchmarks to ensure that success is occurring with the program and for it to be reviewed over a period of time, because we know that things can always improve as we go forward in the health-care system.

Today in the Chamber, we have a number of individuals who have a keen interest in hearing screening in the province of Manitoba. We have Andrea Richardson, doctor of audiology and co-founder of Hear for Life in Manitoba, and with her is her husband, Rob. And I believe that Andrea has done a significant amount of work in this area and I think that her work should be recognized within the—within this Legislature.

With us also is a family, Chris Brown, Debbie Brown, their son Julian, and with them also is Hannah, their 16-year-old daughter who has overcome hearing loss with a cochlear implant and is a strong advocate for a universal hearing screening program.

These individuals have provided me and my colleague from River East a significant amount of background on this program and the need for it and the significant tie-in with the cochlear implant program that the government recently announced, and how this universal newborn hearing screening program would just enhance the services and the supports that are—that could be and should be available to Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, every year three in 1,000 babies are born with an educationally significant hearing loss. The universal hearing program is a way to identify

those children with hearing loss early and to begin the rehabilitation and intervention process early.

Without early detection, children are more likely to develop poor language and cognitive skills and struggle in school, and in speaking to Debbie Brown earlier today, we talked about the need for the school system to understand the supports that are required for individuals in schools. We talked about an individual within the school system who needed that one-on-one support with a teacher's aide and how, without a uniform and co-ordinated effort from the Province on this very serious matter, we see that there are a lot of gaps within Manitoba, both within the educational system and within the health-care system, Mr. Speaker.

There are rehabilitation programs currently in place for babies and children, once identified, but no universal hearing screening. So with universal hearing screening program, the rehabilitation programs would become more effective, and we've talked about this before in the House, Mr. Speaker. We talked about how we put the cart before the horse in Manitoba with regard to hearing programs—hearing support programs. We need to ensure that we have the means to identify and to track and to address hearing impairment with newborns or early detection in young children so that we can then provide the supports that are already in place within our province. We have the supports in place within this province to address the significant needs of children with hearing loss.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about is Manitoba missing the boat with regard to tracking and managing the entire province under one umbrella. Something to consider would be to incorporate this under the early hearing detection and intervention branch or committee. We have so many tools in place in Manitoba that could just be co-ordinated in a much better way within the province.

So we're asking the minister, we're asking the government to look at this, to identify that we have so much to offer in our province, we just need to have a better co-ordinated effort, and that, to start, would be with the universal hearing program—screening program for infants.

The biggest problem for screening programs out there is the data tracking and follow-up. So we need to have a centralized database which would provide the benchmarks and identify the outcome so that we can move forward in ensuring that we are meeting

the needs of newborns and infant children who are needing supports with hearing loss.

* (10:10)

The Canadian association of speech-language pathology and audiology and the Canadian Academy of Audiology both support the implementation of early hearing detection and intervention universally across Canada. So we have so many agencies and associations out there that support the move towards universal hearing screening in our province and in our country, Mr. Speaker.

The minister has said that she supports universal hearing and screening for newborns, but just one RHA at a time, was her comment in the last session or the last debate. As such, I don't understand her reluctance to this bill and to this—to supporting this bill, and I would hope that partisan differences could be overcome in this instance, to support an initiative that both the opposition and the government side support.

At this point, I would like to share some personal comments from audiologists and from parents of children who are looking at this government for support of Bill 215. Mr. Speaker, what we hear is the Healthy Child Manitoba program states, That every child should have the best possible start in life. And this is a statement that is on the website, and it was commented on by Andrea Richardson who is an audiologist. She talked about the effects of late identification of hearing loss as detrimental to the well-being and development of the child.

We've talked about the significant need for this government to pay attention to families. Well, I'd like to just quote from an email from Chris Brown, who is the father of Hannah, who was diagnosed at 14 months of age with a severe to profound hearing loss. And thanks to a friend, visiting from Ontario, who was an early childhood development specialist, and alerted us to her hearing loss. Our provincial medical community failed to diagnose this child early, even when our concerns were brought to their attention repeatedly.

This was unacceptable then and, sadly, little has changed in 15 years later. And this has to change, Mr. Speaker. Currently in Winnipeg, there are high-risk screening programs at both Health Sciences Centre and St. Boniface Hospital. And while we feel there is a good start, it is frustrating to know that these programs are not equivalent. As it stands, the

standard of care you receive is determined by geography.

Mr. Speaker, I think that what Chris Brown has indicated here is key. We need a program in Manitoba that is uniform, that is available to all families. We have the ability to do that in our province. We have the tools, we have the specialists, we have the technology to do that. We just need the will of this government to support Bill 215.

So I look forward to the debate in the House, as do the family members and the stakeholders within the community of Manitoba, who want to see some leadership from this government to tie this all together and make this a program that we can all be part—a part of. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to rise in the House today to put some comments on the record regarding screening for newborns and, in this particular case, the issue of screening for hearing.

Certainly, we know, and the facts bear out, that we're committed to do more screening in Manitoba, not less. And this is the direction that we have been moving over the years as we continue to develop our capacity. And we know, you know, conceptually, there's nobody in the House, I think, that wouldn't agree that we need to do all that we can to achieve universal hearing screening here in Manitoba, and, certainly, that is our goal.

We have seen this screening develop in phases across Manitoba. The member is correct in saying that it's not yet available in every regional health authority, but I can say that all of our regional health authorities are aware of our desire to expand screening across the board for infants, and hearing, of course, is no exception.

We know that we have a record of increasing resources on issues of prevention, early detection initiatives, like screening programs being mentioned today and, of course, we, too, take our advice from medical professionals and experts, educational experts, and we would continue to welcome the advice of people like Dr. Richardson that the member mentioned today. And also from consumers of our health-care system, people like the family that the member opposite references, the Brown family, who have had an experience that has not been positive, who, undoubtedly, have much advice to give from several fronts, whether it's through the education system or through the health-care system.

And we welcome the opportunity to learn more and do what we can to expand our services to families across the province.

The debate today, I suppose, centres around whether or not the expansion of universal newborn hearing screening needs to happen under the auspices of an act in the Legislature. I'm not aware of—it could be that somewhere in Canada there is a bill or a law of this nature. I don't believe that there is, but I stand to be corrected on that. But we do know that jurisdictions across the land are working hard to expand the kinds of screening programs that they have for infants, and indeed hearing is among them.

Again, we must be aware that, you know, it's very important to know that all newborns are assessed by physicians, midwives, nurses, as the case may be, following birth and during subsequent well-baby visits in all parts of the province. And if concerns about hearing are identified, follow-up and referral is pursued, of course.

We also should state on the record that would be, you know, in contrast to some comments made across the way that, you know, there was no universal hearing screening program anywhere in Manitoba when we started on our journey in 1999. It is now, as I said, being phased in as additional support to our front-line professionals and to families is being developed.

And I noted what the member said concerning the family, the Brown family, that issues that exist within our school system to provide more supports for students that have needs, students that have, you know, many additional talents as well is needed. And certainly prior to coming to the Legislature, members, I think, are aware that I worked in the school system, and more specifically, Mr. Speaker, I worked in the student services realm, and certainly it was part of what motivated me to become involved in politics when I saw, you know, what needs there were for professionals working in the realm of student services and for families and students that needed more supports that just weren't coming at that time.

We know that year over year we have exponentially increased funding to education and student services in particular, which I think is so important for individuals that are living with hearing loss and with challenges with hearing. So screening is a very important component, we agree, and the supports that one builds around a student, a child, and a family are also critically important.

I appreciate the members mentioning that we have recently been able to announce that cochlear implant surgery and bone-anchored hearing aid surgery will be performed here in Manitoba for the first time, starting, we hope, as early as this summer. And we think that this will be another very important investment that we can make for families, for young people and adults, to be fair, that are living with significant hearing loss.

And I think that this demonstrates that we are making investments in this realm, and we would agree that we want to see the screening and supports that can come to families that receive the information as a result of screening showing that they need additional support, that those investments continue to be made. We know that we have a long history of innovation and indeed international respect in terms of our conduct on newborn screening using approaches that will support the continuum of care, help professionals and patients and families. We know in the WRHA there is currently targeted screening using digital technology, but we want to move to a universal mandate for that screening.

* (10:20)

The member opposite referenced the Manitoba early hearing detection program, EHDI, formerly known as the I HEAR program, which I have spoken of previously in this House, that it's doing tremendous work in this area and in helping families and it—we know they are a really important groundwork on which we can build to provide more services for families. They have been critically important to the development of universal screening in Brandon, Assiniboine, Burntwood, North Eastman. Work is well under way in Central, as well, and we know that we have much advice that we can take from the professionals involved in that program, much that we can learn from the families engaged in that program.

And it would be, you know, in the same way, Mr. Speaker, that we have learned from other health professionals that have assisted us in being the first program in Canada to screen—or first province in Canada to screen for exposure to alcohol during pregnancy at birth. The Families First screening, which we started back in '03, has resulted in 97 per cent of all births being screened by public health nurses.

So we know as we build our investments, like newborn metabolic screening in Manitoba, another very well-established universal screening program,

that we can achieve that level of universality that the member speaks of today.

It's worthwhile to note, also, Mr. Speaker, that the Manitoba newborn screening program has also been planning for cystic fibrosis screening, and acquired funding for a pilot project with an expectation for that to commence a little later this year with a view to universal screening on that front.

So, Mr. Speaker, while, again, we see many programs being built across the province to screen universally for any number of items, like the use of tandem mass 'spectrometry'—spectrometry; easy for me to say—in doing screening for congenital adrenal hyperplasia. We know that while we're broadening our tools and broadening the kinds of screening that we have to do, we also need to continue to invest in building our workforce and our cadre of professionals that can do this kind of screening. You need to do these things in tandem, and as we build our workforce, which we've been committed to doing since we came into office in 1999, we're able to expand screening.

So, as the member mentions, the Healthy Child Manitoba mandate, to give all children in Manitoba a fair shake, is what we're absolutely committed to do. Whether or not a bill is required or a law is required on the issue of universal newborn screening, I think, is what we'll debate. But on the concept in providing as many advantages for our newborn babies here in Manitoba, it's something I believe is an issue on which we can all agree. And we're going to continue to make our investments, Mr. Speaker, to provide screening, to provide prevention initiatives, to provide support and to provide all of the tools that a family can have to nurture their babes that they love so dear.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk for a few minutes on this important bill dealing with universal newborn hearing screening, and introducing it and making sure it is present for all children in Manitoba.

First of all, I'd like to thank the MLA for Minnedosa for her work in continuing what I began some time ago and introduced previously; thank the university—the MLA for Minnedosa for bringing this forward so that we can debate it and, hopefully, we will be able to pass it if there is a real interest in children and in helping children on the other side.

First of all, the question was asked: Why should we have a bill?

Well, it's abundantly clear why we need a bill; because in 12 years it's not happened. And we need this bill because there's been 12 years of far too little action on the other side, in terms of introducing newborn-universal newborn screening in our province in Manitoba. We are sadly very far behind. Almost every other jurisdiction in North America now has universal newborn hearing screening, and the children in other jurisdictions are benefiting, whereas our children here are not having that benefit. And the sad part is that when children are missed because they have not been screened as newborns.

Universal newborn hearing screening is vital, it's essential, it's now recognized all over the world as being essential but, sadly, not moving quickly here in Manitoba. Though we have partial screening for high-risk infants in a number of regional health authorities in Manitoba, this is not good enough. The sad fact is that when you have partial screening for high-risk infants, you miss approximately half of all the children who have impaired hearing and should be identified early. The sad fact is that when children are missed and they are not screened early, then their speech development doesn't develop as well as it should, and these are children who are often identified, then, at age three, four, five, six or even seven, and there is a very critical time early in a child's life, in the first two or three years, where speech development develops, and with a child whose speech development doesn't develop well or normally, they are often not just impacted for a short period of time, but they may be impacted all during their school years, indeed for life.

The lack of ability to hear impairs speech development. It impairs learning. A friend of mine whose child was not identified until I think about age five, she—his daughter—struggled in school, and this has been—had a huge impact on her in school. Because her speech was not developed as well, she was the target of bullying and all sorts of problems in school. Because her speech had not developed well, it made it a lot more difficult to learn, as well, and she has struggled, although she has finally done very, very well.

But the fact of the matter is that when children are not identified earlier on, we are putting them through a very, very difficult period and for a very prolonged period of time. We should not be leaving

any child undetected in this province, because it is to leave that child in a position where they have a problem with speech development, a problem with learning, a problem with all sorts of things in their lives, and no child should ever have to go through that. That's why we need universal newborn hearing screening.

How many children, we must ask, how many children, under this government, have not been screened early on and have had to go through these difficulties? How many more children will have to go through these difficulties because we don't now have newborn hearing screening in a universal way? Whereas almost all other jurisdictions in North America and most in Europe have this, our children are being left behind and it's shameful.

This NDP government has been slow and delayed in bringing in universal newborn hearing screening, and, sadly, indeed, it has been slow and delayed in bringing in many other aspects of newborn screening. As I pointed out previously in this Legislature, we have fallen far behind most other jurisdictions, which is very sad because it means that children are dying and growing up with disabilities when, in fact, they could have been screened and been helped as a result of the newborn screening.

The good thing is that we can do something about the children who are identified earlier on. The bad news is that we are still not identifying every child with universal newborn hearing screening at birth, as we should be doing, until we move quickly, as I hope all members will agree, to pass this bill through to second reading so it can move forward and we can get this in place in this province. I hope that we can move it forward so that we will help children in this province, because this legislation is badly needed because of the delays that have occurred. It is badly needed to help the children of this province.

* (10:30)

There can be hardly another measure which has got so clear an impact for lots of children in this province every year. It could be making a big difference. It should be making a difference. I hope that every MLA will stand up and make sure that they vote for this legislation before our time is up, and to give people more time to speak on this, I'm going to close now and pass this on to others to speak.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors): Mr. Speaker, and I'm very pleased to be able to speak on this subject, and I'm very pleased to speak after the member for River Heights. The reason why I like to speak after the member of River Heights is he says we should continue to invest in children. We believe that. And I believe that it's very appropriate that we continue to invest in children, so, therefore, I'm pleased to be the chair of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. I'm pleased to have—I call it a treasury board that deals with children; every month we talk about how we can move things forward and we talk about investments in children.

And, you know, the \$30 million we invest in children is a good, solid investment as far as Healthy Child Manitoba. And, you know, that involves the prenatal benefit which actually insures that mothers have good nutrition and support during the pregnancy and has actually shown that more mothers actually have good outcomes on the child.

And what we also work on, the family first home visitors, where we actually have home visitors not just go to and assess the child in the hospital, but actually we have a program where we have communications between the professionals and the homes and the young child and the families as they develop. And, you know, it's interesting to note that the Liberal Party and the member opposite actually voted against the Healthy Child investments and voted against the \$30 million to provide for children.

And, you know, it's not just in this House that we have the record. In 1995 he was part of a Cabinet that demolished the health transfers to the provinces, and we're talking about investments in children, investments in health, investments in all the health-care system. So the member across may say that we're not moving fast enough, may not say that we've started the Healthy Child initiative and moved forward with 5,000 home visits a year, have a lot of professionals doing absolutely great work, and I have to commend the professionals. But, on our side of the House, we're increasing the investments to children, to young families, to babies, and the Liberal Party and the head of the Liberal Party not only votes against that but has a history of voting and taking money out of the system that's helping those young children.

So I know that there's a word for people who do one thing and—or say one thing and do another, and,

Mr. Speaker, I think that that word might be Liberal. And so, it's interesting to note the member opposite.

And I look at our record of increasing resources for prevention and early detection initiatives such as screening program, and we've invested based on the advice of health professionals and medical event—evidence. We're not going to substitute political judgment and rhetoric for actual medical advice. We actually listen to the physicians and we continue to invest in early prevention and intervention. And, you know, I think that's good because I look at our focus on children. My department invests very, very much in upfront and prevention. And we knows that—we know that by investing in prevention, we do make a huge difference in people's lives.

So I want to assure the House that in Manitoba it's important to note that all newborns are fully assessed by physicians, midwives, nurses and the staff—some of the staff from Healthy Child work and actually do home visits, do assessments, do look at the child and work for—in all parts of this province to make sure that the children have the best possible start. If concerns about hearing are identified or any other issue are identified, we try to deal with it as soon as we can possibly do so.

And, you know, let's not make any pretenses; prior to 1999, when we took office, the Conservative Party—also, there was no universal hearing screening program anywhere when we took office. There was virtually no home visitors when we took office. There was no prenatal benefit when we took office. And so these are all initiatives that the NDP government moved forward with. And, you know, there may be crocodile tears from members opposite, but the truth is we have made huge strides. And, often, when we're at interprovincial or international events, they're looking at Manitoba's Healthy Child program as a model that should be emulated in other jurisdictions.

We also have a long history of innovation and international in respect to a lot of what we're doing with health professionals, patients and families. I look at the coalitions where what we're trying to do is support young families and children out in the community so that we're tying people together. I look at some of the other initiatives that we've just put in, like the Early Childhood Unit in Education, which is tying early childhood development, families, schools together. And I think that's very, very innovative, and I think it makes a huge difference.

I think what we also want to do is see how we can tie parents to make sure that they have all of the supports that are necessary. So, therefore, you look at something like the Triple P program, the Positive Parenting Program, that we actually have across the province, that we're having parents access the supports that they need for their children. And I think it's commendable that the staff is bringing people together from health, education, the child-care centre, all of the professionals together, to make sure that we have positive outcomes for children.

So, let's go through some of the records of achievement. First, the Families First screening was launched in January, 2003. It has resulted in 97 per cent of all births being screened by a public health nurse in this province, and it started in 2003. We also have newborn metabolic screening in Manitoba. It's another well-established and effective universal screening program done for all Manitoba newborns.

We also have other programs that we do on the—in each health-care institution. So I think we have a record of screening. I think we have a record of helping support babies, childrens and families, and I think we also have a record from the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party on what they have done in the past. And I don't say that nothing was happening in the past, I just say that we've moved forward on this initiative drastically.

I look at Healthy Child Manitoba and the Prenatal Benefit. I know it's only \$81 for those young moms, and I know that it does provide a lot of information and support, but that \$81 and, often, milk coupons and different things, does make a difference. I look at the 4,400 income-eligible women a year that are making use of it, and I think that that Prenatal Benefit really makes a difference.

And I think the fact that the Conservative Party actually clawed back the \$14 million of the national child tax benefit was really sad. I think that that restoration really says that you're helping support the poorest of families, the young moms that need the cash in their pockets. And, you know, it's interesting, because even things like the healthy food programs for providing good solid food for families, you know, the 750 gardens in northern Manitoba; I think that's a very positive thing.

I think the whole idea about getting milk and breastfeeding is very, very good. I know the home visitors, when they talk about breastfeeding, they actually talk about the huge nutritional value of that,

the social value of that, and I'm pleased to see the huge increase in breastfeeding. I think that makes a difference. But, you know, it's not done by a single screen. It's done by developing a relationship with the young parent, talking about them, educating them, and working with the young family. And I think that that's a positive thing.

So the member opposite, the Leader of the Liberal Party talked about how important it was to do a single act, and he talked about how important it was to do one thing. And I think, Mr. Speaker, it's important to continue to move this important issue forward. I think it's important to move all issues forward.

So, therefore, I'm proud to be in a government that's actually moved forward on multiple fronts to increase the health and benefit for all in multiple sectors. And, again, when one looks at the past records of either party opposite, you look at our record, I'm proud to be a New Democrat and I'm proud to make a difference for young moms and babies.

Thank you very much.

* (10:40)

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, and I am pleased and proud to have the opportunity to stand in support of Bill 215 today. And I was somewhat disappointed with the comments from the minister responsible for children and healthy children, in the kind of partisan political speech that he just made that had very little relevance to the need for universal screening for hearing in the province of Manitoba.

We all know that every child deserves a healthy start to life, and what's more important than trying to ensure that we know whether children can hear or not, because we know it has a significant impact on their future development, and it's been articulated very clearly by the member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) and the Leader of the Liberal Party.

And I was hoping, Mr. Speaker, that we could get beyond partisan politics, because very many times in this Legislature—and I know a lot of the viewing public may not understand this—but there are many, many things that we, across political lines, agree on. And there are things that move forward in this Chamber because there is agreement from all sides of the House.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of those issues that I thought partisan politics could be set aside on and we could all work together to try to ensure that children that may have hearing problems have it identified as early as possible so that the supports and services can be put in place.

Mr. Speaker, common sense tells me, and I think it tells all Manitobans, that this is something that should happen and it could happen very easily without a lot of extra additional cost to the system. But what's the cost to a child, to a family, when they aren't identified early and when the proper supports can't be put in place?

Mr. Speaker, this is one of those things that we shouldn't be criticizing each other on. It's one of those things that we should be joining together on and saying, let's, in the best interests of children and families, move this legislation forward.

And, you know, I heard the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) say we don't need legislation. Well, Mr. Speaker, in order to raise this issue and move this issue forward, I believe we do need legislation, because it needs to happen and it needs to happen now. And, you know, the Minister of Health has brought in a piece of legislation that is going to limit the amount of money that regional health authorities spend on administration. Well, she doesn't need legislation for that. It takes good fiscal management on behalf of a government and good policy to make that happen, but she has a piece of legislation on the table. So for her to be critical of this legislation coming forward when it makes common sense, ultimately, we should all be reaching out to families that need our support and need our help, and we should show leadership as legislators and not be critical of each other.

This goes beyond New Democrat, Liberal or Conservative Party policy, Mr. Speaker. This speaks to common sense, to caring about children that need to get off to the best start in life, and what better way than to ensure they have a test done to ensure that they can hear well and they can develop to the best of their potential at the every earliest opportunity?

So, Mr. Speaker, I have nothing more to say except to say, let's not use politics in a way that is going to take away from this issue. Let's ensure that we move forward and pass this legislation. I'm not going to speak at length because I would like to see this legislation come to a vote today and ensure that we can all stand together and support families that need our support. Thank you.

Ms. Diane McGifford (Lord Roberts): I'd like to join the member from Minnedosa in welcoming the guests to the House today. I think it's always important when the public is here to actually listen to what we have to say, so I certainly welcome the guests to the House today.

And I'm pleased to talk about this particular piece of legislation for several reasons. First of all, of course, Mr. Speaker, this government is very keen on moving towards newborn hearing screening—universal newborn hearing screening—so it does give me the opportunity, along with those of my colleagues, to put a few comments on the record.

But also, I'm very keen on speaking to it, Mr. Speaker, because I'm—I've become a grandmother, and my first grandchild was born 18 months ago. I know the member from La Verendrye had a grandson in February. I've talked to the member from River East; I know she's a grandmother. And the member from Lakeside is a grandfather. And I think grandparents have a very special interest in their grandchildren, not to supplant the interests of the parent, but we're able to observe and get to know our grandchildren in a slightly different way than the parents have. And, of course, our grandchildren become and are extremely dear and important to us.

So I am concerned because I have a grandson, and I hope I'll have other grandchildren. Actually, my grandson is not so—not a newborn anymore, but running around, having a great time and sometimes, Mr. Speaker, makes more sense than some of us in this House. But, anyway, let's not go there.

I was very pleased when the Minister for Healthy Living (Mr. Rondeau) spoke to us because he pointed out the \$30-million investment that this—*[interjection]* \$30-million investment that this government is making through his department in creating healthy children. Of course, that is a very small portion of what this government actually spends on children, because we have our huge Education departments, we have Family Services and Housing. So there are many other kinds of expenses that we incur.

And I didn't think it was remiss of the Minister for Healthy Living to point out to the member from River Heights that he was a member of a Cabinet that hugely cut transfer payments in Health in 1995. And I see members opposite shaking their heads, but they certainly didn't like it in 1995 when they had to deal with it in their budget-making process. So I believe the cut was something like \$200 million. So

that doesn't sound—a cut of \$200 million in 1995 usually isn't the sign of a person who's interested in investing in the health of children.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) spoke about this, and I want to make the point, too, that our government is doing more screening, not less screening, and this is the direction we're taking to develop capacity and move towards universal screening. We need to do all we can to promote universal screening and this is the direction that we're moving in. I think her point was, and I reiterate it, that we don't need legislation to do what we're already doing. So I make the point that the Minister of Health already made. We know that universal screening is important to Manitoba, and it's the goal of our government and it's the goal of our regional health authorities.

Mr. Speaker, we have a record of increasing resources for prevention and early detection initiatives such as screening programs, and we've done so based on the advice of health professionals and medical evidence, not substituting that with political judgment. And just talking, just noting our early screening programs, I recall, again, when my grandson was born in St. Boniface Hospital in a wonderful environment—and I should congratulate the Minister of Health for that—it was a room in which mom and dad were with the baby. The baby was born with mom and dad right there. Parents spent—there was a little bit of a slight problem with the child—which was detected immediately—so the parents had to spend two or three days in the hospital, but they were in the room with the baby the whole time, not the kind of opportunity that I was afforded when my children were being born. So I congratulate the Minister of Health on that program.

* (10:50)

But the point that I was making is that we do know that Manitobans would like a universal screening program, and we are moving towards that. We just don't think that at this—we just don't believe that legislation is necessary. What would legislation achieve when we're already moving in that direction?

I might add—it is our understanding, and the Minister of Health has said this, that universal screening for newborns is not yet standard practice in other provinces in the country, and we're not aware of any province that has legislatively mandated newborn hearing screening. Again, I make the point again that legislation isn't required.

Mr. Speaker, in Manitoba it is important to note that all newborns are fully assessed by physicians, midwives and nurses following birth. As I mentioned with my grandson, and during subsequent well-baby visits in all parts of this province, and I know my daughter benefited greatly from having visits from a public health nurse who helped her with issues like lactation. And so I'm very pleased that we do have this program.

If there are any concerns about hearing are—if any concern about hearing is identified at this problem—at this time, follow-up and referral for service is—there is follow-up for service for the child.

Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of Health has said this and I just reiterate it, that we want to take our advice from medical experts, from educational experts and from the consumers of health care on this matter. In other words, I reiterate that legislation is not what is required to deal with issue—with this issue.

And the Minister of Healthy Living (Mr. Rondeau) made this point and, you know, just briefly compared the '90s to the current time to say that there was no universal screening program anywhere in Manitoba when we took office. Now I realize that time has passed and I'm very pleased to put on the record that we are—we have made progress and that universal screening is now being phased in as an additional front line—as an additional support to front-line health professionals and families throughout Manitoba.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have a great record on newborn screening and the Minister of Health and the Minister for Healthy Living mentioned many of these initiatives so I won't mention them, but I do want to highlight, just very briefly, because my time is running out, I do want to highlight the work that we've done in midwifery and maternal care in Manitoba, because I think there is some very strong evidence that midwifery contributes to healthy children.

One of the most significant investments we've made to improve health care for moms and babies has been establishing publicly funded midwifery.

Mr. Speaker, over 70 per cent of midwifery clients are from populations at risk and these moms and babies are seeing lower rates for preterm, stillbirth and low weight. Again, I reiterate our interest in investing in children.

In 1999, there were no funded midwifery positions in Manitoba; now there are 45 funded midwives with more than half of these positions in rural and northern Manitoba; 25 positions are in rural and northern Manitoba.

So we did recognize the importance of midwifery and proclaimed The Midwifery Act in 2000, something that the opposition didn't get—the current opposition didn't get around to doing, but I know there was a big interest in midwifery, and I do salute members of the opposition for the work that they have done in midwifery, Mr. Speaker.

I agree with the member—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The honourable member's time has expired.

Point of Order

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to raise a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Point of order.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, we've been debating a very significant bill here—the universal newborn screening, and I'm sure that members opposite would like the opportunity to pass this on to committee and have members of the public come and speak about it.

I know that time is running short here and I certainly hope it would not be the intent for the members to not pass this bill and to just speak it out. I know that they will probably say they have more speakers that want to speak, Mr. Speaker, but there's plenty of opportunity to speak to this bill in third reading and we have the opportunity right now; we have the bill before us. We have the opportunity to move it to committee. We have the opportunity to be a leader in legislation in Canada, so I would like to canvass the House to see if there's leave to pass this bill onto committee.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It was raised as a point of order and, first of all, dealing with the point of order, our rules state that when a matter's before the House, that all members have the right to speak to any bill or motion that is brought before the House, and that is in our rule. And unless all members that wish to speak have spoken, then the Speaker will put the question. Otherwise, the Speaker does not put the question because in here, our rule is debating, and every member has the right to debate any bill as long as they wish to. And time is always allowed for that.

And the next question was, she asked leave, if the Speaker would put the question. Is there a will of the House to call the question?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No, there's other members that wish to speak.

* * *

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): I appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record with regard to the proposed bill, Bill 215, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act.

Mr. Speaker, the bill, in summary, ensures—proposes that screening for hearing loss occur before an infant is discharged from a hospital if born in one, or alternatively, that a child be referred to a health-care facility or health professional equipped for and capable of screening the child for hearing loss if that child is born in a location outside of a hospital.

I want to echo some of the words spoken so eloquently by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) in her remarks earlier. We do appreciate, on this side of the House, any and all constructive work undertaken towards improving the public health-care system in the province of Manitoba and providing for better care for Manitoba citizens. This bill, Mr. Speaker, does tend towards that objective, which is very encouraging. That's not often the case from members opposite.

The record on health care and the provision of health-care services between the two parties in this House is very clear. In fact, it's very stark in terms of a comparison between the records of the two parties that occupy this House, notwithstanding the independent member that is—sits under a Liberal banner, and there were words spoken earlier about his particular record in this regard, which, frankly, is a shameful one.

Our government, in regard to newborn hearing and screening, our government is, in fact, doing far more screening than has ever been done before in the history of the province of Manitoba, not less. This is a fact, Mr. Speaker, and it is in this direction that we are moving as a government to increase and develop—increase capacity for newborn hearing screening. Universal hearing screening is important to Manitobans and it is a goal of both our government and the regional health authorities throughout the province of Manitoba, to enhance screening.

We have a concrete record, in fact, of increasing resources for prevention and early detection initiatives such as screening programs. And we have done this; we've proceeded with this increase in resources, based upon the advice of health-care professionals and medical evidence, Mr. Speaker, not substituting this for political judgment through legislation, such is being proposed by members opposite.

We, in Manitoba, realize that it's very important that all newborn—

* (11:00)

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

The hour now being 11 a.m., we will move on to resolutions. Order, please. And we will deal with Resolution No. 7, Water Quality.

RESOLUTION

Res. 7—Water Quality

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): I move, seconded by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe):

WHEREAS Lake Winnipeg, as the second largest freshwater lake in Canada and the tenth largest body of fresh water in the world, is one of Manitoba's most valuable natural resources; and

WHEREAS excess nutrient loading from human development, such as cities, farms and golf courses, contributes to unsafe levels of ammonia, E. coli and rapid algae growth in Lake Winnipeg; and

WHEREAS a moratorium on hog industry expansion was instituted in 2008 in the overdeveloped areas of southeastern Manitoba, the environmentally sensitive Red River Valley Special Management Zone and the Interlake in an effort to protect Manitoba's water quality; and

WHEREAS funding is available to assist producers in transitioning to more environmentally friendly production to help them with the upcoming ban on winter manure spreading scheduled to come into effect in 2013; and

WHEREAS the government of Manitoba has made significant investments in sewage upgrades in the city of Winnipeg and numerous other rural municipalities throughout the province; and

WHEREAS flooding this spring will wash additional pollutants into our waterways and have a negative effect on the health of Lake Winnipeg; and

WHEREAS we all share a responsibility to protect Manitoba's water.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba commend the provincial government for its leadership in protecting Manitoba's water quality in the Lake Winnipeg basin.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to continue its aggressive efforts in improving the quality of the lake so that future generations may continue to enjoy Lake Winnipeg and all of Manitoba's abundant freshwater resources.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for the Interlake, seconded by the honourable member for Concordia,

WHEREAS Lake Winnipeg—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: It is my pleasure to rise this morning to speak on this very important topic of water quality in our province, and I would like to begin my remarks by noting that we are in the midst of a major flood here, obviously, as we all know, in the province of Manitoba, probably the flood of the 21st century, I think it would be safe to say, and virtually unprecedented in the history of our province given that both the Red River region and the western Manitoba region are under threat, and, of course, the region that I represent, the Interlake, has been chronically flooded for a number of years now.

So I would like to begin my remarks by commending our Premier (Mr. Selinger) and our Cabinet members for doing an exemplary job in managing this flood. They have taken a very proactive approach, preparing for it months in advance and working around the clock, seven days a week—I know this for a fact—to ensure that this flood is managed to the very best of our ability. And I have observed this process from the very beginning and I have to say that it has been most impressive how our new leader has managed this and has taken Manitoba through this flood in the best possible way that could be envisioned. So I take my hat off to him in that regard.

The whole topic of Lake Winnipeg, obviously, is forefront in the minds of all Manitobans and rightfully so. This is truly a crown jewel of our province and is under threat, and it's not just a threat from Manitobans. Of course, the Lake Winnipeg watershed is a huge watershed, extends all the way to the Rocky Mountains and to within, I believe, 50 miles of Lake Superior, just to put it in perspective, and, of course, all the way to the south, the entire Red River watershed, which drains North and South Dakota as well as Minnesota. So this is an incredibly large watershed, and all of us have to do our utmost to ensure that the water is focused upon and lowering our collective nutrient loads is forefront in our minds.

And, again, I acknowledge the good works of this particular NDP government over three terms in office to address this very serious challenge that we all face. And I can look to a broad number of initiatives that we have undertaken over the years, for example, the first jurisdiction in Canada and in all of North America, I believe, to actually create a Department of Water Stewardship. What a brilliant decision that was. What a huge step forward and rather unique that this government took that action and something that has paid off dividends over the years.

The expansion of the conservation districts, a very good step forward, I believe, Mr. Speaker, an initiative that was begun by the Schreyer government back in 1974, I believe it was. And when we came to office in 1999 there were, I believe, nine conservation districts in the province, and now we have more than doubled that amount, and virtually all of the province, including the Interlake, with the West Interlake Watershed Conservation District and the East Interlake Conservation District, all of that region now covered off, something that was completely lacking, obviously, when we came to office.

The hog moratorium is something that was very much needed in our province, and I know we have to do things that ensure that agriculture is not impeded. In the province of Manitoba agriculture is, of course, the very base of our economy and has been historically, but we do have a responsibility to move forward in a sustainable manner, a long-term sustainable manner, so that as we—as they say, that we leave the land in as good a shape if not better than we inherited it from our parents as we pass it on to our children. And this particular moratorium will reap dividends in the days and years to come.

I know in the Interlake, in particular—and this is an area that has some of the best water resources in our province, if not the country, extremely high-quality water to be found in our aquifers. And anybody who would like to follow up on that, I would highly recommend to them the Bob Betcher report written back in—I'm just checking here, I have a copy of it, Mr. Speaker. Bob Betcher wrote a definitive report back in March of 1995 called *Groundwater in Manitoba: Hydrogeology, Quality Concerns, Management*. And this is where I learned what I do know about the Interlake aquifers being second to none, but what I did also learn from the report was that these aquifers are highly vulnerable to pollution.

*(11:10)

The overburden cover is very thin in places. This is typical ridge and swale country with a lot of exposed limestone coming to the surface. And you have to understand that these limestones in the Interlake had been passed over by glaciers many centuries ago, which highly fractured these formations. And then, of course, when the glaciers melted, Lake Agassiz formed, sat atop these formations, and the water over the centuries eroded these fractures so that there is a direct and rapid conduit from the surface to these aquifers, which makes them highly vulnerable to nutrient contamination. And, unfortunately, that was what was occurring until such time that we put this moratorium in place. And, I know, I have many hog operations in the Interlake and it's just unfortunate that most, if practically not all of them, are located in marginal areas, swamp areas or built on ridges and, although we tried to slowly close the door and slowly guide industry in the correct direction, they were very unco-operative and, at the end of the day, we were forced to impose this moratorium on the expansion of the industry as our main means of protecting these aquifers. And the same rule applies to varying degrees in other regions of the province as well.

I do want to make some mention—I only have a few moments left here—of the flooding, as I began my remarks. In particular, the flooding that is being experienced on First Nations communities is just horrendous, and the inaction by the federal government over the years has been one of the greatest disappointments that I've experienced as a member of this Legislature, a member of the Interlake where there are eight First Nations communities and, of the eight, I would say that

virtually all of them, with maybe one exception, is experiencing horrendous flooding, chronic flooding, and the necessary infrastructure to prevent this, to alleviate this is one of the most important tasks that I envision for myself going forward and our government.

And, again, I have to acknowledge the Cabinet and our Premier (Mr. Selinger) in this regard. They have stepped outside of the box to address some of these serious issues. We have—we are breaking new ground. We are basically moving into the domain of the federal government because of their inactivities, because of their lack of caring and irresponsibility, it is incumbent upon us, much along the lines of Jordan's Principle, where if there is something wrong, if people are suffering, then do what's right, step up to the plate and put in place the repairs necessary and then seek payment from the proper quadrant at a later date. That is our mandate going forward and it will be an interesting summer in the days to come. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I am privileged to put some words in the record in regards to the members' resolution—private member's resolution that has come forward dealing with water quality today. I'm a bit astounded that—and, you know, and I agree with a lot of the whereases that the member has here. There are some that I take exception to, and I'm kind of surprised that the member from Concordia is the one that seconded this motion, though, given the fact that it's his government that has forced the City of Winnipeg to spend \$350 million to take nitrates out of the waste-water treatment facilities, the new ones that are being built in north Winnipeg in his own area, Mr. Speaker. And I find that, if anybody should understand that the NDP have let down the issues of water in this province, it should be the members in north Winnipeg that have been forced to pay this—these dollars into the system.

But, I digress. I want to say that I agree with the member in regards to the fact that water is one of the most important issues we can deal with in the province, Mr. Speaker. We often talk about how hydro is sort of the oil of Manitoba when compared to Alberta. Also, down my area, oil's pretty important these days as well; it's driving the economy along with agriculture, tourism and it's certainly a big issue that we need to continue to work with those who are investing in our province.

But water is the key issue to sustenance in our life and will be one of the most important issues, as it always has been, in the past, from this day forward, and we need to protect our water resources and—for current and future resources wherever we have that opportunity, and I want to be—make sure that I'm on the record to make that very clear.

If we don't take steps to protect our water today, there will be negative impacts on public health, on the economy and on our overall quality of life, Mr. Speaker, and I think that goes without saying. But, you know, the NDP tout their record. But the record isn't that great in regards to if once you delve into the careful scrutiny of it, and I've already outlined some of those issues. They made a lot of promises in water in 1999 and, of course, they promised to fix health care in months with \$15 million, and we know where that went. And they promised to have balanced budget, and the debt's doubled in the 11 years that they've been there. So we can't trust them in regards to the promises that they've made. There's no doubt about that. And I guess I would say that it's the same with water. There have been steps taken to improve—try to improve things. Dollars have gone into saving Lake Winnipeg and the number of groups that do good work in finding science to deal with those issues.

And I'd say that the challenges of Lake Winnipeg, though, continue under this government's watch. And we've got algal blooms and beach closings and swimming advisories marring the beautification of the region, Mr. Speaker, and the use of it. And I don't see a lot, you know, other than a few things that I've mentioned in regards to what the—what they've done to try and fix this.

I do believe, though, that, as I've mentioned earlier, the member from Concordia, the member from Interlake have just indicated that, you know, tried to—I mean the resolution comes around to commending the government of the day for the work that they think they've done in regards to water management, Mr. Speaker, and that's where I take exception to it. I can't commend them for the overall work that they've done in regards to water in Manitoba because they haven't listened to the scientists; 63 scientists indicated to them that they needed to remove phosphorus, not the nitrogen from the situation in the waste-water treatment plants that I've put forward in—and I think they needed to listen to.

And I know members of the government have been to Israel. They've been to other areas, and this—the scientists around the world have spoken in regards to this issue. There's lots of documentation on that. And the Clean Environment Commission in Manitoba has had many presentations to it from these scientists. And one that I—one that was—that that they were advised on in December 19th of 2008, stated, and I quote: Removing nitrogen will at best do nothing, and at worst increase the dominance of the filamentous nitrogen-fixing cyanobacteria that are the public face of eutrophication in Lake Winnipeg and many other lakes. End quote—or end quote, Mr. Speaker.

These same scientists, respected scientists, also advised the Clean Environment Commission in '08, and I quote: Resources intended for nitrogen reduction would be better spent on a more comprehensive management strategy for phosphorus in the Lake Winnipeg watershed, especially in the Red River basin. End quote, Mr. Speaker.

The *Free Press* editorial board weighed in to this area with the City of Winnipeg waste-water treatment issue in the past as well, and I'd like to quote there, Mr. Speaker, saying that: The Province's decision, the City believes, was motivated by political consideration as opposed to a sensible cost-benefit analysis of the problem. The longer the Province refuses to study all the evidence, the more obvious it seems that politics not science is guiding its decision. End quote.

Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, we continue to be disappointed by the NDP's government indifference to this thoughtful advice, but being put forward—been put forward by the distinguished groups of scientists and, of course, the comments that I've just made from others as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just say for the record as well, that there's boil-water advisory and drinking water avoidance advisories in 64 communities in the province as of April 21st, 2011. There was—the same date—there was 30 public—semi public water systems in the same area. There were 15 area-wide private wells under the boil-water advisory or drinking water advisory avoidance area as well. And these are not signs that the government has dealt with water quality in this province.

There has been boil-water orders since I was elected in 1999. I was first asked to be the Environment critic for the Progressive Conservative Party in Manitoba in 1999. Those boil-water orders

are still about the same numbers as they were at that point, and we've actually added more to it, Mr. Speaker, and that is not fixing the situation.

And I'm not getting into the infrastructure that's required in regards to lagoons and those areas, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP have fallen behind. They may have the largest debt in Manitoba's history, but they have not dealt with the infrastructure debt that isn't even on the books, and that has, if not doubled, it's tripled in Manitoba since they've come in. So they've let these infrastructures fall apart, basically.

* (11:20)

And I think you can look at the Heavy Construction Association and other industries as well that are very, very concerned, certainly the Association of Manitoba Municipalities who the government says we're working with all of the time. *[interjection]* You know, and I think the member from Gimli is laughing about that, Mr. Speaker. He thinks that because they've got this budget for roads and a few bridges, which they—we've—had—my colleagues have been raising in the last few days, that they're solving all the problems. He doesn't understand that infrastructure is also more than roads. It's lagoons, it's water-treatment facilities and other areas as well. So I think those are important issues.

Mr. Speaker, there's Dorothy Lake that I mentioned last week under provincial parks where they've had sewage overflows. The Otter Lake area, there's been more in those areas. I know my colleagues have other things that they're going to say in regards to the municipal situation around the province, so I'm going to not get into that one right now.

I'd just say that one of the areas that the member raised in his comments is about agriculture and Bill 17, in regards to the moratorium—selective moratorium that they put on the hog expansion industry in '08, hurting that livestock sector tremendously in this province, and did it with no science. If they could prove the science to me, Mr. Speaker, and bring that forward, I'd be glad to deal with it. But they did it under the auspices of the member from Dauphin, who was the Conservation Minister at that time. Did nothing to put science forward to make up—to back his argument.

And the farmers knew that, and I guess when you look at situations around the province, the

University of Manitoba, scientists from those areas, they didn't listen to them either, Mr. Speaker. And so, I'd say that Manitoba farmers and livestock producers are using a wide variety of beneficial management practices on their farms to help protect our water sources.

As the member said, farmers are stewards of the land. They do take care of it, Mr. Speaker. These examples include nitrogen management planning, using alternate watering systems, relocating confinement areas away from repairing areas, improved manure storage and handling, farmyard runoff control, riparian area management, precision agricultural applications and wintering site management, just to name a few.

You'd also have to look at the new—well, you know, an area of support is that the federal and provincial governments recently announced the Manure Management Financial Assistance Program, which will help with upcoming ban on winter spreading in those areas, Mr. Speaker. Repairing manure storage structures and adopting manure treatment systems. We need to make sure that those are supported and continue to work on.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to put a few words on the record in regards to respected scientist Dr. Don Flaten, from the University of Manitoba, who indicated in that debate in Bill 17, in June of '08, and I'd like to quote him as well, quoting: It's a well-documented fact that nutrient loading, especially phosphorus, from land and water, contributes significantly to the risk of algae growth, the eutrophication of water bodies such as Lake Winnipeg. What many people don't want to admit is that the risk is equally large whether that ton of nitrogen or phosphorus is coming from eroded soil or lawns around the cottage development, a sewage lagoon from a small town, inadequately treated waste water discharged from our cities, or crop and livestock farms, as well. Therefore, each of us needs to be doing a better job of nutrient management of—

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

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the Chamber to speak to this resolution brought by my neighbour and colleague, the member from the Interlake and I'm also pleased to stand side by side with many champions for Lake Winnipeg in my community of Gimli, including among others, the friends of Lake Winnipeg

organization, which is Rick Gamble, the mayor of the village of Dunnottar, is a part of that organization.

I think about the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium and the work of Dr. Alan Kristofferson, who I paid tribute to in this Chamber with my member's statement at the beginning of the session. And a member of that board, Mr. Bill Barlow, who has been a long-time mayor and councillor in the community of Gimli, who I had the privilege of serving on council in Gimli, and was very privileged to work with the Gimli council to bring the *Namao*—assisted in bringing the *Namao* research vessel to Gimli, by making provisions within our council's mandate to provide for berthing at the Gimli Harbour for the *Namao*, when minister at the time, Jean Friesen, minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, came to announce our support for the *Namao* research vessel.

I also stand beside many fishers, Mr. Speaker, Robert T. Kristjanson, for one, and Chris Kristjanson, his son, lifelong fishers on the lake, who have been tremendous advocates for Lake Winnipeg, who have brought photographic and video evidence of the impacts of those algal blooms, and who have brought photographic and video evidence, or have photographic evidence of some of the things that they found in their nets in 2002, when the North End waste-water treatment facility discharged 427 million litres of raw sewage into the Red River. And, it was absolutely disgusting, the results of that particular episode, over 50 hours of discharge into the river.

Now, it's really disconcerting that the members opposite have talked about scrapping \$350 million to rejuvenate that North End waste-water treatment plant. Oh, they say, it's savings, and it's interesting because the member from Tuxedo called it a complete waste of money. Now, I know the member from Tuxedo has a summer residence in Gimli and she's up there quite a bit; I do see her there quite often in the coffee shop. So they're saying if you took that money out of the budget to rejuvenate that 80-year-old waste-water treatment plant, you can put it in roads.

Well, that's interesting logic, because if you wanted to drive up nice, paved highways, which we have been doing to the Gimli constituency, by the way, to get to the lake and see the results of 427 million litres of raw sewage being dumped into that lake, because they insist on neglecting the need to overhaul that facility. *[interjection]* Well, they're

saying it's under our watch. Well, that's why, Mr. Speaker, the Clean Environment Commission is saying we have to redo that project. Now, they're saying that they would scrap that entirely and save money. *[interjection]* Now, here they go. They're yelling because they disagree. They don't want to listen, but they'll certainly stand up there and talk about their position on the issue.

But the science also talks about ammonia; the science talks about E. coli; the science talks about phosphates; it talks about nitrates. And 427 million litres of raw sewage going into the river, and we're going to fix that. But you guys have said you'd scrap that project. You said you would scrap that project, and I find that—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a lot of time left and members that wish to speak on this subject will have ample time. If you just wish to wait your turn, I'd really appreciate that. The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Bjornson: Now, that's one of the examples of things that they would do. They've also said that our Water Protection Act is wrong-headed. They've also suggested that they would slash a half a billion dollars from the budget, and what would that mean as far as our ability to protect our water? What would that mean as far as money for drinking-water quality, water and waste-water treatment upgrades, drainage and programs to protect our lakes and rivers? *[interjection]* Well, the members opposite are saying, you're not doing anything with it. What are we doing? We're doing a lot of things for Lake Winnipeg: 95 per cent of Lake Winnipeg Stewardships Board's 135 recommendations have been completed or taken action upon, and in 2009 the progress report said that it was confident the Province's actions to save Lake Winnipeg were concrete and on track.

We had an historic memorandum of understanding with the federal government on protecting Canada's sixth great lake. We brought in the moratorium on hog barn expansion in environmentally sensitive areas. We introduced specific septic field rules, increased inspectors and brought in new water protection areas, all opposed by the opposition. We committed to the wetlands protection and restoration initiative to restore the Delta and Netley-Libau marshes, reducing the nutrient load in Lake Winnipeg by 6 per cent; new restrictions on lawn fertilizers; legislated a first-in-Canada ban on phosphates and detergents

and successfully lobbied for a national ban; invested millions for scientific research, including support for the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium research ship, the *Namao*, which I've already referenced, Mr. Speaker; developed lake-friendly products with local leaders and made products—pardon me, the lake-friendly products campaign and made products used in the Legislature lake friendly. We've also aggressively fought the Devils Lake diversion.

So, if members opposite are saying, you're not doing anything, I would rather stand in this House and talk about our record on what we have been doing and what we will do compared to what they have done and what they said they will do. But, again, it's really disconcerting—really disconcerting that they would scrap that project to fix an 80-year-old waste-water treatment plant: 427 million litres of raw sewage. *[interjection]* And that's why we're fixing it. Under your watch, they say; that's why we're fixing it. It's an 80-year-old facility, and we want to fix it. And, you know, for them to—*[interjection]* Welcome to another episode of adults behaving badly, Mr. Speaker.

An Honourable Member: We're watching you.

* (11:30)

Mr. Bjornson: The opposition—yes, it's rather fascinating. They're talking about, fix it, fix it, but now they're going to scrap \$350 million to fix it. So that sounds really interesting, Mr. Speaker, that they're going to suggest that we're not fixing it, but they're going to scrap the \$350-million project that would fix it. So it's rather fascinating.

Well, you know, let's talk about their record. If you go back to the 1990s, drainage works were constructed without regulation or enforcement, and we're trying to address the drainage issues after years of neglect by the Conservatives. In '06, we gave water resource officers new inspection powers, which the Ombudsman described as a commendable step; the Tories, on the other hand, said, oh, not necessary, and accused us of creating water police. The Tories slashed the former environment and natural resources department, including a 43 per cent cut to water resources, and I know the member from Emerson even mocked the Province's efforts to protect the Red River system from unfiltered water being pumped from Devils Lake. The bottom line is that the members on this issue are quite short-sighted.

The members on this issue are—seem to be okay with allowing ammonia in the lake. Ammonia is toxic for fish. The members should—you know, they talk about science, and science tells us that ammonia is toxic for fish. E. coli forces beach closures, and algal growth is harming Lake Winnipeg. These are scientific facts.

And we have to fix an 80-year-old waste-water treatment facility here in Winnipeg because the people of Manitoba deserve better. The people of Manitoba deserve the sixth great lake to be that crown jewel for tourism here in Canada—in Manitoba, I should say. And I know in my constituency, I represent a fishing industry that, if combined commercial-recreational, over \$80 million a year. I don't have the figures on the tourism component of our community, but I do know that tourism is, of course, one of the mainstays of the local economy. What kind of tourism will you have if you do not fix an 80-year-old waste-water treatment plant and you allow millions of gallons and—pardon me, millions of litres of raw sewage to be dumped into the river? That's why we've committed to fix it, but members opposite will scrap that plan. Manitobans deserve better, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I have often characterized the lake in three ways: the serene, the surreal and the savage. It's very serene to walk along that lake and see a very gentle breeze and very gentle waves on the lake. It's surreal to walk along the beach and you can't discern the water from the horizon. And it's a savage lake, as it reminded us last October with that weather bomb, where suddenly you have eight to 10 feet of wind-affected waves wreaking havoc on the shoreline, Mr. Speaker. On the surface, it's easy to tell what mood our lake is in; it's underneath that concerns me.

And we have a lot of work to do, and we've done a lot of work to address the health of Lake Winnipeg and we'll continue to work to address the health of Lake Winnipeg. And I thank the member from the Interlake for bringing forward this important resolution, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I'm pleased to rise today to put a few words on the record about the private member's resolution brought forward by the member for the Interlake.

You know, I've been listening to the member from Gimli talking about all the money that's supposed to be being spent and waste-water treatment in Winnipeg, and the commitment,

supposedly, from the Province is around \$235 million. Over the last five years, from 2004—more than five years, actually—from 2004 to 2011, the actual contribution to that upgrade is \$31.7 million. That's a pretty sad figure when you're talking \$235 million. At that rate, it's going to take 20 years and most of the work they're doing will be obsolete in—by that time, that—those—work that's being done now.

The many—large number of scientists have said that the removal of nitrogen is not necessary in the sewage treatment plants, and I wonder how much more useful that part of the funding, that some \$350 million, would be in improving the sewers and waste-water disposal systems in the city of Winnipeg so we don't get spills like the member from Interlake was talking about.

During the '99 campaign, the NDP promised to protect quality and quantity of Manitoba water and they certainly haven't delivered. You know, they talk about the sewage lagoons across the province and municipal sewage lagoons, and every sewage lagoon is designed with an outlet. Every sewage lagoon is designed with an outlet to a water drainage system of some sort.

At the present time, the City of Dauphin is engaged in an emergency discharge from their sewage lagoon into the Vermillion River, which flows into Lake Dauphin, and the ammonia levels were somewhat high in the discharge so they were told to treat it with chlorine. It's my experience that chlorine is just as deadly to fish as ammonia is, and I don't understand that kind of an order going out to a municipality.

There are certainly better systems for dealing with waste water from lagoons and situations where some of the effluent has to be removed from the lagoons, and one that I'm very familiar with is the one at Roblin, where they put it on the crops, on hay crops, as irrigation and have a controlled wetland.

You know, this NDP government have totally failed to do anything that is protective of Lake Winnipeg, and we're seeing it in the numbers that are—we're seeing larger algae blooms every year this government's in power. They keeping paying the lip service; they keep saying, we're going to do this, we're going to do that, and the lake's getting into worse condition. There's no imagination; there's no plan on actually how to do anything to protect the lake. There's a bunch of political rhetoric that leads nowhere.

A number of years ago, I was pleased to be on a committee that was a non-partisan committee that was struck—it was called the Consultation on Sustainable Development initiative, COSDI for short, and we developed a white paper. It took a lot of time; it took a lot of work; it took a lot of argument and, finally, a lot of co-operation. And that was shortly before the NDP government took power. We developed a white paper, delivered it to the government; it got shelved. And I've always been disappointed that got shelved. That was a very good committee, looked at land use and environmental issues and came up with some very workable solutions that have never been put in place.

You know, I spent 15 years as the chair of a local planning district. One of the last things that we did at that planning district, before I retired from municipal politics, was put in place our livestock policies. We've seen those livestock policies spread now to quite a few more planning districts; we were one of the first ones. But those livestock policies looked after most of the problems that come out of the livestock industry in this province, as far as phosphate and other issues that surround or seem to surround some of the livestock operations.

You know, the manure—the effluent that comes out of the hog barns, and we heard it over and over and over again on Bill 17, is a valuable commodity, and we've seen fertilizer prices—nitrogen this spring at about 68 cents a pound, up from, well, when I was farming, up from about 30 cents a pound. The very idea that farmers would put on any more than would feed the crop is unheard of to me.

I know there are other people who want to speak to this. I would like to say a lot more on this resolution, but I'll leave it at that, and thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

*(11:40)

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to put a few words on the record regarding this important resolution from the member from the Interlake, the resolution about protecting the water quality in the Lake Winnipeg basin.

Water always has been a precious resource for all people, at all times, Mr. Speaker, and we tend to take it for granted, particularly in this country. And I come from Europe where we don't take it quite as granted there because of larger population, more

pressure, more industrialization, years ago. So, we knew, you know, how important water was.

In Canada, it wasn't always that important to take it seriously because we had a huge country and there was volumes of water, and we had a thin population, or a population thinly distributed, but, of course, all of that is changing, Mr. Speaker.

We take water for granted because wherever you go, at least wherever I go, at any hotel, you turn on the tap and usually the water is drinkable. Some places, you know, it may not taste quite the way we like it, or we're used to it, but it's usually fairly good water.

It's not the case in other places in the world, Mr. Speaker. There are Third World countries and areas—just reference sub-Saharan areas and many other places. I'll name the country of Haiti and others that do not have those clean water supplies, that don't have those: I take it for granted, I turn on the tap, and I have clean water. It's just not there. In fact, you'll hear stories of women having—and it's usually women—women having to walk two, three miles with a container on their head or their shoulder, carrying water back to the house. That is the norm in many Third World countries and places.

That is rapidly changing, thank God, and thank God, because we put a lot of effort, or some effort at least, maybe not all we should put into helping some of those countries, particularly CIDA and non-governmental agencies. And usually the first thing they do is: we will drill a well for this village so this village can have clean, pure water—drinkable, potable water. It's so important, Mr. Speaker.

And the pressure on clean water is enormous because whether we are aware of it or not, and I'm sure we're all aware of it, is the population has increased. When I was born, Mr. Speaker, I hate to say how many years ago that was, but there were roughly two billion people on this globe. Now, there are over seven billion. That's three and a half times as many. So there's three and a half times as much pressure on water—on the need for water. We have to be aware of that.

And we know that there will be future impacts and those impacts could be so negative in some areas that maybe we could even face the possibility of wars being fought over water. As the population grows, as global warming becomes a reality, possibly because of the population and the increased industrialization, we will have scenarios where the

ice caps are melting more rapidly than they ought to. They are already where the sea ice is melting in both the Arctic and the Antarctic at incredible rates. And because of that, if the oceans do rise, it will not only jeopardize some very low-lying countries, but it will also impact us directly. It will impact us because our river flows will be altered or changed, because that same pressure won't be there. That will affect dams, that will affect hydro development; it will affect many things.

So global warming is a reality, Mr. Speaker, ice-cap melting is a reality, industrial growth expansion is a reality, population growth is a reality. All those are connected to our water supply or need the water supply. And so whatever we can do to make it safe and make it safe for future generations, those are the things we ought to do.

We all remember the stories of Walkerton and North Battleford and contaminated water and what that can lead to, Mr. Speaker. So it's a battle we all have to fight together. Now we will quibble about the means how to get there. One side will say you ought to have done that and this side will say, well, we did this. But we still have a common venture; we still are aiming for the same positive results; that is, in a province that is so richly blessed with this natural resource, we have to protect it.

And, Mr. Speaker, we have protected it or are in the process of strengthening those laws that will protect it. We were, after all, the first jurisdiction anywhere, I believe, that created a Department of Water Stewardship in 2003. That was unique and that was proactive and it's been referenced by some of the other speakers. In 2004, we had The Drinking Water Safety Act that came into effect; new regulations that dealt with more stringent water-quality monitoring and recordkeeping and assessments.

And in 2008, we introduced a regulation to establish water protection areas, to protect water systems in places where they are most vulnerable. And the member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) has already stated that we've doubled the number of conservation districts in the last number of years.

But still the major emphasis of this particular resolution is for Lake Winnipeg and the importance of Lake Winnipeg. We all agree something has to be done—something is done, and we are doing the best we can to make sure that the quality of the water in Lake Winnipeg and the fresh water in Manitoba in

general is, you know, is at the level that we deem healthy for our people. We could, with regard to what this government has done, mention some of the things and some of the record of this government—and it's some of the historical record.

As the member from Gimli has already pointed out, the—our government has taken action on 95 per cent of the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board's 135 recommendations. In its 2009 report on progress, the board said that it was confident the Province's action to save Lake Winnipeg were concrete and on track. We were doing the right thing; we're not heading the wrong direction. Again, there may be quibbles about just how we tweak this, but we are going the right direction. We signed a historic MOU with the federal government on protecting Canada's sixth great lake, which is Lake Winnipeg.

Yes, there was a dispute over the hog moratorium. But I would remind members that, from my own experience, when I went back to Europe, I'd say roughly around the year 2000-2001, in there somewhere, the Dutch were going through some real tribulations with their hog industry. And they would jokingly say there are more pigs in Holland than people, and they are right. And they're mainly concentrated in two provinces in the south called Limburg and Brabant, provinces I know extremely well because I am from that area.

And I also know, despite their scientific approach to the problem of manure and how do we deal with this issue, they were having some serious difficulty with contamination of groundwater. And it got so serious, in fact, that the neighbouring adjacent area, which happened to be the province in Germany called Rheinland-Westfalen, or Rhineland—or North Rhine-Westphalia, I believe with the Green Party there, they're actually trying to ban any kind of hog production—totally ban it, because saying, you know, we—it's so concentrated, it's hurting our groundwater. And, of course, we face similar problems in some areas of our province and try to address that.

We've introduced new septic field rules, increased inspectors and brought in new water protection areas. Some of those were opposed by our friends across the way. We are committed to wetland protection and restoration initiatives to restore the Delta and Netley-Libau marshes, helping to reduce nutrient loading in Lake Winnipeg by 6 per cent. And we brought in new restrictions on lawn fertilizers.

I live at the lake, Mr. Speaker, actually a very beautiful place in Cranberry Portage right at the lake, and I enjoy being there. And I have a yard, I guess, right in front leading up to the lake and I like to cut the grass. But I'm really not too sure whether I should be putting fertilizer on that grass like some of my neighbours do and also on some of the other lakes because the land slopes to the lake. I don't always know what's in that fertilizer. I don't read the labels. But, you know, we do know that there's phosphates and nitrates, ammonia, I'm not sure, that leaches or drains into the lake, and it can't, no, cannot possibly be good for the water quality. Those are the kinds of things we have to be very much aware of.

At one time I would go fishing, Mr. Speaker, on those lakes in my little canoe, miles from civilization. If you were thirsty, you'd dip over and you'd drink the water; there would be no problem. Nowadays, I'm not so sure you want to do that unless you want to catch some form of Montezuma's revenge or whatever they call that when your stomach, you know, rebels. Because I think the water is contaminated in some places. It's still not maybe to a drastic degree, but we don't have the same certainty and surety we once had.

Mr. Speaker, we legislated a first-in-Canada ban on phosphates in detergents and successfully lobbied for a national ban. We've invested millions for a scientific research including support for the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium research ship, the *Namao*, and that's been referenced by the member from Gimli.

We've developed with local leaders lake friendly—the lake-friendly products campaign and made products used in the Legislature lake friendly. And, of course, we all know we've aggressively fought the Devils Lake diversion in North Dakota to stop the artificial flow of foreign biota into Lake Winnipeg. So we take our freshwater resources rather seriously, Mr. Speaker, and well we should.

And I want to thank the member from the Interlake for having brought forth this resolution, because I think it's an extremely important resolution, and I look forward to all members in this House supporting it—you know, totally and absolutely. And with that, Mr. Speaker, I will leave it to some other speakers. Thank you very much.

* (11:50)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to this resolution and I want to say that I can't support this resolution. There is a fundamental problem.

The NDP have been in power for 12 years, almost that, and where we are now, the phosphorus problem in Lake Winnipeg has got worse, not better. The algal blooms problem on Lake Winnipeg has got worse, not better, and it's not just Lake Winnipeg; it's many other lakes around Manitoba. Killarney Lake is a good example. The MLA for Flin Flon has just mentioned a northern lake where he's afraid to drink the water now because of Montezuma's revenge. I mean, there are many, many other examples of problems, and when we've had a government presiding over a situation which has got worse instead of better, then I'm not prepared to support a resolution complimenting the government on making things worse.

So let's have a look at this carefully now. When we look at the situation with Lake Winnipeg, which fundamentally is a provincial treasure, it's something that we all, I believe, are very concerned about. I've had the opportunity on many, many occasions to be on Lake Winnipeg, to be around Lake Winnipeg. It is a provincial treasure. It is a wonderful, wonderful, incredible lake which contributes so much to our province in terms of beauty, so much to people in terms of opportunity, so much in terms of the economy, from the fishing to the tourism to many other attributes.

But Lake Winnipeg has changed dramatically under this government and since this government came to power. Algal blooms, recognized as problems when they were elected in 1999, have grown to enormous sizes now. As was talked about at the Red Zone conference and the conference and summit on Lake Winnipeg last fall, algal blooms up to 160 kilometres long, more than 20,000 square kilometres in extent. The problems of algae on Lake Winnipeg are enormous and they have grown very significantly under this government, under the watch of this government.

In fact, it is so bad that, at the conference last fall, Lake Winnipeg was recognized as an international-scale environmental, ecological disaster and that we are sitting on this international ecological disaster. It is also recognized as one of the largest ecological disasters on the planet. It is a sad and sorry tale which has happened under the watch

of this government, and therefore I believe it would be irresponsible to support this resolution.

There are issues on Lake Winnipeg above and beyond algal blooms, as many know from last year with problems of erosion which were abundantly clear at Victoria Beach, at Lester Beach and at many places around Lake Winnipeg.

There are problems with the algal blooms not just because they look awful and are pea-soup green, and as they washed up and caused horror to many on Victoria Beach last year, they are a breeding ground or a place where the algae produce microtoxins. They are a major health issue because these microtoxins damage and are toxic to various organs in the human body, from the liver to the brain to many others, and so that the presence of these microtoxins has got short-term and long-term health problems for all of us, and we have to be very, very concerned about the situation of Lake Winnipeg and the environmental disaster that it is at the moment.

Clearly, I am here to say, you know, this is not the time for self-congratulation by this government. This is the time for all of us to get down to work and address this problem. And, sadly, in 12 years the problem has got worse, not better, and that's why I will be voting against this resolution, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I rise today to put some comments on the record with regard to this resolution because, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is facing a fairly serious situation and we face this more and more often, as the years go by, at this time of the year. And regardless of the NDP wanting to congratulate themselves for everything that they are doing in terms of trying to save Lake Winnipeg, the reality is that the actions that have been taken by this government to date are very miniscule in terms of the magnitude of the problem that is being faced. If the government were serious about fixing the problem, they would spend more time addressing the issues that are being faced by the conditions of water quality in Lake Winnipeg, in the water situations as they exist in many parts of this province, than they do in congratulating themselves.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the quality of water in Lake Winnipeg, it's been known for a long time that one of the contributing factors—and I think the member from Gimli today put it on the record—that it's the—the problem with the quality of water in some of the parts of Lake Winnipeg is a result of the fact that the human effluent that is flushed down

from this city down the Red River and into the lake. We've known that for some time, and it's not an issue where we can start pointing fingers, either at the city or at one party or another; it's a problem that needs to be fixed.

And, Mr. Speaker, although the government has indeed put some resources into it, it is probably the single biggest issue that faces water quality in Lake Winnipeg. We can talk about—we can point fingers at other users of water in the province and people who contribute to nutrient loading in streams. But the single biggest factor in the quality of water in Lake Winnipeg is what happens right here in the city of Winnipeg.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's not a matter that you can say, well, we'll address this in 15 years and, hopefully, in 15 years the conditions will be better. But, at the same time, we're going to take draconian measures against anyone who is a water user outside of the city, and the balance isn't there with this government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that from knowing people who live, for example, in the rural landscape, those people have to protect the quality of the water that they use for their domestic purposes and even for their animals. So they don't wilfully pollute the water that they use. Whether it's groundwater or surface water, they protect it.

Mr. Speaker, I happen to be one of those people who lives in a rural setting, and I know the importance of the quality of water for consumption by my family, my neighbours and anybody who lives in the rural landscape. And so for the NDP to suggest, and they have, they have implied that, in fact, rural people don't care about the quality of water and we, as a party, don't care about the quality of water, and that's absolutely just plain untrue.

And, Mr. Speaker, I haven't accused anybody on the government side that they don't care about the quality of water. But what I'm accusing the government of is not taking the proper action in terms of identifying where the problem is and addressing the problem. Instead, the government has chosen to make water a political issue and they do it from a partisan perspective, and that's what is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, they don't listen to science and they don't listen to reason. It's not unlike Bipole III. They don't listen to reason. They don't listen to the engineers. They don't listen to science. They do it from a political perspective, and that is what is

wrong with the decision on Bipole III, and that is what is wrong with their approach to managing water in this province. Because everything they do is done with the intention of trying to extract as much political points as you can from an initiative, and we see this time and time again from this government. And it doesn't mean that individuals on that side of the House don't care about issues. It doesn't mean that they don't care about the quality of water, because they do. But they sometimes get misled by

interest groups who have an agenda and, instead of governing for all the people in the province, they govern for interest groups and their friends, and that is what is wrong. That's why—

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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 3, 2011

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