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Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 5, 2013

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 and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Good morning, everyone. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, could you seek leave of the House to move directly to Bill 208, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Support Our Troops Licence Plates), sponsored by the honourable member for Lakeside?

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to proceed directly to Bill 208? [*Agreed*]

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 208—The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Support Our Troops Licence Plates)

Mr. Speaker: We'll now call Bill 208, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Support Our Troops Licence Plates).

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I move, seconded by the member from Steinbach, that Bill 208, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Support Our Troops Licence Plates), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring forward Bill 208, the support our troops licence plate. This is a bill mirrored from the province of Alberta. In fact, there's two other provinces that have it, besides Manitoba. This plate would be served as a recognition of those that serve our great country of Canada. Of course, we know Manitoba has a large number of military people within it, and would give

us, as legislatures, the opportunity to recognize them by bringing this plate forward.

I would be remiss if I didn't talk a little bit about some of the initiatives that are out there right now, and I know the member from Gimli has a group in his area. It's called Faces of Freedom, brought forward by Chris Heald, whereby wounded soldiers have a hunt. Normally in September is when they do this, and it's recognizing those veterans that have been injured or wounded in the line of duty, and I can tell you, I've been able to take part in not necessarily the hunt but the festivities of whereby they're able to have the opportunity to meet with their US counterparts, one of our biggest allies, of course, and I know how important it is for us to work together as two strong nations. And Canada has played a significant role in number of wars in protection of our freedoms, and what we're able to do in this House and other parts of Canada and the United States, the result of that. So I'm very pleased that this organization has, in fact, stepped forward to honour those veterans. What this plate does is—and I left it up to the government to decide what fee they wanted to charge for it, as we, as opposition, as we all know, cannot dictate that, and I know the government has a number of plates where they brought forward to be able to set up a fund whereby some of that money might go back to help those veterans.

As we know, and, unfortunately, we've heard a number of suicides in the last—just few weeks, Mr. Speaker, it's sad. And this thing about diseases, whenever we come back from serving this great country of ours, a lot of people don't want to talk about it. They don't want their friends to talk about it. They don't want their family to know about it, and I have had friends, unfortunately, succumb to some of those bad memories. And whenever we have an opportunity to set up this fund, I think it would be well spent and I know that the money would go to good use, and I leave, again, as I say, that up to the government to decide how they want to do that.

There's another organization that's called Project New Hope, and I want to speak just briefly about that as well. And a fellow in my area—and I know there's others that have done this as well. We had a veteran who had been in the Armed Forces for 43 years, and

he wrote a book in regards to Project New Hope and it's dedicated to just a few of the veterans that I would like to mention: Sergeant Keith (Buster) Lawson—he was a warrant officer—Albert (Bert) Hargreaves, Art William Campbell, and just to name a few. And I can tell you that they realize how important it is to be able to reach out and have those folks that are in need be able to reach out.

So I think all members of this House know somebody, has been related to somebody that has served in service and protection of us as legislatures and our families, and how important that is to be able to give back.

So I know that whenever I've talked to some of my Legion members and we've talked about this issue, and I can tell you that what we find is that they just can't seem to express really how they feel about whatever trauma they went through, and it's more than just trauma through being shot or wounded. Just the idea of standing beside somebody one minute and they'll be gone the next, we have no idea what that's like unless we actually been there. And I haven't, but I know several members of my family have served and they did it so that they were able to give back just a little bit. And I think that's what this bill is all about, is just a way to give back and to be able to say to those members that serve, we support you. And I think that's what I'm asking everybody in the House today to do, is support our troops by the passage of this Bill 208.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I thank the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) for bringing this bill forward and for his comments this morning. Of course, this is the last day of the sitting in the fall, but before we come back in the spring I would like to have the opportunity to pursue some discussions with the member for Lakeside as well as some organizations that do support the military and military families, to see how we can make a plate of this type come to fruition here in Manitoba.

* (10:10)

I listened carefully to what the member for Lakeside had to say, and he said, look, we'd like a plate; we leave it to the government to decide how this should be done. I think I can actually do one better and I would like to have those discussions with the member for Lakeside, as well as all members of this House, including the member for St. James

(Ms. Crothers), our military envoy, to find out the best organization or organizations that could come forward and effectively be the sponsors of a speciality licence plate that would allow Manitobans to show their respect for the individuals who serve in the military, as well as the families here that support them, and also provide financial support to organizations that are doing really, really good work.

And I know the member for Lakeside mentioned a couple of organizations here in Manitoba. I am actually quite fond of the Military Family Resource Centre, which is located over at 17 Wing in St. James. The Military Family Resource Centre is intended to assist families who are left behind when their loved one goes and serves. We know the military has been stretched thin with a number of assignments in past years, and I know it puts a tremendous strain on families. The Military Family Resource Centre is there to back up those families to help them, and our government is very proud to be part of that. I had the chance, I believe it was last year, for I Love to Read Month, I was able to go and read at the new, expanded daycare out at the family military resource centre and that was quite a good experience and I'm proud that our government is partnering to continue to provide services to families.

I know one of the things, as the minister responsible for MPI, one of the issues that military families have raised in the past is difficulties in getting a driver's licence. And the province of Manitoba, there's been greater requirements put on provincial agencies who issue driver's licences to meet certain standards. We met with the military, we listened to what they had to say and MPI came up some more common-sense rules on how we could make sure that individuals who are newly transferred to Manitoba, who may not have known someone in the province for two years, can still quickly get a driver's licence because obviously that's very important.

As well, we know that moving into a new province, finding a family doctor can be a concern for military families. Whenever they move, which is often many times in their career, and I'm very proud we're able to work with the Department of Health to provide that any military family moving into Manitoba is now guaranteed priority at getting a family doctor. Generally, when a military family comes in, there's a military family being transferred out, and doctors in Manitoba have agreed to hold those places and give priorities to military families, which I think is very good.

But beyond that, there are other organizations I know that support veterans or those currently serving. I know Wounded Warriors is a tremendous organization that supports those who come back with physical or, as the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) was talking about, emotional injuries. We know as well there's the Legion and the army, navy and air force groups that also provide certain services. And I think it is useful to have a discussion to make sure that if a plate is to go forward, that it be done in such a way it maximizes the ability of Manitobans' generosity to really assist veterans.

I know in my own circle of friends, one of my best friends was in the military for a number of years; he served in Bosnia for four months. And he'd be the first to tell you he was not in combat—he's a dentist. He went into the military, first of all, as a way to pay his way through dental school, but then to serve his country, and when the tap on the shoulder came, of course, he went.

And he would admit to you that he didn't do well and when he first returned from Bosnia, he had some challenges in his life; difficulty sleeping, difficulty relating to family and friends. And even though he will admit that his was the most serious issue and it didn't stop him from continuing to build his dental practice, outside of the military there is no question it had an impact on his life.

And as I think the member for Lakeside put pretty clearly, it's not always easy for members of the military to talk about the issues that they're having, it's not easy to talk about what they've experienced. We do live in a culture where we're not supposed to talk about those things, and I know that's been the way it is. I know trying to get my mom's uncle to talk about his experiences in the Second World War was pretty much impossible because he made it very clear this was not something he wanted to open up and discuss. And in some cases people may be able to shake those things off and be all right. We know in other cases there are things that need to be opened up and need to be discussed, and we know, to this point, it hasn't always happened

And I know the member for Lakeside commented on some of the tragedies we've been hearing about, even in the last week, with individuals in the military taking their own lives. We know there's been decisions that have been taken to cut-off people who've served our country from benefits. We know even that increasing the age that veterans are going to be able to claim CPP benefits is going to

have an impact on their lives. And so I know there's a lot of advocacy and a lot of work to do.

In terms of working with MPI to come up with a specialty plate, I can assure this House that Manitoba Public Insurance is quite excited to work with groups that come forward with good ideas for plates. And, again, I do want to heartily say that having a support-out-troops plate that—with money that's going to go to worthwhile organizations is something I expect MPI would be quite quick to adopt.

Manitoba Public Insurance administers the Manitoba speciality licence program on behalf of the Province of Manitoba, and they do work closely with a number of different organizations, as members are aware. In some cases that's been local sports teams, various community-interest groups, educational groups in the province that are interested in obtaining their own licence plate series. And I'm pleased to say that MPI has come up with a complete policy on what should be the key factors in an application, and there is now an application that's very, very easy to locate on the MPI website. You google speciality licence plate program, it comes up very quickly, but certainly we'll do more than that. We'll make sure that helpful organizations will receive this information, and I expect there'll have to be some discussion among those organizations as to which one or which combination should come forward with an application, and we can make this happen.

The idea is that the plate would be \$70, as are the other speciality plates. Thirty dollars of that would go to the organization or organizations that have come forward with their idea, and I think could be a very, very good thing. Again, the licence plate is—application is fairly user-friendly and easy to work with. I know that MPI, when they receive information, is quite quick to get back to various groups and flesh out a number of details.

Generally speaking, the goal of MPI is to have an organization come forward with some promise they'll be able to sell at least 2,000 of the plates. I'm very hopeful with the work, I know, the member for Lakeside will do and perhaps the profile this could have. I'm very hopeful that Manitobans would buy at least 2,000 of these speciality plates. It operates at a break-even for Manitoba Public Insurance. Manitoba Public Insurance does not gain from, nor do they lose from having these kinds of plates, and, of course, the police services in Manitoba are given their input. We want to make sure that any proposed plate does not pose a problem for law enforcement. And, actually,

with law enforcement unlocking the program just a couple of years ago, that allowed us to move forward.

So I know this is the last sitting day for 2013. By the time this House comes back I would hope that we'd been able to have some further discussions, we can move this along, and with the assistance of the member for Lakeside and other members of this House, I would hope we can identify the right organization or organizations to take this forward. And I look forward to Manitobans being able not only to say they support their troops, but all—that Manitobans truly do by making sure that a portion of the funds go to good organizations to support the individuals and the families of the individuals who go forward and defend our country.

So thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Good morning, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague from Lakeside for bringing forward this bill. He has a long history in this Legislature and beyond of supporting our troops. He brought forward legislation several years ago—I don't remember how many years ago now, but several years ago in terms of—*[interjection]* It feels like yesterday, I know, he says, but it wasn't yesterday—ensuring that we had veterans' licence plates for those who have served in the military. And that was a recognition for them of the service that they provided to our country in defending our freedoms and in defending our nation. And that was something that was adopted and it's—I think it'll be one of the many legacies, I think, of the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler). Not that he's looking for credit for these sort of things—that's not why he does it. But it is still something that was a good idea then and I think it's proven to be a success and an important thing to do.

* (10:20)

So today he's taken it at another step, another step forward, and not just recognizing those who have served, but allowing people, ordinary Manitobans, to offer their support to those who have served, Mr. Speaker. And I don't know if there is more appropriate time, even though it's an unfortunate time, to have to debate this bill. We've seen four suicides in the last several days of people who have served us honourably in the military, and that's become the issue of some debate, as it should be in Canada, about how we are helping those who are coming back from a theatre of war, coming back often with memories and issues that are difficult for

them to deal with and difficult for most of us to understand.

Now, I don't pretend that these sort of plates will necessarily be a solution to that but what it is, is it is certainly an opportunity for all of us to show support for those who are and who have served in our military. It's a very public way of showing that we appreciate the fact that people have done this for us, done this for our children and our grandchildren, to give them a country that is free, Mr. Speaker.

It's also a tangible way to raise funds for some type of an organization that will benefit those who have served in the military, so it has a two-pronged effect. It's a very, sort of, overt way of people to show their thanks for those who have sacrificed for our freedoms and it's also a very tangible way financially to raise funds to ensure that those who have needs, after their military service, or perhaps even during their military service, Mr. Speaker, are having those needs fulfilled from a financial perspective. And so I appreciate the fact that the member for Lakeside has brought this forward.

Now, when he drafted this bill and when he conceived of the bill, he would not have had any idea that these difficult things that we're seeing happen and play out nationwide would be happening. But I do think it's timely that we have this discussion and this debate because there are many people I know in Canada who are saying things like, well, what can we do, what could we do to support those who are helping us by being in the military? And this is only one way, Mr. Speaker, but it's a real way that people could show that kind of support.

Now, I heard the Attorney General (Mr. Swan) indicate that this is the last day of session. That is true, I believe, Mr. Speaker, to be the last day of this session and, as such, he does not believe this bill could pass today. I would disagree with him. We have, in fact, passed bills in one day in the past that were important. The member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) had a bill passed in one day. I certainly think this bill could be. It's structured in such a way that it doesn't specify fees, it doesn't specify where money is going, so it could certainly be—that could be negotiated, even within the context of this bill.

So I won't press the point too much, Mr. Speaker, other than to say I think if there is a will there is a way, and I certainly know, on our side, there is a will to see this bill pass today. And the bill is structured in a way that it will allow, then, the government in discussions with organizations, the

military envoy, the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), to determine where the funds would go and what that design would be and all those fine discussions could happen. Of course, we don't pass this bill, though, in this session, then it's going to be delayed and then those discussions don't have the same sort of impetus and they won't be—it just puts the process back. And if I've heard the—I've heard the Attorney General (Mr. Swan), even this session, talk about how important it is to have bills in place and I'm sure if you meant that on other bills he would probably mean that on this bill as well. I would take him at his word previously and I would have to take him at his word now, that he would also think it's important to have this bill in place.

So we are certainly willing to take the legislative steps and those steps are within our purview and our ability to do so, to see this bill pass today, Mr. Speaker. And I think that that would be a credit and a service to those who are in service to us. And I certainly hope that the Attorney General will allow that to happen. I will not use my full time to speak today because I want to see this bill pass quickly and I want to see it pass today as one small step of ensuring that those who have served us know how much we appreciate it, in a tangible way, to help those who have helped us. Thank you.

Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Lakeside for bringing this bill forward.

I am very happy to be able to stand to speak to this today as, certainly, as the military envoy as well. And, you know, as I'm new to this role, I've discovered just how much there is to learn. And certainly as I move ahead and become more familiar with not only the various military in Manitoba, but also some of the challenges that they face.

I don't come from an intense military background by any means, but certainly my—I've got family members that have served, and most recently—thank you—a nephew that served in Afghanistan. And it—I think that it becomes very pertinent to you when you do have a family member, and it's unfortunately something easy to overlook if you don't have those kinds of ties. I certainly have a strong recollection, my nephew is 21 and I can still see him running up the hill at a family reunion when he was about 9, and he had a homemade utility belt on with measuring cups and spoons and a spatula and a whisk, and he was leading a group of his cousins on some great, you know, adventure. I wish I could have taken a

picture of it; I still have it in my head, clearly, as a souvenir of his childhood. But to see him grow into a young man and go through cadets and then become a reservist and see the transformation of that kind of experience on him as a human being is quite incredible.

This, I think, is a fantastic idea, and one of the things that I think that is significant about having a licence plate program is that it's a constant reminder for those of us who maybe don't have those kinds of personal connections to be able to have a visual reminder. And as we move farther away from experiences with Remembrance Day for veterans from the world—World War I and II, I think that it's important for the public to have those kinds of reminders.

In St. James, certainly my experience going to the Remembrance Day ceremony at Bruce Park, I'm very happy to say that there are still many people that come together on that day to remember why we're there, not only for veterans from the First and Second World War, but also from other wars, the Korean War as well as Afghan—our Afghan veterans as well—excuse me. And this significance for me is that we have people that are connected to our military folks, they want to be supportive, they're there to show that support, but it never hurts to have those extra reminders so that we can discuss it.

I know certainly with my two young children, explaining to them what Remembrance Day was all about was a very moving moment for me because they were at the—they're at the age where they can start to make those connections. But keeping that commitment to remembering is so important.

I know we certainly have some other very excellent ceremonies in Manitoba throughout the year. Apart from our annual Remembrance Day ceremonies, there is also an—on Armed Forces Day, the Brookside Cemetery candlelight service, and I'm very excited about being able to attend this. They actually place candles on all of the cemetery stones for the ceremony, and I've heard that it's a very, very moving experience.

We also have the military levee here every year, and this Saturday I'm actually going to be attending a welcoming home for 60 Afghan vets that were—for the most part were from the Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry. I can only imagine what that kind of a homecoming would be like after six months away, and some of these soldiers have had three tours of duty.

But it speaks to their commitment on our behalf that they are willing to do this for us. And being able to have, you know, a licence plate just to show recognition for that is very important, I'm sure, for them as well. We have every reason to be supportive of our military folks, and I—the thing that I appreciate about this is that it's a way for those of us who are not military folks to be able to show support for them.

The one thing that I would like to see more of though is a connection, a direct connection between the sales of those licence plates to go towards an organization that can actually physically support or financially support those who are returning. As we've certainly heard in the news recently, there are far too many stories of soldiers coming back with post-traumatic stress disorder that clearly need support.

If we can apply pressure federally to provide that and do what we can here provincially, I think that it's—would be money well spent, because it's not just an issue for the soldier, it also has a direct and very significant impact on the family, their spouse, their parents, their children. And to be able to provide a nuts-and-bolts way of having some of the income created by this licence plate program going to help those folks would be an even better way to move forward on this.

*(10:30)

Also, I think that when we look at what we've also done here in Manitoba, simply by having this role to make sure that the military folks' concerns are voiced at the table, is very significant. But we've created legislation that's protected the jobs of reservists when they were called into service in Afghanistan and on other tours. We've designated the Trans-Canada Highway, west of Winnipeg, the Highway of Heroes, again, as a way to recognize the work that they've done, the commitment that they have. We're continuing to support families through the resource centre to make sure that veterans and their families have the support that they need. And we've extended the right to vote in the provincial elections to Armed Forces personnel serving outside of Manitoba, so that they still have the ability to be engaged in what's happening politically at home. We've also brought the Yellow Ribbon of Support campaign to the Legislature. And we are holding a special service of remembrance on Armed Forces Day, as I mentioned earlier, at the Brookside Cemetery.

Some of the things that I've begun to learn in this role is that during World Wars I and II, Manitoba soldiers were awarded the most Victoria Crosses per capita in all of Canada. And certainly, you know, Valour Road, and some of the other recent stories we've had in the paper about the—just the level of commitment from our soldiers—I'm not really surprised at that discovery, but it's certainly something to be proud of and, again, one more reason why having this kind of program is a great acknowledgement for our soldiers and their families.

So I'm appreciative of the member of Lakeside for bringing this forward. I know that the number of military folks that live around my area, not necessarily in my area, that I speak to on the doorstep, also shows to me that even after they've retired, many of them decide to stay here in Manitoba. And I would certainly like to continue to have an atmosphere here where they feel welcomed and appreciated and heard, and that we act on their concerns. My feeling as a new person in this role is that I would like to make sure that we're able to facilitate any services that they may need to maintain their health when they come back from a tour, that their families are supported as well as possible and that we make sure we continue to have that commitment to remembering not just what our veterans who are no longer with us have done, but those that are still in the military, still working actively and still protecting us and defending democracy here and throughout the world, are honoured and acknowledged.

So I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this, and I thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill 208, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Support Our Troops Licence Plates). This is a very timely bill, and I would thank the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) for bringing this forward. It is really important that we are supporting our troops and the people who have fought and worked so hard for us as Canadians, on behalf of us as Canadians and, indeed, for the world, in Afghanistan, to try and create a more peaceful world in which it will be better for all of us to live, whether we are in Canada or Afghanistan or anywhere else around the world.

At no time, would I suggest, has this bill been more important than now. In the last two weeks, we have had four soldiers commit suicide, and that is just an extraordinary and a terrible tragedy. And it

speaks to all of us as Canadians about the importance of paying a lot more attention to post-traumatic stress disorder and to the conditions which lead to suicide among our troops.

Suicide is very often a call for help from people who have reached the end of what they feel that they can do, what the end of life as they feel that it is worth living, and they are calling out to help for— from us in paying attention to this really terrible condition and the impact that it's got—post-traumatic stress disorder.

And the fact that this condition comes from people who have worked so hard for all of us and on behalf of all of us and have, as a result of their time—I think for most of these, it was in Afghanistan, if not all of these soldiers—that it comes from really terrible experiences in the sense that they have witnessed loss of life, people being injured, people being hurt, and that out of this very tense situation in which— although the effort is to keep the peace and establish the peace and allow for the development of Afghanistan as a peaceful society, there is a lot of turmoil. And there's been a lot of turmoil, and people—soldiers have been exposed to really difficult situations, losing friends and comrades, and seeing sights that most of us, I am sure, would have some difficulty in dealing with if we had been there in their places.

So I want, at this point, to pay tribute to these four individuals: Master Corporal Sylvain Lelièvre from CFB Valcartier; Warrant Officer Michael McNeil from CFB Petawawa; Master Corporal William Elliot from CFB Shilo; and Master Bombardier Travis Halmrast from Lethbridge, Alberta. And I think we should pay tribute to them for the work that they have done on our behalf, for the effort that they have put forward in Afghanistan and elsewhere for us.

But we should also take a little bit of time to consider the current situation and what needs to be done in terms of post-traumatic stress disorder. I would suggest it's not a time for laying blame, in terms of things that could've been done to prevent this, but rather it's a time to consider what can be done and should be done now.

And I would suggest that, if you look back at the First and Second World War, that in those wars, there were many soldiers who lost limbs, and because, in part, of that, out of those conflicts developed an extraordinary expertise from a medical perspective in dealing with people who had severe

injuries, who had lost limbs. There was an incredible development of prosthetic devices, of approaches which would help people who had significant physical difficulties as a result of being in the war, who had lost an arm or a leg or two legs. And this development was extraordinary in the extent to which it occurred, and there were many, many Canadians who played an important role in developing the expertise in dealing with and helping people who had lost their limbs.

*(10:40)

And I would say that there is one, in particular, that comes to mind that has a Manitoba connection. Probably few people here know that the development of the knee replacement—the first artificial knee was developed by a Manitoban, and he was actually working during the Second World War in a hospital in England where they were doing hip replacements, and he designed the first knee replacement. And he came back and he worked in Winnipeg, and then for many years he worked in Brandon.

And so out of this, really, challenge that was faced at that time came extraordinary advances in the medical knowledge of treating people who had lost limbs of replacing hips and knees. And right now we need to have the same dedication to understanding and addressing the mental issues which come from people who have been in conflict. And we need to make sure that we are making that effort that we are dedicating ourselves to improving the ability that we have to look after people who have had severe mental health trauma in the nature of post-traumatic stress disease.

And we can do this. We need to do this. But in order to do this we need to make sure that we dedicate ourselves to putting in the time and effort to do the research, to do the work which is so important to helping people, to preventing suicides, to preventing—and helping people deal with such, you know, horrific experiences which cause this post-traumatic stress disorder and this mental condition.

So, Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of this legislation. I want to once again congratulate the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) for bringing it forward. It's very timely. I hope we will get all-party support to move this forward today because we should, and we should dedicate ourselves into making greater awareness of these issues and to moving all of us forward in a better situation for helping people with post-traumatic stress disorder

and preventing these suicides in the future. Thank you.

Mr. Frank Whitehead (The Pas): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) for bringing forward this important issue, and I just want to add on a few words for the record in how much the military people from all walks of life, from all parts of the province, from all sectors, how grateful I am for having been involved in all the wars and conflicts and peacetime, you know, efforts to maintain some level of peace throughout the lands.

Mr. Speaker, we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all our veterans for the sacrifices they made throughout the years in defending the principles of democracy throughout the world on our behalf, maintaining some peace in a very hostile environment sometimes.

Many Manitobans were among the Canadian troops who went to war, including several hundred Metis and First Nations, young and old and in between. I remember, for example, when three members of my community graduated from high school and then decided, well, this is what they want to do, is enter the military, and they went through the training in Wainwright, Alberta, first of all under the Sergeant Tommy Prince platoon and then also with the Korea platoon and finally helped start up a program called Bold Eagle Program, which still runs today, which our community co-founded. And that was to provide an opportunity for young Aboriginal people to get involved in this kind of service, which is a unique kind of service. It's different. It's for the cause of humanity; not for themselves, but for other people.

I was very proud of these three young men. One of them just happened to be my son, and when they were done with their training and development and readiness, they were deployed, different parts of Europe. My son, he served with the 2nd Battalion Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry, and when he came home, he was a different man. Lots on his mind from what he saw and from the activities that he was involved in.

And it's true what my colleague said earlier. There are some things that will always stick with you forever, and it's true, especially true for veterans. Those things will never leave you. And I know from, you know, personal experience through my dad and now my son, how those events impact your life and impacts the life of people around them—friends and family alike, and co-workers.

When the news broke out, the suicides, one of them was his friend, Elliott. And it was hard. It was very difficult. But they have their own little network, too, that they discuss matters of this importance and matters of difficulty. It's just my good fortune that I've learned how to help people in that area, so I'm always there to help, whatever I can do. Three members of my community, young men, they did their tours. Unfortunately, we buried one of them back home. That was tough. Hard for everybody. And I think we need to remember what these young people go through and experience, and it's events like this that force us to think about these people in uniform or that were in uniform.

But in time we begin to forget about those events. But for the veterans, young and old alike, they never forget. I think we need to be reminded from time to time to remember always these men and women in uniform, and for us to be reminded of a licence plate that would say, support our troops. It doesn't matter when, what era, what decade, but that three words—support our troops—would remind us every day that we need to remember these young men and women.

* (10:50)

You know, some things we don't see or we don't hear about. You know, when we send our young men and women across or overseas or wherever, we hear about their deaths in battle, but we never hear about their injuries or how many were injured while they were deployed. Loss of arms and legs, we don't hear about that. And I remember being in a—invited in a ceremony several years ago, it had to do with remembering an event in Bosnia, what they called Medak Pocket event. I didn't know anything about it. Nobody knew anything about it. But when that ceremony took place at the arena, there was hundreds of army personnel, Governor General, everybody, and I had to ask, how come we don't hear about this? There are some things we will never hear about. But having reminders like this will remind us that we always keep in our hearts and in our minds these young men and women, or the old veterans, that we must remember them and we must do everything we can to help them survive the trauma that they experienced.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I gather that there'll be other people who want to speak to this important bill, but I don't think there's a willingness from anybody

in this House to hold up this legislation from coming to a vote. So I'm asking for leave to not see the clock at 11 o'clock and—until this matter has come to a vote at this stage.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to not see the clock at 11 a.m. to allow this matter under discussion currently to continue?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No? I hear a no. Leave has been denied.

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): I thank the member for bringing this resolution to the House this morning to allow all of us to have a chance to comment on it and to reiterate—I think I can speak for all members in the House—to reiterate the sentiment and the true feeling of this Legislative Assembly that we do, indeed, as elected representatives in Manitoba, support and value our Armed Forces, support and value the families of those members of our Armed Forces, and that we are today, in fact, this morning, working together to further exhibit our support for the Canadian Armed Forces and family members of service personnel in our province. So I would like to thank the member for bringing this resolution forward, and I look forward to further discussion on it to a successful resolution as we proceed here in the Legislature with this piece of legislation, this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, we have, as a provincial government—and I know some of my colleagues have made reference to this already—undertaken a great many initiatives over the last number of years to enhance the profile of the Canadian Armed Forces in Manitoba. We have initiated—in fact, I was present with other members of government last year when we initiated the Highway of Heroes in Manitoba in my region of the province. The Highway of Heroes is the Trans-Canada Highway adjacent to Canadian Forces Base Shilo. And it was a very, I think, very important symbolic gesture that the Province of Manitoba made in declaring the Highway of Heroes, the Trans-Canada Highway, a designated roadway with designated signage. And I know each time I come to—back and forth to the Legislature from Brandon which I do with alarming regularity, I'm always struck by passing that sign and reflecting on the sacrifice that our Armed Forces have made not only today in the field where they serve, but throughout the history of this country, where they

have served with distinction and valour around the world.

I also want to talk about the fact that Canadian Forces Base Shilo has borne its fair share, and maybe more, of the burden of our recent engagement as a country in Afghanistan. Since the start of the war in Afghanistan, Mr. Speaker, over 40,000 Canadian troops have been deployed. That's the size of the city of Brandon. That deployment in Afghanistan has been extraordinary. And today there are still 600 active service personnel in Shilo—in Afghanistan, over half of which are stationed out of CFB Shilo. So I want to—I just want to reflect and reflect on and commend, in a very, very heartfelt and sincere way, the sacrifice of Canadian Forces personnel from Shilo and recognize the depth of that sacrifice. I know in the last couple of weeks we've had a number of suicides, many of which are service personnel suicides from post-traumatic stress disorder; many of which have been directly associated with service personnel at CFB Shilo. And I know associates of mine and friends of mine and constituents of mine knew some of these men who have committed suicide in the last couple of weeks as a consequence of their traumatic stress from serving in a hot war zone in Afghanistan.

So gestures like this are important in letting those folks know, letting people know, who are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder upon their return to Canada and return to civilian life, that they're not alone; that we're with them and that we are supportive of them. And we've got to do a lot more as a country to give support to those who have served this country in the Armed Forces. We've got to do a lot more. We've got to provide—and it's not this level of government that's responsible for that support, Mr. Speaker, but it is this level of government that can continue to encourage the federal government and society at large to give as much to our service personnel as they've given to us in serving this country in a war zone and serving a mandate of peace around the world. We owe it—in a profound way we owe it to service personnel to provide everything we could possibly do in this wealthy, great country that we have, to do everything we can to support service personnel upon their return from Afghanistan and return from their active service around the world. It's up to us to do everything we can to support those folks and their families.

So as a provincial government, I'm very, very proud of our support for Canadian Forces personnel. I'm very pleased that we were the first government in

the country to initiate the position of military envoy, which is a very, very important position. I have had occasion a number of times over the years to work with the military envoy at CFB Shilo in particular, but also at 17 Wing, but at CFB Shilo in particular, in my home community. This is a very important and significant office that this Legislature has established to support our serving—service personnel and the—our military establishments in Manitoba. I know that we will be working together with families and service personnel and organizations like the Royal Canadian Legion, of which I'm proud to be a member of since I was a kid, Mr. Speaker, working with those organizations with families to find out the best things we can do as a province to support the Canadian Armed Forces and service personnel in this province. I know that we will continue to do that in the years to come, and I know that there will be many initiatives that this government will undertake throughout our mandate as we move forward through time in the years to come.

* (11:00)

Okay, Mr. Speaker, I know that there are many members that want to speak to this resolution, and I know that there will be time for members to speak to this resolution as we move forward in this Legislature—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member for Brandon East will have two minutes remaining.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 4—Employment and Income Assistance—Rental Allowance

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 11 a.m., it's time for private member's resolution, and the resolution we have before us this morning is sponsored by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie, and the title of the resolution is Employment and Income Assistance—Rental Allowance.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer), that

WHEREAS the provincial government has failed to provide affordable housing, due to cutting corners, increasing taxes and not focusing on those people in this province who are in the greatest need of support; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has continually claimed that they advocate for those who

have lower income, yet has allowed substandard housing to become the norm across the province; and

WHEREAS Manitobans looking for affordable housing often have very few options, with high rental prices and low rental allowances forcing Manitoba families to make choices between necessities such as rent, food or a winter coat for a dependant; and

WHEREAS rental allowances in this province have remained stagnant for years and the provincial government has taken no action to raise them; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has the obligation to give families the tools they need to succeed.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to adopt the recommendations of the Make Poverty History campaign and boost the rental allowance allocation for recipients on social assistance payments to three quarters of the average cost of rental living space.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie, seconded by the honourable member for Brandon West,

WHEREAS the provincial government has failed to provide affordable housing—dispense? Dispense.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, and it's with great disappointment that I rise to bring this point forward and call this government to account for their lack of support for those living on employment and income assistance who are often forced to live in substandard housing. We are not the only group or the only organization to call on this government to make changes in this area. There have been a number of organizations through Make Poverty History, which is a consortium of over 120 groups in this province who have drawn attention to this need for some time.

And our party has joined them in this call to improve the allowance for housing, particularly at this time of year when the home is a very important aspect for many people in the community to celebrate the coming season—Christmas and the holidays—and home is what it's focused around in many cases. And many people are struggling to have adequate housing or any housing of quality, and we have not moved on—in this area in terms of increasing the housing allowance for many, many years, other than very small adjustments, and we are well behind the market.

Housing's one of the most basic necessities of life. Inadequate housing is awfully—often linked with a very wide range of social problems, including poor health, mental health issues, addiction issues, extensive use to the health-care system and a lack of housing hurts Manitobans in more ways than you can possibly imagine.

This government has had many opportunities to move in this area, and their failure to move has been quite shameful. And we continue to call on this government to raise the rental allowance to 75 per cent of the market median rents.

They often tout their record, in terms of building housing, and though it's very difficult to track exact numbers, we know that while housing—it does get built, there is certainly a significant number of rentals that are lost from the marketplace in any given year, particularly through the condo development process, where a lot of places are renovated and become condos and are lost to the rental market, particularly the low-income rental market.

And there is also a trend with many private owners to upgrade their facilities to the point that they're actually out of rental regulations, and so those places, too, are lost to the marketplace. And though it is very difficult to track, there certainly are summary rental unit numbers that suggest that over a period of the last five years there has been very little, if any, net gain in terms of rental facilities for those with low incomes. So we don't seem to be making a great deal of progress across the province.

Not long ago there was actually a competition to find Manitoba's worst housing unit, and I had the dubious pleasure of being a judge in that process. And though we didn't inspect all the facilities in person, we were supplied with very good photos of many of the facilities, which included a number of Manitoba Housing facilities as well as some private ones.

And it is very sad to say that the state of housing in this province is certainly nothing to be proud of with issues of mould, in many places bedbugs were a real problem and continue to be an ever-expanding problem, security issues in many places with doors that couldn't be locked and so that people acted—had to fear for their personal safety in their rental facilities. It was very—a very sad comparison, and so, certainly, it leads us to believe that there is lots of room for improvement, and we certainly call on this government to take steps to help these people and make improvements in that area.

In fact, in terms of those that stay in short-term housing, often there's very little to—very little incentive for the landlords to make improvements, and, certainly, the sharing of facilities makes it very difficult for some of the residents in these facilities. And we have no real good indication as to how many numbers there are even in city of Winnipeg in terms of housing that meets very, very poor standards and certainly leaves people with a lot of risk associated with it.

There's very—lots of indicators. Actually, University of Manitoba did a very extensive study just of those that are in Manitoba Housing facilities and it suggested that there were a number of health-related issues to living in these types of facilities, and one of the most obvious ones was actually premature mortality, very finite definition, and in terms of shortening life expectancy by being actually part of—living in Manitoba Housing as compared to have good housing, whether it be private or public in source.

And we also see all kinds of examples not only of that, but of health related things. Injuries were almost double for individuals in social housing. The TB rate was two and a half times that in social housing as to others, and the diabetes rate was actually twice as high for those in social housing. So, clearly, there's some issues.

Very often, particularly when it comes to food related issues, the food allowance actually ends up going for rent. So then they end up going to Winnipeg Harvest in many cases, getting food help from there, or they actually end up with a very substandard diet, a very poor quality diet and that, obviously, contributes in a major way to the problem of diabetes which we know is an epidemic across this province. So, certainly, there's lots of room for improvement.

But it has other implications as well, and one of the examples that comes to mind for me is actually in the last year when I was working on housing issues. Talked to one young lady who was making—was getting her life together, a single mom with two children and living in Manitoba Housing, and making—you know, going back to school. She had her two children in child care and—supported child care—and things seemed to be working out pretty good. She was making progress and she had picked a career and she was working towards that. Everything seemed to be going fairly well for her and then her housing unit had a problem with bedbugs. Well, the

child-care centre where her children were going had a zero tolerance for bedbugs. So her children were back at home and, of course, she had to quit her training course because she had no family support in the community. So she had to quit her training just to stay home and look after her kids, and so her career was cut short simply by the fact that Manitoba Housing couldn't manage the bedbug problem in that facility.

* (11:10)

And I checked with her a few months later and nothing had changed, things were still in the same situation. In fact, she said she thought the problem was getting worse, and yet the facility had been treated by Manitoba Housing own staff on a number of occasions, but not in a systematic, well-planned process. They come in and they spray one or two suites or apartments, but don't do the—even a floor at a time. And if you check with people in the industry whose occupation it is to work at controlling pests like this, they just laugh. They say that, you know, that's just fooling yourself. You're really not dealing with the problem. You're not making the proper steps. He—the people in the industry that I spoke to actually indicated it's probably lack of training on the part of the people that are doing the application. And though we have checked to see that they've actually sent a few people through training, there is really no indication that the people actually doing the application are the same people that were trained. Obviously, there's someone in the system that is supposed to be responsible for them, but the problem just seems to continually get worse and we very rarely see a facility that Manitoba Housing has, that has a bedbug problem, actually get cleaned up and come back on stream as a bedbug-free facility. And, as I said, it has huge implications for the individual. It can actually ruin their life plan.

So there are many things to talk about in regards to this but we know that good housing is a great start in life, and so we certainly would encourage the government to take steps now and join us in call-in making changes to the housing allowance so that more people can benefit, particularly at this time of year when, as I said earlier, it's the holiday season. Housing is a really important part of this season, an important part of the community. It would actually be the—probably the greatest Christmas present these people could ever receive is if the housing allowance was actually increased. So I call on the government to actually move on that and make many people happy at this holiday season and move forward in

trying to improve the quality of housing across this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): It's my privilege to stand up and to put some facts on the record. I sat intently listening to the member opposite put information on that I can easily dispute, and I will put on the accurate facts about what is happening in this province for people that have—that are living in Manitoba Housing.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

There are record investments happening across Manitoba. They're happening in every constituency, in the North, in the rural and in urban settings, and we are making a difference. And we're taking it one step further when we are investing near a hundred million dollars into restoring our existing stock. We are not only upgrading all the units but we are hiring local individuals to 'curick'—with job creation, with training opportunities, and that's making a difference. They're building the homes for their neighbours and themselves, and they are doing it with much pride, and that cannot be underestimated.

We also have a number of new builds across the province. We have made a commitment that will be fulfilled by 2014, of 1,500 new, affordable and social housings in the—as well, we have a commitment of 500 more affordable units, as well as 500 more social housing units. That is how we're going to make a difference.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, what did they do when they were in government? Zero; they did not invest in the existing stock, nor did they invest on building any new housing, so I will not take any advice from the members opposite at all. I know that our approach, by working with all levels of government, by working with community members, by working with faith organizations, by working together, we are making a difference. We have a lot of work to do but I am not going to apologize for the results that we have experienced. I listened as the member put some facts—I'd like to put some truth on the record: The poverty rate has declined since 2002—10.2 per cent overall and 7.9 per cent for children. It has gone down.

We know that we have a lot more work to do but we also know that the best way out of poverty is training and employment, and we're proud to tell you that the unemployment rate in 2012 was 5.2 per cent. So that also is providing us with hope and

opportunity. There are fewer Manitobans that are living in poverty, a decrease of 16,000 people between the years 2000 and 2010. The poverty rate fell for all Manitobans by 19.4 per cent—that is making a difference. And how has that happened, you might ask? That has happened by a commitment to building more housing, social housing, by insuring that we have training and employment opportunities, by ensuring that we have child care for their children so when they want to take advantage of those opportunities that they can, by restoring benefits. By doing all of that, we have seen this improvement. But as I've said, and I will repeat this many times, we have much more work to do and we are committed to doing it. And I think if you ask Manitobans who would have the best interests of low-income Manitobans, it would be very easy for them to say because of what they've seen happen currently and the actions from the past, that it would be this current government that will make the difference and has made the difference for many Manitobans, and we will continue to do that.

As we have been making the reductions in poverty, we've also seen improvements to EIA rates. They have also increased. For a single parent with two children, it's increased by 33.6 per cent; a two-parent family with two children, by 40.5 per cent; and a single adult has increased by 31.1 per cent; and a single person with disability, by 18.4 per cent. Those have improved by restoring benefits but also by ensuring that new benefits are added. One of those new benefits is what we call RentAid, which is a shelter benefit which assists individuals and enhances their income so they're able to pay their rent. That's one action that we're taking.

When I hear the members opposite talk about what they think has happened, I think that they need to reflect on what did happen when they had their wheels—their hands on the steering wheel. When they had their hands on the steering wheel, they reduced EIA rates, they started a hotline, a welfare snitch line, so people could report on their neighbours, and what they also did was claw back the National Child Benefit. They did all of this. And what did that do to the people living in low income? It hurt them desperately. It took away any hope and opportunity, and that's why this government has worked with all of our partners and with the—and with all individuals.

When I think about the record of the past and the statements that I've heard from the members opposite, they're a one-trick pony. They really do not have a plan, and I'm proud to say that we have a plan

called the ALL Aboard strategy. That—we worked with a number of community residents; we were in consultations. The Minister for Conservation began those consultations, and in those consultations community members told us what they wanted to see in a strategy, and we created that together. We put it in law. It is now in legislation that we have to provide an annual report, that we have to make sure that while we're doing our budget exercise that we are evaluating what is the impact going to be for low-income Manitobans.

But one of the most important parts of that strategy is the committee that we work with. It represents many departments in government, but also we have invited four community residents and activists to sit at the table with us. That's one of the first times in government that we have a Cabinet committee that includes community members, and the value that that brings is phenomenal. And that—with their information that they share with us, we're able to continue to move forward.

As I said, we have a lot more work to do, but I am confident with the commitment from this government since 1999 to support individuals living in low income through employment, better housing, improved education, training and employment opportunities. That's going to make the difference for everyone. We know that when people are employed there is a totally different perspective that happens. There is a hope and an opportunity that happens for them so they can contribute to their own families as well as to their own community and with much pride.

I think that this House has heard me often talk about the initiative that we have at Lord Selkirk Park, and Lord Selkirk Park is something that will be written about for a number of years. And when it was written about, you know, when I think about it, six or seven years ago, everything was negative. Well, the stories coming from Lord Selkirk Park now are shining examples about a government's commitment, a community's commitment and the determination to make a healthy, supportive, safe community. The units have been redeveloped, and in the redevelopment we've also developed a family centre as well as a child-care centre with the Abecedarian model, which is going to make a difference for the future of that province.

* (11:20)

So there are many examples. There are examples in Portage la Prairie. There are examples in Brandon.

There are examples in Riverton. It's happening across the province where we are saying in Manitoba is a Manitoban, and we are going to work with you. So we will continue to work diligently for individuals living in low-income areas, ensuring that they have hope and opportunities and pride in who they are.

I have full confidence in this government's ability. I had a lot of fear about the opposition.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): It gives me pleasure to rise and put a few comments on the record in support of this resolution brought forward by my colleague, the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart).

And, Mr. Speaker, this is something that we have been calling on and that Manitobans deserve, and when I hear members of the government side of the House stand and talk about telling the truth, it's almost laughable, because how can anyone believe a word that comes out of their mouth? This is a government that lied to Manitobans before the last election. Each and every one of them went door to door and lied about not raising taxes. What did they do in the last two budgets? Since the last election they have raised taxes on Manitobans more than any other government in the history of the Province of Manitoba. It's shameful. So for them to stand in this House and talk about telling the truth—and their record is abysmal. Manitobans can't believe a word they say. When they stand up and talk about how wonderful things are and how much money they're investing, it appears that right across the board within government that the more they spend, the worse it gets, and we've seen proof of that time after time in this Legislature, and we see those that are the poorest and need the most support within our province are the ones that are suffering the most under this government.

But who are the big winners? Mr. Speaker, the big winners are the 37 members of the government side of the House who have seen \$5,000 more in the pockets of their constituencies and their political organization as a result of the vote tax. We see the big winners are the members of the government side of the House and the big losers are those that are living below the poverty line, those that need affordable housing that aren't getting it. And there are many, many Manitobans that won't be fooled and won't believe a word that this government says, because they can't tell the truth. They don't tell the truth to Manitobans before an election and we've

seen their actions speak much, much louder than words. It's the families in Manitoba that have had their pockets picked once again, and it's the families that are living in poverty that are the ones that are suffering the most.

We see child poverty increasing under this government's watch, regardless of what they say, and we know that this resolution and the support of this government for this resolution, that was a recommendation of the Make Poverty History campaign to increase the rental allowance allocation for recipients of social assistance payments to three quarters of the average cost of a rental living space would go a long way to help those individuals.

And rather than the government talking about someone else's track record, why don't they stand in their places today and say, yes, we support this. We're—we support trying to give a hand up to those individuals that are trying desperately to make—get their lives on track and at least give them some hope and some opportunity that they will have the ability to move forward. Is it that difficult?

Maybe, just maybe, they could look at saying no to the vote tax. Maybe they could look at saying, let's at least start somewhere, let's make a small investment that might help the lives of those that are most in need in our province. But, Mr. Speaker, we don't hear any of them standing up and saying, no, I won't take that \$5,000; I will give that money to those that are really in need in our province. We didn't hear that from anyone on the government side, and I'd be interested in having many of them stand up and tell us that they will not line their own pockets at the expense of those who can sit around—who sit around the kitchen table and don't have the ability to make the decisions that government has made about their own lives.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many that could use the kind of support that is asked for, called for, in this resolution, and I would like to see members of the government side stand up—let's forget the politics in this. Let's think of the people that need the support, that need that hand up, that need that helping hand to make their lives just a little bit better, to work their way out of poverty. I would advocate for them and I would hope that members of the government side of the House would advocate on their behalf and stand up and support this resolution and make sure that Manitobans in need have that opportunity. Thank you.

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I will—well, I'll gladly stand up, Mr. Speaker, and give some thoughts on the record for this private member's resolution.

I do want to bring it back to some thoughts and some information, actually, on housing. Make Poverty History Manitoba suggests the government should continue with the commitment to increasing supply of non-profit, rent-geared-to-income housing to a minimum of 1,500 units within the next three years. I'd like to be able to say that we're on track for that; 1,322 are completed, Mr. Speaker, on their way to be completed. On top of that, we've developed 500 more social housing units and constructed 500 more affordable units. And, you know, to be clear, when members opposite, particularly the Leader of the Opposition, was in government, there was no new social housing built, zero.

And their idea of innovation and trying to deal with the complex issues of poverty was brought in by saying, why don't we create a snitch line so we can—so that we can be dividing families and we can create chaos in areas where some of the most vulnerable people were suffering.

And not only that, but they campaigned on it; they were quite proud of it. Now, members opposite, of course, don't talk about that now. They talk about other things, but they don't talk about that.

But, you know, there are incredible stories of success in terms around innovation, when it comes to housing. One of them, very proudly, is BUILD, under the leadership of Shaun Loney. Social enterprise, this is a gentleman with a group of people that, when they look at people and they see people, they see potential. They see possibility. They look at these situations that look—where most people only see hardship, and they have an ability to say, look, I think lots of people can contribute. And so what they do is they get unemployable people, they get them jobs, and in those jobs they renovate homes, and they've renovated thousands of homes in low-income areas and have saved literally millions and millions of dollars for those homes, to make those homes more affordable for families in those areas.

* (11:30)

Now, it's not a coincidence, Mr. Speaker, that that is an organization that started after 1999, because that's being innovative. We look at Inner City Renovations. Once again, looking at people that are unemployable, giving them the skills, building

with them, renovating houses in the core area, creating jobs. Many of them use that as a stepping stone to move into the field of construction and housing and building. That has turned into a multi-million-dollar social enterprise organization. Once again, it's not a coincidence that it started after 1999. And that is a far cry in terms of being innovative and creative and working alongside of people in our communities, and bringing people together, strengthening families—much different approach than starting a snitch line, I can tell you that. Much different approach than doing that.

Now, we also believe in the support for and the struggles of Aboriginal people. And that's why we've been very proud to partner with organizations like the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development and support them, to make sure that the education and training and employment, that barriers are removed for all people, particularly people that deal with issues of poverty.

Now, I was at an event, and one of the CEOs at the Manitoba aerospace came up to me, started talking to me about the incredible work that CAHRD is doing—once again, private sector support from non-profit organizations that are being supported by our government working alongside of us. In fact, CAHRD's initiatives have been so effective that they are now doing housing—they are now in the business of housing to make sure that those families not only have good child care, not only can get good health support, but can actually make sure that they're—they have good places to live. And we're seeing that—all that development down on Higgins Avenue. Once again, what was there before? Absolutely nothing. And we're doing it together because we continue to invest and understand the best way to do this is through shared co-operation and shared responsibility.

I'd like to ask the members opposite, who did they talk to that was actually poor? Who did they talk to in a non-profit organization? What Aboriginal person did they talk to that said, actually, creating a snitch line is the best way to go, it's good government policy? Like, who did they talk to that said that? Because that's not the things that people are asking us to invest in, to work alongside of, Mr. Speaker.

You know, when I was growing up in Winnipeg's North End, there was a local YMCA cut, alongside of all friendship centres; cut 56 organizations that support children and youth.

Many of those organizations provide jobs to low-income people. Of course, those jobs are used to pay their rent—cut. One budget—56 organizations and one budget that took it out on the poorest people in our province. And then they weren't even done there. Then what they talked about is, let's share the pain. That's so when people came and saw them, when poor folks came and saw them and said, hey, you know, like, this is really hurting us, they said, well, look, sorry, that's the budget, you have to be able to share the pain.

So when I walked down to the local YMCA with my basketball and the doors were closed, what happened? Me and my buddies had nowhere to play basketball anymore. The doors were closed. But if you go back to that facility now, if you go there now, what's going on there? QuickCare clinic, so people can get health services. You got youth programs in partnership with the local YM-YWCA. You got elder and senior programs going on in that program, supports for jobs and being able to help people deal with some of the challenges dealing with poverty, supports around things like Healthy Baby program. Not only is that place back open, but it's thriving. It's flourishing. Because we understand to deal with the complex issues of poverty, it's the idea of shared co-operation.

The idea of shared co-operation is that you'll work with people—why I spend so much time going out to talk to the public. If I really want to know how to support poor people, I should actually go and talk to some poor people, and I should try to do it provincially. And so I've—I went on and talked to members of our community all throughout the province around how we build safer and healthier communities. I went and did it on the early years. As we know, giving young people a great start in life and maximizing the potential of a young person starts before they're born, as to why we have an incredible amount of supports for prenatal, as to why we have the Prenatal Benefit. And, you know, we do contrast on the National Child Benefit, and the reason that we bring that up so often is because when they clawed it back, it really hurt poor families. It did, Mr. Speaker. So when I say it and other members on this side of the House say it, it's important to remind them of that, that those kinds of decisions actually hurt families because you're taking money out of their pockets.

When I got to go up to—the member from Lac du Bonnet, we sat together, we got to hear directly from his constituents, from his riding, from his leadership.

And we sat there together, and what they were saying is that bringing people together to have discussions, to be able to share thoughts and ideas for children, for youth, for families make a difference. Well, how do we do that? Well, you have to co-ordinate services. So one of the ways we do it is through parent-child coalitions. Did parent-child coalitions exist before 1999? Absolutely not.

So me and the member from Lac du Bonnet, we can agree or disagree, and we can sit there in his riding, listen to what people have to say directly, have good debate, talk about where gaps are and listen to people directly, and why can we do that? Simply because we invest in the idea of co-ordination of services, totally impossible to do if our government approach was let's create a snitch line, totally impossible to do if we decided to cut 56 organizations that support the most vulnerable families. The investment of parent-child coalitions allows two people from opposite sides of the House with different views to agree and work with members of their own community and say this is how we can approve things and move forward, and I gladly do that. I was proud to go up there and do that.

As to why the—when we announced just recently the innovation fund, not only was it supported by the United Way, the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council, Dave Angus and the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, Jim Carr, Gregg Hanson, but it got national attention that a national foundation in Montreal could've invested anywhere, and they came to Manitoba and they said there's a golden moment to support young people, to support families that are struggling the most, and this is where we want to make our investment because there's an incredibly strong structure to work from. There's lots of activity; there's lots of non-profits that are supporting; there's huge engagement from families. There's something to build from. I'm telling you, if our approach was a snitch line, you would not be able to bring in the good folks in McConnell foundation to support some of our most vulnerable young people, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this important resolution. I stand here concerned about poverty in Manitoba and about the situation of housing and about the situation of food banks. I stand here as a Liberal who has met and talked with people all over our province, people who are on low incomes, middle incomes and high incomes. I stand here as one who has spent much of

his time over the last several years working with and helping people who are poor deal with a very frustrating environment that we have in our province at the moment because of this NDP government, and one of the central issues has been the support for housing. I see this every day, day in and day out, in the purple—people that I try to help and work with around the province deal with their issues and help them.

This has not been recent. For the whole time that I have been in this Legislature it has been one of my concerns. I have been a supporter of and worked with people in Make Poverty History for many years. I remember, in 2006 at the École Leila school, an event for Make Poverty History. I remember being at a campaign with Bob and Joyce Kroeker in July of 2006 where we were talking with the emphasis that Make Poverty History was putting on improving things for those who are poor and those who are less well off and those who are marginalized in this province. And it was at that meeting that Bob Kroeker was telling me about his recent work in Egypt, and it happened that it was with an association, the Mennonite Economic Development Association, where my son had actually been also in Egypt. So we shared some stories, but we also shared the concern about people who are poor in Manitoba.

I remember, after that our efforts to introduce legislation, Bill 26, to bring in for the first time a comprehensive plan to address poverty in Manitoba, and I remember the many people who came to support that legislation, but the NDP at that point said no. The NDP, of course, later on, brought in their program called ALL Aboard, but it has proved to be not an effective program and it has not addressed the increasing number of people who are having to use food banks and the increasing number of problems faced by many who are poor in Manitoba.

* (11:40)

It is important to bring dignity to people and ensure children have food. That was a strong message that was brought by people from Make Poverty History to a meeting that I was at here in the Legislature in October of 2012. That meeting emphasized the importance of raising the support under Employment and Income Assistance for shelter costs. And the fact was that at that point it was emphasized that while rental costs have gone up 60 to 70 per cent since the NDP came to power, the EIA rental allowance has stayed essentially the same.

And during this time, the number of people needing food banks has gone up and up, and it's had the largest increase of any province in Canada since the NDP came to power, an increase of about 50 per cent.

I remember at that meeting that Dr. Sharon Macdonald from the Health Sciences Centre spoke and emphasized the importance of good housing to good health. She said, in meeting with many of the people that she dealt with who are struggling, that I have to pay the rent, I don't have enough money for food. How can children do well under such circumstances? The answer, of course, only is it with great difficulty. We need to change this, we need to support this resolution instead of standing up there and pontificating like the NDP are doing.

We can change things for people in this province. There is no sense at all in people having to use their food money to pay their rent because this government is so skimpy on the support of rent for people on income assistance. It doesn't make any sense. It has caused problems for many, and that is one of the reasons why I and the Liberal Party have been working hard here.

One of the things that has advanced our knowledge of the importance of housing is the efforts of people like Jino Distasio and many others across Canada to understand the importance of how housing first is so vital to helping people who are struggling with mental health problems, who are struggling with poverty at the same time. And it has been very clear that if you provide housing first and support for housing first, then a lot of the other things can fall into place.

And this government has put housing last and they have undervalued the importance of housing and undersupported housing for those who are the least well off in our province. And not only has it contributed to food bank use, but it has been a major contributor to the number of children who've been taken away from their families, who've been apprehended and put in the care of Child and Family Services. And this is an absolute disgrace, that we have 10,000 kids in care in this province, and those 10,000 kids are roughly 10 times the number of kids per capita that you would see in other civilized societies like the United States, like the United Kingdom, like England, like Sweden, like Australia, like New Zealand. It doesn't make any sense the approach that this government is taking.

I pointed out earlier this year that high infant mortality rates in Manitoba are much higher than they should be and that policy changes are needed, and one of the first of these changes is to increase the shelter rates for children and to make sure that people have a home, that they have access to clean running water, and that they have help when they are struggling. The NDP continues to stonewall any improvement in the shelter rates. It is disgraceful. And, hopefully, one day they will come and realize that they have been wrong for many, many years and that they had better change. And certainly people around Manitoba are recognizing the problems that this government has created.

Dr. Anna Reid and the Canadian Medical Association this year released their report talking about how it is so critical to reduce poverty in order to increase the health of our citizens. And chief among the concerns that have been raised is the fact that the NDP have kept shelter rates for those on income assistance far below what is needed in current day's market. And certainly it is a disgrace because what it has meant is that too many families have had to use the money from their children's food in order to have a place to stay, in order to pay the rent. Time and time again, the NDP have not done what needs to be done.

In Brandon, Glen Kruck who was the regional manager—manager for the Canadian Mental Health Association presented not long ago in our Legislature at a committee meeting, and he said there have been absolutely zero apartments available in Brandon since the year 2000 at the provincial shelter rate for those on income assistance at \$285 per month. They have so underpriced, undervalued shelter for people who are poor that there are zero apartments in Brandon available for the price that they are willing to pay.

And not only Gren Kruck but Arnold Grambo, who was representing Manitoba community builders, emphasized this point—emphasized that the lack of affordable housing and in part of that, that's due—that this government keeps the shelter rates so low is a very serious problem for every city, town, village and rural municipality in this province. Our problem is systemic and it will never be solved by timid band-aid individuals and governments like this NDP government. When I asked him about shelter rates being too low, he replied, there is no question that the shelter rates are way out of line and that they are too low. It needs to change.

Mr. Speaker, we need to support this resolution right now.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise in the Chamber to have this discussion today. And I really appreciate following the member from River Heights who made a real spectacle of himself, quite frankly, during a political announcement on his party's behalf in front of Gilbert Park, Manitoba Housing, and I know the residents didn't appreciate that very much. And I understand very much from the member from Point Douglas—has family who lives there—it is their home and they're proud of their homes. But I'm sure he does remember that—how that backfired on him.

And what I'd like to say about Gilbert Park, of course, is that Gilbert Park was recently renovated and retrofitted to become more energy efficient by the BUILD initiative here in Manitoba. And as my colleague from Point Douglas pointed out, the BUILD initiative, a social enterprise, started right here in Manitoba, post-1999, because that was not something that you would see during the Conservative years in office, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

But I—again, I appreciate the opportunity that my critic has allowed me to speak to this. I know that they're not going to ask questions in question period on this because, of course, that is broadcast and they do not want to have this discussion broadcast, because the contrast is so clear between our government and what they did when they were in government.

Now, I've had the privilege of serving as Education minister and, of course, I believe that education is the greatest equalizer for poverty. And, of course, many teachers who happen to be politicians on this side of the House were motivated to become politicians because of their dismal record when they were in office. And we know that you have to invest in education, you have to create opportunities for our youth. You have to allow for a system that engages our youth and lets our youth explore the many gifts that they have that they come through the door with every day and have a very engaging education system. And the way you're going to do that is by investing appropriately in education, unlike the members opposite, when their leader sat at the Cabinet table with Filmon and they cut 2 per cent, -2.6, zero, -2 per cent and zero, five consecutive years of cuts to the education system,

Mr. Speaker, and a very significant impact that that would have, particularly on the most vulnerable who need more resources to support their learning. And who are among the most vulnerable are those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and they do tend to need more resources to support their learning needs. So that was just on the Education file.

Then I had the privilege of serving as minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, and we're the only government that talked about—the only party that talked about training as being essential for the growth of this province. They said nothing about training, Mr. Speaker. And what have we done? We also brought in EIA into the Department of ETT at that time because we recognized that the big equalizer in poverty is having a job as well, so education, training and having the wraparound supports that individuals need to move from being on Employment and Income Assistance and getting into the workforce in long-term, sustainable jobs.

* (11:50)

So now here I am, I have the privilege of serving as the Minister of Housing and Community Development and I've had wonderful opportunities to meet with many community development organizations who are doing incredible work in their community, incredible work as advocates, incredible work finding people housing, assisting them in housing, assisting them in understanding the system and working to make their communities better places to live. So I'm really excited about this portfolio that I now have the privilege to serve as the Housing Minister, and, again, it's a matter of contrasts. And, you know, I know Hansard doesn't record visuals so I don't have any graphs to hold up but if we looked at the funding of education, how it went down and down and up and down, the peaks and valleys—mostly valleys when members opposite were in office—and we've increased funding every year, over \$440 million in funding for education—*[interjection]* I hear Waldorf and Statler are alive and well—\$440 million more in education funding, and we've increased it every year. So you have the flat-line funding of the Tories and the dips in Tory funding, and we have the great increase in funding for education.

Then we could talk about the stats that I had under the privilege—under my role as minister responsible for the Bureau of Statistics. Every year, three thousand more people leaving the province than moving to the province when the Tories were in

office, and what's happened since we've been in office? Over a hundred thousand—again, I'd love to have the visual. It goes down, down, down, down when the Tories are in office, and when we get in office, the population goes up, up, up, up. And why is that? Because we are investing in supports for the community.

Now, let's talk about housing. I asked my staff, because I'm a very visual learner, and I asked my staff to provide charts previously when I was Education Minister on the funding, and it's quite stark. And I asked my staff to provide charts and data as far as population trends in the province, when they were in office and when we were in office. It's quite stark. And, again, I said to my staff in housing, I said, show me a graph of the investments that the Tories made when they were in office on housing compared to the investments that we've made in housing. Well, surprise, surprise, there's a very sharp contrast because it was flat line, flatter than the prairies, the investments that they made in housing, and then we come into office and you see it going up and up and up. It's because we believe in investing in community and investing in supports that are important to Manitobans. We believe in investing in housing.

And for them to say that nothing's happening in housing, well, I guess they're not going and talking to people in Manitoba housing, because what have we done so far, in terms of our investments in housing? It's been quite substantial. In fact, our investment in public housing has included renovations to benefit more than 26,500 housing units, assisting in renovations to 1,747 private households. Coincidentally, that 26,500 units that we've invested in renovating, if you add the 1,747 private households and if you add to that the fact that we've got a 1,500 commitment in terms of more affordable housing, 1,500 commitment in terms of more social housing, if you add up the recent announcement that we've—we're adding 500 more units in social housing, 500 more units in affordable housing, add all those numbers together and what do you get? About 33,000, perhaps—gee, that sounds familiar. Oh, that's right, that's the number of people who left the province of Manitoba last time they were in office over the course of 10 years. So just a little interesting math that we have there.

Speaking of interesting math, the members opposite always talk about being champions for the poor, but I don't understand how they think that they were the champions for the poor when they were in

office. What changed 20 years ago when they were in office? And they talk about being champions for the poor. Well, 20 years ago, you know, they clawed back the federal child benefits, \$48 million. They took \$48 million out of the pockets of the most vulnerable people. They cut EIA \$150 per month over the course of three years, 1993, 1994, 1996. Oh, coincidence? Was that when the Leader of the Opposition sat at the Cabinet table as a member of the Filmon government? And they cut EIA by \$150 per month. And now he stands up in the Chamber and claims to be the champion for the poor. But is he not also the individual who said earlier in this session that do you believe that past behaviour is a good indicator of future behaviour? Hmm, I find this rather intriguing.

Think about all the things that they did as champions of the poor, and, you know, the member from River East spoke to this, and I think the member from River East was sitting at the Cabinet table when they came up with this wonderful idea. We'll call it a snitch line, turn in people who are cheating on EIA. That was their response to the needs of people with the greatest need.

Well, we have a line of our own, but we call it the pest line, actually, and that is for our bedbug strategy. I heard the member from—my critic speak about bedbugs. Well, we have a pest line and we have 97 per cent of our social housing stock, of our Manitoba Housing stock that is bedbug free. We've become experts in dealing with that because we see there's a problem, we deal with the problem.

Members opposite, they don't deal with problems—and, you know, when we talk about the renovations that we've been doing over the course of our tenure in government, over 26,000 upgrades to residence, when was most of that stock built? Well, I would hazard a guess that a lot of it was built in the '70s, in the '80s, coincidentally, when there were NDP governments in office. I would hazard a guess that that was the case, because we know that Housing is important to people in Manitoba.

We are doing a lot of work with community organizations. We have recently introduced a rent tax credit to entice private enterprise to invest in rental housing and keep it as low-income housing as a percentage of the development that they undertake, because we know that housing is something that needs investment from the private enterprise as well, and we're going to see that happening here in Manitoba.

So it's rather curious to have members opposite stand up in this Chamber, bring this resolution to the table, because if I were them I would not want to be debating this, because the comparisons are so stark, what we do versus what they did, what we're going to do versus what they're going to do, because they have said that they are going to cut half a billion dollars from the budget, and where are those cuts going to go? They're going to go to the community enterprises; they're going to go to the community development organizations; we're going to see less people involved because they're going to be cutting funds to very important enterprises that are supporting housing—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to put a few words on the record in regards to this fantastic and very important resolution brought forward by the member from Portage la Prairie, and I encourage absolutely everybody in the House to help support this resolution, especially during this holiday season, take some of the recommendations from Make Poverty History coalition by raising the rental allowance portion of Employment and Income Assistance to 75 per cent of the median market rental rates. As we know, housing is one of the most basic of all of the necessities. Inadequate housing has been linked to a wide range of social difficulties and problems such as health, education, justice, and the list goes on.

So with that, I encourage all sides of the House to stand up in unity and support this very, very, very important resolution, especially during this time of the year.

Thank you.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to have all of two minutes to talk about a topic that Conservatives the world over are known for making worse, and for speaking out of both sides of their mouth at least, depending on the political situation of the day. For anybody who happens to be following this debate outside of this building, you know, all three of them, the people, you know, keeping an eye on what we do here at the Legislature from the public should have some context. They should know that while the Conservatives are bringing this motion forward this morning, this afternoon, I can guarantee you, they will be calling for cuts to social programs just like housing in the

afternoon session, during question period. They will talk about spending on one side, then they'll talk about cutting on the other side, and never will the two mix.

So you have to ask yourself, regardless of the excellent work being done by real antipoverty activists in the community—who I admire and I thank them for their honest advocacy—you have to question the integrity of the motion that's been brought here and its accuracy and whether the people who are doing that really know what they're talking about. They don't like to talk about the '90s; they would just as soon everybody forgot about that. I share that opinion. I don't have that option because I was living

in the '90s under their policies. But we don't even have to go that far back into the past to see that they have not changed one bit, and the simple conclusion, Mr. Speaker, is that voting Conservative is like hiring someone to steal from you. It makes about that much sense. The Leader of the Opposition has called for nothing less than 500—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) will have eight minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m. this afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 5, 2013

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