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DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 24, 2014

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, colleagues. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Can you canvass the House and see if there's leave to move directly to Bill 201, The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act?

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to proceed directly to Bill 201? *[Agreed]*

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS— PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 201—The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: All right, we'll now call Bill 201, The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino), who has six minutes remaining.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): The most horrendous moment in married life comes when there's a breakdown, and it becomes tenfold or a hundredfold more serious and more heartbreaking when there are children involved.

Now, I appreciate the intention of the honourable member from Midland and I appreciate that he's trying to do what most of us think should be done in order to alleviate the suffering of families, except that we have to take a closer look at how the proposed amendment might jeopardize the other provisions of the Maintenance Enforcement Program. As it stands now, the Province assists in the

collection of spousal support and child support, some through court orders or some through separation agreements. And the way that I see this is that our culture of the law regarding divorce and separations is that we try to encourage reconciliation; if not reconciliation, conciliation regarding child custody and access. And we also promote that aspect of that horrendous time that, for the sake of the children, husband and wife or partners should come together and agree that if it is in the best interests of the children, then it will be done.

As an aside, I spend some time in a church basement as part of a marriage prep team, and as such I was assigned the—well, it's one of those tasks that I relish, talking about brokenness, brokenness as defined by those who are experts in the field as referring to that point wherein the relationship has not just broken down but is irreparable. And the way that we approach it, me and my wife as marriage presenters, is we always cull and take from our memory of 42 years of marriage how to deal with the problems and how to resolve personality differences, how to share financial burdens and sometimes some financial windfalls.

And we also found that the best way is always to talk. Talking does not usually mean just talk. Sometimes you just have to write down what you want from the other and the other responds with something else. We call that conciliation, and in the middle of all those, sometimes we offer ourselves as the conciliators. And I find great pleasure in being able to at least be responsible for the repair of a broken relationship, for them to give it another chance, to give it another chance to work, because love is always a very powerful incentive. And children, when it involves children, it becomes a little bit more paramount.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I want to start, actually, by acknowledging and congratulating my colleague the MLA for Tyndall Park on 42 years of marriage. I mean, it's a milestone in today's society for any couple to hit 42 years. In fact, I was just commenting to my colleague the MLA for La Verendrye that the honourable member's been married for as long as I've been alive,

so that's quite a milestone. So I congratulate the member and his spouse and wish them—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise and obviously support my colleague the member for Midland's (Mr. Pedersen) private member's legislation, private member's bill, this morning, The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act.

* (10:10)

I listened carefully to the remarks by the MLA for Tyndall Park, and I agree wholeheartedly with many of his comments that, obviously, the dissolution of a relationship, whether it's a marriage or a relationship in which children are involved, is an unfortunate situation that many couples today find themselves in just due to the stresses of life. And there are instances where reconciliation and conciliation and mediation are all components of achieving an amicable resolution to that situation, especially when children are involved. So whether it's custody—physical custody of the children or whether it's the financial support of the children that resulted from that relationship, those can all benefit from those services that the MLA for Tyndall Park noted and commented on.

But I think this bill that the member for Midland brings forward takes a realistic view in—and unfortunate that it is that reality, but in all too many or too many instances—and I'm not suggesting that it is the norm, but there are many instances where the legacy of bitterness as resulting from the dissolution of a relationship can impact a person's thinking. We see it in our court systems all the time. I mean, obviously, on the one extreme we have, obviously, violence that can occur, but on the other extreme we can see where, unfortunately, children become pawns used by one spouse over another spouse or one partner over another partner in that constant battle over the dissolution and the blame that may result from, again, the dissolution of a relationship. So I think what the member is trying to suggest here is that we need to take steps as a Legislature to minimize that opportunity that children and—will suffer unduly as a result anymore from, obviously, the suffering that they—the emotional and, let's be honest, the financial toll that the dissolution of a relationship can have on children.

In talking to my colleague, my understanding in the background from his drive to bring forward this bill this morning is the result of a disagreement that was taken to court between two individuals over the

allocation of child support payments. The judge, in that instance, ruled in favour of the one spouse that indicated that, no, the original payment order stand and were valid and for—and, as well, allocated that spouse \$15,000 in court costs. The other party, though, refused to pay.

Well, Mr. Speaker, \$15,000 is not a small amount of money for any individual, must less—much less an individual that may have already incurred significant costs—legal costs, as—paying for legal fees to end the relationship, the ongoing court costs, you know, fighting the—potentially—custody battles and negotiating and fighting over support payments. So to add that burden—that financial burden which may occur, as I had previously noted, just simply out of malice to force the other individual to spend money that they don't have, again, as a final sort of act of retribution—in this case, financial retribution over the dissolution of that relationship—is truly unfortunate.

And I think the member is taking, actually, quite a reasonable approach in his amendment to the family maintenance, garnishment amendment act through this, in that should there be an order and a judgment for legal costs resulting from a child-maintenance order, and should the judge rule that one party should receive legal costs, that that individual has six months to collect before this would even go into the Maintenance Enforcement Program. So, again, I mean, it's not something that would happen right away. Six months, I think, is a reasonable amount of time for any individual to maybe reflect on the decisions they made and, more importantly, take steps to abide by that judgment made by the courts.

But, again, should that judgment not be abided by that was dealt in a—in our—in and through our legal system, then those appropriate costs would go through the Maintenance Enforcement Program that does right now facilitate child and spousal support payments. I mean, they are the organization and they are the part—component of government that right now keeps a record and takes any kind of legal action, in terms of the garnishment of any payments owed, which can, again, provide a sense of stability, for lack of a better word, in often unstable times when, again, that dissolution of a relationship.

So, to afford a spouse a single avenue, and a single avenue that currently exists and which is mandated to ensure that child and spousal payments are duly received, and, again, and it's that agency's responsibility to garnish wages, should it come to

that, I mean, to put the onus again on that individual, well, you're going to have to go to small claims court and get a garnishment order.

Well, again, Mr. Speaker, you're putting additional costs, both in terms of time, money and just, more importantly, putting additional hardships in terms of emotional and other stress on that individual and the children involved simply because of an unwillingness to use a reasonable approach.

The member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino) also makes the comment that we need to take a closer look at this legislation and at this bill that the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) puts forth, and we do need to take a closer look, and one of the ways that we, as a Legislature, to take a closer look is to approve this bill today in this Legislature and forward it on to committee, so that the committee and interested members of the public can come and make a presentation on the bill, provide advice and suggestions.

I'm not going to suggest that this bill is perfect, because I don't think any piece of legislation's perfect. I think what the member for Midland, and I think what this side is asking for is, let's move this bill forward. Let's move it to the committee stage so that we can hear from individuals who have been affected by the system, who maybe have gone through this instance where they've been awarded legal costs, and yet the other party's refused to pay legal costs, and so additional monies have to be spent literally chasing that individual down, or additional time has to be spent chasing that down. We may also get comments from individuals within the legal system that may have suggestions how to improve the legislation even further

But I think the goal of the legislation is laudable. And, I think, as the member for Tyndall Park noted, that it—that the best way is always to talk when we're trying to come to a resolution in these instances. But it's not always the most—it's not—it is not a way that always works out. He did note, though, that in his own marriage counselling classes he talked about a process where things are written down as part of that reconciliation or conciliation process.

This is almost an extension of that because we're talking about the writing down of a judgment, the writing down of a legal judgment and the awarding of costs and we're simply saying let's take that writing down of a legal judgment and let's put it over to a component and—of government and, again, the

Maintenance Enforcement Program, to deal with that and to deal with those costs.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is a good piece of legislation put forward by my colleague. I think this legislation is something that all members should look at supporting and that all members should value the opportunity to allow, again, interested parties, affected parties, members of the legal community, to come forward during the committee stage, make comments on it, so that if there are any components of the legislation that we can tweak to make it even more effective, we can do so. But I would agree wholeheartedly, again, with my colleague the member for Tyndall Park that we need to do what we can to ensure that the children are the—are a primary responsibility of this bill, and I think this bill is part of that.

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

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak. I want to thank the member from Morris for his comments in recognizing the—both some of the merits of the bill that's been brought forward by the member from Midland, and more importantly, for recognizing some of the wisdom of my colleague from Tyndall Park, who I found in my time in the Legislature has been a very mature and helpful and thoughtful and secure voice in this Legislature, for all of us, so I welcome those comments.

Which leads me to—the member from Morris made the point, and I'm making this point with all due respect to members of the Legislature but, more specifically, to those members who are newer to this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, over the last several years.

*(10:20)

And I just want to provide a little bit of contrast to members. These private members' hours are useful and this bill is useful to the extent that it provides another example, another means of describing how we can improve the situation in Manitoba for families.

I want to note that during my nine years of opposition in this Legislature, I can only recall one situation when a private member's bill was allowed at that time. I think it was our leader. I proposed many bills in the Legislature: one, for example, to deal with deaths in nursing homes; one to deal with the critical incidents in nursing homes; one to put in place PACT—PACT program as we're putting in

place now at Grace Hospital, because there was no PACT programs and despite our pleas for PACT programs, the government of the day wouldn't do that.

And I'm not doing that as criticism of the government of day, but I want members opposite to recognize that we've changed in this Legislature. We recognize non-partisan input. We try to improve the situation for all Manitobans by working together.

Since I've—since we've been in government and I've been on this side of the House, there's been dozens of opposition member bills that have gone through this Chamber—dozens, Mr. Speaker. And there will be more. And so we're not taking an attitude of partisan, non—we're not taking a partisan attitude towards this. If a bill is helpful and if a bill will improve the situation, it doesn't matter if it's brought by a member opposite. I just want members to remember and recognize that this—we have changed in this Chamber. It's not like the old days when, when we were in opposition, nothing was allowed to go through.

I know you're not partisan, Mr. Speaker, but I know that there was a time when you were on our side of the House as opposition. It was very frustrating because I would go to ministers and say, look, I'll give you all the credit for the bill, just put this in, it would help Manitobans. But we've changed, and that's a welcome change, and there's bills that go through this Chamber that are brought by members opposite and there's bills that go through the Chamber that are brought by us and there are bills that go through the Chamber that are brought by the Liberal member, that pass. And that's good for all of us and I think we should acknowledge how we have changed and become less partisan in this Chamber and have become more helpful in this Chamber.

And I actually think that we'd of talk—we should talk about that more. We talk about the differences so much, and, good heavens, the differences will always get coverage and the differences will always get press and the differences will always be talked about, but what's not talked about is the majority of issues that go through this Chamber that go through on a non-partisan basis, that go through collaboratively, that go through with improvements, that go through by acknowledging that our job is to help Manitobans to make Manitoba a better place to live, not to tear each other down and to say that our way is always the better way.

So, I—in that context, Mr. Speaker, that's why I welcome the comments of the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino) and the recognition, I think, of the member from Morris that there was wisdom and comments, and I recognize the efforts brought forward by the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) on bringing forward this bill. This bill has some improvements.

I don't like to talk personally, but I did do family law for a time as a practicing lawyer, and it was not fun. In fact, between all of the forms of law that I did—criminal, family, labour, administrative, some commercial—I thought family was the most difficult because of the emotions and the extent of the conflict and the difficulty in the conflict. And I greatly admire those leaders—I think it started in Manitoba, of changing family law to make it a process that put children first and which tried to take as much as possible the edges and the conflict out of family law, but I know in the context of being a human being that we will never make it perfect. All we can do is make it better.

This bill is a recognition that there's some better things that can be done related to maintenance and garnishment orders that can improve the situation. Now, I started out by saying, Mr. Speaker, that we passed—we've passed many more bills in this Chamber—since we've been in government—that are private bills than, I think, any other time in history. This particular bill, I think, is an adjunct and is important. I think what's more important, though, is that there are other initiatives that have happened, in terms of family maintenance law over the past decade that have been adds-on, that have been amendments to the act, that improve the act. I think this is one of those suggestions that the member ought to discuss and I think will be discussed and I think we will discuss with the Attorney General (Mr. Swan) that would—that could see improvements and could be part of a number of improvements that we should and will make to maintenance and to family law in the province of Manitoba.

In my own experience in this Chamber, we've made a lot of change and a lot of investments, significant changes in 2012 to the enforcement program, significant changes in terms of how to deal with conflict. Even back in 2001, 2002, 2004, we passed various pieces of legislation to improve garnishment including extraprovincial garnishment as well as technical changes that allowed for access to data banks, access for cross-referencing between federal and provincial compliance orders,

the examples of the First Choice program which provides court referral and early intervention, mandatory For the Sake of the Children program that's mandatory in child custody and access cases, extensions of the laws to include family, same-sex couples, Mr. Speaker, property rights and obligations of couples in common-law relationships, support for victims of domestic violence, intervention in abusive behaviour, capital improvements to women's programs and rights.

It's been extensive, but there is much more that remains to be done, and I think that this particular suggestion will be taken into consideration. I suspect—I don't know for certain—I suspect that we can see it move into some larger changes that can be put into place. One of the issues that I think is a difficulty, and I did encounter this when I was minister responsible for this area, is that some of the significant changes that we made as you amend the act complicate matters and some matters you can't fully address by virtue of some of the amendments.

So I think that, while it's, I think, a reasonable suggestion for members to say we'll pass this bill, take it to committee and put it through, I think a better course of action, in light of the fact that members know well that there are bills that pass here and there are bills and motions that are going to go through this Chamber in the next few weeks that members are bringing forward, I think the best course of action is to allow this particular action to be reviewed by the government and the department for implementation, and it can come back in a more comprehensive fashion with respect to other legislation to be put in place.

So let it be known, categorically, Mr. Speaker, that we on this side of the House and, I believe, members on that side of the House, want to improve the situation for families that are in conflict and families that are in crisis and families that are in breakdown, and we can and we will make changes to ensure that the quality of life of those involved is made whole and made better by virtue of what we can do here, not just in the form of legislation but in the form of mediation, counselling and related supports that are put in place.

So, with those few comments, I welcome this suggestion, this amendment by the member. I think there's an opportunity to infuse this into some overall exchanges that we could and should, I believe, bring forward in this Chamber in a more thoughtful—I don't

mean thoughtful but I mean in a more comprehensive fashion. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I'd like to thank the member from Midland for bringing this bill forward, The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act. To me it's an important piece of legislation. The member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) has brought this forward more than one occasion, and I think I would ask the members opposite to side with us on this bill and put it through.

The member from Kildonan made a couple of good points there in regards to, you know, he feels that there should be changes made to the bill. But I think the first thing we have to start with is by passing this bill on the second reading to put it to committee because when it gets to committee we will then have input from the public, from people who have actually experienced the hardships and what happens with a divorce.

* (10:30)

I mean, the member from Tyndall Park made some excellent comments, that we need to try to reconcile a divorce before we go into it. We need to talk, we need to get some, you know, advisors in to talk to the people involved, to try to save the marriage. But, unfortunately, there are times when a marriage gets to a point where there is nothing you can do. The marriage gets to be so bitter that the couples will basically do anything to hurt each other. So when it gets to this point, we need to make sure that there are things in place that can help the couple go through this procedure.

I mean, the family law system is complex, and when people are very upset like that, they have a hard time thinking straight. And, I said, they get—divorce can be very bitter. And I've seen divorces where one member of the couple will do anything they can to hurt the other. And a lot of times, it's by taking him to the court, challenging him in court, because they either have enough money or it really doesn't matter to them. And then the other person, who may have custody of the children, then has no money to, you know, to pay these court costs. And sometimes these court costs can be quite significant, like \$15,000. If a single mother with two children has to pay a \$15,000 court order—court bill, it's rather difficult for her to look after those kids properly because it does put a burden on her.

So what this bill will do, it'll mend the maintenance protect—or Maintenance Enforcement Program, so that after six months, if one of the—other party is not able to collect the court costs from the other, it'll go into the Maintenance Enforcement Program, which will be guaranteed a way—because if one of the parties of the divorce has used all their finances to fight the court battles, they may not have anything to, you know, further their kids in sports or do a lot of things. And it takes a lot of emotional toll on those people. So I think this bill is one that will help that.

And I don't think we can wait for drafting a new bill because this is only one part of that legislation. And I feel that this piece of legislation needs to be acted on as soon as possible. And the first thing we need to do is talk with people who've had this experience, with first-hand experience, that can tell us, you know, this is what should be done. And I feel that it's a very important bill for us to debate and move on to second reading, so we can pass it, so that couples who are going through the divorce proceedings won't have to worry about having that happen to them when they're finished with their divorce.

I know that there's several members here that—well, like the member from Tyndall Park had mentioned some—a lot of good issues. And I'm just hoping that a number of the members from across the way will be willing to work with us on this bill. The member from Kildonan mentioned that, you know, non-partisan. Well, I agree. This is a bill that is something that people need to look at. And I would ask the members to please pass this onto second reading. I know there are other members are willing—or wishing to talk to this, so I thank you very much for your time.

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) to bring this amendment forward.

You know, I came from a different background, and when I came in at that time, and there was not anything in my mind that I can imagine that there could be something like that kind of program, where a family maintenance could be provided. And then I thought, how come I never heard any—this kind of situation back then? And at that time, divorce was not really a kind of concept in the Indian society. I thought, why does it happen? And when society became more affluent and more divorce started coming forward, and then we have to have this kind

of a program so kids and families can be taken care of.

But I will go back to the concept. I think in the Western world you cannot think about arranged marriage, how somebody you have not seen and you just got married and how you create that love. And I can only tell you my father and my mother, they have not seen each other and somebody arranged that marriage and they just seen each other on the honeymoon day. And after that, they stayed their whole life and with great love. Love started after—when they were seeing each other. There was not love before.

How that happened, I think that's—go back to the kind of institutions the society creates. There was Rama and there was Sita. There was his father, his brothers. They created this. I don't know that much mythology as real; I don't want to offend any religion, but I respect that aspect of the society. And Rama was going to exile. Sita did not have to go there, but she said no; she wanted to go with her husband to exile too. And the kingdom was given to his father—or his brother. Brother did not put—sit on the chair of [*inaudible*] Brother just sat down then, every time he will sit on the floor, he will put his elder brother Rama's shoes—not—slippers over the chair. So that kind of scenario has been produced, and Rama obeyed his father. He went to exile, and this society—and these days we can say, hell with you, father, I'm not going to listen to you.

So that kind of a creation of a society institutionalized, created this society and with that society gives really—gave really family values. And those family values, I think that's why there are not that many divorces. So I think, along with all these maintenance programs, though it should be available, we have to go back our roots why these marriages fail. I think we gone more than toward how much I can get out of this marriage, not how much I can give into this marriage and to this relationship to work out.

So this kind of institutionalized—I see when we were kids, there will be kind of play and as we played that will be played, Rama, Sita and that whole scenario, and every girl would look into, okay, I want to look just like Sita. Every boy will look like—will think about, I just want to like Rama, and that concept. So people did not get married to a boy or girl; they're married to that institution. They have respected that institution, and that institution, they want to make sure that the institution succeed.

So I think—but, like, arranged marriage, I think, is very hard to understand for the Western society, but I think that arranged marriage, we understand over there, but it causes many problem over here because society does not understand.

If somebody go back over here to get marriage, arranged marriage, and Immigration will immediately say, you only stayed one week. How—that's a marriage of convenience, it's not real marriage. They don't understand the culture. And so many people have to go through Immigration that will lose that case, then they have to go to appeal, then they have to make understand. Then they have to go back, pretend the way Western world does. They will have to go back and go there and go to the Golden Temple, have photos and have to create all that scenario, which really they don't have to.

* (10:40)

I can give you one example. One girl, she got married to the guy, and as a—from village side, and Immigration phoned them, what's your date of birth of your husband? She did not know, or forget. When did you get married? She did not know. Why did that—you got married and that's it. And the celebrations of—anniversary, these were on the city side of Western culture. So—and so they failed their case, and later they called them on interview.

Then—but I had a chance to go back to Delhi and we were in the consulate general's office over there, so I tried to make them understand. Marriage in our—my father got married. He got married, and after that he did not care when he got married. He had a good wife and they have an understanding. He did not care what is her date of birth, what was his date of birth. And if I am not in Canada, I would not know what's the date of birth—my wife's date of birth. Now I have to fill out the form, every time I have to write the date of birth, so that's the—because that had been created. Otherwise who cares what's her date of birth is and when we got married, we are having a good family and we enjoying our life.

So, I think that we have to go back to our roots. Our roots are we have to institutionalize love—real love, which—that love creates how much you're giving, not how much you take out. And if we can create that kind of society, then these problems will be reduced. But I am not undermining—sure, if somebody needs that kind of help, that help should be available and that should be available immediately.

One other day, one person had that problem. A wife took all the—like, on the call—or whoever that's in the apartment took all the money out of his account. Now, on the other hand, he has two kids. They did not have money to spend, so he phoned me, what can I do? Make some changes.

But now maybe that change could be totally against what the member is suggesting. So we have to take—have to make balance, so check both sides. What can happen in their situation, what can happen in their situation? We cannot just take on—thinking to just one side and let the other side suffer. In that case, those kids were suffering because they did not have money. And money, why not you take by part? If even you want to take that money out of the account, maybe take it by part, not as one shot and let the kids suffer from.

So I think this kind of a bill would—needs really thinking—deep thinking and more consulting before this bill should go further. So, by saying that, I think there will be more members will be speaking, and I won't go further, and I thank you for giving me this time.

Mr. Speaker: Any—the honourable Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities.

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): Glad to put some words on the record for Bill 201, the family maintenance amendment act and garnishment act.

I was glad to hear so much debate on this. It's one of these debates that I think there is a—you can get a—sort of a collective idea of not only how important the—this bill is in terms of what it means to families and families who are struggling, but you heard it from the member from Tyndall who talked about personal circumstances, and I think we all know families and children who have struggled. We got to hear from the member from Morris, of course, highlight that when we're having discussion here today that we should take into account children first. Of course, the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), you know, brought in history—an historical perspective and understanding that there are, of course, many issues that we discuss that are entrenched in partisanship but there should always be a willingness to listen, to hear one another, to take into account thoughts and ideas. And I think that's a very important point.

And I know the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan), the Attorney General, and his officials are working

in—with regards to the maintenance informants—Maintenance Enforcement Program, and I think it's important for people to know that, of course, he's listening to all thoughts and ideas from members of the Legislature. I know I got to hear the—from the member from La Verendrye, and I know that he's an excellent coach out in his neck of the woods and he spends time with many families. And there's probably no doubt that those young people that he's coaching have gone through, you know, family breakups, and so he's probably got front-line personal experience working with families who are dealing with this.

And, of course, we just heard from the member for Maples talk about a very personal testimonial on families and marriage breakups. And so these are the kinds of debates that I think are very important because, you know, it starts with taking into account the emotional and physical and moral well-being of children in some of the most vulnerable times, of course, when a family breaks up.

I do want to say that it's important for government, when we're looking at when a family is going through incredibly tough times, that there's broad support for those families. And I know that, as the Minister responsible for Children and Youth Opportunities, when families are dealing with the kinds of circumstances that happen when a divorce takes place, it's important that those parents and those children have safe places to go and get support in their neighbourhoods and in their communities.

I've got to say that I am incredibly proud of the professionalism and the support that our educators provide to their students and the supports they get in schools, of course, all of the different supports that are going on for social services and, of course, non-profit organizations and the incredible work of front-line staff with the—with health professionals. We want to make sure that when families are struggling that children are getting the support that they need, but also that families are getting the support the need and not just parents but also grandparents and extended family as well.

I know that family resource centres exist all over the province, and we understand how important it is to continue to invest in places like family resource centres that provide, of course, a place where children and parents and grandparents and older brothers and sisters can come. There's often a co-ordination of multiple services in there. It could be health services. It could be those social services

that I talked about. It could be support around education. You know, this, you know, clearly can have an impact on a child's academic achievement and a whole variety of fronts. And to have those family resource centres in our neighbourhoods throughout our province during this time, I think, is incredibly important. I'm glad that our government continues to invest.

We also know that we invest in things like parent-child coalitions where different organizations and different businesses come together to co-ordinate the services to make sure that when families are at their most vulnerable state that there's a co-ordinated way in which families can access services and resources. And so we have to make sure that children, parents, grandparents and extended family have the supports they need when they're actually going through this.

But when it comes to the maintenance informants program, primary function, of course, is take the child rights and, of course, the financial support into account. You know, I know that our government has made improvements to family maintenance, some of them to do with a lot of emphasis on accountability. In 2012 the maintenance informants program allows for more timely transfer of funds for those receiving support. We wanted to make sure that there was a simple and easier method for those who need the support, that they can get that support.

We, of course, want to hold people accountable, hold those individuals accountable and to make sure that if they're not taking their child's well-being into account first, that we can find ways in which we can track those people and garnish wages. We, of course, have tried to put efficiency into this by having less time in processing payments and making sure that we're holding those people accountable to make sure that they have all the tools they need to get the supports to their children that they need to be able to.

I also—in 2001 we created something called the compliance unit, Mr. Speaker. The compliant unit uses the most powerful legislative tools that we have to be able to hold people accountable and to make sure that there are ways in which we can do broad investigations, there's ways in which we can talk to people and get the information that we need.

*(10:50)

We also were able to introduce in 2001, when someone wins and we're able to work with the

Western Canada Lottery Corporation to make sure that if there are winnings and those kinds of natures that that money's tracked and getting to the child and that the people who need it the most.

Also in 2004, we passed extra provincial garnishing orders as well, Mr. Speaker. In 2007, we wanted to make sure that we're finding ways in which we can co-ordinate the way in which we get information, of course, to hold people accountable, not just in our own province, but what happens if someone in our province isn't living up through obligations and they try to do something by moving to another province. Well, we wanted to make sure that there was ways in which provinces could work interprovincially together to co-ordinate ways in which we can share information.

In 2010, we're consistently trying to work through technology and update computer systems to use data, to find different ways in which can—to track people down, to make sure that we're using all the different tools at our fingertips, Mr. Speaker.

Coming back to the most important aspect, though, Mr. Speaker, is always going to be that we're taking into account the well-being of children and often parents and grandparents and all those involved, and so we—we've continue to not only invest in things like parent-child coalitions and family resource centres and, you know, of course, making sure that organizations and—that are available to all people all throughout the province where families can go seek support, can go and find all the different services. Of course, what happens to one family when there is a divorce and you provide service might not be the exact service that another family needs. The families that are struggling in all different ways, and we look at the uniqueness of those situations and we want to make sure that there's lots of choice for families and their children to get the supports they need.

There's a program called the First Choice program that does support children, that does support parents as they're going through, of course, these difficult times and, as again, the primary focus of the First Choice program always takes into account the emotional and the intellectual and the overall moral well-being of children.

And so when we take the time to debate bills like we are today, it is great to see that all members of the Legislature are willing to share their thoughts and ideas from their own personal experiences. We all know families that have gone through this.

You get to hear the—those personal experiences that they're willing to share because, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we always want to have a bill and we always want to have legislation that are going to help families, particularly when they're going through the most vulnerable times.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James): So, I'm happy to get up today to speak to Bill 201 and appreciate the member opposite for bringing this forward.

I can't say I'm speaking from personal experience. Certainly, even in my family life, my parents have demonstrated a long and hearty marriage of 53 years, which overshadows my measly nine by quite a lengthy amount, and even after nine I have greater respect for their 53. And I know that 53 years of marriage certainly provides plenty of stories and experiences; some stories that I've been told through the years happened before I came along. You know, my mother and father married when they were 19 and 21 and they had quite a whirlwind romance, and I think one of the best stories my mother told me about my father was that at a local festival she discovered that he had wrestled a pig in a three-piece suit and I'm pretty sure she knew at that moment that he was a keeper.

For my dad's part—coming from a very small community, I don't know if members in the Chamber are familiar with the groundhog festival, but that is the community in which I was born and raised. It's a fact I don't often share, so the fact that I'm saying it here is kind of remarkable. But they have an annual beauty pageant and the winner of the beauty pageant unfortunately gets to wear the title of Ms. Groundhog. And my mother was pushed into that pageant by my father and, at that time, you just had to skate around the local ice rink and were judged on your attributes. It was a long time ago. But, anyway, she won that title, Ms. Groundhog, and I think to this day is quite proud of it.

But at any rate, what my experience with marriage—certainly, looking at my parents' marriage and my siblings who've all managed to stay together, it's not always wine and roses, that's for sure, and I [*interjection*]-or perogies and sour cream. I'm fortunate in that way. But I have had many close friends through my upbringing that did not have parents who were able to stay together, and I'm familiar with their experiences that they had and I have a great deal of respect for those that have to go down that route. It's very challenging.

And since becoming an MLA, I've had constituents contact me in similar situations that have been heart-wrenching. And through those experiences I've been able to become more familiar with the system that we have in place here, and while there is nothing that we can legislate to make that process pain free, there are certainly things that we can do, have done and continue to do to make that process a little more manageable. And, I think, particularly in partnerships that are dissolving that have children involved, it's extremely important that we do as much as we can to protect those children and support the parents as they go through this very trying time.

I had a constituent, in particular, that recently connected with me, and some of the supports that she needed I was able to provide her guidance on getting. And, you know, I do want to echo what the member from Kildonan said which was that, you know, we're—we have a process in place that we are continuing to examine and make sure that we make the kinds of changes that are going to be the most beneficial for people that are in great need, and that is an ever-changing process. However, going through this with my constituent I certainly had an opportunity to see some of the things we have in place, and our government definitely has programs that help families through this emotional and financial difficulty, whether it's through offering mediation services or programs to assist children, assistance settling issues around child-support fees. And some of my other colleagues have outlined a few of those programs, including the First Choice program which we always hope will help resolve some of those disputes at an early stage, but if it doesn't during divorce proceedings and if parents can't agree on arrangements for their children and mediation has failed, either parent can ask the court to make a decision for them when it's based on the child's best interest. And this takes into account the child's physical, emotional, intellectual and moral well-being.

We also have For the Sake of the Children program which helps parents with children to understand their situation and how it's going to impact those children, and that's provided at no cost. And this is a mandatory program for those dealing with child custody and access. And we have passed a variety of legislation to ensure that family law works to help families and we want to continue doing that.

We've made a number of changes to the law to extend the benefits of family law to same-sex

couples. We passed the common-law property and related amendments act in 2002 which extended property rights and obligations to couples and their common-law partners so that if there's a break down there's a share of their property. And we, I am very proud to say, extended the common-law property rights to same-sex couples making Manitoba one of the first jurisdictions in the country to do so. I think that the fact that we've increased that to those same-sex couples just—is recognition that the challenge of a dissolving partnership is no more difficult or less whether it's a same-sex couple or otherwise.

As well, we have, in 2001, reorganized and created a specialized compliance unit to target wilful debtors. Another initiative that was introduced in 2001 provided the Legislative authority to seize lottery winnings. We also made other changes in 2004, 2007, 2010.

The point that I'm trying to make is that this is not a system that we feel is just cut in stone and can't change—

* (11:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for St. James (Ms. Crothers) will have three minutes remaining.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 13—Habitat for Humanity

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 11 a.m., it's time for private members' resolutions, and the resolution we have under consideration this morning is entitled Habitat for Humanity, sponsored by the honourable member for River East.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I move, seconded by the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart), that,

WHEREAS having safe and reliable housing is paramount to the health, well-being and stability that Manitoba families deserve; and

WHEREAS Habitat for Humanity's vision is to provide families with a foundation for positive change through affordable housing; and

WHEREAS one of the best ways to empower families that are extremely motivated to break out of the cycle of poverty is to remove the barriers

associated with home ownership when such families are in financially vulnerable positions; and

WHEREAS Habitat for Humanity has operated in Manitoba ever since the first Habitat home was built in Winkler in 1985; and

WHEREAS since 1985, Habitat for Humanity has helped to provide over 300 homes and offered a hand up to many families who otherwise may never have had the chance to experience the benefits of home ownership; and

WHEREAS Habitat for Humanity is active in over 15 communities in Manitoba, creating more than 40 jobs, engaging 2,000 volunteers every year and helping place families in a position where they can thrive; and

WHEREAS Habitat for Humanity allows families the opportunity to gain self-esteem and a sense of security for their children while becoming active community members; and

WHEREAS Habitat for Humanity has formed successful business partnerships with the private sector, government, individuals and community groups that make the construction of their homes affordable.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba congratulate Habitat for Humanity for three decades of success in Manitoba and commend the many volunteers, community organizations and businesses who help to provide safe and affordable housing for Manitoba families.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), seconded by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart),

WHEREAS having safe and reliable housing—dispense?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Before I proceed to recognize the honourable member for River East, I just want to indicate for our guests who are with us in the gallery this morning that there is to be no participation in any of the proceedings here in the Assembly, and that includes applause. So I'm asking for your co-operation, please.

Now, the honourable member for River East.

Mrs. Mitchelson: It's a proud day for me and for Manitoba when I can stand here today and introduce this resolution commending Habitat for Humanity for the great work that they have done over the years, not only in Manitoba but right across the North America. And Habitat has really played an integral role in our community by providing safe and affordable housing to many, many families. They've made a real difference, Mr. Speaker, in the lives of Manitobans and Canadians and internationally, with offices located all across the world from South Africa to Thailand to Costa Rica and Slovakia.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to talk about the history of Habitat here in Manitoba. And we were fortunate and very proud to have Habitat start its Canadian operations right here in our province. And they've been building homes for families to help them break out of the cycle of poverty here since 1985. And Habitat originated—Habitat Manitoba originated in Winkler and owes its start to the 1985 Mennonite economic development associates' annual convention in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

After hearing the founder of Habitat for Humanity International's keynote address on providing housing to those in need, Mr. Al Doerksen of Winkler became inspired to join a building mission in Chicago. He spread the word about Habitat back home and convinced three of his friends—Paul Hiebert, Jake Pauls and Hugo Jantz—to join him in building a home for a family in Chicago.

Deeply impacted by the poverty that was witnessed, Mr. Doerksen and his friends returned home to start their own Habitat affiliate in Canada. They opened the first Habitat office in Winnipeg in a church basement and built their first home for a family in their hometown of Winkler. The first project was a success and the idea caught on like wildflower—wildfire, growing from 69 affiliates across Canada—or growing to 69 affiliates across Canada. Since 1985, it's estimated that Habitat has enabled over 2,200 low- and moderate-income families to purchase a home.

Mr. Speaker, we have a proud history in Manitoba of caring for each other and for providing the supports and services to families that need that kind of support, and Habitat is a prime example of that. They inspire generation after generation of new volunteers and community members to take part in this very innovative challenge that many of us in the Legislature and many other Manitobans and volunteers have been involved in. It's a business

model that's based on the foundation that providing people with a home can break the cycle of poverty. Many people who are in financially vulnerable positions live in neighbourhoods that are considered unsafe and are living in housing where there are issues with mold, humidity and poor heating systems simply because these areas are more affordable places to live.

This is where Habitat for Humanity comes into the picture. They remove the barriers of home ownership, Mr. Speaker, for families by offering them the opportunity to purchase a home with a no-money-down, interest-free mortgage. This allows people to purchase a home based on their income rather than on the property value. The structure of the mortgage for the family is set so homeowners pay only 25 per cent of their family income, freeing up costs for food, medicine, clothes and other essentials. Concurrently, the monthly mortgage payments received from the homeowners are then reinvested into the program, to be used to purchase new land with the chance of building more homes in the community. Habitat also has a retail operation named ReStore, which covers the overhead expenses of their homes.

Mr. Speaker, the work of Habitat for Humanity has resulted in many, many positive incomes—positive outcomes for families in Manitoba and across Canada. For many families, the lives of their children have dramatically 'impooved'—improved after moving into their Habitat home. As stated in the Canadian mortgage and housing corporation, Habitat homes resulted in across-the-board improvements in children's well-being and school performance, with the majority of children reporting increased confidence, improved behaviour, higher grades and enjoyment of school and better attendance. Children also had—really have the opportunity to increase their participation in extracurricular activities such as sports, community volunteering, music and the arts. Many of the families that have the experience of owning a Habitat home are much better off financially than they were before they had the opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, since homeowners must complete a minimum of 350 volunteer hours to help build that home, many of them noted also the value of becoming involved in a wider supportive community as a result of the program and the home that they are able to move into. And those homeowners take great pride in having that opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear not only does Habitat for Humanity improve people's financial situations but their emotional, physical and mental health and well-being.

* (11:10)

There's a lot of people that I would like to thank and recognize for their contributions to Habitat over the last 29 years. First, I'd like to acknowledge Mr. Doerksen and his friends Paul Hiebert, Jake Pauls and Hugo Jantz for their vision and their hard work in getting Habitat for Humanity off the ground in Manitoba. I'd also like to thank and congratulate the current CEO of Habitat, Mr. Sandy Hopkins, and his staff for their continued investment and efforts in expanding the program across our province. And, Mr. Speaker, we certainly can never forget the many, many volunteers that commit their time and their energy and their effort to support the Habitat builds that happen.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's the public-private partnerships also that we have to talk about and say thank you to the businesses in our Manitoba community that are so generous and give of their products and support Habitat. This is a win-win situation for all of us in Manitoba, and we should be really proud to be the kind of province that we are where we reach out to those that need the support and help that Habitat provides, and that there are many, then, in our community have the opportunity to have a home of their own which they would not be able to have if it wasn't for the wonderful work that Habitat for Humanity does.

So I just want to say thank you. I understand this resolution should pass unanimously at the end of the hour and I just want to say thanks to all members of the Legislature for extending our warmest wishes and our best wishes for continued work on behalf of families in need in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Housing and Community Development): I'm absolutely delighted to stand here today and speak on this particular motion brought forward by the member from River East, and I thank her for bringing this motion to the Chamber today.

I, too, would like to extend my congratulations to Mr. Doerksen, Hiebert and Pauls, as well as CEO Sandy Hopkins, for the work that they have done and continue to do on behalf of Manitobans.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, Habitat for Humanity really speaks to something that is fundamental about Manitobans, that is that we give more of our time per capita than in any other province in Canada as volunteers and we give more money per capita to non-profit organizations and charitable organizations than any other province in Canada. And that's something that we should be proud of because it speaks to who we are as a province; it speaks to the fact that we care about each other and we look after each other.

And in my new role as Minister of Housing, I will never forget the first key ceremony I had the opportunity to attend and how incredibly emotional that was and the tears of joy that were shed by the two families that moved into their new homes in north Winnipeg. It was one—a very powerful moment and it reminds us of why we are here and why we're doing the things that we're doing to improve the quality of life for people in Manitoba.

Now, full disclosure, Mr. Speaker, I noticed in the gallery there's a number of guests, and I'm very pleased that they're here to celebrate this today. One of the guests happens to be my brother, Don Bjornson, who is a former chair, past chair for Habitat for Humanity and currently serves as the vice-chair of the board of Habitat for Humanity Canada.

And, you know, Don and I, we didn't inherit my father's skills as a carpenter. In fact, I have a quick story to tell, and I know he knows what story I'm going to tell, and it's going to be in Hansard, and my dad reads Hansard. But I remember my brother sharing this story about he was going to renovate his bathroom and it was a simple job hanging up some towel racks and things, and he said to his daughter—she came and looked in the door, what are you doing? He says, oh, I'm going to do this, and I need the level, I need the screwdriver, I need the drill, and she shrugged her shoulders and said, I'll get the Band-Aids.

But I did not inherit my father's skills either, Mr. Speaker, but I know that—I rib my brother about that but he was involved in a team that did a blitz build of a number of sheds for Habitat and when I mentioned this story to one of his colleagues they came to his defence and said that he did a fantastic job, a stellar job with his team and, yes, he did need a couple of Band-Aids. And it was perhaps on his advice that when I volunteered on a Habitat build with a couple of my colleagues, the MLA from Wolseley, the

MLA from Burrows—we were on a build that took place across the street in Memorial Park—it was probably on my brother's advice that they didn't give me sharp objects to work with as well.

But, certainly, as the minister responsible, formerly, for the trades portfolio, I really appreciate the skills that so many of the volunteers bring to the table and give so generously of those skills, and their patience with those of us who don't have those skills, to work with us and teach us those skills as we work to build a home for someone. And it's an incredibly powerful feeling.

And I have to say that I learned how to shingle a roof, and I shingled my own shed last year. So it was a very important skill set to learn. And—[interjection] No, I'm not going to have time this summer. I appreciate the member—one of my colleagues is asking if I could come to his house, but we'll see how the—how it weathered the first winter.

But we know how important it is. We know how important safe, affordable housing is for Manitobans. And I, you know, as minister responsible for Housing, going through one of the coldest winters since 1898, that message was driven home time and time again. And so you think about those individuals who have difficulty finding safe, affordable housing.

And we know it's incumbent on us as a society to provide safe, affordable housing. And I'm very proud of our record where we have achieved 1,500 affordable housing units, 1,500 social housing units, and we've started our next endeavour to add 500 more affordable housing units and 500 more social housing units over the next three years.

But we need partners to do that. We need partners in the business community. We need partners in the volunteer sector. We need partners from non-profit, church organizations, from community clubs. And these are the partners that in true Manitoba fashion are stepping up to the plate and making sure that we can work together to deliver affordable, safe, quality housing for Manitobans.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that we're discussing this today. As I said, it is fundamental to have safe, affordable housing and Habitat for Humanity got that very early on. They understood that very early on. And I know the member mentioned that Winkler was the first Habitat for Humanity chapter in Manitoba, but it was also the first Habitat for Humanity chapter in Canada. And the member opposite also mentioned that the refit

store was something developed here in Manitoba, and it is something that has been replicated all over the world as a very successful model to support the efforts of Habitat for Humanity. So Manitobans have certainly risen to the challenge and adopted a worldwide model and made it their own, and it is a model that is being replicated in other areas as well. So I think that's something that we can be very proud of.

It is about a hand up and not a handout. It is about providing families who earn their down payment by completing required sweat equity, and the home is sold to them at fair market value. And, again, the joy that we've seen in their faces—my brother did tell me, you got to go to a key ceremony. And I did attend one very early on in my tenure as minister, and, again, it was just an incredible celebration not just for the family, but for the community.

And to see so many businesses that had stepped up to support it—I bumped into a friend of mine from university who has started a very successful company manufacturing countertops. And he and his company have embraced Habitat and support Habitat for Humanity. And it was great to see him after 25-plus years, having seen him at university, and he's got a role to play supporting his community through his business with the countertops. So that's just one great example. It's what we do best in Manitoba. We look after each other because we care about each other, and I think that's a fabulous statement to who we are and Habitat really embodies that.

So as we continue as a government to work with our partners, we'll continue to work towards safe, affordable housing, to work towards community capacity-building, to work towards meeting the housing needs of Manitobans through this collaboration.

The contribution of non-profit organizations to the provision of services and affordable housing is invaluable and, as mentioned by my colleague, the desired housing option is home ownership. And it's not always easy to gain. Residential—a foothold in the residential housing market, for many low- to moderate-income households, they struggle to do so. But Habitat for Humanity is helping them to realize that dream and reach that goal.

And it is a key factor in breaking the cycle of poverty, and my colleague from River East mentioned a number of indicators that suggest that it helps break that cycle of poverty. Building equity—it

can increase to—it can lead to increased savings, providing stability and a foundation for family success, better success at school. All of these things are critical, when the worry is not necessarily about keeping the roof over your head any more, when they've had to struggle pay rent and meet the demands of everyday life.

* (11:20)

And, certainly, having that home ownership in—that we've seen in mature neighbourhoods as well, where Habitat for Humanity has developed in places like the former Sam Steele school site on Nairn, and north Main at—north Winnipeg at Main Street, at Fernbank Avenue, where I had the privilege of attending my first key ceremony.

Stability in the family is critical—stability in family lives—and this allows that opportunity to gain that independence, to connect with their communities and to grow with their communities. And extraordinary things can result of that—extraordinary changes can result—can be a result of the Habitat investments and our community investments in those who are struggling to find shelter, Mr. Speaker. And homeowners become stakeholders in their community. They become involved citizens. They create the quality of life and character that define the neighbourhood. And the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation did mention that home ownership increases civic involvement. It increases memberships in civic groups, in voting, in volunteer work, in charitable donations. It provides committed families the ability to access the numerous benefits that are offered by the possibility of home ownership.

So, again, with these few words, I want to thank my colleague from River East for bringing this to the table. I would like to thank my colleagues in advance for passing this resolution. And, again, I'd like to thank each and every one of you in attendance today for the work that you've done in the past, the work that you'll do in the future to make Manitoba a—to provide Manitobans with safe, affordable housing, which is fundamental and very important to us all. And keep up the good work.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): It's a great pleasure to actually rise to speak to this resolution introduced by the member from River East, and it was also a pleasure to second that motion in recognition of the great contribution that Habitat for Humanity has made in Manitoba in many different

communities and continues to make, because we know the process continues.

I know in my own community, Portage la Prairie, a build is planned for this summer. And, certainly, I think that's number 7 in the community, and that's certainly made a significant difference.

And it's really a pleasure to attend the events where the keys are turned over to the new owners. They're—being moved to tears is probably an understatement in most cases. It's their first opportunity, in most cases, in their lifetime to have pride of ownership, the security that it provides, something—you know, owning their own residence and the stability for their family. And I know a number of references have been made to the impact that it has on the family and the impact on the family is absolutely huge. And, in fact, because we have so many already in the community and we continue to build, sort of, in the same vicinity, you very often see volunteers from previous builds coming down the street with hammer in hand and hard hat to actually contribute and help even further to add to their neighbourhood. That's really what they're doing.

Now, we all recognize the significant value of stability and having your own home, the benefits in terms of health and the kids active in the community, doing better in school. Very often these families are single-parent families, and so it's often a struggle to provide all of those benefits and those advantages to the children. So this has just opened doors for them that would not have happened.

And I think back and I have been involved in a number of the projects in the past and swung a hammer a few times, and I'll—you know, still got all my fingers and toes. I know the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) made reference to his need for bandages. Coming from a farm background, I can pretty much build anything I need to, given a little bit of help and expertise in some of the areas, and they certainly are great at providing that and keeping us working together.

But one of the first organizers was actually Ed Connery, someone that's familiar in this setting, having been the MLA for Portage for a number of years, and Ed is really good at getting things organized. He's really good at getting the businesses to step up. Many businesses in our community probably went further than they initially thought they were going to because Ed simply told them that they should, and they have been very good at stepping up and continue to be very strong supporters. But when

Ed phones you up, it's a question of, well, how can I arrange my time to come and help, because he—when he phones, it's always a really worthwhile cause, though he's not as active in it now as he was, having passed the reins on to another generation.

And Charlie Clifford, I think, is the current chairman in our community, and Charlie is another great guy, in terms of getting volunteers and getting people out there. But it is an honour to come and spend time helping with the current build and doing what you can. And I always try and make as much time available as I can, as—back as many times as I can possibly arrange it. Even with my less-than-expert help, they do seem to manage to come up with a pretty nice finished product in most cases, and certainly the families that are—have benefitted from it have certainly been a great contributing factor in our community.

And I know that they're mandated to volunteer 350 hours of time towards the project. For most of them, that's a drop in the bucket as compared to the time they actually put into it. They are so honoured by the privilege and the opportunity that's been given to them that many more hours than that are often put forward. And, as I said earlier, they continue to give to the community. So it's certainly a great advantage to the community as well, to the family as well, that I would suggest that the volunteers need to be—and that's the meaning of the resolution here today is that we want to recognize the volunteers.

The volunteers that help organize—and certainly we have a number in the gallery, and I hope this project continues to grow and spread to other communities because I know that there are many places in the province where these types of projects and the ability to own their own home and the benefits of owning their own home could certainly be achieved, and we continue to push this.

In fact, in our own city, the City actually is always on the hunt for a site to give to the Habitat for Humanity project in our community and, in fact, often turn over the sites for the value of a dollar even though they have extended services. In many cases, they've taken an undeveloped lot, put in the necessities for them and so that they can actually continue to build the community, because the positive impact both to the community itself and to the individual family is just so great that everyone recognizes that they need to do this.

So I would certainly like to take advantage of this opportunity to thank the volunteers that have

come today, to thank the volunteers in our community and hope that we could get more of these projects in the future. The member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) made several comments about how great the need is for housing and in particular affordable housing in the communities, and it continues to grow.

We see more and more people struggling to make ends meet in our society, and housing is one of the basic necessities of life. It's very difficult to focus on your family, it's very—on the needs of your family—it's very difficult to focus on your job if you're struggling with housing, and I have talked to a number of families over the years who—they're in rental units. They continue to move from place to place simply because the quality of the housing is probably, in many cases, less than they would desire, and certainly we've seen lots of science that backs that up, that suggests living in substandard housing, whether it be private source or Manitoba Housing, has a health impact on the family. It certainly has an education impact for the children, certainly has an impact on their ability to prosper as a community as well. And it has long-term health impacts to our health system as well—long-term financial impacts to our health system.

So we certainly—we're doing a number of things when we put people in stable housing. And I think one of the significant points to mention here is the way they've got this structured, it's about 25 per cent of their income that they put towards housing. If you look at many people that are on income assistance or struggling to make ends meet on minimum wage jobs, it is frequently more than 40 per cent of their income that they're putting towards housing.

So it provides that level of stability, and the difference in value makes for a much greater quality of life. And certainly we are very pleased to bring forward this resolution, and I think that everyone in the House here—and I hope that we will all support it unanimously—should remember that we can put back, we can volunteer, we can donate financially, but we can make a difference in our communities and we should try and do that whenever we can.

But this is one particular case that I think, actually, is just so rewarding to see that the keys pass on to that family. And of the Habitat for Humanity houses in our community, I know all of those families are still there. They're still—they're contributing to community, they have become a major part of their community, and you can recognize the

pride in ownership—you see that; they're putting back into the community, they continue to volunteer. So those are the types of people you want back in a community, and just that little bit of extra help that Habitat for Humanity has offered certainly has made a big difference for those families, it's made a big difference to the community and it's a very rewarding experience for the volunteers.

* (11:30)

So I appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record in support of this today, and I'd like to thank all of the volunteers that have come today.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): It's a pleasure to rise and speak in support of this resolution and congratulate Habitat for Humanity for the tremendous work that they do in Winnipeg, elsewhere in Manitoba, and you'd recognize Habitat for Humanity's efforts throughout the world.

Mr. Speaker, if you ever find yourself in central Georgia you can stop in a lovely little town called Americus, and Americus is the world headquarters for the Habitat for Humanity organization. You can tour what's called the global village. And if you tour the global village you will see, first of all, well, it's really a big before-and-after display of showing some of the types of housing, if we can call it that, that many people around the world live in, in slums and in cities—Africa, Asia, South America and, unfortunately, in North America as well. And if you tour the global village you can see the range and the breadth of the types of housing and the international reach of Habitat for Humanity has provided.

And it is quite an amazing thing to see and quite amazing to learn about the story of Habitat for Humanity, which was really begun by a couple, Millard and Linda Fuller, who were business people in Montgomery, Alabama, who left behind their business interests, who met an individual in southern Georgia who provided the inspiration to start Habitat for Humanity. And it didn't hurt, Mr. Speaker, that Americus, Georgia, is just a few miles down the road from a place called Plains, Georgia. Plains, Georgia, is the birthplace and still the home of President Jimmy Carter, who I'm going to talk about a little bit later because I know that President Carter has a special connection to Winnipeg and President Carter has played a huge role in the tremendous success that Habitat for Humanity has enjoyed here in Manitoba.

I think many folks who've spoken today have already talked a little bit about the benefit of the Habitat for Humanity model. What it does is it offers partner families the chance to become homeowners, but it's not simply a free ride. Homeowners who want to become owners of a new home built by volunteers and themselves need to show great commitment, and I know personally I've been involved in some of the sweat equity projects, as it's called. I believe that the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) spoke of the 350 hours that families were required to put in. Of course, those hours can be contributed not just by the people that are going to be living in the house but by neighbours, by other members of the community and, indeed, by members of the Legislature, and I've been glad to do that. They put me to work in the ReStore, where I hope I was able to make myself even a little bit useful.

The beauty of the model, though, is that people are able to afford to pay what they can, not based on the fair market value of the home, but based on their income. But because there is such a tremendous commitment to families who receive Habitat for Humanity houses because of their engagement—they actually have a very good record in Manitoba and elsewhere of people following through, paying down their mortgage, which means that money that is given to Habitat for Humanity or is raised by Habitat for Humanity, actually, can go on in perpetuity continuing to build new homes with the involvement of families and volunteers. And it means that Manitoba, as we often say, punches above its weight, and the investments and the volunteer work here in Manitoba has continued to mean that Manitoba builds more Habitat for Humanity homes than any other province in Canada, which is something I think we should be very, very proud of.

You know, in Manitoba, of course, as I mentioned, President Jimmy Carter certainly gave a big lift. He came to a project back in 1993, I believe it was. He and his wife Rosalynn came outside the United States on behalf of Habitat for Humanity International. I think many of us remember the excitement that was generated from having Jimmy Carter here. That really allowed Habitat for Humanity in Manitoba to raise its profile to attract more people, to be involved with their board and also to be involved as volunteers or donors of time.

What I've also heard other members say today is their own personal connection to some of the Habitat for Humanity builds and, certainly, I'm pleased to

say, Mr. Speaker, that my own part of the province has benefitted from Habitat for Humanity.

There was a very sad story in the West End a few years ago when the Thistle Curling Club, of which I am a member, burned down. Thistle Curling Club is located very close to the Minto Armouries just off St. Matthews Avenue, and I was very pleased that something positive was able to come from a loss to the community. Now, in the West End, as folks who know it will know, there's not a lot of spare infill housing opportunities. There's not a lot of space. When the Thistle Curling Club burned down, it was found there was room for six homes, three side-by-side homes that went up thanks to Habitat for Humanity. I've had a chance to get to know the families, to get my hands a little dirty helping out some of these families. And, again, these families represent the best of Habitat for Humanity, truly appreciating the opportunity that they've been given to become homeowners, with themselves being so engaged in making sure that they're part of that success.

I was very pleased as well, Mr. Speaker, at that time, I was the minister responsible for Manitoba Lotteries. I used to be the lotteries and liquor minister. Those were the fun days. But Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, in 2008, made a major investment in Habitat for Humanity, of which I am extremely proud.

And I'm just trying to find on my desk the details of that involvement. It was a landmark partnership between Manitoba Lotteries and Habitat for Humanity. Manitoba Lotteries agreed to contribute up to \$2.5 million towards building homes in Winnipeg, in Brandon, in Portage la Prairie, in Steinbach and southeastern Manitoba and Selkirk. The program matches dollars from other donation dollars, up to a potential total of \$5 million. This commitment was renewed in 2013.

And, again, because of the success of the Habitat for Humanity model, that investment of money actually doesn't just build a series of houses. It builds houses and then allows that money to be rolled over as people pay down their mortgages and allows more and more homes to be built.

So, since that time, of course, we have never looked back in Manitoba. I'm very proud that Manitoba continues to be, I believe, the most successful province at using the Habitat for Humanity model to provide safe, affordable and effective housing for people. So I think we can be

very proud as Manitobans, but I do want to thank all of the volunteers, the board members, all those who give their time and their effort to make sure that people continue to have homes through the Habitat for Humanity model.

So, certainly, we support this resolution, and I will enjoy hearing from other members as they talk about their own stories of working with and supporting Habitat for Humanity. Thank you.

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise. And, actually, taking a cue from the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) and talking about our own stories and our involvement for Habitat, my involvement with Habitat is slightly different in that I wasn't involved in a build, but I was heavily involved in Habitat.

One of the things that we've talked about, obviously, Habitat starting in Winkler, Manitoba, in 1985, and that—but one of the things that we haven't touched on, actually, is 21 years ago was the start of the Cycle of Hope ride, which is a critical or an important component of Habitat for Humanity's fundraising goals.

Every year since 1993, Habitat for Humanity has organized these Cycle of Hope rides to various parts in the country. So it just happened that in the year 2000, I decided to partake in one of these rides where we biked from Winnipeg, Manitoba, to Green Bay, Wisconsin. And it was, Mr. Speaker, without a doubt, one of the most memorable opportunities in my life.

You—the—as soon as you mention the word Habitat on the road when you hit these communities, and they were—most of them were small communities that we hit throughout the route, Mr. Speaker, because, obviously, due to safety concerns, you had to stay off the interstate, so you were confined to secondary roads. And so you would have communities lined up throughout on the ride to Green Bay. And anytime you engage in any one of those communities and, you know, you have this large convoy of cyclists coming into your community plus the—their support crews as well, in their vehicles, to provide, you know, the necessary services in terms of maintaining our bikes and feeding us and carrying all our clothes and that.

And anyone would ask, you know, what's going on? As soon as you mention Habitat, they knew, and they were very appreciative of what you were doing, especially when you would mention, you know, that

you had already been—you'd left Winnipeg earlier and you were biking 1,600 kilometres to get to Green Bay in order to raise funds.

Every individual on those rides, Mr. Speaker, and I'm not sure if it's changed, but back then you had to raise \$2,500. And I was very blessed not only to have the support of friends but, actually, a number of my future colleagues here in the Manitoba Legislature supported me. The member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) also very generously supported me in those bike rides.

* (11:40)

The Cycle of Hope bike ride, that initial one, Mr. Speaker, so impressed me, and to have an opportunity to do it again in 2001—and so I took it upon myself and a couple of individuals who had done the earlier ride to actually be part of the organizing crew. So we actually organized the trip from Kansas City back to Winnipeg in 2001. And that year, Winnipeg—and I might have my terminology wrong—was actually, the, I believe, the host city for the Habitat build. So every dollar that we raised was actually matched by Habitat Canada, so essentially a two-for-one. Again, what a tremendous, tremendous experience. I mean, you would stay in church basements, in YMCAs and college dorms and, I mean, basically, anywhere a community could put you up. And at each community you would make arrangements so—for some local group to provide a meal to all the riders and their support groups. And they were—I mean, boy scout groups and 4-H clubs. Highlight, obviously, is when, you know, if you could get a local cattlemen's association to put together a meal, and it did happen on occasion, not surprisingly, in some of those states that we went through.

The—probably the highlight, though, is actually we'd happened to be in Sac City, Iowa, on July 4th, and so the community invited all of us to attend their community potluck. And I can say, to this day, Mr. Speaker, I have never eaten as well as I did that day, because you can well imagine that after cycling—and some of those days you would cycle up to, we'd call them century days, 100 miles or 160 kilometres—you really needed that calorie intake. So—I mean, to see this veritable feast in front of you of home cooking like you wouldn't believe, it was quite something. But we never forgot at the end of the day why we were there and that, you know, despite, you know, some very significant hills we encountered, some headwinds and rains and a few bumps and scrapes

and a few broken collarbones among my colleagues on one particular ride, we knew why we were there.

And so when we had—when we were coming back from that secondary ride in 2001 and coming into the city of Winnipeg, we actually ended the ride at the build, Mr. Speaker. So we got to come in and cycle in through a—with a police escort. I still have that picture framed of the large group of us all wearing our Habitat for Humanity Cycle of Hope bike jerseys. And we got to cycle right in and to be surrounded by all these volunteers actively working on the builds so that you could see and make that direct connection between, you know, the efforts that you had undertaken in the last two weeks physically and, obviously, the lead-up in training and fund-raising, to make this a reality for yourself. But to see the fruits of that and see, you know, as my colleague from River East mentioned, they were actively putting in their required sweat equity to achieve that dream of home ownership.

And for many us in all of our communities, home ownership all too often can be a dream, Mr. Speaker. We know that recently the Manitoba Real Estate Association has commented that the average cost of a home now in, at least here in the city of Winnipeg, is nearing \$200,000. So for a lot of individuals it is becoming unaffordable to attain that dream of home ownership. And that's where organizations like Habitat for Humanity come in to fill that role and to provide that very important opportunity for many families in our communities. Home ownership is the cornerstone of not only family, but any community. And as soon as you get individuals taking part and not only participating in the construction of that home, but it gives them, again, that sense of ownership, that sense of community, and we saw that consistently throughout the ride. Again, when we were talking to individuals and when you went to the actual builds, you saw the pride the people had in swinging a hammer. And many of those people, as the honourable minister noted, did not have a lot of skill sets when it came to construction, but still is that ability to swing a hammer and know that that nail being driven in by yourself was to build your own—not your own house, but your own home.

So for me, I mean, that to me is—when I think in any time I hear or read about the successes of Habitat for Humanity and when I saw my colleague for River East put forward this motion, I was more than happy to speak on it and share my Cycle of Hope rides and the great, great memories they were. I know they're

currently in works and they're actively training on this year's ride, and I hope that this year's Cycle of Hope ride is as successful as the previous ones. I won't be able to participate this year, Mr. Speaker, but perhaps you and I could undertake that at another time.

But, anyway, with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to congratulate Habitat for Humanity for not only the work they do within our communities but within our country and around the world. They are without a doubt an important component of the fabric of our communities, and so with that I'd like to conclude my remarks.

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): This is an honour and privilege for me to rise and put a few words on this very progressive and socially conscious resolution brought forward by the member from River East. I thank her for this and wholeheartedly support this.

Mr. Speaker, such initiatives are not only important for this particular focus target, but such initiatives and such thoughts brought forward by groups are helping us to build a better world we—that all of us here, we feel—and we feel responsible for. The world has witnessed such movements led by intellectuals and leaders that brings the community together and helps those who are in need. So let me read the basic mission. It says, Habitat for Humanity believes that every man, woman and child should have a decent, safe and affordable place to live. We build and repair houses all over the world using volunteer labour and donations. Our partner families purchase these houses through non-profit, non-interest mortgage loans and initiative financing methods. Habitat for Humanity International was founded in 1976, and today Habitat for Humanity is a true world leader in addressing the solution for poverty and housing.

This is something that I—and we all believe that we need to really help those who are in need, but I am privileged as a member elected for the last 11 years, I have witnessed some great occasions. But one of the things that gives me tremendous satisfaction is when I was a witness in Transcona to this housing being given to the key and the ownership certificate given to the family from Ethiopia. And I could really feel the excitement and in the eyes—glowing eyes of the children, of this woman that was so excited. And his—her son, I would think about 15 years old, was trying to be. And I encouraged him, I said, I came as an immigrant and people here who have come here as an immigrant,

they fill—build together families and their lives and they become very successful. And he said, yes, I am going to build my own housing, with my own energy, with my own money. So you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, such initiatives give the incentives, give them morals, security, safety and pride.

So this is something that I can't really say enough about how important it is for us to think that such initiatives are very important. And I'd like to share something very personal. At one of my fundraisers, our previous Premier and Governor General of Canada, Edward Schreyer, came and he said, I met one of your friends—business friends. I said, where did you meet? At one of the Habitat buildings in the US, he said, I met Frank Dottori, who was the founder of Tembec Inc., which is a multibillion-dollar corporation, very busy executive. And he said, two days, they were all working to put nails and, you know, frames on building the housing. So I was moved, and I said, these are the people who have a tremendous amount of pride in contributions, making society better.

And then I hear that President Carter, Jimmy Carter, was here in Winnipeg putting housing together. And I believe that he has got an interest in carpentry, and I do have, but I don't have the skills, Mr. Speaker. But I think that the pride that I take that when you look at—I go back to India and where the mud houses are being built, I remember as a kid when one of the houses were being built, I put a brick onto the wall, and that my contribution was. I came home with a great pride that I have helped that family to build a home.

* (11:50)

So this gives the volunteers a tremendous amount of satisfaction in contributions, but such kind of moves—this kind of initiative in the community makes the community better. It resolves all the problems and conflicts and motivates people to work together and help each other.

So I think that these initiatives, how to build a better world statement by Tommy Douglas, courage my friends, it is not too late—still it is not too late that a lot of people in the world who are poor, who don't have homes, they live on the streets and I witnessed them. I witnessed them there; I witnessed them here. So the world is not far from perfect, but I think we need to really bring such initiatives that motivate people, gives them security and we work together to make that happen.

So I must say, yes, I will not take too much time on this and I think the resolution has to pass unanimously. We are all agreeable to that. I will leave you with that, and I'd like to once again congratulate and thank the member from River East to bring such progressive resolutions and this particular resolution is worth a big applaud. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is there any further debate on the resolution?

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the resolution? *[Agreed]*

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): Yes, on House business, can you canvass the House just to confirm that, indeed, this resolution is passed unanimously?

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to let the record show that this resolution has passed unanimously? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Swan: On House business, could you canvass the House to see if there's agreement to call it 12 o'clock?

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to call it 12 noon? *[Agreed]*

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 24, 2014

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