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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
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EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
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FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
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GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
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ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
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JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
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LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
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WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Point Douglas	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 9, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Madam 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.

Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business, I would ask leave to proceed directly to Bill 208.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to consider Bill 208 this morning, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Continuity of Learning)? [*Agreed*]

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 208—The Public Schools Amendment Act (Continuity of Learning)

Madam Speaker: So we will deal with Bill 208, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Continuity of Learning).

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I move, seconded by the member from Flin Flon, that Bill 208, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Continuity of Learning); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques (continuité de l'apprentissage), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Kinew: I am very happy to rise in the House today to bring forward this bill for second reading. It is a very serious matter because it deals with some of the most vulnerable children in our society. And while it is, you know, maybe just a—an incremental step towards ensuring that those children in care can have a stronger educational opportunity, it is still an important step.

So, essentially, this bill allows for kids in the care of Child and Family Services agencies to stay in the same school that they've already been learning in even if they are moved because they're apprehended or because the foster placement changes or because maybe they're transferred to another caregiver. This is an important step because we have seen through studies, over the past number of years, that the educational achievement for kids in care lags behind that of other children in Manitoba. And, when we think about it, the kids who are in care are really wards of all of us. They are the collective responsibility of Manitobans because they are wards of the state.

And so, seeing as how we have a fiduciary duty to look out for their best interests, I do think it's important that we do all that we can to make sure that they have the proper opportunity to pursue their full potential and to be able to transform their lives for the better.

Now the reason why this bill is important is because, sometimes, when kids are moved out of their homes or they have their placements changed, they're forced to change schools. And, if we could just imagine a young person who's already in a vulnerable circumstance having that one element of continuity in their lives disrupted, I think we realize that that can be very harmful for a young person.

So imagine somebody who has maybe just been separated from their parents, perhaps even separated from their siblings. The one element of continuity, the one element of stability they may have in their lives is the ability to go back to the same school that they were previously studying at, and to have their same friends at the schoolyard and in the classroom to support them through those difficult times, and maybe even the important teachers and counsellors and mentors at the school who play such an important role in the lives of children to maintain a presence through this period of transition and what is, in fact, likely a very stressful time.

Now we know from, you know, the evidence that when children are put into high-stress situations in their early years that this can have, you know, real impacts on their mental health and also their physical health. Many researchers, like Dr. Gabor Maté, who was just in town earlier this week, say that early

childhood trauma is often one of the underlying causes of addiction later on in life.

We also know that the science shows that when you are put into a high-stress environment as a child, that will elevate the stress hormones in your body, like cortisol for instance, and that the effect that that has of increasing, you know, blood flow of, you know, putting increased stress on your body can have real physiological impacts, such as making you more likely to suffer from hypertension later on in life. So that illustrates the stakes, Madam Speaker, that the mental health of children, the physical health of children can be at risk.

Interestingly, studies show that the one—one of the most important interventions you can make for children going through a high-stress experience as a child is to have somebody there to act as a caregiver and to show them some TLC. So, if these young children who are wards of the state are having the family and community supports that they were accustomed to removed from the situation, then it seems to me that we ought to preserve the caregivers who are in their lives at school as being part of their lives.

When I was at the University of Winnipeg, I had the privilege to work with a few remarkable young students who were coming out of the Child and Family Services system, and it was a great pleasure to watch them achieve once they were given the opportunity to attend post-secondary. There was some institutional inertia at the early stages of this program called the tuition waiver program. Some of what I might call the old guard in the institution thought that this was merely accommodation and that we would only be bringing in students who would require more supports and who may, you know, not be positioned to succeed, but, in fact, what we saw is that many of these children outperformed their classmates who maybe had a—more traditional living arrangements as they were growing up.

*(10:10)

So, for instance, we had, you know, a number of these students in the tuition waiver program with 4.0 GPAs or higher, which is certainly a high achievement.

But the reason why I bring it up in the context of this bill here today is because one of these students—and out of respect for her privacy, I'll use a pseudonym in the House today. You know, I could just call her Natalie, I guess. She shared with me her

personal experience growing up and, you know, I'll spare the—my colleagues in the House today the relatively brutal details of neglect and abuse that she suffered as a child. Suffice it to say that she did experience a very rough upbringing and, as a result, out of concern for safety, she was removed from the care of her mother and she was placed in, you know, various foster homes as she was growing up. And she related to me the intense emotional toll that she experienced as a result of being forced to move from foster placement to foster placement, the sense of disconnection that she felt, and even then, as a young adult, the stress that she was going through having been separated from her siblings and now trying to reconnect with them and pull her sisters and herself back together. So, again, like, a personal illustration of some of the stakes of what we're talking about here today, Madam Speaker.

Now, once this young woman was able to find stability with a long-term placement, was able to find stability at school by being allowed to stay in the same school for a few years consecutively, then she was able to achieve dramatic progress in terms of her education. And after having a social worker work with her on her university education, she enrolled at the University of Winnipeg. She got her tuition covered by the tuition waiver kids in care program, and she became very, very successful. She is one of the high achievers that I was talking about who had a high grade point average in the university, and I can tell you that she's now on her way to graduate school. I'm pleased to tell you that I just signed a reference letter for her just a few days ago for her to be able to enter a master's program here in Manitoba.

And so we see the impact that can happen for a young person if we allow continuity of learning. If we create an environment in which they are allowed to have stability at school, we know that young people are smart enough. They have the work ethic. They have the gifts and the talents to succeed, Madam Speaker. What they need more than willpower is a little way power. They need for us in the House and for us in positions of decision-making to be able to help them have a way to success.

And so this young woman—who, for the sake of the debate here in the House today, I'm calling Natalie—she actually did come out and, you know, speak at an event in favour of this program that we ran there, and her words were remarkable. You know, she shared her personal experience growing up. She shared the transformative impact that education had in her life, and she told the assembled

people at the end there a line that I'll never forget. She said, Four years ago, I didn't know what a Ph.D. was. Now I'm on a Ph.D. track, right. And I can think of no better illustration of the importance of education.

And so, if we could keep kids in care in the same schools, we are going to increase their likelihood of finding success and transforming their lives, and I believe that this is a bill that all members of the House can support.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the sponsoring member by any member in the following sequence: first question to be asked by a member from another party; this is to be followed by a rotation between the parties; each independent member may ask one question; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for introducing the bill.

I would like to ask him if he has looked at The Protecting Children Act (Information Sharing) to see whether he believes this act makes the introduction of this bill irrelevant.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Yes, we looked at it and we still believe that this Bill 208 is important to bring forward.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Could the member from Fort Rouge—and I want to congratulate him for bringing this bill forward today—tell us why this bill is important for strengthening supports for children in Manitoba?

Mr. Kinew: Well, having spoken to educators, you know, they relate to me some of the challenges around, you know, keeping kids who are involved with the CFS system not only in class but also up to speed with what their peers are working on so, certainly, educational attainment is an important one. But also speaking to some people who work as advocates for children, it was pointed out to me that this bill may actually decrease the instances of missing children in our province because if students aren't being bounced back and forth between different schools, they're less likely to fall through the cracks.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): With respect to the schools in Steinbach, the admin—the staff

were great. My concern is the trustees within the HSD school system. Steinbach has a high number of CFS children. My concern, obviously, is for the LGBTQ CFS children at the Hanover School Division. How do we protect those kids?

Mr. Kinew: Well, I think that the Human Rights Code of Manitoba has to be, you know, something that we convey to all school trustees as being one of the, you know, foundational documents of the legal structure in our province here. I am confident, you know, having met many of the trustees in Hanover that, you know, they are reasonable people, and if they have the opportunity to, you know, review the Human Rights Code and the prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, I do think that reasonable people at the end of the day do want to do what's right for children and will do the right thing.

Mr. Wishart: I'd like to ask the member, he—no one in his previous government knew for many years that the number of kids in care continued to rise in Manitoba, far out of proportion actually with many other provinces, why they waited until now to introduce a bill that they feel is so absolutely necessary.

Mr. Kinew: Well, I could tell the minister that none of us in the House should be happy with the ever-increasing number of kids in care, and we should all work together to do what's right for children and for communities so that children can be safe, but that they also can have the necessary stability and community support to be successful. And so I do think that this is an important step towards achieving that.

And what I can tell them is I wasn't here prior to the last election, but I'm here now and that's why I'm moving forward on this.

Mr. Allum: I'll fill the Minister of Education in in a few minutes on the context for this bill.

But maybe the member could tell us, if he could, who he's consulted with this bill and what are the origins of this resolution.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, you know, I've reached out to, you know, people in the child welfare industry, if you will, child welfare agencies, spoken to educators, people who are working in school divisions, both I guess on the admin level and also in the class level, who are in school divisions with a high number of kids in care to hear from them what their, you know, concerns are. And, essentially, you know, they

favour the implementation of the recommendations that have been made by, you know, various reports issued over the past number of years, whether those were by a commissioner or by, you know, Kevin Lamoureux of the University of Winnipeg, and so this is—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

* (10:20)

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It gives me great pleasure to stand up and ask this member a question.

I'm going to ask the member: Why do members opposite believe that this change is necessary through legislation? Does he not realize that working co-operatively with school boards can achieve the exact same thing?

Mr. Kinew: I mean, the same argument could be made about The Protecting Children Act that was passed last session, and yet we all stood together to support it because there is a legislative framework required for some of these steps, and Bill 208 certainly falls in that category. And so, in as much as we were able to work together to ensure passage of The Protecting Children Act, I think that, again, this is not a partisan bill. This is more of a positive step that all parties can get behind, and so I would hope that we can work together on this bill as well.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I thank the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) for bringing this forward. I have seen circumstances where this would have made a significant difference in a child's life, and I think it's important that we support this initiative.

But I do have a question, and the question is this: That this doesn't mandate that the child stays in the same school, but it enables it. Who makes the decision? I mean, is this the CFS worker, is it the biological parent, is it the foster parent? How does the decision get made?

Mr. Kinew: I appreciate the—you know, the detailed, policy-oriented question.

It's difficult to set out now who the decision maker would be without knowing the particulars of the case, but essentially the legal guardian in conjunction with the social workers and the school would collaborate on a decision. I think that's maybe the best way to respond to the member's question at this point.

There may be instances, like I—for instance, an example was shared with me whereby the transportation for a new caregiver—in this case, I believe it was a grandparent for the child—the transportation burden was too much for them to stay in the same school, so in that case, it made sense for the child to change schools. But, again, it has to be on a case-by-case basis with the best interest of the child in mind.

Mr. Wishart: My question to the member is that he just referenced the fact that the previous to The Protecting Children's Act that school boards could actually do this co-operatively.

But, in fact, the legislation of the time actually prevented any sharing of information between school boards. So only since The Protecting Children's Act that that would become an option, and, accordingly, we believe that The Protecting Children Act made this something that can be done, actually, co-operatively by regulation.

Does the member not agree with that?

Mr. Kinew: Well, I agree that this is a bipartisan issue that I'm sure the minister would be happy to vote in favour of. Again, this is about ensuring that kids in care in our province have the best possible opportunity to reach their full potential by way of having their educations proceed with the minimal amount of disruption possible. In this case, enshrining it in legislation is an important step towards ensuring the continuity of learning is a reality for kids in care in our province.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): My question would be if the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy's report entitled The Educational Outcomes of Children in Care in Manitoba was released June 2015, the NDP didn't act on that at that time. Months and months went by.

You know yourself the legacy of the party that you belong to and how over the 17 years, there's been an increased—

Madam Speaker: Order please.

I would just remind the member that questions should be directed through the Speaker and avoid doing a direct response using the words 'you' and 'your' to a member.

Thank you.

Mr. Teitsma: Apologies, Madam Speaker. Thank you for that correction.

My question would be for the member, then: Why would he want to belong to a party that has that kind of legacy, that has increased the number of children in care, that has failed to act, when, instead, our party has acted immediately? Why would you want to be a member, much—why would he want to be a member, much less, lead it?

Thank you.

Mr. Kinew: Well, I'm happy to be a member of the party of Tommy Douglas, who brought universal single health—single payer health coverage.

I'm proud to be a member of the party of Stephen Lewis, who stood shoulder to shoulder with people in South Africa to end apartheid and to bring HIV coverage to more than 10 million people across the globe.

And, yes, I am proud to be a member of this Manitoba NDP caucus.

Madam Speaker: The time for questions has expired. Debate is open.

Debate

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): Well, Madam Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise to put a few words on record regarding Bill 208, introduced by the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), and I know he shares our concern about children in care, and certainly we know that Manitoba has a large number of children in care, over 10,000, certainly well out of proportion with other provinces in terms of the number of children in care, a real cause for concern.

And I know that he's also aware that children that are touched by the CFS system have poorer results in the education system, in fact, quite dramatically poorer results in terms of their success rate in graduating from high school, and I think that's a sign that we need to make changes to make sure that they every opportunity. We don't want—as he's referenced—we don't children that we as a government, we as a Province are responsible for to be disadvantaged simply because we found it necessary to apprehend them, move them.

We want to make sure that we are there to make sure that they have educational opportunities whether they be in the K-to-12 system or, as he's referenced, opportunity beyond the K-to-12 system in the post-secondary system because we want them to be successful in the long term. It's benefit for

them, absolutely, benefit for their family and benefit for all Manitobans.

So we certainly are looking for opportunities to make sure that these children have every opportunity in the system. Accordingly, with the leverage and opportunity that was created by The Protecting Children Act, the information sharing that is associated with that, and it was one of the things that we actually had in mind during the process of developing the act to make sure that it was easier for kids to stay in the system.

I know from my time as critic for Family Service in the previous government that there were a lot of kids that were lost in the education system during the process of CFS, some of it driven by the nature of the system. It is very, very common to get six month temporary orders when a child is apprehended, so they often get enrolled in school in their first placement with foster families. But that doesn't always work out, and so as we all know, kids in the CFS system actually often have very many foster families and are moved fairly frequently until they find a stable environment, and some never do.

And so, when they're moved, very often if it's a considerable distance then we're in another school division, some quite distant from the original one—where possible, in the past where they'd stay in a local area they continue on in their school division and that's always relatively easy to do.

But, when they're moved to another one, the process of providing information actually falls to the school division, falls to the social worker, and it's been kind of past practice to wait and see how this—the placement works out before they actually enrol the kids in the school division. So sometimes we were seeing delays of—six months was quite common. If you track the child back through the education system to see where they had been enrolled and when, you would actually find that there was often six-month gaps in there when they were not actually enrolled in school anywhere.

And I know that the member is concerned about that and, certainly, as Education Minister, I'm very concerned about that. The loss of continuity is, especially at that time period, pretty much guarantees that a child will lose the advantage for that particular year of going to school and it certainly will set them back in the whole process. We know that that's traumatic and they've already received, as the member has said, quite a dramatic trauma in their life be—by being apprehended and moved from place to

place, and, certainly, that's something that we need to deal with.

And we believe that The Protecting Children Act now gives us the ability to make this happen, actually, by regulation and co-operation far more so than was before because now the information is actually available to Education as one of the participants under that act with families and, of course, a number of other departments are as well.

* (10:30)

So we can work together in a much more co-operative manner and we believe that that's what government should do. Government shouldn't operate in isolation and in silos, and we should remember that the person that we're all focused on helping is actually the child, that we need to do whatever is necessary to make that work within the system.

So we think that we can accomplish a good portion of, in fact, everything that this bill is suggesting, simply by working in a co-operative manner through regulation, if necessary. In fact, we don't even think it might need regulation other than to inform the different school divisions that this is now in place; this is how it will work. So it's more a matter of information sharing and making the school divisions aware that this legislation now has the ability to—for them to get the information that before they were restricted from getting simply because of privacy issues. And that was one of the intents on The Protecting Children Act, whether it involved education, whether it involved the justice system, and whether it involved health. All of these things were rolled in together.

So I would certainly commend the member for being concerned about children. I'm concerned about children, in particular, CFS children, who, we know, have been at a disadvantage in the system previously. But I think that The Protecting Children Act has great potential in terms of working with—interdepartmentally to deal with these types of problems, and I would encourage the member to give this process a little time to take place. It's already started, and we will certainly be pursuing it aggressively to make sure that every child that is currently in the system—and we know we have too many CFS kids in the system—has the option and the advantage that we can put in place for them. We think it's very important.

I know that the previous government did come up with a bill in this area. It never seemed to get brought forward, so it died on the Order Paper at the end of their government's life. I think it's the fact that we have already, in the few months that we have been government, brought in legislation that will deal with this and actually make it work—make the departments work together better—is a very strong indication of how important this is to our government. We feel a responsibility towards the children in care that is significant, and we want to make sure that they have every advantage, every opportunity in life.

I think it's absolutely critical that, as a government, that we work in a co-ordinated manner between various government departments to make sure that we can make these things work better. It isn't a question of passing separate pieces of legislation all the time. We would just end up with a patchwork that doesn't actually deal specifically with the child and specifically with the trauma of that child. I am absolutely in favour of doing whatever is necessary to minimize the trauma to the children in care, whether it's the original apprehension and, in that regard, I know that our Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding) is working very hard to make sure that supports are better for the families in the future so that the number of children that are apprehended into the future actually is reduced. And I think that's a better long-term solution, and I'm sure the member probably supports that as well.

But we do not feel that this piece of legislation is necessary. We believe we have covered off this problem with The Protecting Children Act, and we do not think a piece of legislation that effectively would be redundant in terms of dealing with the problem that we believe we already are in the process of dealing with is necessary. So, at this time, we will not be supporting this piece of legislation.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): First of all, I want to commend my friend from Fort Rouge for bringing this important piece of legislation forward. It is a reflection of his dedication and his commitment to improving the well-being of every person in this province, whether it's a kid in CFS or anything else, and I thank him for doing it.

I want to say that I couldn't be more disappointed by the Minister of Education's response to what is, really, a very sensible, common sense thing to do. His suggestion that the sharing of

information act covers off on this is nonsense. I would ask him to point to the regulation, outside of a very, very broad regulation that would allow the government to pretty much do anything at any time anyways, to tell us where exactly this would fit in. The obligation is on the minister to do that, and I invite him to educate the House as to how that might happen.

The second and other issue that needs to be addressed here, of course, is that the reason they don't want to do it is because they don't want to spend any money. Now, this doesn't require any expenditure; we're not allowed to do this from that side of the House, to commit the government to spending money. That's as it should be. But he knows full well that you need an envelope of dollars to support transportation needs within the school division in order to make this—the recommendations in this act work.

And so, as typical with cutting funding to education as they've already done, they won't spend another red cent on the people who actually need our supports. And I know that my friend from Lac du Bonnet who wanted to be Education minister, but isn't, agrees with me on this. And I just want to correct the member from Radisson a little bit. To give him some context—he wasn't here, so it's only fair. His notes weren't complete, as usual.

In fact, there was, from—the Canadian Centre for Health Information did put out a very important point. Government was a big part of that report in the first place, and immediately thereafter, the Department of Education established a task force called the Manitoba Task Force on Educational Outcomes of Children in Care. It included a recommendation on this page, which they'll—on this issue, which they'll find on page 20 and 21, that included a series of other recommendations as well that we were, in fact, proceeding with until other events intervened and we weren't able to get to it. And opposition at the time was—

An Honourable Member: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Yes, I believe the member opposite just referenced the absence of the member, and I don't believe that is something that is permissible.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Official Opposition House Leader): I—you know, I think the reference was to the fact that the member is—that the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) is actually a new member of this House as of the last election, that he was not here prior to the last election. That was the reference that the—our member used.

Madam Speaker: I have to indicate on this point of order that I did not hear any such comments being made, not to indicate that perhaps they weren't made, I just did not hear it and I apologize for that. But also to indicate and just to remind everybody that when we are speaking in the House, there is to be no reference made to the presence or absence of a member in the Chamber.

* * *

Mr. Allum: Just for purposes of clarification, I did refer to the member from Lac du Bonnet, because he as Education critic would know fully and completely about the Manitoba Task Force on Educational Outcomes of Children in Care, and I was just reminding him of that. And for the member from Radisson who wasn't elected in the last session, I was just saying he wasn't a member of this Legislature at the time. So we would invite the House leader to listen more closely in future.

I don't want to go—continue at length, because I think it's really important that we vote on this bill and we vote positively for it. But I just want to say that that task force was chaired by Kevin Lamoureux, who's now vice-president for Indigenous Affairs at the University of Winnipeg. We on this side of the House call him the good Kevin Lamoureux, but perhaps out of my respect for my friend from Burrows, we'll call him Kevin Lamoureux the younger for this purpose—as well as from Tammy—by Tammy Christianson, who is the executive director of Ndinawe.

And that task force had intensive consultations, and I just want to go through with some of them: Winnipeg School Division; Seven Oaks School Division—these were all participants on the task force—Education and Advanced Learning, of course; Manitoba Centre for Health Policy; Metis Child and Family Services Authority; Voices: Manitoba Youth in Care network; First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority; General Child and Family Services Authority; Manitoba Teachers' Society; First Nations of Southern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority; Manitoba Association of School Superintendents; Pathways

to Education; from CETA, task force Manitoba Foster Family Network; family nation—First Nations of Manitoba—southern Manitoba Child and Family Services authority; Student Services Administrators' Association of Manitoba; Marymound; Manitoba family services and the Manitoba School Boards Association.

* (10:40)

All of those organizations participated in the task force, came up with this recommendation. If it's good enough for them, Madam Speaker, it's good enough for this side of the House, it should be good enough for the Minister of Education as well.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): I come from the North, obviously, and I would support anything that enables our children to remain in our own communities, and so I just wanted to congratulate the member for bringing this forward. You know, I want to work diligently and hard for residents of the North.

I brought up the fact that I live in Steinbach. My kids attend the SRSS, the SMS schools. The teachers and the administration are wonderful people and they work very hard. And it is very disheartening, you know, there is a large portion of kids in care in our—in those school systems. And, currently, my son right now is completely missing his best friend because his best friend is no longer in class, and we have no idea where he is and no recourse as to find out what's going on with this one child.

And my thought, always, as a First Nation person is, you know, that's a fear we live with: our indigenous kids getting taken for, you know, perhaps a racist person wanting to get revenge on the mother. I know I was subject to that myself. A racist person called CFS on me simply because I wouldn't discipline my child in a way that she saw fit. I simply spoke to my child and put that—my child in a time out. That was not appropriate, according to the other parent, and so CFS was called on me. Obviously, I didn't lose my children, but, you know, that very real fear, it has always been instilled when you live in a place where there is still rampant racism.

And so the more that we can keep these kids in the communities that they know, that they love, you know, I believe in the attachment theory. I believe that an impact in a young child's life carries with them forever, and it—and the stress of being in a new situation, living on guard with that increased,

accelerated rate of stress forever impacts a child and carries with them into their adulthood.

And so I support the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) and thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Due to the fact I did not have my mic turned on, I am going to have to repeat that.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 208, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Continuity of Learning) act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Madam Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Madam Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Madam Speaker: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Maloway: A recorded vote.

Madam Speaker: A recorded vote having been called, call in the members.

Order, please.

The question before the House is second reading of Bill 208, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Continuity of Learning).

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Allum, Fontaine, Gerrard, Kinew, Klassen, Lamoureux, Lathlin, Lindsey, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Saran, Selinger, Swan, Wiebe.

Nays

Bindle, Clarke, Cox, Cullen, Curry, Eichler, Ewasko, Fielding, Friesen, Goertzen, Graydon, Guillemard, Helwer, Isleifson, Johnson, Johnston, Lagassé, Lagimodiere, Martin, Michaleski, Micklefield, Morley-Lecomte, Nesbitt, Pedersen, Pivniuk, Reyes, Schuler, Smith, Smook, Stefanson, Teitsma, Wharton, Wishart, Wowchuk, Yakimoski.

* (11:00)

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Yeas 15, Nays 35.

Madam Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 3—Support for Refugees and Newcomers

Madam Speaker: The hour is now 11 a.m. and the time for private members' resolutions.

The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on support for refugees and newcomers, brought forward by the honourable member for St. Johns.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be—[interjection] Sorry. Okay, it's good; nobody heard me anyway.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. John's.

Ms. Fontaine: I move, seconded by the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew),

WHEREAS Canada has a long history of welcoming refugees and immigrants, with a national identity built on the values of diversity, acceptance and tolerance; and

WHEREAS the Federal Government and the Canadian Parliament have advanced these values by welcoming thousands of Syrian refugees and announcing a strategy to provide asylum for the Yazidi survivors of the ISIS genocide; and

WHEREAS Manitobans are concerned about the imprudent and unjust travel ban recently announced in the United States which unfairly targets predominantly Muslim nations; and

WHEREAS this travel ban indicates that for the time being the United States cannot rightly be considered a safe country under the standards set out by the Safe Third Country Agreement; and

WHEREAS suspending the Safe Third Country Agreement would be a practical step to provide refugees and asylum seekers with an incentive to present themselves to the proper authorities rather than braving dangerously cold conditions to make their way to Canada and would ease the burden on the residents of Emerson and surrounding communities; and

WHEREAS the current 1,000 person cap on privately sponsored refugees limits the ability of Canadians to respond to the urgent needs of refugees and asylum-seekers; and

WHEREAS all Manitobans call upon the Federal Government to properly support communities, such as Emerson, that are seeing large influxes of asylum seekers and refugees; and

WHEREAS all Manitobans want the Federal Government to continue its efforts in protecting the safety and security of Canadians and ensure that Canada is an open and welcoming place for all newcomers.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to call on the federal government to both immediately remove the cap on privately sponsored refugees and suspend the Safe Third Country Agreement with the United States of America.

Motion presented.

Ms. Fontaine: I'm pleased today to bring forward this resolution to the Manitoba Legislature.

I'm sure that everybody recognizes the global refugee crisis that we're facing across the world. We see it every day in newscasts; millions upon millions of people that are forced to leave their homes, you know, in respect of conditions that they have no control over. I know that all of us have seen the images of incredibly desperate people making decisions to risk their lives on barely what you can call boats to travel from their homeland to places in Europe. We've seen all the images of women and children and men and elders who—their bodies strewn on European beaches or in the Mediterranean. In some respects, I think that maybe we're a little bit divorced, obviously, from that reality because it hasn't—we don't live and see that every single day.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

However, we know that even—that this global refugee crisis has now hit home in our own province, particularly on the border town of Emerson.

So I know that everybody in the House would have heard, back on January 27th, 2017, President Donald Trump's executive order, which is actually called the Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the US. But, actually, after that it's been called the seven country ban. So I know that everybody must, or I would hope that everybody would know about that executive order because it made almost instantaneously international news across the globe and actually put in place massive protests all across the US. Those seven countries are Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Syria.

What people may not know and hasn't garnered as much attention is that actually two days prior to that ban, President Donald Trump signed on January 25th two previous executive orders. The first order is called the Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the US. Now, it's commonly known as the interior enhancement order. The second executive order that was signed is the Border Security and Immigration Enhancement Improvements, which is now being commonly known as the border enhancement order.

So, for some reason, and I'm not entirely sure why media have come to kind of dismiss the previous two bans and solely concentrate on the seven Muslim country ban, but, actually, what's occurred and brings us to why we are seeing an influx of refugees into Manitoba since January is that those three executive orders that were signed by Donald Trump actually present the conditions in which the US is no more—is no longer safe for refugees.

So, if you don't know about those first two executive orders, some of them—and I'll just go over a little bit of what's in those executive orders and the language that's embedded in those executive orders. So in—when we talk about the interior enhancement order, that order actually embedded language that the US would build more large-scale detention centres for refugees and asylum seekers that are coming into the US. Most people may or may not know that—and I think that there's kind of this—people honestly don't have a clue of what goes on for refugees when they enter the US. So a lot of people think that you enter your refugee status, you seek asylum and then you're just—you're processed a little bit and then you're kind of let go. Actually, that's not what happens. A lot of people that come into the US are actually immediately detained which—in these large-scale detention centres, which, I mean, if I might be so bold, I would suggest that they are the same as

almost a prison. You are not allowed to leave there. You are detained, you know, sometimes with your family. So women and children are detained in these large-scale detention centres while you are processed. And even while you're waiting to get processed, oftentimes you don't have access to legal counsel, so that just extends how long your process takes to be able to make your refugee claimant—your claim.

So what they've done in that first executive order is they've actually said that they want more and more refugees and asylum seekers to actually be detained, and so much so that they have embedded in there, as I said, the ability to build more large-scale detention centres. So what does that mean for people that are coming into the US? It means that if you're route that you're leaving your country because of fear of prosecution and violence and persecution, for a myriad of different reasons that people have, and so your route makes—comes from, you know, you end up in South America and you come through Central America, you end up in Mexico, your first country of entry is the US. And so the Safe Third Country Agreement means that you have to process your asylum and your refugee claim in the US. This interior enhancement order makes it that it is no longer safe for refugees.

And what I should point out and perhaps—and I apologize I didn't mention this in the beginning, is that the Safe Third Country Agreement was signed between the US and Canada. It was initially signed in December of 2002 and it came into force in December in 2004. But that whole agreement, which is a way to kind of manage refugee claims, was predicated upon that both the US and Canada were safe for refugees and asylum-seekers so that if asylum seeker X came into the US, their application would be processed equitably, fairly and safely. That's what the safe country, third—the Safe Third Country Agreement is predicated upon, this understanding that both the US and Canada are safe. So the first executive order that was signed on January 25th, that interior enhancement order, actually dissolves that. It is no longer safe for refugees and asylum seekers.

The other piece that was signed, the executive order, the border enhancement order, actually gives states—it actually extends the—and really deputizes states' ability to be the—to be able to enforce federal laws. So what that means is that it will now penetrate bigger areas of the US. And one of the things that happens is that it's at the discretion of these

individuals, law enforcement, border services—and, again, at this point we're not even sure who all is going to be a part of this piece.

* (11:10)

It's at the discretion on whether or not you feel that this refugee or this newcomer or this immigrant is maybe a little bit suspicious based on your own ethnocentric world view of what that person presents in front of you. So now Joe Smith, whoever that is, if Joe Smith doesn't happen to like or feels a little bit shaky about the individual that they're coming in with, that Joe Smith has the ability to detain that immigrant or that refugee or that asylum-seeker. And they are deputized to do that. So the question becomes, does that make it more safe for refugees and asylum-seekers? And I would suggest to you, and so would the Harvard Law Review immigration and refugee clinic would suggest to you that it is no longer safe for refugees and for asylum-seekers.

One of the other pieces that these previous—these two executive orders also talked about was that you can now, and again it's embedded in the language, is that they want to criminally prosecute more refugees and immigrants. So, for instance, as we just celebrated International Women's Day, let's say I'm an immigrant, my application hasn't been processed, but I'm getting the living crap beaten of me every single day by my partner. I am less inclined to call the police because that is a criminal matter. So not only will I be deported or detained, so will my abuser. So it is actually putting women's lives, immigrant women and refugee women's lives at risk along with their children.

So all of this to say that the Safe Third Country Agreement is no longer—it is no longer, it's not safe for refugees and asylum-seekers. And so we have a responsibility as Manitobans to call upon the federal government to immediately revoke or suspend that Safe Third Country Agreement so that we can have refugees and asylum-seekers actually present themselves to border services Canada in a legal way so that they don't have to go through these measures of crossing through frozen farm fields pregnant and with their children.

Miigwech.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Sorry, the question period is up to 10 minutes, and will be held and the questions may be addressed in the following sequence: The first question may be asked by a member of another

party and any subsequent questions must follow the rotation between parties. Each independent member may ask one question, and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): My question for the member is why the NDP government in previous years did not work to address this ongoing situation as rates of refugee claimants jumped by 110 per cent from 2014 to 2015?

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): So perhaps the member didn't hear any of my explanation, but actually things have shifted in respect of the election of President Donald Trump and the executive orders that he only just signed a couple of months ago.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Just further to that, I'd like to ask the member exactly how have the recent moves by the Trump administration to order travel bans and threaten deportation impacted Canada, and specifically Manitoba.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech to my colleague for the question.

So what we've seen now is that there is an environment of fear in the US so that immigrants and refugees and asylum-seekers see and understand—and, first off, they see it every single day in respect of the language and the narrative of hatred that we're seeing in the US. But they do feel that it is unsafe for them to stay in the US any more. And so they are making those dangerous checks—treks into Manitoba because they just understand that it is no longer a safe environment for them in the US.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Does the member for St. Johns and her colleagues there see any unforeseen consequences related to stating publicly that the United States cannot rightly be considered a safe country?

Ms. Fontaine: No, and I do want to point out that I'm not the only single person in this country that is saying that the US is unsafe for refugees and asylum-seekers. I would encourage everyone in this room to read the Harvard Law Review and what they've proposed and actually read the letter that they wrote to our Prime Minister to immediately revoke and suspend the Safe Third Country Agreement because, as in their words, it is unsafe for them to do so in the US any longer.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Yes. The member for St. Johns talked about some of the stories that we've seen in the media of people walking across frozen

fields or getting along the frozen river to try and get into Canada.

Could the member tell the House how would that change if, indeed, action was taken to suspend the Safe Third Country Agreement with the United States of America?

Ms. Fontaine: If Canada were to immediately revoke or suspend the Safe Third Country Agreement, instead of individuals choosing to trek through really dangerous conditions, particularly in the midst of our Manitoba weather—winter weather—they would actually just be able to go to the Emerson border crossing, to Canadian Border Services, and say I'd like to make a refugee claim. And they'd be processed legally and would not have to be able to put themselves through very, very risky situations and actually risk their lives.

Mr. Jon Reyes (St. Norbert): Yes. I just want to know, have any of the members of the NDP personally visited the community of Emerson or the town of Altona since the start of 2016?

Ms. Fontaine: One of our members have, and I've been spending the last—I do want to just point out that I just became the immigration critic in the last month and since then, I've been meeting with different refugee organizations here in Manitoba, including last night hearing directly from newcomer youth on what they want to see happen in respect of this refugee crisis.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the member from St. Johns for bringing this resolution forward. It is very interesting. I'm happy that we're discussing it here in the House.

My question is: You refer to the Harvard Law recommendations, if I'm correct? Who else have you consulted with prior to bringing forth the resolution? Have you talked with the Welcome Place in MANSO who have been so hands-on with this?

Ms. Fontaine: So it is called the Harvard Law Review immigration and refugee clinic, and I would suggest that members do read it. It's only about 12 pages, but it really does map out some of the concerns and, as I said, I have been meeting with some of the refugee organizations and elders in the community, and based on everybody that I've met with, everybody so far is wanting the Safe Third Country Agreement revoked or suspended.

Mr. Wiebe: Further to the comments from the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), I know myself I've met with individuals and groups that are providing services for refugees. As well, I know others in our caucus have. I'm sure members opposite have.

But, specifically, can the member talk about whether the suspension of the safe third party agreement has support from local officials in Emerson?

Ms. Fontaine: I think that we've all, as we've watched this unfold on the news almost every single night, we understand and see the reeve of Emerson many times talk about the suspension of the safe third country review. So I would imagine that they do have the support or they would like to see that.

Mr. Teitsma: I would like to ask a question further to what the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) brought up, which is consultations with those who are affected, specifically in—on the Canadian side of the border.

Have herself or other members of the NDP met with stakeholders there and interviewed them to find out how this resolution may or may not assist them?

And then, also, I appreciate the work of the Harvard Law Review, but my question is: Is there been any documented examples—concrete examples—or is this simply fear mongering?

Ms. Fontaine: I don't even know how to respond to that last question. Clearly, the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) isn't watching the news or isn't seeing the images that most of us that actually pay attention are seeing every single day. And I don't know what he thinks fear mongering is, but when a woman chooses to trek in winter—in the dead of winter—with her baby or her toddler or being pregnant, clearly there's a problem. And for the member to be saying that we're fear mongering is so irresponsible.

* (11:20)

Mr. Swan: I wonder if the member for St. Johns could tell the House some ideas of how government can work with the strong community organizations in Winnipeg and elsewhere in Manitoba to actually help support those seeking asylum and refugees in the province of Manitoba.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that question. So I do want to acknowledge that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) did make an announcement about a week and a half ago, I think, in respect of some—I would imagine

and I would hope, some preliminary resources to organizations.

I do want to point out though that those organizations have been operating for months now beyond capacity and have gone above and beyond the duty that—above one hundred per cent. This government has to be able to support and give additional resources to be able to support the amazing work that they're doing to be able to advocate and really settle refugees and newcomers.

I think that we all have a responsibility to show our humanity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Teitsma: Just by way of clarification so that my words are not misinterpreted. I certainly do not want to underestimate the—what these refugees are going through and the choices that they're making. I understand that they're very difficult.

My question—first part of the question I would like still to have answered by the minister, which is, has there been any consultations by herself or other members of her caucus with the people down in Emerson or on the Canadian side of the border? Thank you.

Ms. Fontaine: So again, I'm going to repeat myself in one of the previous answers. I know that some of our caucus members have gone down to Emerson. I haven't had an opportunity to go down just yet. I do plan to go down there at my earliest opportunity, and as I said previously, I have been meeting with refugee and newcomer organizations, and again, including last night sitting with youth and hearing the really important voices of newcomer youth on what they would like to see with this global crisis.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): Your last—the resolution part, would this be—when we call upon the federal government, is this going to be a temporary or an indefinite period of time?

Ms. Fontaine: I thank the member for the question. It's actually a really good question. I appreciate that.

I guess, you know, in the immediate I would like to see the safe third country immediately suspended, and I think that the Government of Canada has to do some soul-searching and really be honest and courageous on whether or not they really truly believe that the US is still safe for asylum seekers to process their claims there. We have to really be honest about this issue and about what we're seeing

across the globe, but certainly what we're seeing just across the border in respect of some of the really atrocious language and behaviours of hatred towards newcomers and immigrants.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for question period has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate is open. Any speakers?

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Just to start, I want to talk about the—really, the strength of it being a strong indigenous woman who's brought this resolution forward this morning.

You know, as we speak, about continuing to welcome people to the province of Manitoba, maybe there's nothing stronger than having an indigenous person, of course, of those who welcomed all the rest of us to the province of Manitoba at one time or another. I think that speaks volumes about the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine). It also speaks volumes about the things we can do right in Manitoba and in Canada.

In my comments, I want to make it clear that there's no suggestion by the member for St. Johns or anyone on the opposition side that this is the fault of the provincial government. Despite the comments that one member made, I don't think there's any suggestion this is the fault of the previous provincial government. This is a situation though which is impacting Manitoba and there is no question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but that it has been thrust upon Manitoba by events following the election of a new president of the United States.

And it is unfortunate that certain things which have been done which have been said and, as the member for St. Johns pointed out in some detail, the signing of certain executive orders and events which have happened surrounding and following that time have unfortunately given many Canadians and many people around the world fears that I'm afraid the United States is not a safe place for many refugees who went there to try to find safety from the persecution, the oppression, the violence and the threats in their home country, and that does call upon action.

The member for St. Johns' resolution accepts that that is, frankly, not an action that the Province of Manitoba can take on its own. We don't have control over how many privately sponsored refugees are able

to settle in the province of Manitoba. That will require action by the federal government.

Manitoba alone cannot amend or revoke or suspend the Safe Third Country Agreement; it can only be the federal government. But how important it is, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Given the statements that I've heard members from all sides of this House make about the strength of welcoming refugees, and it's—again, it's not just members in the New Democratic Party, it's members of the Progressive Conservative caucus, it's members of the Liberal caucus. We have stood and we have applauded as there have been people in the gallery that we've welcomed to this country.

And we need to work together, to speak together, to make it clear to the federal government that Manitoba believes that we can do better, and that we, as we conduct these proceedings in the shadow of the Museum for Human Rights, that we are passionately committed to the principles of diversity, to multiculturalism and the defence of human rights.

And sometimes that's easy. Sometimes it's easy as we walk to Folklorama and we fill our foods with food and we enjoy shows. And sometimes it's easy when we get invited out, as I know the member for Gimli (Mr. Wharton) and I will be at the Irish Association gala dinner this weekend. Sometimes that's easy work, and it's fun work.

And sometimes it's not so easy and it's not so clean. And the people that are now arriving in Manitoba carry with them not physical baggage, but they carry with them emotional baggage. They carry with them the things that they've seen. And we need to be there. We need to be there to support them. And this is a day we can stand together and truly, truly do the right thing.

Now, what is the difficulty and what are the challenges that are being provided? Well, right now, we have two entirely contradictory laws which are now playing out along the 49th parallel. And, before I go on to that, I do want to say on behalf of our caucus, but I think on all members of the House, how much we appreciate what the people of Emerson are going through. And we have seen stories of how they've opened their homes, their businesses and they've welcomed people at all hours of the night. I know the people in Emerson have big hearts. They're simply saying, you know, there comes a limit on what we as one community are able to do. We know just the other day the town of Gretna welcomed someone

who'd walked across the border. It may be that other border communities are going to face the same thing.

Why is it that refugees are coming across the border at night, up the Red River, across frozen fields? Well, they're coming here because there are two laws, which I suppose we'd say are mutually exclusive. One is that if you are a refugee arriving from the United States, it is your obligation to present yourself to the nearest border station, which, of course, is outside of the town of Emerson between Interstate 29 and Highway 75. Well, people who now feel unsafe in the United States, who are seeking safety for themselves and their families, know that if they simply report to the Emerson border station as it presently stands, they will almost certainly be refused entry to Canada.

It is also the law that if individuals make it into Canada and they present as refugees, they will not be kicked out of Canada, unless, of course, they cannot ultimately prove their claim. And why is that law in place? Well, it's in place because Canada is the signatory to an international treaty dealing with the status of refugees, of people who have come from war-torn nations, people who are escaping persecution, and Canada is a proud part of that treaty. And I don't think anybody in this House would suggest that Canada should shirk its responsibilities and not follow its responsibilities, signing through on that treaty.

* (11:30)

So we have two contradictory pieces of law. How can we resolve that? Well, the suggestion of the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) is the only solution that makes sense, to move to suspend the current safe third-party agreement which has been in place with respect to the border with the United States since 2004, perhaps to suspend it until there is a different regime in the United States, there's a different set of executive orders and there is a different reality in the United States.

If that order—if that agreement is suspended or rescinded, well, then someone who is a refugee can present themselves at the Emerson border station or any other border station and be processed and be protected without having to make the trek across a frozen field at night.

And just because someone is a refugee does not mean that their refugee status will be accepted. Those individuals will still have to prove their grounds for being a refugee. If they commit illegal

acts, which very few refugees do, they will be sent out of Canada.

But it is a fact that we need to call upon the federal government in the current circumstance to rescind this agreement to allow the processing of refugees arriving in Canada to happen in a safe way, to happen in a way it's not going to have the people of Emerson getting a knock on their door at 5 in the morning. I accept the word of the people of Emerson that a great burden's been placed upon them, and that should not be the case.

And what is the other piece of the resolution? The resolution is to ask the federal government to change the cap of 1,000 on privately sponsored refugees. One thousand people is incredibly small in a country the size of Canada and, of course, it's private sponsoring of refugees that has been a hallmark of the province of Manitoba.

If someone comes as a refugee, as I think most people know, they don't get anything more than the equivalent of provincial welfare until they're able, after a year, to be removed from that and go out to work. It's a very, very modest payment by the federal government, and everything else is actually put up by the community, whether it's a faith community, whether it's an ethnic community, whether it's simply a group of people, friends, family who get together to say we're going to do something about this.

And that happens in Manitoba. I don't have the definitive facts at my fingertips, but I'm going to put on the record today that I believe that Manitoba leads the way when it comes to that kind of generosity and that kind of welcoming.

And we should speak as one voice to call on the federal government to lift that cap. But, of course, if there isn't a private sponsor, the person's not going to come in the first place. But, if we are able to have more than 1,000 people sponsored privately—I'm sure we could [*inaudible*] the province of Manitoba alone, but across the country, why wouldn't we take every opportunity to do that?

So I believe that this is a tremendous resolution. It speaks to the reality of us as Manitobans, and I hope all members will support this resolution, and we can—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Jon Reyes (St. Norbert): Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on the

member of St. John's resolution on support of refugees and newcomers.

I'd also like to congratulate the member for St. John's (Ms. Fontaine) on her role as immigration critic for that side of the House.

First of all, I would like to say I'm very proud to represent the constituency of St. Norbert which is rich in diversity, which includes ethnic communities like the French, the Metis, East Indian, Chinese, African, Middle Eastern and many, many other communities, many of them who immigrated to Manitoba.

The southwest quadrant of Winnipeg is one of the fastest growing quadrants in the city, and one of the reasons being that we have a lot of new immigrant families. They chose Manitoba to be their home province, friendly Manitoba.

As we have seen and witnessed, the number of refugee claimants is rising—entering Manitoba through Emerson. Most recently, 19 more refugee claimants went through the border in the adverse, stormy weather conditions. I want to thank my colleague the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon), the town reeve, the local firefighters and emergency services personnel in their efforts helping the refugee claimants and also ensuring the safety and well-being of their local communities.

Since April 2nd of 2016, there have been increasing numbers of refugee claimants seeking asylum in Manitoba. Our government has been proactive in providing support to refugee claimants by way of funding through the—to the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, Welcome Place and the Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations, MANSO.

Last year, some of my colleagues and I witnessed first-hand the services and care provided by Rita Chahal, executive director of the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council and her staff, some of her staff even being former refugees themselves. They are doing a tremendous job and I'm sure all members of the House cannot thank them enough, especially under these circumstances. So thank you, Welcome Place and MANSO.

I also want to thank and recognize the Manitoba Islamic Association through the local mosque in my constituency of St. Norbert, the Waverley Grand Mosque helping out with newcomers and refugees as well.

I cannot forget, as well, to thank the RCMP to help ensure and protect both refugee claimants and the local citizens in the areas affected. I work closely with the RCMP as a member of the advisory council on diversity, so I proudly salute our men and women who wear the red serge. As you can see, many organisations, whether they are non-profit or privately funded, are helping because it is our nature as Manitobans to be welcoming and working together.

Our recent announcements are significant first steps in dealing with the immediate needs of refugee claimants as we seek additional engagement by the federal government.

On February 23, the Manitoba government announced funding to assist with transitory supports. These supports included 14 emergency housing units to address the need of temporary shelter; \$70,000 for Manitoba support-response coordination; \$110,000 for Welcome Place support and provide paralegal services and safe transportation from Emerson to Winnipeg. In order for this to be sustainable we need to support—we need the support of our federal government and we must work hand in hand with the municipalities and the non-governmental agencies to ensure the safety of all refugee claimants entering our province.

So, when I review the resolution brought forward by the member of St. Johns, I notice some clear errors that must be addressed. In the resolution, the member of—for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) states that the current 1,000-person cap on privately sponsored refugees limits the ability of Canadians to respond to the urgent needs of refugees and asylum-seekers. This is factually incorrect.

Currently, the federal government sets a cap for privately sponsored refugees at approximately 2,200 and in recent changes by the federal government, a new cap of 1,000 has been put in place for 2017 on applications for private sponsorship of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. This is due to a backlog and long wait times faced by those applications who are still being processed. Private refugee sponsorships are not all the same. There needs to be clarity from the member for St. Johns to ensure this resolution is correct.

Another issue in the resolution is that the NDP claimed that the US cannot rightly be considered a safe country. Well, this is a concern. The NDP are playing politics for their federal counterparts and trying to drag Manitobans into it. Our government has stepped up by providing additional supports to

organizations offering direct services to 'rushfugee' claimants. Despite the fact that refugee claimants increased by 103 per cent from 2013-14, while in government, the NDP made no mention of the concerns. And despite the fact that refugee claimants increased by 110 per cent from 2014 to 2015, while in government, the NDP had made no mentions of the concerns. And there are still thousands of nominee applications pending approval under the PNP system, a backlog created by the previous government.

Fortunately, one of the successful programs the Filmon government introduced and championed—thanks to former MLA Bonnie Mitchelson—was indeed the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program. The MPNP was Canada's first provincial nominee program and is the path by which the vast majority of economic immigrants come to Manitoba.

I just want to remind my colleagues not on the government side of the House that the PNP is an immigration program under which the Canadian province of Manitoba selects skilled workers who plan to work and live with their families in Manitoba as permanent residents and have demonstrated ability to get a job in their occupation and establish in a local labour market, thereby making an immediate economic contribution to the province.

* (11:40)

Now, we heard members from the other side describing the current PNP as: If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Well, first, we inherited a backlog. Well, I guess that ain't broke. Second, the 'prossing' wait times were 42 months with the previous government. Guess that doesn't need fixing, according to the interim Leader of the Opposition.

Have the members of the previous government ever asked former applicants, immigrants, what jobs they obtained when they started working? Well, I have, and the majority of the applicants who I spoke to were working in the field. They were not trained or unfamiliar with—which leads to stress and anxiety for our newcomers.

Under the improved and enhanced Provincial Nominee Program, under our government, the PNP will expedite application approvals, six months or less for processing and work to address the approximately 170,000 job openings that'll be necessary to be filled by 2022.

Successful applicants will be working right away because of the improvements to the PNP because we

want newcomers to be successful right away. We are on the road to recovery in the right direction. We will repair the services and improve in rebuilding the economy through a more enhanced and improved PNP. For both refugees and newcomers, Manitoba will continue to be the home of hope.

Again, I want to thank all the organizations and groups involved who have worked together with our government for helping us deal with this situation.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): I deeply thank my sister and colleague, the member from St. Johns, for bringing to this House today a very important private member's resolution, that of the support for refugees.

During our time in government, housing supports for refugees, in addition to other assistance, was made concrete in words and actions. Our government supported the construction of Welcome Place, IRCOM 2 and housing complexes on Alexander Avenue, all of these now housing hundreds of refugees as we speak. Likewise, many refugees have also called home many Manitoba Housing complexes located in the Logan constituency in addition to Manitoba Housing buildings located in other constituencies in Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this side of the House, we walk the talk. Why is it important to assist refugees as caring, compassionate, thinking human beings. Supporting refugees is the humane and natural thing to do.

Just imagine one of the world's most tragic and catastrophic disasters of all time: the murder of 6 million Jews during World War II could have been averted if many countries of the world accepted the Jews when they were trying to flee the Nazi regime of Germany. Sadly, our own country, Canada, was one of the countries who turned them away when they tried to enter our country. To the credit of China and the Philippines, they accepted Jews who fled from those countries thanks to the efforts of a caring and quick-thinking Chinese diplomat who was then stationed in Vienna and did so to great risk to his life and career.

Growing up in the Christian tradition, we were told that the Holy Family, Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus, were also refugees who left Nazareth and fled to Egypt, lest the baby Jesus will suffer the same fate of all children two years and under

who were ordered killed by Herod. I would like to hear if the holy book of Quran who also has a story of refugees fleeing their homeland because of persecution and grave threat to their life. Likewise, I'll be interested to hear of other faith communities and indigenous communities included if there are similar stories that we could all learn from.

Over the past few years we have seen graphic footages of fleeing refugees boarding decrepit and rickety boats, and paying mercenaries their life savings and ended up drowned in the Aegean Sea on their way to Greece. I can still see the vivid image of two-year-old Syrian Alan Kurdi, his lifeless body washed ashore. As a mother and grandmother, I can fully appreciate the pain and grief of Alan Kurdi's family and community. I'm sure every colleague here feels the same way too. How painful it is that such tragedy has happened to several, has happened several hundred times over in addition to inhumane beheadings, torturing, raping and killing of innocent civilians in war-torn Syria and other countries in Africa, which are places of strife and extreme violence. No one among us here in this Chamber had experienced such horrific instances in our life.

Extending support and assistance to refugees who have found themselves in those dire circumstances is a very small thing to do in the grand scheme of things.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, tragedies such as those continue in Syria and many other countries, and millions of people, and here we are in Manitoba and we have the time and resources to help.

Many people, our very own citizens, are needing support themselves, and many say therefore charity should begin at home. That is fair comment; indeed, no one, including our very own citizens, should live in third-world conditions because Canada is a first-world country with huge resources. It therefore behooves on us people in government to prevent these things from happening to our own people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that Canadians and Manitobans are passionately committed to the principles of diversity, multiculturalism, and the defence of human rights. Manitoba has a long, proud history of welcoming newcomers around the world. We need to stand together as one House and call upon the federal government to take concrete action to deal with the hundreds of refugees who are coming to our province. Suspending the Safe Third Country Agreement is that concrete step. And it is a

position supported by the local community, notably the Reeve of Emerson, Mr. Greg Janzen.

The UN is ambivalent, as said it—Tom Chedi [*phonetic*], lawyer with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said that the UN doesn't have a position on the agreement but continues to monitor the situation, according to CBC News early this week. But we are not ambivalent. We know that in times of crisis it is important to stand with the most vulnerable, those who need our help. Refugees make up a critical component of Manitoba's newcomer population and are an integral part of our society.

Speaking of refugees who are now flourishing, productive, amazing Manitobans, I can think of so many of them. In one of my conversations with one of the intrepid journalists from Manitoba, he shared with me that his family left Europe because it was not safe for their family to stay in their country. In like manner, many Manitobans like Louise [*phonetic*], Abdi [*phonetic*], Derotta [*phonetic*], and many, many more, they, too, have come here originally as refugees, and now they are citizens helping countless people in the work they do with organizations that help refugees, newcomers and vulnerable members of our community. Manitoba shares a commitment to protect refugees and respond to humanitarian pressures for resettlement.

* (11:50)

In 2016, Manitoba grew to just over 1.3 million people, an increase of more than 16,000 over the last decade. This growth helps keep our economy going and our Manitoba culture thriving.

Since 1999, over 150,000 new immigrants settled in Manitoba. Newcomers to Manitoba have an annual real GDP impact of over \$353 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our diversity is one of our biggest strengths, and our diverse NDP team will work hard for all Manitoba families because everyone matters.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Seine River. Oh, the—before we start, the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway)—Official Opposition Leader—House leader.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business, I'd like to ask if there is unanimous consent and leave to not see the clock

at 12 o'clock and conduct a vote on this important resolution.

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): On House business, Mr. Deputy Speaker, no, the request is denied. We will stick with the usual plan to carry the hour until 12 o'clock.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Leave is denied.

The honourable member for Seine River.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): Good morning, Deputy Speaker.

It is with great pleasure that I speak to the Chamber this morning on the member of St. Johns' resolution, Support for Refugees and Newcomers.

Manitoba has long been a province which supports individuals from all cultural backgrounds. Manitoba has offered many programs for individuals seeking to start in a new country.

I can identify, with my own family and their moving to Canada to settle in a better land and build a future for their family; investment in the promise of bettering what they had; and looking at a promise for growth, happiness and general well-being.

I can further look to my past employment where I had the privilege of meeting and working with many individuals from very different backgrounds and getting to learn their cultures and helping support them as they moved to this new country.

Many services are in existence, like Welcome Place, and offer to assist many families and individuals as they adjust to a new country, a new climate—in general, new ways of doing things. Without these places, many would struggle with basic life—English, finding housing, settling, education, work programs—generally learning how to adjust to the new lifestyle.

Manitobans are proud and have been able to support these new refugees and newcomers through combined efforts with the Province and federal government.

However, Manitoba is currently faced with a growing humanitarian situation which requires a co-ordinated effort by all levels of government and non-government agencies who've—with dedicated federal leadership.

Manitoba is always working to support the citizens. Manitoba continues to support all the

refugees entering our province. Manitoba needs assistance—financial assistance to continue to help families and individuals as they enter Canada. These individuals need support and our government needs funding to enhance these supports.

Manitoba has offered support through provisions of additional funding with—from the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, Welcome Place and the Manitoba association of newcomers organization.

We, as a government, are proud to support the Syrian refugees. The town of 'alona'—Altona, sorry, has welcomed 45 privately sponsored refugees. Many communities have sponsored families and have assisted the families with becoming active members within the community.

We are proud of families and individuals in Emerson who have also assisted the many families who have entered into Manitoba, especially over the last two days with the weather being such; it's been very harsh for these individuals.

As a Manitoban, I am proud to be a part of a province which supports and welcomes diversity. But we need help—financial help—so we can continue to offer core support to these families.

Since April 1st, 2016, there has been an increasing number of refugee claimants seeking asylum in Manitoba. Core support which has been offered through social service programs, health, labour market, training, employment and income assistance, all need additional support so we can continue to help these individuals.

As a government who has worked co-operatively with federal government, municipal counterparts and engage non-government agencies to ensure safety and the well-being of individuals seeking refuge in Manitoba.

Currently, our government continues to seek support from the federal government: support for formalized protocols for better information sharing between provincial authorities and the Canadian border service agencies and the RCMP; enhance supports and reimbursement of associated and transitional costs, including those meant to address emergency shelter needs; extend the duration of the government, allowing Manitoba to recover the costs of legal aid services from the federal government related to refugee claimants; and to work with all levels of government and non-government organizations to ensure refugees and refugee claimants arriving in Manitoba have access to the

core services necessary. Our government wants to ensure families and individuals are able to have the support they most need. Furthermore, the government of education and training continues to work with the communities impacted.

But, however, I do have some concerns with the private member's resolution. The cap for the privately sponsored refugees is approximately 2,200; not the 1,000-person cap as the member from St. Johns had stated.

Another concern I have is the members opposite's claim that the United States is not a safe country. I have a child living in the United States, and she has never once said that she has felt unsafe or afraid while living in that country.

Yet the member—sorry—yes, the number of refugee claimants has increased steadily since 2016. But the issue of these seeking asylum in Canada is not new. Between 2014 and 2015, the number of refugee claimants doubled, and doubled again in 2015 to 2016. During those years, this was not a concern for the NDP government.

Under the current agreement, there is a requirement of continual review to ensure the conditions that led to the designation as a safe third country continue to be met. I would like to know if there has ever been a review, since the election of President Trump, of these regulations.

In closing, I would like to extend a thank you to the many individuals and groups who have supported the individuals entering Manitoba: Welcome Place, Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations, organization partnership Winnipeg, Emerson, its many citizens, volunteers and town council; the United Way of Winnipeg; RCMP and the many faith-based organizations that have supported these individuals.

Thank you.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): I recognize I don't have a whole lot of time, but it's nice to get a few words on the record.

You know, I think that this is a very, very good resolution to bring forward in that it needs to be discussed, but there are a few facts in the resolution that do need to be discussed.

You know, diversity is key here in Canada. Without diversity, we wouldn't have the small businesses and the new ideas and technologies that

we do today. We wouldn't have our traditions and our culture and heritage.

You think about Folklorama, Mr. Deputy Speaker, everyone in this House takes part in Folklorama, whether it's Lohri, Mela or Diwali—these are events that just take place in my own constituency—the heritage and culture that come with newcomers and refugees, it's critical. And that's why we do need to discuss this topic.

You know, as time continues to move forward, we're going to be faced with challenges. And, you

know, I'm really trying to condense everything I have to say, but we need to ensure that the safety and security of Manitobans is kept as the main priority and that Canada continues to be an open and welcoming place for all newcomers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Burrows (Ms. Lamoureux) will have nine minutes remain.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

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