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Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 28, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom, know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Orders of the day. Private members' business.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: As previously agreed, we will start off with resolutions and we'll be dealing with Resolution No. 13, Problem Gambling.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 13—Problem Gambling

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I move, second by the member from Springfield,

WHEREAS over 85 percent of Manitobans have gambled in the last year, and this number has remained high for many years; and

WHEREAS the percentage of gamblers in Manitoba identified as problem gamblers is among the highest in the country; and

WHEREAS almost 50 percent of the people with moderate and severe gambling problems are uneducated about the statistical realities of gambling; and

WHEREAS Manitobans' total per capita gaming revenue is the third highest in the country and well above the Canadian average, indicating that the provincial government has a high dependence on gaming revenue; and

WHEREAS the percentage of Manitoba's gaming revenue distributed to problem gambling education, prevention and treatment is the fourth lowest in Canada and well above the Canadian average; and

WHEREAS the human impact of problem gambling include financial pressures, job loss, family breakdown, increased health-care costs, judicial system's involvement and, and decreased quality of life.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to reduce its dependence on gambling as a revenue source; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to significantly improve its commitment to problem gambling education and prevention.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

There was a few deviations from the, the printed—

Order.

There's a few deviations from the printed resolution. Can we have it as printed?

An Honourable Member: As printed.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. As printed. Okay.

WHEREAS over 85 percent of Manitobans have gambled in the last year, and this number has remained high for many years; and

WHEREAS the percentage of gamblers in Manitoba identified as problem gamblers is among the highest in the country; and

WHEREAS almost 50 percent of people with moderate and severe gambling problems are uneducated about the statistical realities of gambling; and

WHEREAS Manitoba's total per capita gaming revenue is the third highest in the country and well above the Canadian average, indicating that the provincial government has a high dependence on gaming revenue; and

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to significantly improve its commitment to problem gambling education and prevention.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Member for Emerson, seconded by the honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler),

WHEREAS 85—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Graydon: I'm pleased to rise to put a few words on the record about gambling addiction and the importance of doing everything that we can to reduce the prevalence of problem gambling in this province.

Mr. Speaker, it would appear that, that it has—when we look at the statistics, that the, the gambling percentage in Manitoba is very much higher on a per capita basis than it is any place in the country, and it's no secret that Manitobans have a significant portion of the gamblers who are considered to be prom—problem gamblers or addicts.

And in fact, according to the data in the report put out by the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, last year, Manitoba had the highest percentage of gamblers in a province. That, I don't think, Mr. Speaker, is something that we need to be proud of. This is a troublesome news, particularly given the tremendous impact that gambling addiction can have on one's personal and professional life.

Not only, Mr. Speaker, on their personal and professional life, indeed, the social costs of gambling addiction cannot be underestimated. It includes rising—include rising debt, job loss, bankruptcy, family breakdowns, serious health problems and, in worst cases, criminal activity and incarceration.

Mr. Speaker, when we start to, to take a look at the total cost of family breakdowns and the impact that this would have on, on any members of the family, any member of the family, this is—has far-reaching impact and implications. So, we would,

we would certainly want to reduce this as much as we could, even with the worst—the majority of problem gamblers and low-income earners.

So it just adds to the impact of, of the effect on families when their—when the money is wasted in these, in these particular institutions.

The Addictions Foundation, in its report last year, noted that almost 50 percent of the people with gambling problems are uneducated about the statistical realities of gambling. Everybody believes that they can beat the system. Many still believe that the myth that you've been playing a machine for a long time and haven't hit the jackpot, you're due to win. That's simply not true. Unfortunately, not everyone knows that, and it drives them to keep playing, Mr. Speaker.

Government involvement in gambling is also—is about striking in a balance, knowing when to draw the lines. And at one time, Mr. Speaker, it was agreed to in this province that we would, we would use gambling as a tourist attraction, that we would be advertising at the perimeter of our province to encourage people to come—tourism as a destination point. But that seems to have changed dramatically in a short time.

The fact that the current NDP government is so reliant on gaming as a resource—as a revenue source, suggests that the balance is starting to shift too far in one direction. In fact, Manitoba's total per capita gaming revenue is the third-highest in the country, well above the Canadian average.

And worse, according to the *Canadian Gambling Digest* the percentage of Manitoba's gaming revenue, revenue distributed to problem gambling education, prevention and treatment is the fourth-lowest in Canada and well below the Canadian average, Mr. Speaker. But we'll talk about those things in a moment.

*(10:10)

First, I want to talk about a couple of ways in which the current NDP government is failing Manitobans who suffer from gambling addictions. The government's recent decision to install ATMs in the phillips street casino is a prime example of how dependence on gaming revenue has taken the place of responsible government policy under the NDP government. The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, under the guise of safety concerns—safety concerns, Mr. Speaker—recently decided to install ATMs at McPhillips Street Station Casino. In their news

release and subsequent media interviews, Manitoba Lotteries Corporation said that there would—had been about 65 reported safety incidents in recent years where people had to cross a parking lot to go to a nearby ATM.

If people are afraid to leave the premises to go to the ATM across the parking lot, perhaps that suggests that there's a crime problem that's gone unaddressed by the NDP, not an ATM problem, and I wonder if there are many other parking lots in this province or in this city that people are afraid to cross for other reasons, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP tried to go ahead with this initiative back in 2004 but flip-flopped on it after listening to the advice of the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

In a news release dated January 24th, 2004, the NDP stated, and I quote, the MLC will not proceed on a proposal to install automaded—automated teller machines at Club Regent Casino and McPhillips Street Station Casino.

After consultation with professionals at the AFM, concerns were raised regarding the merits of ATMs in our casinos, noted Smith. Our government is deeply committed to work—working in partnership with the AFM in promoting responsible gaming and a result the MLC will not be proceeding on the proposal, unquote.

It looks at this time, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the NDP are trying to subsidize their budget and it looks like they're not listening to the experts. Mr. John Borody, CEO of the Addictions Foundation has again stated his opposition to this move. They're not co—committing to help reduce problem gambling. Instead, they're prioritizing their own reliance on gambling revenue, which goes up every year, and making cash more readily accessible to those who suffer from gambling addictions.

And I'm wondering, Madam Deputy Speaker, if the next move they'll do is just have a slot in that gambling device that they're working on, that they can just slip in a debit card. Is that something that they're looking forward to?

And another suppo—com—component of the, of the government's problem gambling strategy is the Voluntary Exclusion program run by Manitoba Lotteries Corporation in two Winnipeg casinos.

Unfortunately, the program is less than ideal. I would suggest, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we have, we have gone from the type of gambling facilities that were first introduced in Manitoba as a tourist attraction; we have gone to the Atlantic City style gambling program or profile.

And we have a reward system right now that the more you gamble, the more points you get and you can buy TVs and—or you get food or whatever with these reward programs. These type of incentives, I would say, are irresponsible, and I would suggest that the government across the way is morally bankrupt.

I was recently contacted by a Manitoban who is a self-described compulsive gambler. Recognizing that she has a gambling problem and wanting to stop, this individual first signed a voluntary self-exclusion form to bar herself from the casinos. Under this program you're supposed to be able to put your name on a list and you won't be allowed entry into a government run casino. It takes a lot of courage and self awareness to be able to do this, and I commend these Manitobans who have tried to overcome their gambling addictions with this type of tool.

Unfortunately, in this case, the casinos made no effort to ensure that she did not enter the premises. In fact, this individual informs me that she was able to gamble so often that the casino staff knew her by name. When she inquired about this policy in 2001, she received a letter from the Manitoba Lotteries Commission or corporation in—in—indicating that the Voluntary Exclusion program was a gratuitous agreement and could not be enforced. The purpose of this program is to help people. You should be able to enforce things.

It leads one to question how committed this government truly is to reducing problem gambling if this Voluntary Exclusion program cannot be enforced. Government reliance on gaming and revenue and government spending on problem gambling programs, many of, of, of these with gambling addictions, believe that the reason the government does so poorly on preventing and treating problem gambling is because it has vested interest in having people spend as much money as possible in the casino.

And I would go back again, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the Atlantic City style of gambling that we have promoted here in the city of Winnipeg and, with the reward system, this here just, just fortifies what I had said earlier.

As we mentioned in the text of the resolution, Manitoba's total per capita gaming revenue is the third highest in the country and well above the Canadian average. One thing I'll give them credit for, they've been able to advertise and entice more and more people to spend their hard-earned cash chasing a dream at a machine. According to the most recent edition of the *Canadian Gambling Digest*, Manitobans took in \$726 per gaming revenue for every Manitoban over the age of 18. That's a substantial amount of money in this province, Madam Deputy Speaker, an increase over the province's previous last year of 705. In fact, the government's revenue in Manitoba goes up every year. Meanwhile—

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

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act): Madam Deputy Speaker, as the Minister responsible for Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, I'm pleased to stand in this House today and talk about this government's responsibility and our commitment to responsible gaming initiatives in the province of Manitoba, and I will also be pleased to talk about the strides that this government has made since 1999 to ensure that gambling is conducted in this province in a responsible manner.

Gambling certainly is a complex issue, and in Manitoba, as in every other Canadian province, and I believe as in every American state and many other countries, is under government control and regulation because, indeed, there are difficult issues to be dealt with. In Manitoba, as in every other province across the country, there's no question that gaming provides a source of revenue for the government and for communities. It provides a source of employment for communities, and it provides economic development for communities. And as I look across the floor to the members, well, members from all parts of this province, Manitoba Lotteries Corporation provides revenue to those communities, first in terms of economic development but also in terms of supporting those communities, and I can look over at the other side of the House and find a festival in every single riding that the members of the opposition represent. Manitoba Lotteries is there supporting those communities.

Now, having said that, there is no question the entire question of gambling raises moral and social

issues. The great majority of Manitobans enjoy gaming in some form. That may be going to the Casinos of Winnipeg. That may be attending at First Nations run and managed casinos. That may be attending at hotels in their own communities or restaurants or lounges in their own communities. That may be going to Assiniboia Downs and supporting racing in Manitoba. Perhaps it's attending their local legion which may have VLT machines or may run raffles; bingos, raffles that all of us are encouraged to buy tickets any given day to support sports teams or new facilities in a community; church groups. Yes, sometimes even, Madam Deputy Speaker, political parties. Manitobans enjoy purchasing lottery tickets. They enjoy playing Sports Select. The great majority of Manitobans in the past year have engaged in some kind of gambling.

The simple fact, as well, is that most Manitobans who participate in gambling do so for fun and for entertainment. However, there's no question that gambling can be a problem for some Manitobans, a small number of Manitobans, but a serious issue nonetheless, and so I'm very pleased that, over the past 10 years, our government, through the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, through the Manitoba Gaming Control Commission, and through support of the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba has taken a multidimensional, co-operative, and holistic leadership approach to develop and implement new initiatives and measures geared to problem gambling prevention and education.

The Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Melnick), who is very knowledgeable in this subject, will follow with certain comments on specific measures of this government, but I can certainly give an overview of where this government has gone in the past 10 years.

* (10:20)

I want to focus on the record because my friend, the Member for Emerson, has put some comments on the record which, which frankly leave a misleading view of how things in this province work and he talks about reliance on gambling revenues.

And it's interesting to note, Madam Deputy Speaker, that when this government came to office in 1999, gaming revenue as a percentage of total provincial revenue was 3.6 percent. Ten years later, it's actually 3 percent of total provincial revenue, or some 20 percent less than it was after 11 years of Conservative rule in this province. So, indeed, there is no question, there's no question, that the

government relies upon, upon gaming revenue to support our schools, just to build highways, to support every aspect of our Manitoba government, but our reliance from gaming is less than it was in 1999.

As well, and as the Minister for Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) will, will describe in more detail, the support given by the Province of Manitoba, through the Department of Healthy Living, through the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, through the Manitoba Gaming Control Commission, is four times what it was in 1999. That shows a true commitment by this government to dealing with this issue; to making sure that Manitoba is a, is an appropriate and safe gambling jurisdiction.

In 2005, Manitoba became the first province in Canada, first province in Canada to formally entrench responsible gaming policies in legislation. This ensures that Manitoba Lotteries and First Nations casinos adopt and implement responsible gaming policies, including voluntary exclusion, education initiatives, as well as employee training to detect and to assist potential problem gamblers.

We recognize that social responsibility is a key part of this complex industry and we've committed funding, people in ingenuity to develop innovative programs and services focused on prevention, education and service and support for those negatively affected by gambling.

The Lotteries Corporation, AFM and the Gaming Commission each have particular areas of expertise, influence and legislative authority. They're each responsible for distinct initiatives and programs. And our prevention-focused education initiatives form a major part of our social responsibility programming, which also includes treatment, staff training, services for families, on-site education, research and, indeed, public education.

And I'm pleased to have the opportunity, as will the Minister of Healthy Living and other members of my caucus who wish to speak on this, to outline some of the services and resources that have been developed over the last several years by these Manitoba agencies.

Now, Manitoba Lotteries, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the first lottery corporation in all of North America to establish a responsible gaming policy. It continues to be recognized—*[interjection]*

Well, the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) should know that the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation

is recognized, not just across the country, but across North America and the world, as a leader in responsible gaming. So if the Member for Inkster would like to await his turn and put his obviously vast knowledge on the subject, he could listen and he could learn that in Manitoba, the leadership of the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, has been recognized across the world as a leader in the area of responsible gaming. The work that the Lotteries Commission has undertaken in the area of responsible gaming is without equal in Canada and most of the world. *[interjection]*

Well, and I know I hear the opposition members chattering because they remember what Lotteries was like before this government took power in 1999. And indeed, if they will open their ears for once and if they will listen, they will understand a little bit more about what's happened in 1999, under the guidance of this government.

Manitoba Lotteries implemented the first Voluntary Exclusion program in Canada; there are currently almost 900 people enrolled in the program. The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation continually employs emerging technologies and reviews to approach the detecting and responding to voluntary exclusion issues. And, indeed, Lotteries is always looking to improve their efforts and, indeed, they are on the cutting edge of new technologies to ensure that people who choose to voluntarily exclude themselves from casinos can be detected and can be, can be prevented from using the facilities as those individuals, as those Manitobans, have chosen.

The Lotteries Corporation today commits nearly \$6.4 million annually to responsible gaming initiatives, including problem gambling programs and research. And again, this is almost four times, almost exactly four times the funding in 1998-1999. And indeed, there are many other ways that the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation assists Manitobans in becoming educated and becoming aware and for the great majority of Manitobans, continuing to enjoy gambling, which is certainly a very, very popular entertainment product. And, indeed, despite the comments of the Member for Emerson, continues to be a tourist draw, continues to encourage people from beyond Manitoba's borders to come to Manitoba and enjoy our safe facilities, good entertainment, great food and a, indeed, a great experience.

Now, I see already, Madam Deputy Speaker, that my time is coming to an end. So, certainly, we'll

hear from other members of caucus. We may hear what words of wisdom or pearls of wisdom the opposition members have. Again, an opposition which spent one-quarter of what this government is spending on responsible gaming, the govern—the Conservative government, of course, that introduced casinos to Manitoba, the Conservative government which introduced VLTs to Manitoba, I will be interested to hear what else they have to say. And, indeed, indeed—[interjection]

Well, oh, I hear the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) would like to put rural hotels and rural restaurants out of business. I see the Member for Brandon West is adopting the position of John Loewen when he was in this House, and the Member for Brandon West is looking to put rural communities at risk and putting rural businesses out of business. I look forward to hear what the Member for Brandon West has to say and, indeed, what other members have to say on this important resolution.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Madam Speaker, this is a very important and difficult topic for all Manitobans to be faced with. Gambling is, especially when it becomes problem gambling, is a very difficult thing for families, for individuals and, unfortunate to hear the Member for Minto and his crass, petty politics that he plays when he talks about rural hotels.

I would like to actually point out to the Member for Minto, the minister that, never once, never once did he talk about families; never once did he talk about the impact that gambling has on families and, you know, what we are faced with is a cold, heartless government that doesn't look at the victims, doesn't look at the damage, the carnage that is left behind when problem gambling is allowed to get out of control. The minister gets up and crows about the fact that never before have we had to spend so much money on problem gambling, and that all took place under this government, under this government that's got—they are, by far, the biggest addicts of gambling out of all of the victims. This is a government that is so dependent, that is so addicted and this minister should be ashamed of himself. Never once did he talk about the victims. Never once did he talk about the children who are denied a birthday gift, who are denied a Christmas gift, who are denied basic necessities, whose families have to go into, into line-ups to go get groceries because one of the

parents or both the parents have a gambling addiction.

And the Minister for Healthy Living sneers at it all. Shame on her. She knows full well that the carnage that takes place with the—with the kind of addiction that's been driven up by this government.

Initially this was meant to be as a tourist draw and was only supposed to be advertised outside of the province. That's what this was billed as, and I can remember the Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) getting up, and there was one bus that had a sign promoting gambling and there was one sign outside of the Hotel Fort Garry, and he crowed about, and you're stuffing this down the throats of Manitobans. And then, months later, as Premier, went on one of the biggest advertising binges advertising gambling to our local population, and not once now, not once do we hear about families. Not once do we hear about the children or the spouses that then are, are forced, forced, Madam Speaker, to deal with the kind of carnage that happens in their homes.

And we should be careful. Yes, we want to make sure that everything is funded properly, and maybe if this government cared a little bit more about the rural areas, their main source of revenue wouldn't have to be one-armed bandits. Maybe if this government would, would do more, do more than just swagger into the coffee shops in rural areas and give their higher-than-thou mighty approach to how they try to solve things, maybe they should start caring a little bit. Maybe the ministers should show a little bit more heart, a little bit more compassion for those people who are suffering out there. Maybe that's what they should be doing, and I say this to the member from Dauphin, maybe he should show a little bit more heart and compassion for those individuals.

We have seen an explosion, an absolute explosion of one-armed bandits—commonly known as just slot machines—one-armed bandits in this province, and it's been under this government, under the NDP, the ones that used to talk about a social conscience. They took it to the local pawn shop, traded in their social conscience for a proliferation of one-armed bandits like we've never seen in the history of this province. And they sit and they crow about how they like, how they like communities. Shame on them. Shame.

* (10:30)

They don't care about the families and the—we have, we have for years. For years I have stood in

this House and said we should have a moratorium on the expansion of gambling until we know about the social and economic costs to families, to communities, and never once has there been an uptake because they don't want the news. They don't want to know what the cost is to families. They don't want to know what the cost is to communities. They don't want to know what the cost is for health care and social services and education, and all the rest of it. They don't want to know that, because this government is so addicted to gambling.

And the only reason—the only reason why they force, really—the Member for Minto (Mr. Swan), I went to university with him and he's, he's a fine young man, and I know he's forced to stand up and defend the indefensible. I know that against his better judgment and against his conscience he's forced to get up and defend something as ugly as the, as the problem gambling issue that we have in this province, Madam Speaker. That, that minister, the member from Minto was forced to, to tow the party line, was forced to give the Cabinet position, because this government is addicted to gambling.

Never before have we had the kind of revenues—never before have we seen a government eluding its own population like this NDP government like we see right now. And they, they should actually read, read this motion, and it is, it is a very telling motion, and it talks about per capita gaming revenue, third-highest in the country, well above the Canadian average. And it goes on to talk about problem gambling, including financial pressure, job loss, family breakdown, increased health-care costs, judicial system, decreased quality of life. I would ask the members opposite, at least read the motion. At least look at the motion.

And I have seen first-hand, Madam Speaker, in my office individuals come forward when I was the, the critic for Lotteries and they would sit with their hands in their, in their, their, their head in their hands, and they would cry in my office and tell me the kinds of problems. I've actually had one individual sit in my office—and I know this isn't a big deal for the, for the honourable minister from Dauphin; I know, I know this isn't, this isn't a big issue for him, he doesn't have the heart for it—but that individual stood, sat in my office and told me about how—that he has to watch carefully when he drives by a hotel 'cause if he sees that gambling sign outside of the, of the hotel, he already feels his heart palpitate, and what he wants to do is right away turn

off and go in and throw away his hard-earned money. He had to go—he had to go for counselling.

He's one of the, the NDP victims of gambling, who sat in my office and cried and wept about how tough it was on his family, and the mini—the member for Dauphin should be ashamed of himself for, for being one of those *Silence of the Lambs* for actually sitting and, and, and, and not taking on his government saying how about we do a moratorium on it, how about we look at the cost of it, do a proper study.

I say to the minister, the member for Dauphin, do a proper study, you know, and, and, and if there is no—if there is no cost to Manitobans, if this is purely a, a, a sport, if people putting in \$5 or \$6 into a one-armed bandit, well, then, then fine, we'll, we'll go along with that. But I, I would suggest to that minister and all ministers on the government side, they should go to Cabinet and say, you know, we have a heavy reliance as government on gambling. We know that. But we also should know what effect this has on local people, on families, on, on mothers and fathers, those people who end up in the home who—finding, finding out that the house has been so mortgaged that they've lost the home. When they find out that their cars have been repossessed. When they find that furniture was hauled out of the house. When kids find out there isn't enough money for gifts for Christmas or for a birthday party because one of the parents was on a gambling addiction kick.

And, and where, wh—where is the government? Where is the government? The government sits back, allows this to grow out of control. Never before in the history—never before in the history of this province have we seen this kind of gambling in, in, in our province. And I would suggest to the government, and I will say it one more time, put a moratorium on gambling. Leave it where it is. Do an economic—an economic and, and, and social impact study on what impact this has on our families, and, I, I, I know the, the honour—honourable member, one of the other Cabinet ministers doesn't, doesn't seem to care either about this issue. We should know what impact this is having on families, on our communities.

Thank you for this opportunity to put a few comments on the record.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): We need no lecture from the member across, at all. This government has proven our commitment to resources—for the resources for

Manitobans—[interjection]—resources for Manitobans to prevent—[interjection]—gambling problems—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It's getting hard to hear. Can we just keep the din down or take conversations to the loge, please. Thank you.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'll just start again, Madam Deputy Speaker. We need no lecture from the member across the way. This government has proven its commitment to addiction resources across this province. We have increased the funding for addictions by 54 percent. These resources are provided to the addicts themselves, but also for their family members, specifically to the funding for problem gambling. We are aware of the issues that are faced by some individuals, and because of that, we have made specific investments, and those investments have provided us with the acclamation and the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation around the best social responsible gaming policy in Canada. And this policy is being copied by other jurisdictions, and that's the best praise that we can have.

Specific initiatives include the AFM's problem gambling helpline. We have residential and community-based rehabilitation. We also have gaming facts Web sites that, I must add, that is translated in multiple languages. We have started the responsible gaming information centres at casinos in Winnipeg. AFM, It's Your Lucky Day and Keeping Your Shirt On, our youth gambling awareness programs in Manitoba middle and high schools. Responsible gaming awareness has happened in the casinos for the staff. As well, there is a suite of responsible gaming features on Manitoba's VLT network. The Manitoba Gaming Control Commission's award-winning, province-wide public education campaign has been running since 2005.

When we talk about the resources that are being provided by AFM around prevention, education awareness, we also have to acknowledge the importance of the 12-step program, Gamblers Anonymous, which provides those resources in the community for the individuals, and the Al-Anon program which provides those resources for families.

I, too, am very familiar with the devastation that addictions has on families and communities, and it is important that we provide the prevention services but also provide intervention and programming that's made possible.

The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation has provided \$3 million in funding to AFM, in 2008 and 2009, for their responsible gaming strategy, and these services are made throughout the province of Manitoba. We know, and we have kept records, people are accessing these services and are getting provided the information that they need.

* (10:40)

I think that we also, when we're talking about gambling addictions, we need to realize that there are polyaddictions, that individuals are addicted to other substances. And what we need to talk about is the investments that we've made to the addictions system and how we have, together with mental health organizations, provided an initiative called the Co-occurring Disorders Initiative or CODI. And this provides a no-wrong-door approach. Individuals, when they approach an agency, they are provided the resources that they need, and those resources are implemented in a way, that they are treated with respect and dignity and supported on that road to recovery, so they can return back to their families and provide the support and contribute back into our community.

We have a renewal of the Manitoba addictions strategy, and it's a five-point plan that has been endorsed by other agencies in our community, as well as alcoholics themselves, that talks about the importance of co-ordinating our services and ensuring that services are accessible, are readily available and are provided across Manitoba.

Our five-point plan includes building a better system, and that refers to ensuring that there are standards of care throughout the province. It ensures that there are training opportunities for staff, as well. The improvement of service access and the increase of residential treatment capacity go together, and this speaks to our initiative at the Magnus Centre where we are bringing in the continuum of care for alcoholics and addicts.

It will include education, outreach. It will also include primary care, residential treatment in out-patient services, Madam Speaker. It will also include supports for families, and it will also include after-care services, second-stage housing. And there will be opportunities for training for the professionals as well as for other community members.

This is extremely important for people that are dealing with gambling addictions, with alcoholism, or with any substance that they're dealing with. By working together with our partners—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

I would request, once again, any conversations that are taking place to please go to the lounge. The person—the member speaking deserves to be heard by those who are listening. So, I, I ask your co-operation. Thank you.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As we build a stronger, better system to provide those supports to the individuals dealing with the addiction, we cannot underestimate the importance of the safety net that we provide, the importance of the education and prevention initiatives that, through the support of the Manitoba Lotteries Commission and AFM that we're able to provide.

Addictions devastates individuals, families and communities but as a government, we have shown our commitments to strengthening that system by our investments of increasing by 54 percent and, more importantly, by ensuring that there are prevention initiatives, public awareness, so people can identify early on if there's going to be an issue, and that those services are made available to them.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

So, I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to put a few words on the record about this government's commitments to developing a mental health and addictions system across the province of Manitoba that will support individuals dealing with gambling addictions, but other addictions across the province.

We will work together. We have accomplished—we have made accomplishments, but I'd like to say that we continue to believe that we have more work to do. And we are committed to working with community partners, with individuals and continue to strengthen the system. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yeah, Mad—Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to be able to stand in support of this resolution, and the minister who spoke before me simply amazes me. You know, you listen to the minister and you, and you see that this is someone that just seems to be in some sort of a wonder, wonderland. Does she have no concept in

terms of what's actually taking place in, in our casinos.

Mad—Mr. Speaker, she completely ignores the real issues that are there, and I would like to point out two of those real issues. There is a social cost to gambling and gambling addiction in the province of Manitoba. What does this minister and this government do? They hit—they hit their heads into the sand and they pretend the problem is not even there.

Mr. Speaker, one of the actions that they've taken just recently is they put in ATM machines in casinos. That's one of the major issues dealing with the resolution that's here today. And then you have the other issue of revenue. And what is the government doing in terms of revenue? You get the minister standing up talking about, well we, it's only a, it's a smaller percentage of overall revenue to the Province.

Well, take a look at what money you're getting from Ottawa and the amount of income tax and retail sales tax that you're getting today compared to 1999. Mr. Speaker, the amount of revenue that's coming in from gaming has actually been increasing. But what does this minister—or either minister have to say about that particular issue? Again, they simultaneously put their heads into the sand and ignore the problem. They just see it as, show me the money. That's what this government is all about, especially if you take a look at it in terms of the last number of months when we have a government that's desperate for revenue. They're changing laws so that they can borrow money and they don't have to worry of having to, to pay a penalty because the Cabinet overspent their budgets. They're going over, way over their heads in terms of understanding how an economy and how a government should be spending and providing good, sound policy.

I'd like to remind the government in terms of what it said back in 2004; 2004, January 21st, and I'll, I'll provide this because maybe the, the current minister has, has lost this press release. This press release came from the New Democratic Party, Mr. Speaker, back in 2004. Smith, that was the minister, NDP minister at the time, also announced that the MLC will not be proceeding on a proposal to install automated tele-machines, ATMs, at Club Regent Casino or McPhillips Street Station Casino. That was in 2004. Smith also announced that, based on the feedback from AFM, ML—the MLC will not

proceed on the proposal to introduce ATMs into Winnipeg's casinos.

He even goes further, Mr. Speaker, and he says, he also—meaning the NDP minister—he also noted that most other jurisdiction in North Americas permit ATMs in casinos. He's take—he's being boastful on how the NDP back in 2004 were being responsible and not allowing ATMs to go into casinos.

That was a good policy. I applauded the government on initiatives such as this because I realized the consequence of gaming in the province of Manitoba. Well, they've had a full reversal in terms of a position. We now have a minister who says, well, we're putting in ATM machines into McPhillips casino. Well, why are they doing that, Mr. Speaker? What's the rationale? What is—what does the minister say? *[interjection]* It's dangerous to cross the street because they might get mugged.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if that's the case, that's a crime issue; deal with the crime issue. I don't believe it's that safe. You know, I live by McPhillips Street, it's not that dangerous to cross McPhillips Street. You know, you look both ways. And, generally speaking, even though it has gotten worse, I will say that crime has gotten worse in the north end of Winnipeg, but it isn't that bad that you have to kind of watch for someone jumping on you and robbing you. It hasn't quite gotten that bad.

And I suspect if they would do things such as reinstate the community policing on McPhillips and other initiatives that would make our streets in, in all a little safer, well, that would in fact assist. But to use the fact that, well, we want our customers to feel safe so they don't have to cross McPhillips because of crime, well, I, I, I just, I just don't, I just don't buy it, Mr. Speaker.

* (10:50)

And the reason why I don't buy it is because, you see, I've been—I was a number of years ago a critic for Lotteries and I can remember meeting with individuals and family members and talked about some of the consequences of gaming. I've—I remember two cases in particular, both of them which ended up in, in suicide.

One individual graduated from high school. This is in rural Manitoba, graduated from high school, was looking forward to be able to go to university here in the city of Winnipeg and the family, the parents, had given this youth the money to be able to register. They put it into his own bank account and

all this kind of stuff. Then they went on holidays. Over the summer the youth got addicted to gambling and lost all the money. He felt so ashamed that with the fact that he lost the money, Mr. Speaker, that he went into a garage and he committed suicide.

I had another individual that you can see in what—in the morning he would be taking money out of his bank account and then he would be going and playing the VLT machines, and after a period and, again, I wouldn't necessarily want to be quoted on the months but I believe it was three to six months, he had squandered tens of thousands of dollars, his life savings on these VLT machines. And as a result, he went into the garage and committed suicide. Both of them involved garage incidents, and they leave the car runnin' and it's the carbon monoxide that ultimately kills them.

Now these, sadly, are not isolated cases. These are, these types of things are happening today. There are families that are broken up, that are breaking up. We have children that are not getting the food that they need because we have parents and others that do not have the ability to be able to manage being in front of a VLT machine, and it's, and it is, you know, I've had people explain to me, as the sensation is similar to that of being addicted to a drug, crystal meth. You know, the VLTs are like a crystal meth to gamblers, Mr. Speaker, quite often, unfortunately and sadly. And as a result, we see so much tragedy in our communities.

Take a look in terms of the correlation between the number of individuals that are in our prisons today that have some issues that are related to gaming. Where we have individuals that are stealing from their workplace in order to feed their, their gamb—gambling addiction. You know, there was a time, and that time was when the NDP were in opposition, that they seemed to be a little bit more sensitive to the issues of social, the social costs of gaming in the province of Manitoba.

But now, Mr. Speaker, they are—you know, the member from Carman has pointed it out quite accurately. Today the NDP is addicted to the money and the revenue, and it's that short-sightedness. It's the money that's coming in that they like to see but what they're not really putting any value to is not only the cost to our social fabric and, and our society, but also the cost to the Treasury, because it means that there's more crime in the streets. There's more addiction-related issues that the taxpayer is going to have to pay for. Those are the costs that

we're, that we're incurring because we have a government that seems to be insensitive to being able to having a responsible gaming policy in the province, province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that I'm running out of time. The last quick comment is I'm very disappointed that the current minister has not done anything in regards to the scratch and win. He still allows Manitobans to go and scratch a ticket when he knows full well that that grand prize has already been won, and that is something in which I would like to see a government protect the rights of the consumers, as opposed to sit back and say, let the consumer continue to be soaked. This is a policy in which, I hope, the government will revisit and make the necessary modification so consumers are protected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): It's my pleasure to rise to speak to the resolution brought forward by the member opposite related to gambling in the province of Manitoba. Now, Mr. Speaker, as I start my comments here today and before I go into the history of how it came about, gambling and the facilities in our province came about, I want to tell members that we have some experience in my community as Club Regent is located in the community of Transcona, and we know first-hand the impacts that casinos have and has have—has had, upon the community and the surrounding portion of Winnipeg in which that casino is located, but that's not to say that there's only one casino. There is also McPhillips Street Station in Winnipeg as well, and I've been to events at that casino as well.

I do know that casinos do provide some entertainment value for folks in our communities, and it's not just the gambling aspect of it. We have recreational activities there that are sponsored from time to time. We have entertainment shows, musical performers that come into the casinos and provide a value to the quality of life of our communities in that aspect and so that there is some value as a result of those facilities being there.

But I want to provide for the members opposite who sponsored this particular resolution, Mr. Speaker, the fact that, in 1991 to 1991—to 1999, that the previous Conservative government was the government of the day that introduced large-scale gambling into the province of Manitoba, with over 5,000 VLTs being introduced into our province. So let not the members opposite say that they didn't have a hand in what has happened in this province

with expans—with respect to the considerable expansion of gambling in the province of Manitoba, and I know all too well when the Crystal Casino was located in the Hotel Fort Garry, just down the street from this particular Chamber, that the gambling was centralized in the city of Winnipeg here and that there wasn't the wide-scale gambling that was ongoing at the time, but the government of the day, the Conservative government, decided that they want to significantly expand gambling in this city and in this province, and they undertook the construction of two casinos, one being the McPhillips Street Station and the other being Club Regent Casino.

And I know at the time, Mr. Speaker, that the then family member that was related to the honour—the current Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), mentioned that there was going to be two suburban casinos and that the original price tag on those two casinos was going to be some \$29 million. Well, at the end of the day, those two casinos came in at a cost of \$145 million, \$145 million obviously paid for out of the pockets of Manitobans to construct those two casinos.

Now, the localized impact of constructing Club Regent casino in my community was the fact that we had in so many other communities of this province, we had local community clubs that were sponsoring bingos as a means of fundraising in those local communities. Now, in my community, and I know this because I had members of the Rotary Club and the Kinsmen Club and the local community clubs calling my office when the Conservative government of the day decided that they want to greatly expand the casino activities and the gambling activities in this province, the members of my community were coming to me and saying, why is the government trying to shut us down and put us out of business so that we have no means to fund our community clubs, no means to fund the activities, the good activities that we have in our communities?

And at that time those community clubs and those community service organizations were saying to me, why—[*interjection*] Well, the Member for Brandon West says, why don't you shut them down? I say to him, why is that not a part of your policy now? Since you were the one that started the casinos, why don't you say that you're going to shut those casinos down? [*interjection*] It wasn't your policy in those days. You brought 5,000 VLTs into the province of Manitoba—[*interjection*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Reid: –and greatly expanded the gambling in the province of Manitoba–[*interjection*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Reid: You constructed two casinos in the province of Manitoba that took away local fundraising opportunities from the service groups of my communities and put them out of business, essentially as a result of the decisions you made as a Conservative government involved in gambling in this province.

So you have, as a result of the policy decisions that were made by the Filmon Conservative government, of which I assume that the Conservative Party is still an adherent to, you've said that you believe in wide-scale gambling in this province because of the activities and the decisions you made during the 1990s.

Now, I have to look at the comment that was made in one of the WHEREASes in this particular resolution. Problem gamblers is among the highest in the country. Well, the two Conservative–

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Radisson, I mean for Transcona, will have five minutes remaining.

* (11:00)

The hour being 11 a.m., we will now move on to–the honourable Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker. We're at 11 o'clock, I understand, so I would like leave to move directly to Bill 236.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement for us to move directly to second reading of Bill 236? Is there agreement?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

SECOND READINGS–PUBLIC BILLS

Mr. Speaker: 'Kay, there's agreement. I'll be call–I'll now call Bill No. 236, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act.

Bill 236–The Child and Family Services Amendment Act

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), that Bill No. 236, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, be now read a

second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Member for River East, seconded by the honourable Member for Morris, that Bill No. 236, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, and I'm pleased to stand today in the House and introduce these amendments to The Child and Family Services Act.

And, Mr. Speaker, as a direct result of many, many foster families who, throughout the last number of years, have opened their hearts and their homes to very vulnerable children that–in our community with very high needs and many of those foster families today feel that within the system their voices aren't being heard. And, you know, as they come forward and discuss these issues with me, and there are many throughout the system and it's not isolated to one area within the Child and Family Services system, we're finding that foster families have been disenfranchised as a direct result of some of the inaction taken by this government.

And, Mr. Speaker, I just refer back to a news release that was issued in October of 2006, and this was as a result of the Phoenix Sinclair tragedy and the many, many recommendations that came from many reviews that were done, and the government announced with great fanfare that foster parents will see increased support through stronger protocols to build teamwork with social workers and their agencies to ensure a voice for foster parents in planning for children in their care.

Well, it's two and a half years later and we're not seeing this put into action within the Child and Family Services system. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, we just got a pretty scathing report from the child advocate yesterday, who speaks to the whole issue of foster family recruitment and retention, and she talks about how the government, again, announced with great fanfare their success in recruiting new foster families. But at the same time, she comments on those foster families that have been working with vulnerable children over the last many years, feel that they are not being listened to, that their children–under their care–voices aren't being heard. And we know that in many, many instances, the only continuity and the only consistent care and support for vulnerable foster children are the foster families themselves, that for sometimes many years

have cared for, 24/7, children and understand those children's needs.

And we're seeing changes as a result of this government's legislation and the devolution process, Mr. Speaker, that did put in place regulations and I'll quote from the Gage Guimond report, because it states very clearly in the Gage Guimond report that current legislation, regulations and standards require that agencies look at placement of children in care with extended family as the first priority, and that if that is not possible, then placement with the child's community is considered the next best option.

That was legislation that was implemented by this NDP government. And that was amended and changed, just over a year ago, that said that the safety of the child should be first and foremost and should be paramount. And the other consideration should be secondary to the safety and the well-being of the child. Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not seeing today, within the system, that happening, even though the legislation has changed.

I've asked the minister, I asked him through the Estimates process, what directive he had given to agencies that safety and security should be of paramount priority. And he says, well, it's in the legislation. If that legislation isn't being followed in practice, those children are vulnerable.

So, we know that there are issues. We know that the child advocate is wondering, with the new recruitment of foster families, and I quote, right from her report yesterday, that she wonders if new foster parents are coming in the front door while experienced caregivers are going out the backdoor and that's what we're hearing. We're hearing from foster families that they would like their licence revoked with one agency and moved to a different agency. They're finding that they're not being listened to and that the voices of the children aren't being heard. And first and foremost, Mr. Speaker, I want to say, that it's the children, in my mind, that need to come first. And I do know, when foster families commit 24/7 to looking after vulnerable children within our society, that need the kind of support, they need to be listened to, they need to be heard.

And when you hear foster families crying out and saying there's a plan for this child but we're not given any written information on what that plan for that, this child is. I find that unconscionable. How can this government possibly expect foster families to plan and prepare children for a move when they

aren't even given the plan in writing so they can follow that plan? There's something wrong here. And it only makes good common sense, social work practice, to ensure that foster families have the information and the tools that they need, not only to look after the children in their care but to plan for any process that might move the children out of their care.

Now, we're hearing horror stories from families that are saying, as the plan progresses, which they have no idea in some instances what that plan is, and as children are taken for weekend visits or home visits with prospective new families, we have foster children coming back to foster homes that are having night terrors, that are awake all night. We have children that are regressing in their behaviour. Children that at one point in time, may have been toilet-trained but are no longer toilet-trained. These are pretty significant issues. These are issues that foster families have brought forward to agencies, to workers. And sometimes, Mr. Speaker, it's a different worker each time there's a visit with the foster family. There seems to be a revolving door of case workers within the system and the only consistency for these children is the foster family that has loved them and has cared for them, sometimes for many years.

Mr. Speaker, so it's important and it's incumbent that this legislation pass. This was a recommendation in the report on Gage Guimond that said this was sorely lacking. We do know that—in the instance of Gage Guimond, the report was extremely critical and it was as a result of lack of communication and, at that—communication that broke down between the agency and the foster family. That the agency refused to put Gage Guimond and his sister back into that loving foster family when the family placement broke down. And as a result, Gage Guimond was moved to another unsafe home, which, we know, resulted in his death.

*(11:10)

Mr. Speaker, these kinds of things could be prevented if only a foster families were given, in writing, before any decisions were made to move the child, the information and the assessment of that child, and what was in the best interests of that child while that child—why that child would be moved to a different location.

Mr. Speaker, that has to happen. It should happen. These recommendations have been before this government for a considerable period of time.

They are not acting upon them, and I think the only way we're going to get any action is to get this recommendation enshrined in legislation so that the supports for the children and the families that are caring for those children are there when they're needed.

Mr. Speaker, I would hope that members of the government would stand in their place today, refer this legislation to committee, and let's get on with enshrining this in legislation for the protection and for the well-being of some of the most vulnerable children in our community and in our Manitoba society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister for Family Services and Housing. Before recognizing the honourable—*[interjection]* Order. Before recognizing the honourable minister, I want to remind our guests in the gallery, there is to be no participation and that also includes applauding.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, it's—I am pleased to be able to rise in this House and speak on challenges facing the child welfare system of Manitoba.

It is, certainly, in the context of this week, that Manitobans, I think, are being reminded almost daily of the importance of the child welfare system in its role in protecting children and, as well, of course, the controversies that can surround the apprehension of children. Indeed, in today's paper, and I think in every day's paper in the last couple of weeks, we have seen a testament to that critical role and the controversies that surround the very difficult task that befalls those who have to make very difficult decisions, whether as social workers or, indeed, the very important and critical role, indeed, the foundation of the child welfare system, which is the— which are the caregivers that the child welfare system relies on and, indeed, fostering is the issue that is before the House right now.

Also, I think, in the context of this week, that we have seen the children advocate lament, as we have publicly and within the child welfare system, the number of children who must be brought into care and apprehended from their birth parents. Mr. Speaker, the fact that we are now approaching about 8,000 children in care—of a population of a city like Dauphin, or Portage la Prairie, perhaps—reminds

us of the challenge that we have as Manitobans in raising healthy communities, but more particularly, questions around the parenting in this province. It's a trend, by the way, that goes beyond Manitoba. It is one across the country where we're seeing increases in the number of children coming into care.

But we have to look at what is causing that to happen to our children, and what adults do to children or what adults cannot do for children. We have to look at all of those systemic causes, as well as the immediate causes. That is why parenting skills are so important and Triple P is, is, is launched in Manitoba, a world-class approach. That is why we have to enhance mental health and addiction services. That's why we have to enhance training and employment opportunities, as we are doing. That is why we have to empower the local communities, and we have to engage, in ways we haven't before, the federal government for on-reserve support services. We have to get beyond this—communities that are in despair, Mr. Speaker, and, as well, families who do not have the proper tools to raise children in a safe and healthy way.

But that often, as the Children's Advocate says, goes way beyond the child welfare system. So, at stake here today are questions around the child welfare system, a system that, in this province, has been found very recently to have, for many, many years, been broken. It is a system, as the member of the opposition said in this House—going back in the 1990s when she was the Minister for Child and Family Services, she got up in this House and proclaimed that the child welfare system is not working.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard statements from the member opposite that foster parents' voices are not being heard, they're being disenfranchised. It was that same member who took part in the disbanding of every nickel going to the foster family association. It had to be disbanded. It is the cuts being made every year, either cut or frozen foster rates, for seven years, against the advice of the Children's Advocate.

And to stand up today and, all of a sudden, find some new-found interest in, in fostering, Mr. Speaker, I welcome that because it certainly is a change in direction from when she actually had a decision that she could make and the power to enhance the role of fostering in Manitoba. *[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Mackintosh: Now, Mr. Speaker, we have this foundation of care in Manitoba, this fostering, all of these wonderful people who have indeed opened their hearts and their homes to welcome children in who need someone on their side in a healthy environment.

They have to be celebrated, Mr. Speaker. They are, each and every one of them, heroes for doing this work, and which is why we have now, finally, been able to get out of that trough that the foster care rates hit in the '90s, and now recognize that increasing foster-care rates as necessary, recognizing that additional needs for children, whether it is the car seats and the cribs, we have to help them. But, as well, we have to ensure that agencies are being more respectful and are working on a team basis with the foster parents of Manitoba, recognizing their insights into the needs of the children that they are caring for.

Now, the issue that is before the House in terms of legislation, yes, there is a good intent always to enhance communications between child welfare workers and foster parents. That always has to be backed up, and we have to do better on that. That is why we have enhanced the child care—the child welfare investments to historic proportions, Mr. Speaker, and indeed now we are moving ahead, like never before in recent history, with stronger standards, with stronger training, with dedicated positions to support foster parents in the agencies. And we are working with the Children's Advocate to ensure that that office is as strong as possible. It's also about increasing the information management systems so that we have the proper information. It's about ensuring that the casework, the caseloads are mitigated, because they have been crushing in the past, and we have invested significantly with more resources for the front line.

As well, we've been working, of course, with the federal government to try and get a better symmetry between the funding for child welfare off-reserve and on-reserve, because that two-tiered child welfare is only worsening as the Province increases its budget, and, in fact, a 10 percent increase this year, \$29 million, and I think over the last three years, a 67 percent increase. It is the fastest—or it is one of the most significant funding investment increases in government.

And it has to be because of the lessons we have learned from too many tragedies, Mr. Speaker, tragedies that have been happening to children of Manitoba for many, many, many years.

With the legislation before the House, we have, as hundreds and hundreds of more foster parents enlist to help the children of Manitoba as a result of the Circle of Care campaign and those big hearts, yes, we have to look at how we can enhance the communications in the system.

Any time there is legislation proposed, of course, and we most recently introduced legislation to make it absolutely certain to a reader of both of the pieces of legislation, the authorities act and child welfare act, that safety is paramount. We have to consider the legislation very carefully because the test always is the best interests of the child.

When we have legislation, as before us now, we have to ask: What impact does this have on a child? For example, in the event of a placement breakdown: What are the barriers to ameliorating that situation posed by the legislation? Section 51, of course, of the act provides mechanisms, appeal information for foster parents. But what more has to be done when there is an objection to a child being moved from a foster home, Mr. Speaker?

* (11:20)

That is a good question to further analyze, along with the front line workers, because it, it is the front-line workers that have to be involved whenever there is a change in legislation considering the best interests of the children. That's not our idea. The external reviews done as a result of the tragedy of Phoenix Sinclair have said very clearly: make sure that the enhancements, the stronger standards, are done listening to the front lines and the insights. We also have to listen to the foster parents and what impact that will have on their ability when there's a child in their placement that they can't handle any more, and do they want the time delays that would go with the requirements set out in the legislation. We will want to consider that as well.

So the wording will have to be carefully considered. What impact it has on, on the, on treatment, on treatment beds, on emergency beds, that is not clear. In fact, it's quite vague.

So the intent, that of better communication for foster parents and workers, good documented case plans, those are important for good social work and the child welfare systems, but they have to be addressed in a way that considers best interests of the children and the stakeholders' views and, as well, of course, whether it is best in legislation or best left in

regulation and standards where there are a number of ex-exemptions and exceptions and so on.

So, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to continued discussion on this, and I can advise the House that I have asked the department to look carefully at this legislation and talk to some of those who would have good insights into its wording.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, and I'm very pleased to stand and speak to this bill, Bill 236, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, brought forward by the Member for River East, and I want to commend her for bringing this bill forward.

I, I'm appalled at the statements by the Minister of Family Services levelled against this member on this side of the House for making such statements, because, Mr. Speaker, this member was the Minister of Family Services for seven years—[interjection]

She's, she's corrected me; it was six years.

But in six years the NDP government, the management was so bad by the ministers on that side they had four ministers, and what do we have today? The minister said we have challenges facing child welfare. Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a crisis in child welfare. He has understated it very dramatically.

I think that it's very important to, to recognize the foster families and the work that they do. We, we've just heard how many more children are going into foster care in this province: 8,000 children in care, tripled under the NDP government. This—and the minister is saying, well, we're not as bad as other provinces, or we're the same as other provinces. Benchmarking against other provinces is not a solution to what we have to do here in Manitoba, levelling criticism against the federal government. I think this government should take some responsibility.

When they fast-tracked through devolution, one of the questions we gave to the, to the government was: What are you doing to make sure that the funding models are, are, are in place with the provincial and federal government? But instead of doing that ahead of time, they chose to fast track the devolution process, and now we're dealing with some of the fall-out. That is their responsibility and they have not accepted it, Mr., Mr. Speaker.

When we're talking about children in care, be very, very—first, foremost and most important thing to consider is the safety and well-being of the child. The child's interests must come first,

Mr., Mr. Speaker. When a child is placed in foster care and is in that care of that family for a period of time, there is a bond that is created between the child, the foster parents, other siblings in the house, extended family. There's love, there's security, there's safety, there's consistency in that child's life. To take a child from that home with no apparent reason to do so, that being no child protection concerns, and just announce that the child is going to be moved must absolutely be as devastating for any parent to have that happen within their home with their own child.

Imagine that. Imagine someone comes and says, well, we need to take your child and place them someplace else—if there's no reason for that. So Mr., Mr., Mr. Speaker, when a child is to be moved there needs to be a reason for that and that needs to be communicated to the foster family. There needs to be some planning around this kind of event, if that has to happen.

Certainly though, in the majority of cases, and many foster families that we've spoken with, believe and, and, it's ultimately true that the best place is a loving family, and if that's the situation that's being provided for the child, what possible reason could there be to move a child somewhere else and uproot that child and take them somewhere else where they don't feel safe and loved and cared for?

As the member from River East said, some of the visits that children go to with, with members of their family that they have been taken from and placed in foster care result in these children being traumatized when they return to the foster family, and there are probably some reasons for that. So, to look at those kinds of issues and then simply say, well, we need to place the child back in that situation without, without due reason and without consulting and planning with the foster families, is not acceptable. We have seen what has happened with the Phoenix Sinclair case. We've seen what's happened with the Gage Guimond case in which he—that young child was removed from a very loving foster family situation and placed with extended family and we know the outcome of that—that Gage Guimond died as a result of that.

If we'd had proper legislation, such as what the member's proposing today, that was a death that could have been prevented. And, Mr. Speaker, this, this bill is a result of one of the recommendations from the report that followed the section 4 review on Gage Guimond, and it really states that any decision

to move a child when there are no child protection concerns contain a written reason for this decision, including reference to the impact on the child, the appropriateness of the move in accordance with the child's stage of development and the degree of attachment to the caregiver. That is a recommendation from the Gage Guimond report. Who can argue against that?

I don't think anyone can stand in this House and argue against that recommendation, that statement, that child care—well, I see one member on the opposite side is shaking his head, and that, that is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker—

An Honourable Member: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Burrows, on a point of order.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I apologize for interrupting the member, but I was not shaking my head at what she was saying but rather responding to some finger-pointing from the member behind her which she couldn't see.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised, the honourable member does not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Morris to continue.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, then I assume that the member opposite will speak in favour of this, this bill, and I look forward to his comments.

* (11:30)

Again, what we have here is, is a bill that will put into legislation the notion that any—a very simple, simple plan, that a decision to move a child from a safe and loving foster family when there are no child protection concerns that the foster family needs to be aware of this and there needs to be some discussion on how appropriate this will be according to the child's age and according to the situation and according to the attachment to the caregiver. Now we can imagine if you've got a very young child, they would attach to the foster mother as their mother, and ripping the child from the mother's arms would be very, very traumatic not only to the child but to the mother.

Mr. Speaker, I know my time is growing short, but I just want to say once again that when we're talking about children that are taken into the child welfare system, it is paramount that the safety and well-being of the child be first and foremost in any decisions of placement with that child. If the child can be placed with a family that's loving and caring and it's safe, that should be reason enough to leave them there if there are no child protection issues present, but if the child needs to be moved for some reason, then that again, there should be written notice to the family so they can have some consultations, some planning for that event.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to passing this bill. I look forward to speaking about it in third reading and passing it. I look forward to what members opposite will have to say, and I encourage that this bill be passed on to committee and passed quickly. Thank you.

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on House business.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, on House business, Mr. Speaker.

In accordance with rule 31 sub 9, I would like to announce that the private members' resolution that will be considered next Thursday is a resolution on removal of provincial sales tax from certain services used by Manitoba municipal governments. That's removal of provincial sales tax from certain services used by Manitoba, Manitoba's municipal governments, sponsored by the honourable Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese).

Mr. Speaker: 'Kay, according to rule 31-9, it's been announced that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Thursday is a resolution on removal of provincial sales tax from certain services used by Manitoba municipal government, sponsored by the honourable Member for Ste. Rose.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Okay, we'll continue the debate.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, as I rise to speak on Bill 236, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, I would like to begin by talking about foster parents. We as a government appreciate all foster parents. They do a tremendous job on behalf of Child and Family Services agencies and on behalf of society, and I have friends who have

three foster children, and certainly they're very attached to those children and hope that they will be more or less permanent in their household.

However, you know, the goal really is family reunification that, if it is safe to return children to their family of origin, that is probably the most desirable thing to do, and I know the family that had five children apprehended by a Child and Family Services agency, and they were told that they had to take anger management courses and that they had to get their drinking problem under control or eliminated, and if they did that, they would have their children returned to them, and having known this family for many years, my guess would have been that they would not be successful, but they were. They completed the anger management courses. They went to treatment for alcoholism, and indeed, they did get their children back. So this is something that happens from time to time, and family reunification is an important part of what Child and Family Services agencies do.

We have had a recruitment strategy to recruit more foster parents, and I believe the original goal was 500 foster parents, and we greatly exceeded that and recruited about 2,000 foster parents for which we're very grateful. And I went to an information meeting about being a foster parent, and it was very interesting because there was a large number of Filipino families in attendance and I understand that many of them have stepped forward and have been accepted as foster parents and I think, from what I know of the Filipino community, they would make excellent foster parents.

Now, it's very interesting to listen to the former Minister of Family Services present this bill and speak because I don't think she has a lot of credibility. As was pointed out, this was the minister who totally eliminated the grant to the foster parent association of Manitoba. This was the organization that provided support and resources to foster parents and, as a result of losing their grant, they folded. They were gone. This is the minister that reduced the per diem amount to foster parents. It made it financially more difficult for foster parents, made it difficult for the agencies to recruit foster parents and so there were less homes available for fostering.

And what our government has done has, has restored the child and the foster parent association funding, has increased the per diems and that has helped to recruit more foster parents. Also, we know that the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry had

recommendations about child welfare, the most important one, I think, being the devolution to Child and Family Service agencies to Aboriginal agencies, and I don't think that the members opposite support the devolution to Aboriginal agencies. I don't think they want to admit it, but I think, philosophically, that they, they have never supported Aboriginal child welfare authorities. And that, that's a problem because we, we believe that Aboriginal families should have control over Aboriginal children. There were many reports, not just the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry report, that recommended that, including when members opposite were in government.

Now, we believe that we have demonstrated over the last nine years our commitment to foster parents in the child welfare system and we have issues with this bill. For example, when a placement breaks down, this bill requires a written plan and a whole bunch of steps to go through but, sometimes, when a placement breaks down, agencies need to act immediately and not to be required to go through what could be a lengthy process. Also, any change to legislation regulations requires careful analysis so the children are not put at risk and that the work of the agencies is enabled. Implications of this bill have to be reviewed thoroughly, and as the minister said, he's asking his staff to look into it because maybe there are good ideas in this bill. And if there are good ideas in this bill, it's probable that the government would act on it.

And for the benefit of members—*[interjection]*

And for the benefit of members in the public gallery, it'd be interesting to know how private members' bills work and whether the government does pass them, which was the challenge that was issued to us. I was here from 1990 to 1999. Almost no opposition members' bills or resolutions ever passed in this House and some of them were excellent pieces of legislation. For example, my colleague from Transcona was our Labour critic and every session he put forward a bill to bring in presumptive legislation for firefighters and the government of the day never let that bill go to committee, but when we became government, we implemented legislation on presumptive legislation for firefighters.

Now, I would have to say that since we formed government in 1999, there have been a number of private members' bills and resolutions that have been passed. In fact, many of the resolutions have passed unanimously. We, we have been far more generous

to opposition members than the Conservative government was to us when we were in opposition. However, if it's a good idea, if it's a good idea, if it's a good idea, we will adopt it and we have, and we have done that in other situations—*[interjection]*

Well, you know, it's interesting. I haven't had a chance to read the Children's Advocate's report, but we know that when there's a lot of publicity about child deaths that what happens is that Child and Family Service workers become more cautious because they don't want to make a mistake, they don't want to end up on the witness stand and, and they do apprehend more children and that's a result of the publicity and of the concern that individuals have for children that are entrusted to their care. And, and they, they—I would say they err on the side of caution and that's probably a good thing, to err on side of caution, rather than to have a child stay in a dangerous situation and be harmed in some way.

* (11:40)

And so the numbers are high. Our minister just admitted what the numbers are and we, we agree that they're too high and, and we're not, we're not going to resolve that by one piece of legislation. We're going to resolve it by investing more in children and families, and we've done that by increasing the budgets for child care. We've done that by things like the prenatal benefit. We've done that through the Ministry of Healthy Living. We're doing that through the healthy moms and me programs and many other children's programs. We've done that by investing more in health. We've done that by investing more in education. We've done more in investing in training, so that parents have jobs, so that parents have income, so that parents have supports, so that we have home care. We have all kinds of things that are supporting families and supporting children so that they aren't apprehended, but that's really a long-term strategy. It's not going to happen overnight. We do need to strengthen families.

And we're not going to solve any crisis today or tomorrow, but we are working on it. We've been working on it since 1999, and we're continue—going to continue to make progress, and we're going to continue to work on all these problems, not just with the Minister of Family Services, but with many departments in government, all—many of which support families, not just Child and Family Service agencies. They are really the last resort. *[interjection]*

I would suggest that the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon), instead of nattering at me, he might want to listen to speeches and he might actually learn something.

Anytime a child is removed where protection concerns exist or not, foster parents are provided with instructions and information as to what their options are. Section 51 of The Child and Family Services Act provides the steps or mechanisms for foster parents to address placement changes of children they are caring for. It allows for foster parents to challenge a decision about the removal of a fo—of a foster child. It sets out steps that ensure due process for the foster parent and keeps the best interests of the child in the forefront. So there are already existing mechanisms in The Child and Family Services Act, under section 51.

The process required for removing and/or changing a placement of a child from a foster home in Manitoba is very thorough and very clear. Paramount in this decision-making process is, first and foremost, the safety and best interests of a child or children involved. Our legislation is also very thorough regarding the rights of the foster parent. It is yet another safeguard ensuring the best interests of children are met.

And there are problems with this bill. Some of the wording will need to be examined closely. For example, words such as caregiver and propriety could be viewed as extremely subjective. Also, are the topics addressed in the bill best addressed in legislation? This bill needs to be viewed not in isolation, but in the context of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Child Welfare Initiative, the current legislative scheme, including regulations and standards. First and foremost, our laws are focussed on the safety, protection and best interests of all children in this process. Our laws also protect the hundreds of dedicated and selfless foster parents who've assumed the responsibility of providing safety and protection for children in Manitoba.

And I could go on at more length about the government record. For example, we allocated \$48 million in new funding to implement the recommendations of reports and hire 150 more front-line staff, and many other things, which I hope my colleagues, in speaking to this, will address. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Disappointed to hear the hard-line political approach taken by the Member for Burrows. I don't think it serves either his argument or this topic well to have that sort of a partisan approach to an issue that's so serious to so many children and foster families around Manitoba.

First of all, let me begin by commending and thanking my colleague for River East for bringing forward this well-thought-out and timely and needed piece of legislation. I would say that, despite some of the rhetorical comments by members opposite, of all the colleagues I've had the opportunity to meet and serve, I'm not sure that there's one who would equal the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) in terms of her compassion and her heart for children and for foster families. And I think she deserves that recognition here in this House for having, not only that strong desire to better the lives of children, but better the lives of the foster parents with whom they're interacting with and with whom they're being served by. So I want to commend the Member for River East for that today.

I, you know, I had the pleasure to second this legislation when it was introduced in the, in the Legislature here a few days ago, and in reviewing it with the Member for River East, it's such a common-sense thing. I mean, I know that the basis for the bill comes from recommendations that have come from a report based on a tragedy.

But even if those recommendations weren't there, if they'd never existed in a report—and, of course, we wish they never would have had to come from a report as a result of the tragedy of Gage Guimond, but I think if you would go to Manitobans on the street, if you would walk out of the Legislature today and walk down Broadway Avenue and say to the first 10 Manitobans that you met: Don't you think it would be common sense, don't you think it would just make sense to have written recommendations, written reasons why a foster child is having to go out of a home, doesn't it just make sense to have a plan, doesn't it make sense to have reasons? I think that they all would say, of course it does, absolutely it does; doesn't that already exist in the province of Manitoba?

And so I like to take direction from ordinary Manitobans and the common sense that they bring to issues, and I think that this government should respond to that as well. It's been too long. Frankly, it's been way too long to have waited on these

recommendations. They should already be in place. I think Manitobans deserve it. I think Manitobans would demand it, and I think for the sake of the children and the foster families it's something that's long overdue.

You know, I also think, when you compare it to other things that we deal with here in the Legislature, it just adds to the fact that it has to happen. I had the opportunity in my role here to talk about criminal justice issues and, you know, how many steps and hoops have to go through before an accused person has any of their liberties taken away, before anything happens to an accused person.

We often hear the frustration of victims in the criminal justice system that it seems like all of the, all of the wait and all of the rights fall to an accused person, and there's sometimes there are reasons why that happens, but there has to be documentation. There has to be evidence. There has to be proof. There has to be a number of different things in place before an accused person has any of their liberties impeded upon. And here we have an innocent child, an innocent child who has done nothing, not even any accusations against anything within our system, who doesn't seem to have any of those rights or the foster families that they're working with. There's no documentation. There's no necessity to have proof or evidence about why an individual or child is going to be leaving a home.

So just compare those two, and I think in a common-sense perspective most people would go, well, why is it that we have all of these rights and all of these reasons for documentations that flow to an accused person in our society and yet, when it comes to foster parents, when it comes to innocent children, none of that applies, none of that is put into place.

And so it's long overdue that this has come forward, and I'm glad the Member for River East is championing that charge, and I can think of no better person to do that, Mr. Speaker.

I want to commend the foster families who are here with us this morning. I know that it is not easy, and it's not something that they would choose to do. When they would have decided to become foster families the last thing they probably ever would have thought they'd be doing is sitting in a gallery in the Legislature watching politicians debate a piece of legislation that impacts foster families.

So, some of them, maybe, have had to step outside of their comfort zone to do it, but they do it because they know it's important. And we appreciate that you've come here to support the legislation, to support the Member for River East for the work that she's doing and for the important work that this needs to be brought forward.

In fact, it is all about the safety of the child, as has been mentioned by the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) and the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu). That's why this legislation is here, and in every decision that we make when it comes to children in care, it has to be paramount. It has to be the reason.

It wasn't that long ago that even in the legislation that existed in Manitoba it didn't clearly spell out that safety of the child had to be the predominant reason for the decisions that were made, and it's unfortunate that it took so long for the government to even move on that recommendation.

So, when we look at this particular bill, we do it through the lens, through the scope of does it benefit the child. And, of course, it does because every child should have those rights. Even if they're at an age where they don't understand their own, their own world, their own existence and their own dynamic that they're in, they should know at some point that there was a system there trying to protect them, trying to ensure that their rights were being protected.

I don't have personal experience with fostering. You know, I have a young child, as members of the Legislature, many will know, and I have a hard time even trying to relate to the feelings that foster parents must go through when there is an action taken against a child to move them out of a home and they're not given reasons. They're not given a plan. They're not given real ideas about where that child is going and the environment that they might be going to.

* (11:50)

But I have had the opportunity to meet with a number of foster parents, and I've been tremendously impressed with the heart that they have and the reasons that they do it. You know they do it because they want to make our province a better place. They do it because they want to benefit these children. Some of them have a faith perspective and they're

fulfilling a faith perspective to help these children along, but they all do it with the heart of bettering the lives of these children. They know it's an investment for the future of our province.

And if the government only had \$1 to spend, you know, if the government only had \$1 that it could spend, could they invest it in a better place than investing in the life of a child, and there's \$10 billion that this government has to spend. They have \$10 billion and one would hope that they would put on it as a priority, as a focus on these foster families, on these children. And this legislation, which wouldn't be very expensive, but in fact, would improve, in many ways, the lives of these children and of the foster families and encourage more foster families to come forward. I mean, I wonder how difficult it must be to have foster families put themselves up front and say, we want to do this, when they know that under the current legislation somebody could come in and say, well, we're going to now remove this foster child without reasons or without a plan of where they're going to go.

Now, despite the fact that they all do it with all the right intentions, with a strong heart, I'm sure that there are many who simply take themselves out of the system because it's too much to bear. It's too much to think about, that that might be the end result or because they have this negative and this difficult experience.

I did have the opportunity some time ago to meet with a foster family in the region that I represent who is going through a difficult time, of who, I think, that this bill, had it been in place, would have made a big difference in the situation they were dealing with. And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, after having a listen to their situation, when I went home that evening, my wife said, you know, in the five years that you've been elected, I've never seen you as disturbed as you are and as concerned as you are about a situation. And my heart went out to that particular family, to all the other families that deal with these difficult things because they foster for all the right reasons. They foster because they care about these children. They foster because they care about Manitobans.

I'm asking the members opposite if they care equally, as these foster parents do, about the children, if they care equally about Manitoba, they'll move this bill to committee. They'll let these foster parents come to committee and have their say, to say

what is happening in their homes and in the system. We would all benefit from that. We need to hear from that. We need to protect the children.

Please, do the right thing. Do the common sense thing that Manitobans would expect you to do, and move this bill on so we can have that discussion, so we can better the lives of children in Manitoba. Thank you very much.

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a former Minister of Child—or of Family Services and Housing myself. I know that the member that proposed the bill was also a, a, a minister. We heard the current minister speak this morning on, on this bill. I, I appreciate and I want the member from River East to know that I appreciate the thought that went pr—into this proposal and, and the, the spirit in which this proposal was brought to this Chamber.

I, I know that we're joined in the gallery here today by people that—in, from the community that are deeply interested in improving the quality of life for children in care, improving and advancing the ability of those very courageous people, as the Member for—Kelvin, help me—

An Honourable Member: Steinbach.

Mr. Caldwell: —Steinbach stated in his remarks, the people that take on the role of being foster parents do so with incredible integrity, and do so with an incredible love for the, the young lives that are placed into their hands. And the member concluded his remarks by talking about feeling disturbed, and his wife acknowledging that he was visibly moved by the situation that he referred to in his own constituency.

And, and I can't speak for the other ministers or those who have served as minister in that very challenging portfolio, but I suspect the same experience was had by them. But I remember more than once, at my desk, reading reports and weeping and not even knowing I was weeping. It was just happening as I was reading through various reports, particularly from the Chief Medical Officer's pen, on some of the horrible tragedies that befall the most vulnerable children in our society on an ongoing basis through time, through the decades, and indeed through the last century in this, in this province, where lives are lost and taken in the most abysmal, appalling, tragic, inhumane way and all of us in this

House are familiar with some of those events that have taken place in our own time here, you know, over the last 20 years.

So, it's a very, very, very difficult portfolio, a very challenging portfolio, and I would suggest, along with Health, probably the two, the two portfolios that are the most compelling on a human level for those who occupy that position. And it's not a position that is an easy one, and I acknowledge, and it's been acknowledged earlier, that the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) served in that portfolio for six years, which is a, which is a testament to both her fortitude and her strength of character because there is, on a daily basis, lives are in balance in that portfolio of Family Services and Housing, and it is not an easy portfolio.

Having said that, it's also probably one of the most satisfying portfolios from the perspective of on a daily basis everyone that—not only the minister, but the entire staff that manages and operates the portfolio of Family Services and Housing on a daily basis, they are called upon to save lives. And there's probably nothing more satisfying than, than dedicating one's own life to helping those in the most dire of circumstances and amongst those adults, but children and families are probably the ones that strike most close to home.

So, I appreciate your wife's remarks to the member—the Member for Steinbach's wife's remarks to him, and I know that all of us that hold that position from time to time, that office from time to time, feel it on a, on a daily basis, and it is a very challenging position to put oneself in.

With regard to the bill, there are—I think this is a bill that, that is—and I'm glad we're debating it today and I know that we do, as members of this Legislature, and certainly on the government side of this House, literally on a daily basis think, reflect, discuss, debate and advance positive solutions and positive ideas towards making our child welfare system the best it can possibly be.

I'm part of a government that, that has and part of a party that prides itself and has a, a history since its foundation and its antecedents with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation has a fundamental principle, social justice, community and care for community. I'm proud to be part of a government and a party that has made as its—one of its fundamental purposes for existence creating a better world in the immortal words of Tommy

Douglas, T.C. Douglas, our Greatest Canadian, the founder of the Canadian medicare system, Canada Pension Plan, so many of the, of the institutions and the rights that we have as Canadians to health care, the rights that we have as Canadians to justice, the rights we have as Canadians to community and the vision of living together in community and all caring, being our brothers' and our sisters' keepers.

T.C. Douglas, Tommy Douglas, stated, oh, many times during his life, to bring courage to those who were disadvantaged. Courage, my friends, it's not too late to build a better world, were his words. He spoke them for decades. Those words still ring true today, and the spirit of this bill, I would suggest, reflects

that desire to build a better world. And I thank the Member for River East for contributing to that debate that we have on the government side of the House on a daily basis. *[interjection]*

I understand that, understand that.

There are, Mr. Speaker, in, in—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Brandon East will have two minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 28, 2009

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