

Fourth Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 9, 2010

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): It is my duty to inform the House that Mr. Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the honourable Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

PTH 15–Twinning

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

In 2004, the Province of Manitoba made a public commitment to the people of Springfield to twin PTH 15 and the floodway bridge on PTH 15, but then in 2006, the twinning was cancelled.

Injuries resulting from collisions on PTH 15 continue to rise and have doubled from 2007 to 2008.

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation stated that preliminary analysis of current and future traffic demands indicate that local twinning will be required.

The current plan to replace the floodway bridge on PTH 15 does not include twinning and therefore does not fulfil the current nor future traffic demands cited by the Minister of Transportation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation consider the immediate twinning of the PTH 15 floodway bridge for the safety of the citizens of Manitoba.

Signed by K. MacDonald, D. Amos, A. Chornoby and many, many other Manitobans.

Madam Deputy Speaker: In accordance with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Multiple Myeloma Treatments

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Health Canada has approved the use of Revlimid for patients with multiple myeloma, a rare, progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment that must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is treatable, and new, innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival and enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

The provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta have already listed this drug on their respective pharmacare formularies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

And this is signed by B. Sais, D. Sais, V. Spence and many, many others.

PTH 16 and PTH 5 North—Traffic Signals

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The junction of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north is an increasingly busy intersection which is used by motorists and pedestrians alike.

The Town of Neepawa has raised concerns with the Highway Traffic Board about safety levels at this intersection.

The Town of Neepawa has also passed a resolution requesting that Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation install traffic lights at this intersection in order to increase safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider making the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north a priority project in order to help protect the safety of the motorists and pedestrians who use it.

This petition is signed by H. Jones, C. Speiss, B. McMinn and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Blumenort Christian Preschool

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And this is the background for this petition:

The community of Blumenort, Manitoba is quickly growing and changing. Several new developments are in the process of being constructed and many young families are moving into the region.

Blumenort families looking for early child-care education, nursery school, have only one option in the community, the Blumenort Christian Preschool.

Research shows that nursery school children, ages three to five, gain several advantages by providing school readiness and interactive play with other children in a structured, caring and clean environment.

Blumenort Christian Preschool is currently without government support and will be unable to continue offering quality nursery school programming without provincial support.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Family Services to consider working with the Blumenort Christian Preschool to ensure that affordable nursery school options remain in the Blumenort Community.

And this petition is signed by G. Penner, C. Kehler, C. Kellett and many, many others.

Provincial Nominee Program—90-Day Guarantee

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Reuniting families through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program should be the first priority in processing nominee certificates.

Lengthy processing times for PNP applications causes additional stress and anxiety for would-be immigrants and their families here in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider establishing a 90-day guarantee for processing an application for a minimum of 90 percent of the applicants that have family living in Manitoba.

This is signed by D. Arends, D. Arends and J. Castro and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Deputy Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Ms. Bobbi Sturby, mother of the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Howard), and Mr. Stuart MacMillan, who are the guests of the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady).

* (13:40)

Also in the gallery today we have Mr. Bruce Tascona from the Military Historical Society of Manitoba, who is the guest of the honourable member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski).

Also in the public gallery today we have 24 grade 4 students from Riverbend School who are under the direction of Ms. Diane Moroz. These—this group is the—under—in the constituency of the

honourable Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines (Mr. Chomiak).

We also have seated in the public gallery 40 grade 9 students from General Wolfe School who are under the direction of Mr. Matthew Craig and Mr. Carlos Mota. This group is in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan).

And we also have in the public gallery today 23 grade 7 students who are from the school—H.C. Avery School. They are under the direction of Ms. Val O'Leary. They are the guests of the honourable Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines.

On behalf of on—all honourable members, I welcome you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Child and Family Services Agencies Government Action

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): We are concerned about the published reports coming from the office of the Child Advocate about chaos within the child protection system. This comes at a time, Madam Deputy Speaker, some eight years after we and many others warned the government about the need to proceed with extreme care and caution in the process of devolution. It also comes four years after the current Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) promising that he was going to get to the bottom of the issues that were then plaguing the system and which, as of today, he appears not to have dealt with.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to ask the Premier, who did not—was not the Premier that brought about the changes that have led to this chaos, whether he is today prepared to be a Premier who is an agent of change in Child and Family Services, or is he going to continue to try to defend the unacceptable status quo?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Madam Deputy Speaker, as Premier and this government, we believe in making progress in improving the lives of children and families wherever they live in Manitoba, regardless of their circumstances. And the child welfare system is an important component of that strategy to improve their lives, which is why we understand how difficult it is to work in the child welfare system, how hard it is for the families and children that are going through these very difficult situations where there are children that, for a variety of reasons, are sometimes removed from their

homes. There are children that are—need to be put into foster care. There are parents that require additional support in order to do their job of parenting, and we want to be there as partners with these families to help them function properly while putting the interests of the child uppermost in the interventions we make, which is why we have increased the resources to the child welfare system by 60 percent.

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Deputy Speaker, he's eight months in the office of Premier. It was under his predecessor that changes were made that have contributed to the very significant chaos that exists today. We are disappointed that he is using the same rhetoric and the same failed approaches as his predecessor and maintaining the status quo when what is required from this Premier, as a new Premier, is some leadership, some willingness to be open and a fundamental change in direction from the chaotic direction that was taken by his predecessor.

I want to ask the Premier, because we're—because we see the Minister of Family Services throwing in the towel with the answers that he gave yesterday. He's—won't take responsibility. He says these are—it's the fault of society more generally. The issue, Madam Deputy Speaker, is they have very specific responsibility to take what is always a difficult situation and to make it better. Instead, what they've done is taken a difficult situation and made it worse.

Will he change direction, Madam Deputy Speaker, and will he overrule his failed minister and come up with something better than the tired rhetoric that we're hearing today in the House?

Mr. Selinger: Madam Deputy Speaker, the direction we want to take is one that'll improve the lives of children, their parents and all of the members of their family. That's the direction we want to take.

That direction has included increasing the resources for the workers that work with families. There's an additional 220 child workers out there. It increases the legislation and support we brought in for Healthy Child, where we start at the time when a young mother is pregnant to provide a prenatal benefit and then provide home care, home visits through nurses and home advocates that work with these families to get off to a healthy start.

It includes the investments we're making in day care so people can have proper settings for their children when they enter the labour market. It

includes increasing our investments in education so more young people can get a grade 12 education, additional training, college education, university education so that they can provide a decent living for their family.

It's an approach that was anchored in our budget this spring where we wanted to protect front-line services, and uppermost, there were services to families and children.

Children's Advocate Report Standing Committee Review

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Deputy Speaker, he's reading off the exact same script that his predecessor used to use every time these issues came up. It is not good enough that after 11 years in power we have a very current report as of today that is saying that the system is in chaos. We have a situation where we know of situations where children continue to be removed from safe, loving environments and be put into situations where they're put at greater risk.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we know that there will always be challenges, but the job of government is to take responsibility to make it better rather than making it worse. His fourth Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh), yesterday threw in the towel.

Will the Premier, today, say that he's prepared to do better? Is he prepared to call the committee, a public committee, to bring forward the Acting Children's Advocate so that we can have a full picture as to where things are going wrong and get on with the job of finding solutions? Will he commit to that public process today so that we can get on with fixing the challenges that they've created, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Madam Deputy Speaker, we are a strong believer in having a healthy, constructive public debate on child welfare in whichever fora the members wish to pursue that in. We think it's important to discuss that here in the Legislature. We think it's important to discuss that in standing committees. We think it's important to discuss that with members of the community.

We also believe it's important for people to understand that we are doing things like the EDI approach where we test every child as they enter school every year to see what issues they have in order to prevent learning problems, in order to prevent child development problems.

We think it's important to continue to provide support to families when they are in crisis. We think it's important to provide parenting resources to families at all levels of their parenting experience.

And so we will continue to find ways to move forward. We were very pleased this year, after several years of requests, that the federal government joined with us to provide prevention resources in the child welfare system to go beyond cases coming into care, to do work at the community level to prevent children and families coming into care. We think those things really make a difference.

Children's Advocate Report Standing Committee Review

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Madam Deputy Speaker, I heard the Premier in his last answer indicate that they were quite prepared to debate the issues of the Child and Family Services system in the Legislature and in committees.

I would ask him to follow through on that commitment and immediately call a committee of the Legislature and ask the acting Child Advocate to come forward and share with us her concerns about the chaotic system that exists today so that we can all work towards finding positive solutions to the issues that are plaguing the Child and Family Services system today.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Well, first of all, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) wanted to make a case that somehow there was some status quo ongoing in child welfare. And, in fact, we are following a path that has been set by the former Children's Advocate, a path of significant reform, indeed, overhaul of child welfare services in Manitoba.

That's why, of course, we've added \$112 million in new investments, 230 more positions. That's why Manitobans have come forward and have offered 2,200 more foster-care beds.

* (13:50)

But, indeed, if there—if the Children's Advocate believes there is chaos in child welfare—that is, child well-being—many people will agree there is breakdown and chaos and crises in far too many families. And that is why we've been making investments and that's why the federal government is interested in working with us now.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And all the money in the world isn't going to fix a broken system that is in chaos, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have a system in chaos, a Child and Family Services system that isn't protecting children and isn't working.

Will the minister today, given his Premier (Mr. Selinger) hasn't made the commitment, will the minister commit to having the acting Child Advocate come before a committee of this Legislature so that we can hear why she believes the system is in chaos and what we can do collectively to try to fix it?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, first of all, as I said earlier, just to repeat, but it's the Children's Advocate that actually made the recommendations that form the basis of the Changes for Children initiative.

When the member who just asked the question was in office, she said: Child welfare in Manitoba is not working. She said that, and if I'm wrong in any of that quote, she can correct me. And by the time she left office, the front-line workers came to her with a document entitled crisis in child welfare. The Children's Advocate and the Ombudsman then said, in 2006, child welfare was broken.

There have been serious historic challenges for child welfare. When Changes for Children was announced, it was a new investment in child welfare in Manitoba. But when we have 8,500 children coming into care in Manitoba, we have very serious breakdowns across this province. Unfortunately, in many remote northern communities—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Foster Care Long-Term Placements

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): We're hearing all too often from foster families that have opened their hearts and their homes to children in this province that are having them taken away after long-term placements and placed in circumstances that could put them in jeopardy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I don't know if that's what the minister believes Changes for Children is going to do, but will he commit today to stopping the policy that has been put in place by his government that allows children to be taken away from long-term foster placements and placed in situations that could be putting them in danger, just like Gage Guimond?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Well, first, Madam Deputy Speaker, I—every day I see the

reports of situations about what parents do to children, what they do to their own children, and what they cannot do for their children. It is dismaying to see that. And when we see 8,500 children in care, a population the size of Portage la Prairie, all Manitobans have to recognize that this province faces a serious challenge of parenting and the supports necessary for parents to fulfil their responsibilities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that's why we've made the new investments and why we are putting a new focus on prevention, because we have to make sure there is involvement earlier on before there is physical and sexual abuse. Thank goodness the federal government has been listening to us for on-reserve services as well.

Children's Advocate Report Standing Committee Review

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Family Services said, and this was some four years ago, he said, and I quote: "We need these questions answered in public about the role of the child welfare system in this case. The public is owed accountability."

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, if four years ago the public was owed accountability, why aren't they owed accountability now? Why is he not—why is he refusing to call the Children's Advocate before a legislative committee of the Assembly?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): I believe the Children's Advocate was just before a committee of the Legislature, which led to the series of questions. But, as well, the Auditor General, just a few weeks ago, was before the standing committee, in public, and talked about the overhaul to child welfare. She said: "We've seen real action. We've seen real improvement." And the systemic changes are a significant—they're having a significant impact. I don't think there was a single follow-up question to that independent officer of the Legislature.

But we are always interested in getting the advice of Manitobans and officers of the Legislature, which is why Changes for Children is based on recommendations from the Children's Advocate and from the Ombudsman, and that is why there is an overhaul that is ongoing with a new focus on prevention through the family enhancement stream.

Mrs. Stefanson: The media reports today have said that the system is in chaos and it's important that

this—that the Children's Advocate be able to come before a public committee of this Legislature to be able to get to the bottom of why the system is in chaos. All we're asking, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that the government allow for that to happen, that they allow for this accountability to take place publicly in our system so that we can get to the bottom of why the system of—the Family Services system is in chaos in our province.

Why are they refusing to allow that to happen?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, we certainly are aware that the Children's Advocate, that office is—makes comments independent of government. That office and the Children's Advocate is well-known for making comments. Those comments can be made anytime, anywhere, on anything of interest to the well-being of children, can attend any meetings.

That office is wholly independent and is most interested, of course, in pursuing the well-being of children, as is this government, which is why when we talk about allegations of status quo there is an overhaul ongoing. We're not cutting foster-care rates like the members opposite. We aren't breaking the system like the members opposite. We're repairing a system that's been a long time in need of overhaul.

Mrs. Stefanson: We know that the system—the Child and Family Services system is in chaos today, okay, under their watch, Madam Deputy Speaker. Two years ago the minister himself said that he was out of his skin with respect to what was going on in the Child and Family Services system. He agreed four years ago that we need to, and I quote: have these issues answered in public and that the public is owed accountability.

Well, if that's the case, why are they refusing to call the Children's Advocate before a public committee of this Legislature? What are they afraid of?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, it's not—you know, the Children's Advocate is available for any question and answers. The Ombudsman, as well, has been overseeing the overhaul of child welfare, as has the Auditor General. They all make reports. We know that they make pro forma reports and speak publicly at any time.

And I also want to just deal with an allegation raised by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) going back to that old allegation about

devolution. You know, it was the Children's Advocate herself in the external reviews that supported devolution and historically has always put an emphasis on the need to make sure that we had more culturally appropriate governance and services and, in fact, she called it a significant milestone in the delivery of services.

Children's Advocate Report Standing Committee Review

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): And while that significant milestone today is chaos in the Child and Family Services, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's unconscionable what this minister's policies and this government's policies are doing to children, vulnerable children within our Child and Family Services system. I don't know why the minister would try to defend his position that the Child Advocate should not come before a committee of the Legislature.

I would ask him today to ensure that the public knows and can hold this government accountable for the decisions it's made in our Child and Family Services system.

* (14:00)

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Well, those discussions, I'm sure, can take place between House leaders, but what we're focussed on in the Family Services area is to make sure that we move ahead with what the Children's Advocate has already said, what—that has already been laid out for us as a path of reform for child welfare. We take those recommendations very seriously and we continue to watch for the observations to make sure that we move consistent with her observations of the well-being of children.

And I remind members opposite, in putting children first, it's No. 1 to have safety as job one, which is why this Legislature unanimously passed Gage's law to make sure that, while culture is very important, nothing can trump the importance of safety when placing a child.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Legislation isn't worth the paper it's written on if, in fact, it's not being followed and it's not being implemented and there's no direction given from this minister to make that happen.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we're spoken to our House leader. He is quite prepared to ensure that a committee of the Legislature immediately is called to

ensure that we have full public accountability for the chaotic situation in our Child and Family Services system.

Will the minister today ensure that that happens? We on this side of the House are prepared to have that happen. What are they trying to cover up? What are they trying to hide from?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, you know, the member opposite, who had not an insignificant role in breaking the child welfare system herself, Madam Deputy Speaker, does not have credibility on child welfare. The cuts to foster care, the disregard for the Children's Advocate and, never in the history of this province, has there been such disregard and disrespect for the Children's Advocate, even getting rid of the Children's Advocate, operating completely contrary to demands by the Children's Advocate. They continued on their path to make cuts to child welfare and we're fixing those things up now. That's what we're doing.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And the Child Advocate says today, after 11 years of NDP government and 11 years of commitment to make the system better, that there is chaos in our Child and Family Services system. That's today, Madam Deputy Speaker, and, quite frankly, I'm not sure why they're not prepared.

And I would ask again, we're prepared—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to remind all honourable members that I do need to hear the questions and answers. We are in front of the viewing public so I do ask for some co-operation in maintaining decorum.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. And for the sake of the children in our Child and Family Services system we would ask that the government take a primary role, ensure that there is a committee of the Legislature so that the advocate can come forward and indicate why on earth the system is so chaotic today after 11 years of NDP government.

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, the Children's Advocates have very clearly set out what the challenges are and, in fact, there are almost 300 recommendations and, indeed, a very important among them are recommendations from not just the Children's Advocate but from the Ombudsman and, as well, the Auditor General, about the importance of investing in prevention activities.

So we've been doing it with Positive Parenting Program, with the family first program, the FASD prevention program, suicide prevention. Those are all initiatives that go to the heart of the investments that are necessary for the best bang for the buck to ensure that children, then, aren't exposed to physical and sexual abuse, that there can be an involvement before there's a risk to child safety.

So the advocate has spoken and we're on the path following the recommendations that the advocate in fact made.

Children's Advocate Report Standing Committee Review

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Deputy Speaker, the child welfare system in Manitoba is in chaos. These are the direct words from the Children's Advocate as reported on the *Winnipeg Sun* Web site only a few hours ago. Far too many children like Phoenix Sinclair and Gage Guimond continue to die in this province while under the care of the government. Under this government many deaths are not—still not fully investigated, and such suffering of children could just as easily happen again.

With the system being described as chaos by the person who should know it best, our Children's Advocate, will the Premier act like a leader and protect Manitoba's most vulnerable? Will the Premier agree that the Children's Advocate should be asked to appear before a legislative committee on an urgent basis to talk about the state of child—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Just—prior to recognizing the honourable First Minister, I just want to remind all honourable members that the matter is referring to has been taken under advisement, and I just want to caution all honourable members in how they phrase their questions and their answers.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): We are debating child welfare issues right here as we speak in the House. They think that's very appropriate. We think it's very appropriate that the independent officers of the Legislature have the ability to speak without fear or favour about what's going on in the child welfare system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have had comments from the Children's Advocate in the past on recommendations that needed to be followed up on. Those recommendations have been followed up on by this government, and, in particular, this Minister

of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) has followed with great concentration and determination to move on those recommendations. In turn, the Ombudsman has commented on the progress made, the Auditor General has commented on the progress made and they have made favourable—very favourable comments on the progress made on implementing recommendations, including recommendations from the Children's Advocate.

All of this material is in the public domain. All of this analysis and opinion is available for public consumption, and we are very happy to debate it here in the Legislature and all the other public forums that are available for it to be debated in, including today right now.

Minister of Family Services Resignation Request

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Deputy Speaker, child welfare in Manitoba is today a disaster, and yet this Premier is not ready to act on an urgent basis to have the Children's Advocate appear before a legislative committee.

The government has been in charge of Manitoba's most vulnerable children for almost 11 years. The situation is now worse than it has ever been. The present minister has been in his position for four years and the situation is now worse than it was. The solutions are not working, because we should've seen the results by now if they were.

I ask the Premier today to ask his minister to resign and to replace his minister with somebody who can get the job done.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): If the member from River Heights is seriously interested in progress in the child welfare system, I wish he would look at the report of the Auditor General who said: I am extremely impressed with the amount of energy and effort that has gone into addressing not just our reports but those that have been issued by the Ombudsman and the Children's Advocate, and they certainly have been faced with a large number of issues they've had to deal with. Those that we've had to follow up, we've seen real action. We've seen real improvement.

That's what the Auditor General said. That is a positive commendation on the role of this minister on following up on the Children's Advocate recommendations as well as recommendations by the

Ombudsman and the Auditor General themselves. There has been real progress.

There are further issues to address. We understand that, and that is why the investments we are making, we will continue to make in spite of all of the members opposite voting against every single one of them, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

* (14:10)

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Recognizing the honourable member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: If the Premier is doing such a good job, why are so many children still dying? If the Premier is doing such a good job, why do we have the equivalent of a city of children in care? Why do we have the same number of children in care as they do in British Columbia, which has four times our population?

I don't believe that Manitoba parents and children are worse than in British Columbia, but what I do believe is that this government has done such a poor management job of child welfare in this province that we have a situation which is a disaster, a situation in chaos. It's time for the Premier to acknowledge this. It's time for the minister to acknowledge his failures. It's time for the minister to resign.

Will the Premier take action today and change ministers and get somebody who can do the job?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I've previously answered that question. The minister has followed up vigorously all the recommendations made to him to improve child welfare. This has resulted in an additional \$112 million. This has resulted in another 2,300 foster parents. This has resulted in another 234 child welfare workers.

This has resulted in investments in prevention that are now going to be co-funded by the federal government. This has resulted in legislation for healthy children in Manitoba. This has resulted in greater improvements in our investments in day care in Manitoba. This has resulted in child welfare children's coalitions with parents and care providers working at the community level to improve the circumstances for children and families.

All of these measures we have taken year after year and have made improvements. These improvements have been acknowledged by the

Auditor General. These improvements have been acknowledged by the Ombudsman. The child's—Children's Advocate themselves have supported the direction that has been taken in child welfare.

Yes, there is more work to be done. Yes, there are serious issues, and we will address them in partnership with the community.

Children's Advocate Report Standing Committee Review

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Deputy Speaker, the Children's Advocate is publicly being reported, as of today, as saying that there is chaos within the child welfare system.

It is now five years since the death of Phoenix Sinclair and they still haven't followed through on their commitment to have a public inquiry in connection with that tragedy. So the rhetoric would mean something, Madam Deputy Speaker, if there was action to back it up.

Today—he's now been asked 13 times today whether he's prepared to do something very basic to move us forward and that's call a public legislative committee to bring the Children's Advocate's office before committee. He's been asked 13 times. He's dodged it on all 13 requests.

Will he now give a straight yes or no answer? The opposition can't call committee, the government can. Will he?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I have made it very clear. We're willing to be here every day to debate matters of public importance, including child welfare in this province of Manitoba. We are willing to do that. We are willing to do it in the House right now. We are willing to do it in the House as we proceed throughout the rest of the meetings this afternoon—hearings this afternoon.

We are prepared to move the budget forward, and we are prepared to move legislative measures forward which will be in the interests of community safety, which will be in the interest of children and families. Members opposite have blocked on the legislative agenda of this House. They have voted against extra resources in the budget. They have done everything they can to thwart investments in children and families.

We want to move forward to invest in children and families. We want to move forward on legislation that will protect children and families.

The members want to block that up. The public knows that. We know that.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's pretty hard to block bills that the government hasn't even deemed important enough to call before the Legislature for debate. They're so single-mindedly focussed on protecting their own salaries they haven't even called these bills for debate. How could we possibly block things that haven't been called?

But that aside, Madam Deputy Speaker, he's now been asked 14 times, and I'm going to ask him a 15th time today if he is prepared to call a legislative committee meeting to have the children's—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again I'm going to ask the co-operation of all honourable members. We need to maintain decorum in the House.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. What we're asking is for not more of the political rhetoric that we get from elected members of the NDP. We're asking to have the Acting Children's Advocate come before a public committee of the Legislature to elaborate on the very significant issues that are now being reported in the media, to respond to questions about the current state of chaos in the system and, more importantly, to work with all legislators toward finding solutions.

Why won't he allow that committee to be called? Why the stonewalling?

Mr. Selinger: Madam Deputy Speaker, several questions ago it was made very clear the House leaders can certainly discuss calling committee meetings here in the House. There's no barrier to that other than the unwillingness of the members opposite to co-operate in moving the affairs of the House forward.

There is a very serious set of resources that are being put forward to help children and families. There are bills in this House which will increase community safety and provide a more secure environment for children and families, and the members are stalling on all of those things.

The House leaders can discuss moving the affairs and the business of this House forward, including having standing committees do that. They want to thwart all of that activity. They want to cherry-pick and prevent the business of the House from moving forward. They want to stop the budget

from moving forward. They want to stop investments in children and families. We want to move the province forward; they want to block it.

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Deputy Speaker, the rousing applause for a debate over chaos in CFS really illustrates how out of touch this 11-year NDP government has become.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not the biggest decision he will have to make as Premier. Eight months ago his party delegates made him Premier of Manitoba. The House leader reports to him, not the other way around. It's within his power to call the committee immediately to bring forward the Children's Advocate to expand on the issues, to begin to work to find solutions.

Why won't he exercise the leadership and the responsibility that his party delegates gave him eight months ago and say today in the House, yes, I'm prepared for an immediate public committee meeting with the Children's Advocate? Why doesn't he have the moxie to make a decision, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Selinger: Madam Deputy Speaker, the House leaders are fully able to meet anytime, 24/7, to move the business of the House forward, including the business of standing committees of the House.

The members opposite do not want extra resources to go into the child welfare system. That is why they have voted against it. They have voted against additional resources for the Healthy Child initiatives. They have voted against additional resources for social housing for Manitobans. They have voted against additional resources for education. They have stopped all the bills in this House that would make communities safer.

We are willing to move Manitoba forward. They have to stop thwarting the wishes of Manitobans and blocking it up. We're prepared to sit here and debate public policy and priorities for Manitobans every single day. They want to go on holidays and get nothing done.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition House—excuse me—the honourable House leader for the official opposition.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order.

Point of Order

Madam Deputy Speaker: Point of order?

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, on a point of order.

I'm not sure where the Premier has been, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the reality is that until yesterday more than half the bills of this government weren't even presented to this House—as of yesterday—and there's only seven days left in the session. They haven't called the bills; that's the reality.

The second thing, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that both—I've heard in this House and this question period that both the Premier and the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) both indicated in response to a question that it's up to House leaders to call a public committee to compel the Children's Advocate to testify.

Well, I want to make it perfectly clear, Madam Deputy Speaker, as Opposition House Leader, I am in favour of calling the committee, and I would ask the Government House Leader to stand up on this point of order and tell everyone that he wants to call the committee anytime, anywhere, and we're going to be there.

* (14:20)

Madam Deputy Speaker: Recognizing the honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable House leader for the opposition rose on a point of order, and I'm rising to speak to the same point of order.

And in that context, I'd like to recall an earlier point of order, earlier in this session, when the Opposition House Leader rose and expressed great concern that the opposition have all the time that they needed to make sure that every member of their caucus spoke on the budget implementation bill. And we afforded them all of the time so that they could do that, and they used up many, many days speaking on the budget implementation bill and, then, of course, they have the nerve after that to say that somehow it's the government's fault that all that time was used up.

And then, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, we bring forward bills—[interjection] Oh, I guess they don't like what I have to say. You know—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to remind all honourable members that a point of order

is a very serious matter and we do need to hear everything that is being said. The honourable Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Mr. Blaikie: Madam Deputy Speaker, I—you know, I participate in this point of order somewhat reluctantly because I don't think it was a point of order. But to the extent that you're hearing people on this point of order, I just want to respond to what the honourable member had to say.

The fact of the matter is that the reason that we don't have as many bills moving forward as the government would like or, for that matter, as the public in Manitoba would like, is because the honourable members chose to adjourn the debate on every bill as they were introduced. We could have had all kinds of bills in committee by now, hearing witnesses, hearing from Manitobans, the very people they say they want to hear, but we haven't been able to do that. Why, Madam Deputy Speaker? Because of the official opposition.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I just—thank you. I wanted to thank everybody for their submissions to this point of order, but I would have to rule at this point that this is not a point of order. This is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was hoping to actually—to provide comment on the point of order. If I'm too late, then I would stand on another point of order.

Point of Order

Madam Deputy Speaker: On the—the member for Inkster, on a new point of order.

But prior to recognizing you, I just want to remind all honourable members that a point of order should be raised to draw the attention of the Chair in the House to some departure from the rules or from the normal procedures of the House. Could the honourable member please state his or her point of order?

Mr. Lamoureux: The immaturity from the member from Wolseley never ceases to amaze me, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I do believe that it is a point of order to ultimately suggest to the Chair that it is outside of the norm where House business would be talked about in and during question period.

Having said that, I think it is—given the importance of the issue that we have before us—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to remind all honourable members that a point of order is a very serious matter and I do need to hear the words that are spoken.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I share with you. I would ask that the NDP control themselves and listen and you'll learn something from the point of order.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we need to be perfectly clear as to what it is that has been brought up, and it is outside of the norm of the rules, but it is something that is worthy in terms of noting. You have the official opposition, through me, the Liberal Party, who has indicated that we would like to see a standing committee to deal with the Child Advocate. There seems to be support from two parties inside this Chamber. We're missing the support of the third party, which happens to be the party in government that has the authority to call the standing committee. And I believe what all that has happened through these points of order is just a gesture of good will to the government saying that if they truly want to have the standing committee meet, that both opposition parties are prepared to have that. And I think it's a noteworthy point of order for the government to take note of.

Madam Deputy Speaker: On the point of order, the member for Inkster does not have a point of order.

I would like to remind the House that the purpose of points of order is to bring to the attention of the House a breach of the rules and should not be used to debate issues or rebut points.

Children's Advocate Report Tabling Request

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Deputy Speaker, there is in excess of 8,600 children under the provincial care in the province of Manitoba. Yet we have an incompetent Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) that is not doing the job that he's been mandated to do. The job that this minister is supposed to be doing is to protect the interests of those children—of those 8,600-plus children.

I'm looking to the Minister of Family Services and asking the Minister of Family Services: Will he share with Manitobans the report that was brought to

LAMC, those first two pages, which clearly shows that this government—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I want to remind all honourable members that they—submission that is being discussed right now has currently been taken under advisement and cannot be referred to in the House.

The honourable member for Inkster, can you please rephrase your question?

Mr. Lamoureux: Sure, with pleasure.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Family Services stood up in an answer yesterday and talked about LAMC and how money was going to be flowing to the Child Advocate. It seems to me, whenever the government wants to talk positive from LAMC, they have a clear blanket; they can say and do whatever they want.

But when it comes to a sensitive issue that is affecting the children of our province in which the public have a right to know, my question to the Minister of Family Services: Why will he—why is he choosing to hide behind the Speaker's Chair in order to prevent a report from being tabled?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. To the member of—for the member of Inkster, could you please withdraw that comment. That's a reflection on the Chair.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will withdraw the comment and ask for the Minister of Family Services to recognize that there is a role for government to demonstrate leadership and in the issue in terms of the Child Advocate report, those first two pages tell a lot in terms of the Province of Manitoba—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member for Inkster, once again, I'm going to remind you that you cannot refer to the submission. It is currently under advisement. So, once again, I'm going to ask you to please consider your questions.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Lozenges, please.

I believe the—that despite the legislative skew, the member that just asked the question was invited or is a member now of LAMC, and I guess the member can tell the House all the questions that he addressed, then, to the Children's Advocate when she gave her annual request for money to that commission. He can perhaps—

An Honourable Member: On a point of order.

Point of Order

Madam Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the honourable member for Inkster.

Just prior to your point of order, I was just going to remind the honourable minister that we cannot discuss information that has been put forward at LAMC.

An Honourable Member: Madam Deputy Speaker, if the member would—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Does the honourable member for Inkster—he was rising on a point of order. Do you have a point of order? The minister has withdrawn his comments, but did you have a point of order?

Mr. Lamoureux: Well, the point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, was in reference to what the Minister of Family Services just finished saying.

He invited me, Madam Deputy Speaker, to share with this House questions that I might have posed to the Child Advocate, and I'm wondering if, in fact, I would have leave to be able to share with this House exactly what it is that the minister has suggested.

I would be more than happy to share the dialogue that I had in LAMC with regards to the Child Advocate's office if the minister will give me leave—

* (14:30)

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The—in regards to the honourable member—[interjection] Order.

I just—on the point of order, I want to remind all honourable members that a point of order is to remind the House of a breach of the rules or to draw attention to the House about something in regards to the operation of the House, and it should not be used to debate issues or rebut points.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Question period has finished. Oral questions—time for oral questions has expired.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I realize I only had the opportunity to ask one question. I would ask for leave to be able to have my two supplementary questions.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Does the honourable member for Inkster have leave to pose his next two questions? [*interjection*]-I'm sorry, I can't hear. Does the honourable member for Inkster have leave to ask his next two questions?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I'm sorry, I've heard a no from several members.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I just-I want to remind all honourable members, when a Speaker stands they should be heard in silence. So I would appreciate all honourable members having some decorum in this House.

Just prior to recognizing the honourable member, I want to remind the House that oral questions has expired. Leave was requested to ask another question, and leave was denied.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a matter of privilege.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster, on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Lamoureux: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It's with great seriousness that I bring to the floor of the Chamber what I believe is a true privilege. Madam Deputy Speaker, privilege is based, not only in terms of *Beauchesne's* and, ultimately, members' rights. You will recall that there is an agreement that is between the different House leaders in terms of being able to ask questions inside the Chamber looking into question period, and I have in good faith followed the opportunity to be able to support question period; and in the past what has happened is that there is supposed to be seven questions and, generally speaking, if their clock runs out, that members would be afforded the opportunity-and members I'm referring either to myself or the Leader of the Liberal Party-to be able to finish their questions.

Obviously, the government is very sensitive on this issue of Child and Family Services in terms of what it is that's taking place. I understand and I can appreciate that they don't like the questions that are being asked of them. I understand and I appreciate that, at times, questions can be very difficult to answer. But because you don't like the questions it

doesn't mean that you should be attempting to change the rules, and what I'm seeing, Madam Deputy Speaker, is a government, and it's being sensitive to the fact that they don't like these particular questions. One member of the New Democratic caucus, the member from Wolseley, said no from his chair, or at least he's the individual that I had heard that had said no, denying me the ability to be able to finish my question.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it's important that we recognize that there is a great deal of discussion that goes into the order of question period-

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I'm just going to ask for all the members' co-operation so that I can hear the member for Inkster who's rising on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a great deal of discussions that take place surrounding question period, and there was a number of compromises that were ultimately achieved in order to ensure that there was a sense of fairness in regards to question period.

I have on occasion stood up and have asked for leave in the past in order to be able to finish my supplementary question-questions, and the government, in the past, has allowed me to do that, Madam Deputy Speaker. They've allowed me to do that because I believe that there was an agreement that allowed for the independents, or the Liberals, to be able to conclude their three questions, their question and two subs.

Now, because the member from Wolseley decides upon his own, or I don't know, if he was told by others to say no, I was not afforded the opportunity to finish my question and two subs. As a result, Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe that we're in violation, or the government is in violation of what, I believe, was something that was accepted, something that was accepted amongst the different parties. It was agreed to. I take the Government House Leader (Mr. Blaikie) at his word and felt comfortable in believing that we would not lose our opportunity to ask supplementary questions. That was a critical component to being able to even have an agreement, a House leaders' agreement.

And so, what I'm asking, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that maybe there might be will of the House that would allow me to ask the two questions, as per was agreed upon in the past. You know, we

can reassess and renegotiate during the next session if need be, you know, the order of question periods.

But I truly do believe that given the fact that I did stand up and ask for leave, that I shouldn't have been denied. And I believe maybe the member from Wolseley maybe might have said it innocently, not remembering about the gentlemen's agreement that was there.

I believe that I should be allowed to ask those two questions and I would very much appreciate if you would ask if there would be leave again, Madam Deputy Speaker, which would resolve it.

Just in case, I want to make sure that I do this properly. I would move, seconded by the MLA from River Heights, that this matter be referred to the Legislative committee. But it wouldn't have to be that way if I could just get the leave to ask those two questions, and this way we'd be keeping in good faith what I thought was an agreement.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for Inkster, do you have a motion to bring forward?

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Well, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Okay. Just prior to recognizing you, I want to remind the House that contributions at this time by honourable members are to be limited to strictly relevant comments as to whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity and whether a prima facie case has been established.

The honourable Government House Leader, on the same matter of privilege.

Mr. Blaikie: Madam Deputy Speaker, I tried to listen carefully to the honourable member from Inkster and I—*[interjection]* I was saying that I tried to listen carefully to the honourable member from Inkster and if I understand it, his complaint is not—is with the absence of leave to ask a question after question period had expired. If the member is—and it was the—you indicated that question period expired and leave was sought. Leave was not granted. If the honourable member is making an argument that there has been—*[interjection]*

Surely, we should be able to have some kind of procedural debate without this kind of behaviour, so if I can just continue.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, to continue.

Mr. Blaikie: If the honourable member is referring to an understanding that he—an understanding between the parties as to whether question period actually expires at a particular time or whether a certain number of questions have to be asked, then that's an agreement that I was not particularly aware of.

* (14:40)

If the member wants to make that argument that somehow we have to get to a certain amount of questions and that the Liberal Party has to get to its question, the member will at least admit that there was some confusion today because the Liberal leader asked one of the—a question in a slot where the Conservatives normally ask a question.

And there may have been members who were under the impression that this was, if you like, particularly coming at the end, an extra question, and that when the member sought to—leave to have that supplementary question, it wouldn't have been out of the ordinary given the fact that we don't—are hardly ever asked for leave and, in fact, I don't remember it myself, at least in my short time here.

So if the honourable—if the honourable member feels that some kind of agreement has been broken, that's a different matter because I like to respect that—agreements when they've been made. It's not an agreement that I made personally, but if that's an agreement that exists between the parties, then perhaps the honourable member should be given leave to ask his question.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Did the honourable Opposition House Leader want to comment on this same matter of privilege? No.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, just in reflection, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I may, just to ask for leave. It's in keeping with what we've done in the past—just to ask for leave to finish off the question, which means two supplementary questions, and then everything would be in keeping with what the agreement was, and then we're more than happy to expand upon that if the Government House Leader would like—at least straightforward.

Ask, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I may, just have the leave to ask the—I believe it was two supplementary questions, it might've been one. I'm

not 100 percent sure, but the Clerk would be able to tell you if I had one question and one sup.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have to deal with the matter of privilege first before I can entertain another request. And I think I have probably heard sufficient argument, and at this point I would have to say that this is not a matter of privilege.

In addition to the ruling, the question period arrangements that were negotiated between the Speaker and the House leader only provides for the Liberals to finish their supplemental and their questions on Mondays and Tuesdays, and not on Wednesdays and Thursdays. So that is what the agreement does state. The honourable—so this is not—just—this is not a matter of privilege, but you can ask—you can request once again for leave.

* * *

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would just request for the leave once again.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Again, I'm going to put this to the House.

Is there leave for the honourable member for Inkster to finish his two supplemental questions?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Agreed. There is leave.

ORAL QUESTIONS (Continued)

Children's Advocate Report Standing Committee Review

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the Government House Leader.

Madam Deputy Speaker, my—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I'm just going to ask all honourable members that I can make sure I can hear the questions and the answers.

Mr. Lamoureux: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. My question then would be for the—supplementary question would be for the Premier.

It's a question that has been referred to throughout question period and I think that the Premier would do well by providing a straightforward answer and that is: Does the Premier—is the Premier prepared to acknowledge that

there is a need for a standing committee to be able to meet—of the Legislature—and have the Child Advocate come before it sometime in the next couple of weeks?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): As I've said earlier, Madam Deputy Speaker, we remain open to a full public discussion of all matters of importance including child welfare, and the House leaders are completely available to discuss how those arrangements could be made.

Child and Family Services Agencies Client Increase

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, and finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that there has been a great deal of discussion. I understand even the *Winnipeg Sun* now has a portion—I'm not too sure entirely if how much—but there's a portion of the report that might even be on the *Winnipeg Sun* Web site. I'm asking—[interjection] Okay, Madam Deputy Speaker—I know where you're going. I'll withdraw that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: All right. Thank you very—I thank the member for Inkster for withdrawing that and just keep in mind that there are certain items that are under consideration right now and have been taken under advisement.

Mr. Lamoureux: Okay. Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, again what I would look at is the—in—the record high of 8,600 children that are under provincial care compared to 6,600 back in 2005.

How would the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) best explain why it is that the numbers have increased from—by 2,000 since 2005?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Madam Deputy Speaker, the decision about whether children should be in care are made by trained child welfare workers, and when they believe a child needs to be brought into care, they act in the best interests of the child, under the child welfare act.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you. And, once again, time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS Joan Robert

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): The community of Russell has recently lost one its pillars of its community, Joan Robert. Joan was instrumental in numerous success stories within the community, especially in the field of music, drama and choir.

Joan founded and directed three choir groups within the community whose memberships stretched beyond the surrounding area.

Joan volunteered countless hours in directing musical theatre, festivals and individuals studying music and voice within Major Pratt School in Russell. Her perfectionist qualities were recognized and valued by everyone she touched in the fields of music and voice, and she was a key figure in the promotion and direction of the North West Marquette music festival.

In addition to all volunteer hours, Joan found time to assist and teach voice and music to students within her home. She knew her students well and was able to get each of them to reach their highest potential. Her students respected and loved her and would continue to stay in touch with her long after voice lessons or music were completed. Many came home to say their final farewell to Joan at the funeral service this past Monday, and their voices were heard singing beautifully throughout the funeral service.

Joan was a tremendous advocate and supporter of the community of Russell. This was her home and she was extremely proud of the many things the community had achieved over the years. Along with her husband, Clement, who predeceased her some years before, they became the major influence and driving force of the new community centre, which includes an exceptional sound and stage lighting facility. Joan and her husband were generously—were generous in their financial support for the project, and owning a construction company was a plus. Many hours of in-kind support was donated by Clem and Joan and their family in preparation of the site for the community centre. In recognition of her dedication and commitment, the community centre now proudly bears her name as the Joan Robert Auditorium.

Joan was also a supporter of significant—and a significant contributor to the Russell palliative care unit as well as the newly announced dialysis centre and many other community projects.

Over the years, Joan was recognized for her efforts with a number of significant nominations and awards. Joan always was generous, but I can honestly say that she gave far more to the community than we can ever repay. She was a very gifted and talented individual who shared her gifts generously with the people whom she touched. She was a no-nonsense person who got things done and helped

many reach their highest potential, especially in the field of music and voice.

I will miss Joan and so will our entire community. Her family should be very proud of her contributions to the community, and I know that many of her outstanding qualities have been instilled in her children and her grandchildren. Much like the indelible mark she made on the community of Russell, Joan has left this community a rich legacy with exceptional music choirs and individuals who have a love for music and will continue that for their lifetime.

Military History Society Legion House Museum

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Madam Deputy Speaker, preserving the history of our province is a paramount duty that will allow future generations to learn from our mistakes and successes. This duty becomes even more imperative when the history at stake is the military history of our soldiers. To ensure the deeds of our soldiers are never forgotten, the dedicated staff of the Military History Society of Manitoba diligently maintains the Legion House Museum.

Located on the second floor of the Royal Canadian Legion Norwood/St. Boniface Branch No. 43, this small-scale museum houses a great deal of history. Museum visitors can sample permanent exhibits depicting Canada's battles in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, particularly highlighting Manitobans and the participation of units from the province. The museum also houses an archives and library collection including a wide variety of military history books and the extensive embarkation lists of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, which includes over 400,000 names. Anyone looking to find out about a long-lost relative who had served in the force can approach the museum for use of this data base.

The museum hosts various rotating temporary exhibits from personal collections and on loan from other museums. I was able to see a particularly sombre piece of military history during my visit to the museum: the uniform of Corporal James Hayward Arnal, who died in Afghanistan in 2008 after he was struck by an improvised explosive device. James belonged to the 2nd Battalion of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in Shilo. His uniform was donated to the museum by James's mother, Wendy Hayward, who graciously agreed to share her memories of her son with the rest of us.

* (14:50)

Madam Deputy Speaker, I encourage all members to visit the Legion House Museum and learn of Manitoba's military history. I would also like to thank the dedicated members of the Military History Society of Manitoba and, in particular, Mr. Bruce Tascona. The society is a non-profit organization that aims to collect information about military culture and history and promote the study of military history in our province. Thank you.

Brock Hayden Pulock

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I'm requesting leave. My private member's statement will be a little bit over the two minutes.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Does the member for Minnedosa have leave? *[Agreed]*

Mrs. Rowat: It is with a heavy heart that I rise today to pay tribute to Brock Hayden Pulock who lost his life on Monday, March 29th, 2010. Brock was 13 years old, a conscientious grade 7 student at Grandview School and was a captain of the Grand Plains Hawks Pee Wee hockey team and a staunch supporter of the Toronto Maple Leafs and Toronto Blue Jays.

Brock is survived by his parents, David and Tannis, and his brothers Derrick and Ryan. Brock will also be missed by his extended family, his many friends, teammates, teachers, coaches and members of the sports community where he travelled.

My family connected with the Pulocks through—what else—hockey. It goes beyond words when I say that the Manitoba Hurricane family are heartbroken and that we will miss Brock the Rock's entertaining observations. Brock, armed with a quick wit, kept all of the Hurricane clan on our toes. We all had such great stories—or we all have such great stories of Brockster, be it finding the elusive Subway, innocently—not really—suggesting to his mom to consider a questionable shop as a good place to shop for an outfit to please Dad, to rattling off accurate stats on almost any sports team.

Brock loved to socialize, and was a Facebook friend to many. He loved sports and outdoor activities, be it planting a garden or fishing with his family. He was known as a calm but competitive leader both on and off the ice, the diamond or the court. Brock had the ability to strike up a meaningful conversation with both young and old. He possessed such maturity that was beyond his years.

To Brock, his family was everything. He was his mom's faithful companion. Brock and his mom were kindred spirits, spending hours together at home enjoying early morning couch conversations. At school she actually taught him his first class of the day, which they both cherished. At home, in school or on the road, they had many conversations about sports, about current events, about the latest gossip and about their family. Above all, Brock was never embarrassed to tell his mom he loved her, something he did every day.

Brock was his dad's right-hand man. The two were so much alike in their ability to interact easily with others. As Brock grew older, he showed so many signs of being a carbon copy of Dave. He loved to meet people, to be around others, to laugh, to tease and to play. With quiet confidence, a logical argument and an irresistible grin, Brock won his dad over every time. He was especially successful on clothing shopping trips; Brock liked to look good and he expected Dave to look good as well.

Known around town as the Pulock boys, Derrick, Ryan and Brock were a team of hardworking, respectful and level-headed young men who were seldom seen alone, spending countless hours together at both work and play. Brock was their errand boy, their informant, their voice of wisdom and their best buddy. At home, after school, Ryan especially enjoyed the tasty bread-maker bread that Brock was just mastering to make. The boys were as close as three brothers could possibly be.

Brock made such an impact on all who knew him. The member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) and I have had the honour of knowing Brock and the Pulock family. In this Chamber, we have had many discussions and actually have created questions with the help and the assistance of the Pulock family.

Brock had great dreams of being an elite athlete—a stud on defence, as he said, or an ace on the mound and, of course, his dream of being a physical education teacher. We wish you could have lived those dreams, Brock. They weren't at all out of reach. Godspeed, Brock. You will live in our hearts forever and, as your mother wishes, you will never be forgotten.

Medical Assistance for Jamaica Program

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to commend the volunteers and donors behind Medical Assistance for Jamaica, a Manitoba organization that ships medical supplies to

hospitals and other health facilities in Jamaica. It works in collaboration with the Winnipeg-based International Health Overseas Project Education or HOPE Canada, as it is known.

International HOPE collects and warehouses redundant medical supplies and equipment donated by Manitoba's regional health authorities for redistribution to developing countries. The donations include everything from hospital beds, crutches and canes to unused sutures and bandages. Medical Assistance for Jamaica, in turn, raises funds to pay for the considerable costs of shipping containers of material to the island and to purchase the occasional piece of equipment which is not available through the health authorities. Its volunteers also help inspect, catalogue and pack the material.

Medical Assistance for Jamaica succeeded in delivering a huge 40-foot container to two hospitals in Kingston, Jamaica, in 2007, and is now fundraising to send off another container this August.

Their fundraising gala on May 15th, which I had the honour of co-emceeding with Audrey Gordon, was organized by the Medical Assistance for Jamaica team, headed by Carmen Nembardt, the Honorary Consul for Jamaica. The patron of the gala banquet was Winnipeg entrepreneur and philanthropist, Hubert Kleysen.

The guest speaker, Dr. Vernon DaCosta, is a renowned expert in fertility management at the University Hospital of the West Indies in Kingston. He encouraged the agency in its international co-operation, quoting Jamaica's own Bob Marley: "One love, / One heart, / Let's get together and feel all right."

Guests included a number of volunteers from International HOPE, as well as members from Manitoba's consular corps. Steve Kirby and the University of Manitoba Jazz Ensemble gave us a splendid display of their talents and reminded us how proud we can be that the University of Manitoba has succeeded in luring a director of such calibre as Professor Kirby from New York to Winnipeg.

Special mention should be made of Hyacinth DaCosta who worked deftly behind the scenes to make the fundraiser a true gala.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am confident that all my honourable colleagues in the House will join me in wishing Medical Assistance for Jamaica further success in its humanitarian endeavours.

Child and Family Services Agencies

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Deputy Speaker, there are presently more than 8,600 children in care and we have, as has been noted by the children's 'advocus,' chaos in child welfare in Manitoba.

Why is it chaos there? It is there as a direct result of the way this government and the present minister have managed child welfare in Manitoba. The government—the minister put in place devolution. We agree with devolution. We agree that Child and Family Services should be delivered in a culturally sensitive way. It has been done that way with Jewish child and family services and other cultural groups for some time, and it is only logical and smart that this be done.

But the government completely failed to change the system to one which primarily supports children in their homes and their families, rather than one which primarily apprehends children at the first sign of any trouble.

The minister then reacted to the death of Phoenix Sinclair and Gage Guimond by bringing in Gage's law, which put child safety first. Now, we agree with Gage's law and putting child safety first, but what the minister failed to do was put in place a proper risk assessment, the result with—that at the first sign of any minor problem in a family, children were brought into care. I had reports in one community that virtually any child that wandered outside their home was being brought into care. It was chaos, this huge influx of children into the Child and Family Services system—which we've seen—without an increase in resources to look after these children and make sure they're cared for well, make sure that they're given the environment so that they can turn their lives around where there's a problem.

This is what's happened, is that the system has become totally overwhelmed just as the Child Advocate has said. There are not enough staff; there are not enough people to look after all the new children. It is chaos and it is chaos because of the way—

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

* (15:00)

**MATTER OF URGENT
PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): In accordance with rule 36(1), I move, seconded by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), that the regularly scheduled business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, issues with regard to the Department of Family Services and, in particular, the crisis in child welfare.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member for River East, I believe I should remind all members that under rule 36(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other parties in the House is allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

As stated in *Beauchesne's*, citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion. In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I understand that the rules under a matter of urgent public importance that I am to make a case and present sufficient reasons to warrant setting aside the business of the House to debate this matter that I—or this motion that I have just presented. So I am wanting to indicate, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we found out just late yesterday and in the media today that the Child Advocate has considered the Child and Family Services system to be in a state of chaos, and none of us should take that issue lightly.

And I guess the major concern for us as an opposition party and myself as the critic responsible for Family Services—believe that it's very important to set the business of the House aside today to discuss this, because, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is in the public's best interests for us to have this debate.

We, as yet, haven't got agreement from the government, although we asked, I think, about 16 times today in the Legislature for a committee of the Legislature to be called and to have some public discussion to provide some accountability around the Child and Family Services system that for far too

long under this government has created the state or the situation, the crisis, the chaos that we see today.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, the reason for the urgency in the debate of this motion is that we're dealing with the lives of children. These are some of the most vulnerable children in our Manitoba society and when we have a system that's described in chaos, I think it's incumbent upon us to set aside other issues. And what other issue could be more important than the safety and the security of children and children's lives?

And it's important, Madam Deputy Speaker, that all members of this Legislature recognize and realize that every day that the Child and Family Services system continues to be in chaos, we're putting the lives of children at risk. And these are not children that many of us would understand as families do, but these are children that are vulnerable. These are children that have had to be apprehended from their family as a result of some sort of dysfunction, whether it be abuse or neglect.

And these are children that, far too often, Madam Deputy Speaker, under this government's watch, are not being afforded the opportunity to have the best possible chance to grow and to thrive and to learn and to become productive members of society. And it's as a direct result of the policies and the legislation that this government has put in place. And, you know, we've heard members of the government, we've heard the Premier (Mr. Selinger), we've heard the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) stand up and talk about all the wonderful things that they have done to improve the system.

Well, any amount of money that's poured into a system that is dysfunctional, Madam Deputy Speaker, is not going to fix a system that is in chaos, that seems to have no sense of direction, and we don't have strong leadership to try to protect the most vulnerable children that need all of our support.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important today because I don't want to see another minute wasted on a system moving in a direction that is chaotic, that is not serving needs of children and that might put one more child's life in jeopardy for one more minute.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would urge all members of the House to support—and I understand that, in a bit of damage control mode, the government hasn't agreed that we might debate this

motion today. And this motion is only the first step in trying to get to the bottom of the issues that are facing vulnerable children that need protection in our Manitoba society. So I would encourage all members to support this motion and we should be able to debate it fully in the House today. Thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on the same matter of urgent public importance.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would remind the honourable member from River East that it's not up to the—I say I would remind the honourable member from River East that it's not up to the government whether or not this proposal for a debate on a matter of urgent pressing public importance is accepted. It's up to the Chair.

So—but the fact of the matter is, Madam Deputy Speaker, that—rising to speak for the government on this matter—that we would certainly want to indicate to you—although the—ultimately it is up to you, Madam Chair—or Madam Speaker—that we would certainly be prepared to see this go forward as a matter of urgent public importance.

And seeing that I've got the attention of the honourable member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) now, so I'll say again, it's not up to the government whether this is accepted. It's up to the Speaker. We can only indicate whether or not we are prepared to have this debate and, given that the debate and the wording of the debate is framed in such a way that it does not violate any previous rulings of the Chair with respect to other matters, we are certainly prepared to accept—if the Chair so rules—that this is a matter which the Chamber's been seized of today and in previous days but there may well indeed be a need for more extended debate which, if the proposal for the—for this particular debate is accepted, then that will be provided to the Chamber.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster, on the same matter.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Deputy Speaker, I would request leave just to add comments onto the MUPI, please.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is there leave for the honourable member for Inkster to make his comments on the matter of urgent public importance? *[Agreed]*

There is leave.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I do appreciate the fact that it would appear as if there is support within the Chamber to have this debate continue this afternoon.

I believe that that is a positive thing in recognizing that you will take that into consideration in terms of making your decision. I do believe, ultimately, that there is a high need. We're talking about in excess of 8,600 children that are very dependent on child welfare in one form or another, or where the Province is providing care, again, indirectly, and in some cases directly.

Given the comments that have been made and the things that have been—that have come public over the last number of days, that, indeed, there is justification for having this type of debate, if we believe in putting our children first, I believe that not only are we required—or should we be having this debate, but I also believe that there is a need to have a broader discussion that takes place in terms of a standing committee, but I'll leave that for members that might be commenting on the—potentially, the emergency debate itself.

But to stand in support of the debate is the reason why I want to stand on my place at this time.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

* (15:10)

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on whether the motion proposed by the honourable member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) should be debated today.

The notice required by rule 36(1) was provided. Under our rules and practices, the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. There must also be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter.

There are procedural shortcomings with this MUPI motion and it is technically out of order. But, despite these shortcomings, there appears to be a willingness to debate the matter. Therefore, I will put the question to the House. Shall the debate proceed? *[Agreed]*

Just to remind all honourable members, the time limit for a MUPI debate is two hours and the speaking time limit for members is 10 minutes.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I rise with a heavy heart to have to speak on a motion like this, a matter of urgent public importance, and that is, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I care very much about the children that are served by our Child and Family Services system. And I just want to at the outset say that I spent six years as the Minister of Family Services, and I know that the present minister likes to bring it up and talk about how imperfect the system was then, and I want to admit that there never has been a perfect Child and Family Services system in the province under any administration and we all strive and work towards trying to make the system better for children.

So I have never said that the system was perfect when we were in government. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, we didn't see the kind of criticism and the kind of things that are happening in our Child and Family Services system today, and I will talk about a few of those things and some of the very significant changes that have been made by this government, by this administration, and, you know, I look to the present Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) and, you know, he was not the architect of the legislation or the system that we see in place today. It was his predecessor Tim Sale that was the architect of the devolution process, and we have never in this House stood up and said that we do not support devolution. But when the legislation came before this House and this Chamber, we raised some significant issues about how this was going to be implemented and some very cautionary notes about making sure that the process was managed in a way that it would protect children.

At the time, the unions within the Child and Family Services system were very concerned about what this whole process was going to do to the labour force, to the work force and to those that felt stressed within the system. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, we took those considerations into account, we listened very carefully to people that made presentation at the committee stage for the legislation, and we also raised the issues about moving forward and ensuring that safety of children was primary and first and foremost as this process evolved. And we supported the legislation at that time with the assurances from the then minister that, trust us, things were going to be just fine, the system was going to be a lot better, and we should just move forward.

Well, fast forward a couple of years and that minister was replaced for a short period of time for the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell), and

then the member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) became the Minister for Family Services, and that was at a time when we saw the tragic death of Phoenix Sinclair, and we saw the damage control that she tried to put in place and all of the reviews that she ordered, you know, to try to delay having to take responsibility for the death and for the mess that was happening in Child and Family Services.

And, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, she was the one, I believe, that rushed through the process and gave the direction that this needed to happen; it needed to move and it was going to happen, and, as a result, children were transferred to new agencies, to new authorities. Their files were closed and they were never reopened. And this is what the member for Riel and the legacy that she has left for vulnerable children in the province of Manitoba.

And, you know, she had to be removed from that portfolio, and the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh), the new Minister of Family Services, was left to pick up the pieces. Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, he's had four years to pick up the pieces and to try to make things better. And, regardless of how much he talks about all of the wonderful programs and the Changes for Children and acting on all of the recommendations, we see a system in chaos today. Not my words, but the words of the Children's Advocate, who has said that this system is broken; it's in crisis; it's in chaos; that we have foster families leaving the system because they are not pleased with the way the children under their care are being treated.

And this isn't necessarily about foster families, foster families who have opened their hearts and their homes and provided loving, safe environments for children. It's about the children, Madam Deputy Speaker, that, for some reason or other, under this government's policy, are being moved from those foster families without any written reason from the agency or from the authority that would indicate that it's in the best interest of the child. Now, this was recommendation No. 47 that was made as a result of Gage Guimond's death, and it was a recommendation that this minister stood up and said he was going to accept and he was going to implement. And the recommendation clearly said that there should be a written reason from the agency indicating why any move from a long-term foster placement—when there were no protection concerns—that there should be a written reason why it was in the best interest of the child.

I've asked this minister time and time again whether he will implement that recommendation. I've brought in a private member's bill asking him to implement that recommendation, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, he has refused, saying it's not necessary.

Well, the report said it was necessary, and we are hearing from families today that are being mistreated because this minister will not take action to implement that recommendation. And I know, Madam Deputy Speaker, of cases where foster families have appealed, first to the agency, asking for the agency to consider leaving that child in their loving foster home. And the agency has written back and said no, with absolutely no reason. Their next step of appeal is to the authority, and the authority, without any written explanation, has said, no, the child will be moved. The third avenue of appeal is to the adjudicator that's appointed by the minister and his department—his office. And when you get an adjudicator's report back, a five-page written document that says, for all of these reasons, the child should remain with the foster family and not be moved, you would think that that would be a final decision.

But, you know, what we're hearing from foster families today is, no. Again, a year later the agency starts the whole process over of wanting to remove that child from that loving foster home, Madam Deputy Speaker, for—with absolutely no written rationale or reasoning.

* (15:20)

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is not right, and I don't know how this minister—and I've been to his office and I've talked to him behind closed doors about families, because we do know that foster families, if they go public and get the media involved or get me involved and I go to the media, that it's going to jeopardize their ability to keep that child because they've breached confidentiality.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, I've gone and pleaded with the minister, asked him to personally review and ensure that these children are not going to be removed from a stable, loving situation. And we see that this minister turns a blind eye, a deaf ear, to those families, and I don't know why he wouldn't show the kind of leadership that he should be showing after four years in this chaotic child and family services system, why he wouldn't show the leadership and ensure that children are not moved without the proper rationale or reasoning.

And so, Madam Deputy Speaker, I know my time is up, but I do want to indicate that it's important that we discuss this today because I don't want to see another minute where children are put into a chaotic system that this government has created without trying to find some positive solutions. We on this side want to see children protected. We don't want to see what's happening today—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to speak on this matter.

And, first of all, I just wanted to respond to a statement that was made, and I might not accurately quote it, but the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) said: With 8,500 children in care, why aren't you doing something to protect those children? Well, the reason they're in care is because they've been judged by professionals to be in need of protection. In other words, that's the child welfare system going to work.

The responsibility for parenting is certainly one that has been increasingly a shared responsibility with government providing more resources, but the primary responsibility for parenting still rests with parents. And so we've got to continue to make sure that not only the government investments are directed in a way that can provide positive supports for parents who are in need of greater support, but we've got to make sure that all Manitobans are reminded of their role, whether they're family, friends or neighbours, in helping families that are in distress and to guard against family breakdown and child abuse.

We certainly have seen, over the last five years, a very significant increase of the number of children coming into care in this province and, in fact, I was just asked in a media scrum what the reasons for that may be. We've seen some trends across North America that are comparable, but what we care about is what's happening in Manitoba. And, according to our figures, there's been a 50 percent increase in the last five years of the children in care; 8,500 or over is the latest number in Manitoba. That is cause for very serious alarm. We also know that, disproportionately, the children coming into care are Aboriginal. Madam Deputy Speaker, 85 percent of children in care now in Manitoba are Aboriginal and, disproportionately, they're coming—they're in remote and northern communities.

What parents do to children and what parents cannot do for children is so distressing, and that is why investments outside of child welfare, first and foremost should be mentioned, that go to work for families. I've learned very recently that the Positive Parenting Program out of Australia is actually recognized as an international best practice. I am very pleased that Manitoba has adopted that as the main healthy child investment in parenting skills development.

As well, we know that visiting families, where particularly families are at risk, when a baby is expected and postnatally, can be a very important intervention, and, as well, that's been recognized as an international best practice. And we do have that in Manitoba. As well, it's the investments made in education and health care that can make big differences to the well-being of families.

In child welfare itself, though, we've increasingly recognized that there is a necessary move from an apprehension-based model to one that's called differential response, where another stream of child welfare is provided, to provide assistance for families when there is early signs of breakdown.

The family enhancement stream has been designed very carefully here in Manitoba as a result of the recommendations from the Children's Advocate and the Ombudsman and investments that are very significant are now going to work. And there's over 20 pilot projects that are the second phase of family enhancement in Manitoba, as well as the development and testing of a new risk assessment model, based on best practices in other jurisdictions. That risk assessment model is the foundation on which family enhancement will develop.

But also in child welfare, the Changes for Children initiative, which is based on a path set out by the Children's Advocate and the Ombudsman and, to a certain extent, by the Auditor General, has put in place in Manitoba a 60 percent budget increase for child welfare, or new investments of \$112 million. Key to that are increases to foster rates after cuts to foster rates in the last decade and now, under Changes for Children, foster rates are up 21 percent. We funded 230 new positions; 116 of those are for front-line relief, 54.5 of those are for family enhancement.

And, as well, we've been able to successfully, and on a sustained basis, significantly and almost reduce or eliminate the housing of children in hotels.

There were 166 kids in hotels in 2006 and it's now down to an average of two or three a week. That does fluctuate but it appears that the systems that have been put in place as a result of devolution have made a difference.

There have been about 12,500 registrants for new training initiatives under Changes for Children and I think, most significantly, even though the recruitment strategy for new foster families had as its strategy the recruitment of 300 more foster beds, we are now at 2,207 new foster beds, and that's a net increase, Madam Deputy Speaker. That speaks so large—loudly to how Manitobans are prepared to open their hearts and their homes. We're also very pleased because of the interest in culturally appropriate child welfare services. We're very pleased to see that we've been able to recruit increasing numbers of Aboriginal families as foster parents.

But the breakdown that's happening in too many families is a sad fact across this country and in Manitoba, and so the increasing number of children in care has come at the same time as the Changes for Children initiative was launched. And while we've had caseloads reported in inquest reports in the 1990s of between 40 and 80, the average caseload now, I understand, is about 29. Some of the—well, I should say that our ability to do better on that one has been undermined to a certain extent by the increase of the number of children in care, and that has to continue to be looked at, but reminds us of the importance of the new investment in the family enhancement stream and prevention, as Alberta has pioneered in this country.

When we look at where children are coming into care from, we always end up looking at the challenges in remote and northern communities and, indeed, it was in the inquest report into the death of Tracia Owen, where the judge there found and concluded that the only social service in the community was the apprehension service of child welfare, and the need to move towards equitable funding for child welfare on reserve to equal that off reserve. In fact, there's a 25 percent difference. It's a subject of a national human rights complaint and widespread criticism of the federal government. So we're very pleased to have engaged the federal government. We look forward to a positive announcement from the federal minister and I thank the grand chiefs for their advocacy with Minister Strahl in that regard.

But we have to make sure that the prevention model allows for interventions, whether it's parenting skills or other interventions, in those remote or northern communities. We have to make sure that there are on-reserve prevention services that are no less of a quality or quantity than what the province is able to provide.

* (15:30)

And so a new funding model has been developed by the staff at both the provincial and federal levels and that will certainly enable the family enhancement model to be institutionalized over the next year and a half in Manitoba, based on the pilot projects that are now under way. And we're seeing examples of that celebrated in the media from time to time, or whether they're—it's the testing of the risk assessment tool.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's with those remarks that I conclude, and I can only say that we will continue to listen to outside observers of the child welfare system and take their advice and make sure that the investments that are being made for Manitoba children are the best ones, in the interests of not only the well-being of children, but our collective well-being as well. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to make a few comments on this matter of urgent public importance. I want to acknowledge the MLA for River East in bringing this forward. Clearly, the NDP government, when it comes to child welfare in Manitoba, has messed up really badly. After 11 years of this government, child welfare in our province is in chaos. It's a disaster, and this government has been covering up instead of correcting the problems.

Far too many children are dying, investigations are not being done and reported in a timely fashion, and problems go far, far beyond this. First of all, we need the NDP, instead of turning on their spin machine, to start coming clean. We need public release of information. We need to have the Children's Advocate come before a legislative committee to discuss the current situation with child welfare in Manitoba.

There are now more than 8,600 children in care in our province. As the minister himself acknowledged, this is like having a city full of children in care. It is a disaster. I don't believe that children and families in our province are any worse than in other provinces, and yet we have much

higher numbers and proportions of children in care in Manitoba than in any other province. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not the children's fault; this is not the parents' fault; it's not the families' fault. It's the direct fault of the way this government is managing child welfare in our province. The NDP have been dishing out spin on this issue for a long time. Let us look at some of that spin.

The NDP have trying to said that all is well, that they're doing a wonderful job. Well, the Children's Advocate has shown that to be completely false. We know that the situation with child welfare is in chaos and a disaster. The NDP have blamed the federal government. Well, this government has been in power for 11 years, and we're talking about the citizens of our province wherever they may be living. There is no excuse for this government. It is this government which has laid the trail to disaster.

The minister has said that he's protecting children, and yet he has not presented outcomes. Are there fewer deaths of children? Are, in fact, we having the children who are in care turning out better, less likely to get in problems with the law, ending up as more productive citizens, doing well? We've not been presented with one iota of evidence that there are improved outcomes, or even that this minister is actually measuring or concerned about outcomes for these children.

The minister has said this is just reflective of trends across North America. Well, in British Columbia, Madam Deputy Speaker, where they had 11,000 children in care, they have, in the last number of years, looked at this carefully and they have managed things so that they are now down to 9,000 children in care, because they're better supporting children in their homes and doing a better analysis and assessment before they take children into care, before they do this drastic move.

The minister says what parents do to children is so distressing. Well, I would argue that what this government is doing with the people of Manitoba is distressing. There's been adequate attention to poverty for 11 years, and what is the result? We've got poor families who are forced to go to food banks because they're starving and poor families who are poor and having trouble getting food—that's one of the problems, one of the reasons. Indeed, when I was in Cross Lake, I was told that about 30 percent of the children in care are there not because there's anything wrong with the family, but because the environment, the housing condition, the support—

right?—for these family is not there. And it's not the fault of the family or a problem in the family; it's a problem with the government.

There is a lack of identification early on of children with FASD, and so we end up with an extraordinary proportion of children in care having FASD, because the children with FASD are not identified early and their families are not supported adequately and allowed to raise them so that they can do well.

You know, the—time and time again, we have seen the excuses. The minister the other day said, we have children in care in Manitoba twice as long as Saskatchewan. Well, instead of seeing this as a positive, I suggest that this is part of the problem—that this government has not arranged Child and Family Services so that, in fact, there is rapid assessment and answers; too long—too often kids are tied up, you know, in courts before there's a resolution. There are problems related to holding children in care for so long.

You know, the fact is that, as many have acknowledged, children who have a government as their parent, no matter how well-intentioned the government or necessary the arrangement is, are often damaged by that. So we should, even when we take children in care, try to get long-term situation resolution as quickly as we can—not to delay it and delay and delay and end up with more problems.

The minister has talked about the breakdown of families. How much of this is due to poor parenting? How much is this due to poor management of Child and Family Services by this government?

I recently had two instances where families came to me where all the indications I have are that the child was inappropriately taken away when the family could have done much better being supported and the children and the families being supported. Well, the result of the action in taking away the child and all the legal distress and everything else about the situation, instead of support, these two families are now broken apart because of all the stress and all the problems which were created by a system which was designed to apprehend and cause problems rather than to support the children and the family.

That's not to say that there are not times when you do need to take children into care, but you must do the proper risk assessment. You must make sure that you've got a better situation and not a worse. You must recognize that the government is not a

good parent, as good as a biological parent, and that we can do much better in our province than we've been doing, and that a significant part of the reason that we've got so much chaos in Child and Family Services right now is the direct actions of this government.

And this government should not be allowed to escape because this is a problem of their origins in many, many ways. It is not a question of devolution. It is a question of how you operate the system so that you're providing the kind of environment which is more supportive rather than more threatening and apprehending. It is a matter of how you change the system so that you protect the child and the family and improve relations in the child and the family.

This Premier (Mr. Selinger) should have been taking emergency action today. As I indicated, the Child and Family Services Minister has completely failed to do his job. He should resign. There should be a new minister put in place.

*(15:40)

The backlog of child deaths is disgusting. The backlog of cases that have not been fully investigated, I should say, Madam Deputy Speaker, is disgusting. There is much to learn about many of these situations that can generate improvements in the system. And to sit on these cases because the minister hasn't been on his toes and made sure that the staffing and the resources were there was a complete mistake and adds to the problem. There must be action. There needs to be action quickly.

That is why we have this matter of urgent public importance before us today, and that is why it is so sad seeing a minister and a premier trying to defend the status quo rather than coming forward with a recognition that they've created a disaster and they better do something about it before there are more children and families and problems in this problem—in this province.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I want to acknowledge, as well, the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) for bringing forward this matter of urgent public importance and thank the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and the member for River East for their comments.

Regrettably, Madam Deputy Speaker, this isn't the first time chaos in the Child and Family Services system has been the subject of a matter of urgent public importance in this House, and I think

Manitobans can be excused if they are sceptical about the value of ongoing debate when they don't see that debate followed up by meaningful action on the part of government to actually address the very serious issues that are coming forward.

But, without debate and without bringing it forward, the likelihood of action is that much more remote than is already the case, and so we will continue to debate this issue and advance it until we are satisfied that actions are being taken to actually follow through on the commitments that are being made by government and to fundamentally address some of the very, very significant issues that we know exist within the child welfare system.

Much of the chaos that's now being discussed—and the word "chaos" is one that was chosen by the Children's Advocate in a report that's now become public. Much of the chaos that's being referred to was predated by changes made, commenced in 2002 under this government, and then followed through on in 2003 through to 2005 and even to the present date.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there were important debates which took place in this Legislature through 2002 about the issue of devolution and some of the important and good outcomes that could be achieved through such a process but also some of the risks that could be faced in the event that the process wasn't followed in a limited, measured and very careful way. Those concerns were raised by members of the opposition who supported, in principle, a limited process and a careful process of devolution.

They were brought forward by other professionals within the field. Viewpoints Research, at the time, did interviews with members of the front-line profession, social workers who had many years of experience and were actively involved in the world of social work, who came forward with very significant worries and concerns about what might happen in the event that devolution was not handled in the appropriate way.

Many of those workers who had spent their careers in the field of child and family services predicted that if it was mishandled, that we could see the sort of tragedies that we know have, in fact, happened in the years since it was rushed through. Those workers should have been listened to, Madam Deputy Speaker, but weren't. Members of the opposition, other groups that commented at the time, should have had their warnings heeded but they were not, and we see the result of that.

Now, the minister has evolved in terms of the comments that he's made in response to these terrible situations that are happening under his watch as minister. He's now the fourth minister under this NDP government to handle this portfolio. He wasn't the minister who introduced these changes at the outset, but he is the minister who, for the past four years, has been responsible for making changes and for overseeing a system that is very, very significantly damaged as a result of policies of his own government.

But, when you look at the way he's responded to these issues in the past, initially he was talking about the need for questions to be answered, about the need for changes to be made, about the need for accountability on the part of the system. He talked passionately about his outrage at different things that had happened and his concern about the very significant breakdowns that had occurred under the watch of his government. He said, in 2008, in response to the issues related to the Gage Guimond tragedy, and I quote: "What a deadly, tragic cascade of neglect, nepotism and bad casework." This was the minister two years ago.

That sense of outrage and concern today has been replaced by a complete sense of resignation, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that concerns us greatly. His only fallback today is that this is a societal issue. The implication is that there's nothing the government can do about it except continue with the failed approaches that they have applied in the past. That is a very disconcerting change in the minister's response. It is a suggestion that he has, in effect, thrown in the towel when it comes to try to address these significant issues, and that is a very sad reflection on how dysfunctional things have become under his watch and under the watch of this government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the reality is that this is an inherently difficult and painful field for everybody involved. When a child comes into contact with the system it's because things have gone wrong in their life, there's been a breakdown in the family or the community of one kind or another. That part is undisputed, and the minister's not wrong to suggest that those are issues that are important issues.

Where he's wrong is in failing to take responsibility for what the system does once it comes into play in the case of these children. And what we need assurances of, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that

when the system becomes involved in the life of one of these children that the system is, in fact, making things better for that child, not making it worse. And that's really the issue, it's not that these aren't serious societal issues that the minister's talking about. The issue that he is responsible for and that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) is responsible for is ensuring that when these kids come into contact with the system that the system does everything reasonable and everything possible to ensure that every step is taken to ensure the safety and well-being of those children.

The concern is that when the system is—through the mandate of this minister and government, the system is going in and removing children from loving, safe situations and placing them into situations of uncertainty and situations where, in the case of Gage Guimond, active resistance on the part of the individuals who, in fact, said that they were not in a position or even wanted to be put in a position of responsibility, that those are situations that are system-created tragedies, not tragedies that are created by any other factor.

And so, as we look at what is the responsibility of the minister and the government, and the responsibility that we want to address in this House through the processes that we have, we need to know that the system is taking a difficult situation and doing everything it can to make it better, not taking a stable situation, disrupting it and adding to the heartbreak and agony and tragedy that we've seen in cases such as those of Gage Guimond and Phoenix Sinclair. And that's really what is the—at the very heart of the debate that we're having, is that the system is actively doing things that make things worse, that create more risk than would otherwise would have been there, that is creating more heartache and death and despair than would otherwise would have been the case prior to these kids coming into contact with the system. It is the exact opposite of what we would expect the system to do.

We would expect the system to pursue a variety of goals, first and foremost amongst which is safety and, beyond that, to the stability, the nurturing, the love and the well-being that every child requires.

If we can be assured of those things, then pursuit of the goal of cultural reunification is something that we have said that we support and we continue to support, that it's not a mutually exclusive debate. But there are certain basic fundamental matters that need

to be absolutely assured before we begin to pursue other goals. And I think that is where we get into this debate and some differences between what we have been saying right from 2002 to present and what the NDP government has been saying on this issue. And I think both opposition parties have been consistent on this point, that there are certain things that all of us know override others. And these basic fundamental issues of safety and stability need to override others.

* (15:50)

And the government, in recent years, because of some of these terrible tragedies, has paid lip-service to that principle, but they continue to fail to act on it. And it's the actions of government that are far more important than the words of government when it comes to these very significant situations.

The debate today, Madam Deputy Speaker, we hope, will move things forward in causing the government, whether it is prepared to acknowledge so publicly or not, causing them to change the internal way of operating within the system. We are disappointed that they've failed that to date, as far as we know, to even take the basic step of bringing the Children's Advocate before the committee in a public forum, to lay out clearly the systemic issues that are being referred to in what's being published in the media right now, and to lay out what their perspective is on what's happening currently, what's causing it to happen and what steps might be taken to resolve it.

That is a fundamental first step toward moving from what is a system of chaos toward moving toward a system—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired, and I just want to remind all honourable members that currently there is a matter that has been taken under advisement of the House and that that matter is embargoed and cannot be referred to in the House.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not an easy topic that we discuss today. I think the sad reality of the tragic deaths of children in their families, of the abuse of children and the neglect of children, is something that is hard to face as a society, but it's important that we confront it, especially that we confront it as legislators and as people who are responsible for making the laws in this province.

And I think—I want to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that when I make my remarks today, I start from the premise that all of us in this House, every one of us, deplores the deaths, the murder, the abuse, the neglect of children in our society. I take that as a given. And I want to say that it's—it—many days I feel greatly honoured and privileged to be in this House and many days I look around this Chamber and I have tremendous respect for my colleagues. And then there are days like today where we take an issue of such importance to our society and cheapen it by using it for political gain. And I regret that because—*[interjection]* I do think we should debate it. I would welcome an open and honest debate on this issue. That would be a tremendous change in this House.

I would quote for all the members what the Children's Advocate said in her most recent annual report, and I think that we should take that advice, where she said: "I need to re-emphasize that these matters require more than a system's response. It is something upon which we must all join together to solve."

And I would agree with that; I think it is something that we all have to join together and solve, and I wish that we would move together to do that.

I want to also just speak for a moment about my personal experience with the Minister for Family Services and Consumer Affairs, and I want to say for all members, I think that the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) and the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) share a bond, in that they have both been ministers of Family Services, they have both been ministers responsible for Child and Family Services. And I know that both of them have had that horrific experience of being in their office and hearing about the death of a child, the death of a child in care or the death of a child who didn't get into care in time.

I know that both of them had emotional responses to that issue, and I've never had the opportunity to sit with the member for River East when she's received that news, but I have had the opportunity to sit with the member for St. Johns when he's received that news. And I can tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there is no minister more caring for children, there is no minister more dedicated to their well-being and to changing the system to take into account that well-being and to further that well-being than the current Minister for Family Services and Consumer Affairs.

And it is too easy, I think, in this House to question each other's honour and to question each other's intentions, and I don't think it serves us as politicians and I don't think it serves, ultimately, the public that we serve.

I've listened carefully to the debate that we've had so far and the questions from the opposition, and one thing that I wanted to speak about was this issue of increasing numbers of children in care. And I would agree that increasing numbers of children in care is a symptom of many things that we have to deal with in our society, but I think for a moment we have to reflect on what is the alternative to taking those children into care who need to be there.

I mean, the alternative, Madam Deputy Speaker, we could keep the numbers low by refusing to take children into care who need to be there and I don't think any member of this House wants to see that. The goal of the Child and Family Services and the goal of the legislation that we brought in that was supported was to make safety the top priority when considering matters for children.

I also listened to comments from the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), who said that biological parents are always better. I wish that were true, but I have sat with too many children and too many adults for whom that was not the case, for whom their biological parents did not provide the love and the safety and the security to which all children have a right. And I would much rather a system that puts safety as its top priority than whether or not a parent is biologically connected to a child as its top priority. So I would say to the member for River Heights, with all due respect, that we can talk about how we want to bring down the levels of children that need to be in care, but to say that taking children into care is a symptom of a system not doing its job is illogical, and not true, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I also want to speak for a moment about the issue of devolution for which we've heard a great deal of criticism, and I think we all know in this House that that was a recommendation of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry. It was a recommendation that was not acted upon until we came into government. And I remember when those discussions were happening about devolution and I remember discussions with First Nations people who were eager for the opportunity to control the fate of their own children who had had tremendously negative experiences—talking about the scoop of the 1960s, when children were taken out of their

communities, talking about the experience in residential schools—and so they were eager for this opportunity and this challenge and were preparing their communities.

They also, you know, had, I think, based on their experience in the past, the expectation that the day would come when they would be blamed, when they would be told that they weren't ready for this responsibility, but they took it on anyways. And I think we've, sadly—at the time I thought, no, certainly we're beyond the day that people would question the right and the capability of First Nations people to lead and to take care of their own. Surely, we've come beyond that, but sadly, Madam Deputy Speaker, as we see, in this House, we haven't moved beyond that attitude.

I do want to also speak about the importance of resources in the system. I think one of the things that we've heard is that resources don't matter—doesn't matter to give more resources to the Child and Family Services system and I would differ with that. We heard from the minister the result of those resources, the results they've had on caseloads going down, which has been one of the top concerns of people working in the field, that they had caseloads which were so large that they couldn't possibly do their jobs, and those caseloads have come down and they've come down because of added resources to the system.

We've also seen resources go to better training for people who work in that system. We've seen resources go to support for foster families—a support that wasn't always there in the past—and, as a result of that support, we've recruited more than 2,200 new foster beds to the system and I think all of us should say thank you to those foster parents that sign up for that kind of duty and that kind of responsibility in our system.

One of the other things that I want to speak about—and I think, often, we talk in this House about all the things that have gone wrong in the system, and that's to be expected, but I also want to talk about some of the innovative approaches that I've heard about in the system. And one is in a devolved agency that has taken the step of putting foster families right in—foster parents right in the home to work with the parent to strengthen their ability. This is a tremendous commitment where somebody leaves their own home for a year to sit with a parent who's in distress, who's in crisis to help them improve their parenting skill. And, I think, once in a while, we

should recognize the innovative approaches of some of these agencies.

* (16:00)

It is incumbent upon all of us to do more to strengthen families and to prevent children from needing to come into care, and all the things that we do as a government are oriented towards that. Investments in community, organizations through Neighbourhoods Alive!, investments in education, investments in health, in early childhood education, all of these things are designed to strengthen the family.

So, finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would say that there has been no government system, no public system in recent memory that has been under more public scrutiny than the child and family system. And people are working to change it, to improve it. They work every day to do that, and we should remember the work of those front-line people who work in a system, who are trying to do a better job, and we should commend them for that. And we should band together as legislators to continue to pass legislation to invest in programs that strengthen those families. And we should, for once, not take the opportunity of tragedy to point fingers at each other.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I feel compelled to speak to this matter of urgent public importance because I think it is something that is taken seriously and needs to be taken seriously when you have this type of situation, as described by the Children's Advocate, of a system in chaos. When there are more than 8,500 children in the care of the government, we need to look at new and innovative ways that we can make this a better situation.

Now, I don't believe that it's cheap to debate this in the Legislature today. In fact, I believe that it is a matter of urgent public importance and that we should all be very seriously debating this issue, and we should be actually calling a committee to find out from the Children's Advocate her basic needs and wants and what she could give us and offer us in terms of insight into what needs to happen here, because we are dealing with the most vulnerable children in our society; those who aren't being cared for by their parents or those who are being abused by their parents, and it is a very, very, very critical situation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I remember standing in this House five years ago as the critic for Family

Services and talking about Phoenix Sinclair. This case is infamous because this little girl was dead for nine months before anybody even noticed she wasn't around. How tragic—how tragic is that? And part of the reasons for that is her case—her file was closed in transfer during the devolution process and it wasn't opened again. This is—I thought at that point that was the lowest possible position that there could be in the child welfare system, but that was five years ago, and today we see a system.

Mr. Doug Martindale, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

We've gone through a number of child deaths. We've seen Gage Guimond, this poor little child who was in a loving foster family situation and taken and transferred to another situation even beyond the wishes of the recipient foster caregiver. Now, that is just beyond comprehension, that a child should be taken from a loving situation and placed into a position where the child wasn't even wanted, Mr. Acting Speaker, because the recipient foster caregiver didn't feel that she had the necessary resources to care for that child. That is a very, very sad situation.

But, you know, Mr. Acting Speaker, with the devolution process that came in in 2002 and evolved over the next several years, we did, at the time, have much debate in this Chamber and we did, at the time, give some warnings to the government about how this would need time because it doesn't happen overnight. And when you do something as major as this kind of change, any time, in any organization that goes through this dramatic type of change, the approach would be to roll out a little bit and then examine how that worked, looking at what didn't work, what is working and effect change as you go along.

So it would be a measured approach over time, a helping approach over time, to get to the situation where it could have, perhaps, evolved on a much more—maybe it would have taken a little longer, Mr. Acting Speaker, but, perhaps, it would have given the opportunity to correct some of things along the way and help the situation.

So I just want to say that we did give the government some heads-up, I guess, or encouragement to do it in a more measured approach, rather than do it on a very rushed approach because this is—change like this is something that does take time for people to get accustomed to.

It's—it really—when I hear the last speaker, the Minister of Labour (Ms. Howard) speak, and she talked about—this is a symptom, I think her words were, a symptom of society. When I hear those words, a symptom of society, what I hear, basically, when I read between the lines on that, it's saying, I can't deal with that, we can't deal with that, it's a symptom of society, so we can't deal with it.

But, Mr. Acting Speaker, I would like to say that if that is the attitude, that is a give-up attitude. That is an attitude that says, I wash my hands of the situation because I can't deal with it. And I think that that is the wrong approach to take. You can't just say: this happens; it happens, what can we do about it; it happens everywhere. I don't think that that is the kind of approach that we should take within this Chamber. I think that any responsible government, any responsible minister, would say: No, we can do better than this, we need to do better. And part of the process to get there is to have this debate, to bring in the Children's Advocate, to have a committee. Let's hear what the Children's Advocate has to say.

We, on this side of the House, believe that there can be a better way. We're willing to debate. We're willing to offer suggestions, but the government fails to see that it's up to them to call the committee and we will be there, Mr. Acting Speaker.

The Children's Advocate herself said it's a system in chaos. Now, when you get the Children's Advocate, the person in this province charged with the welfare of children, that speaks volumes to the people of Manitoba.

We don't even know the extent of the problem. Five years ago, we know that there were 31 children who had died while either receiving care or just having been released for care. Those 31 children had died under this government's watch—the highest number ever, over—and I should qualify that—over a four-year timeframe.

Now, five years later, do we actually know the statistics on how badly this system has failed? We know that the Children's Advocate has said it's a system in chaos, but we also know that there's a huge backlog in the system, and we don't know the actual extent of the problem. I think Manitobans need to know. They need to know what is going to be done about it and it is incumbent on this government to act, not just say, it's a symptom of society, and wash their hands of it, but to act, to do something necessary here.

* (16:10)

Part of that, as we've said today, is: please, let's have a committee. Let's call the committee. Let's hear what the Children's Advocate has to say. Let's hear what she has to say to the questions that we pose to her, and let's see what she can—what insights she can provide that would be able to be brought to the government to bring some kind of change.

Now, they talk about changes for children and change that's been happening. But the changes haven't worked, Mr. Acting Speaker, because we haven't progressed. We are no better today than we were five years ago, and, certainly, it's likely going to be worse. *[interjection]* And I'd like to remind the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) who's chirping from her seat that this government has had the reins of power here for 11 years and they have not changed the system. And the system is in chaos, just as the Children's Advocate has said today.

So I just want to remind the government that it is up to them to change the system and get that chaos word out of the children welfare system. Thank you very much.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors): Mr. Acting Speaker, and I'd like to put a few words on the record about this MUPI, and, because I think that it's something that we all as legislators believe is important. I believe that we all care about all children and we want the best outcomes of all the children.

I've had the privilege of working with the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) in the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. And that's part of a system—it's a Treasury Board for children. It's a Treasury Board to talk about investments in the future and how we be—we become proactive. And I know the member from Morris is chirping from her speech, seat, after her speech, but I'd like to correct the member. She has said that there has not been any changes, and I would remind the person—I'll tell you a few of the changes that we've done.

In order to support families, we've worked with the family first, home visitors. It started in the year 1999-2000, and there was 450 families that were visited by home visitors. These are people who support families, work with parents to build parenting skills and develop skills in at-risk families. I'm pleased to let the member know that by 2007-2008, there was 1,456 homes that were visited,

and we continue to move forward with that proposal. We continue to move that program forward.

And what's happening with that program? What that happens is we have home visitors who work with families to build parenting skills, to build discipline in the families. And it's supporting families, and it is improving it. And, Mr. Acting Speaker, the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) has voted against those investments in building the family. She has voted against the home visitor program every single year, and she's voted against the investments in building capacity among families.

You know, another program that we've had which was actually world renowned is the Triple P program. It's a positive parenting program. It's been effective in Australia and around the world. I'd like to let the member know that right in the early parts of our government, we started adopting the Triple P program. We now have lots of people, almost 1,000—over 1,000 practitioners from around the province have been trained in the Triple P. The funding for Triple P in the 2009-2010 is \$1,581,200, and what that is is bringing together family services, education and experts in different fields and moving forward. And they're moving forward by creating the supports that active, healthy families need to raise children and deal with issues.

And the members opposite may not know of this, but we have 26 parent-child coalitions that do workshops on temper tantrums, raising your teens, misbehaviour, et cetera. And these coalitions develop the skills in parents, develop the confidence, have dialogue between experts and parents at all ages. And, you know, Mr. Acting Speaker, that the member—the Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) talk about what changes you need to do. The changes start with the community. The changes start with parents. The changes start with changing behaviour. And I'd like to let the members know, whether it's been the Liberals or the Conservatives, they voted against those programs which have been actually results driven.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

They've been actually statistically proven to make a difference in the families. And so these are important programs that have been internationally proven. They have statistics to back them and they actually are—have been in place by our government and continue to be expanded by our government, and I'm pleased with that.

I'd also like to mention to the entire House that we also have the early development instrument, which is the EDI. All school divisions participate in the EDI. We test the kids when they are entering school and we find out a number of factors on their development. And, because of that, we've been able to isolate inputs that we can do with children either in a population, a community, or a very specific neighbourhood where we can make inputs and have different outcomes.

In other words, we're working to—with the school boards and communities and day cares and all those partners to have actually better outcomes for specific children. This might be language development. It might be social and emotional development. It may be any sort of things like that, but the deal would be we want to work with kids and their parents and community to support people. And I think that's really important, and the EDI—I would like to let all members know—the public data is out there so that people can design programs and support the people who need it.

And another program that we have introduced was the prenatal benefit which provides financial assistance for healthy nutrition during pregnancy to about 4,000 income-eligible women, 29 percent of whom are on the First Nation. So the Leader of the Liberal Party was discussing things that were happening on First Nations. I'm pleased to see that we look at a Manitoban is a Manitoban, and we've extended that benefit to First Nations.

Since the program launch in 2001, over 35,000 women have received the benefits, and this also comes up with, not just the financial benefits, but it comes up with information; it comes out with counselling and discussion about proper child rearing, and it talks about nutrition. It talks about all those child development issues that need to be discussed. And then there's a relationship that's built between the facilitators in this program and the young parents, and I think that's important because you're building, again, capacity. And, again, just to remind the member for Morris, she voted against that program in giving money to young mothers.

And so those are important things. We need to make sure that we also develop young children, so I'm also pleased to see that we've expanded the Roots of Empathy program across the province. We are now reaching about 4,000 people in the Roots of Empathy.

And I know when I was first Minister of Healthy Living in 2003, I had a chance to meet with Mary Gordon. She talked about empathy, understanding, compassion, dealing with others as being a huge skill. And so I'm very, very pleased to see that 4,000 children are participating in the Roots of Empathy program.

I actually had a chance to see that in place in St. James school division, and, you know what, Madam Deputy Speaker? That was a program which actually dealt with kids, aggression, bullying, behaviour that was inappropriate in the social sense. And so I'm pleased that, where B.C. sort of retracted their program in this year that's had some economic difficulty, we've actually increased the program and continue to expand the program, cause that's long-term benefits.

So I think that I've looked at where we are going. I'm pleased that Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) has sat on the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, has participated in those discussions to put these programs in and expand those programs.

*(16:20)

I differ from the members opposite because I believe that these programs have had a huge impact in building the capacity in parents and building the capacity in the community. I believe what's happened is they make parenting skills stronger in parents, which allows parents to continue to have their children present.

And, finally, I also look at the inherent contradiction of the members opposite to continue to criticize professional decision making. I would not look at the decision of removing a child from a family as being an easy one. I believe that these professionals make these tough decisions and they—it is a tough decision. I don't think that anyone would do it lightly.

And I think that we want to continue to work and support the professionals out there, but we also want to continue to support the community, the system. I would think that no one, no matter where they are in the House, would ever want to see a negative outcome for any child. We all want to see the best for all the children, and I think that no party has a monopoly on good ideas.

However, I think what we need to do is keep the discussion going, not only in this Chamber, but out in the community. We also have to look at best practice around the world. We have to look at

adopting the best systems, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think what we need to do is have the best system for—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): And I'm pleased to rise to put a few words on the record on the matter of urgent public importance, debating the crisis of the Child and Family Services that we're dealing with today.

You know, when we reach levels of, in some communities, of 40 and 50 percent of children in CFS, it means there's some very fundamental failures in the whole system. I get—and very interested to hear that comment once again coming from the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk), that we voted against this and we voted against that. The legislation passed. We voted against chaos when we voted against your budget. You voted for chaos. The legislation passed. The money went to Child and Family Services. There was no follow up. There was nothing done to make sure it was being put to good uses. It was not results driven. It was put out there, and the constant suggestion I hear from the government is, why isn't this working? We put another \$112 million into it. We put another \$45 million into that. Well, it's still failing. You're not doing the results-oriented-orientation you need to do, and to see that you're getting some results for the dollars you're spending.

The minister, earlier, talked about increased foster homes in the system. We're seeing, in my area, a decrease in foster homes simply because the—some of the foster families are having children that they've cared for for quite some time taken away from them arbitrarily, and they—it's a heart-wrenching process and they don't want to go through it any longer. So there's certainly a drop in the number of foster homes in some areas of this province, and probably will continue to be.

I heard mention of—several times today—of the increasing number of children in care, and I think that would indicate a systemic failure. We hear various of the government talking about trying to put in place the programs that will mentor families, keep families together, keep the children with their families, and yet we see, in the last three years, roughly, three to four years, a 30 percent increase in children in care. Certainly, the programs that are—they're putting out there on the ground to try and mentor families and keep families together cannot be

working if you're seeing that kind of increase in the number of children in care, and that number continues to grow.

I think a lot of the problem comes from the move to rush devolution. There would seem to be a terrible urgency to rushing devolution into place, and I know we've supported the concept, but we also laid out an awful lot of the safeguards and suggested that this not be moved too quickly because it would result in failure if it was moved too quickly. Children were lost; files were lost. It was just an absolute disaster the way devolution took place and the movement of children into the four authorities. There had to be a settled move done over a period of time to do it and it was rushed. It caused all the problems that we're seeing now.

You know, when we talk about the office of the Child Advocate, another thing that has happened in relation to that was the transfer of investigation into child deaths from the child—Chief Medical Examiner's office into the Child Advocate's office. And I was the critic at the time for Child and Family Services and certainly raised concerns about the transfer of those child death investigations into the office of the Child Advocate and remember quite clearly being concerned that it would overwhelm the Child Advocate's office, it would be too much to handle with all the other responsibilities of that office.

We understand that there's a backlog of about 150 of those child death investigations sitting in the child—chief—in the Child Advocate's office, and I remember in the committee hearings on that bill that did the transfer—and I can't remember the number of the bill, but on the bill that did the transfer—and Dr. Markesteyn making a presentation, and making a very reasoned—Dr. Markesteyn, by the way, is the former chief medical officer of this province—and he made a very reasoned, rationale presentation on why the investigation of the child deaths should not be moved over into the Child Advocate's office.

And the answers we heard—and there seemed to be very little regard for what he said from the government—the answers were that they were going to transfer staff and they were going to transfer resources and all these good things were going to happen and it was going to speed up the whole process; it was going to help the whole process. Instead, it's taken it the other way. And it's probably something that needs to go back and have another look at it.

You know, the—once again, we're hearing the Premier (Mr. Selinger) this morning on the radio talking about we put another \$112 million into CFS; \$112 million, that's an awful lot of money, and we're not seeing the results. We're not seeing numbers going down; we're not seeing children necessarily in safer environments. All we're seeing is a huge amount of money going out, and everybody thinking, on the government's side at least, thinking the problem's solved. I would say the minister has failed miserably in his mandate with Child and Family Services, and maybe you've got to make some definite changes very shortly to address those shortfalls.

* (16:30)

You know, I heard one of the members from the other—from the government's side of the House talk about putting programs in place that start and—work in day cares and schools, and it just—it all sounds very wonderful when you're playing lip-service to it, but, once again, it just doesn't seem to be occurring; it doesn't seem to be happening. The day cares are drastically short of spaces. Day cares are over needed. There's more spaces needed than are available. And so you're trying to put systems in place before you have the system that's already exists. Even working half decently, you're going in a different direction, putting something else in place that won't work either because you haven't got the first system working. And that's exactly what happened with devolution.

You didn't have the system working well enough to start with, and then you tried to put another system in place halfway through, and we're paying the price now. And we will pay that price into the future until somebody takes—makes the right moves, fixes the system and does the things that are going to protect our children into the future and protect the children of this province and, probably, in the long run, cut down on the number of children in CFS services by making better homes, better places for them to live in the first place.

With those remarks, I think I'll sit. Thanks, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to put a few words on record in regards to this particular motion that's on the table today.

We—in my constituency, I have a number of different groups, so to speak. But I would suggest

that my phone rings 40 percent of the time from—because of CFS issues. It takes up a lot of time, and you sit and you listen, and it's consistent, it's consistent that the agencies are overloaded. The workers are overloaded. The foster parents—they have ran out of foster parents. The foster parents find that there's such an inconsistency between how one is dealt with and how the next one is dealt with, how these children are dealt with.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, we can feel sorry for the foster parents and we can feel sorry for the workers, but the most important people that we're need to talk about today is the children. The children in the care of this agency, of CFS—the children are so terribly important. They're the most vulnerable and the most defenceless part of our society. They don't always get the opportunity to speak for themselves. Many of them have some issues because of fetal alcohol syndrome, maybe some other issues that they've had in homes, that they were abused. They don't get the type of treatment that's necessary because they haven't been panelled. They present issues to the foster parents that the foster parents have never dealt with.

The foster parents ask for help. The foster parents ask for direction; the direction they get is from workers, and the workers change so often. The workers have not been trained. They haven't been there long enough to be trained. I—their hearts are in the right place, but they don't have any direction from the top. They haven't been trained. The foster parents then ask for direction from untrained individuals, and then, all of a sudden, out of the blue, a child is snatched from a caring foster home where they have been for six years, and all of a sudden, she's gone. They bring her back finally through CFS, do their due diligence and do bring her back.

By the time the child gets back, she has a lot of issues that have to be dealt with that weren't there before. And so then a process starts, an appeal process starts for the custody of this child. And the people that get involved are so inconsistent from one case to the next that even the groups that have been formed by the foster people, by the foster parents, are confused to what will really take place.

But, when the system does rule in favour of the foster parents and say, yes, it's in the child's best interest to stay in that environment, and immediately, immediately a process is started to remove the child again, there's something wrong if the system is broken. The system is in terrible, terrible chaos.

The inconsistencies within agencies—within agencies—is great. The inconsistencies between agencies is even greater. The agencies, Madam Deputy Speaker, compete with each other. That's not the purpose of this. That wasn't the purpose of devolution. The purpose of devolution was for the welfare and the well-being of our children and of the children in the care of CFS.

Devolution's not a bad thing. Unfortunately, devolution wasn't thought out well before it was put in place. You didn't have the qualified people. They weren't in place to deal with issues and then the caseloads. The caseloads—when we talk to workers, the caseloads are so large that they can't keep up and so they burn out. They ask for help. They can't get it, so they burn out. You need to fill that spot and so you fill the spot with someone that isn't trained again, and so then the foster parents don't know what's going on.

They try to keep a good record, and a number of my constituents have had children taken out of their care after they've been there five, six, seven years—been taken out of their care and only to be brought back in four or five months. Four or five months later, they're brought back with issues that the family has never seen, that the child had never exhibited before. The reason for those is because of the abuse that took place under the care—under the care—of CFS.

Madam Deputy Speaker, 31 children died—31 children died under the watch of this government in the last five years. That's a terrible record. It's hard to believe what I heard from across the Chamber today when a member stood up and tried to shame people for speaking out about this very important issue, and that individual should be terribly, terribly ashamed of herself. The member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard), when she used the term that we were making a mockery of this particular case and politicizing this particular issue. I say to her that those remarks have hurt every child in this province, every vulnerable individual in this province, every defenceless child in this province, and it also cut very deeply with every foster family in this province as well.

The people that open up their arms and open up their hearts to take these people into their families and raise them to the best of their ability with the morals of that particular foster family, to the standards that that particular family live by daily, and to introduce them into a society that they have never

had that opportunity to be in, Madam Deputy Speaker, that member from Fort Rouge owes this House an apology. She owes the foster parents of this province an apology, and she certainly owes the children of this province, the foster children of this province—she owes them an apology not only for saying it but because she even thought it.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to put a few words on the record.

* (16:40)

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): And, you know, it's unfortunate. This is a matter of urgent public importance before this Manitoba Legislature, and it's unfortunate that members opposite don't see fit to put—to defend their record, this—the record of the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) in this province who—and they've been through four ministers of Family Services, I believe, since they came into power. And, certainly, we know that each one along the way was responsible for a little bit of—little more of the chaos that we see in that our children and our communities are faced with today.

And so, I think, it's unfortunate that—and, I think, you know, quite frankly, they're refusing to debate this now because they know that they're in the wrong. They know that, you know, when we pick up the paper today and the headlines read, advocate warns of state of chaos when it comes to the child welfare system in our province, Madam Deputy Speaker—so they know what's going on here and, yet, they're refusing to debate to defend their record because, really, they don't have a record to defend.

The fact of the matter is that children continue to fall through the cracks, and the child welfare system under this NDP government—and it's unfortunate, Madam Deputy Speaker, because, you know, they—you know, I believe that they do want to do the right thing here. I believe that they want to, but, for some reason, they can't and they won't. And year after year after year, where we pose questions of the Minister of Family Services at the time, members opposite have come back and they've defended their record all the way along. And they've defended the fact that children are falling through the cracks. They've refused to admit the fact that we have such a serious problem within the Child and Family Services system in this province.

And the problem, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that they won't take their heads out of the sand and realize that we have a crisis situation in this province

with the most vulnerable people in our society, and that is the children. And so I think it's unfortunate, because what took place today—certainly, in question period we were asking questions of the Minister of Family Services and of the Premier (Mr. Selinger). And, certainly, at one point, the Premier had said that, yes, we could call a committee and we would debate this at committee. We'd debate this here and there and anywhere, he said. He'd be happy to debate this issue. Yet, you know, members opposite aren't getting up to debate the issue.

So the Premier said earlier today that they would debate it any time, any place. And, yet, Madam Deputy Speaker, they're refusing to put up members to debate this very issue today. So, once again, the Premier says one thing, but everyone else on the other side is saying and doing another—

An Honourable Member: Who's running the show over there?

Mrs. Stefanson: And so it is—it does pose that question. Who is running the show over there? Because it's not this Premier, I'll tell you that much, Madam Deputy Speaker. This Premier had the opportunity today to stand before this Legislature, to stand before Manitobans and do the right thing and call for a standing—or call for a legislative committee for—so that the child, the Children's Advocate could come and present before the legislative committee so that we could pose questions of the Children's Advocate and members opposite could pose questions to the Children's Advocate.

The important thing, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that we create a system, that we have a system that's transparent and accountable to the public out there. And what's unfortunate here is that the very leadership of this NDP government is now denying us the ability to go before committee and to ask pertinent questions to do with the most vulnerable citizens in our community, and that is the children. So I think it's unfortunate.

And I thought at one point today that the Premier was, perhaps, maybe showing a little bit of leadership to allow this to happen. But then his Minister of Family Services got up and shut that down and said, no, no, no. I don't care what the Premier said, but I will tell you definitively, not a chance will we allow that to happen, because they are afraid, Madam Deputy Speaker, of what may come out of such a committee hearing. And I think that that's the unfortunate thing, because all of this has to come out. We need to understand why the

Child and Family Services system is in complete chaos. And we need to understand and get to the bottom and the root of that. And, yet, members opposite continue to want to put their heads in the sand and not admit the fact that there is a problem.

Well, the first thing, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that members opposite need to admit that there is a problem. The media has been talking about the fact there's serious problems within the Child and Family Services department for years. It goes way back beyond just even this Minister of Child and Family Services. There were three other ministers prior to this that—and the system failed. It failed Gage Guimond. It failed Phoenix Sinclair, and it has failed many, many others, other children, the most vulnerable people in our province.

Yet, even after those incidents, this Minister of Child and Family Services still refuses to admit the fact that there is a serious problem in our system, and I think that it was unfortunate today that I believe it was 15 or 17 times that members on this side of the House asked them just a simple question, and that was that, you know, just to call a committee and bring the Children's Advocate before the committee so that we can pose questions to get to the bottom of this. And I would think, Madam Deputy Speaker, that members opposite would want to, just as much as we do, get to the bottom of why the system is in chaos.

You would think, Madam Deputy Speaker, that members opposite would want to know why children continue to fall through the cracks in the existing system. You would think that they would want to do what's in the best interest of those children. But why would they refuse to call such a committee to happen? Why would they do that? It just doesn't make sense to me if their real concern is that of the children, the most vulnerable people in our society, but I suspect what the unfortunate part of all this is that members opposite are more concerned about protecting themselves than they are about protecting the children in our province.

And we know that because this whole legislative process, all of what we've been debating over the last little while, the government has called—Bill 31 is the first and the most important bill for them to pass through this Legislature, Madam Deputy Speaker. They put their own self-interest to protect the salaries of 19 members of Cabinet ahead of any other, ahead of the children, ahead of every other bill out there. So they have already proven what they are interested

in, and that is protecting themselves rather than protecting the most vulnerable citizens in this community. And so I think it's unfortunate.

I think the government had an opportunity today. I think the Premier (Mr. Selinger) had an opportunity to show some leadership, to call this committee, so we could call the Children's Advocate before the standing committee and get to the bottom of why the system is in complete chaos. We thought for a moment that he was going to allow it, but then, you know, the Minister of Child and Family Services said no, no, no, no way can we do that because we'll get in deep trouble.

So, again, he chooses to protect himself over protecting the children, most vulnerable in our society. And there are many examples out there that I don't have a chance to get into right now, Madam Deputy Speaker, of where this minister has—or where the Premier has had an opportunity to get up and show some leadership on issues. Perhaps the previous premier, you know, did not show the right leadership in some of these areas and that, you know, the system in chaos was created really by a previous premier, but this Premier had the opportunity today, he's had the opportunity for the past seven or eight months, to stand before Manitobans and to do the right thing on behalf of the children of this province, and he chose not to. And what I say is, shame on him for not showing the kind of leadership that he should have.

And, beyond that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would say that the Minister of Child and Family Services had an opportunity in his position today to show some leadership by calling a standing committee to have the Children's Advocate come before that committee so that we could pose the questions of the Children's Advocate as to why they believe that the system is in chaos and yet he denied us the ability to do that. And it's unfortunate because he had the ability to do it, but he didn't have the will to make it happen because he is more concerned with protecting—

* (16:50)

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

The honourable member for Charleswood.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Thank you—

Madam Deputy Speaker:—I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I apologize. I'm didn't see the honourable minister.

The honourable Minister for Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Madam Deputy Speaker, and I'm pleased to rise in the House to discuss this very important issue, which is, I firmly believe, near and dear to the hearts of all members of this Chamber, and that, of course, is the protection of children in care.

Members know that for 13 years I was a teacher in the public school system where, even in a community that like Gimli, people would often see a number of issues of children in care. Many students who came to Gimli and came to the high school were in foster care. They'd come mid-year and we'd see them, unfortunately, come and go and sometimes not always get the necessary supports that they needed, but that was the reality of teaching in the 1990s, unfortunately. We didn't have a lot of supports in the 1990s when it came to dealing with children in care and children at risk.

And, today, it's quite the opposite. I know I often dealt with students who suffered from FASD as a teacher, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I know that there were very few supports provided for FASD in the 1990s. In fact, I think the amount in 1999 was \$10,000—\$10,000 for programs, and it didn't include—the figure that we invest today is over 1.3 million. *[interjection]*

Now, it's interesting because, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the members opposite, members opposite are chastising us for not standing up to speak. But now we stand up and speak after listening to them in relative silence, and we listen to them wanting to shout it down. You know, and, when I go home at night and talk to my kids, how was your day today, I tell my kids, well, you know, I had a very good day. We made decisions that—we made decisions to make Manitoba a better place. I guess members opposite go home and their children ask, how was your day today? Well, I yelled at an adult in the Chamber for an hour. That's really an accomplishment. You know it really speaks to their bullying and boorish behaviour.

But, you know, they do want us to speak. They just don't want to listen, and that's evidenced by their behaviour in this Chamber on a daily basis, Madam Deputy Speaker.

An Honourable Member: I think they just made the point.

Mr. Bjornson: I think they just made the point, indeed. Thank you very much.

When you look at what we've been doing in this government—and I'm very proud to be part of a government that's been nationally recognized for a Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. I think the work that we do with eight Cabinet ministers sitting at the table each time to discuss the issues that face our children, from prenatal benefit all the way to the training opportunities and transitioning opportunities for students going into the work force and all the supports that we provide for our children, we've taken a very holistic approach to making the world a better place for children here in Manitoba. We know that that's not without challenges, and we continue and are committed to address those challenges, and we'll continue to do so as a Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm very pleased that we've introduced things like the prenatal benefit. And the prenatal benefit is having an impact, like the Roots of Empathy program. And, in my former capacity as Education Minister, I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Mary Gordon, who my colleague from Assiniboia referenced earlier. And the Roots of Empathy program is a fantastic program that will help in making the world a better place for our children and for young parents who might be struggling with some of the skills that are needed to be effective as a role model and to be a good parent. And it will also—working with the Positive Parenting Program, which is statistically verified to reduce conduct disorder—these are long-term solutions to what has been a long-term problem in our society and the ills of society that, unfortunately, do rear their ugly head on occasion and do so at the expense of our most vulnerable and of our children.

But, again, it is our government that is taking a very holistic approach. Part of that is the great equalizer of education and our investment in our education system. Part of that is providing more opportunities for students to succeed. Part of that is providing more opportunities for employment for people in Manitoba and provide more training opportunities for the disadvantaged. And, having a stable home with a stable income and more opportunities available to the parents will invariably provide more stability, more income and more opportunities for the children of those parents.

And we know that families do need assistance, and we've provided that assistance, as I said, through

the Roots of Empathy, through the Positive Parenting Program. And when parents are at risk and parents are having difficulties and parents are suffering from various pressures of the reality of everyday life, that they might not have the appropriate coping mechanisms, there are infrastructures in place to assist.

Our parent-child centred coalitions support families, \$3.2-million investment, 23 funded coalitions province-wide, seven family resource centres focussing on the positive parenting, learning literacy, nutrition, physical health, and school readiness.

As Education Minister, I was pleased that we had worked with the school divisions that brought them to the point of an early development indicator where we could assess the readiness to learn and provide students with a basis for the essential skills that they would need and the supports that they would need in the event that the EDI indicated that they weren't ready to learn. I'm very proud of that work. I'm very proud of the work that the Roots of Empathy program, as I mentioned before, has been engaged in and that is supporting schools in Manitoba but it's also providing students with opportunities to increase emotional literacy. And certainly when we talk about the issues that face families and the challenges that some families face, young families in particular, the challenges that they might face, emotional literacy is a critical component to positive results and pro-social behaviour and decreased aggression. So these are critical parts of the Roots of Empathy program. Expanding the Families First program to visit more families, up to 450 families—up from 450 families in 1999 to 2000, 1,456 in '07-08, supporting parents and building strong relationships with their child while sharing information and suggesting activities to help children grow up healthy and happy.

We take a holistic approach to the child here in Manitoba, Madam Deputy Speaker, and we do know that there are challenges and we do know that unfortunately, our most vulnerable are victims, but we are doing what we can to support those young families, to support families at risk and we'll continue to do so with our investments.

Now, members opposite were talking about the BITSA bill and that being a priority. Well, the budget implementation bill is a priority when 80 percent, I believe, of what we're investing is being invested in services, invested in services to support

Manitobans. Now, the members opposite talked about balanced budget and how they would balance the budget in a much tighter time frame. Well, it begs the question, what services would they cut? What services to families would they cut? What services in the health care system would they cut? What services would they cut in the education system? And I know painfully well how much they cut from the education systems in the 1990s. And that is often the first line for children at risk who aren't safe—don't feel safe at home but they feel safe at school, and they need supports at school and they need more investments in our schools to support those children at risk. And I'm very proud of the work that this government has done in support of those children at risk.

Madam Deputy Speaker, 75 percent of the Healthy Baby benefit, for example, I talked about the prenatal benefit. Here's another example, 75 percent of the Healthy Baby recipients have consented to be referred to Healthy Baby Community Support Program or the public health provider, and the Healthy Baby program is in more than 100 communities including Manitoba First Nations. Healthy Child has invested, as I said, \$1.3 million in an FASD strategy. The early development indicator, as I mentioned earlier, Triple P—these are all part of a group of strategies. It's not just any one single strategy. It's a group of strategies. And again, I'm very proud to be part of a government that has a Healthy Child Committee of

Cabinet, that has Cabinet ministries—ministers and an interdepartmental working group that looks at all the needs of our students and works towards a better environment for students of Manitoba and ultimately a better Manitoba.

And, with those few words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was pleased to be part of this debate and I would like to assure members opposite that this is indeed a priority for our government as it should be for all members of this Chamber and we should be working together to make Manitoba a better place for all children.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, it's interesting to hear the minister talk about this being a priority for the government. I'd hate to see something that wasn't a priority, then, considering the mess they're making of this.

When you've got a Children's Advocate that is warning about chaos in the child welfare system, how could this minister stand here and put words on the record that he did with pride about this and pride about that and pride about this when there's over 8,000 kids in care, when there are kids dying in care, when the Children's Advocate is saying—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

The hour being 5 o'clock p.m., this debate is terminated. The House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 9, 2010

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