

Third Session - Fortieth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MELNICK, Christine	Riel	Ind.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	NDP
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 13, 2014

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

Bill 71—The Animal Diseases Amendment Act

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): I move, by your honourable Ron Kostyshyn, moved by honourable Gord Mackintosh—or seconded by the honourable—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

When members of the Assembly, including ministers, are introducing bills, they would move the bill itself and then have a seconder by constituency name. So if that will help the honourable minister to please follow that process.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Moved by honourable—I move, seconded by honourable Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship (Mr. Mackintosh) of St. Johns—yes—that Bill 71, Animal Diseases Amendment Act, please.

Mr. Speaker: If I might provide some guidance to the honourable minister, the seconder for the bill must be available for the minister to use as seconder. So I encourage the honourable minister to choose a seconder.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize for the misunderstanding.

Moved by myself—I move, and seconded by Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Ms. Oswald), that Bill 71, The Animal Diseases Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker: Because the microphone was not on at this time, which is my problem, I'd like the—ask the honourable member—minister to repeat his last comment there, please.

Mr. Kostyshyn: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I moved, seconded by Jobs and Economy Minister, that Bill 71 of The Animal Diseases Amendment Act now be read for the first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Kostyshyn: The Animal Diseases Act has helped us protect animal health in the province of Manitoba. However, the experience has shown us that the act can and should be improved to enable more responsive measures to manage and respond to animal disease.

The proposed bill establishes clear authority for my department to act proactively in dealing with activities, practices and behaviours that may create a risk to health and safety of animals and the public or that may promote the outbreak of—spread of disease. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? [*Agreed*]

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing none, we'll move on to petitions.

**Provincial Sales Tax Increase—
Reversal and Referendum Rights**

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act is a law that guarantees Manitobans the right to vote in a referendum to either approve or reject increases to the PST and other taxes.

(2) Despite the fact that the right to vote is enshrined in this legislation, the provincial government hiked the PST to 8 per cent as of July 1st, 2013.

(3) The Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba has asked the courts to rule on whether or not the provincial government broke the law by failing to address the referendum required before imposing the PST tax increase on Manitoba families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the PST increase.

(2) To urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to vote in a referendum on increases to the PST.

This petition is signed by C. Ramage, P. Wollman, R. Book and many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: In keeping with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to have been received by the House.

Beausejour District Hospital— Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The Beausejour District Hospital is a 30-bed, acute-care facility that serves the communities of Beausejour and Brokenhead.

(2) The hospital and the primary-care centre have had no doctor available on weekends and holidays for many months, jeopardizing the health and livelihoods of those in the northeast region of the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority.

(3) During the 2011 election, the provincial government promised to provide every Manitoban with access to a family doctor by 2015.

(4) This promise is far from being realized, and Manitobans are witnessing many emergency rooms limiting services or closing temporarily, with the majority of these reductions taking place in rural Manitoba.

(5) According to the Health Council of Canada, only 25 per cent of doctors in Manitoba reported that their patients had access to care on evenings and weekends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Health to ensure that the Beausejour District Hospital and primary-care centre have a primary-care physician available on evenings, weekends and holidays to better provide area residents with this essential service.

This petition is signed by C. Bender, A. Berry, J. Mellors and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Cross-Border Shopping

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba has a thriving and competitive retail environment in communities near its borders, including Bowsman, Swan River, Minitonas, Benito, Russell, Binscarth, St-Lazare, Birtle, Elkhorn, Virden, Melita, Waskada, Boissevain, Deloraine, Cartwright, Pilot Mound, Crystal City, Manitou, Morden, Winkler, Plum Coulee, Altona, Gretna, Emerson, Morris, Killarney, Sprague, Vita, Reston, Pierson, Miniota, McAuley, St. Malo, Foxwarren, Roblin and many others.

Both the Saskatchewan PST rate and the North Dakota retail sales tax rate are 5 per cent, and the Minnesota retail sales tax rate is 6 per cent.

The retail sales tax rate is 40 per cent cheaper in North Dakota and Saskatchewan and 25 per cent cheaper in Minnesota as well—as compared to Manitoba.

The differential in tax rates creates a disincentive for Manitoba consumers to shop locally to produce their goods and services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To acknowledge that the increase in the PST will significantly encourage cross-border shopping and put additional strain on the retail sector, especially for those businesses located close to Manitoba's provincial borders.

To urge the provincial government to reverse its PST increase to ensure Manitoba consumers can shop affordably in Manitoba and support local businesses.

This petition's signed by S. Bauereiss, E. Koss, A. Ramsden and many more concerned Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Any further introduction of petitions? Seeing none, we'll move on to committee reports. No committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Speaker: I have a report to table. In accordance with subsection 58(1) of The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and subsection 37(1) of The Personal Health Information

Act and with section 42 of The Ombudsman Act and subsection 26(1) of The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, I am pleased to table the annual reports of the Manitoba Ombudsman under these statutes for the calendar year ending December 31st, 2013.

* (13:40)

Ministerial statements?

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: I have no guests to introduce at the current time, so we'll proceed directly to oral questions.

Manitoba Hydro Development Concerns

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Manitobans are naturally concerned as they watch this spenDP government in its headlong rush to Americanize Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Speaker, and they naturally ask themselves, what is the rush? Why rush?

It illustrates, of course, a lack of business sense by this government; that's not unique. The US market is, of course, oversupplied and will be for decades to come. So why the rush to sell cheap hydro to Americans and brag about it while Manitobans are forced to pay higher rates than their American customers are? Why the rush to sell? Why the rush to sell a concept when Manitobans are being told by this government that for the first time they should build the lines in the United States where the hydro will be shipped at lower cost than they pay?

This is an incredible scene to watch, Mr. Speaker, as the government ignores expert after expert at the Public Utilities Board, and they are telling them, these experts, that this is not a good idea. In fact, they're telling them it's a bad idea.

Why is this government so willing to keep selling a concept and so unwilling to listen to the experts on the issue?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the need-for-alternatives review process is one that we endorse and support. It's exactly the forum where everybody should be able to put their views forward, including experts, and listen to the views, including of the proponent, Manitoba Hydro.

Manitoba Hydro's case is simply this: All their export sales are profitable; otherwise they won't sign a contract. They sign a contract for export prices,

which, the Minister of Hydro has put on the record, are substantially higher than the price Manitobans pay. The profits made off the exports of Manitoba Hydro pay down the cost of generating facilities and allow Manitoba to have the lowest rates in North America. That has worked in the past. That's what they believe will work in the future.

They have provided a variety of scenarios. They still believe the best scenario—Manitoba Hydro believes the best scenario is to build Keeyask and move forward because we have \$9 billion of signed contracts for additional export sales at higher rates, substantially higher rates, than Manitobans pay, profitable rates for Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Pallister: Manitoba Hydro supports this proposal that the government is advancing no more than it did support the bipole-west proposal the government politically pushed on it. This is a politicized process and it's a political outcome that the government is fighting for here.

It makes no sense, and the fact of the matter is the Premier ignores the expert witnesses that are appearing constantly. But he goes further in this House and elsewhere. He continues to misrepresent the domestic need. He says that we're going to freeze in the dark by the end of the decade. Not one expert witness supports that contention, not one. Expert witnesses say we have, some of them say, over 20 years to get this right.

So why the headlong rush? Why the big, aggressive sells—sales job by this government? Why ignore expert testimony not only from Manitoba but from experts around the world?

Manitobans understand that this is a monumental undertaking and they want to see us get it right. Does the NDP approach of ignoring expert witnesses and misrepresenting what they say help us get this right?

Mr. Selinger: Well, on the contrary, we support the Public Utilities Board doing a need-for-alternatives review which invites expert testimony so we can hear the best opinions from everybody, very different than the approach of members opposite which bury things and never let them—the light of day shine on them.

I will table again for the member opposite, for the purposes of getting the record straight, the rates that are paid for hydro in other jurisdictions, and I will put on the record that in Minnesota it's 11.24 cents. Those are the rates down there; Wisconsin, over 12 cents. Those rates are

substantially higher, nearly double what they are in Manitoba.

The member could take this opportunity to apologize, if he wishes, because those rates provide the margin of opportunity for Manitoba to provide them with costs at a rate that is preferable for them and profitable for Manitoba, preferable for the customer and profitable for the people of Manitoba. That is a good story, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite does not want to sell hydro into the export market, which he has said, he will then drive rates in Manitoba up extremely high. That's when Manitobans will pay more. When they can't export their power, when they can't export their—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The First Minister's time has elapsed.

Mr. Pallister: Well, driving rates up is exactly what this government's doing and what it's going to do, Mr. Speaker, with this foolish proposal.

This government ignored the experts when it came to the bipole proposal. The experts at Manitoba Hydro wanted the route built on the east side. This government and this Premier told them what to do. It forced them not to listen to their own experts but to listen to the politicians instead.

This government ignored the experts when they eliminated the right of Manitobans to vote on tax increases. They took that right away. And the real experts, we assert, on where money should be spent in this province are the people who worked for it and earned it, not the 36 members opposite.

And they ignored the experts when they hiked the PST after promising not to. They ignored the experts who told them, quite rightly, what it would do to the Manitoba economy and what it is doing.

This kind of NDP arrogance, it permits three dozen NDP politicians to believe they're smarter than any experts. Why have a Public Utilities Board if you're not going to listen to it anyway?

Will the Premier go on record today and guarantee the people of Manitoba that he will listen to the PUB export—experts when they—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable leader's time has elapsed.

Mr. Selinger: The only person that's not listening to the experts in front of the need-for-alternatives review is the Leader of the Opposition, because he

skipped over the TyPlan socio-economic review, an expert which said, overall, the Preferred Development Plan exhibits the greatest socio-economic benefits to the people of Manitoba, northern communities and First Nations compared to other plans.

Morrison Park Advisors' commercial evaluation: The Keeyask and Conawapa plans provide the most government revenues, generate the most significant construction employment and attendant economic development and hold the promise of maintaining the province's electricity competitiveness for decades into the future, Mr. Speaker, decades into the future.

So the only person not listening to the experts is the selective Leader of the Opposition which cherry-picks the information he wants. We listened to them all, Mr. Speaker, not like him.

PST Increase Impact on City of Winnipeg

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe the Premier would listen to Tim Sale and Ed Schreyer and other NDP experts that might have a different opinion.

Mr. Speaker, just six short months ago the City of Winnipeg—in six short months the City of Winnipeg has been forced to pay \$700,000 more as a direct result of the illegal PST hike that was forced upon all Manitobans. The cost will be passed on to hard-working taxpayers in Winnipeg in order to feed this NDP's spending addiction.

Mr. Speaker, what does this government have to say, this government who lied to Manitobans before the last election and said, read my lips, no new taxes? What does this government have to say to hard-working taxpayers in Winnipeg on why they have to pay more?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, we know that that 1-cent-on-the-dollar increase in the PST is going directly into investments in infrastructure and directly into investments in infrastructure in the city of Winnipeg, some \$50 million into street repairs, into infrastructure needs in the city of Winnipeg. That not only improves the day-to-day life of people who live in this city, but we also know that those investments in infrastructure are going to create jobs, are going to create jobs today and tomorrow, and they're going to create the opportunity for young people to get the skills to do those jobs today and tomorrow.

That is going to be the impact of that 1 cent on the dollar, and those investments in infrastructure are going to help our economy grow and are going to help us get to a place where we can balance the budget responsibly without making the kind of cuts that have been advocated by members opposite.

Mrs. Mitchelson: The numbers speak for themselves: \$700,000 in six months, \$1.4 million in a year, money that the City of Winnipeg has to turn over to the Province of Manitoba as a direct result of the NDP government's complete financial management. That's not peanuts. That's big money to taxpayers in the city of Winnipeg.

* (13:50)

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the question: How many police officers will have to be cut and how many potholes won't be fixed as a direct result of this PST hike?

Ms. Howard: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say \$50 million probably fixes a lot of potholes, and I would also say our record on funding for police officers, increasing police officers in the city of Winnipeg, increasing police resources and RCMP resources across the province, is very clear. We have stepped up to do that.

We've also stepped up to work with the City of Winnipeg on programs that we believe help to give young people an option so they don't find themselves in trouble, but, more than that, this investment of the PST into infrastructure gives a huge return. We know that it creates jobs. We know from the Conference Board of Canada that for every dollar we're putting into infrastructure we're getting \$1.16 back in jobs and economic opportunity. Those are very important.

The other thing I would say to the member opposite, we have seen, over the last 13 years—

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

Mrs. Mitchelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that Manitoba families will have to dig deeper into their pockets to pay the price for NDP financial mismanagement. They have a spending addiction that they don't seem to understand.

Mr. Speaker, what does this government expect the City of Winnipeg to do? Do they expect them to cut services to families or to raise taxes or to do both?

Ms. Howard: We expect the City of Winnipeg to work with us to make historic investments in infrastructure, investments that are going to pay off in economic success for this city. They're going to pay off in terms of jobs. They're going to pay off in terms of a better quality of life for Manitobans.

But I also want to say to the member opposite, you know, I received my property tax bill yesterday, and my property tax bill has a \$700 rebate for provincial education taxes. That provincial education tax rebate, one of the highest in the country, almost \$500 higher than it was when the members opposite. Manitoba families have seen property tax increases contained over the last 15 years. In fact, increase—while people have seen their house values double, almost triple in value, they have seen property tax increases maintained at the lowest rate of increase in the country because of the work we have done to make sure people get rebates on those property tax increases and keep life affordable in Winnipeg and all of Manitoba.

Business Development Government Record

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Another day of photo ops for the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and the NDP. Unfortunately, his photo ops always seem to come at the expense of Manitoba taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP are using our money, our provincial tax money, to create jobs or at least leave the impression they are creating jobs.

Mr. Speaker, we ask: Why is this government believe that the only way to create jobs in Manitoba is with taxpayers' money?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, the way that you create jobs in Manitoba is to work in partnership with industry and with businesses, point No. 1.

Point No. 2, I would say to the members opposite that I believe he's referring to the investment that we're making with Price Industries. Yes, absolutely, on this side of the House that we believe investing \$1.5 million in training, highly skilled jobs, Mr. Speaker, are going to be the result of that. We'll partner with Price Industries to do that.

And further, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the member opposite that, unlike the record of the people across the way, our MIOP loan program, fully repayable, secured, interest-bearing loans, \$10 million to Price Industries that they'll be paying

back in exchange for a 50,000-foot expansion and 175 good-paying jobs here in Manitoba.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear Manitoba's not competitive with other jurisdictions. Instead of having businesses knock on our door to come to do business, create jobs, we are subsidizing businesses to stay here. As with the Price incentive package, it is clear this manufacturer could not afford to expand without a government subsidy because of our competitive disadvantage.

Why has this government failed to create a climate to attract investment into our province, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Oswald: I would note for the member opposite that KPMG ranked Winnipeg No. 1 for competitiveness in the midcontinental corridor, No. 1, ahead of many jurisdictions.

I can say to the member opposite that he might be interested to know that when his leader sat at the Cabinet table MIOP loans were usually provided at an interest rate that was below the government's cost of borrowing, at a net cost to the taxpayers. We put a stop to that practice, Mr. Speaker, and, further, MIOP loans are now set at or above interest rates. That, under their watch, was the purest form of corporate welfare, costing the taxpayers money.

Our approach is to invest, train Manitobans and get that money back with interest.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that photo ops do not replace sound economic policies.

Mr. Speaker, the fundamentals here are clearly not conducive to business development in Manitoba. In fact, business leaders have said that we are at a disadvantage here in Manitoba. After 15 years, the NDP government has failed to develop a positive climate for business development.

Why has the NDP failed to make business climate more favourable here in Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I'll reiterate for the member, KPMG did this analysis 2010, 2012 and ranked Winnipeg No. 1 both times for competitiveness.

I would remind the member that when his leader was a Cabinet minister, he and his colleagues approved several repayable loans. Their overall performance on MIOP was a loss of 25 per cent. Subsequently, when we came into power, we stopped that practice. We've doubled the amount of money

that we're loaning and we have a 5 per cent or less loss rate. We've improved the program.

We're training people—175 highly skilled jobs. We've removed the small business tax. Heavens to Murgatroyd, Mr. Speaker, with friends like them, business people don't need enemies.

Personal-Care Facility Violence in Care (Case Concern)

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, a very distressed man came to see me on the weekend. His 96-year-old aunt had been beaten up in a Winnipeg personal-care home.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to explain how this can continue to happen to the vulnerable elderly in personal-care homes where they are supposed to be safe.

Has this NDP not-government not learned anything from a recent incident where one resident attacked another and killed them? Why is this continuing to happen in our PCHs?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): I would ask the member if she could bring me some more information on this particular case, or to my office, if she hasn't already.

What she describes is absolutely unacceptable for our seniors. We want to know that when our seniors are placed in homes they are getting good care, they are getting safe care and they're getting a quality of life, Mr. Speaker.

We brought in a number of initiatives to make sure that people have that, including bringing in the Protection for Persons in Care Office that will look into any accusations of abuse and, of course, follow up on them, Mr. Speaker, which I hope to be able to do if it hasn't been done already in this case.

I would ask the member to bring that information forward because it is very important that we follow up on any cases where somebody is suspecting abuse.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, I wonder why this minister doesn't know. These reports come out. They're in the protection of persons in care annual report. There's a lot of people getting beaten up in our hospitals and in our personal-care homes. This is only just one example.

This 96-year-old lady was attacked not once, not twice, but three times. The last time, on the weekend,

the same man who attacked her before came into her room and punched her in the face.

Mr. Speaker, can this Minister of Health explain: Why should this 96-year-old frail lady have to lie in her bed in a personal-care home and worry about when is that next attack coming and what is it going to be like?

Ms. Selby: Of course, someone should not have to worry about their safety when they're in one of our personal-care homes. That is not what we would want for any of our loved ones. We want to know that they're in a safe place, that they're in a caring place.

And I do want to say, Mr. Speaker, that our staff and our personnel working in our personal-care homes work very hard every day to provide a caring, loving and warm, safe place to be.

Sometimes when something happens that doesn't go as we would expect, we want to know about it. It's why we brought in personal-care-home standards in 2005. That's why we brought them into law, so that they have to be standards. When something happens in a personal-care home, when there is abuse reported, we look into it, we want to know about it and we definitely don't want to sweep it under the rug.

So I would say again to this member, if she hasn't made this particular case known to my office, I would ask her to do that, please.

* (14:00)

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Health demonstrates over and over again that she does not know what's happening in the Department of Health.

Mr. Speaker, a staff person at the personal-care home told the nephew that there was nothing he could do to keep this man from wandering around beating up little old ladies. I find that totally disturbing and totally unacceptable. So did the nephew. So yesterday he filed a police report about the beating his aunt took on the weekend.

So I'd like to ask this Minister of Health to tell this nephew: Are there not policies and standards in place in personal-care homes that protect residents from violent attacks by other residents? Does she not know what's in place in personal-care homes in Manitoba?

Ms. Selby: Yes, there are standards in place, Mr. Speaker. It's why we brought in the personal health-care—the personal-care-home standards in 2005 and legislated that those standards be in place. It's also why we have the protected person in care office, so that if anyone sees or suspects abuse of any of our elders that they can report that and an investigation happens.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to point out that we know that we do have—some of our patients do have some challenges. We know that some of them have some special needs, which is why in Winnipeg we have over 400 beds for residents who need a protected environment, who may have behavioural issues. We're also able to equip any bed with additional staff should that happen. We have hired over 400 more nurses to work in our personal-care homes. We've done as much as we can to bring them up to understanding the particular cases that they have to deal with by providing them training to work with Alzheimer's and other dementia, but—

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

University College of the North Lobdell Report Findings

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, the Lobdell report on the University College of the North organizational and optional—operational review from 2004 to 2011 was released last June. This report was conducted for the Council on Post-Secondary Education, yet there was no mention of it until eight months later, in February of this year.

I ask the Minister of Education: Why did it take so long for this report to be released?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, UCN is a very important institution not only to those of us on this side of the House but to northerners and Aboriginal northerners. We want to make sure that northern Manitobans have the opportunity to get a good quality education, go on and get a good job, stay in their communities and make sure that they're able to support their families and good—live good and productive lives.

The Lobdell report is a—was an important part of the process in learning about the good things that UCN has done to date and also things that need to be continued to work on going forward into the future.

UCN is a very important institution. We supported it on this side of the House; they didn't even want to see it happen.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, and I guess I'm going to have to give some more information to the minister, because he failed to answer the last one.

Thirteen out of 31 of the University College of the North campuses had a graduation rate of zero per cent over the seven years that the study took place, Mr. Speaker, graduation rates including obtaining a degree, a diploma, a certificate, meaning that it can take as little as a year for a student to graduate from the University College of the North.

Why hasn't this minister done anything to help increase graduation rates, considering that his department has had the Lobdell report for almost an entire year, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Allum: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry that the member thinks so poorly of the institution, that he thinks so poorly of the staff there and that he thinks so poorly of the students.

The fact of the matter is the Lobdell report indicated that it's remarkable that UCN has made as much progress in the short amount of time as they have to date. There's no question that other work needs to happen in order to improve outcomes there.

On this side of the House, though, Mr. Speaker, we're committed to making sure that UCN is a success. We're committed to making sure that UCN students get a quality education. We're committed to being sure that UCN students get a job at the end of the day.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, we're committed to UCN; they didn't even vote for it when the time came.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, it's not the institution's reputation that's in question here. It's the minister's ability to manage his department.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education said himself, and I quote, northerners need outcomes, end quote. Yet he has sat idle with the report that concludes that the University College of the North lacks outcomes.

This NDP government likes to talk about—talk out of both sides of their mouths and has failed to help students in northern communities.

When will this minister stand up for northern Manitobans, or is he all about the cover-up, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, you can't be more open and transparent than having a report that goes public that says quite clearly that UCN has made tremendous progress on several fronts and needs more work on other fronts.

And we're going to continue working with the institution, with President Jonasson and with the governing council and the elders council to make sure that it becomes an institution that all Manitobans can be proud of but that supports northern Manitobans in particular.

When we came forward with the UCN proposal in the early part of the decade, the members opposite said that they were going to kill that proposal. So for the member opposite to stand up now and ask us what's going on—several years ago they had a chance to stand with members of UCN, with northern Manitobans to support a new—an institution up there. And when they had that chance, they failed.

Former MPI CEO Contract Executive Training Course

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, the NDP want to convince Manitobans that MPI is broke. And so to do that, they have to go to the PUB and first convince the PUB that MPI is broke and Manitobans should pay more. So they've hired somebody at \$180 an hour, after they had a \$500,000 payout from their job previously.

But when looking at the expenses of the corporation, we find that executives from MPI took a course called fundamentals in testifying that was supposed to train them to do PUB training and testifying at the PUB. That course cost \$8,000 to train a few executives.

Why did MPI pay \$8,000 to train executives to testify at the PUB and then they turned around and hired somebody at \$180 an hour to do exactly the same thing, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Well, it continues to be a pleasure to talk about Manitoba Public Insurance, of course, the public auto insurance corporation that provides the best service and the best rates for Manitobans.

And I know the member for Steinbach may not take it from me, but maybe he should listen to what the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) had to say on CJOB radio this morning. And, of course, we were talking about the Manitoba affordability advantage, and what did the member for Brandon West say about utility costs in Manitoba? He said, well, I think that when you look at the basket of rates that they look at, often they're among the lowest in Canada.

Well, the member for Brandon West is getting much closer. I think maybe tomorrow he'll understand that those utility rates are indeed the lowest in Canada.

Mr. Goertzen: I don't know how that's a justification to waste money, and, certainly, the member from Brandon West would never waste taxpayers' money, Mr. Speaker, like this government.

This government authorized \$8,000 in training so that executives could go to the PUB and testify before the PUB, and yet, instead of using those executives, they decided to hire somebody else who they'd just given a half a million dollars, pay them \$180 an hour to go to the PUB to do exactly what they paid executives \$8,000 to be trained for.

Why did they put out \$8,000 of MPI ratepayers' money and then turn around and hire somebody at \$180 an hour to do exactly the thing that the training should've covered, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Swan: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to talk about ratepayers' money at MPI.

Who knows? Maybe tomorrow morning the member for Brandon West will go back on CJOB and he'll let everybody know that since 2004 Manitobans have enjoyed overall Autopac rate decrease of 14.9 per cent.

Maybe the day after that the member for Brandon West will go on CJOB and tell everybody that, indeed, an independent analysis by Deloitte says Manitoba has the lowest average insurance costs in Manitoba.

Maybe then the member for Steinbach can get together with the member for Brandon West and they can better understand how the public insurance system provides dividends for every single ratepayer in Manitoba. You know, Mr. Speaker, they should talk.

Travel Expenses

Mr. Goertzen: I'm sure that CJOB will make time for the minister if he wants to go on CJOB and apologize for raising the PST after promising not to.

* (14:10)

Mr. Speaker, the person that the NDP hired for \$180 an hour after they got a half million dollars to go to the PUB and say that MPI is broke is a well-travelled individual. In fact, with MPI they've been able to visit, on the MPI dime, Dublin, Ireland; Zurich, Switzerland; London, England. They've travelled to Orange County, Florida; San Diego, California, a few times; New York City; San Antonio, Texas; San Francisco, California; Las Vegas, Nevada; Naples, Florida—I don't have enough time to go on and on.

Mr. Speaker, how can they convince Manitobans that MPI is broke when they're sending somebody who travelled the world on MPI's dime?

Mr. Swan: Well, you know, any time we want to talk about MPI's rates, the member or any member over there can ask the question.

Perhaps the member opposite isn't aware that, of course, Saskatchewan's public auto insurer, SGI, has just applied for a rate increase of 5.2 per cent. And, of course, Saskatchewan conducts its own comparisons of auto insurance rates across the country, and filed with Saskatchewan's proposal in front of their equivalent to the Public Utilities Board is their analysis Saskatchewan has proven that Manitoba has the lowest average auto insurance premiums in Canada.

And, Mr. Speaker, we put our money where our mouth is. Every year Deloitte will look at not just MPI premiums, they'll look at hydro costs for home heating, they will look at costs for Manitobans and will continue to show that Manitobans enjoy a huge affordability advantage because of our publicly owned utilities, which we are very proud of, which the Tories would sell off if they ever got the chance.

Rural Highway Maintenance Government Intention

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the ongoing saga of this NDP government's infrastructure mismanagement is accentuated by their disregard of critical rural highways.

For example, Highway 15 east of Winnipeg to Dugald and beyond to Whiteshell cottage country is

travelled by about 8,000 vehicles every day, and yet regular maintenance has been ignored for years. It's more than a disgrace, it's dangerous.

When will the Premier be addressing the Dugald Road disgrace his government has perpetrated?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I appreciate the question from the member for River Heights because it allows us again to indicate we've put a 5-and-a-half-billion-dollar infrastructure program in place over the next five years, a historic investment in infrastructure in Manitoba. It will lift the economy by \$6.3 billion. It'll provide 59,000 jobs. It'll provide good opportunities for young people to have jobs in this province. It'll provide tremendous spinoffs to all of our businesses which will acquire \$1.4 billion of additional equipment and assets within their companies.

I only wish the member from River Heights would have voted for that program so we can pave the highways of Manitoba, look after sewer and water and build strategic infrastructure which will strengthen our economy, strategic infrastructure like CentrePort, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I understand from Reeve Jim McCarthy of Springfield that Highway 15 is not even on the Premier's \$5.5-billion plan.

Mr. Speaker, as I travelled Highway 391 north of Thompson to Nelson House last week, there were approximately 80 orange signs, photos of which I table now. Each orange sign marked a bad section of the road. People driving this stretch of partly paved, partly broken highway feel just how bad orange is.

In over 14 years, this NDP government has failed to ensure a quality highway from Thompson north to the community of about 3,000 people in Nelson House.

I ask the—

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

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I just have to say to the member opposite, under his approach, which was to vote against the budget, there would be no highway improvements in Manitoba; they wouldn't be happening. There would be no 5-and-a-half-billion-dollar infrastructure program. There would be no early tendering process which allows the companies to mount all their employees and training and equipment to be ready to go during the most important rebuild that we're doing in the province.

There would be no additional protection for flood protection for the people around Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin and the Assiniboine valley and Brandon, Manitoba.

If he's really serious about infrastructure, let him stand up right now and say he supports the infrastructure program we're mounting in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, when this Premier's government came to power, Highway 15 and 391 were there already. They just haven't been kept up by this government.

Mr. Speaker, whether it is eastern, southern, western or northern Manitoba, the management and maintenance of highway infrastructure has been deplorable under this NDP government. After 14 years of ignoring this issue and continuing delays, only now are they recognizing how badly they've positioned Manitoba. It's imperative to not just throw money at roads but to build roads that are more durable and last longer in Manitoba conditions.

What effort is the NDP government making to ensure that each road that is built is better built and lasts longer than previous highways?

Mr. Speaker: The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger:—question. First of all, he's wrong. The trend line on infrastructure spending has been going up every year for the last several years. Certainly, every year in Manitoba our infrastructure spending has been much stronger than when the Conservatives were in government, where they increased the gas tax and cut the highways budget. We are putting more resources into infrastructure, including highways, than ever in the history of the province, Mr. Speaker, and the member from River Heights has voted against that.

We've also seen productivity improvements. They're recycling asphalt now, improving the ability to take the same amount of dollars and do 30 per cent more road in Manitoba—roads in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. We like productivity improvements. We like greater efficiency, and we have designed this program, over the next five years, to get tenders out earlier, to group tenders, to get better value for the money, to train more Manitobans in apprenticeship, have better equipment and build the future of Manitoba.

And the member opposite has voted against it. He votes against it, then he wants to pave the roads. Get real.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable—order, please. The honourable member for St. James.

ACCESS Winnipeg West Centre Official Opening

Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that Manitoba residents have the right care at the right time and in the right place.

Today I had the pleasure of joining the Minister of Health, the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors (Ms. Blady) and the community members at the opening of ACCESS Winnipeg West at the Grace Hospital.

Could the Minister of Health please inform the House how this new access centre will provide better access to care and services for Manitobans?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): Well, Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to be able to open the brand new ACCESS Winnipeg West this morning at the Grace Hospital. I want to thank the members, the MLA members for St. James, Kirkfield Park and Assiniboine for their voice for their communities, knowing that they wanted to bring health care closer to families and seniors.

ACCESS Winnipeg West doesn't just include primary health care but also family services so that people can see not just a physician or a nurse practitioner but also a counsellor, a psychologist, an occupational therapist, pharmacy, physiotherapy, psychiatry, many, many ways that people can get help all in one place, Mr. Speaker.

Also a daycare there, Mr. Speaker, I toured it this morning, with 80 new spaces scheduled to open very soon.

And I'd just like to say we've already seen 50 new patients connected to this centre.

Cattle Enhancement Council Statement of Expenses Request

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, last Friday the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) and myself attended the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council annual general meeting, along with the

board of directors, as none of the cattlemen seemed to be aware of—that it was happening.

Now, I—at that meeting I provided a written request to the board of directors for a breakdown of expenses for the last four years in order to understand where \$7 million has disappeared.

Now, will the minister ensure that the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council board of directors do indeed provide me with this breakdown of expenses for the past four years so that we can get to the bottom of where \$7 million of cattlemen's and taxpayer money has disappeared?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): And I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question.

As the member opposite is well aware of, the audited financial statements that include the MCE's annual report is on the website, and I think there is no reason—there is 'true' 'transparency' of the auditor report and I encourage the members opposite to truly entertain the opportunity to get on the computer, to investigate it, because I think that'll be the simplest of starting point of your questions being brought forward for the minister of Midland.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, at the annual general meeting, the chairperson, Ms. Frieda Krpan, asked me, do I actually want a breakdown of each and every expense, and I said, yes, that's what I want, I want a breakdown of the expenses.

* (14:20)

Anybody can read the general financial on the website, but that doesn't tell you where \$7 million disappeared. They had their lawyers there, they had their accountants there, I asked in Estimates; nobody wants to give the information.

Will he ensure that the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council board of directors provides me with a breakdown of the \$7 million that's disappeared?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Let me be repetitious, as I would have to be to get the message across to the member opposite, as we know that we have a third-party independent agency that is doing the audited statements as we're closing down the MCAC—MCEC organization.

But let me just share some information. I know the importance of the agriculture industry because I've done it for 35 years. I know the challenges where

the agriculture—the beef industry risk—what the BSE has done.

This government was proactive to develop a system, and we continue to work with the cattle enhancement. We provide livestock insurance, we provide forage insurance. That is a path we're focused on to regenerate.

Where were they when they talked about community pasture? Where were they when they supported young generation farmers as we move forward towards the beef industry in the province of Manitoba? That's what I ask today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: It's time for members' statements.

Southeast Mentored Hunts Program

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to recognize the southeast mentored hunts program, an important initiative that pairs experienced hunters with young children to teach them about conservation and proper hunting techniques in southern Manitoba.

Southeast mentored hunters was started three years ago by Warren Graydon, Jason Edbom, Blaine Alexiuk, Jason Lafreniere and Darryl Rodewald. Children from all across Manitoba from both rural and urban backgrounds participate in a memorable one-day experience where they learn proper hunting techniques from experienced hunters.

After completing a day of the program, the mentees are given membership to the Manitoba Wildlife Federation, a subscription to Outdoor Edge Magazine and hunting insurance. They also receive a free lunch courtesy of Danny's Whole Hog. The program is self-funded by the mentors themselves, by the Safari Club International and Manitoba Conservation.

This program has been a huge success, Mr. Speaker, and is looking to expand and include more young people that are interested in conservation of wildlife and hunting as a sport.

Two more mentors have recent been recruited, Raymond Hildebrandt and his son Kyle, to help extend the program to two—to a two-day hunt featuring 10 children.

The work of southeast mentored hunts goes far beyond just mentoring children through—though, Mr. Speaker, they also work closely with persons with disabilities and a veterans' organization, Faces of Freedom. The group is working on planning a turkey, big game and waterfowl hunt with a group of people with disabilities. Mentors will be taking three veterans out on hunting deer, two of which were wounded in action in Afghanistan. Through this program the mentors will help bring hope back to the lives of veterans by providing them with the opportunity to get outdoors and learn new skills.

The mentors go by the motto Conserve, Hunt, Share. As conservationists and hunters, they want to share their knowledge with anyone willing to learn.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the members of this House will join me in recognizing the mentors for getting this initiative off the ground and running, and all the sponsors for supporting this program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Electric Buses

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): After being absent since 1965, electrical buses have returned to the streets of Winnipeg. Recently we unveiled the new battery-powered Xcelsior prototype transit bus, the product of a dynamic public-private partnership between the provincial government, New Flyer Industries, Red River College and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, created right here in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, electric buses last rode into Winnipeg streets 49 years ago in the form of electrical trolleys. It was my great pleasure, once again, a few years back, that I was the passenger in the first ride of the prototype bus along with the member from Kildonan—that was the first prototype built right here in Manitoba. After great efforts and new research and development, the new and improved electric bus made its historical maiden voyage from the Hydro building on Taylor Avenue to the Hydro building downtown. The most impressive thing about the new buses is that it can be charged in less than 20 minutes. They can also cover 100 kilometres for just \$12 worth of energy. These green buses help reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. These are the right choice for our economy and an environmentally friendly future.

We are proud of the partnership we established to produce these buses, as well as the innovative technology created through our collaboration. I'd especially like to thank Paul Soubry, CEO of New

Flyer Industries, and Scott Thomson, CEO of Manitoba Hydro, for all the hard work they have done. Others have also been duly impressed. Recently, the New Flyer Industries transit authority was awarded New Flyer Industries \$138-million contract for electric buses for their own, and on the Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, signed a contract with them for 89 buses.

Mr. Speaker, for many years, our government has been—has seen the potential of developing alternative green energy. This is why we have invested in the job training for innovative businesses like New Flyer Industries. This investment has already seen great returns. It has helped create green jobs right here in my own constituency of Radisson, neighbouring St. Boniface Industrial Park.

Congratulations to everyone involved in this successful project. I look forward to seeing the electric bus business slowly grow to a big, big business.

Junior Bison Girls Provincial Volleyball Championship

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today to honour and commend the Junior Bison girls volleyball 14-and-under team that captured the provincial championship at the end of April in—here in Winnipeg. This past weekend, the girls, Bison girls volleyball team, attended the national volleyball tournament in Abbotsford, British Columbia. The team completed in the tier 1 champion open volleyball category against 31 teams across the country, including a team from London, Ontario. This team captured the national championship, beating Forest City from London, Ontario, in three sets in the final game.

The team members include my niece, Justine Gillert, Sydney Elliott, Anna Maidment, Julia Arnold, Katreena Bentley, Ashly Carriere, Kristen Taillon, Cierra Cyr and Tania Wallack and Jordan Hamm. The girls were coached by the coach—head coach Ken Bentley and assistant coach Paulette Jerrard-Gillert.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has always had a great reputation and success in our volleyball programs, and these girls continue this reputation in winning the nationals. These volleyball players have made our province of Manitoba very proud on the successful journey in winning the national volleyball championship.

In closing, I would like to take this time to congratulate the team.

Northern Manitoba Regional Science Fair

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, every year, thousands of students across the country participate in the school's science fair. Their fairs let students really experience the science they've learned over the year. Science fair projects let kids discover for themselves the fascinating world around them.

On March 21st and 26th, grade 4 to 8 students from across northern Manitoba came together in Flin Flon to present their science projects. This year had dozens of fantastic projects on a variety of topics, focused on general science, life science, health or physical science.

This year, two grade 8 students will be taking their projects all the way to the Canada-Wide Science Fair. After winning the regional science fair, grade 8 students Katie Dollard and Taylor Hydamaka will soon be presenting their project Does Music Help People Engage Better? to a panel of national judges in Windsor, Ontario. Their exceptional work tried to find out if listening to music improves people's ability to learn, exercise or play video games.

To test an individual's ability to learn, Katie and Taylor gave their participants math tests either in silence or while listening to music. They also observed music's potential impact in an individual's performance playing video games and while exercising. What's truly impressive about the girls' project is that they have continued to improve their research between science fairs, gathering even more data over the course of the spring so that they will be ready for nationals.

Mr. Speaker, science fairs help many of us discover a lifelong love of learning. Congratulations to Katie, Taylor and all those students who participated in the northern regional science fair. Thank you to all parents and teachers—dedicate so much of your time and their time helping your children and students create such wonderful projects. Keep up the great work, and good luck at nationals. Thank you.

*(14:30)

Arborgate School Choir

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Music education is extremely beneficial in the psychological development of youth. Studies show that

students with music education tend to have larger vocabularies and stronger reading skills than students who do not.

On April 23rd, the Arborgate School choir from the community of La Broquerie in the Seine River School Division sang here at the Legislative Assembly.

The choir, which includes about 40 students from grades 4 to 8, meets twice during the school day cycle to practise. During the Christmas season the choir sings at the local credit union and seniors homes.

Arborgate School is located in the municipality of La Broquerie. It is a French community that 'hotes'—hosts an annual festival, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, in June. Hockey is a very popular sport in La Broquerie, and the local hockey team is known as the Habs. Arborgate is one of the two schools in the municipality, and students travel as long as an hour by school bus to get there.

Arborgate School's music program began in 1997. It features a process where grade 1 to 6 students learn through listening, moving, singing, instrument playing and speech. Students have three music classes per school cycle, which they are taught by a music specialist. The school's grade 6 and 7 students are encouraged to expand their musical perspective and have learned how to play the Aboriginal flute and ethnic drumming. Grade 7 and 8 students take band class which exposes them to playing music in a group setting.

In addition to its stellar music program, Arborgate has excellent competitive athletic teams, quality technology and a strong art program. With a school that is rich in talent and a community that continues to expand and becomes more diverse, I would like to thank Carol Martens, the Arborgate School music and band teacher, for all of her hard work and dedication and for bringing her students to the Legislative Assembly to perform.

Thank you.

I would ask leave to provide a list of the names of the students to go into Hansard.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave to include the list of names the honourable member has referenced? *[Agreed]*

Alyssa S., Cameron S., Celine S., Emily B., Kyle W., Lucy C., Morgan J., Rudi G., Angela R., Aria K., Erin W., Kiara V., Leslie P., Meadow P., Milena F.,

Ruby D., Ryan S., Alyssa K., Anastasia W., Angelina S-W, Evelyn L., Julia L., Kaila K., McKenzie S., Chloe G., Ivy P., Beatrix D., Sydney S., Tori P., Cole P., Taylor S., Arianna H., Jaden S., Josh B., Lauren F., Salena U., Sydney K., Andrew S.

The adults attending included Annette Lyss, Jennifer Waite and Carol Martens.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances? *[interjection]* Sorry, my apology, the honourable member for Steinbach?

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): In accordance with rule 36(1), I move, seconded by the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), that the regularly scheduled business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, the abduction of Nigerian schoolgirls.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: Certainly, I believe that all members of this House, regardless of which political party they represent, or the independent members as well, Mr. Speaker, would see this as a critical issue for us to discuss here in the Legislature.

I think all of us, when we've seen the news reports, our hearts have been broken by the terrorist act of the abduction of these young girls. And we know that here in Manitoba, a far way away from Nigeria where these actions took place, there's not a lot that we can physically do, Mr. Speaker, but there are things that we can do when we stand together with our friends in the African community and all of those who are concerned about what has happened. There was a rally here on Sunday. Representatives from all political parties were at that rally. All of us had the opportunity to speak, to try to do what we can to ensure that the girls were returned.

Now, I've had the opportunity this morning to speak to my counterpart in the government, the Government House Leader (Mr. Swan), and we've had discussions with the independent member from the Liberal Party, and there was a couple of ways we could have proceeded with this. One is a matter of urgent public importance, which we filed this morning; another is a government motion. The government indicated that they were interested in bringing forward a motion. There was a notice provision that would have delayed that debate for a couple of days. We agreed that this is something that shouldn't be delayed. That's why we called for a

MUPI, a matter of urgent public importance. But I think that the better course to proceed to ensure that all members have a chance to—those who are interested—to speak to this, and also to ensure that we have a particular resolution that is passed, is to proceed by way of a government resolution.

So I'm going to ask leave of the House to withdraw my motion for a matter of urgent public importance, and we will give leave for a government motion on this issue, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) has asked for leave to withdraw his motion for a matter of urgent public importance.

Is there leave of the House for the motion for a matter of urgent public importance filed by the honourable member for Steinbach to be withdrawn?
[Agreed]

Grievances.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, will you please canvass the House to see if there is leave to move and debate a government resolution entitled Abduction of Girls in Nigeria, brought forward by the honourable Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross) and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, given that the usual notice has not been provided for this resolution.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to move directly to debate of a government resolution entitled Abduction of Girls in Nigeria? [Agreed]

GOVERNMENT RESOLUTION

Abduction of Girls in Nigeria

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister responsible for Status of Women): I move, seconded by the MLA for Steinbach,

WHEREAS in the middle of the night on April 15th, 2014, approximately 300 girls were taken from their school in Chibok, Nigeria, by the militant group Boko Haram; and

WHEREAS people from around the world have been speaking out to draw attention to this horrific crime; and

WHEREAS individual acts of violence and abuse against women are acts that are connected to create a world in which women's participation in society is limited, their rights can be violated and ignored and their physical and mental health is damaged; and

WHEREAS the education of girls and women is fundamental to their full participation in society and essential to the achievement of genuine equality.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba condemn in the strongest terms the acts of violence that occurred in Chibok, Nigeria, and all acts of violence and subjugation against women around the world.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the federal government to take all diplomatic and humanitarian measures deemed necessary to ensure the abducted girls are returned safely home and are able to continue and complete their education without fear.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Minister of Family Services, seconded by the honourable member for Steinbach,

WHEREAS in the middle of the night on April 15th—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

The motion is in order.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Roughly 300 Nigerian schoolgirls have been abducted by the militant Islamist group Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. The violence brought on by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria has killed thousands since 2009. This group continues to threaten the lives of these girls, suggesting they will be sold into slavery. Boko Haram kidnapped the girls roughly a month ago and has released a video with roughly 100 of the girls appearing in the video.

The global community has come together calling for action to bring back these girls. The United States, Britain and France have pledged to send specialist teams of intelligence and communication experts to help the Nigerian government bring home the kidnapped girls. The Canadian government will be working with the Nigerian authorities to assist in finding the missing girls. They are providing surveillance equipment and the technical expertise to operate it.

We know that education is an equalizer. It's an important privilege, fundamental right that everyone in the world should experience. The actions that have been taken towards these young women, towards their families, their communities and their country is not understandable to us. It is a crime that has happened. The fear that has happened throughout that country, the acknowledgement of the event that has happened and the time that it has taken for us to have—start having this conversation has been a huge concern for the Nigerian community all over the world.

*(14:40)

In the past weekend, there was rallies all over the world to bring awareness and attention to the lives of these 300 young girls. People came to the Manitoba Legislature dressed in red, and, as they were singing, they joined hands and talked about bring back our girls.

As a parent, I can't understand how that must feel. As an observer of the media last night, when I saw the young girls huddled together, dressed in clothing that they have not worn before, obviously, probably forced to put that clothing on so they can stay safe, it was not—I could not understand how someone could do that. The fear that those young women must be feeling, the fear that their families and their community are feeling, and I have—I know that it's the Nigerian community around the world are chanting every moment and praying to bring back our girls.

As I've said, education is a right. The United Nations have said that on three different occasions in different reports. They have emphasized the importance of young women accessing education and the value of that education to ensure that they have a bright future, that their community has a bright future, that their families. We cannot deny that right. We need to work together. The world needs to come together to go to Nigeria and find those girls. We hear in the media reports that it could almost be impossible, but if we don't try, it won't be possible. So we need to continue to pressure our federal government and other governments around the world to come together and to ensure that we are looking diligently to bring back our girls.

Also, yesterday, people were making the comparison of what's happened in Manitoba, the 1,200 missing and murdered women that have happened in Canada. That was the recent report by the RCMP. We have a similar issue. We need to

make sure that, as we move forward, that we are addressing the issue of equality, making sure that we are preventing the sexual exploitation and trafficking of girls and young women across the world. We need to make sure that, as we're moving forward in our society, that we are addressing those issues, and, as I've said and I will say again and again, that education is one of those equalizers that is so vitally important.

What this militant group has done is they have put fear not only for the 300 girls that they have abducted, but throughout the country of Nigeria. I can't imagine what it must feel like for the other young women who are attempting to go to school and the fear that they walk in every day. When children go to school, they have the right to feel safe.

So we need to continue to work together to bring back our girls, to make sure that they know that we will not accept that kind of action towards anyone in the world. I'm very proud that our federal government has spoken up and said that we will provide supports. We need to make sure that we are doing our utmost to ensure that we are bringing back our girls.

So I thank you very much for allowing us to put this government resolution today on the floor and to have a debate about what can we do to bring back our girls and address this issue for these 300 Nigerian girls, but what do we do to prevent it from happening in other parts of our country, of our world, and in our province.

Thank you.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's words and I'm glad that we were able to work together with the government. I don't think this is an issue that should ever be partisan or be looked at in a partisan way.

On Saturday night of this past week, I received an invitation from my friend Kenny Daodu to come to a rally on Mother's Day on Sunday about the issue of the missing Nigerian schoolchildren, and I was—honoured is the wrong word and obligated is the wrong word, but I felt compelled that I should be there and that I should bring my family to that rally, because it's the least that we could do. But, in many ways, it was the most that we could do, being so far away from the situation.

As we drove in on Sunday afternoon and on Mother's Day, of course, there's a lot of other places that the people would rather be than at a rally on the

front steps of the Legislature, but I also felt that there was no better place to be on Mother's Day than to be there and support those families who are going through an unspeakable tragedy because of the terrorist acts of a terrorist organization, Mr. Speaker. But as I drove in with my son, who is now seven years old, he was wondering, what is it that we're going to. What kind of a—he thought it was a convention, because when I go away and bring him with, he often thinks it's a convention. And I tried to explain it to him about what was happening in another part of the world—that young children his age had been taken, had been abducted. And it was very difficult, of course, for him to understand that, having no experience in a country like that, and he said to me, as probably only a young child could do, said, well, we should buy them all home security—home alarms so that they would be safe. And that was his solution.

I wish that there was such an easy solution to such a complex problem, Mr. Speaker, but I thought it was important to bring him there—to bring forward an understanding for him that not every part of the world is as safe as Canada, and that not every young person is as fortunate to not only attend an education—have an education but to feel safe in their schools and in their communities.

And I want to commend the community, the—all those who were involved with organizing the rally on fairly short notice on this past Sunday. Not only Kenny but many others, of course, were involved with the organization, getting the word out, Mr. Speaker, and I think that they felt that it was, again, as much as they could do at that moment. I know there are other things they want to do to continue to ensure that there's awareness and that there is pressure, and pressure is an important part of this, in ensuring that national governments don't stop the search for these young girls.

As I said at the rally, and there were representatives from all political parties at that rally, and I appreciated that all of us could come together—that we need to be united. These terrorist organizations, whether they are committing terror in Nigeria or other parts of the world, they rely on the governments and they rely on the world to be divided—to be divided against each other. They rely on people to be divided against each other. And what I was heartened about on Sunday, as we were there and we sang, all we are saying is bring back our girls, that everybody was united. There were people from different backgrounds. There were people from

different religions. And it's important that this does not become an issue between countries. This is not a division between countries.

We draw borders on a map because that's how we organize our world and that's how we organize governments, and that's how we organize our lives, but this particular issue cannot be divided by borders on a map. The world must stand in unity on this issue to ensure that these young girls are returned to their home and that they have the right to have an education and safety, Mr. Speaker.

We cannot be divided by politics. It doesn't matter if you're a Liberal, New Democrat. It doesn't matter if you're a Conservative or a member of the Bloc Québécois in Ottawa. Everybody has to be united on this issue, and I think everybody was. The—each of the politicians who spoke from the different political parties at the rally on Sunday talked about the need to continue to be involved, continue to put pressure on the national government, but also other governments. I was heartened to hear that the United States and other governments have decided to send resources into Nigeria in the hunt for these young girls.

We can also not be divided by religion and too often in this world, religion does divide us, and that's a sad thing, Mr. Speaker. It shouldn't divide us. I was heartened that on Sunday there were representatives there from the Muslim community who came to—spoke—the Islamic social services who spoke at the rally, because this isn't about religions. There is no religion, I don't believe, in the world that condones this type of behaviour. No religion, in their mainstream variation, would condone this kind of behaviour, so it was wonderful to see people of different religions and of no religion who came to gather on Sunday to say, this is wrong and we need to stand against this.

*(14:50)

So I am heartened that we are doing this, because what more can we do? This is something that we can do at this early stage, and maybe there are other things that will come to our minds that we can do as a Legislature to try to bring whatever force we can bear to ensure that these young girls ultimately are home with their families and get the education that they have the right to have. We are not just, as I said on Sunday, not just in the shadow of the Manitoba Legislature. We are now in the shadow of the Canadian Human Rights Museum, and the

ability for all young people to have an education should be considered a human right, Mr. Speaker.

So I am pleased that this Legislature has decided to come together in a motion that is bipartisan, that has all party—I believe will have all-party support, and we need to continue to not forget these girls in whatever way that individuals choose to do that, whether that is through speaking about them, whether that is through social media, whether that is through their prayers of their various religions, Mr. Speaker. We need to do what we can do.

We have often talked about other atrocities in the world, whether it's the Ukraine, Mr. Speaker, or Syria, and I think it's actually an important part of what we do as legislators, that we shouldn't underestimate the power that we sometimes have individually and collectively, that we sometimes diminish ourselves by thinking that there is nothing we can do. This is something, and I think this is important.

And I appreciate all the members of the House coming together and showing those who would commit terror in our world and commit terror against young people, that we will not be divided. They may have hoped that the world would be divided, that religions would be divided, that countries would be divided; we will not be divided, we will be united against this act of terror, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Multiculturalism and Literacy): In an extreme violation of their human rights, over 300 schoolgirls were abducted by a militant group in Nigeria. Today, over 250 of these girls are still missing and their families desperately want them to come home.

Manitobans unanimously condemn this repugnant act that tears these girls away from their families and threatens to cut down their potential before it has been given a chance to flourish. These girls were devalued based on their gender and viewed with contempt simply for desiring to get an education. This situation reminds us that women and girls all over the world still face prejudice and violence every day.

Mr. Speaker, just yesterday, James Anaya, the United Nations' special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, released a report where he supports the demand by various communities in Canada for the federal government to call an inquiry into the tragic reality that there are too many missing and murdered Aboriginal girls and women in

Canada. Our government affirms our support for this important national issue.

According to the Native Women's Association of Canada, they have documented some 660 cases of women and girls across Canada have gone missing or have been murdered in the last 20 years. Until now, families and friends of these missing and murdered girls and women are awaiting justice, and subsequent concrete, vigorous actions from authorities and communities are needed to address this issue.

Mr. Speaker, we live in a province that celebrates diversity and promotes mutual respect for all people. Manitoba continues to be a leader in multiculturalism, policy and programming, which is supported by Canadian law and entrenched in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I am proud that The Manitoba Multiculturalism Act recognizes that our province has been a multicultural society from the time of its original peoples, the Aboriginal peoples. We listen to the First Peoples' wisdom and further enshrined in our Multiculturalism Act that the diversity of Manitobans with regards to culture, religion and racial background are fundamental characteristics of Manitoba's society, which benefit all Manitobans economically, socially and culturally.

Mr. Speaker, today in our province there are over 250 flourishing ethnic cultural organizations, over 148 different languages spoken and over 150 different countries represented. Citizens of Manitoba are wholeheartedly committed to inclusion, partnerships, education and raising awareness of the benefits of a society united by a commitment to equality, freedom and opportunity for all.

Mr. Speaker, in Manitoba we are steadfast in our commitment to building bridges between communities—among communities so that prejudice and discrimination are eliminated. Eliminating prejudice and discrimination allows everyone to pursue their hopes and dreams regardless of background.

Mr. Speaker, last Sunday, men and women from all faiths and ethnicities gathered to support the Nigerian community in their demand for the safe return of these girls and to bring their abductors to justice. My colleagues from both sides of the House joined me at the rally Sunday, organized by the Nigerian Association of Manitoba. The rally was co-ordinated by the Nigerian Association of

Manitoba Incorporated, which is the umbrella organization for all Nigerian groups and associations here in Manitoba, which includes Okin International Club of Canada, Umunna (Igbo) Cultural Association of Manitoba, Al-Haqq Prayer Group of Canada, Incorporated, Nigerian professionals of Manitoba, and prayer for Nigeria incorporated.

Almost 1,500 Nigerians call Manitoba their home. I urge all Manitobans to stand in solidarity with them. With our voices united, it is my hope that the demand for justice will be heard. Manitoba supports the Government of Canada's commitment to assist efforts under way globally to locate the missing girls. We can do our part here at home by remaining vigilant and refusing to be complacent. We must always try for the social equality and justice that allows our young girls and boys to fulfill their human potential. Young people are the stewards of our future. Their passion for social equality is an inspiration.

Today we have in the gallery representatives from the Nigerian Association of Manitoba at the University of Manitoba and the Nigerian Association of Manitoba, who have been actively raising awareness of the situation.

We also have a member of the Manitoba Islamic Association, whose multi-faith prayer vigil on Sunday demonstrated Manitoba's dedication to building unity through our diversity.

Mr. Speaker, today I reaffirm our government's commitment to diversity, justice and human rights for all. Bring back the Nigerian girls to their school and their families. No more missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. And I urge all my colleagues in the Manitoba Legislature to ensure our words and actions help create a society where people of our different—of different gender states, ethnicities and race are respected and live in peace. Thank you.

House Business

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business, Mr. Speaker. I regret to interrupt debate, but I'm required as—under a certain time limit to table the list for concurrence of ministers to be questioned concurrently.

Mr. Speaker: Just want to ensure that the House is clear that the list of ministers required for concurrence has now been tabled, and we'll now return to the debate.

* * *

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the abduction of about 300 girls in Nigeria the night of April 14-15 by the extremist Boko Haram represents an awful and completely unacceptable circumstance. It is not acceptable that this is happening anywhere in the world, and we can certainly sympathize with the families, relatives of the more than 200 girls who are still missing more than a month after they were abducted.

This attack and abduction of schoolchildren in Nigeria is an event of very large proportions. It warrants discussion because if there is one agenda that we need on the international stage today, it is the agenda of ensuring girls and women have opportunities for education, for personal growth, and opportunities for jobs and for development as they grow.

The millennium goals have made clear the imperative of a global effort to ensure women are able to get an education if we are going to be successful in addressing poverty globally.

* (15:00)

The efforts of Malala in Pakistan have spoken out to all of us of the dire need for people around the world to stand up strongly in support of the opportunity for women to have the safety and security essential to access education and to be able to contribute to their family and their community.

It is of great concern that the militant group Boko Haram acted not only to abduct these Nigerian children, but also to interfere with their education. We need not only to ensure the safety of children around the world, we also need to ensure that every child can get an education. It is a human right. It was recognized by the United Nations 66 years ago and is about time that individuals, communities and countries act together to ensure that all children can get an education, and most particularly that these girls are now found and returned safely to their homes, and are able to continue and complete their education without fear.

The efforts of Fiona Sampson and 160 girls in Kenya who took their government to court and won a judgment against the government for not enforcing the laws of Kenya and the international laws against the rape and defilement of women also speak to the movement which we must also support and strengthen internationally to protect women, to provide safety for women and to prevent the rape and defilement of women. The efforts of grandmothers

around the world, and particularly a partnership of Canadian and African grandmothers, to help women families and communities in Africa who are dealing with HIV/AIDS and many other issues is another example.

Last Friday in Winnipeg, Sally Armstrong, a crusading Canadian journalist, spoke out about the importance of supporting women in the fight for women's rights and in the global fight against the abduction and mistreatment of women. It is important that we in Manitoba speak out not just for women globally, but that we also recognize that we have issues here with our own missing and murdered women, issues that we must address and that we need to address forcefully at home together with our efforts internationally in a global effort, a global battle for the rights of women.

Manitoba has a large population of people who have come from Nigeria. We must stand in this Chamber in solid support of Manitobans who have come from Nigeria and are now in desperate concern over what is happening to the girls of Nigeria. Pleased that there are members of the Nigerian Association here today, and look forward to doing everything we can in working with them.

I want to note that members of the Nigerian community have made a vast array of contributions to our society here, whether it is in teaching, in medicine, in health care and in so many other areas. Indeed, last night I was at McNally Robinson where a Nigerian-born artist, Yisa Akinbolaji, was showing his art. And he was talking about the children in Nigeria who had been abducted and the need for all of us to improve our communities in whatever way we can, and to protect and support children and girls so that they can get an education and have a good life.

I want to note and to emphasize that our Manitoba Liberal Party Leader, Rana Bokhari, who is here, is particularly concerned with what is happening in Nigeria today. She has been concerned with the well-being around the world of children and of women. She listened on Friday, as did I, to the worlds of Sally Armstrong—the concern for girls rang out strongly in Sally Armstrong's words. And certainly our concerns today were mentioned by Sally Armstrong, who noted not only how important it was to have a global effort speaking up on behalf of the children who've been abducted by—in Nigeria, but she also commented that we should be encouraged that there is so much global outrage

because it hasn't always been the case in the past. And this global outrage and action is important. The fact that other countries are ready to help in one way or another is also important.

And we should see, perhaps, this as a turning point in which we can mobilize people around the world to stop and prevent this sort of thing and to send a message to militant groups everywhere that the world will no longer tolerate this sort of action.

Certainly, the impact of social media has enabled us to know, moment to moment, what is happening around the world, and this is a good thing. And it has enabled many, particularly young people, to be in almost first-hand contact with the change that's happening, which has brought global attention and global action from the ban on landmines, which resulted in part from Internet email campaign, to the rising of the Arab Spring, in which Facebook and Twitter were so important. It is vital that we continue to have the freedom to use and participate in the Internet and social media to help us mount international campaigns and to create awareness, as is happening now, and to use this to raise the bar globally to improve the rights of women.

There is yet much more to do. We cannot stop here. There are particular areas of the world where the rights of women are not being respected. And, for example, Dr. Mukwege, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, visited Manitoba not long ago, and he talked about the extreme problem of rape and violence against women in his country and the need to address that and to help that with global action. It is a further example of the dire circumstances for women in some countries and the need for much more effective international action. Let us hope that around the world people can come together as we are coming together, different parties, putting politics beside and putting children and girls and their well-being and their education first.

Thank you.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to put a few words on the record with regard to this very tragic and concerning event that has happened in Africa. I want to welcome the guests in the gallery who have a direct connection to the—to Nigeria and to the communities that are deeply affected by the tragedy here.

We stand united with Manitobans. All of us in this House are very concerned and outraged by the demands made by the Boko Haram and I believe that

with this outrage comes some very serious concerns with regard to how we can best address this and how we can do—what we can do to assist in bringing back the girls, bringing them back home, Mr. Speaker.

* (15:10)

Living in a nation of freedom and democracy, it could be tough to understand or even believe that this is happening in our world, that we are actually allowing men—grown men—to take our children from places of protection where they're learning, they're becoming educated. And it is their right to have and to pursue an education. It's their right to pursue ambitions and to expect society to allow that to happen—so to see what has happened three weeks ago in Nigeria and know that this is not an isolated incident but a story that we see every day as girls around the world risk their lives to be educated.

In 2002, we learned of Malala's personal tragedy and how as a young Pakistani girl was shot in the head while she was taking transportation to school to become educated, who now has become such an advocate throughout the world. And she must just be outraged and so disheartened to see a situation like this occur once again.

So we need to stand united as a Chamber, as elected officials within Manitoba, and to express our outrage and our concern with what has happened in Nigeria and what continues to happen in so many countries throughout the world.

As a mother of a child or a daughter who's 19—and, you know, I'm almost embarrassed to realize that yesterday I was concerned that she's planning to go to school in Ontario this fall and how sad I am going to be without having her as a roomie or as somebody to go for a walk and enjoy the sunshine, Mr. Speaker. And knowing what has happened in a country that struggles for their daughters, (1) to have an education, and then also to know that their daughters are at risk for pursuing something that is their right. So I—you know, I hugged my daughter a little extra hard this morning when I left because I—you know, we are so privileged.

But we as a society and we as members of this Legislature have a very important role to play in expressing our outrage. These girls have a right to see their hopes and their dreams realized, and we can only imagine what their parents and their grandparents and their communities are feeling right now by having something like this happen to their most precious children, the future of their communities

and their country. These young women need to be found, these young women need to be nurtured and hugged, and they need to be given the opportunity to realize their dreams.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I and all of us in this Chamber, I believe, hold these families and these young girls in our hearts during this very, very difficult time. And we want to show that if we can ourselves show a fraction of the courage that these young women and their families have shown in pursuing their right—their human right to an education, that we need to stand united and speak loudly in support of these families and these girls. And we condemn the Boko Haram and that—the evil works that they are undertaking, and they are to be shamed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Christine Melnick (Riel): I, too, want to add my voice in support of the resolution brought forward to the House today and also would like to acknowledge supporters and members of the Nigerian community who have joined us, most notably Abdul Aziz, Titi Tijani, Sylvester Aghidi and Fabian Gbem. Thank you very much for coming to join us in the Legislature this afternoon.

Well, I certainly agree with all the statements that have been made this afternoon and just wanted to add my own horror as I learned that these women—young women, young girls, were taken—not only taken but were stolen in the night through trickery. Terrorists appeared dressed as soldiers coming to the school, saying that they were there to take care of the girls and make sure they were safe. The girls were released and, as the truck drove away, the individuals at the school realized what they had done. And my heart goes out to them. I can only imagine the horror they feel, and I hope that they understand that the world is with them in our care and our sympathy. Certainly, the Boko Haram have only added to this by taunting the world, saying that they are now wanting to sell the girls as wives. That, of course, is a code for slavery of the worst kind and I know it's something that we all abhor and together stand against.

I, too, was at the Sally Armstrong talk on Friday and have followed Sally's career for many years, finding her to be a brave and now internationally renowned Canadian journalist, whose bravery has led her to some of the darkest places on earth. She spoke about this terrible act and, while condemning this act, Ms. Armstrong also stated that she is concerned

that—of the focus of this horrible event by the world and has noted that never before has there been such an outpouring of action at the highest levels of government and also on the individual level through social media.

And she noted that she felt that this is a time that could be a tipping point, not only with this terrible incident in Nigeria but with the young women who brought the case in the Kenyan high court and won. They are now talking to 13 different African nations. I will be taking this message to the Panzi Hospital about the winning of this law case against the sexual abuse of females from the age of three to grandmothers, Mr. Speaker, were the ones who brought this case in Kenya. And I hope that together we'll be able to stand with any cases that are being brought on a local, national or international level and I believe we, as Manitobans, will and members of this House will be able to stand in support of those cases.

We know that Michelle Obama on Sunday spoke of this in her address to the United States of America and really to the world. So I would like to rededicate myself today, as I know all members of this House are, to not only continuing to speak about this issue but also to continue the pressure, so that each one of these beautiful young women and other young women who are facing horrendous situations, terrible abuse, whose names we will never know, might find freedom some day and the respect that we all know. All people in the world should be able to live in safety in the home, safety in the workplace, safety in the school.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Well, Mr. Speaker, days ago, when I became aware of this situation, it really, really dramatically brought to my attention how many young girls still in this world struggle. Whether it's with wanting an education or wanting to be treated as a human being, there are so many fights that little girls are still having in many parts of the world, and to know what happened to these young Nigerian children, because that's what they are—they're children—is absolutely horrific.

I was so captivated by this when I heard about it and I've been following it on Twitter and I felt so helpless that I joined the millions of others that are tweeting this, and I've tweeted and tweeted since this first started, you know. And I think this is going to be the one thing that we can say Twitter does have some actual real advantage for, is that you can't hide these things from the world anymore. It was like the

young girl in India a couple of Christmases ago that was raped by multiple men on a bus and the country would've been happier if that was never made public but, because of social media, that story went viral. It went around the world and it allowed all of us that want to advocate for safety for girls, safety for women, safety for boys because bad things happen to them, too, but it doesn't allow terrorists the freedom to get away with what they have been trying to do. I think social media could, indeed, be one of those things that is going to change that particular area and change it for the better.

* (15:20)

I, too, saw the tweet with Michelle Obama holding up the sign: bring back our girls. I've been on a website and I've seen the names of every one of those children that are missing, and it's heartbreaking to see pictures, to hear mothers who are anxiously worried about their daughters.

We know that some of those girls have escaped. We know some of those girls have died. We know that some of those girls have been bitten by snakes. We know that they are going to be sold for \$12. A young girl that, maybe, you know, at a very young age is going to be sold for marriage at \$12 a head. We know that in some countries this is not uncommon for young girls to be sold into marriage. These girls are then forced to drop out of school. And what chance do they have, to be forced into marriage at age 12? It really is hard to comprehend.

And I was frustrated at first that it was—seemed to be taking all the countries a long time to—and days at that point felt long—for countries to react, but—even for Nigeria to react—but once people started to react, countries have stepped up to the plate. And I'm glad that John Baird has made the comments he's made and moved forward with support by Canada to try to find these young girls. Hopefully, there is still time to rescue them, and rescue all of them. That is certainly what we are all going to be praying for.

We also are hearing from all the countries in the world that are condemning Boko Haram for what they thought was their right to do. And it is absolutely appalling that this could even be thought by anybody, in any country, that it would be okay to do these—to do this to little girls. That is totally unacceptable. I'm glad we're all standing around here today to put ourselves out there to also speak out against it, because it is wrong.

I was disappointed I wasn't able to be here on Sunday; I was caught between two Mother's Day events. But certainly thinking a lot about what was going on here on Sunday with people coming forward, and a lot of mothers coming forward who are worried about other mothers' children and wanting to make enough noise and to be heard across the world.

There is another rally march on Thursday at noon, starting on Portage Avenue and coming down here to the Legislature. One of my constituents, actually, Gertrude Hambira, is one of the organizers of the event, along with members of the Nigerian community—to encourage as many people as possible to come and make this walk from Portage Avenue here to the Legislative Building.

This rally was only planned within the last few days, and I have to give credit to the Winnipeg Police Service because normally you need about two weeks to get the permission and get the right documents signed in order to have a rally, but they have really stepped up and they are making it happen by allowing a permit to be pulled together very quickly because they, too, know that time is of the essence in this.

Gertrude herself fled Zimbabwe a number of years ago at threat of her own life from a corrupt regime there, and fled to Canada. It was sometime later when her children were snuck out of Africa and supported to come here to Winnipeg with the great support of the Rotary Club of Charleswood. We spent anxious moments with the family the night the kids were supposed to land here at the airport. And, of course, they landed in winter, and one of their first exposures to this country was certainly biting cold, but they love the freedom here, they love the safety here. And Gertrude was a farm laborer, a union organizer in Zimbabwe, and the government of the day was out to have her killed. And so she doesn't want to see these types of things happening in other countries, and she's very prepared to stand with the Nigerian people.

And I notice that Kenny Daodu was here at the Legislature on Sunday, a very strong advocate for the Nigerian community here in Winnipeg. And I think, together, what people are trying to do is ensure that we can speak loudly with one voice, with a sea of red, as we continue to bring these messages forward which will encourage countries to really step up, get in and do everything they possibly can to find these girls.

I understand it's not going to be easy. It's in the northern part of the country and this may be something very difficult. But a group like Boko Haram won't stop unless there is such a major outpouring of denouncement of what they've done and countries getting in there and making sure that a group like that, a group of terrorists who decide to be extremists in their views that will do harm to little girls—that is totally unacceptable.

And the world is watching and the world needs to speak with one voice, and I would urge everybody to join in with Gertrude and walk in support of these girls and to wear something red in support of protecting these girls from anything that could be happening to them. And it's so important that we get our message out, get it out strongly, get it out soon and do all that we can to ensure that these young girls, these children, can be returned to their families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): I want to welcome the members from the Nigerian society here today and I want to thank them too for their amazing effort to put together such a quick rally. In a few days they managed to put on a fantastic rally and I want to echo the words that have been said in this Chamber: everybody stands together on this.

I know the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) and I stood at the rally on Sunday, and we had a great conversation about how the world is standing together on this and how—actually that was kind of our conversation was about how we were going to do this motion and talked about how we're going to come together as a Legislature and debate this. And I think it really shows the united part of the world that we're all together on this in condemning the actions of Boko Haram and this horrific event that they've done.

I know the world is outraged and, to be quite honest, since the event has happened and I learned about it, I actually haven't slept quite well. I have a stepdaughter and I have a granddaughter who actually was at the rally, who's probably the youngest person at the rally being just over—she's turning four months old and, you know, I brought—we brought them to the rally on Mother's Day and it was kind of a sombre Mother's Day because I was—the whole time I was there, I was thinking about the mothers whose children are missing right now, and I couldn't help but my heart pouring out to them, thinking, you know, where are their children and hopefully they're all safe and hopefully we can get them returned safe.

I want to say that I really am happy with the federal government, their actions. I've heard today on the news that they're actually taking some more action. They're sending some special forces troops and negotiators over to Nigeria to help out and same with the US government has been sending—they're sending the same special forces and some negotiators to help find them. And they're talking about surveillance planes looking, scouring the areas to try to find these girls.

And I think that part of what the message here is that the world shouldn't give up and that we should all push and continue to look for these girls and get them back safe and get them back to their homes. And I'm hoping that once they are back safe and sound, that they—we heard one of the girls who was returned home is fearful to go back to school—and I'm hoping that once they're returned and that they're safe that they're helped to see that it's not a dangerous place to go back to school, because the worst thing that we could have happen is have those girls be afraid to get an education because that is—if that happens, then these terrorists win. They're trying to take away something from these girls that is a fundamental human right, which is the right to an education and the right to their freedom right now.

* (15:30)

And I'm hopeful that when we get them back that we can get them their education and keep them safe and allow them to have a very safe place at a school that doesn't have something like this ever happen again.

We need to send a strong message to the country of Nigeria. When this happened, I mean, one of the things that you think about being on this side of the world and so far from the situation is what can you do? We're so far removed being this far away. Well, I guess they like to say that the pen is mightier than the sword. I—the—one of the things I took right away was I actually wrote the Prime Minister of Canada and I wrote the President of the United States and I wrote the Nigerian government, and I asked for action and I asked for them to do everything that they can to bring these girls back. And the Canadian government has responded and the American government has responded, and now we need the Nigerian government to respond strongly and work together with everybody in the world to bring these girls back home safe and sound.

I just want to make sure that we all—this is something that where we're all standing united, and I

think the world is united against this organization, Boko Haram, and, hopefully, we will all work together to get these girls back safe and sound and get them back on the right track in life, which is continuing on their education and allowing them to be members of a great society and not have to live in fear and have horrible groups like Boko Haram out there. I'm really hopeful that we can turn this around with the pressure that I think is going on around the world on all sides of all parties right now. Everybody is talking about getting these girls back safely.

So, with that, I just want to thank you very much for the time, Mr. Speaker, and bring back our girls.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I, too, would like to rise and join with all members of the Legislature here to condemn the activity that has gone on that the Boko Haram has created by taking innocent young girls in the dead of the night. And who knows what horrendous things have happened or will happen to these young girls. And, you know, it's a mother's worst nightmare, a grandmother's worst nightmare, to think that your daughter or your granddaughter could be harmed in such a horrendous way. We—our hearts and—have to go out to the moms, to the families, and it's not only the moms that are condemning this horrendous activity but it's the fathers, too, and the grandfathers that really don't condone this kind of activity.

They are terrorists, and it's the Nigerian Association and community here in Manitoba that has joined together and helped all of us and created the awareness by bringing together people at the Legislature over the weekend on such short notice to condemn the activity and to pray for and to ask for the world to be united, as I believe they are, in wanting to see these young girls returned safe back to their home environment. And, you know, I look at the kind of life that we have lived and the isolated life that we live here in Manitoba and in Canada, and how fortunate we are to be able to stand here and speak in the Legislature in a democratic society without any fear that we are going to be harmed in any way as a result of anything that we say or we do.

When I look to all of the young women who have been educated in Canada and all of those young women who have gone on to become educators and to teach our children—many, many of the teachers in our country and our province are women that have had that opportunity to succeed in our education system. And, Mr. Speaker, is it too much to ask that that same opportunity isn't provided to every young

girl, to every woman throughout the world? It's unacceptable for any of us to even—well, I can't imagine what would go through anyone's mind to think that women in any way, young girls, should be harmed, should be taken. And I'm sure they're fearing for their lives right now.

And many of those that are closely associated or related to those young girls must just be so distressed. We can only stand here, united, and say no to this kind of activity. You know, we were the first province across this country of Canada to give women the vote. We struggled, as women, to succeed in that respect, and to think such—it pales in comparison to what disadvantage many women in other countries are going through.

Mr. Speaker, we must commit ourselves every day to continue along the path, not only to look at some of the things that happen here in Canada, in our own backyard, but to look at the terrible atrocities that are happening right around the world.

So, Mr. Speaker, I echo the comments that have been made by many, many others. I just want to say that my thoughts and my prayers are with the families and with the young girls that need to get their lives back on track and they need to continue to pursue their dream of becoming educated and being contributing members of society. We want that for all children around the world, and we will join hands and we will stand together today and we'll stand together into the future to say no to those that would harm our children, our young women, in the manner that they've been harmed.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad we've had the opportunity here to debate this. Let's again make our commitment today and every day to work as hard as we can to ensure that young women, that young girls, have the opportunity to succeed, to grow and to thrive in a worldwide fashion.

So, again, thanks for the opportunity and I'm so pleased that sometimes we can set aside our partisan differences and speak as one, which we have this afternoon, on behalf of these young girls and women.

Thank you.

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I just want to take a moment to thank you for being here and for the rally on Sunday.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it's easy for me to imagine the member from Riding Mountain's sadness at her daughter going to Ontario, and that's easy for

me to think about, but to allow myself to even imagine what these girls are going through, I don't even want to go there. I try to—I don't even want to visualize; I don't want to think about it, and we must. We need to be thinking about it around the world and I echo, as did all of the other members, everything that was said here. I wish that I thought the world was united on this issue. I guess I don't feel that we're there yet in the world that we live in. I think there's still, sadly, many countries where women and girls are treated much differently than their male counterparts.

And I guess what I—the most heartening thing about the rally that I found was that at this rally, there did seem to be a good mix of men and women. It was both men and women equally there at the rally. It was not—so many of us women have been at rallies for women where it has been only women often there, and people tend to think of it as a woman's issue, and it was mentioned that way at the rally. Somebody mentioned this is not just a women's issue; this is everyone's issue.

I would say differently. I would have to go in the words of Jackson Katz and say this is, in fact, a man's issue. It is men around the world that have been perpetrating this on women since the beginning of time—just saying—and I think that it is when men rise up—women have been rising up, but we need all of the men to rise up and that's what I saw at this rally. And maybe that will be the one thing that we will see come from this particular event because it's just so horrendous that perhaps we will see the men and the women stand together around the world on this. And I think that is what we need to see before we're truly going to see change is that all of us are really standing together on that.

* (15:40)

So I know that everyone's heart goes out to the girls, to the families, to all of those affected, and I think that all of those affected are so many around the world. And as the member from Steinbach said, it's just a feeling that you can't do much, and yet going to the rally was kind of, as he said, all you could do. And we can pray and we can do this and we can continue to, you know, talk about it.

And maybe we're right. Maybe the ability of social media to make something come to the forefront will really make the world rise up on this particular issue and we will see the girls brought back, and then we will see real change come to our world in many of those places where girls still cannot

get an education and are so often involved in traumatic, horrendous experiences that generally we never hear about here. So that is my wish and hope for today.

Thank you.

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today and add a few comments on the record. I've listened intently to a number of the speeches put forward by my colleagues in the House, and you can clearly hear the—collectively, our concern for these young ladies and for the state in the situation that we have currently in Nigeria, that children are somehow being used as pawns.

I mean, western education is a sin is how—is what Boko Haram translates into, and when we look at those—that—just that very phrase, that western education is a sin, I think of my own situation with two young daughters, and a four-year-old about to turn five in a few days and a seven-year-old, and the many times that I've dropped them off at school and taken the younger one to pre-school. And I couldn't imagine, Mr. Speaker, and I listened intently to my colleagues' comments that suddenly, you know, should someone decide that they disagree that young women deserve an education, deserve that opportunity to read and write, and it's truly frightening that this is the world we live in.

But we use the word and we often throw it around, about terror, about terrorism, and it often becomes a word that we hear of so much in the media that it's almost lost some of its impact. And yet when we see what's going on with these 300 young women in Nigeria, it truly is terror and terrorism in its most frightening form.

The member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) commented—she talked about maybe this—these kidnappings of these 300 young ladies may be the tipping point in the collective view of the world as to the situation going on in northeastern Nigeria, because what's happening now in northeastern Nigeria just didn't start with the kidnapping of these 300 young ladies. Boko Haram has been around for some time and has been instigating a campaign of terror in those communities, and kidnapping has been part of that. There was a recent kidnapping of a French family that was in the area and they were held for some time in exchange for the—and released through the exchange of some prisoners and funds through negotiations. As well, Boko Haram has released—or has attacked, sorry, police facilities in an attempt to release members of theirs that have been

detained or arrested. Along with those releases they have also, in those instances, kidnapped young children to use as pawns and props to further their own goals in that.

So, I mean, suddenly the world becomes aware of what's going on in northeastern Nigeria with this very atrocious act of 300 young ladies being kidnapped, and so I truly hope that the member for Riel's words are accurate in terms that this a tipping point, and it seems to be that way, Mr. Speaker. It seems to be that the world is waking up, that these groups do exist and these groups are an affront to those ideals that they suggest that they represent.

The member of Steinbach talked about how religion is being used as an excuse, and there is no religion in the world that would justify the treatment of men, women or children in this manner.

I mean this is just—as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, this is just terrorism, and the goal here is to terrorize. The goal here is to terrorize the local populace into submission and probably with the end goal of creating their own state with their own vision, and yet—and it begins with denying, denying fundamental rights like education. And we've seen in our own world, and we're very fortunate that we live in the world that we do, that I think nothing of sending my own daughters and son off to school and I don't blink an eye as to their safety, and, if there ever is an incident at school, it makes the news not—mainly because it's something so out of the norm.

And yet here in northeastern Nigeria, due to the actions of Boko Haram, these incidents are unfortunately becoming the norm, Mr. Speaker, and they're grabbing the world's attention. And, hopefully, by grabbing the world's attention, we can focus that attention in a positive manner because it is only through the power of education that we are going to transform those parts of the world. And again it's not because we want to transform them and, as I mentioned earlier, that the western education is a sin is how Boko Haram's name translates. The goal is not to transform them into a western society. The goal is to transform their own communities and those—that transformation will occur through education, through learning simply how to read and write and be part of their communities.

And it's that kind of empowerment that is really going to change not only those communities but that country and the world, and we've seen it, you know, in countless jurisdictions around the world what

happens in the transformational power that education can become in a community, and so it leads to fear. And it leads to fear, a fear that should individuals become educated, their likelihood of taking a stand to defend those rights, and we've had comments.

The member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) talked about, you know, the Kenyan court case. As individuals become aware of their rights, they become more willing to fight for those rights and to prevent the erosion of hard-won rights and, obviously, to acquire new rights to protect themselves and future generations.

Mr. Speaker, there—the comments are very true that oftentimes as we sit and watch on CNN and various news stations about what's going on and the evil that occurs in our world, we can often feel impotent in terms of our power to actually take action, and obviously me standing in the House today doesn't—will not bring these young girls home. But, hopefully, all of us collectively standing in this House today, echoing that same sentiment that we need to bring back our girls, echoing that sentiment that we are behind you as a country. We are behind you as parents, as brothers and sisters. That we share your pain and we share your sorrow. But most important of all that we share your optimism that we will indeed be successful in bringing our girls back to their homes, to their parents and to their siblings.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those comments I encourage and I have no doubt that we'll—you'll collectively support this resolution, and we will hopefully be one step closer as a community and as a global community to putting the pressure on organizations like Boko Haram to let them know that their tactics, their views are simply unacceptable and not just in 2014. These views are abhorrent and have no place in civil society much less any society, and given the diversity of the people that attended the recent rally on Sunday, peoples from all religious backgrounds, I think that there's a common theme from individuals of all backgrounds. They see the horror as to what's going on. They share that horror and they want to send that message that we will not stand idly by.

So, with those comments, I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is there any further debate on this motion?

Is the House ready for the question?

* (15:50)

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): I have two requests for the House, Mr. Speaker. The first is that if you can canvass the House to see if it's—or if it's agreement of the House to make this vote unanimous.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement of the House to consider this motion as unanimous? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Goertzen: My second request is that you canvass the House and see if you are empowered as Speaker to send a copy of this resolution to the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Speaker of the Senate, with the request that it be distributed to all members of the House of Commons and all members of the Senate.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement of the House to permit the Speaker, myself, to send a copy of this resolution to the Speaker of the Parliament of Canada and the Senate of Canada and to ensure that those—a copy of this resolution is distributed to all members of Parliament and to all members of the Senate? *[Agreed]* Thank you.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Acting Government House Leader): I wonder if we might go into debate on second readings of bills 33, 37 and 59.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Mr. Speaker: We'll call bills in the following order: Bill 33, followed by Bill 37, followed by Bill 59.

Bill 33—The Apprenticeship Employment Opportunities Act (Public Works Contracts)

Mr. Speaker: And we'll start by calling for debate on second readings Bill 33, The Apprenticeship Employment Opportunities Act (Public Works Contracts), standing in the name of the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

Is there leave for this matter to remain standing in the name of the honourable member for Steinbach? *[Agreed]*

Is there any further debate on this bill?

Okay, then we'll leave the bill standing in the name of the honourable member for Steinbach.

**Bill 37—The Public Schools Amendment Act
(Connecting Schools to the Internet)**

Mr. Speaker: We'll proceed to call Bill 37, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Connecting Schools to the Internet), standing in the name of the honourable member for Elmwood, who has five minutes remaining.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I'm pleased to continue on with my presentation on this particular Bill 37. And, as indicated, the bill amends the public school act to allow school boards to enter into cost-sharing agreements for the installation of fibre optic networks to establish and improve schools' connectivity to the Internet.

Now this has been an issue as indicated for quite a long time now. I can recall back, you know, even 10 years ago, before the federal Conservatives took over the national government in 2006, the Liberal minister of Industry at the time, John Manley, had presented a fair amount of money to the provinces, and Manitoba, in fact, had a broadband committee that was set up. And we were working with Reg Alcock in those days—was a big supporter and promoter of government online programs and broadband issues.

And what happened was, once the government changed, the new government didn't fund or didn't propose to fund broadband to the same extent, or—nor online government programs for that matter, anywhere near the extent of John Manley and the previous Liberal government.

And the reason that this is so important—and, for example, we're not talking about huge expenses here—a number of years ago, school boards in other jurisdictions—the United States—had gone out and laid their own dark—done their own dark fibre builds, and they were able to then have adequate broadband in their schools. And, Mr. Speaker, you know, what they—they not only had enough capacity for themselves, but they had excess capacity. So the school boards turned around, and they sold that extra capacity. They actually sold it to private companies. So the school division was not only getting its broadband for free, but in fact what it was doing was actually making money for the taxpayers by selling the excess, because there's—it's very easy to have excess capacity when you have a large dark fibre build.

The other issue that we were dealing with in those days was the idea of whether you should trench

it or whether you should lay it on the ground. And if you are dealing—I know we were dealing with Thompson at one point in time—and in Thompson you could simply lay it on the ground; there's rights of way available that are owned by the governments. So we didn't really see this as being that cost-prohibitive.

But, as we see here, one of the holdups for this whole proposal has been legislative, because these school boards cannot go and do this without some other body helping them.

So this legislation, what it does is it allows them to go into partnerships with another school board, municipalities, government of Manitoba, government of Canada, and any agency of the government, Crown corporations and a prescribed band council. Now that's probably—thank you, Mr. Speaker—that's probably where it should be left, but the bill goes on to allow the school board to pursue a partnership with private entities and—but, once again, that is only if the minister approves it. Now, I'd say that's fine when there's an NDP minister in power. I think that they would make sure that all the other avenues were exhausted, but I would say if there's a Conservative minister in power, then I would be a little bit suspicious about whether or not they'd consulted enough to try to actually put this together and not be giving a sweetheart contract to one of their friends. Because potentially what you could have is you could have the school board getting into and making an arrangement with some private company, and whereby the school essentially becomes a cash cow for a private development, right. So I don't think we'd want to see that.

And we all know, member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) knows, that years ago there was advertising to students, right. If you're operating a private company and you want to get into schools and stuff like that, you could use this provision to advertise to students and do other sorts of things. So I just want to be, you know, careful here. I know that the—I want to encourage economic development, and this is one way of doing it, but we just have to make—be aware that we want reasonable development to occur and we want this development to be in the interests of and to the benefit of Manitobans as a whole, and especially people in the rural areas in the North. They are already at a big disadvantage in the whole area of broadband and economic development. And this is one big way that we can spur development in rural areas of Manitoba, in the North of Manitoba, and develop this economy in a way that

we've been wanting to, we've been trying to for many, many years, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I want to speak for a few minutes to this bill and this proposal. One of the tragedies under the NDP government has been the poor access to broadband Internet service in so many parts of Manitoba. And this is a problem in terms of access for schools and in terms of access for individuals, in terms of growing businesses in many parts of Manitoba. And I think it's important to put this on the record, because when we're looking at the limits to being able to educate our children, to develop businesses, to get—for people to get access to all sorts of services, whether it be health care or government services, broadband access is critical.

I have here in front of me a report on the current state of Canadian broadband by comparison. And this shows the average household download across Canada. And, sadly, Manitoba is very close to the bottom. In fact, of all the provinces, only Saskatchewan is close to Manitoba. And it doesn't bode well for the development of our economy. It doesn't develop—bode well for the school system. It doesn't bode well for access to good quality health care and other things. And when we look here at another current state of Manitoba broadband by comparison, oh, we do okay in Winnipeg and Portage la Prairie and, interestingly, in The Pas. But when it comes to Flin Flon, Beausejour, Minnedosa, Morden-Winkler, we're much lower. And the fact is that in many parts of rural Manitoba, you know, the speed is actually much lower than that if you're not in a community, a sizable community, like Morden and Winkler.

* (16:00)

Indeed, I have here the—a list of communities without access to broadband, and these include Baden and Barrows and Big Black River and Bissett and Brochet and Cormorant and Dawson Bay and Falcon Lake and Fisher Bay and Gillam and Grand Rapids and Herb Lake Landing and Homebrook, Island Lake, Kelsey-Carrot Valley, Wanless, Little Grand Rapids, Loon Straits, Mountain RM in south, Mystery Lake, Local Government District National Mills-Part of Division No. 19, Oxford House First Nation, Pelican Rapids First Nation, Pikwitonei, Pointe Du Bois, Poplarville, Powell, Red Deer Lake, Salt Point, Sherridon, Stevenson Island, West Hawk Lake, Westgate, and many communities in Manitoba which don't have access to broadband. And it's a shame.

It's a shame for our province, and it should not be this way. But it is, because there hasn't been adequate attention to this. And this is one of the first things that should've been done by this government in 1999, and it's still being very significantly neglected. And I think that it's an opportunity to bring attention to that, and I think that this is one of the things that this government needs to be held accountable for. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: This bill—oh, sorry. The honourable member for Steinbach wishes to debate?

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I'll be brief, Mr. Speaker, and then I'm prepared to see this bill move to committee.

I just want to put on the record a couple of concerns regarding those school divisions who have already put in the fibre optic into the—and connecting up their individual schools. In some situations, and it's the case in my community and also, I believe, the community represented by the member for La Verendrye, that the schools within the division are connected up with high-fibre optic cable, but the—and so they have high-speed Internet, but those communities that the schools are in themselves don't have high-speed Internet, Mr. Speaker. And so they aren't able to go back in time and to partner with another organization or another entity to try to see if they can have some of that cost shared. The legislation, as it's currently written, I don't believe, allows for that.

So my hope is that when we get to committee, the government will consider those who've already put in the fibre optic cable and extended that cost out of the school division. What remedy is there for them to have some cost recovery to the benefit of those communities that they are in, that their schools are in, that don't actually have high-speed Internet, Mr. Speaker, because it's not just about ensuring that our schools have high-speed Internet—and that's something that's important—but we'll all benefit if our communities have high-speed Internet. And I think that there are ways and cost-effective ways and ways that don't impact security, from my understanding, from those who have made this presentation to me.

I'm not an expert on this topic. Some might say I'm not an expert on any topic, but I'm not an expert on this topic in particular, and I would say that if there is a way that we can ensure—that we can go back and ensure that those who have put the money in already can have some cost recovery if they choose to and then also provide high-speed Internet

to the broader community. That would certainly be a win-win situation.

So, hopefully, that'll be discussed at committee and in the discussions that happen on this bill, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: I neglected to mention at the start of debate on Bill 37 that the bill also remains standing in the name of the honourable member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen).

So is there leave of the House that this matter remain standing in the name of the honourable member for Midland?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No? Leave has been denied.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: Question before the House is second reading of Bill 37, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Connecting Schools to the Internet).

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

SECOND READINGS

Bill 59—The Adoption Amendment and Vital Statistics Amendment Act (Opening Birth and Adoption Records)

Mr. Speaker: We'll now proceed to call second reading of Bill 59, The Adoption Amendment and Vital Statistics Amendment Act (Opening Birth and Adoption Records).

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard), that Bill 59, The Adoption Amendment and Vital Statistics Amendment Act (Opening Birth and Adoption Records), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been advised of the bill, and I table the message.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, second—or Minister of Family Services, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that Bill 59, The Adoption Amendment and Vital Statistics Amendment Act (Opening Birth and Adoption Records), be now read for a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

And the message from his—from the Lieutenant Governor has been tabled as well.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, it is truly a privilege to stand here before my honourable colleagues to speak to Bill 59, The Adoption Amendment and Vital Statistics Amendment Act (Opening Birth and Adoption Records)—represents what has been, for many Manitobans, a long and sometimes lonely journey.

For many years honourable members on both sides of the Chamber have received heartfelt letters and emails requesting that Manitoba change our adoption laws so that adult adoptees and registered birth parents involved in adoptions can receive these significant records. It is referred as the Holy Grail.

Mr. Speaker, this bill establishes a system that allows for more openness with respect to birth and adoption records. Many people have been waiting a long time for information related to their birth and adoption, and we are pleased to introduce amendments that we feel will provide an open regime, while still respecting the privacy concerns of individuals involved in the adoption process.

For the first time, adult adoptees will be able to request copies of their pre-adoption birth registration, which will provide them with their birth parents' identities and, most importantly, their identity of birth prior to being adopted.

For those birth parents who have wondered what happened to the child whom they placed for adoption, they will now be able to request their adult adopted child's substituted registration of birth, providing them with the children's adopted identity.

On numerous occasions, the Family Services office has received letters from elderly individuals who have emotionally documented their desire to receive, prior to their death, a copy of their pre-adoption birth registration. Not only would they like to know their identity at birth, but, most importantly, they would like to be able to share this significant information with their family and the future generations of their family.

I'm also aware of many birth mothers, who, on the child's 18th birthday, have contacted the Post-Adoption Registry asking for information regarding the adoptive identity of their child whom they placed for adoption. I am pleased to advise that, based on the changes being introduced, these birth mothers will now be able to receive a copy of their adopted adult child's substituted registration of birth.

Being able to receive this important record will bring peace of mind for many birth mothers.

Disclosure of pre-adoption birth registrations and substituted registrations of birth is the most significant feature of the open records regime. Until now, these documents have not been able—have not been available to adoptees or a birth parent named on a pre-adoption birth registration. For many Manitobans involved in adoptions, these documents are a critical link to completing their family's history and personal identities.

Amendments to The Vital Statistics Act were required in order to make this possible. It is important to note that the privacy of adoptive parents will continue to be respected under the new legislation, as their identifying information will not be disclosed to birth parents. Indeed, throughout the development of this legislation, we looked carefully at other jurisdictions and undertook our own analysis of privacy considerations. In addition to being consistent with the open birth and adoption record regimes of other Canadian jurisdictions, we believe that these amendments achieve an appropriate balance between individual privacy rights and the public and individual interest in more openness with respect to birth and adoption records.

To this end, proclamation will be deferred for one year. This will allow time for adoptees and registered birth parents to understand the changes and, most importantly, to file disclosure vetoes if they wish to keep their information private.

We are sensitive to the fact that many young parents, in particular, may have placed children for adoption with the understanding that privacy would be respected, and we will continue to honour that expectation. Importantly, any disclosure veto filed with Manitoba's Post-Adoption Registry will continue to be effective and respected.

*(16:10)

Until the new legislation takes effect, adoptees and registered birth parents will continue to be able to file contact vetoes for Manitoba and non-Manitoba adoptions. Any contact veto filed will continue to be effective and respected after proclamation. As a mother of teenage boys, I'm particularly pleased to announce that these amendments include a provision to respect the privacy rights and decision-making abilities of mature minors. Adoptees aged 16 to 18, whose adoptions took place in Manitoba prior to proclamation, and for those whose adoptions take

place outside of Manitoba, will have a new right to file a disclosure veto.

This amendment gives the mature minor the right to decide whether they wish for their personal information to be shared with their birth parents before this information is disclosed.

Once the new legislation is in effect, a person involved in a Manitoba adoption, including mature minors aged 16 to 18, will have the ability to file a contact preference instead of a disclosure veto or a contact veto.

Under this model, a person filing a contact preference may include a written statement that provides an explanation for the type of contact that they are open to as well as any additional information they wish to share. For many adoptees and their birth parents, these stories are critical aspects of understanding personal and family histories. Understanding where we come from and what happened to our kin is a fundamental human need, and we believe that this provision will help to fulfill this need for many affected individuals.

After careful analysis of the legislation in other jurisdictions and consideration of the experience of front-line workers, Manitoba chose the contact preference approach. We will also—we also believe that it provides for the best balance between openness and privacy interests. Notably, this model facilitates open records and contacts while respecting information and privacy rights as it gives individuals full control over how the contact, if any, will take place.

As feelings regarding contact with birth parents or adopted children may change over time, an individual can change their contact preference at any time. The contact preference is supported by the requirement that the individual seeking the information must sign a formal written undertaking to abide by the contact preference. Given the serious implications of breaching a contact preference, it is an offence under the act to knowingly contravene a term set out in a contact preference. The maximum fine for any offence under this act, including knowingly contravening a term set out in a contact preference, has been increased from \$20,000 to \$50,000.

Manitoba has taken the lead in addressing particular concerns of adoptees involved in inter-jurisdictional adoptions. Special provisions of the legislation will address the circumstances of those

adoptees who were born in one jurisdiction and adopted in another. We are very pleased that we have legislation that allows for adoptees who were born in Manitoba and placed for adoption outside of Manitoba to access copies of their pre-adoption birth registrations. There are many adoptees who fall between jurisdictional lines, and we have made provisions to ensure that this is—that this no longer occurs with respect to access to Manitoba's adoption and birth records.

This is unique to Manitoba and respects the legacy of the adoption practices that resulted in far too many Aboriginal children being placed for adoption outside of Manitoba. The introduction of this legislation is significant for Aboriginal people. As the honourable members present are aware, the adoption of Aboriginal children to non-Aboriginal families, commonly referred to the '60s scoop, resulted in many Aboriginal children being placed for adoption outside of their communities of birth and even outside of Manitoba. For many Aboriginal adoptees, reconnecting with their birth families and their home communities is an integral aspect of affirming their identity as First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people.

These amendments include additional provisions that respect the historical realities of Aboriginal people. An Aboriginal person who was born in Manitoba and who was adopted will be able to request that their pre-adoption birth registration and identifying information about their birth parents be given to a government or an organization or other officials for the purpose of applying for benefits or services to which they are entitled.

Furthermore, adopted Aboriginal children are also entitled to this right. Where the adoptee is a child, their adoptive parent or guardian may request that the child's pre-adoption identifying information be shared with the third party so that the adopted child can receive benefits or services due to all Aboriginal children.

We are sensitive to the emotional implications for many adoptees and birth parents throughout the province. We have crafted legislation that allows for the creation of a central-desk model whereby the adoption community no longer has to go to three places to request records: the Court of Queen's Bench, the Vital Statistics Agency and the Post-Adoption Registry. These amendments will allow for the establishment of a single-service window at the Post-Adoption Registry where clients

will be able to request all of the information that they require including for their birth record and adoption order as well as Post-Adoption Registry services. As Manitoba is the first jurisdiction that has been able to implement a single-service-window model regarding adoption and birth records, we are particularly proud of this accomplishment.

Importantly, these amendments continue to ensure that in compelling circumstances affecting the health or safety of an individual, the director may contact a birth parent or an adult adoptee or a member of their extended family, if they cannot be located, regardless of a disclosure veto, contact veto or contact preference that may have been filed.

Over the years, adoptions have evolved from focusing on the protection of individual privacy to allowing for more sharing of information. It is time for Manitoba to join the other Canadian jurisdictions that have introduced legislation that allows for open adoption and birth records and to lead the way for those that are just starting this work.

Before proclaiming the new legislation in effect, we will undertake a robust public awareness campaign to ensure that Manitobans adopted in or outside of Manitoba and those involved in adoptions prior to proclamation are well-informed of their rights following the proposed changes.

On a more personal note, individuals and families involved in adoptions have reached out to me during my career as a social worker and throughout my tenure as a member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. I am both humbled and honoured to introduce this legislation, as I vividly remember many of the very personal stories regarding adoptions that I have been told. I know all too well that the motivations for seeking one's birth parents or birth child are varied, and while some may be desperate to know, others are content to leave the chapter of their lives closed. Importantly, this act truly allows individuals to make the choice that is best for them, and I am proud of this accomplishment.

I would like to emphasize that this legislation has been written with very mindful consideration of the many experiences of adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents. We have done our utmost to ensure that the legislation carefully protects the interests of individuals and families involved in the past adoptions and that it paves the way for a new era regarding adoptions in Manitoba. Thank you.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): It's a pleasure to put a few words on the record regarding Bill 59, and I would like to thank the minister for introducing this bill and the amendments around it—The Adoption Act both and The Vital Statistics Act—because this is a complicated area of law. Certainly, there are a number of restrictions that have been placed on these records in the past, mostly for very good reason, because, certainly, privacy was an issue and continues to be an issue for many.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

But there are a lot of people caught in this no man's land where the access to the information is currently very restricted. In fact, anybody pre-1999 going right back to 1925 when The Adoption Act was brought into place here in Manitoba, they're actually caught in this. And that, of course, leaves a lot of people at both ends of life—children that were put up for adoption who wish to find if there are still parents alive or siblings that they might be in contact with, and parents and even grandparents, in some cases, wanting to know what has happened to children that were put up for adoption and wanting to trace them—and right now, the limited access to the records has certainly left them in a very difficult position.

* (16:20)

And in—I have looked at—I have personal interest in this area, so I had looked at a number of bills all across the country and even a number in the US that actually attempted to deal with this rather touchy problem of maintaining access to the information while honouring the restrictions that were put in place, in many cases, quite a while ago. And it is important that both of these be honoured and it is difficult to come up with legislation that does that. And, certainly, there are portions of this that seem to reach out very well and do what is necessary. There are also still some additional restrictions that must go through individuals who will be an employee of the Province to ask whether—to ask people that might still be around whether additional restrictions can be lifted further so that at the very least health information can be passed on, not only to that generation, but the ones following, because as we know now far more about the genetic linkage on a number of health situations than we did back prior to '99 and back quite a bit further than that.

There are also implications, as the minister has indicated, to both First Nations, Inuit and the Metis because of the number that were put up for adoption

in the '50s, '60s and '70s. And, when I spoke to the Metis Federation regarding their interest in this area, they indicated they have over 3,000 applications in various positions in the process in terms of membership with the Metis Federation awaiting information that might be available when—once this bill is passed. And so, certainly, they anticipate quite a number of applications that are stalled in the process, as well a number of new applications, actually having a great deal of impact on their membership and the number of people that they will have joining the Metis Federation. And it will have an impact on First Nations as well, particularly as to who has full membership in some band situations. And that will have—it is of particular interest for those that were adopted outside of Manitoba's jurisdiction, which, during the '60s, there were a number that did that.

So it's particularly good that this is brought forward. I know it's been a long time coming, because we have talked to a number of people that have been waiting quite a little while for this bill, and so maybe as much as five years since the first indication that there would be movement in this area. And so some people are becoming a little frustrated and wanting to move forward on this. I am glad it is now on the table. Certainly, we'll be looking forward to its passage.

As I indicated earlier, I have a particular interest in this area because I am one of these people. I'm an adopted child from the late '50s, and I have been unable to trace my parentage in any way because of the restrictions that existed because we couldn't get access to part of this information. So I am looking forward to this one on a personal basis, and I think it's very good for Manitobans as a whole. I know there are a lot of people out there like myself that want to do the follow-up, for their own curiosity to some degree, for more information related to health, because, of course, I have children and I want to know that if I have any health-linked illnesses, I certainly would want to be able to warn them of that situation.

We have, 'til this point, we have tried to get access to some information and really could get nothing. So this is certainly a move in the right direction, and I intend to take full use of this bill as soon as it is available to access. So I appreciate the minister moving on this, both as a party and on a personal basis, and I thank her for that. So, certainly, we will look forward to supporting this bill as it's moved forward. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): It's good that this legislation is finally, after, I think, it's 14 years in government, coming forward. And it's been needed for a while. And I have talked with many who have been affected by the previous legislation and have not been able to search for their birth parents. And this has been sad. And it is good that things will be changing.

I think it's important to note that British Columbia has had 'hopen'—open records for adoption files since 1996, recognizing as they did then that this is the humane and caring approach. And Newfoundland and Labrador opened their files in 2003; Alberta, 2004; Ontario, 2009. I think anyone who is, you know, concerned about opening the files should see the movie *Philomena*, the story of *Philomena Lee*, who gave birth to a son, *Anthony*, in Ireland. *Philomena* was young and not married at the time, and she stayed with her 'invant'—infant at a convent in *Roscrea* where she was looked after by the nuns. And about age three, to her great sadness, her son, *Anthony*, was taken from her and sold for adoption. The movie tells the story of her search over many, many years for her son. It captures the intensity of both mother and son wanting to find each other and the efforts of mother and son who tried to find each other and how they were deliberately blocked by those in charge, in this instance, at the *Roscrea* convent. And, tragically, by the time *Philomena* did locate her son, he was dead, and his body had been buried on the very grounds of *Roscrea* where she had gone in vain to ask where he was.

We need to move forward from the situation that has happened in the past where these records are closed to recognize the importance of children being able to know about their parents and the parents being able to know about their children. And I think that the measure here, which we now have, is an important step in that direction. I look forward to comments during the committee stage with regard to details of the legislation.

I note one of the people who's been a very strong advocate is—for this is *Penny Treflin* who has worked very hard and tried to search for her birth parents and particularly for her mother. And she says that she has lived for 69 years with a hole in her heart, and she now deserves a chance to see if that hole can be healed. Thank you.

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): I just wanted to put just a few words on the record with regard to this bill.

Some bills are not very emotional. I don't know if you've noticed some of them, you know, you're cleaning up legislation and you're, you know, doing some important things. I'm not saying they're not important, but they don't have, I don't think, sort of the emotional connection that this particular bill has. There's so many people in our country, and I'd like to thank the member from *Portage* for sharing his story and, you know, putting that on the record.

I can only imagine what that must be like and to have to wait so long for it to happen has to be very difficult. And I know it has to be incredibly difficult for the people who originally, you know, gave up their children and making those decisions at that time. I knew that—I imagine the vast majority, of course, are people who love their children very much and believe that what they were doing was something that was going to be to the betterment of their children, and that's why they did it: so that their lives would be the best lives that they could be. And it's hard to understand—not the giving up because I do understand that, why sometimes people feel that that's the best thing—but sometimes it must be hard to understand the desire to not have that information out. But we respect all people's feelings around that.

So I'm very pleased that this is going to allow an adopted individual, 18 or older, to request a copy of their original birth registration unless the disclosure veto has been filed by the birth parent, and I understand that happily that doesn't happen very often. So, from other provinces who have disclosure vetoes, I understand that it's only about—I think it was about only 3 per cent or something of the people that actually put that disclosure veto on trying to not have that information go out. So I think that's very encouraging for the people that are waiting for this information to be available to them, and individuals are going to get copies of their birth registrations for the first time.

* (16:30)

And, you know, we had to be sensitive to understanding that individuals involved in past adoption, you know, were promised that their privacy would be respected. And, so, while some may wish that we didn't have to include those provisions, that's why we felt that we did; people, you know, were told that back then, and I think it's important that we be very careful around what we're doing with regard to that. But, as the member from *Portage* mentioned, you know, medical records are,

of course, a huge concern for people and so I can certainly understand that side.

I believe that one of the provinces—Ontario—had tried to do it without a disclosure veto, as I understand, and then there was court challenges. So, you know, we did want to make sure that we weren't in that boat, that things didn't get slowed down further by the legislation being challenged because it didn't include the disclosure vote because that was successfully challenged in court in Ontario.

So once the changes are proclaimed, the disclosure vetoes will not be available but contact preferences can still indicate no contact. So adult adoptees and birth parents will have a right to birth registrations, adoption orders and/or written summary of available adoption information.

So, of course, in cases where an adoptee is an Aboriginal minor, his or her guardian may be provided with a copy of the original birth registration and any identifying information about their biological parents and any other information relevant in order for that adoptee to receive benefits or to secure their Aboriginal status. So I think that that is going to be huge for people as well, to be able to, you know, finally get that status. And both The Adoption Act and The Vital Statistics Act require amendments to ensure consistency and avoid legal obstacles and liability.

And one of the people, of course, that this is going to help are the people from the '60s scoop generation, and I think that everyone here is, no doubt, in agreement that that was a pretty devastating thing and we really want to see those children be able to get the information that's so important to them in securing their status on that. Aboriginal people, of course, will benefit from opening pre-1999 adoption records, particularly because children who were part of the '60s scoop generation can learn about their birth families and acknowledge that unique interest of Aboriginal people to access their birth records to secure that status and, of course, to receive the benefits that are due to him—to them, so that will also make a tremendous difference.

We know all too well how many of those who are part of the '60s scoop generation may have ended up far away from their birthplace and we will make sure that we reach out both nationally and internationally to try to find as many of those people as possible and let them know that, you know, this opportunity does exist for them now in Manitoba.

So I'm proud that we have gotten this legislation to the floor and hope that we will see it going through very soon. Thank you.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Just a few words. I know I get the indication that there are others in the Chamber who want to put a few words on the record regarding this bill, and we're certainly prepared to see it move to committee today or at the end of the day, according what the schedule with other speakers, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We do support the legislation, we appreciate the fact that there are many in the community who this will benefit and who have lived either with a lack of knowledge or the inability to get information about their adoption.

And I appreciate the comments from the member for Portage. You learn something new in this House every day, usually it's about policy but sometimes it's about your colleagues, too, and I didn't realize that about the member for Portage, so I was educated on that and I appreciate him putting those personal words on the comment, it's—on the record.

It is something that I've heard from other Manitobans that it's difficult to access medical information when you've been adopted, and that's not something that I'd considered when this was first raised to me almost a decade ago by a constituent—who I recently actually attended her marriage, or her wedding just this weekend—but 10 years ago she had said to me that she was hoping that adoption records would be opened because she was unable to get medical information and she was concerned about things that are passed on from generation to generation, and she wasn't able to provide that information to her own family doctor.

So that was an eye-opener for me. It's not something that I had considered until she had raised it with me, and now to hear it again, it echoes in my ears from the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart). So I think this is something that is a long time coming, and I recognize that there are challenges with it as well. There are always privacy issues or concerns or there are things that people entered into for various reasons and for various reasons why they did things. And so I understand that there are probably some good reasons why things take sometimes a little bit longer than we'd like them to. I might consider 10 years to be a little bit longer than one would've hoped, but I do think it's positive that this bill is here today, and I do think it will help many people to give them an understanding

and give them information that they need on a variety of different levels.

Why I have the floor, I do want to say just generally a couple of words about adoption, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and there are people in my family who've taken the step of adopting children into their family. It's something my wife and I have considered at different times in our life, it hasn't come to 'fuition' at this point, but it is, I think, a great gift that people can do when they adopt into a family, and it's something that can be life changing and life altering.

And—but there are different things that we can do, I think, as a Legislature to make that process easier. I know when people look at international adoptions, there are lots of walls and lots of challenges to that, and some of those are outside of our control. When we look at domestic adoption, I think that there are things that we can do to make that process go easier, and I also know that there's a financial hardship. And so we've seen different tax credits that have come forward federally, and I believe that there is one provincially as well.

But those sort of things, I think, need to continue to be looked at to ensure—you know, earlier today we talked about—a very respectful conversation—about bringing our girls home in relation to the Nigerian crisis that is going on with those young schoolgirls, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But there are also many young people, many children, who don't have a home simply because they don't have a place to go because they don't have parents. And so adoption can fill that for them, and that is part of bringing children home as well.

So I hope that there are other things that we can do as legislators in the time ahead in a session, that we can make adoption easier, then we can make it more affordable or make the process easier for those families who wish to engage in adoption. But I do appreciate this bill coming forward because I do think it is something that ultimately will bring information and some answers that people have waited too long to get.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 59, The Adoption

Amendment and Vital Statistics Amendment Act (Opening Birth and Adoption Records).

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

* * *

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): On House business, could you please call for second reading Bill 56, The Vital Statistics Amendment Act.

Bill 56—The Vital Statistics Amendment Act

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call number—for second reading, Bill 56, The Vital Statistics Amendment Act.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection): I move, seconded by the Minister for Multiculturalism and Literacy (Ms. Marcelino), that Bill 56, The Vital Statistics Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

* (16:40)

Mr. Lemieux: I'm pleased today that—to state that currently The Vital Statistics Act requires individuals to undergo transsexual surgery prior to applying for a change of sex designation on their Manitoba birth registration.

With these proposed amendments to The Vital Statistics Act, transgender individuals will no longer be required to undergo transsexual surgery before they can apply for a change of sex designation. Instead, individuals may apply to change their sex designation by providing an assessment from a medical professional declaring that the requested sex designation, male or female, is the sex with which the individual identifies.

This bill is a matter of basic fairness and a matter of human rights. Transgender individuals will now be able to make this important step in transitioning to the sex they feel is part of their true self. These amendments respect the standards set out in The Human Rights Code, which state, that a person cannot be discriminated against based on the gender identity.

This amendment will also benefit transgender individuals born outside of Manitoba. A Canadian who have lived in Manitoba for at least one year will be able to apply for a change of sex designation

certificate. They may be able to use their certificate to change a number of identity documents like driver's licence and a passport, without having to present personal health and medical documents to every issuer. This will assure individuals, who may have been marginalized in their country of birth, that Manitoba recognizes their chosen identity.

Providing documentation from a health-care professional will also ensure that Manitoban birth certificates are accepted by other authorities that issue identity documents. With the changes to the act, birth certificates will still be in line with the standards set by Canadian driver licensing authorities and Passport Canada.

I must acknowledge the support and advice of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission in this matter, in the development of this amendment. The help of the staff and the new executive director has been invaluable.

We have consulted with, and received support from, identity management organizations such as Manitoba Public Insurance and Manitoba Health. We have consulted and received invaluable input from Manitoba's health-care regulatory bodies and professional associations such as: the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Manitoba Psychological Association, the Manitoba Nurse Practitioners Association, and the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba.

In developing this legislation, we met with academic representatives, advocacy organizations and transgender health-care service organizations such as: Clinic Community Health clinic, the healthy sexual and harm reduction team of the WRHA, the Institute for Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Winnipeg, Manitoba's Centre for Human Rights Research Initiative at the University of Manitoba, Rainbow research centre, Winnipeg's transgender health network, and Two-Spirited People of Manitoba.

This is only a sample of the consultation and communication conducted in the development of this bill. All of these individuals and organizations can now be proud to see that this change is being made based on their input. I would like to thank them for their hard work and sincerely for the support in this process.

In Manitoba everyone should feel as though they are protected from discrimination. As a government, it is our job to make sure that our laws reflect the

needs of everyone in the community and recognize their individual identity.

The proposed amendments to The Vital Statistics Act help address the needs of transgender individuals in Manitoba, and to harmonize with the identity management standards of other provincial and national identity management organizations. They are supported by provincial and national regulatory, professional and advocacy organizations and comply with The Human Rights Code of Manitoba. More importantly, they comply with what we all know is right and fair.

I am pleased to recommend this bill today, and I hope that we can look forward to support from all members of this Assembly. And, hopefully, dealing with this right—this human right and this fairness issue, that we, as a Chamber, as we've shown, we can come together on many different issues. It was shown in the resolution just before on missing girls, and I believe that this is one of these other issues that this House should unanimously support, and I look forward to that.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Just briefly, I've been through the legislation. I believe this is a reasonable and responsible change. And I'm looking forward to any comments and discussion that may come at the committee stage.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's my pleasure today to put a few words on the record with regards to Bill 56. And I want to start by thanking the minister for bringing this forward, but I also want to thank several former ministers responsible for the Vital Statistics Agency. I have spoken to many of them about this issue.

Shortly after I became elected, and before I was elected, I had the good fortune of being able to speak to members of the transgendered community about the realities of their lives, their struggles and what could help to make those lives safer. And really, as the minister said, this bill is about human rights, but it is really about safety. And in those discussions one of the things that was brought to my attention, that in Manitoba, like in many other provinces, in order to change your gender officially on your identification, we require you to have complete gender re-assignment surgery. And some people may take that path, and other people may choose not to or to have partial surgery. And some people may choose to

change their gender by taking hormone therapy and dressing and looking like the other gender.

And it was expressed to me, you know, given the expense of this surgery, but also often the pain of it, that really there was something unfair about prescribing to people who had otherwise gone through counselling, gone through psychological evaluation, had done all the things necessary to receive gender reassignment treatment in its various forms, that as government, we said, no, we know better. *[inaudible]* the medical professionals, we know better than you what your gender is. We're going to tell you what you have to do to change your gender. The other thing about this was that it wasn't consistent. Oftentimes, people who looked like the gender that they represented themselves as were able to get ID in that gender. They were able to—you know, you go get your driver's licence, and if you look like a woman and they think you're a woman, then that is what would be recorded on your driver's licence.

But what was really brought home to me on this issue is when I attended for the first time the Transgender Day of Remembrance. And this is something that happens in our community every year, several of the organizations the minister talked about are involved in. And this is a solemn occasion where the names and lives of transgendered people around the world who have been killed in the previous year are remembered. And the first time I went to that event, it really affected me when those names were read out. And I realized that these were people from all over the world, but also people in Manitoba, and as we talk about this bill, I want to say the name of Divas Boulanger, who was a transgendered woman who was murdered in this province, and I believe whose murder is still unsolved.

But we read the names of people from all over the world who were beaten up and hurt and killed for no other reason than because of the clothes they wore, or the length of their hair, or the fact they chose to wear makeup or high heels, or no makeup and no high heels. And that affected me greatly because, you know, I reflected on what greater injustice is there than to discriminate against somebody based on how they look, on how we perceive them to be.

And I know, throughout our history as a society, people who are different than what we perceive or say is normal have been at various times in our

history despised. And that is true of transgendered people. It's been true in our history of gay and lesbian people. It's been true of people of colour. It's been true of people with disabilities. It's been true of Jewish people. In fact, if you add up all the people who throughout history have faced discrimination, you'll find that we are in the majority in the world.

But society changes, and education happens, and people open their hearts and minds to stories that are different than our own. And that has happened for me. I can't claim to have always been as open to the stories of transgendered people. It wasn't until I actually put aside the prejudices that I had and opened my mind and had those conversations that I understood the tremendous discrimination that these people still face. But also safety, and that's what I want to talk about.

* (16:50)

We know that transgendered people face a much higher rate of violence than other people; we've seen that play out time and time again. Anybody who wants to see an example of this can watch the movie *Boys Don't Cry*, which tells very compellingly the story of a transgendered man who was murdered for no other reason than because it was discovered that he was transgendered.

But we also know that people who live in the gender that they identify with often face discrimination, insults, violence, sexual assault; they also face record numbers of employment discrimination. And that's why I think also the step that the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) took to add transgender to the Manitoba Human Rights Code was so important.

And we—I'm sure many of us know the courageous stories of people who, at some point in their life, sometimes late in their life, decide to live their true identity, decide to live in a way that fulfills them, that makes them happy and change their gender in their job. And I had an experience of this with an employee who we were working on when I was working at the Women's Health Clinic; we were working with an employee of the school division on teen health clinics, and this person transitioned into a female while they were at their workplace.

Can you—can we all just take a moment to imagine the courage it takes to send out an email to all of your colleagues that when I come to work on Monday I am going to be in the opposite gender and I want you to address me as the opposite gender and

I'm going to begin dressing as the opposite gender? Can we just for a moment imagine the courage that that takes?

But the other thing that that tells me is how, in order to take the kind of courageous step, how absolutely compelling it must be to believe that you are in the wrong body, that you don't identify with the body in which you live.

And so I think that this piece of legislation is going to save lives; I absolutely believe that because we also know that people who are transgendered experience higher rates of depression and mental illness, not because of anything inherent in them, but because of the way they're treated by the world and they experience higher rates of suicide. We know that they are involved in the sex trade at larger proportions because they are more able to be exploited and that that often ends in violence and death.

And so what we do here today is more than say it's going to be easier for you to change your gender on your identification once you've met certain criteria, the same kinds of criteria that are identified in virtually every health-care setting.

But it also, frankly, is a mark of respect that we show to this community that we bring forward this legislation. It is a mark of respect that we say we believe that you get to decide what gender you want to be known as and we're going to treat you with the respect to recognize that and not prescribe to you that you have to undergo a surgical procedure before we allow you to be the gender that you are in. It will mean that people will be able to have identification that says who they believe they are and who they truly are. It will avoid the concern, the anxiety that may come when you have to cross the border and you have a passport that says you're a female when you look like a male and you have to answer those questions time and time again, sometimes in countries that I don't think are as progressive as our own.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

We also know there is a growing number of families who have children who, at younger and younger ages, are expressing that they are transgendered, and I think we've read some of those stories—I'm familiar with some of the lobbying efforts by those children and by their parents to make it—to make the world a little more accepting place for them.

And I know, and I'm coming to understand as a parent, we don't always understand everything our child does; we don't always appreciate everything that they do. I'm sure I am looking forward to a life of challenging my own perceptions and expectations. But we love our kids. We love our kids and we want them to be safe and we want them to be full members of society; we want them to find love and employment and a family and be celebrated for who they are. And I believe this legislation takes us another step towards that.

So this is fundamental human rights legislation. It will improve the lives of perhaps a small number of Manitobans, but an important community of Manitobans. It will protect their safety, and I believe today this legislation is going to save lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), that debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): I wonder if you could canvass the House to see if there's agreement to call it 5 o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it 5 p.m.? [*Agreed*]

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 13, 2014

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