

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

Vol. LX No. 45A – 10 a.m., Thursday, May 22, 2008

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 22, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I believe if you canvass the House, you would find agreement to go to Bill 226.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement to proceed with second reading public Bill 226, The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act? [*Agreed*]

**Bill 226—The Social Inclusion and
Anti-Poverty Act**

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that Bill 226, The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act; Loi sur l'inclusion sociale et la lutte contre la pauvreté, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, Bill 226 seeks to set a provincial framework for a plan to improve social inclusion and to reduce poverty in Manitoba. This bill sets the specific target of reducing poverty by half by the year 2012, using this year, 2008, as the base line.

When we can put a person on the moon, when we can eliminate the scourge of smallpox from the world, when we can dramatically increase the power of computers while at the same time dramatically reducing the cost per byte, when we can set the goal of a Canadian museum for human rights, and having set the goal, we are now well on the way to achieving it, we can and we must set the goal of reducing and then eliminating poverty in our province.

This may sound grandiose, but it is needed. The lack of progress in the last two decades is apparent, and yet we have more tools now and more ability to reduce poverty and to reduce social exclusion than we have ever had before. We need to set our minds

to this. We need to set the goal of reducing and then eliminating poverty in Manitoba but, to do this, it's not enough just to talk about it: we must have a plan; we must have the appropriate accountability; and we must very much engage all Manitobans in our efforts.

We can reduce and we can eliminate poverty, and we must put our efforts to doing this. It is badly needed to help elevate the lives and the dignity of those who are poor. It's necessary to improve the health of those who are poor. It's needed to reduce the need for certain of those who are poor, at the present time, to resort to criminal activity. It's necessary to reduce poverty to help those who are not well-off, to give them opportunities.

Reducing poverty improves human dignity and well-being and brings multiple benefits to our society as a whole, including reduced crime, reduced health care and social cost, improved communities, and a better province. No one in Manitoba will contest that there is not significant poverty in our province and that this needs to be addressed.

In September 2000, the United Nations set the Millennium Development Goals, which included, as the first goal, to reduce global poverty by half by 2015. If we can accept this as a global goal, then reducing poverty in Manitoba, by half, by 2012, three years short of the 2015 in the Millennium Development Goals, should be achievable for our province with all the resources that we have.

In today's world it is no longer enough to just talk about reducing poverty. We need to have the goal, we need to have the commitment, and we need to have an action plan. Governments in today's world need to set performance targets, and performance targets on action to improve the human condition are among the most important of all, and those to decrease poverty are among the most important of these.

To achieve the goal of reducing poverty by half, we, of course, need a clear and functional definition of poverty. We need to have an approach with sufficient rigour to allow for international comparisons, where one of the goals of this effort is

to achieve in Manitoba one of the lowest levels of poverty in the world.

There are, of course, different approaches using the low-income cut-off and others. But as Muhammad Yunus with the Grameen Bank has pointed out, and others, that poverty is not just about income, that we should have a definition which does mention income, but one also which takes into account the access to housing and other aspects of human life which are so important to human dignity. We need to note, as Muhammad Yunus says, that any program that merely meets the physical needs of a poor person, or even provides a job, is not by itself a true development program unless it leads to the unfolding of his or her creative energy.

Antoine Rebeau [*phonetic*] has put this in a slightly different way. He said there will not be sustainable economic value creation if there is no personal development in human value creation at the same time. And that is why this bill addresses, not just poverty, which one could think of in terms of income, but social inclusion to reduce social exclusion and to promote social inclusion.

We need to involve those who are poor. As Jeffrey Sachs, who wrote the book *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* has said: The poor cannot wait for the rich to issue the call for justice. We need to get poor people involved in the changes themselves.

As Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank learned early on, they needed to create an environment where those who were poor were able to help each other. As Yunus has said, no one who borrows from Grameen Bank stands alone. Each belongs to a self-made group of five friends, no two of whom may be closely related. When one of the five friends wants to take out a loan, she needs approval from the remaining four. Although each borrower is responsible for her own loan, the group functions as a small social network that provides encouragement, psychological support and, at the time, practical assistance in bearing the unfamiliar burden of debt and steering the individual member through the unfamiliar world of business and helps them out socially in the world.

*(10:10)

So promoting social inclusion is a vital, important and necessary part of the plan which we have in Bill 26. Let me outline some aspects of the plan in Bill 26. It is not in and of itself a plan but it

provides the framework for the plan, and that framework provides for a provincial strategy oriented in five areas: preventing poverty and social exclusion with a focus on developing the potential of individuals, strengthening the social and economic safety net, promoting access to employment and increasing the attractiveness of work, promoting the involvement of society as a whole in the provincial strategy and ensuring consistent and coherent interventions are implemented at all levels.

Bill 226 also requires aspects like a gender-based analysis. The recognition of the family as the basic unit of personal and social development while respecting the role of parents supporting families with dependent children who are at risk of long-term poverty through early and integrated intervention aimed at giving the families access to a range of services and programs adapted to their needs: promoting school success, improving basic education, including literacy, supporting volunteer and community actions, recognizing the contributions of the elderly and promoting, for persons living in poverty, access to culture, recreation and sports.

The bill also provides for the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg to be designated as the minister's advisory council on poverty and social exclusion, Mr. Speaker, and we would expect that the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, which has demonstrated the long-term ability to plan, to do in-depth research, would be able to harness the goodwill and the efforts and the ideas from antipoverty groups and others all over Manitoba.

So I ask today that MLAs give serious consideration to Bill 226. I hope we can garner an all-MLA, all-party effort against poverty in Manitoba and make this a historic occasion. We want this to be the best that it can be. We're ready to consider any amendments that any MLA suggests in an effort to have a bill which can stand as a marker for all our efforts toward the goal of reducing poverty and social exclusion.

As Muhammad Yunus in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Oslo, Norway, entitled, *Poverty is a Threat to Peace*, delivered December 10, 2006, said: When we look back at human history it's clear we get what we want or what we fail to refuse. If we're not achieving something, it's because we've not put our minds to it. We are accepting psychological limitations that prevent us from doing what we claim we want.

It goes on to say: It is possible to eliminate poverty from our world because it is not natural for human beings. It is artificially imposed on them. Let's dedicate ourselves to bringing an end to it at the earliest possible date and putting poverty in the museums once and for all rather than having it living in our lives.

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for bringing this issue into the House. He's talked about poverty and social exclusion and, of course, this party has long been a champion of prosperity for everybody and of social inclusion.

We believe, Mr. Speaker, as the founders of our party, people like Tommy Douglas believed, we believe in a society that includes everybody, that widens the margins and let's everybody into the tent. We're very proud of the work that we've done on poverty. We know there's work to do and, of course, we continue to do that work.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that education is extremely important in combatting poverty, that education is one of the keys to social inclusion. I'm sure that the member will agree with me. We know that education is important not only in reducing poverty but also in amending the conditions that often surround poverty, for example, ill health, for example, conflict with the law. We know that education is key in these areas too.

This party is committed to social and communal well-being. I'm very proud of the work that we've done on education. I have talked about education as being, in my view, very, very key to combatting poverty. I think our Premier (Mr. Doer) is famous across the country for saying that education is not only important for combatting poverty, Mr. Speaker, but also for improving our economy. You can't have an economic strategy without having an educational strategy.

So, education has been the first priority in our economic growth strategy. I point out to members in the Legislature that Manitoba's expenditure per student in K to 12—public education is the highest in Canada. You know, we value our students. We believe in educating them and, again, we believe that education is the key out of poverty.

You know, earlier, in fall 2007, I was down east with my colleague from Rupertsland having a meeting with Minister Strahl. At that point, we talked about poverty on our reserve communities,

and pointed out to Mr. Strahl that, in contrast to the provincial input in dollars per student, the federal people were sadly behind. So we hope that that will change. But right now, education is not properly funded on reserves, and we know that our reserves' communities are not well developed economically, and certainly, poverty is an issue.

Before I interrupted myself, I was making the point that Manitoba's expenditure per student in K to 12 is the highest in the country. Though these expenditures are the highest, Mr. Speaker, and even as housing values are rising, net education property taxes have gone down, which is something, again, of which we're very proud. We've made a lot of progress, Mr. Speaker, on the poverty issue since 1999 when there were many reports of people not even being able to get insurance on their houses in the hard core of Winnipeg.

So, I think that I will talk a little bit about post-secondary education because, of course, post-secondary education is so important in combatting poverty. This government has worked very, very hard to keep education accessible and affordable for all Manitobans. Our tuition freeze has lasted for nine budgets. I know there are people who deplore the tuition freeze, but I note, today in the House, that the tuition freeze has been one of the main instruments, not the only instrument, but one of the main instruments that have allowed post-secondary enrolment to grow by over 35 percent. Again, the best key out of poverty, the best lever to make change is education, particularly post-secondary education, almost necessary if you are going to have a job in the modern economy and the knowledge-based economy that will allow a person to avoid poverty. So the tuition freeze has been extremely important.

I'm also proud of the fact, Mr. Speaker—and this is really, I think very important in combatting poverty—that we have introduced a Manitoba government bursary. The old bursary was cancelled in the dead of the night in mid-July in 1993-94. One of the first acts we did in coming into government was to re-introduce the Manitoba bursary. It began at \$6 million. It's now grown to \$8.2 million, and it's used to alleviate student debt. By alleviating student debt, it is very instrumental in encouraging students not only to enrol in post-secondary education, which is the first step, but what is really important is to stick with it and to graduate. So I think it's extremely important.

I could add to this all kinds of good news about various scholarships and initiatives, but I think I'll simply say that Manitoba is the most affordable place in Canada to attend post-secondary education. Mr. Speaker, not only do we have the third-lowest tuition—we are behind Québec and Newfoundland in this endeavour—but we have grand supports for our students; I have outlined some of them.

* (10:20)

Basically, since 1999, our government has increased student assistance by a staggering \$160 million. This has been, obviously, really, really important work in keeping Manitobans out of poverty.

We have, of course, said that the tuition freeze is going to end in the 2009 academic year and that would put some stress on students, but we've also made a commitment at that time to double the Manitoba Bursary which is already at \$8.2 million. So we're taking care of that, Mr. Speaker.

One of the programs in Manitoba, one for which we're famous across Canada—indeed, I can remember attending an honorary doctorate ceremony at the University of Manitoba where the former Governor General, Adrienne Clarkson, was awarded an honorary doctorate and attending one where her husband, John Ralston Saul, was awarded an honorary doctorate.

Both of these very distinguished educators and champions, I think, of poverty and all things Canadian spoke—will you believe this, Mr. Speaker—about the ACCESS programs we have right here in Manitoba and how these programs were models for the rest of Canada. They're programs that provide special supports for people and have been a tremendous stepping stone for Aboriginal people into post-secondary education.

One of the wonderful things about the ACCESS programs, one thing I'm very proud of is the fact that we have graduated more Aboriginal engineers than every other institution in Canada put together. Isn't that remarkable, Mr. Speaker? We have graduated more Aboriginal dentists, more Aboriginal doctors, more Aboriginal lawyers. These are very, very important initiatives in moving people from poverty.

In this year's budget, we have introduced a new concept in post-secondary education and that is a commitment to transition programming. I was very pleased earlier this week to join the president of the University of Winnipeg, Lloyd Axworthy, and

several other distinguished people where we made a commitment to opportunities funds.

The Opportunities Fund program is one taking place at the University of Winnipeg. Mr. Speaker, it works with kids as young as those in grade 4 through grade 9, encourages them with supports to participate in post-secondary education by getting used to post-secondary education life.

There was a group of children from Strathcona School; they're called the Eco-Kids. They're learning how to grow gardens; they're learning about the environment; they're having lectures with professors of Science at the university so that, while these children aren't enrolled in post-secondary education, they're learning something very important and that is that post-secondary education is something that's available to them. It's something that they can do; it's something they can shine at. The University of Winnipeg is a place that they're welcome.

Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely, extremely important initiative in combatting poverty.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I'm pleased to rise and speak briefly to Bill 226, The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act.

Certainly, poverty is an issue that continues to be a serious problem in our province. It spans across demographics and across regions. The bill is clearly well-intentioned and it's big on vision. Targets are important and we hope to achieve a goal, but we need a plan for how to achieve these targets, concrete action. As we have seen with this NDP government, they have a tendency to be big on talk and short on substantive action. However, we applaud the Member of River Heights for his commitment to keeping poverty on the government agenda and for bringing forward this bill.

In Manitoba, the number of people that rely on Employment and Income Assistance has remained relatively stagnant. Child poverty is still a devastating problem in many communities and with many sectors of our population. Much more can be done to help people achieve financial independence and fulfil their potential.

The current NDP government has a policy of hiking minimum wage on a regular basis rather than adopting sustainable effective policies to lift low-income Manitobans above the poverty line.

One of the best ways to make a substantial difference to the lives of low-income Manitobans

would be to significantly raise the basic personal exemption. By taking those Manitobans who are at the bottom of the income ladder off the tax rolls altogether, we can actually leave more money in their pockets than we could by raising the minimum wage.

In fact, raising the minimum wage creates an incentive for employers to simply eliminate those minimum-wage jobs altogether, Mr. Speaker. That leaves unskilled or inexperienced labour without hope of ever finding employment. It prohibits these Manitobans from sharing in the dignity of the workplace.

Raising the basic personal exemption is better for business and it's better for low-income Manitobans. It needs to be raised substantially, though; the token increases allowed by this government are not going to cut it. In a time of unprecedented federal revenues, there is no need for this government to keep paying for its wasteful spending decisions on the backs of low-income Manitobans.

Income assistance must be available to individuals as a hand up until they get back on their feet. We need an employment and income assistance system that is fair and sustainable. While other provinces have been able to help more and more people become independent of social assistance, the number of people in Manitoba who need assistance has stayed mostly the same.

The most recent statistics available for the National Council of Welfare show that, in Manitoba, the estimated number of people on welfare actually increased by .2 percent between '04 and '05, while other provinces posted reductions from 2 percent to 15 percent. Once again, Manitoba is falling behind.

The best way to help people get off assistance is to provide them with affordable housing, child care, education and access to good jobs. Training is an important part of this picture. There are many people on assistance that would benefit from training programs that will get them good-quality jobs and off assistance for good.

Another way this government is doing a disservice to low-income Manitobans is through hiking of a variety of fees and taxes that impact Manitoba's bottom line.

This year, they hiked Pharmacare deductibles once again. Pharmacare deductibles have gone up six times over the past seven years, a total of 34 percent

increase. Except for the 2007 election, this NDP government has increased Pharmacare deductibles by 5 percent every year since 2002.

It's no coincidence that, in an attempt to placate voters, they gave seniors a break the year of the election; then they were right back to their old ways. In fact, this year, the government was extra sneaky; they implemented this year's Pharmacare deductible increase before it was even announced to Manitobans. Specifically on April 1, Pharmacare deductibles rose by 5 percent. This occurred a full three weeks before the 2008 budget. The increase is a tax on Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens, including those on fixed incomes.

To add insult to injury, Pharmacare deductibles aren't the only thing going up this year. Manitobans are going to be shelling out more dollars for any number of things, including vehicle registration fees. They're at \$119 this year. Since the NDP came into office, that's a hike of 150 percent. We're the highest of any western province. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is \$70; Saskatchewan is \$68; northwestern Ontario is \$37; B.C. is only \$28; we're at a \$119.

Camping permits are up more than 20 percent. Since the NDP took power, the provincial sales tax has been expanded twice to include services such as plumbing, electrical and legal services. The cost of a driver's licence has gone up. The NDP are pocketing more revenue on liquor taxes, land transfer taxes and other fees that Manitobans pay.

When will they put it all together? It's more money out of the pockets of low-income Manitobans and into the wasteful hands of this NDP government.

Every year the Social Planning distributes its Child Poverty Report Card. The report card is a valuable evaluation of child poverty in our province. It is a way of knowing how families in our province are faring, relative to other provinces in Canada as a whole.

*(10:30)

The most recent Child Poverty Report Card showed that between 2004 and 2005, Manitoba's child poverty rate actually increased slightly. In fact, Manitoba has the third highest child poverty rate in all of Canada. Half of the single mothers live in poverty and over 15 percent of two-parent families live in poverty, the second highest proportion of all provinces. But really, what matters most is that child poverty continues to exist at all. The fact that the

Child and Family Poverty Report Card still needs to be published means that the job is far from done.

Poverty is a reality for thousands of children and families and particularly for children. This situation is far worse when one considers that the published child poverty rates for our province usually do not include First Nation communities of which there are many and where poverty is often widespread. It means that it is time to look at a new way of eradicating poverty, helping individuals to fulfil the potential and achieve independence. Ultimately, platitudes do not help impoverished families. What is needed is a vision for the future without child poverty, along with leadership, innovation, and most of all, meaningful and serious action.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to Bill 226.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill 226, The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act. I have a dilemma, and perhaps my colleagues on my side of the House could help me with my dilemma because I don't know whether it takes more gall for a Tory to speak on anti-poverty or more gall for a Liberal to speak on anti-poverty—*[interjection]*—and let me make my case.

Let me start with the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) because it really takes a lot of gall to say the NDP lacks action on poverty. They were the government for 11 years in Manitoba and what did they do? They reduced social assistance rates. They cut foster care rates. They closed employment centres. They clawed back the National Child Benefit, but I think they share some responsibility with the federal government for that one because the federal government said, oh, we're going to bring in this new, wonderful National Child Benefit—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Martindale: The federal government said we're going to bring in this new National Child Benefit, but we're going to let the provinces do anything they want with it. So what happened? Two provinces allowed all the children to keep the money, and Manitoba deducted it from welfare cheques and put it into other programs—*[interjection]*—under the Tories. The Member for—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Martindale: —and what did we do as a government? We ended the clawback in stages. The result is that 14 million—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have lots of time left. The members that wish to make comments will have their opportunity. The honourable Member for Burrows has the floor right now.

Mr. Martindale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to see that members opposite are so interested in my critique of their government. It's quite interesting. I seem to have lit a fire over there, got under their skin or something.

So we know what their record is. Speaking of gall again, the member said that employment and income assistance rates have been—no, statistics have been stagnant. This is absolutely not true. The number of people receiving social assistance has gone dramatically down. We now have the lowest average annual caseload in 22 years for employment income assistance, with over 10,000 fewer persons receiving income assistance now than in 1999. So that's absolutely not true.

We are doing many things such as rewarding work, which I will get to. Let's talk about the minimum wage. The members opposite like to talk about the minimum wage. Well, when they were in government, they increased the minimum wage twice in the run-up to an election. What does this government do? This government has increased the minimum wage six times in a row. Their record, twice in 11 years; our record, six times in a row.

The Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) who has taken over the nickname of the former Deputy Premier, which I probably wouldn't put on the record because the Speaker would ask me to withdraw it, but, Mr. Speaker, we did have a nickname for the former Conservative Deputy Speaker—*[interjection]*—and he wants to talk about income tax.

Well, what have we done? We have dropped thousands of people off the income tax rolls on the bottom end so that poorer people don't pay taxes anymore. That's what we have done. And it's a matter of record.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I see some members that are trying to have a conversation back and forth so please use the loges. That way we can hear the member that has the floor.

Mr. Martindale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your timely interventions. The Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) says that Manitoba is falling behind in housing, child care, education and training, and jobs. Absolutely not true. We are going in the opposite direction to what he's accusing us of. We're making progress in housing. We have greatly increased child care.

Now, what did the current Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), when she was formerly the Minister of Family Services, do in child care? She cut the child-care budget by \$10 million. Ten million dollars. And they talk about—*[interjection]*—we're proud of our child care record. We'll put our child care record up against yours any day of the week.

Now, because I only have 10 minutes, I'm going to go on to talk about the gall of the Liberal member who introduced this bill because I don't know how he can talk about this with a straight face knowing that he was part of a government in 1996 that eliminated the Canada Assistance Plan which provided 50 percent funding for provincial social programs, and then rolled money for social programs in with post-secondary education and other things and called it the Canada Health and Social Transfer.

What was the effect on Manitoba? Well, Manitoba lost; I think it was \$240 million in the first two years. That was a huge cut for the province of Manitoba.

So what did the provincial government do? Did they cut, you know, tax breaks for businesspeople, or did they increase taxes for rich people? No, of course not. What they did was they cut welfare rates for the poorest of the poor, people on social assistance. Even when they amalgamated city and provincial welfare systems, they amalgamated them at a lower rate. So they actually took food out of the mouths of children who were on city welfare. They took food money away from city welfare recipients and gave them the lower provincial rate. They amended the social assistance act. They cut the rates. They cut the child-care budget, as I mentioned, by \$10 million.

So who made poverty worse in Manitoba? The federal Liberals. What would the Liberals do now? Well, they have all kinds of idealistic ideas, but, you know, they were the federal government from '93 till what, 2005, and in elections, they promised a national child care program. I think it was in the red book in 1993. Did they ever do it? Well, they had an agreement with Manitoba, and they never got a national program off the boards. They had all these

years to do it, and they didn't quite get it done. Then the federal Tories, of course, cancelled the agreement with Manitoba.

We backfilled. It cost us \$14 million. Mr. Speaker, I believe that was one of the biggest increases in the child care budget in Manitoba was making up for the \$14 million that the Harper government cut for child care by cancelling the Liberal agreement with Manitoba.

They also promised a national Pharmacare program but never got around to bringing it in. They promised and signed the Kelowna Accord. They had many, many years to do it. Mr. Speaker, they did it just before they lost government, and what did the new Conservative, Harper government do? They cancelled the Kelowna Accord. Both governments had an opportunity and they both blew it.

So they could have made a difference but they didn't. In fact, some of us are fond of saying that Liberals run on the left and govern on the right. I would say they campaign like New Democrats and govern like Tories. Mr. Speaker, you really can't tell the difference when you look at their policies in government.

And what has our government done? Well, we've reversed most of the decisions that were made by the federal Tories and the provincial Tories. We increased the National Child Benefit, as I said. We've increased employment income assistance rates. For example, the rate for people with disabilities increased by \$300 per year starting in January 2008, and because of our changes, our increases in benefits and allowing people to keep the National Child Benefit, some amazing things have happened. For example, Statistics Canada released a study recently that showed a drop of 59 percent from 1999 to 2007 in the number of low-income, single mothers. That's a huge drop in the poverty rate for those individuals. I've talked about the minimum wage which is now \$8.50 an hour. We've increased it by 42 percent, or \$2.50, since 1999, and Manitoba's minimum wage is now the second highest among provinces.

* (10:40)

There are many, many other things that I could put on the record, but I'm running out of time. So I'll leave that to my colleagues. We have a good record when it comes to reducing poverty. I think there's more that we can do. There will be more; stay tuned for future budget announcements because these things do change from time to time. We're not

finished yet; we've just started. As my colleague from Transcona says, much accomplished, more to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to be able to address this Bill 226, the bill which we believe is worthy of the support of all members of this Chamber.

First off, I would like to acknowledge that we've had in the public gallery the presence of individuals from the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, Winnipeg Harvest, the Provincial Council of Women, the Salvation Army and others, individuals dealing with mental illnesses, disabilities. Mr. Speaker, we've acknowledged your presence and very much appreciate the efforts that you put in, in terms of the province of Manitoba, in combatting something that is important to all Manitobans. That is the issue of poverty.

Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) stood up and pointed the fingers, saying, whether it's the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) or Liberals, and how offended he was that the Liberals and Conservatives would try to say anything about poverty, I'd like to let the Member for Burrows know that all political parties have people that care passionately about doing something in fighting poverty in Manitoba, in fact, in Canada.

No one party owns the issue of wanting to do what's right in fighting poverty. I listen to the government's response. It's a fairly simple bill to understand. The issue is, do you support the targets? Do you want to see legislation put into place that makes a very strong statement in dealing with the issue of poverty?

It's a pretty straightforward bill. The question is, does the government of the day support it? If the government supports what it is that they claim to want to advocate for, then they should be allowing the bill to vote and allowing this bill to go to committee.

By allowing the bill to go to committee, we are going to be enabling individuals that are in our gallery and many other Manitobans the opportunity to come before committee and express their thoughts and their opinions on this bill and other issues that might be important to them in terms of assisting this Legislature in fighting poverty in the province of Manitoba.

I would suggest that, if the government really and truly wants to take the approach that they're serious about poverty in the province of Manitoba, why then would they oppose the bill?

I'll give them some grace and suggest that they do want to fight poverty. If that is the case, then at least allow the bill to be voted on today, so the opportunity to allow it to go to committee will be there and, ultimately, become the law in the province of Manitoba.

I appreciate the words the Member for Ste. Rose put on the record indicating, I believe, that they would not have a problem with this bill going to committee, Mr. Speaker. Having said that, the only roadblock would be the Premier (Mr. Doer) and this government in terms of not enabling this bill to go to committee.

Mr. Speaker, I thought it was interesting, the minister of post-secondary education was standing up and she talked about how they're fighting through post-secondary education. I'm not necessarily maybe the best-educated member of this Chamber. Having said that, I believe the real issue in dealing with education—because it's in the budget documents where the government is saying, education first—the real issue for education in dealing with poverty, I believe, has more to do with dressing the people that are falling through the cracks.

In fact, when we were in the education Estimates, I am more concerned about those individuals that are not even making it to grade 12, let alone post-secondary education. I, on several occasions, tried to get an understanding of how many children, young adults that are not making it through our high schools, and what is the government doing to track them?

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) could not provide me the answers. Even with the bureaucrats that he had on the floor with him, the government of the day could not provide me answers as to what was actually happening to the drop-outs or the individuals that are not making it through our high school system.

I suggested to the Minister of Education, weeks ago, that they need to get a better understanding of why it is our youth are dropping out of high school because the government is right on the point of education being critically important in terms of dealing with our poverty rate in the province of Manitoba. Well, you have to understand why it is

and address some of those causes in order to be able to overcome and get our young people graduating grade 12. We are handicapping them severely by not assisting them by going through grade 12 and getting that certificate, Mr. Speaker. These are the types of things that we look to the government to demonstrate some leadership on.

We could point fingers all we want, as the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) pointed to Ottawa, as he pointed to the previous government, Mr. Speaker. I can suggest that there is the finger of blame that could be pointed at all political parties in different levels of government, whether it's city, whether it's provincial, whether it's federal, whether it's been monopolized by one or more political parties of all stripes. The time for pointing the finger, I think, is not here in private members' hour when we're afforded the opportunity to actually act on doing something that would help set the targets, put in legislation, something that is quite possible.

I understand the province of Québec has already done something of a similar nature. Other provinces are entertaining it, so why not Manitoba? I would like to think that Manitoba has the potential to be one of the more progressive provinces on the development of social policies. That's why it can be frustrating, from my perspective, someone that wants to see positive social change, feeling frustrated when I don't see the type of changes that are necessary being sat on by the government.

Mr. Speaker, I could talk about, and I've mentioned before, you know, I live in the North End of Winnipeg and I drive from Tyndall Park to the Legislative Building every other day, every day while we're in session. I can tell you the issues that I see every day need to be addressed, and they are highlighted by the fact that so many of them are dealing with the issue of poverty.

I used to represent—and the Member for Burrows currently represents—before they changed the boundaries, Gilbert Park. Mr. Speaker, we believed at the time that what we needed to do was to assist the people of Gilbert Park by taking over the complex through tenant management, to provide the opportunity. I can tell you that the residents of Gilbert Park were moving forward significantly in terms of education and training and taking more ownership, and so forth. It was about educating. It's not just the young people. It's enabling. We have to be creative in the way in which we do that.

Well, sadly, all that progress that was made for a number of years has been set back because this government is more concerned about other issues. Yes, they have improved in terms of some of the capital conditions, but we have to look at the social conditions. How can we improve the education and socializing and helping people by giving a helping hand where we can because they have the street smarts and the ability to succeed, Mr. Speaker.

Quite often, all we have to do is just enable that ability, and we can do that in different ways. That's the challenge of the government. It's more than just handing out money, even though the money is important. It's being bold, it's doing and addressing the areas that cause the problems that we have in dealing with poverty. That's what we look at, the government.

* (10:50)

At the very least—and I would conclude my remarks—at the very least, if you believe in combatting poverty, allow this bill to be voted on. In the next 10 minutes, the government has a choice. If you're serious about poverty, then allow the bill to go to committee, Mr. Speaker, and that's not closure. We'll provide as much leave as the government wants in order for every member to speak on the bill. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): I, too, want to thank the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for bringing this issue forward in the House. It's an issue that I think all of us are very interested in. I think it's an issue that all of us deal with in our constituencies in various ways. I want to also acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of many activists whom I've had the pleasure of working with over the years on this issue and over many, many years as a long, long fight. I'm happy that they're here today, and I'm happy that they continue to push all governments to do better by the most marginalized people in our society.

I also want to take a second to recognize the fact that it is a year ago today that I was elected to this Legislature. I just want to say a happy anniversary to all the new members who are present here today.

Certainly, when I was running—first for the nomination of my party and then in the election—one of the questions that you're always asked when you run is why are you running? What do you want to accomplish? For me, speaking about action to end

poverty was one of the things that drove me to seek the nomination and to run in the election. In the year that has passed, I know that we have made some progress on that front—not enough progress. I don't think anybody in this House would say that that fight is done and that we've done everything that we need to, but I do want to talk a bit about one specific group of people who have dealt with poverty and whose poverty tends to be very deep and very difficult to alleviate, and that's single mothers, single female-led families.

That's a population that I have some experience in working with in my past jobs both with the Women's Health Clinic and the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women, and working as I did for a time in adult literacy programs. It's interesting to me that this bill calls for a target of reducing by 50 percent. I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker, that when it comes to single female-led families in this province, we've done better than that since 1999.

Since 1999, the number of single female-led families living in poverty according to Statistics Canada has been reduced by 63 percent. That is an incredible, incredible number. I think it's important for there to be some research and some discussion of what has led to that improvement. In '99, when we took office, 59 percent of those families lived in poverty according to Statistics Canada. In 2006, that number was down to 22 percent; still 22 percent too high but it is an achievement, and I think we should reflect a bit on what policies have led to that.

In my mind, some of the policy changes that this government has made that have helped those families to come out of poverty are things like increasing the minimum wage. Not just once, not just in the year before an election, but every year. In our time in government, the minimum wage has increased from \$6 an hour to \$8.50 an hour, and I would be one of those that would say we're not where we need to be yet with minimum wage, but I am very proud that we have made steady progress, and that for the people in this province who have to live on minimum wage, they know that they are going to get an increase on a timely basis. They know that that's going to happen. It's not like it has been in the past where years went by without an increase to minimum wage, and that has not been without controversy and it hasn't been without opposition. I think every time there's been a minimum wage increase, we have heard concerns and not illegitimate concerns. I would say legitimate concerns from business about minimum wage, but

the reality is that there have never been more jobs available for Manitobans. The increases to the minimum wage have not hurt the employment market in Manitoba. So I'm proud that we have done that.

I think one of the other policy changes that we made that has helped children and mothers and single-mother families is ending the National Child Benefit clawback. You think about it, Mr. Speaker. That policy that was in place when we came into office was so wrong-headed to take money that a federal government had made available to help families who are living in poverty, and to deduct it from their social assistance payments in order to go into other programs. It essentially meant that those families were never any further ahead. So I'm proud that we did that. That was a \$13-million cost to do that, but I think we have seen the results of that in fewer families experiencing poverty.

We have made historic—historic—investments in child care in this province. I believe that we are now in a time when we all accept that having a child-care strategy, investing in child care, is key to having an economic strategy. Having people available to look after children is the only way that parents, both mothers and fathers, can participate in paid employment. Recently, we saw another historic investment in child care in our multi-year plan that's going to see 6,500 spaces put in place over the next five years. It means that we continue to have, arguably, I would say, the best child-care system in the country, and one of the most accessible in the country. That, when you are talking about how to deal with poverty, especially for families that are led by single moms, child care is key.

The Minister for Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford) spoke to us about our plans in post-secondary education and our policies there. For me, personally, having access to a university education has meant that I live a very different life than my parents lived. I am, of course, of the first generation in my family to be able to go to university, and I was only able to go because there were programs in place that helped support me to do that. As a person with a disability there are programs that helped to cover the costs of my tuition and my books and my living expenses. Without those programs I wouldn't have been able to go to university, and my life would look very different now. So whatever we can do to increase access to post-secondary education for students, especially

those students who do not traditionally participate, is also key to an anti-poverty strategy.

I want to speak a little bit about my experiences in working with, particularly women, who are living on social assistance. I met these women generally through my work in adult literacy classes. In that work, part of what we were doing, was talking to them about the social assistance system, getting them to talk about their rights under that system and getting them to talk about what changes could be made in the system that would make it easier for them to move from receiving social assistance to participating in paid employment.

I'm pleased that we've started to take some of those steps that they had suggested, things like being able to keep more of the money that those women and people on social assistance earn. We have almost doubled the earning exemptions for people on social assistance. A worker is now allowed to keep \$200 of their net monthly earnings plus 30 percent of the earnings over \$200. That makes a big difference when you are wanting to participate in paid employment, but you know that every dollar earned is going to come off the money that you get from social assistance. It's not an incentive to go out and do that, and I think we've helped remove some of that difficulty.

Another thing that we have done that I am very pleased about is invested in training and education programs for people on social assistance; \$1.4 million to help Manitobans who are on assistance find permanent work. I remember, in the time when I was working with women who were on assistance and involved in adult literacy classes, one of the challenges that they had was the limit on the amount of time that they could spend in any training program. We have expanded that now so that we will support two years of training and education. I remember, in that time when I worked with those women, having women pulled out of my adult literacy program because their time had expired even though they hadn't achieved their learning goals and they were making good progress. I'm pleased to note that we have changed that.

Recently we increased the shelter rates for non-disabled single adults on assistance. Many people here would say we haven't gone far enough yet, but we did make that change. I think it's a tribute to many of the people in the gallery who pushed that change to happen.

We've also provided funding to people on assistance to help with the costs of getting a new job, which is also something that I would hear about from women who were seeking paid employment. The fact that—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have one minute remaining.

The hour being 11 a.m., we will now move on to resolutions.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if there would be leave to allow for the question to be put on the bill, so that it could pass.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Is there any no? I heard a no, so we'll move on to resolutions. We're dealing with Resolution 12, VLT Revenue Sharing with Legions.

(11:00)

RESOLUTION

Res. 12—VLT Revenue Sharing with Legions

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise to present this resolution, seconded by the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese). The resolution reads as:

WHEREAS a portion of video lottery terminals (VLT) revenues in Manitoba are allocated as unconditional grants to Manitoba municipalities and rural and urban economic development initiatives; and

WHEREAS the intended community support functions that result from VLT revenue is also provided by the Royal Canadian Legion to communities across Manitoba; and

WHEREAS examples of community support services and programming provided by the Royal Canadian Legion include Meals on Wheels, vehicles for the disabled, and sporting events for youth; and

WHEREAS the Canadian Legion provides support to veterans who have fought to protect our country and democracy; and

WHEREAS the Royal Canadian Legion has been making a positive impact on the lives of Canadians since 1926; and

WHEREAS hundreds of thousands of citizens reap the benefits of the work of the Royal Canadian Legion every year; and

WHEREAS the current government has stated that they recognize the unique and important contributions veterans organizations have made in the past as well as the contributions they make today in our communities; and

WHEREAS legions currently receive 25 percent of their VLT revenue; and

WHEREAS legions operate at the local level and are in a position to understand the needs of their communities better than a centralized provincial government.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider reassessing its VLT revenue sharing model with legions.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to have the resolution as printed? *[Agreed]*

WHEREAS a portion of video lottery terminal (VLT) revenues in Manitoba are allocated as unconditional grants to Manitoba municipalities and rural and urban economic development initiatives; and

WHEREAS the intended community support function that results from VLT revenue is also provided by the Royal Canadian Legion to communities across Manitoba; and

WHEREAS examples of community support services and programming provided by the Royal Canadian Legion include: meals-on-wheels, vehicles for the disabled, and sporting events for youth; and

WHEREAS the Royal Canadian Legion provides support to Veterans who have fought to protect our country and democracy; and

WHEREAS the Royal Canadian Legion has been making a positive impact on the lives of Canadians since 1926; and

WHEREAS hundreds of thousands of citizens reap the benefits of the work of the Royal Canadian Legion every year; and

WHEREAS the current government has stated that they, “recognize the unique and important contribution Veterans organizations have made in the past as well as the contributions they make today in our communities”; and

WHEREAS legions currently receive 25% of their VLT revenue; and

WHEREAS legions operate at the local level and are in a position to understand the needs of their communities better than a centralized provincial government.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Provincial Government to consider reassessing its VLT revenue sharing model with legions.

It's been moved by the honourable Member for Emerson, seconded by the honourable Member for Ste. Rose,

WHEREAS—dispense?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise and to speak to the resolution.

Mr. Speaker, to give you a little bit of background of my own personal affiliation with the legions and/or with the veterans, in my mother's family there were 10 children. Five of the girls were involved in the past war or support as members for that war. Three of her brothers were in that war as well.

On my father's side, of course, there were only four in that family, and three of those participated in the last Great War, Mr. Speaker. So the legions to me are very, very important. They provide a large service, a great service to our communities and as a support service also to ex-members and veterans.

A bit of the history of the legion I think is in order. The legion in Manitoba was formed in 1925 in Winnipeg as a Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League. It was incorporated by a special act in parliament, Mr. Speaker, a charter which was issued in 1926.

The legion has never faltered in its efforts to improve the lot of the veterans and/or the ex-service members. Mr. Speaker. The benefits that are enjoyed today by many of the members—and some of those you'll probably understand were largely due to the persistence of dedicated members at all levels of organization from the top to the bottom—the benefits included and do include the independence program, spousal benefits, which you must understand is very, very important as a lot of our veterans have returned from overseas.

However, some were wounded, some came back with limbs missing and some were unable to perform work that would supply their families with the needs that they needed. So, of course, there were a lot of other benefits that came: spousal benefits; appropriate recognition for the participation in Dieppe and Hong Kong; veterans that were incarcerated; the creation of the Pension Review Board, and many others.

One of the big things that we see today that the veterans work very, very hard at is the War Amps. They work with children who have lost limbs and so on through accidents and through no fault of their own, but they work very hard with these children with prostheses. This type of work is all done voluntarily.

When we take a look at the revenues from the VLTs, we see that \$65 million in VLT revenue is donated in a form of unconditional grants to Manitoba municipalities. That reflects about 10 percent of the total take. Twenty-five percent also goes to rural and urban economic development initiatives. However, Mr. Speaker, the remainder, 65 percent, which is a considerable amount of money, in excess of \$400 million, goes to health care, education, community, social service and economic development.

I would like to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that the Royal Canadian Legion provides many of those same services, and they do it at a cost that's much, much less than what the government, any government can supply that service. I'm sure that the members opposite would be, certainly, wanting to agree that anyone that is volunteering and putting in the hours that the legion does, they would want to support initiatives such as this resolution that is being presented today.

The legions contribute around \$3 million in direct support to seniors and over 309,000 hours a year of volunteer time, which is very, very significant. If you were to employ people to do that, the money would not go very far. I can see that the legions are in a better position to supply the needs than it is to hire people, and which we are doing today through the health-care system, education, community, social services that they speak about. The 65 percent, I would suggest that that money would be better spent if it was given to the legion who are closer to the people that need and appreciate the services.

I can also say that the current government had stated in the past that they have recognized the unique and important contributions that veterans organizations have made in the past as well as the contributions they make today in our communities.

This was a quote from our NDP MLA, Bonnie Korzeniowski on October 19, 2007, in the MLC news.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hate to interrupt the member but, when making reference to other members, please do it by constituency, not by name, please.

Mr. Graydon: I'll withdraw that remark, Mr. Speaker.

The quote was made by the MLA for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski): The legions operate at a local level and are better positioned to understand the needs of their communities and better than a centralized provincial government. There are over 150 Royal Canadian Legion branches in Manitoba and northwestern Ontario to represent the needs.

With those few words, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider reassessing its VLT revenue-sharing model with the legions.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Acting Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act): I rise to speak to this motion that's on the floor today. I'm honoured to speak on behalf of my colleague the Honourable Andrew Swan, the current minister responsible for the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation.

*(11:10)

Mr. Speaker: Order. I just reminded members when making reference to other members it's ministers by their titles or other members by constituencies and not by their names.

Mr. Selinger: I did put on the record the Minister responsible for Manitoba Lotteries Corporation. I'll reiterate that for greater certainty. The member is out of town today, and this allows me to recognize the members of all veterans organizations within our province and to acknowledge their past and present achievements and their dedication and commitment to their country and to today's society.

You may recall, Mr. Speaker, that in October of '07, when I was the minister responsible for Lotteries, our government announced that, effective

January '08, VLT commission rates for the 64 veterans organizations with VLTs would be increased from 20 percent to 25 percent. This commission is the highest among VLT operators in Canada, and as the highest, it gives them substantial support. In fact, as of March 31, 2008, as a result of this increase, veterans organizations have received a total combined increase of \$207,000 for the three months since the new commission rate of 25 percent took effect. Fully annualized and continuing at the same rate, that could be somewhere between 700,000 and 800,000 additional revenue for the year.

I am pleased to note that not only do veterans organizations in Manitoba now receive the highest VLT commission rates across Canada, but since 2002, they have also managed their separate pool of 404 VLTs. This measure has provided them a guaranteed number of machines that will not only serve to ensure their sustained revenue streams for their most worthy objectives, but it also recognizes that the special place they occupy within our communities through other initiatives, such as the replacement of new VLT equipment and the introduction of the Sunday operations of VLTs, Manitoba's 64 veterans organizations have earned a total of 21.6 million in commissions since 2001-2002, Mr. Speaker, a 27 percent overall increase.

We will continue to work closely with these organizations to review the varying components of their VLT program and to address their operational challenges they face in today's society. As a government, we recognize their uniqueness and the important contribution veterans organizations have made in the past, as well as the contributions they make in our communities of today. The partnership that has been established will not only benefit the members of these organizations but also help them to remain strong, vibrant and devoted members of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, there's no question that this government supports veterans organizations, and we have done that in a very practical way by sequestering or protecting the number of machines that they have under their control, by replacing those machines with new state-of-the-art equipment, which has generated more revenue for them, and by increasing their commission structure to be the best in the country. And we will keep them the best in the country because we recognize the very significant contribution they have made historically but, as well,

the very significant contribution they make today in our communities.

I can say for the record, Mr. Speaker, I have two legions in my area, my constituency of St. Boniface, the Norwood Legion as well as the Belgian Veterans Legion out of the Belgian Club on Provencher Boulevard, and both of those organizations provide tremendous services to their members. They're very dedicated. They have a new generation of people participating in those legions. We have many events that we do together, including an event this weekend that I will be attending, and over the years I have come to know many of the members of the legions and have found them to be excellent members of the community who make a terrific contribution, and our commitment to having the highest VLT commission structure in the country is a tangible recognition of the contribution they make, not only in my constituency, but all across this province, and we will continue to support them as the best in the country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this VLT Revenue Sharing with Legions resolution.

Firstly, I think I would respond just a little bit to the Minister of Finance's comments. He said: We're well aware that there was a recent increase in the percentage of revenue that goes to the legions. And he mentioned that the projection was \$800,000 a year.

At the present time the legions donate more than \$8.7 million to local charities and close to 300,000 hours annually to charitable agencies and, when you take a look at the overall, there's about a million hours a year of volunteer work done in communities by the legions. That's a phenomenal number.

One of the reasons that VLT revenues should be a little bit higher to legions is the very fact that we used to have in the legions other very good revenue-raising things such as bingos. Since the VLTs came into being, there's a limited number, there's a finite number on how much money people can gamble and it all goes into the VLTs now. The bingos are a thing of the past in the small communities in most cases. In my own community of Neepawa we had three bingos, and I worked at all of them over the years, that raised money for various organizations in the town. One supported the curling club, one supported the rec centre. The third one that I worked at the most was the Elks, and the Elks, all three of those bingos are gone now. The Elks was the last one to go

but they just became unable to survive in competition with the VLTs.

So basically, what's happened, money that was raised locally in these communities by volunteers running bingos and other fundraising things, events, that money has gone into the VLTs and gone into the government coffers. There's quite an amount goes into the government coffers and then they almost grudgingly give a small amount of it back to the communities. In many of my small communities, my constituencies, the legion is the only show in town. Many of them have—the community hall is the legion hall and it's the only hall of the small communities. The legions are the only place, the legions and the coffee shops, I guess, are about the only places where you can sit and meet and talk to some of your friends and neighbours. Many of the small communities, the legions are really suffering trying to make ends meet, and the communities I'm thinking of are places like Langruth and Kelwood and McCreary. They're places where there aren't a lot of gathering places. In my community, over the years, the legion continues to support such things as minor ball and hockey and soccer. They buy uniforms; they pay for fencing; they pay for anything that's needed in those sports. They're probably the biggest supporter of minor sport in our community.

Besides that, they provide tremendous amount of support for our veterans. I know, most of the veterans from the Second World War—I think, if you fought in the Second World War, you would be at least 80 years old now and maybe somewhat older—but that support is there. What's happening now in the world, we have troops in war zones all over the place and the legions have a role to play to support those veterans when they return home. We will have many more veterans as time goes on, I'm sure.

My own involvement with the legion, I had heard the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) speak about his family's involvement in the Second World War. Mine was a very involved family, too. My mother had three brothers in the war and one brother-in-law and four cousins that all were fortunate enough to come back. My father had one brother and two sisters that were in uniform in the Second World War. So I can add up a total of roughly 10 immediate family members that were involved in the war.

* (11:20)

The legions do operate on a local level and definitely in the position that understands the needs of the communities. They know how to put in those

volunteer hours, Meals on Wheels, all the issues that surround the things that they do. In my own town, the legion does have a hall. They have a Ladies Auxiliary that caters to smaller weddings. There's a dedicated group of volunteers at the legion that rise to almost any situation that arises in the community, and certainly provide for our community.

As I said, in the smaller communities, the legion may be the only game in town, and they're struggling. We do need the increase in VLT revenues and a further increase in VLT revenues to these communities. I would urge the House to support this resolution and reassess the VLT revenue-sharing models in the legions. Thank you.

House Business

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business. In accordance with rule 31(9), I'd like to announce that the private member's resolution that will be considered on Thursday, June—on the next Thursday is the resolution on Privacy Commissioners sponsored by the honourable Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu).

Mr. Speaker: It's been announced that the private member's resolution that will be considered on Thursday, June 5, is the resolution on Privacy Commissioners sponsored by the honourable Member for Morris.

Mr. Hawranik: On a point of clarification, Mr. Speaker, I didn't announce June 5; I just indicated the next Thursday sitting.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, I'm sorry about that.

It's been announced that the private member's resolution that will be considered on the next Thursday sitting will be the resolution on Privacy Commissioners sponsored by the honourable Member for Morris.

That's for the information of the House.

Mr. Speaker: We will go back to resume debate.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): It's certainly an honour to have an opportunity to say a few words, put a few words on the record. I certainly cannot support this resolution, but I want to add some comments with regard to the legion and members of the legion.

From a personal perspective, I just want to add that my father—who was in the military and in the

army and fought in Europe during the Second World War, became part of the military police after the Second World War, came back to Canada, and became active in the legion in Dauphin, Manitoba—has always instilled in his children and his family how important it was to have some contribution with regard to democracy and fighting in the Second World War against the Germans and Nazi Germany led by Adolph Hitler.

Having said that, what was instilled in us was the respect for legion and members of the legion. Many members of the legion did not fight overseas or fight in wars but were allowed to become members of the legion later on in their history. As was pointed out by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), the VLT commission rates to veterans organizations in Manitoba are now the highest and most generous in Canada. That was changed from 20 to 25 percent. This is something we're very, very proud of.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I have to tell you that I've heard some comments made by members opposite with regard to veterans plates and also talking about memorial highways, and so on. I want to say that it's our government and it's the Member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski) and also the Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) who worked with veterans associations, St. James Legion, I believe, and I'm trying to think of the others that were involved in many discussions. They were involved in many, many discussions and consultations with them to see and to find out from them whether this plate should be all encompassing to peacekeepers, police that were in foreign countries, returning and being allowed to use these plates.

As a government, we're very proud. As Minister of Transportation, I was very proud to be able to make those changes with the acceptance of MPI and now you often see the plates as you're driving throughout Manitoba with a poppy in the middle of the plates and veteran on the plates. It's a very proud time, quite frankly, to be able have done that.

I want to emphasize again, the MLA for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski) with her connections to many, many currently in the military and past, has been a great ambassador for us, I believe all of us, all of us in this Chamber, with her connections. Also the MLA for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) who also works

very, very closely with people in the 17th Wing and others on the west side of the city.

Again, what we tried to do in recognition of many of these veterans was just a small token of our appreciation by bringing in veterans licence plates. Veterans Memorial Highway that runs from the Perimeter to Gimli—past Gimli, actually—is again another small example of what we're trying to do to try to recognize our veterans and for the commitment and also the sacrifice that they made, leaving families behind. Having to see what they have seen in the different theatres of war is something that no person—I know I can only imagine. My own father did not talk about the war at all, but, you know, going in, someone who is 17 years of age and having spent five years of your life in the military and seeing what they have seen and losing friends and colleagues was terribly tragic to be able to do that so young in their life. But they made a commitment. They went over there and they did a job that they had to do and the respect for them, no matter what people or how people feel about wars one way or another, you have to take your hat off and show respect to those that put their life on the line, quite frankly, for our country.

We have always tried to show this respect to veterans associations. When I mentioned small tokens of our appreciation by designating memorial highways, by looking at changing the licence plates to veterans plates, was a small token, but raising revenues or commissions to veterans organizations by 20 percent to 25 percent is not a small matter. That is substantial. That amount, that increase will result in an additional \$700,000 for member organizations annually. We recognize the unique and important contribution veteran organizations have made in the past as well the contributions they'll make to our communities now.

Many veterans, as was pointed out by the MLA for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese), talking about the age of many of those veterans, and I believe he's correct when he stated that many of those who fought in the Second World War, even the youngest ones, would be in their eighties now. My father, who's deceased now, would be approximately 84 years of age now, and he was about 17 when he went in, so the MLA for Ste. Rose is correct. Many of them are older now, are seniors in our community. Yet, there are still many legions that are thriving and booming throughout Manitoba. Why? Because often, legions, whether it's in St. Anne, Manitoba, or McCreary, Manitoba, small communities, often the legion, the

hockey arena, the community club, the schools, are places where people congregate and they're a place where, whether people were veterans or not, still remain active in the legion and they have a lot to offer to our communities.

We do show that respect. We have contributed to these organizations and we will continue to do so in many different ways and, again, I just want to say that the Province of Manitoba reinvests in local communities by sharing 10 percent of the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation's VLT net revenue and invests in communities in different ways, but the commission's increase for the veteran organizations will not only benefit the members of the Royal Canadian Legion and Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans, but also help these organizations to remain strong, vibrant and devoted members of our community. I've had the pleasure to be in Iqaluit in Nunavut and that legion, I believe, if it's not the No.1 legion with regard to membership, and the vibrancy around it, it's pretty close, because that legion is the only game in town and it's a place where many members of the community congregate and gather, and that seems to be a huge draw.

* (11:30)

That particular legion in Iqaluit, as I've been advised, they contribute to legions in Nova Scotia and other provinces to help them if those legions are suffering because of membership loss. They try to help them financially to stay on their feet and be able to remain active.

Again, the province of Manitoba has been very active with regard to these legions, and I just want to re-emphasize that our MLA for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski), the MLA for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) were involved in many discussions with regard to licence plates, memorial highways. So we have MLAs in this Chamber, on all sides. I know people argue about taking credit, but I just want to re-emphasize it's our government that brought in the plates and designated the highway. We're proud of that. We'll continue to work with our legions.

The MLA for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) also worked on a designation with regard to a veterans highway, and I believe the MLA for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) also participated in that as well. I believe we all feel very strongly about veterans and also legions, and we'll be supportive into the future.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Madam Acting Speaker, I, too, would like to rise and speak to the

resolution that's been put forward by the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon).

The VLT Revenue Sharing with Legions speaks to the remarkable contributions made by veterans organizations through charitable and community support projects throughout Manitoba. I think that this resolution speaks to the significant role that legions play in the community well-being throughout Manitoba.

Members on this side of the House are committed to preserving the integrity of veterans organizations and to honour to the service and sacrifice given by our veterans. I'm glad to see that there are so many members that are willing to speak to this resolution and speak personally on the significant role that legions play and the veterans have played and continue to play in the role of leaders in Manitoba.

As the MLA that represents the Shilo community and the military community within Shilo, I am very proud to stand in support of this resolution because I believe that when I attend events at various legions within my communities and constituency, I have the opportunity to see military staff or military personnel attend many legion events and supporting the veterans within the communities. So there is a nice mix of young and old at many of these events, not taking away from the seriousness of the role that the past and present military personnel have played and the challenges and the significant role that they play in the democracy of our province and our country.

The resolution put forward by the Member for Emerson speaks to the need to look at, to review VLT revenues and how those revenues are divided and distributed within the province. The revenues that are provided to the Royal Canadian Legion are given directly back into the communities within the province. Examples of such are community support services and programming venues such as Meals on Wheels, vehicles for the disabled and sporting events for the youth.

I'm just going to touch on the sporting events for the youth because I believe that the legion is critical in the support of athletics within our province and our country. The International Peace Garden hosts a wonderful camp, the Legion Athletic Camp, and my son, Cameron, has had the honour of attending that camp for three years, and my daughter will be attending this year for her first visit. This camp creates not only good sportsmanship within the

young people that attend this camp, but it does provide them with the opportunity to learn leadership skills. They interact with many of the individuals who are volunteers at this camp who, I'm proud to say, are members of the legion, either have served or are spouses of members who have served. So it gives my children an opportunity to meet and get to know people who have had a direct impact on the democracy within our province and our country.

The legion played an integral role in setting up the Legionnaire camp in 1962, and that is now going into its 48th year of existence. I believe, in 2006 there were more than 1,200 athletes who attended this camp over a six-week period. So the success of this camp is evident in its numbers in the activities that they provide for the young people that attend. There's basketball camps, gymnastics, judo, sailing, soccer, track and field, volleyball. So there are many opportunities for the young people to experience and to enhance their skills in different sporting activities.

So I want to congratulate the legion for being so supportive of the sports programs at the Peace Gardens. I know that the legions donate financially to the school children. Anybody that's interested in attending the camp, they will do what they can to provide financial support so that this athletic camp is accessible for all Manitobans, for all young people who want to go to this camp. So they do their part in making sure that the dollars are there for young people that want to attend this camp and enhance their athletic skills.

Madam Acting Speaker, the legion spends almost \$4 million annually on direct support to needy veterans and contributes 560,000-plus hours of volunteer time assisting veterans and ex-service members and their families. So the supports that they provide in the community, as a whole, have to be recognized. With population decreases in a lot of rural communities and northern communities we need to see the volunteer aspect increase or be maintained. The legion provides a humungous amount of hours in support of so many needs within these communities.

The legion also, recognizing housing supports that are needed for seniors, has donated over a million dollars to veterans and seniors housing projects annually, Madam Acting Speaker. I think that is a significant contribution to helping and providing supports in communities where it's needed.

The legion has never faltered in its efforts to improve the lot of veterans and ex-service members. Many of the benefits they enjoy today are largely due to the persistence of dedicated legion members at all levels of the organization. These benefits include veterans independence programs; spousal benefits; the creation of a pension review board; and many other appropriate and significant programs and supports.

I had the opportunity to speak to Chris Martin, / the secretary at the Rapid City Legion, yesterday regarding this resolution. They had a meeting last night and they strongly supported the motion to increase VLT revenues to the legions. Their reasons were clear: the Royal Canadian Legions have been in existence since the 1920s and have assisted veterans community events and kids in a variety of ways. Unfortunately in this day and age, with every organization having trouble keeping going, it's more important than ever for the government to help wherever possible. Those were the sentiments of my legion from the Rapid City branch, Madam Acting Speaker.

There are over 150 Royal Canadian Legion branches in Manitoba-Northwest Ontario division who represent various community needs. In meeting with and discussing, you know, the contributions being made, talking to Al Collinson, who's a constituent of mine out of the Souris branch, but is also very active with the Manitoba-Northwest Ontario Command, he has indicated that from 2000 to 2004, inclusive, they donated over \$2,217,665 in donations towards community initiatives.

*(11:40)

To me, that speaks volumes to the support that veterans organizations have given, and I believe that they should be given special consideration for their efforts and that they've provided for communities within their division.

In closing, I believe that we should be looking at significant policy review and how these dollars are being allocated. I believe that the commitment should be there for potential options in providing the supports and the continued work and supporting the continued work of the legions in our province and in our country.

I support this resolution. I give credit to the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) for his efforts, and I look forward to following up on this issue and continuing to support my allegiance within my communities.

Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Madam Acting Speaker, I'm always happy to have the opportunity to talk about our veterans, so I do appreciate this resolution reinforcing how much we do value their unique and important contributions in our communities.

I just want to talk a little bit about—as a daughter and granddaughter of veterans, I have always been qualified, if you will, to belong to any legion; I have taken advantage of that over the years in Ontario, in Brandon and here in Winnipeg. As a matter of fact, I belong to Legion Branch No. 4 in St. James, which is the largest one in Winnipeg. I also belong to the Army, Navy, Air Force Branch No. 283 in Assiniboia on top of that.

I have always been well aware of the work of the veterans and, as a clinical social worker working in hospitals over the years, the presence of the vets visiting has always been obvious to me. They also visit them in their homes, when they come into hospital, when they go back home. I spent the last 12 years at Deer Lodge Centre which everyone knows is the home of many, many vets; the presence of the visitors program was even more pronounced.

I'm also well aware of other areas that they contribute to tremendously, particularly in education. They've worked very, very hard over the years to keep alive the memories and the deeds of those who have passed, those who have come back, and the work they do in the schools, bringing Remembrance Day programs into the schools and, as was just earlier stated, the work they do with the youth in sports programs.

Branch No. 4, being the largest in St. James, in the city as a matter of fact, is a very progressive legion. The thing that I appreciate the most about it is that the president is a woman, Betty Zarney, who took over when her husband suddenly died and has done just a bang-up job for the last several years.

This branch has been a venue for three major announcements. The first one I'd like to expand on a little bit, as did my colleague, the Minister for Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux), and

that was the licence plates. I would like to reiterate that, yes, the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) did put forth a bill on the licence plates but, contrary to popular belief, the Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) and I and the Minister for Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) had been, as he said, working for over a year consulting with the legions and a variety of organizations including Army, Navy, Air Force, and we collaborated for some time. We spent a lot of time on discussing eligibility and the problem with the Member for Lakeside's bill, the biggest problem was the exclusivity of it.

It was based on the model in B.C. where only the members who had been in the World War I, World War II and the Korean War were included. We spent a good deal of time making sure that those who qualified included members from armed forces, RCMP officers who have been involved in peacekeeping efforts in more recent conflicts—oh, Canadian armed forces; allied forces; merchant navy or ferry command; peacetime, as members of the Canadian Forces for at least three years; NATO or peacekeeping missions as members of the Canadian Armed Forces or a United Nations peacekeeping force, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

I think, as you can see, this is a far more inclusive and comprehensive bill. I do appreciate, however, that the Member for Lakeside does support our veterans, and it was good to know that he would ultimately support our bill.

There was also, speaking of the venue that Branch No. 4 provided, the Sergeant Tommy Prince chapter was also introduced. It was initiated by Norman Van Tassel. I just wanted to mention that because he is a Korean War veteran who was here in the Chamber and recognized, and died shortly after. I quite appreciate what he has done, for that further makes our Branch No. 4 unique in having the Sergeant Tommy Prince chapter, as well as he did considerable work with the Korean War. My father was a Korean War veteran so that's been a special thing for me.

Oh, and I must say, back to the licences just for a minute, George Apps is the member of ANAVETS No. 283 who brought the idea of the licence plate to the table and, thanks to the Member for Assiniboia, he was able to bring that, ultimately, to the table with all the other partners. So thanks to George and to the Member for Assiniboia.

Now, Madam Acting Speaker, the VLTs, that was a special day for me because I actually got to make the announcement. Along with the Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau), and the honourable Minister of Transportation at the time, honourable Lemieux—[*interjection*]-No, honourable Minister of Transportation.

I guess it doesn't hurt to repeat what the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) said, too. In 2002, the government of Manitoba, in partnership with the Royal Canadian Legion and the Army, Navy, Air Force Veterans organizations, created a separate pool of over 400 VLTs, 404 to be precise, to be administered by the veterans organizations. This ensures that they will never be negatively impacted by future initiatives within the overall VLT program.

* (11:50)

This is one of the only agreements of its kind in Canada, by the way. The Province has also, in 2004, replaced the VLT machines, which increased their revenue considerably, and introduced the Sundays open for VLTs.

I understand I'm out of time so I'm just going to say, in conclusion, I really appreciate that the commission increase for veterans organizations will not only benefit the members of the Royal Canadian Legion, navy, and air force veterans, but also help their organizations to remain strong, vibrant, and devoted members of our communities. I'd like to point out as well that as a percentage, 20 percent gone to 25 percent will also increase with revenue increases by the Province, and the Province of Manitoba reinvests in local communities by sharing 10 percent of Manitoba Lotteries Corporation VLT net revenue as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Acting Speaker, I, too, wanted to put some words of support for the resolution that's before us this morning. I think that the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) has raised an excellent issue, and I'd like to just kind of add some comments to it.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I think that one of the things that we underestimate is the amount of contributions our Legionnaires still make to our society today. We can see a clear example of that when we look at the number of hours of community-type services in a

volunteer fashion that are provided every year. The Member for Emerson makes reference to some specific hours. What we're really talking about is hundreds of thousands of hours that are put in every year in a volunteer fashion. We need to recognize the value of volunteered hours, Mr. Speaker, because, you know, you're not paying someone to do something. The reason why they're doing it is because they genuinely care, and they want to be able to have a positive or make a positive difference. No one could question the value and the effort of the volunteer time that is put into our communities and how that has enriched our society as a direct result.

Mr. Speaker, I've had opportunity to meet with hundreds of vets. In the '80s, I was a member of the Canadian Forces, and in my training, one of the responsibilities that we had was to participate in Remembrance Day and parades. I can recall in the province of Ontario, in particular, marching with some of our Legionnaires, and it was with great pride that we marched side by side. At the end of the march and particularly this one in, I believe it was actually in Cornwall, Ontario, if my memory serves me correct, we broke at the end of it, the ceremonies, and then we went into the legions. Now, I was not much of a drinker back then—[*interjection*]-No, it hasn't changed; now I don't drink at all. But many of my constituents would probably say it's a good thing because I already talk too much.

Having said that, I did do a great deal of listening because what I found was that the Legionnaires, the people that have served for us so well, have so many stories that they could share. I can remember in particular one story where the individual was talking about some of the starvation camps that were in Asia and where I was shown pictures for the first time of what looked like almost a skeleton, bones with skin covering it, Mr. Speaker, the type of situations that our soldiers found themselves in, completely unbelievable. To hear it firsthand had a serious impact on me personally and that's why, whenever I'm afforded the opportunity to be able to talk about our legions and the role that they play, I like to take advantage of it because there are times—and I'm sure each and every one of us could share experiences that we've had with former soldiers from our past and even soldiers of the present as they go into war zones and they continue to talk about some of the experiences that they've had to endure, all in the name of fighting for what we believe and western society of freedom, of our liberties to be able to be where we are.

The other day, in fact, I reflected on a moment that I thought was very touching inside the Legislature, when we had Legionnaires, actually, and their spouses right behind us, Mr. Speaker; you'll recall the day. I thought it was so appropriate that here we are, able to speak inside this Chamber because of the individuals that were sitting behind us in part and their fallen comrades, and those that have passed away since. Because of their efforts, we're able to be here today.

When I look at the resolution, what I see is an effort by the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) to raise a very important issue. That is the issue of what it is that our legions are doing today and how we, as legislators, can enable them to even do that much more and, at the same time, recognize the valuable contributions that they make today.

We have legions all over the province of Manitoba; they contribute in many different ways. I've been to ceremonies that have been sponsored by them. We hear of working with our young people from the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat). The Member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski) talks about the types of volunteer work that they do. It is immeasurable the amount of contributions that these legions have contributed towards the betterment of our society here in the province.

I believe that there is so much more that they will continue to do. This particular resolution allows for us to enable them to do that much more; therefore, the Manitoba Liberal Party supports the resolution and would ultimately like to see it pass. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): It's my pleasure to rise to add my comments to the resolution that was brought forward here this morning, dealing with VLT revenue sharing with the legions. There are a number of comments that I'd like to make in the few moments that I have remaining in this morning's sitting.

I want to say how proud I am of the activities that my own legion, Transcona, Royal Canadian Legion, Branch No. 9, Mr. Speaker. I've had the good fortune to be a member of that legion for a

number of years now, and I've had a chance to witness firsthand some of the activities that the legion is involved in, as they continue to provide services for veterans. Of course, they also have included the community and me in the various activities that they have ongoing. At the beginning of June, we'll be able to participate in the Decorations Day services that we have been able to participate in for a number of years; our veterans organization also has a Remembrance Day services that we also participate in.

That's not the only parts that the legions participate. They have dedication and memorial services on behalf of members who have passed away and they also go into the schools of the communities and talk to the young folks, the young people in our communities, about what it means to be in service to your country as a part of our Canadian military family.

* (12:00)

I know I have members of my own family that have and continue to be a part of that military service. We're quite proud of those folks that play that role in our communities and our province.

Our members, our colleagues here in the House have mentioned some of the activities that veterans have participated in. With our government, in dedicating different services, whether it be the veteran's plates that we have brought forward on behalf of veterans who have served our province and our country honourably and with distinction, and, of course, we also have our Veterans Memorial Highway, Highway 8 leading up to Gimli, Manitoba, and the services that we have provided for our veterans. I know veterans in my community make use of the veterans support services through the Government of Canada as well.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have eight minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 22, 2008

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