

Fifth 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. LXIII No. 17A - 10 a.m., Thursday, December 9, 2010

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 9, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): In accordance with rule 31(9), I'd like to announce that the private member's resolution that will be considered on the next sitting Thursday is a resolution on Taxpayer Fairness for Manitobans, sponsored by the honourable member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson).

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with rule 31(9), it's been announced that the private member's resolution that will be considered on the next sitting Thursday is a resolution on taxpayers—Taxpayer Fairness for Manitobans, which will be sponsored by the honourable member for Tuxedo.

Mr. Hawranik: And I would seek leave to move directly to second reading on Bill 209.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement to go directly to—on second reading—to Bill 209? *[Agreed]*

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 209—The Capital Projects Transparency Act

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I move, seconded by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik), that Bill 209, The Capital Projects Transparency Act; Loi sur la transparence en matière de projets d'immobilisations, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Stefanson: And it's indeed an honour to have brought forward this bill in this Legislature today. I

believe that this is a bill that requires this government to show more transparency and accountability with their actions with Manitoba taxpayer dollars, and I believe it's a very important bill for any government in this Legislature to follow through on.

Unfortunately, we've seen way too many times with this NDP government that they are fast and loose with Manitoba taxpayer dollars, and this will require them to be more transparent with taxpayers of Manitoba as to what exactly they are doing with taxpayer dollars when it comes to capital projects in Manitoba.

So, Mr. Speaker, this legislation, I believe, is a step towards ensuring governments—more government transparency. The actions of the government, especially when taxpayer dollars are involved, have an effect on all of us, and Manitobans should have the right to know how their money is being used.

The bill would require the government to disclose information about its projects, including the amount and timing of financial commitments, construction timelines and whether the government is responsible for any cost overruns on the project.

Only major projects are covered in this, Mr. Speaker, meaning that not every repaved road has to be disclosed individually. Only large-scale project details would have to be disclosed.

We know that the government enters into agreements all the time in order to fix roads and various infrastructure projects in the province of Manitoba, and they tender out those contracts and they move forward on those contracts and they're really the single payer for those contracts.

We believe that the tendering process is the right process for this, but on major capital projects in this province, we believe that the government is not as transparent as it could be with respect to taxpayer dollars.

And, Mr. Speaker, we believe that transparency is crucial to achieving good government practices in the province of Manitoba. Other provinces do this, and we believe that—are much more transparent than

we are in Manitoba, and it's time that we catch up with other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) himself said on the record—he's on the record as saying, and I quote: Transparency in government is a significant factor in building and maintaining public confidence in the work we do together. And so I believe that the Premier with his words should, in fact, be very supportive of this piece of legislation, and I believe members opposite should really have no problem supporting this legislation because it is transparent—it is about transparency and being more transparent to the public. And if they have nothing to hide, then really it is a piece of legislation that they should have no problem supporting.

So supporting this will—this bill would, in fact, back up what the Premier has already stated on the record, Mr. Speaker.

No major capital project should be kept from the public and when such a large amount of taxpayer money is involved, it's incumbent upon the governing party to ensure that all of the details are made public so that the public is aware of what is going on with their taxpayer dollars.

Government investments, Mr. Speaker, affect taxpayers in a real and direct way not just because of the projects itself, but also because of the financial implications, and an open and transparent government should be fully accountable to its citizens within the province of Manitoba.

Infrastructure projects are already being tendered publicly through the MERX website. The same rules of transparency should apply to all public projects, Mr. Speaker.

And really, how this and why this has come about—this bill, now—is with the government's handling or mishandling of the stadium deal, the Winnipeg stadium deal, Mr. Speaker. The stadium deal is a good example for why this legislation is necessary in our province. The stadium announcement was made days after the Budget 2010 was delivered. Yet the budget made no mention of the stadium deal whatsoever. The stadium deal also did not sufficiently clarify the responsibilities regarding cost overruns. And the bill would address this, too, and would require the government to disclose what the involvement is of the provincial government, and thus the taxpayers of Manitoba, in those cost overruns and what they are on the hook for, moving forward.

*(10:10)

Following the original announcement, the terms of the stadium deal were altered a number of times, leading to changes in contract partners, removal of private partners, more government funding and significant cost overruns. We're now looking at—I know it was reported in the paper—of upwards of \$190 million this morning, perhaps even more than that, Mr. Speaker, instead of the \$115 million that was originally announced, and I think it's incumbent upon a government to ensure that the taxpayers know exactly what they are on the hook for when it comes to a major capital project such as the Winnipeg stadium deal.

A more open approach to the stadium deal would likely have led to more due diligence from the government which, in turn, would have led to a more realistic and accurate project plan agreement. And, in short, more transparency would have forced the government into better management of the stadium issue at the expense of the taxpayer.

And I think that's really important. I think what we saw throughout this whole stadium deal from when it was announced some—more than eight months ago, I believe, that we saw a deal of \$115 million and then all of a sudden we didn't know what the deal was, things were changing, things were not brought forward so that the public knew exactly what was going on.

I mean, I know that within our school, for example, if there are changes within a school that we get emails every day about what's going on and the changes that take place because it affects us, where we send our children to school, and it's just a small example of how I think that, you know, we need to keep parents up to speed with what's going on within our schools and changes that take place within the schools.

And so that's something that we expect of our schools, and why should we not expect that of our government as well, and why can a government—especially when the hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars are being put towards these major capital projects within our province? And I think it's incumbent upon this government to ensure that they make sure that Manitoba taxpayers know exactly what's going on.

So, Mr. Speaker, just in conclusion, we need to be more transparent and accountable to taxpayers in our province in how we spend their money or how

this NDP government spends their money, and this bill is a good step, I believe, towards transparency and openness, and we must also avoid making mistakes on public projects as illustrated by the difficulties and uncertainty surrounding the stadium deal.

And I hope that members opposite can see the merits of transparency and openness when spending the money of Manitoba citizens given, especially given that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) is on the record as supporting more transparency within government, that I believe that this goes towards his own goal of the NDP government becoming more transparent. And so if he really wants to put his money where his mouth is, then I believe members opposite would have no problem, Mr. Speaker, supporting this bill today, so I encourage all of them to stand up for taxpayers in this province, to stand up for transparency and accountability within our provincial government system and to stand up for our taxpayers and ensure that we do the right thing today and for the taxpayers of Manitoba.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on the bill, The Capital Projects Transparency Act.

And I want to say to the member that this government has come a long way when it comes to transparency. I would ask her—I wonder whether she might remember the building of the Charleswood Bridge, which was a three-partnership, a private partnership, and, Mr. Speaker, details of that still aren't fully disclosed of how that partnership worked.

I would remind the member of the sale of the MTS system that was questioned in this House and debate was shut down when people tried to get more details. And many people made a profit, and that wasn't a capital project, but it was a Crown corporation, Mr. Speaker, that was very, very important to the economy of this province, and the members just gave it away.

The member opposite talks about the stadium and the fact that the deal is changing. Well, the member opposite knows that—and she's heard in the House—that the—yes, the deal has changed. We're in tough economic times for some people, but I know the members opposite don't support the stadium, just as they didn't support the downtown—the MTS Centre. They spoke out against that, Mr. Speaker, but

then they're using it and now they're celebrating it that we have an MTS Centre.

And the stadium is a very valuable investment, and as the Premier has said many times, they are still working on details. The member opposite talks about doing due diligence. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's why it's taking time to get the proper deal in place and to make the announcement on the deal, because we are and the government is doing due diligence with the partners.

There's no doubt there is need for a new stadium, Mr. Speaker, but there is also need for a tremendous—and there has been need for investment in this province through this economic downturn. And although the members opposite refuse to support those in our budgets and refuse to support our five-year plan that put tremendous amount of money into stimulus and infrastructure throughout the province—and I heard the member opposite say she supports the tendering process. Well, the tendering process was used in those projects. The tendering process will be used in other projects.

But we have come—we—since we've taken office, we have made tremendous changes in the transparency of how government operates. She quotes the Premier and indeed the Premier has said that, and his actions and our actions as a government show that this is what we are doing, Mr. Speaker. If you look at the records, our government is very confident of our public reporting as it relates to our record level of capital investment, and indeed there has been record levels of investment and infrastructure spending.

But all the member has to do is look at the documents that are tabled. Every budget includes information on planning—on planned capital spending in the financial management strategy, and in this year's budget, in 2010, that was on page 16. As required by The Financial Administration Act, section 45(3), the public accounts include a statement of expenditure related to capital and future contract commitments by the department and the type of expenditure.

The quarterly financial report, which the member asked for and which will be released very shortly, provides updated forecasts for total capital spending for the year, with details on core government capital forecasts provided by category, including government services capital projects, transportation equipment and aircraft, information technology projects, other equipment and buildings,

public roads, highways and airports infrastructure, Manitoba floodway expansion, water control infrastructure, parks, cottages, and camping projects. The first quarter reported that in 2010 that planned expenditures for infrastructure and capital assets renewal in 2010-11 were budgeted at \$1.789 million, and this would be supported by federal dollars of \$151 million.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite want to imply that what they're looking for in this bill is more transparency, more accountability, but, indeed, if you look at the records, that is there. What the members opposite don't want is they don't want to admit that the investments that we are making—along with the federal government investments—and that \$1.7 billion is making a significant difference in this province. In every part of the province, the member—you can see where there is work going on that is revitalizing communities, improving transportation, creating opportunity for economic development, but the members opposite don't want to support that.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we've heard—we know that they won't support it, because we know that their amendment to the budget was to reduce the budget by one—by \$500 million. And I wonder which of these capital projects the member opposite would have cancelled, which of this job stimulus would she have taken out. Would she have wanted to end the—she just talked about schools. Would she have wanted to end the investment in schools in—that are in Steinbach and La Broquerie? Would she have wanted to end the investment in the cardiac centre in St. Boniface? And for many of us, we've had people who have had to use those kinds of facilities.

*(10:20)

Mr. Speaker, we have improved the transparency and the accountability over the time we have been in office. We have had more standing committee meetings. We've had more public account meetings, where the members opposite have the ability to get any information that they want about these projects.

We saw a bill the other day, where the members opposite want to stifle the construction of Hydro in this province but, you know, they don't want to build bipole, they don't want to build dams, they don't want to generate revenue for this province, Mr. Speaker. They don't want to include Aboriginal people in that kind of economic development, in that partnership. They don't want to see the east side of

the province become a World Heritage Site that will be—attract many, many people and create huge tourism economic development in this province.

The members opposite want to put forward bills that will say that they are interested, but they want more information and, indeed, all of the information that they need or want is available to them. The members opposite sound as though they want to start negotiating in the public. I can—can you imagine? This is really good business; you're negotiating on how you're going to build a stadium, but the member opposite wants it negotiated in the public.

Well, Mr. Speaker, those negotiations are taking place and there will be an agreement shortly and there will be a contract to build the stadium and all of the details will be available, but for the members opposite request to have details available before the deal is finalized makes no sense—makes no sense at all.

But, you know, I mean, that's kind of the reckless attitude of the members opposite: negotiate in the public on this particular deal; shut down the development of hydro. The mothball party wants to come back and put all of that on the roll of the dice. Put all of that—*[interjection]* Mr. Speaker, do you know that members opposite, they could talk all they want about hydro, they've never built anything in hydro. In their time in office, they didn't build a hydro line, though it was needed. They didn't build a dam, even though there was future markets there. The members opposite would just mothball everything, and now they want to take out \$500 million out of the budget. They want to take it all out and shut everything down and, you know, if you shut all of that down, that means you're laying people off or else you're raising taxes because you aren't generating revenue.

So, Mr. Speaker, this bill that the member opposite is proposing is not necessary. There is no—all of this transparency is covered off; all of the information is available. The—and if the—if you think you're going to negotiate deals in public, that isn't going to happen. Those kinds of things won't happen.

But, Mr. Speaker, I do want to—I think I said a wrong number on the budget and I—it was—I said that the—our capital investment renewal in 2009-10 is budgeted to be—and it is \$1.7 billion and I think I may earlier have said a million. It's much more significant than that.

But, Mr. Speaker, again, I say to the member: the information that she is looking for—

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

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, to—speaking to Bill 209, The Capital Projects Transparency Act and, as we could tell from the previous speaker, I maybe shouldn't go on too long because I know they're eager to speak, now that the government members have finally learned to rise out of their seats and speak to bills, so we don't want to get in the way of this when they coming on. See, they're all ready. They just want to go so badly, so I'll keep my comments short just to allow them time to do this.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to speak to Bill 209 and—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

An Honourable Member: They should have woke up earlier in the session.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm glad the government members are awake for this last day of session, so it's—so the actions of the government, especially when taxpayers have—our taxpayer dollars are involved, they have an effect on all of us, and something that the government seems to have forgotten is it's not their money that they're dealing with; it's taxpayers' money, and we have a responsibility to be responsible with that money. And always remember whose money it is that you're really spending when you're in government. So transparency is, and accountability is, very important.

This bill would require the government to disclose information about its projects, including the amount and timing of the financial commitments, construction timelines and whether the government is responsible for any cost overruns of the project. Once the project has been announced, then you would publicize these details. We're not asking to be involved in—this bill does not ask to be involved in the negotiations. It's simply let's make it transparent once the deal has been made.

And just looking at the Winnipeg stadium deal, the chronological order of this thing is really suspect in this whole performance of this government,

continues to show their failure in being able to pull anything together. The stadium announcement was made days after the budget of 2010 was delivered. No mention in the budget about this deal, and suddenly we have a major capital project here. They've started the project, there's a hole in the ground and yet no one seems to know what the cost is, who's paying for it, who's involved. It's only a government that—like, the NDP government that would start a project without really knowing what the whole project's going to cost. Many of us have been involved in projects in our own businesses and that, and you would never—you would never—start a project without knowing what it's going to cost and how it's going to be financed and what the terms of the financing would be.

The stadium deal did not sufficiently clarify the responsibilities regarding cost overruns. There was a lot of speculation, and that's all there could be was speculation, because there was never any transparency in this. Course we, again, are guessing that the terms of the deal have been changed. They've been altered a number of times. Do we know whether there's—there are private partners involved now or not, and who is funding it, who's going to be responsible for the cost overruns? The project started out at \$115 million. The projected costs now are approaching \$200 million. Whatever the cost is, will we know when the final deal is—who is responsible for any cost overruns?

All we have to do is look at Bipole III. They started out—let's see; let's see—they started out at \$330 million, went to 2.2. Now it's at, we understand, \$4.1 billion. You know—but we would've had an updated—when Manitoba Hydro put out their updated capital projects cost in the end of November, they didn't—they're still using 2007 numbers. How is it that you can still use 2007 numbers in 2010? Have costs—maybe costs have gone down. You should've put the costs out; maybe they've gone down. But no, no, we're still using 2007 costs. So given their record on Bipole III thus far, we can only hope that they will at least do somewhat better on the stadium announcement, which we understand is supposed to be done very soon.

We would—this bill would address the issues that has come very apparent from the stadium deal through the Bipole III project, that no one really knows, other than government members, what the real costs are and who the real partners are and where the money is coming from, the terms. And as much as they like to talk about transparency, as

much as they like to go back in history and talk about previous governments not being transparent, here they are not being transparent today.

So how can they—why would they not support this bill in terms of being—becoming more accountable and being more transparent? If they're—they're quite willing to go back in history and criticize other governments and previous governments, and yet you don't want to correct what you're calling were faults in the past.

* (10:30)

And, so, Mr. Speaker, this bill really does address a shortfall in government contracting, in government involvement in capital projects, and that's really all it does is there is—from the bill itself, it's got a minimum threshold for the size of contract that has to be disclosed. So what we think it was normal business contracts or ongoing business contracts below the threshold would not have to be brought forward in this—or be covered under this bill. It's for the major capital projects. And always remember—always remember—whose money it is that you're spending. They have forgotten about who—where the money comes from. They've taken the assumption that that money will always come.

And I know, Mr. Speaker, last night I was talking to several constituents, again, and the stadium comes up, obviously; bipole always come up when I talk to my constituents. Really, all they're wanting to know is how much is it going to cost, who's involved, what are the terms, and how will it be paid for, and what is their—as a taxpayer of Manitoba, what are they liable for in this? And that's—this bill will go a long ways towards providing that transparency that constituents every day—and just—perhaps I'm just too new to this game, but I still listen to my constituents, unlike, it seems, the government members have forgotten who their bosses really are, and that's their constituents, the taxpaying public of Manitoba.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly hope that this government will see fit to support this. I know that they're eager to jump up and do their new-found skills at debating, and bring forward and debate this bill.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly hope that they can see the merits of transparency and openness when spending—not their money, it's Manitoban citizens' money. And I hope all members will support this legislation. This is a very good bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, I—if I was to categorize this bill, it's sort of an extended version of a trick question, because it starts within the premise that somehow the members opposite would be concerned about major projects.

But, one question I've always loved asking people is, you know, in the '90s, when they were in government, name me anything they did in the way of major capital projects. In fact, the members opposite, you know, they've given their speeches. It's interesting, because I actually did—I did do—I got a checklist here, and there's quite a bit of blank paper on this bill, so it's—that should prove very useful.

Because, actually, the only major project that I could think of—and you want to talk about a model of why what they're saying has got nothing to do with reality—is the Charleswood Bridge. That by—the Charleswood Bridge was constructed through a public-private partnership. It took an act of the Legislature to legally allow the company to own the bridge—which you cannot do under legislation—after it was built. And to this day, we still don't know what the financial arrangements were. And when you consider that there's been discussion about potential other triple-Ps you wonder why people are concerned about triple-Ps.

That was the one project. Now, I was looking for other ones. I was thinking hydro development—nothing. See highways—I'll get into that in more detail in a couple of minutes—nothing. Health care—nothing. They were good at announcements, by the way. But you know what they did? They froze the capital budget for health care. It's one of the reasons we had people lined up in the hallways, because they weren't building personal care home spaces. Our universities were falling apart. Our universities—you know, the Faculty of Engineering, you know, it took this government to get the job done and get a brand new Faculty of Engineering building.

You know, I could run through the list, but I just want to run through the list of what we've been doing since we've been in government. Let's start with—you know, and this is really the new millennium we're talking about now. It's the 10, 11 years we've been in government, and there's a lot more to come, I can tell you.

Let's talk about the floodway. We have now got to 1-in-700-year flood protection. Is anybody looking at what's happening around the province? Does anybody felt that was the right thing to do? A hundred and thirty million dollars in flood mitigation in the Red River Valley. We now have significant protection all the way up the Red River Valley in terms of community and individual ring dikes. By the way, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) called it—the floodway—he said it was a taxpayer rip-off. I tell you, if we get hit by the big flood—we will get hit at some point in time—but I want people to remember that, you know, this is not the party of Duff Roblin. Duff Roblin understood the need for the floodway. He called it a rip-off. He called it a rip-off.

Now, I want to talk about our colleges and universities. I mentioned about the Faculty of Engineering. Look at what we've done in Brandon with the Assiniboine Community College. Look at the downtown college here, Red River College, and watch out for the UCN campus that's going to be built in Thompson and improved facilities in The Pas.

Health care, you know, I can spend the rest of the morning talking about the improvements to health care in this province. I know in my own area, the improvements to our hospital, to the emergency ward, the personal care home that was built, which is a real pride in our community, the improvements to facilities in communities like Wabowden. But you know what? We—you know, they were good on one thing with health care, making announcements. They recycled them time and time again. You know what? We built them, and I ask the member opposite, especially the member for Brandon, to check out the improvements to the Brandon general hospital that have been brought in place by this government.

Now, I want to talk about a couple of other things because—let's talk about—we'll talk about hydro. Well, you know, since the days of Ed Schreyer name me one hydro dam that the Conservative Party built. It's a trick question. The answer is none. They didn't do anything about bipoles. They didn't do anything about transmission lines. This Conservative Party, basically, from 1969 until this year, didn't do a single thing in terms of hydro. What did we do? What have we done? We constructed Limestone, by the way. Limestone, they said—their option, by the way, as a party was to buy hydro from the United States. I remember that debate. Actually, I didn't mention that yesterday, but

Harry Enns was the critic at the time. That was their model. If we'd had them running hydro policy in this province right now, there'd be no Limestone. We'd be buying power from the United States. Talk about tunnel vision. And what have we done in the last number of years to innovate a partnership with Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation? They—we have now almost finished constructing Wuskwatim, adding 300 megawatts to the power grid.

Now, I want to talk about the MTS Centre. This is my favourite one, by the way. They always had—they always had arena envy. You know, I remember when John Loewen was here, it was, you know, this was a party that, in the 1990s, put taxpayers' money into keeping the Jets in Winnipeg, not into building a stadium. I think one of the reasons the Jets left the city is because there was no stadium. What did our government do? Sat down—and I know the Minister for Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) was a key player. So was our former premier, our current Premier (Mr. Selinger) as Finance Minister. And, you know what? This is typical Tory fashion. They criticized it, they criticized and criticized it, but they were the first ones to be there at the ribbon cutting, sipping on the wine, nibbling on the cheese. You know, in the end, if it wasn't for the NDP government, there would be no MTS Centre, because we understood you can make it work by working with the private sector. That's the way we do it.

But, you know, I've got to talk about highways for a moment, because, you know, I just love members opposite when it comes to highways. In the 1990s, when they were in government, this party that has all these rural members, right? You know how important highways are to rural Manitoba. You know what their sum total of their capital program was in the latter part of the 1990s? Eighty-five million dollars.

Here's the way they operated, by the way. Their idea of a plan, a long-term plan, was what they might do next year. There was no five-year, no ten-year plan. There was no money. There was no amortization. Everything was done based on, you know, straight cash accounting. But what would happen is they would get money from the federal government, and then they would pocket the money and they'd reduce the budget for what they were spending in terms of highways.

Now, I want to tell you what we did. We came into power. First thing we did is we need a long-term plan, and I want to particularly thank those who were

a part of that, the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) and chaired by the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), and they came out with a recommendation, a 10-year, \$4-billion plan.

An Honourable Member: 2020 vision.

Mr. Ashton: You know what? 2020 Transport Vision, we not only adopted it as a policy, we now exceed that, and, in fact, this year alone for the second year running we have over \$360 million on capital alone. That's four times what it was under the Tories. That's what major capital projects are about, Mr. Speaker, and that's why this bill is, quite frankly, laughable when you consider that they wouldn't even dare to talk about a major capital project. As to highways, a major capital project when they were in power was about two or three million dollars. We're now dealing with CentrePort, \$220 million, over two-and-a-half years.

*(10:40)

You know, I get a kick out of members opposite. You know, let's take Highway 1. Which government has now four-laned it to the Saskatchewan border from Brandon? This government. This government. All those Westman MLAs, you know, I—they're always there for the ribbon cuttings, you know, but when it comes to actually—the four lane.

How about Highway 75? In 1999, it was an embarrassment to arrive back home in Manitoba if you were coming up from the States. We're now upgrading it and building it to interstate standards. And we're going to deal with the challenge in Morris with the flooding. It took a significant investment and this NDP government fixed up Highway 75.

How about Highway 59? You know, I remember in the '99 election, they—I think they put up a sign. This was kind of their commitment to the people in that area. I worked as Minister of Highways when we first came into power, and our government did with the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux), and we significantly have extended and upgraded 59, and now not only 59, but 210 in the member's riding.

I won't even get into Highway 6, Highway 10, Highway 16, you get the point. The point is, lip service from members opposite about highway construction; real asphalt, real grading, real expansion of roads under the NDP.

And I want to tell members of this House, when I look at this bill, you know, everything we do now is

way more transparent than it was. We have a—we have not only a plan, we actually put our tenders out the year before. We've worked with the Heavy Construction Association and the industry. We just announced—the Premier did at the AMM—we will be announcing the five-year capital program within the next couple of months. We'll be putting out a list of five years' worth of capital programs.

And, by the way, I look forward to going around the province with my colleagues because, you know what, we're going to send a real message to people in many of the constituencies of members opposite, and that is that you want this to happen, you've got to understand it's only an NDP government that can deal with it. But you know we have that transparency. Everybody knows in this province that this government is a building government, that we've done more in the last 10, 11 years than members opposite did in 25, 30 years.

So, to the members opposite, this bill rings hollow. The real issue here is, you want major capital projects, it's under the NDP.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I would first of all like to thank the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), for first of all presenting the bill, and secondly in her presentation of the bill to this Legislature, dealing with substance, as opposed to huff and puff, substance as opposed to loud rhetoric, which really doesn't resonate any longer with the residents of Manitoba.

I'd like to thank the member from Tuxedo for putting forward a piece of legislation that, really, every member of this House should be supporting, because every member of this House should, in fact, subscribe to honesty, openness and transparency. That's pretty simple—honesty, openness and transparency.

After 11 years, Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no doubt left any more in the minds of Manitobans that this government spends money at the drop of a hat, wastes taxpayers' money at the drop of a hat, hides, in a cloak of secrecy, projects that every taxpayer in the province of Manitoba has a right to know how their money is being spent by this very inefficient government.

There are a number of examples and, first of all, let's talk about the bill itself, and to not support this bill effectively is saying, we don't support telling Manitobans exactly what it is that they're doing as a government on behalf of Manitobans.

In fact it's quite simple, Mr. Speaker, that anything over \$20 million, which is a fairly large capital project, although they spend \$20 million before they have coffee in the morning, but \$20-million capital project, all that the bill is asking is that the total contribution of government to the project should be explained and open to the public. Pretty simple, it's the public's money. So if they're going to have a capital project of over \$20 million, really, the public should know how much of that money is going to be theirs going into a project. The project start and completion date—now, that is a pretty simple request and a pretty honourable request, to say, we will start the project at this point in time; we'll complete the project at this point in time. This is the money that is going to be public money in the project.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The third thing is they project a contribution from the government for each year of the project. Well, some capital projects extend over a period of time, so we would like to know what that capital cost spreadsheet is going to be over a period of time. You can't just simply throw all the capital into one budget year, you should have, obviously, a thought-out proposal, Mr. Acting Speaker, as to how those dollars are going to be expended over that period.

And the last thing is whether the government is responsible for any cost overruns on the project and, if so, specific information respecting the nature and the amount of the responsibility. That's pretty common in business. If the government is going to commit to a capital project, we want to know how much money is going to be government money. We want to know when it's going to start and end. That seems to be pretty common. We want to know, in fact, what kind of budget process it's going to take, over what period of time, and we would like, Mr. Acting Speaker, just simply to say that if there are cost overruns, who is responsible for the cost overruns?

Now, the government side of the House is saying, well, people don't have to know that. Probably the reason why they won't support the bill is because there's a lot of examples that there have been cost overruns with that government.

Let's look at some examples, and I'm going to mention Hydro because the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) mentioned Hydro on a number of occasions. And people are going to say, yes, but Hydro really is a Crown corporation—arm's-length of

government. Well, we know this government doesn't obviously hold Hydro as arm's-length, because they've demanded that they expend an additional \$4.1 billion on a really useless west-side line as opposed to a very responsible east-side line, but we won't go there.

But let's talk about a couple of projects that they did, through Manitoba Hydro, have some cost overruns. Now, any money that Manitoba Hydro borrows is borrowed by the Province of Manitoba and guaranteed by the Province of Manitoba. So it's our money, as ratepayers to the Province. Now, I remember a project that was originally going to be some \$75 million for a downtown Manitoba Hydro headquarters building; \$75 million was the first number; it's gone up substantially. In fact, it's now at \$283 million, and we don't know quite all of the final numbers in there, because they have a tendency of hiding. And this is why the bill is so important, because the government has a tendency of hiding a lot of those expenses in different areas.

So all we're saying is, don't hide those anymore, tell Manitoba taxpayers exactly what the real number is. So, from \$75 million to \$283 million, probably more cost overruns—quite substantial. Had there been a piece of legislation like this, then the government would have to be open, honest and transparent. There's those words again. Darn. Darn. I hate using those words, because they're really foreign to the government, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Cost overruns. Wuskwatim, the one dam that has been constructed by that government opposite, which they keep telling us how great they are with respect to putting in new generation, new power generation for the province. Wuskwatim started at \$800 million. That's a huge capital project. As a matter of fact, almost the same amount as what it's going to cost for the Red River Floodway—a little bit more, actually. So it was a large capital project that was budgeted initially at \$800 million. Now it's coming in at \$1.6 billion. That's a bit of a cost overrun. Just a bit. Now, okay, \$800 million to \$1.6 billion seems to be a bit of a cost overrun there. So it would be really nice to have that information available to taxpayers as to how you could possibly underbudget by half of what the actual—or twice as what the actual capital cost is going to be.

Now, you're going to say that those are anomalies. Well, unfortunately, they haven't been anomalies, because we have another example, and the minister from MIT, in his huff and puff, was

explaining all of the wonderful projects that we have. But I—there is a great project. There is a great project, and I give them full credit for it. It's about time we had twin bridges on 18th Street in the city of Brandon. Absolutely. We've been asking for it for quite awhile, and it's now completed.

* (10:50)

Originally, after four or five announcements and five or six photo ops, which the previous member—the previous minister loved to have photo ops, but not necessarily completion dates and capital budgets—but it started at \$17 million, which is a lot of money; \$17 million is a lot of money. But it ended up at \$28 million—and we don't think that's the real number either because they aren't terribly open, honest and transparent with their total costs—but it's at least \$28 million, from 17 to 28. And I, for the life of me, cannot understand how you could possibly underbudget that much, but it happens continuously with this government because they don't have to be open, honest and transparent.

So, from \$17 million to \$28 million—and by the way, wasn't quite done on time and on budget. In fact, it was about 18 months late from its completion date. Remember what we say in the bill here? We want to know what the capital contribution is. We want to know what the completion states are—start dates and completion dates.

Now, those are some minor examples that should be open and honest and transparent, but then we go to two others. One is Pattern Energy. Okay, here, Mr. Acting Speaker, this bill should open up the deal with Pattern Energy. Pattern Energy was given a contract to provide 138 megawatts of power on a wind farm. And when the RFP went out, there was absolutely no discussion as to whether there would be funding opportunities or lending opportunities from the provincial government. We then found out, after the fact, that Pattern Energy was given a loan of \$260 million.

Now, we have no understanding of the deal whatsoever. That's \$260 million of borrowed money for Manitoba Hydro guaranteed by the Province of Manitoba. We have no idea what kind of security that has been taken by Manitoba Hydro. We have no idea what the protection is for the taxpayers of the province of Manitoba. We have no idea whether the deal itself is going to be able to pay off the loan.

This bill would allow Manitobans the right to be able to know those details. But will the government

support this bill? Of course not. Hide everything they can, Mr. Acting Speaker. Make sure Manitoban taxpayers are kept in the dark, and we don't want to tell them anything as to what's happening with their own money in this province. It's wrong.

The stadium deal has been mentioned an awful lot in this discussion; that in itself should drive this piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): I'm eager to engage, get involved in this debate today, Mr. Acting Speaker, regarding the bill brought forward by our colleague from Tuxedo. And, you know, it calls for some issues related to disclosure of capital projects. Well, you know, the Conservatives don't have to worry about this because they have a shameful record, an absolutely shameful record when it comes to actually doing anything in this province.

You know, these great—they call themselves these great titans of industry, you know, these great captains of commerce, you know, over here in the Conservative caucus, you know. Well, I mean, I was here for a while, I know some of my colleagues have been here for a while, and what is their record? Well, they built a jail, a remand centre, and they built two casinos, which, I might add, both of them were over budget, at least twice the budgeted amount. They were at least twice over that, Mr. Acting Speaker, when they built those two casinos. They built the casino McPhillips Street Station and Regent Avenue.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

That is their record. Their record is building a jail and two casinos, Mr. Speaker, nothing else. They have an absolutely shameful record, and for them to stand up in this House to say otherwise is a mistake.

We have to also remember that they have another record and that is—economic record is that they sold a money-making telephone company and they bought a money-losing gas company. Mr. Speaker, MTS was making hundreds of millions of dollars. They sold it off, and we all know the story behind that. We all know who got rich off that and, you know, we also know that they're eager to get their hands—that their friends are eager to get their hands on the Hydro as well. They bought this money-losing gas company, which continues to lose money—*[interjection]*—and then the taxpayers are paying for that. Exactly. The taxpayers are paying for their economic mistake.

You know, they also are talking about taxpayers' money. Well, these members in the Conservative

caucus have never cut a tax in their lives. They've never cut a tax in their lives, and members that stood up and spoke before me, not one have cut a tax here in their lives, Mr. Speaker. It is our government. It is our government that have cut the taxes.

We've just recently, as members will know, completely eliminated the small-business tax. Here in Manitoba, it is tax freedom day for small business. You know, now they're being cheeky about it, but the reality is they have a terrible record. They have a terrible record when it comes to cutting taxes in this province. No matter what they say—no matter what they tell people out there when they go home, they have a terrible record when it comes to cutting taxes.

Whenever we have cut taxes, which we've done many, many times, they voted against it. Well, I'll talk, you know, we can talk a little bit about that, Mr. Speaker. We'll talk about the fact that we eliminated the small-business tax, which you voted against—the small-business tax, which you voted against. They laugh about that. They laugh about that. We completely eliminated the residential education support levy. We eliminated that tax in 2006. Well, they voted against that. We have increased the Manitoba property tax credit from \$250 to \$650, which, I might add, was \$325 when Filmon was in power. In fact, they lowered that. And what about the farmland school tax? There's a 75 per cent rebate, which they vote against every single time. Do you think they go and they tell their friends in the farm industry, in the agriculture industry, about the taxes that they voted against every single time in this Chamber? I doubt it.

As I said, we've eliminated the small-business tax rate from 8 per cent. When we came into power, it was one of the highest rates. It was one of the highest rates in the nation. It was one of the highest rates in the nation. We eliminated that, Mr. Speaker, just a few days ago, as of December the 1st. We've lowered the small-business income threshold from 400,000 to 200,000, and we've also lowered the corporate income tax rate from 17 to 12 per cent. You know, again, they voted against it. There was a cap—there was a tax, the general capital tax, on manufacturing, which was .5 per cent, and now it's zero. With a payroll tax exemption threshold, we've increased that so there's less companies—there's less employers in Manitoba paying the payroll tax.

Mr. Speaker, we can go on and on. We have reduced taxes in this province by over a billion dollars—by over a billion dollars. We are the tax

cutters. We are the tax cutters in this province. It is this government that is the tax cutters, and the Conservatives, every single time—every single time—they get up and they vote against it, and that is the absolute truth. They know that's the truth. They know whatever they—they go back to their community and they can say otherwise.

The other thing is that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) has made a claim that he's going to balance the budget in one year. He's going to be able to balance the budget in one year. No other jurisdiction in Canada say—claims to be able to do that or is planning to do that. Their own federal government is taking six years. Ontario is taking seven years. We're taking five years, but he can do it in one year. He can do it in one year. Well, how can he do that? Well, we don't know. I mean he'd have to cut—he has to cut half a billion dollars out of his budget. Well, what will—that will mean—that'll probably mean there'll be no new school in Woodlands. The member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) is getting a brand new school in Woodlands. Well, that probably—be the end of that school. I don't think they could—I don't think they'll be able to build that school if they cut a half a billion dollars out of that tax. You know, we—what about that new regional cancer centre in Brandon? Well, that's probably the end of that. And, you know, the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) wants to see Highway 75—work done on that. Well, that's the end of that. That's not going to happen. We've got the member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) talking about personal care homes. Well, that's not going to happen either. That's the end of that.

Every single Conservative in this Chamber stands up day in, day out demanding more money for their community, but how are they going to balance that? How are they going to be able to have endless demands on the provincial Treasury, then cut \$500 million out of the budget the same day? Mr. Speaker, people are beginning to ask these questions. They want to know how they're able to do this.

Mr. Speaker, we're also building new schools in Steinbach, in La Broquerie. We're building a new birthing centre here in south Winnipeg. We're building a new women's hospital here in Winnipeg. In my own community, we're also doing significant investments in our health care. We're doing investments in highways in our area. The member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) talked a great deal about all the great things we're doing in terms of highways for his area.

* (11:00)

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

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

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 4—Child Welfare in Chaos

Mr. Speaker: We'll deal with Resolution No. 4, Child Welfare in Chaos that will be brought forward by the honourable member for Morris.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I move, seconded by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson),

WHEREAS in 2010 Manitoba's acting Children's Advocate said that Manitoba's child welfare system is in chaos, a system rushed into place by the current provincial government; and

WHEREAS children continue to be at risk and are underserved by this provincial government's failure to improve its chaotic child welfare system; and

WHEREAS the provincial government child welfare system is failing children in the worst way possible by not keeping them safe; and

WHEREAS more than five years after Phoenix Sinclair's horrific death, children are still being moved from safe, loving foster homes; and

WHEREAS in October of 2010, Dillon Breana Belanger died while in the care of the provincial government's failing child welfare system after having been removed from a long-term foster home and placed in the care of her mother; and

WHEREAS in June of 2009, 20-month-old Jaylene Sanderson-Redhead was killed by her mother while under the supervision of a Manitoba child welfare agency; and

WHEREAS in September of 2010, a 6-year-old boy who had previously been in foster care, had to go to police and child welfare officials four times begging for help from the abuse he was suffering at the hands of his parents before he was finally removed from their care; and

WHEREAS in 2006, after the tragic death of Gage Guimond, who was also removed from a long-term foster care placement, a review conducted under section 4 of The Child and Family Services

Act led to a report containing 144 recommendations, many of which have not been implemented; and

WHEREAS recommendation 47 of the section 4 review into the death of Gage Guimond requires that any decision to move a child when there are no child protection concerns contain a written reason for this decision including reference to the impact on the child, the appropriateness of the move in accordance with the child's stage of development and the degree of attachment to the caregiver.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the provincial government consider immediately implementing recommendation 47 of the section 4 review into the death of Gage Guimond; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the provincial government consider immediately placing a moratorium on moving children from safe, long-term foster placements until a transparent, system-wide, public review of the child welfare system is carried out.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Morris, seconded by the honourable member for Tuxedo,

WHEREAS in 2010—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mrs. Taillieu: I do feel that this is a very important resolution because it speaks to one basic thing in this province, is the fact that children in care are in compromised situations, Mr. Speaker, because of the actions of this NDP government.

We know that this is a system in chaos. The Children's Advocate has said in her report to the Legislature that this is a system in chaos. In fact, she described the system as—when the Children's Advocate appeared before the committee of the legislator—Legislature and described the child welfare system as a system in chaos, she brought forward many concerns: the increased number of children in care; foster families leaving the system; high turnover of social workers due to burnout and agencies not fulfilling their mandate; lack of information about how to navigate the CFS system; poor communication among agencies and inadequate use of the computerized system, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, what we have is a failure here to protect children in this province. The NDP rushed into a new system of delivering child welfare without

adequately looking at the implementations here. Normally, what you would do is you would bring in a system gradually, assess it, find out what worked, what didn't work, look at what didn't work, fix those things before you just rushed ahead. But instead of doing it in a measured way, they rushed ahead, and what was the consequence? Well, the consequence is over 20 children, since then, have died. And what this government did is they closed the file on 6,000 children in care. They closed the file and because of that, children died.

I thought that with the tragic death of Phoenix Sinclair in 2005, that that was a low point, a low point in how we treated our most vulnerable children in this province. But, Mr. Speaker, that was the beginning—that was the beginning of 20 more children that have died while under the care of this government. And that's unacceptable. The member from River East brought forward a private member's bill, and the private member's bill was to simply allow children to stay in loving foster family situations where there were no protection orders and to—if they needed to be removed, to have a written reason why the children should be removed.

When you have a children—a child that's placed in a very safe and loving home, why would you want to move that children—that child or children to a home that there may be risk? And that's what happened in the case of Gage Guimond. He was in the care of a safe and loving foster family. He was taken from that foster family and placed with a relative who, even herself, had some reservations about accepting the child, accepting the responsibility of caring for the child. And yet this government rushed ahead and did that, and we know the result, Mr. Speaker. That little boy died at just two years of age.

This resolution is about protecting children, Mr. Speaker. And I know that there's many parents on that side of the House. I think they need to look at themselves and say, what if this was my child? Many of them have children, and some of them have young children. And I am going to appeal to them to think about what they would do if their child was taken from them, and if their child was not protected by a failure of the system.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is a failure on the part of this government to keep children safe. I don't know why we wouldn't be trying to get a review on the Phoenix Sinclair death. Why are we not seeing this government call for a public inquiry? We can learn

things from that situation that will protect children from now and into the future. But this government refuses to call an inquiry or call an inquest into that death or call a public inquiry into that death of Phoenix Sinclair. I don't know why, I don't understand why they refuse to find out what went wrong so they can fix it. Why would you not want to do that?

To not support this resolution—and I don't imagine they're going to get up and support it—but to not support this resolution is to not support improving the child welfare system. And it's not supporting keeping children safe. If they don't want to approve this motion and pass this motion, they agree to keep the status quo, which allows children to remain in compromised situations and keeping children unsafe and, in fact, we will go—we are going to see more children die, Mr. Speaker. And that doesn't have to be.

* (11:10)

They need to support this motion, and they need to move forward with what we need to do. One of those things would be to call the public inquiry to find out what went wrong in the Phoenix Sinclair, the horrific death of that little girl. But no, they want to support the status quo, and the status quo, Mr. Speaker, isn't working, because children are dying.

What they want to support is keeping children at risk. They want to support the fact that children are going to die in this province, Mr. Speaker—[interjection] Well, then, the members opposite are indicating that they will support this resolution because if they don't, they support children continuing to die in this province by the enactment of their policies and the things that they will not look at to improve the system.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines, on a point of order?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Deputy Government House Leader): Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, I've been in this Chamber through many occasions of heated debate and rhetoric, but to indicate that people are supporting children dying and to imply that on a member or any members of the Legislature I think is out of order, and if it's not out of order, it is below the level of debate that mature individuals who care about an issue should discuss in this Chamber.

But alleging that members support children dying, which is the comment of the member opposite, is inappropriate for this Chamber, and I ask you to ask her to withdraw those words.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order?

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): The same point of order, Mr. Speaker, it's clearly not a point of order.

The purpose of a point of order is to point out the breach of a rule that had occurred in the House and, clearly, that wasn't the case. I didn't hear the honourable member from St. John—I didn't hear him quote any breach of any rule. It's a dispute over the facts.

He has an opportunity, if he wishes, to speak to the resolution and to add to the debate in this House but, clearly, that's not a breach of a rule and it's not a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On the same point of order?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines, the honourable member does not have a point of order. But I would caution members to pick words carefully because I don't think there's—well, I don't think—it's not I don't think, I know that there's not a member in this House that would support the death of any child or any member, and maybe the words that were intended came out—or were interpreted not to the extent of what the honourable member was saying.

So I would just pick words carefully because all honourable members would—I know for sure would not support the death of any child or even any person. So I just throw a caution out to all honourable members: Please, pick your words carefully.

* * *

Mrs. Taillieu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and those were desperate words coming from that side of the House, because there have been a number of children die under the watch and care of this government. They can't deny that. They cannot deny that, and the fact is they refuse to call an inquest into Phoenix Sinclair's death. They refuse to enact legislation that would improve the safety of children, and so, if they don't support this resolution, they support the status

quo, and we don't want the status quo. We don't want to see children continue to die in the system. So I am—I implore them to support the resolution then. If what the member has said is true, then he should be supporting this resolution.

I look forward to him to stand up and support this resolution which brings improvements to the child welfare system, which actually would have us look at section 47 of the—recommendation 47 of the section 4 review in—which would say that a decision to move a child where there are no child protection concerns contain a written reason from the CFS agency for this decision, including reference to the impact on the child, the appropriateness of the move in accordance with the child's stage of development and the degree of attachment to the caregiver.

Well, by not supporting this resolution, they don't support that, Mr. Speaker. They don't support the recommendations from the Children's Advocate. Well, I say shame on them. I say shame on them. They're supporting the status quo, and if we do have the status quo in this province under these policies of the NDP, we are going to see more children die in the system.

I just do not understand why it is that this government will not support a resolution that improves the safety and the lives of children in care, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to know the reasons why, and perhaps they'll tell me. Thank you.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Well, just as a preliminary point, this is not a government that will pass a law telling children they can't go home when it's safe to do so and in their best interest.

And, in fact, the opposition is simply opposing safe family reunification, and what really bothers me, I think, more than anything else, is they have not learned from the horrid past here in Manitoba and beyond in terms of what has happened to too many of our children. It's just a reckless approach, and it's just heading—would be taking this province backwards and tearing down all of the work that has been done to help children stay in their communities and in their culture in a way that is safe.

And the member then talks about status quo. Anything—it's—anything but that is happening in Manitoba's child welfare system right now. We have, of course, made significant new investments that form the basis of the Changes for Children initiative. That was necessary, because, under the former

government, the child welfare system became broken, and the outside reviews found that we inherited an underfunded and broken child welfare system. We are fixing it.

Now, on the basis of the investments in child welfare—in fact, a 60 per cent increase to investments, \$112 million, I believe, is what has gone into child protection since Changes for Children was announced. Part of that was to enhance the supports for foster children and foster parents, and, in fact, a 21 per cent increase. That has helped to enable, along with a recruitment strategy, the development of 3,231 more net new foster and emergency beds, and, in fact, there are over 2,600 more facilities as a result.

That—as well, those efforts have resulted in fewer foster parents leaving the system and has, most importantly, I think, led to an attack on the ongoing use of hotels that started under the members opposite, and continued on, even though, I understand, attempts had been made to try and get children out of hotels. But by 2006, we understand that up to 166 children could be housed in hotels on a single day, and now they're down to an average of about two children in hotels each week.

So this effort, which engaged the best work of the authorities and agencies, appears to have resulted in an institutionalized approach to ensuring that children are not housed in hotels but have beds that have been offered by the big hearts of Manitobans, as well as, of course, emergency placement beds.

We've been able to add more positions to child welfare, because we know of the caseload numbers of as high as 80, according to outside inquests in the 1990s. And it's been able—we've been able to address caseloads, although, with the lack of the necessary federal investments, those numbers become skewed because much of the work, of course, is on reserve which is federally funded. And, of course, we have increasing numbers of children in care, so I believe the caseloads have hovered in the last couple of years around 29 or 30, and 230 new positions have helped to ameliorate the situations on the front line. But, clearly, with the investments by the federal government that will be coming over the next few years, we expect to see further caseload reductions.

* (11:20)

We certainly have seen thousands and thousands—indeed, I think, about 16,000 workers registered for training, as of last year. Thousands of

foster parents have had new training. We've got increased use of the information management system called CFIS, and we've been able to introduce many new and stronger standards. We, of course, brought in what I call Gage's law, legislation to ensure that everyone—the public and, most importantly, of course, front-line workers—know that while devolution and other changes have helped to enhance the importance of culture and community, it is not to diminish the overriding importance and paramount consideration of safety when placing children.

I think more—one of the most important changes has been the shift to prevention. In addition to the piloting of the family enhancement projects and the teaming up now that will happen with the federal government's investment in prevention on reserve, we've seen the development of the new FASD strategy and continued strengthening of that strategy; the new suicide prevention strategy; Tracia's Trust sexual exploitation strategy, which continues to be enhanced and, in fact, more beds are being added. StreetReach is being strengthened and StreetReach North has been launched. We also have many prevention projects that are under way in addition, of course, to Triple P parenting and the family visiting program that has been recently analyzed as being effective.

So those are all of the—those are some of the elements of the overhaul to child welfare that's going on, just to rebut any statement that there is some status-quo approach to child welfare. Child welfare was broken and it had to be fixed and that is what we are attending to.

I remind members opposite, of course, when it comes to outside reviews, that's where we—the outside reviews are important to heed. The outside reviews found that no child died as a direct result of child welfare services, but at the same time, there were many shortcomings identified. So it's important that we continue to strengthen our approaches to child welfare, to address those problems. And when we hear from the outside independent people who observe child welfare, we hear the Children's Advocate saying that there have been improvements, absolutely. We hear from the Children's Advocate, as well, that we are moving forward. The Auditor General talking about the impressive work that's been done to address the outstanding recommendations and, indeed, saying in standing committee that she has seen significant progress on accountability measures. The Ombudsman is

talking—has talked to a standing committee about how things are progressing, and that is positive.

So we will continue to listen to the independent views and, indeed, the independent reviews and analysis when it comes to the tragic situation that can befall families when a child dies in care. And it's important that, of course, child welfare workers or foster parents or shelter workers or, indeed, birth parents not be blamed in a death until there's an independent view of whether standards were followed reasonably and whether there were any shortcomings on the part of the delivery of social services.

And we have seen many situations where the members opposite just did not heed independent reviews, and in fact they made a practice throughout the '90s of saying that those reviews weren't important, that their recommendations should not be implemented, and that is why, of course, the child welfare system became broken.

And, indeed, I think nothing is more telling than the independent review that was done by now-Justice Suche who said, the system seems to have lost sight of the fact that it exists—get this—to protect children. That's how pathetic it was in the 1990s, and that is why we have to continue to address the shortcomings that have been identified by independent observers and make sure that the approach to child welfare is as strong as we can reasonably deliver.

And, of course, while the member opposite yells out, chaos, chaos, that was a word that was used to describe child welfare that—the child welfare system that we inherited. And she wants to use words that were taken out of context. Well, she can do so; she has that right to do that.

But we will take the words, the considered words of independent observers, make sure that action is taken and Changes for Children continues to strengthen child welfare in Manitoba.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, and the reason that the child welfare system in Manitoba is broken today is because this NDP government chose, many years ago, to rush through changes in the child welfare system before the system itself was ready to take those changes. They were warned several years ago. They've been—they have been in power now for 11 years, and things are not getting better; they are getting worse. And I would really ask members opposite to take this issue more seriously than they have.

I think it's deplorable when we look at people like what happened to Phoenix Sinclair. Where is Phoenix Sinclair today, Mr. Speaker? She's dead. Where is Dillon Breana Belanger? She's dead—he's dead. Jaylene Sanderson-Redhead—dead. Gage Guimond—dead.

And what do these helpless children have in common, Mr. Speaker? They fell through the cracks of this NDP child welfare system that was rushed into place. So they need not look any further than in the mirror as to why children are continuing to fall through the cracks in our child welfare system in this province, and I think it's shameful when we look at someone like Phoenix Sinclair. And I know the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) and others on this side of the House have asked questions repeatedly in this session in question period of the minister responsible, and repeatedly he stands up and he tries to deflect the issues of children who are dying under his watch by referring back to things in the 1990s.

It's deplorable. They've been in office for 11 years and things are getting worse. We are asking questions about how do we get to the bottom of what happened with Phoenix Sinclair. The former premier of this province, Mr. Gary Doer, said that they would call a public inquiry into what happened with Phoenix Sinclair. Yet, five years after her death, Mr. Speaker, no public inquiry has taken place and I'd like to know why. And that's all we've been asking is why have they refused to call the public inquiry and Phoenix Sinclair.

We know that earlier this year, we know that her killer, that he appealed. We know that he was convicted of killing Phoenix Sinclair, and he appealed that and it was rejected by the Court of Appeal here in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. And they had 60 days to appeal to the Supreme Court after that time, yet her killer chose not to appeal within that time frame. And now, several, several months later, this NDP government continues to hide behind the killer, saying, well, perhaps one day he may choose to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, so we better not call a public inquiry into what happened with Phoenix Sinclair, just in case her killer wants to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Well, I say shame on them for waiting, Mr. Speaker. The killer had his time. The 60 days is up, and now the only reason that I can think of and the only reason that many Manitobans can think of, that

this NDP is refusing to call the public inquiry, is because they are more concerned about their own political behind than they are about the children who are falling through the cracks in the child welfare system in this province, and I say shame on them. And I say, beyond that, that if they really, truly are content to stand by and let children continue to fall through the cracks in the child welfare system in this province, then, yes, they will stand up and not support this resolution today.

* (11:30)

But I will ask each and every one of them across the way there to stand up for the children in this province who are falling through the cracks. Never mind about the political rhetoric. Do the right thing for the children and vote in favour of this resolution today. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, I have said this in the House before and I'll say it again: Every child in Manitoba has a right to be safe and has a right to live in a happy family where people love them. Children are born with the right to be loved and safe and, unfortunately, sometimes that just doesn't happen, and when that happens, we need to take action.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that this is a really complicated issue, and it deserves our time and our thought and it deserves our action as well, but it also deserves the credit for the fact that it is a complicated issue without a simple solution.

I would like to just draw attention to the work that our social workers do every day in this province. Every day there are people that face very difficult challenges and choices, and I have great admiration for the people on the front lines. I don't think that I would be able to do the job that they do and I have great respect for them. And I know that every day they help so many children not only leave a place that may not be safe for them and find a place that is, but they also, in many, many, many cases, the majority of cases, help families to heal and help families to reunite when it's been determined that it's safe.

The minister spoke a little earlier about the new focus on prevention over protection, and I have to say I'm really pleased to see that that is the direction that we're going. Of course, if a child is in danger, they must be removed from the situation and we've made that very clear in legislation that safety, of course, is first, but when we can help a family before

that point, before crisis, when we can teach a family how to parent better before a question of safety comes into mind, that is obviously the best thing that we can do as a province, because our focus needs to be on prevention and families. Government will never be as good a parent as a healthy family can be, and we need to keep our focus there.

I do also want to draw attention to something that the acting Children's Advocate has made very clear, that her comment and submissions that the members of the opposition speak about, as she says, were taken out of context and was not a reflection of the child welfare system. In fact, the acting Child Advocate says very clearly: To be absolutely clear, it was not a commentary on child welfare today, she says. She says it did not provide a full contextualized commentary on child welfare in this province or the overall level of safety of the children in care of those child welfare agencies.

She's also said—the acting Children's Advocate has said that the Conservative demand to stop taking children from foster parents is a very simplistic approach. We know that certainly when it comes to a child's safety, the answer is clear, and we've made it clear through legislation that a child's safety is the most important thing to look at. But sometimes that area is not so clear, as it seems to be when we stand here in the House, for the people on the front line every day. They have to make decisions, and I think we need to commend them for the difficult decisions that they make and the fact that most of the children, many of the children and many of the families that they encounter are helped and healed and well taken care of. But when there is a breakdown, whether that's with the family or in foster care, you know, we can't ignore that, and we have to be able to talk about the fact that sometimes breakdowns happen even in foster care.

I think that the minister put it brilliantly when he said that this government will never, never refuse a child to go home when it's safe to do so because certainly we need to help our families, to teach our families, to support our families that are able to heal, that are able to someday provide a safe home and we should be helping children go home to safe homes. We should never say that that's not possible but, again, of course, safety being the thing that we most need to keep in mind.

You know, we are transforming the child welfare system. We know that there was a need of repair and that's why our multi-year plan of action,

Changes for Children, has been put in place. The Changes for Children is our action plan that will strengthen the commitment to child welfare, and, of course, we want to recognize and support the rights of children to develop within safe and healthy families and communities.

And on this side of the House, we also want to recognize that First Nations and Métis people do have authority and do have rights to making sure that their children are cared for, cared for appropriately, and I don't think we can dismiss the fact that culture is important and that children do need to know where they come from and the cultures and traditions of their families and their people as well. And on this side of the House, we think that the way to heal a community is for a community to take responsibility for their children and to recognize that it takes all of us, the extended community, to make sure that children are cared for and provided in the best way.

We're implementing and funding recommendations of Child and Family Services external reviews, and that includes the review into the death of Gage Guimond. That when a tragedy like this happens, it's a horrible thing, and to assume that people wouldn't care is just cruel to say that because, of course, people care and we hate to see any child suffer. But it is important not to sweep that under the table, not to just put it aside and not face it or to blame somebody else when that happens. It's important to see how that happened, where the breakdown was and to address it, and that's why we are moving forward to repair a system that the Ombudsman has said was broken for a very long time.

Work has been completed, or nearly completed, on all of the 289 recommendations coming out of external reviews because we don't sweep it under the rug. We learn from horrible tragedies in hopes that something like that will never happen again to anyone in Manitoba.

Our overhaul of our child welfare system has been recognized in other jurisdictions as well. And I'll let you know, in February, 2009 a report on foster care, Saskatchewan's Children's Advocate say that Manitoba is a leader when it comes to solving issues on child welfare. Now, we know we're not finished. We know we have more to go but it is nice to see that people recognize that we have been working hard and that we do care. In fact, Saskatchewan's Child Advocate says that Manitoba example shows that an issue can be solved, that there just needs to be

a collective political and administration will to do so. And I know there is that will.

I spoke earlier about safety being first, and in 2008, we made that very clear when we amended The Child and Family Services Act to reinforce the principle that child safety is paramount. It's the first thing to decide when evaluating a child placement or whether they're safe in their family home or, in some cases, in their foster care as well.

In 2006 we expanded the mandate of the Children's Advocate to undertake a mandatory review within one year of the death of the child who has or has been receiving services through the child welfare system because, again, we can't sweep these things under the rug. We can't hide from them. We can't point blame at someone else. We need to say, there has been a breakdown in the system and what can we do to ensure that this never happens again. The Auditor General called this a very positive change, commenting that, previously, these reports were not and did not receive an independent evaluation or oversight and there was no public accountability with regard to the recommendations that were made in those reports. And there is now—and we're proud of that. It's been established, and I think a really critical change, according to the Auditor General.

We know that foster rates have also increased since 2007, and let me take a moment to also recognize the hard work that our foster families do. Again, it's a sacrifice that not all of us would be able to take on and perhaps not willing to take on, but these families that do—and sometimes take on children with high needs and other difficulties and bring them into their own family—is really something remarkable.

Since 1999 we've increased funding for foster parents seven times for a total of 36 per cent increase. And for special needs family's children, by an increase of 138 per cent, because we know that families face even more challenges with some of the children that they take in but who do deserve a home.

You know, we had—in 2006 we recognized that we needed more foster families and our goal was to get about 300 more. We thought that would be great. But Manitobans, being as they are, and we know that they are a 'selfish' bunch—selfless bunch that are always willing to step up and help people, instead of 300 families sign up, we got 3,000 new foster placements in Manitoba, which was an increase of more than 1,000 per cent.

And I have to congratulate those families because they have a difficult task of taking in children and knowing that many of those children will be able to return to their families when it's safe to do so. And I can't imagine how difficult that must be, because you can't have a child living in your home and not feel close to them, not feel protected, not bond, but to know that if the family is healed, then that really is where the child needs to be, once it's safe to be there.

I've met some of the foster families in Manitoba and I couldn't believe what optimistic and energetic people they were. You'd expect them to be a little bit more tired for all the work that they do, but, actually, really incredible people.

* (11:40)

And I also would like to talk a little bit about—and I know I don't have much time, but I think it's important that we've also brought in the hotel reduction strategy, which meant, this summer, we saw less than two children a month in hotels, sometimes necessary because of emergency situations or keeping siblings together but, overall, I think we're in the right direction and we will continue to work for children in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, and I have had an opportunity to put many comments on the record around this issue, and also asked many questions in the House without satisfactory answers from a minister who doesn't accept any accountability or responsibility for the system that he has set up and created.

Mr. Speaker, if, in fact, recommendation 47 of the Gage Guimond report had been implemented two years ago, when we brought forward legislation and the government refused to pass it—last year, when we brought forward legislation and they refused to pass it, we would not have seen the deaths of more children in child and family services like we have. And I'll just indicate on the record that Jaylene Sanderson-Redhead was beaten by her mother after she had been moved from a foster home and placed into what the government calls a safe environment—safe family environment.

Well, to me, she wasn't placed in a safe environment and I don't think any Manitoban would agree that the environment that she placed in—was placed in was safe and, as a result, she was murdered. She's dead today. Mr. Speaker, Dillon

Breana Belanger, another child who was in a safe foster placement and moved back into a family circumstance which this government labels safe, was murdered by her mother.

If this recommendation had been implemented two years ago and the government had agreed that there should be a plan and something in writing that indicates why a child should be moved, Mr. Speaker, we wouldn't have seen these dead children today, these children that were murdered in a system that this government refused to fix by implementing a very simple recommendation, a recommendation from the Gage Guimond review, a recommendation that has not been implemented and, as a result, children are not in safe—being moved into safe circumstances today. And the blame lies squarely on the heads of this government for continuing to allow this kind of thing to happen and I would urge them to stand up today and to support this resolution and finally take some concrete action to make sure that people like—children like Jaylene Sanderson-Redhead and Dillon Breana Belanger are not killed by being placed into unsafe circumstances, as this government has—continues to do on a regular basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, if one listens to members opposite, one would think that our government was the first government in Manitoba, and that there was no history here. So I would like to remind honourable members of the history, particularly of the previous government and their abysmal record in the 1990s.

And so I have a number of newspaper headlines and quotes that I'd like to put on the record, beginning with July the 6th, 1999. And who was the Minister of Family Services at that time? Oh, the minister for—the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson). And the headline says: "Foster kids warehoused in hotels again: Child and Family Services can't explain sudden boom of children waiting for homes".

And here's another newspaper article from *Nickel Belt News* of July 12th, 1999. Who was the Minister of Family Services? The current member for River East. And the headline says: "Tory warehousing of kids grows and grows". The MLA for Burrows, Family Services critic, quoted from Child and Family Services board minutes and the Family Services Minister's own *Hansard* statements that label the practice as warehousing. The Filmon

government knows that it's an unacceptable situation, yet they can't get a handle on it. They promise to increase the number of foster homes, but the impact of their cuts to the fostering program lives on and now we're paying for Tory false economy, said the MLA for Burrows.

And here's another headline—in fact, this one is from January 6th, 1998, and who was the Minister of Family Services? The member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson). And what does the headline say? "Pay foster parents, not hotels: NDP slam policy of warehousing children". The MLA for Burrows says, Manitoba has helped create a shortage of foster parents by repeatedly cutting subsidies paid to those willing to take children into their homes. That's what the foster parents are saying to us, the MLA for Burrows said yesterday after reports that children as young as six live in hotels because there are no available foster homes. Given the current rates, they feel they just can't afford to take children.

The Province has since cut subsidies for special needs foster children such as those suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome and subsidies paid to extended families who look after foster children. The critic was quoted as saying: That's why we have children being warehoused in hotels.

And here's another headline from the *Nickel Belt News* in May 1994. And who was the Minister of Family Services? The member for River East. And the headline says: "Slashing foster care rates mostly hurts native kids".

Here's another article from the *Opasquia Times* from May 6, 1994. Who was the Minister of Family Services? The member for River East. The NDP Family Services—actually I was called the minister but I was the critic—the member for Burrows has termed the planned cuts to foster care support by the Conservative government as another slap in the face for families in this province.

Quote: The Conservatives are punishing people for looking after relatives, for agreeing to help children in crisis situations. This is a terrible message to send parents and families in this province. This will be a particular hardship on First—in First Nations communities where priority is given to placing children with relatives, the critic said.

Quote: Foster parents are some of the most dedicated, caring people in this province who agree to look after children who, for a variety of reasons, are on their own. Foster parents should be recognized

for the long hours and sacrifices they make on behalf of children and the Province, the critic said. Just the point that the member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) was making in her remarks.

Quote: Instead, for the second year in a row the Conservatives have cut support to foster parents. Last year, rates were cut and the Province eliminated funding for the Manitoba Foster Family Association, the support organization for foster parents, the critic stated.

Quote: Foster parents by their nature develop strong emotional ties with children in care. Rather than working with foster parents, the Conservatives are taking advantage of foster parents by cutting rates and hoping that the number of children in care will not decline, the MLA for Burrows said.

Quote: The cuts to take place this June will be particularly difficult for the many foster parents in northern Manitoba where the cost of living is much higher and the need often very great for foster parents. The Filmon Conservatives deliberately ignore the results of such cuts upon foster parents attempting to provide a stable, loving, family environment for children lacking such support, the critic noted.

Quote: The decisions of the Filmon Conservatives to cut support for foster families, while it hands out tax dollars to large corporations, are precisely the twisted priorities that make it important there's a change in government as soon as possible, he concluded. And the date on that was May the 6th, 1994. And who was the minister at that time? The member for River East.

And here's another article from the *Portage la Prairie Daily Graphic*, January 6th, 1998. Who was the member—the Minister of Family Services? The member—

An Honourable Member: Let me guess.

Mr. Martindale: Guess.

An Honourable Member: For River East.

Mr. Martindale: The member for River East.

And the headline says: "Cuts keep foster parents in short supply, NDP". The Manitoba government should tell Winnipeg's Child and Family Services to spend the \$2.3 million it costs to warehouse children in hotels on proper foster care, says a critic of the Province's child policies. And the MLA for Burrows says: Manitoba has helped create a shortage of foster

parents by repeatedly cutting subsidies paid to those willing to take children into their homes.

Quote: That's what the foster parents are saying to us, the MLA for Burrows said, after reports of children as young as six living in hotels because there are no available foster homes. Given the current rates, they feel they just can't afford to take children.

Here's another headline from the *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 28th, 1994. Who was the Minister of Family Services? Guess. Who was the Minister of Family Services in 1994? The member for River East. And the headline says: "Foster care cuts hit. Extended family gets less funding". As of June 1st, the Filmon government will reduce the daily rate paid to foster parents caring for members of their extended family by as much as 83 per cent to \$10.97. Current rates are \$16.20 for children under age 10 and \$20.15 for children aged 11 to 17.

Here's another headline also from the *Free Press*, June 26th, 1997. Who was the Minister of Family Services in 1997? The member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson). The headline says: "Foster parents ready to quit. Advocate turns spotlight on cuts, other shortfalls in child welfare system".

* (11:50)

Here's a headline from the *Winnipeg Sun*, April 23rd, 1997. Who was the Minister of Family Services in 1997? The member for River East. And the headline says: "Child standards ignored. Complaints fall on deaf ears". Child welfare standards are frequently ignored in Manitoba and the Province's Children's Advocate is often powerless to do anything about it, a legislative committee heard yesterday. Children's Advocate Wayne Govereau recommended the Province create a children's ombudsman position to enforce standards among children-child welfare agencies. The outspoken Govereau, who's been highly critical of child welfare agencies since he became Children's Advocate four years ago, made the recommendation to a subcommittee reviewing the office of the Children Advocate.

And who was the minister? The member for River East.

Here's another headline: "Inquest concerns ignored: official". And this is people from Sandy Lake-Sandy Bay First Nations: A child welfare official says the Province has refused to fund a crucial training program even though educating

workers was a key recommendation of a major inquest report.

And how much would that training have cost—\$6,800, and they wouldn't pay for it.

Free Press, April 1997. Who was the Minister of Family Services in April 1997? The member for River East. And the headline says: "Probe urged into abused kids' deaths. Advocate wants inquiry into role of flawed child welfare system". Manitoba's Child Advocate is calling for an independent inquiry into a string of abuse-related baby deaths to probe how flaws in the child welfare system contribute to the tragedies. Wayne Govereau said he made the recommendations in his annual report because an independent review is the only way to trigger the public pressure needed to prevent future deaths.

And what happened? Here is the tragic toll. These are child deaths in 1996: Nadine Beaulieu, 23 months; Crystal Colomb, 18 months; Randy Sherwood, 6 months; Devon Cook, 14 months; Brian Thompson, aged two. NDP Family Services critic, the MLA for Burrows, who called for a public inquiry last fall, said yesterday, that inquests can't determine whether systemic issues are to blame. The government is refusing to call an inquiry for political reasons, he said. They want to put the blame on front-line workers or the families involved. They don't want somebody blaming them.

And what happened to the person making these reports about the system, the Children's Advocate, Mr. Govereau? Well, they got rid of him. They brought in legislation limiting the Children's Advocate to two terms and got rid of their strongest critic, because they didn't like what he was saying, and so they got rid of him and refused to implement his requests for inquests and our requests for inquests, not just inquests but inquiries.

And we are going to have an inquiry in Manitoba, unlike member opposite who, even in spite of recommendations from the Children's Advocate, refused to have an inquiry, and we are going to do it. And we are making improvements for children and for foster families. We're reversing all the cuts of the Filmon government and every day making improvements.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, and I've paired—I've paid very close attention to the comments of all members of this House during this particular discourse, and I want to remind members that that is

part of the problem. There is a pattern in this Legislature that I personally have never approved of which is playing the blame the minister for the death game.

Mr. Speaker, I allowed members the chance to speak. I would hope they would allow me the chance to speak despite their protestations.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I believe that every member of this Chamber cares deeply about the lives of children, and they care deeply about the systems that are put in place. There are disagreements about the methodology. There are disagreements about the—some of the processes, but I don't think any member of this Legislature—my gosh, if I thought people in this Legislature actually were of that ilk, I don't think I could participate in this forum.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, we have—in my last comments to members opposite, I talked about their one-trick pony, which was the crime issue. Although it's a federal responsibility, they use it. They throw it out, because they do not have a lot of material to work with.

The second issue that they throw out, because they do not have a lot of material to work with, is the blame the baby death on the government, blame the death on the government, blame the death on the minister, and I think it lowers the debate in this Legislature. I don't think members opposite care any less. I don't think they care any less than members on this side of the House. I don't think the minister of River East, who attacked the member of St. Johns today and heard a bit of a rebuttal in terms of newspaper reports, cares any less than does the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh).

But what we have, Mr. Speaker, is a system that is not perfect. It's put in place for the benefit of those that are in very, very difficult circumstances, and the one criticism that I'd make of members opposite is walk in those families' shoes, walk in those children's shoes before you cast aspersions, and follow the biblical imperative of look at the two-by-four in your own eye before you see the sliver in the other person's eye, and that is, in fact, what we're supposed to do as legislators. We're supposed to try to make things better. We don't make things better by making the tragic, horrific, unbelievable, unspeakable death of a child by blaming it on a particular minister.

The members tried it all through the 1980s when they were in opposition. I remember that. I found it was disgusting. The members, Mr. Speaker, during

the 1990s had a string of deaths. We'll use the example of the 12 baby deaths at—check the record. Check the record to see if I ever blamed the Minister of Health for those deaths. Check the record, check the record, check the record. There were serious problems. Check the record when the individual died at the nursing home and was murdered by a fellow patient. Check the record to see if I stood up in this House and blamed the minister, at that time the member for Lac du Bonnet, for murdering that patient. Check the record. Don't just laugh. Read for a change. Look at something. Don't just play the political rhetorical game.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to that nursing home, members opposite raised protection of persons in care act yesterday. What I tried to do on many occasions with bringing a private member bill to protect senior citizens in nursing homes. I went privately to the minister and urged the minister to bring in the private member's bill to put in the protection of persons in care. He couldn't get it—I don't know why he couldn't get it through his caucus. He couldn't.

An Honourable Member: It's all about you, Dave.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, the member says it's all about me. I'm just trying to give the member a little bit—the member who stands up—who stands up and who hasn't walked a day in the lives of some of the people in this caucus and gone through the experience of some of the members in this caucus, who are far more representative of people in Manitoba than the Charleswood–Tuxedo clique over there, Mr. Speaker. Walk in their shoes and then make allegations.

But, the protection of persons in care act, when we announced it we said there will be more public discussion of problems in personal care homes, because we are making the issue public. We were going to let—we were going to put our laundry out there, and, yes, there will be criticism, but it is better to put out your mistakes and let people discuss it and then learn from your mistakes than to play the cheap game in the Legislature of putting all of the blame on a minister, which serves no purpose other than getting a headline.

So, Mr. Speaker, this resolution is nothing more or nothing less than a political device. What is important—what is important is that we follow up on the recommendations which have been followed up on, that we look at the inquest during all the deaths in the 1990s and, yes, deaths that occurred during our

time in office as well. But at all stages, no matter who was minister, no matter who was in government, I do not think any minister caused or even was any less caring or less moved by those instances than any other person in this Chamber, and that is what I find difficult to comprehend in this kind of a discourse during this kind of a debate.

Yes, we should debate these issues, but, no, we ought not to attribute the kind of self-servicing blame

that we are seeing in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable minister will have three minutes remaining—yeah, three minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 9, 2010

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