

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

**Official Report**  
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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Thirty-Ninth Legislature**

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## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 6, 2010

*The House met at 10 a.m.*

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

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

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

##### House Business

**Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader):** Madam Deputy Speaker, I would ask for leave of the House to move to Bill 204 for debate this morning.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Is there leave to move to Bill 204 for debate this morning? *[Agreed]*

#### SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

##### Bill 204—The Child and Family Services Amendment Act

**Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East):** I move, seconded by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 204, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

*Motion presented.*

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** And it's a sad day in Manitoba when we have, for the second year in a row, a piece of legislation that has to be introduced by way of a private member's bill rather than a government bill, Madam Deputy Speaker, because the government, in its wisdom, has paid lip-service only to the recommendations from the Gage Guimond report that was provided to them.

And we all know the sad story of the death of Gage Guimond as a result, as a direct result, of the policies that were implemented by this NDP government that didn't allow for the safety and the protection, and didn't allow for information to be shared on why a child would be taken from a long-term family placement and placed in a very unsafe situation and circumstance.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, this piece of legislation could, in fact, be called the Gage Guimond legislation, because it truly reflects a recommendation that was made as a result of the review that was done on the tragic death of Gage Guimond, and the legislation reflects, word for word, a recommendation that was made in the Gage Guimond report, and I just want to, for members of the House, refresh their memory and read the recommendation into the record. And it says, recommendation R-47 and I quote: that any decision to move a child when there are no 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. End of quote.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, this recommendation was made to the government over two years ago and we have seen no action on implementing this recommendation. So it's a sad day when we, as an opposition party, have to try to hold this government to account for the lack of action that they have taken on a Child and Family Services system that is in chaos as a result of the directions and the policies and the decisions that this NDP government has made.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are still seeing, today, instances where there are no reasons given for children being moved from stable foster homes to other placements, with no reason or rationale in writing that would indicate that it's in the best interests of these children to be moved. And, you know, we all supported legislation that was introduced a couple of years ago by this government that said the safety of children should be first and foremost the priority of any decision that is made in our Child and Family Services system, and when a child has to be removed from a family because of

unsafe circumstances, we want to make sure, and I know all of us in this House want to make sure that that child is treated in the most appropriate fashion and that their concerns, their well-being are considered first and foremost, and that's exactly what this recommendation is looking to do. It is looking to see this government put in place a plan of action where there is written rationale and reasoning for moving a child from a place of safety into an unsafe circumstance or situation.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I've spent a lot of time in the Estimates process over the last couple of years asking the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh), who is responsible for all children in care—these are children under his watch—to please look at implementing the recommendations that were made to him and to his government to ensure the safety of children is first and foremost, and we hear the minister talking around in circles, not sure where the recommendations are at and, in the meantime, we are still seeing children that are undergoing the same kind of treatment that Gage Guimond was in, and that's unacceptable.

\* (10:10)

That's unacceptable to Manitobans. That's unacceptable to foster families, who have taken—have opened their hearts and their homes to children that have been in unfortunate circumstances, had to be removed from their families, and these foster parents have worked with these children to provide a loving home, a caring home for these children on a long-term basis and, in many instances, have seen these children grow and thrive as a result.

And all of a sudden, Madam Deputy Speaker, without any documentation, any reasoning for moving these children, all of a sudden, they are told that this children is going—this child or these children are going to be moved from their loving home to a strange circumstance or situation.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, most foster parents would want to work to ensure that those children, if they were to be moved, were placed in a safe circumstance, but many of them don't have that option. They are told—there is nothing put in writing—that that child is going to be moved from their home. That child may have to travel many, many miles with a stranger to a strange environment without that foster family having the opportunity to prepare that child, to work with that child, and we're seeing it time and time again.

And I just wonder how many other children are going to have to suffer the fate that Gage Guimond did before this government stands up and listens, stops paying lip service to recommendations that have been made to them and actually implement some of those recommendations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I tried last year to get the minister to make a commitment in the Estimates process to implement recommendation No. 47, and I've tried again this year through the Estimates process to get this minister and this government to make a commitment to ensure that safety was the first and foremost priority and that there was some written decision that outlined why a child would be moved, based on recommendation No. 47 and the Gage Guimond report.

And I'll just quote from the minister this year in the Estimates process when he says, and I'll quote: The "things are usually dealt with by way of standards, and we'll undertake to determine the current status of the implementation of this recommendation."

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, he's had two years. It's a significant recommendation and the minister doesn't even seem to have a clue where that recommendation is at. And then he goes on to say that, you know, there's some consultations within the authorities that talks about the practicalities and benefits of an added layer of review and further documentation. This is common sense. There should be documentation on any file, on any child, that puts safety first and foremost in that—for that child and that child's life.

And I would ask the minister to stand up today to agree to this piece of legislation and ensure that the safety of children and the moving of children from one place to another is done in the best interests of the child. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is not happening today. Thank you.

**Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs):** We are speaking on the same bill as last year, and we will reiterate the same—similar concerns. But I remind members that Gage's law is in force in this province. Gage's law, indeed, is the legislation agreed to by this—the Assembly that has made it absolutely clear that when it comes to the role of the child welfare system and the placement of children who must be protected, that safety comes first, that nothing is paramount to safety, and while there are other considerations, such

as community and culture, nothing can trump the role of safety.

And so by clarifying that in The Child and Family Services Act, we have sent a message, and we have backed that up, as well, by strengthening the every-child-seen-every-time rule that was in the act and, as well, has been strengthened in the standards.

The member opposite is interested in one recommendation from the review into the tragedy of Gage Guimond, but it is our view that we should be interested in all of those, and that's why there is a comprehensive implementation plan under way to deal with those recommendations.

The key findings that looked into the tragedy of Gage Guimond focus on a fundamental breakdown in the provision of child welfare services for Gage as a result of some very serious issues that had developed at that particular child welfare agency. And the member opposite looks to the standards or rules in place, with regard to the information that should be on the file documenting why a child is moved, as key.

Well, that is a very important consideration, but the findings of the Gage Guimond tragedy certainly go far beyond that. Regardless of the rules in place, there was a fundamental breakdown. The system had failed Gage Guimond is the fundamental discovery of the outside reviews, and the application of many, many rules, particularly those with regard to determining the safety of the placement, were not followed as a result of the shortcomings, the very, most serious and tragic shortcomings of that agency.

When we look at changes to laws or standards, it's important that one consideration always be paramount, and that, of course, is, as we said earlier, the safety and best interest of the child. That has to be the test against which we measure the appropriateness of bills from the opposition, or any changes, for that matter. And what this bill does is set out what essentially is now set out in standards. Much of what is in the bill is redundant in terms of what has to be done when a child is moved. There is, in law and regulation and provincial standards, procedures with regard to appeals and the process and for recording information about the move.

The bill does add some additional information that should be provided, and that as well has been addressed by the recommendation No. 47. And it is now, I understand, from the authority, an adopted standard, and it is now looked at as—with a view to

making it a foundational standard throughout the child welfare system.

The difficulty of this legislation—and I think we talked about it last year—was that it does not accommodate the—what may be the best interest of the child when there is a court order or a placement breakdown. The standard that has been developed as a result of recommendation 47, indeed, has more oversight and information requirements, and the authority, as I said, has moved on that, but the inflexibility in the bill is a very serious concern.

#### Point of Order

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. Is the member for River East up on point of order?

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** Yes, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder if the minister might just clarify which standard it is that he is talking about.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member does not have a point of order. It's a dispute over the facts.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, I was speaking of the recommendation into the death of Gage Guimond that recommended that there be some additional information provided when there is a placement move. But the inflexibility in this bill is what is of primary concern. Usually, matters like this, these practice and standards matters, are the subject of, in fact, standards. And the standard that has been developed by the authority, in fact, recognizes the impact that a court order or a placement breakdown can have.

This legislation doesn't do that, and it's very important that there not be a built-in delay, if, in fact, there's a placement breakdown and the child must be moved at once. And sometimes, that placement breakdown—and that's the term that is used generally—may follow from serious concerns from the foster parents themselves, where they think it's very important that the child be moved immediately for a variety of reasons. So, for that reason, it is best left to the standard, recognizing that that is the usual course, in any event.

\*(10:20)

I just want to conclude, though, by remarking that our interest in foster parents isn't just around debates in this Legislature. The 1990s was not a good time for fostering in this province because of

the hits made by the government of the day on foster family rates, on the association that was so important, and even, despite the urgings of the Children's Advocate, the hits continued. And year after year, we saw reductions, I think, of amounting about 20 percent to foster family rates, which means, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there were cuts to the food and clothing and the opportunities for foster children in Manitoba.

And now, since just '07 alone, we've been able to increase foster family rates by 20—I think, over 20 percent—21, I think more than that, since that time alone. I think there have been seven improvements since we've come into office. And we're getting—we're leaving that unfortunate era behind, and will continue to look to see how we can better support foster parents. We have many, many more and, in fact, in a campaign to attract more foster parents, to open their hearts and homes, we had a target of 300 more foster beds. We have now, on a net basis, 2,200 more foster beds in Manitoba as a result of the Circle of Care campaign. So it's important that we provide those supports.

And we also recognize how difficult it is when the child is moved. It is difficult for the child, in some circumstances, and it is very difficult, in many circumstances, for the foster parents. And, so, those supports we will continue to look at improving.

So as we grow the foster support network in Manitoba, as we continue to ensure that, only on an exceptional basis, children are placed in hotels, we will make improvements to make sure that foster parents know that this government is on their side. Thank you.

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** It is a pleasure to rise this morning, and I know there will be many others in the House who have comments to say, and I'm sure that before the hour reaches its intended time, we'll have the opportunity to pass this bill and to move it on to committee so that Manitobans can have their voice heard. Because I expect that when Manitobans would come to a committee on this bill, they would ask why it is that this bill hasn't passed long ago. Why it is that it took a year for the government to act or to not act, as the case may be here, to not see this become legislation to protect children.

And really that's what this bill is about, and I want to commend the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), not just for bringing forward this bill, for the many other things that she does in her work

as an MLA and in her particular critic area over time, to help families who are dealing with challenges with foster children. I know she does it with a good heart, a strong heart. I've seen that in action with constituents of mine. And she wouldn't say it, but I can say it for her, that we appreciate the fact that she not only does that, but puts those words into action by bringing forward legislation.

And now we need the government to take her good idea, or to take the idea that came forward from recommendations from the tragic death of Gage Guimond, and act upon those. And those recommendations should never been taken lightly, which it seems to have happened by the Minister of Family Services. He seems to have decided to put them on a shelf somewhere, keep them wrapped in cellophane and not act on the recommendations of the inquest.

And this would seem to be such a common-sense recommendation, Madam Deputy Speaker. To simply have a written explanation, a reason, when there's no concern about the care that an individual, a child, is getting from a foster family. If there is a movement to have that child moved somewhere else, to have a written explanation, written reasons. I mean, what opposition could the government put forward to that?

And, if there is a technical reason, you know, the minister often brings forward—and I know, in my own time as critic for him in a different role, he would sometimes bring forward obscure technical reasons. And if those reasons exist, we've had a year, over the last 12 months, to bring forward amendments, to have discussions. I don't know if the minister or his department has approached our side of the House—I doubt it—in terms of saying, well, how can we make this work, how can we ensure that this legislation—this recommendation—gets acted upon? Because ultimately, it's such—it seems like such a simple request, such a simple request to ensure that a family, on behalf of a child who's getting good care in a foster family, has those written recommendations. And this is at a time when it's not easy to get individuals to be foster families. It's not easy to have good solid individuals come forward and say, we want to bring in a foster child. Because that's difficult work.

We know that it's difficult work, but I don't know if there's any more important work that happens in the province of Manitoba than in a foster home, a good foster home with a good foster family

taking in a child who otherwise would not have that loving and that stable environment. I don't know if there's anything more, and I remember the former premier, who went off to Washington, would often say that one of the greatest things that we could do to improve our society was to ensure that children were brought up in stable homes. And that was the former premier for the NDP who said that. And I would agree with the former premier. We didn't always agree on every issue that came before the Legislature or came before debate in a committee, but that we would agree with, that having those stable homes is important for any child, whether it's a paternal child or whether it's a child in a foster home environment.

And this, I think, would ensure that foster families would have some degree of security, some degree of knowledge that they're not going to have a child removed from that home arbitrarily, they're not going to be ripped from those loving arms that they've provided. And in talking to a lot of different foster families, not just in my own riding but in other areas of Manitoba, that is a fear for them, a very real fear for them, that they are going to have a child that they have fostered removed without any sort of explanation or rationale. And that's not a selfish reason. That's not because they feel that it's going to necessarily just be painful for them. They're worried about the child. They're worried about where that child is going to be going, and whether or not they're going to have that same loving environment.

And so how is it, then, we can encourage people to become foster families when they have that concern, where they have that fear that the work that they're doing for all the right reasons might be upturned—might be overturned because somebody determines that they're going to remove a child where they're already getting loving care, without any sort of explanation or reasons.

And that's all this is doing. That's all this is doing is putting a safeguard in place, a step that says, well, before you take an action of removing a child from a home where there's no concern about the care, that we're going to have a written explanation.

I just don't understand why any member of the government would have an objection to this. And I suspect if I had the opportunity to speak individually with members of the government and said to them in private, really, what would your concern be about this bill, I suspect the majority of them, if not all of them, would say, there really isn't a concern. This would be the right thing to do for a child. This would

be the right thing to do for foster families. It'll be the right thing to do for those parents who want to bring in children into their home.

So I don't understand. I certainly hope it's not a political reason. I hope it's not a partisan initiative that the government has decided to put up a roadblock on this. I don't think any of us—any of us in the Legislature—would ever want to have that sort of a partisan nature, partisan factor come in to blocking good legislation.

If there's something—I don't know if the minister has spoken with the member regarding amendments or how things could be changed. A year has gone by; 12 months have passed. I'm sure that the member would at least engage in the opportunity. The member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) would like to have the discussion with the member—the Minister for Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh), but I don't believe that outreach has happened to say, well, how can we ensure that this bill then gets passed, how can we do what's in the best interest of the child and what's in the best interest of the foster family.

And, you know, there's nothing that we can do, unfortunately, and I believe that all members of this House, if we could turn back time, we would want to do something for Gage Guimond. We would want to stop that tragic death from happening. I believe every member, if they had that ability, would do that, but, of course, we don't. We don't have that ability. We can't go back in time and we cannot restore that life that was taken.

But there is something we can do. We can learn from the lesson. We can learn from the lesson and ensure that it doesn't have to happen to another child, that there are safeguards put in place. And while that won't bring back Gage Guimond, that will at least leave something of a legacy that something positive has come from what is otherwise a horrific and a tragic death.

\*(10:30)

And so I would hope that the members opposite, that the government, would take the time to reflect on this. If they have other suggestions in terms of how to strengthen the legislation, I believe that the member for River Heights, with all the right reasons and with a strong heart, would entertain those discussions. But I hope that partisan politics doesn't stop what is otherwise an important thing for children from passing in this Legislature this morning.

And I know that all members of the public, or many members of the public, would love to come forward and have the discussion about how this bill would improve child safety, and how child safety could be improved more generally in the system.

With that, I look forward to hearing other comments and seeing this bill proceed to a committee before the top of the hour, Madam Deputy Speaker.

### Introduction of Guests

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Before recognizing the honourable member, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the gallery, where we have with us today 28 grade 9 students from Henry G. Izatt Middle School, who are under the direction of Ms. Lolietta Connor. They are the constituents of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen). Thank you very much.

\* \* \*

**Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale):** Madam Deputy Speaker, when a child is born, whether it's in Manitoba or anywhere around the world, there is an inherent right of that child to be loved and protected, to feel safe and comforted, and it should be the way it is. Every child should come into this world into loving arms, a celebration should be held upon the birth of that child, as I know probably everyone in this House has had some kind of a celebration for births of friends, family and their own children. And it is upsetting, as a mother, and I'm sure to every member of this House, that not all children get that start in life, and some of them have a difficulty in, and go through experiences that, perhaps, some of us can't even imagine.

And that is why that the safety of children in Manitoba and, really anywhere, is the most important thing we can think of. It should be a given, and when it's not, that's when we have to step in and make sure those children are protected and, of course, safety is the most important thing.

Now, in some cases, the safety of that child becomes such an urgency that you can't allow anything to slow it down. And, certainly, when a child is in a foster care home and, as many of them are around our province, they are getting those needs that perhaps weren't met in their family. And we're so grateful for people who step up and take on that kind of commitment, and no doubt sacrifice within their own family to take on children who maybe didn't get as good a start or the fair start that they

deserved, and take children into their homes and provide them the love and the safety and the guidance. And many, many of our children are in wonderful, safe and loving foster homes. But when something arises, whether it be in the child's life or in the protected care, a sense of urgency or a safety concern, there can be nothing—nothing—that comes in the way of that child's safety. And that means—and, perhaps, in cases, removing the child as quickly as possible and finding them a new place.

There are safeguards in place in Manitoba: section 51 of The Child and Family Services Act, the foster parent appeal regulation and the provincial standard of 1.5.6, removing foster children.

Section 51 provides for steps and mechanisms for foster parents to address the placement changes of children that they are caring for. In the case where a foster parent has concerns or questions or maybe doesn't understand what happened, there is appeal positions in place. They are allowed to appeal, and there are steps that are sent out to ensure that the process for foster parents is fair but, of course, with always keeping the best interest in child—of the child in the forefront, which, really, I believe that all of us agree is the most important thing, the safety of children. Our legislation puts children first. The focus is on the safety, the protection and the interest of the children.

And, although I believe that the member opposite has the best intention for children, there can be sometimes some unintended consequences. Agencies need to be able to act quickly. I emphasized earlier that when a placement breaks down and, as we know, most of our children are in loving and safe foster parent homes, but when it does break down, the agency needs to be able to act as quickly as possible. And the existing process for agencies and social work is to remove children is very clear, and currently allows them to do that, because none of us would want to see a delay in a case where a child's safety could be at risk. The thing that the foster parents do understand is that that is their utmost most important job, is to the safety of the children, to make sure that they can act on that as quickly as possible.

As you can imagine, it's a very complex situation, and no two cases would be the same, but our child protection and any changes that we make to our legislation and regulation have to be really carefully thought over, that there wouldn't be an unintended consequence that could actually put



children more at risk. And I know that's not the intent of the member opposite and her feelings of the safety of children in this province.

There's also, of course, a chance for parents, who have their children apprehended, to take a look and have their wishes heard at the—any court appearance, of course with the child's needs and best safety practices being the first thing we consider. The unfortunate time when a child may have to be removed from a placement is laid out quite clear and very thoroughly of what has to be done, and, of course, the most important thing, as I've said, would be the safety of the child.

Some of the wording that can be possibly—lead to unintended consequences of this particular bill really need to be looked at. For example, words such as "caregiver" and "propriety" could be viewed as subjective, and we want to be very clear whenever we're dealing with children, and that safety and protection is the first thing.

We also want to make sure that our laws—and they do—protect our dedicated and selfless foster parents who do assume the responsibility of providing safety and protection to our children, and I can't thank enough the people that take on that responsibility. Occasionally, I've met people in my community who've taken in foster children, and many have their own children already at home, and they just seem to have an abundance of love to add to their family, and I see these children blossoming and growing and the foster parents not differentiating between their, perhaps, birth or adopted children and the children that they bring in to foster.

It's all family, it's all one, and it's really remarkable. I know, as a parent, how stretched you feel sometimes but to imagine actually opening your home up to some more needy children who perhaps come with some special concerns, and having experienced some difficult times in their life no doubt bring sometimes the scars or the possible difficulties that may have come with growing up in an unstable home.

But to bring them into a foster family home and foster parents who understand that and nurture and provide that security—and, then, of course, it also extends into our teaching community. We see that our teachers often have to deal with kids from various backgrounds, and if a child has perhaps had a difficult early life, they may not be used to being the model student that we all hope our kids are, but I see our teachers working and spending a little extra time

and lots of one-on-one time with children and, really, it's our whole community that comes together to help nurture the best interests of our children.

Our government record's pretty clear that nurturing children and protecting them and keeping them safe is a huge commitment for everyone in government. We've invested over \$48 million for new funding to implement the recommendations and hire more front staff. Since the release of the reviews, we've added 150 new workload relief positions.

Manitoba's overhaul of our child care—our child welfare system has been recognized also in other jurisdictions, and although—you know, the best would be to have no child in care, the best would be that all children are born into families that are ready to take care of them. But when that can't happen, we know that Manitoba has a reputation for doing the best we can to make sure that every child has a fair start.

In February of last year, a report on foster care—Saskatchewan's Children's Advocate said that Manitoba is a leader when it comes to solving issues in child welfare and said that the Manitoba example shows that this issue can be solved. There just needs to be a collective political and administrative will to do so. And I certainly know we have that. There's definitely a will to not just to solve issues but to make sure that children are in safe places where they can thrive and meet their potential.

We have certainly made the shift towards prevention services because, as I've said, the most—the best thing we could do is to have no children in care, and the way to do that is to help families before—before we need to intervene, to provide them the supports and to provide them the teaching that they may not have had. They may not have had a parent model to them what good parenting is, and if we can help them learn to be better parents—and we hear of that all the time, parents who maybe didn't get a good start in life and now they do.

\* (10:40)

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to say—my last words are, the most important thing we can do is to keep children in mind and their safety being the most important thing that we keep in mind whenever dealing with children. Thank you.

**Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows):** Madam Deputy Speaker, it's good to see you in the Chair this

morning as well as in question period, and I think you're doing a very capable job.

One of the reasons why I volunteered to speak on this bill is because I have an abiding interest in child and family services issues, and this began in 1993 when I was appointed critic for Family Services. And, originally, or at that time, the minister was Mr. Harold Gilleshammer. I happened to see him, it was about a year and a half ago when I was attending an event in Minnedosa and it was good to see Mr. Gilleshammer again, especially in a non-political context. And then, of course, the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) was appointed as the Minister of Family Services and I was her critic for six years, and we had many disagreements because there were many things that were happening under the Filmon government that we didn't agree with, and I'd like to itemize some of those things just to remind the member for River East.

In fact, I think it must take a lot of courage for her to introduce a bill on child and family services given all the things that happened when her government was in office and she was the member for—the minister for Family Services. I remember very well in a budget that the funding for the Foster Family Association of Manitoba was totally eliminated, and I remember they had a demonstration outside the steps of the Legislature and they had a coffin, and it was really a sad day for foster families in Manitoba because they lost their support group and, when we formed government, we restored their funding.

I also remember that there were cutbacks in foster family rates so that families that were caring for children got less money, and that was really a devastating blow to foster families and it probably had an effect on recruitment, and it probably was one of the reasons why there were so many children in hotels.

In fact, I remember raising, day after day, in question period, and in Estimates, the issue of children in hotels, and I know the Children's Advocate got involved in that. Which reminds me that the Children's Advocate—as we know, an independent officer of the Legislature with a fixed term—his term expired and he could have been reappointed but I don't think the minister of Family Services wanted him to be reappointed, and so his term was ended. And, in fact, there was a search committee to replace him and I think that was all

instigated by the minister of Family Services at the time, the member for River East.

And the reason, of course, was that he was very critical of the government and the minister of Family Services for her policies and their policies regarding children, and he made many recommendations about what the government should be doing, and the government didn't act on those recommendations and, in fact, got rid of the Children's Advocate and hired a new person. And I was actually on the search committee for a new Children's Advocate and we didn't agree with getting rid of him and the new choice so, as the critic, I wrote a minority report and it was supported by my caucus and we disagreed with the decision that the minister of the day made, and for very good reasons.

Now, since we formed government, things have greatly changed. For example, we actively recruited foster families, and I think we had set a goal of 500 individuals as—or foster families—and we greatly exceeded that. We recruited over 2,200 new foster beds in the system.

We also greatly decreased the occupancy in hotels so that an average of less than one child per week was placed in a hotel in January 2010 and, if memory serves me correctly, there were dozens of children every night in hotels in the late 1990s.

We also increased the foster rates. We've increased them 21 percent since 2007 and we also created a new category of foster care rates for remote communities with no road access in 2000.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I see we have some distinguished visitors in the public gallery. I'm sure that arrangements can be made to have you acknowledge who the delegation is, and I'm sure that I'm going to meet them again at a reception this afternoon, but we welcome them. We welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

We've also introduced many new policies and amendments and greater funding. And, as I've said, we restored the funding to the Foster Family Network in 2000 and then we doubled its funding in November 2004. And as I mentioned, the previous Foster Family Association was disbanded in 1993 after the Tories discontinued funding.

And really, the toughest years for foster families were 1991 to 1999. And I've already identified some of the things that happened, but now I have more specifics. And so I can say that not only were foster family rates cut, but they were cut by 20 percent,

almost 20 percent, and those cuts meant fewer shoes, winter jackets and healthy food on the table for foster children.

And since I mentioned the Children's Advocate, the Children's Advocate warned against slashing resources for foster families. And what he said was, the decision to cut funding to the Manitoba Foster Family Association in '93-94 is a critical loss to the system, and that was the Children's Advocate's annual report for '93-94.

When members opposite were in government, they refused to be accountable for caseloads that were 44 to 80 cases per social worker—social worker. When asked about these high caseloads, the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) and former minister of Family Services said it wasn't her responsibility. She passed the buck, saying only that Winnipeg Child and Family Services is an externally funded and managed agency, in spite of the fact that they were totally funded by government.

And I remember meeting with representatives of Child and Family Services agencies. And I remember once the union had a news conference to bring their concerns to the public, but their concerns weren't acted on.

Our government has demonstrated over the last 10 years its commitment to foster parents in the child welfare system, and our legislation puts the safety of children first. Our focus is on the safety, protection and best interests of children.

And we believe that this bill could have unintended consequences. Agencies need to be able to act quickly when a placement breaks down, and we don't want to delay agencies from taking the actions they need to keep kids safe. The existing process for agencies and social workers to remove children is very clear and allows for quick action when necessary. The process for agencies and social workers to remove children is complex, and any changes to legislation or regulations require careful analysis so children are not put at risk and agencies can do their work. And implications of this bill have to be reviewed thoroughly.

And as was explained to me by the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh), sometimes there's an urgency to removing children and providing for their safety, and so there isn't time to go through all the paperwork and to have all the paperwork and applications approved. And so, sometimes there's a need to take action very quickly, and this bill would

not allow for that. In fact, it would slow down the process of providing a safe place for a child.

Our laws protect dedicated foster families who provide care to Manitoba's children. Any time a child is removed, where protection concerns exist or not, foster parents are provided with instructions and information as to what their options are.

And we believe that safeguards are already in place, and these include section 51 of The Child and Family Services Act, the foster parent appeal regulation, and provincial standard 1.5.6, removing foster children. Section 51 of The Child and Family Services Act provides the steps or mechanisms for foster parents to address placement changes of children they are caring for. It allows foster parents to challenge a decision about the removal of a foster child and gives them the possibility of appeal. It sets out steps that ensure due process for the foster parent and keeps the best interests of the child in the forefront.

So in conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think this bill is not a step forward. In fact, it's a step backwards and does not provide for increased safety for children but could put the safety of children at rest—at risk, and for that reason, we are not going to support this bill.

\* (10:50)

**Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors):** I'm very pleased to put a few words on the Bill 204, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, because I do believe that it's very, very important to talk about different records and our commitment to children.

I'm privileged to be the chair of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, that's one of the few jurisdictions in the world that actually has a standing committee of Cabinet that talks about children, talks about long-term development, talks about how we invest in our future. And I'm very pleased to be a chair of that committee of Cabinet, because what we actually do is talk about our investments, our investments in families, our investment in children, and—because that is where we need to go.

If you look at Dr. Fraser Mustard, if you talk to a lot of economists—Mr. Heckman from B.C.—what we do is we look at the importance of long-term investments. They are talking about investing in children as a seven-to-one return on investment. Some are talking about a ten-to-one return on investment. So when you're talking about supporting

children, supporting families, that's where we need to go.

And I'd like to contrast our record on that, our investments in that, versus the members' of the opposition, the Conservative Party. Here is an example. Right now we have a program that has got home visitors that go and support families. What they do is they actually go work with mothers and fathers, with parents, and what they do is they try to work to support the family. They work building parenting skills. They work building nutrition, discipline. They help support the entire family unit. And why I like that, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that rather than just look at taking kids away, you're building capacity. You're building individual capacity for parents to build, and that will grow over the years.

So, in other words, rather than just do a short-term action, the Healthy Child focus is working on parents and children to make sure that we're not just apprehending, we're actually building skills, building abilities with families, and that is an intergenerational response and that's a positive response. And I'd like to note publicly that it's something that this government moved forward, and, of course, the Conservatives continue to vote against investments in children and families.

I look at, also, the parent-child coalitions. The parent-child coalitions are, again, an investment to help support families, and they're helping to support young families. They're teaching them skills, and I have the ability to go to a number of the parent-child coalition presentations, some of the interventions, and that's really a positive thing, because what it's again doing is getting parents to communicate about child development, talking about normal child development, and it's starting to talk about where we need to go to build parents' skills. And there's some on early child good behaviour. There's some on temper tantrums. There's some on nutrition. There's some on sleep, and these are all very, very interesting programs, because what's happening is young mothers and young fathers are getting the information they need to develop proper skills.

I'm also pleased to see what's happened on this side of the aisle as far as FASD. I'm pleased to see that we have moved forward on supporting organizations on FASD. I'm pleased to see that we have a multimillion-dollar investment on supporting families, on supporting individuals living with FASD, and we're actually taking proactive action

with other jurisdictions on FASD. And why I like that is, again, it's an issue that we brought to the floor, we're taking action with. Parents who are—we just made an announcement to have a respite program dealing with parents, who have children with FASD, where the kids are building—it's called Stepping Out on Saturdays—the kids are building skills. They're taught interpersonal skills, communication skills, sharing skills, and their parents are receiving support.

Why I like that program is it's an investment to families. It's an investment to positive parenting, and it's an investment in the future. And I think that that's where we need to go when we are investing close to \$28 million in children, in the Healthy Child programs, and then additional money in other programs through Family Services, through Housing, through Education. I think that's an investment in our future, and I'm pleased to be a government that actually looks at investing in children and looks in investing in families. And I'm pleased to vote for the budget every single year that does that. And I know how the vote of members opposite, the Conservatives, do as far as our investments to children and families.

So it's very consistent; they vote against investing in families and in children. They vote against increasing—and here's an example. In the years 1991 to 1999, members basically cut or froze every year the investments for foster families and during that period, the cumulative cut in foster care rates was almost 20 percent. And that really hurt families—a cut. So, in the tough years, in the 1991 to 1999 period when the Conservatives had control over the budget, they cut foster families. They cut funding, direct funding to children and family by 20 percent. And in contrast we looked at the increased support for foster families, and we've increased it seven times since that time. Since we became in government, we increased it seven times. It's an overall increase of 36 percent, and that basically eliminated the damage done by the Conservatives and really built up the support.

And so, although there might be rhetoric on the other side about supporting families and supporting children, the actual behaviour of members opposite was to cut families and children support, and in our case we've basically increased it by 36 percent, and I think that's huge, and I think it's important. And that does include directly things like the FASD support to families and communities, et cetera.

As far as the Foster Family Network, I am pleased to see that we reinstated the Foster Family Network in 2000, and basically doubled its funding in 2004. And basically that was an association that helped bring foster families together, supported foster families. It was cut in 1993; it was disbanded in 1993. And I'm pleased to see that we brought it back, because I think that foster families need to be brought back.

I also look at, when you're talking about preventing issues, I'm pleased to see that we've made investments in mental health and suicide prevention strategies. This is getting young children busy; it's also getting people to work together.

And I look at investments on suicide prevention, youth suicide prevention and integrating a strategy to deal with people who need help. I'm pleased that we're making investments on that, especially on youth. I'm pleased that we're making investments on youth recreation and activity. I'm pleased that we're—we now have FASD specialists in each family services authority. I'm pleased that we have people who are doing support for child welfare training. I'm pleased that we are making investments in the northern community, where we've increased funding for people who are in foster care for remote communities with no road access, and I think that all these investments do make a difference.

And so, Madam Deputy Speaker, in a tough economic time, we make decisions. We make it—a decision to invest in infrastructure. We make in—a decision to invest in young people and families. We make investments in individuals, and I'm pleased to be part of a government that didn't cut funding to families and to children that are investing in families to children and, economically, that's the right thing to do, both economically and in a human—

\* (11:00)

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

**Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk):** Madam Deputy Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. Time has expired. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Selkirk will have 9 minutes remaining.

## RESOLUTIONS

### Res. 7—Political Interference in Crown Corporations

**Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman):** I move, seconded by the member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik),

WHEREAS Crown corporations have a mandate to provide products and services to Manitobans efficiently and effectively; and

WHEREAS in order to fulfil this mandate, Crown corporations require a degree of autonomy and freedom from interference by the political arm of government; and

WHEREAS Crown corporations such as Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Public Insurance have been subjected to undue political interference from the current provincial government; and

WHEREAS examples of political interference include the decision to build Bipole III on the west side of Lake Manitoba, and the decision to force MPI to pay for enhanced identification cards and the cost of driver licensing operations; and

WHEREAS the consequences of this political interference include draws on the Crown corporations' financial resources to satisfy political objectives, increases in debt, and the inability to make decisions in the best interest of ratepayers; and

WHEREAS these consequences will ultimately impact Manitoba ratepayers in the form of increased rates and fees, compromising the next generation of Manitoba taxpayers who will be forced to pay for wasteful spending decisions in the form of taxes, higher rates and fees.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to end political interference in Crown corporations' financial operations and, instead, insist on accountability to Manitoba ratepayers.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** It has been moved by the honourable member for Carman and seconded by the honourable member for Brandon West,

WHEREAS Crown corporations have a mandate to provide—

**An Honourable Member:** Dispense.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Dispense? Dispense.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Madam Deputy Speaker, and, today, I'm very proud to bring forward this resolution because I think this speaks to the heart of many issues that we're facing here in Manitoba these days, and that is the political interference in our Crown corporations that's an ongoing issue here for us in Manitoba.

The NDP party have two purposes for Crown corporations. First of all, they're using Crown corporations as a cash cow to extract more tax revenue out of Manitobans, to spend on their various political agenda, and secondly, they're using Crown corporations as a propaganda machine; they're advertising in the media through the Crown corporations, they're sponsoring events, they're using the Crown corporations for donations to various public projects in such a way that it's not for the good of Manitoba, it's for the good of the NDP party.

And what they've done is they have forgot what the real purpose of the Crown corporations are. And the real purpose of Crown corporations is to provide Manitobans with goods and services at the most efficient price, and it's to be accountable to Manitoba taxpayers. And their political interference in these Crowns is certainly not doing that.

And there has been many examples of this. The attempt by the NDP to take \$20 million from MPI to pay for university renovations, which was only stopped by a large public outcry from the taxpayers of Manitoba about this. They took over \$200 million from Hydro—I believe that was in 2002—to balance their books and Manitoba Hydro had to borrow the money to pay for that. And that was—that is not in the taxpayers' best interest. It was not in Hydro's best interest.

The botched enhanced driver's licence project: If they would have listened to the public in Manitoba, if they had listened to MPI, if the government had listened to MPI, they would have known that the public had no appetite for these enhanced driver's licence. Instead, if they had listened to the public and people who want to travel south of the border, and given what this enhanced driver's licence has end up costing, we could have had—we could have allowed all Manitobans to have passports which would have worked for both land and air travel which—and the enhanced driver's licence does not allow you for air travel. And so it has a major shortfall and it's end up costing taxpayers a lot of money.

They also continue to use and abuse the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission, Manitoba

Lotteries, Workers Compensation. They seem to have this idea that these corporations are there for their own expedient use and there is—it's unfortunate they do that. These corporations could be run very efficiently, if you let them—allow them to run on their own and to be efficient in being run as businesses which they could—can be; they have done before and they could again if this government would just back off and stop spending and wasting so much money.

And, of course, the glaring example of political interference is Manitoba Hydro, and in September of 2007 when the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was the Finance Minister at that time and minister responsible for Hydro—and he wrote to Manitoba Hydro and directed to Hydro to run their next transmission line down the west side of Lake Manitoba for Bipole III, and this—what this effectively did—Manitoba Hydro is a large corporation. It's very—it can be very well-run without political interference, and what they did with this direction—directive to the corporation was that they basically erased 20 years of planning.

We know that Manitoba Hydro was planning for 20 years to run a third transmission line. They were planning to run it down the east side of Lake Winnipeg, is where it should be. And they were doing that for business reasons and for the least footprint on Manitoba's environment. And, instead, what we had is the government step in and say no for political reasons. I don't know whether they're afraid of some American lobby groups. They have never been able to give us a reasonable—anywhere near a reasonable explanation as to why they're afraid of running down the east side, but it's complete interference with a great corporation, and it's going to cost Manitoba taxpayers not only in the capital cost of building this line—an extra \$1.75 billion in cost, increased cost to build it down there—they're also going to, we're going to lose a tremendous amount of revenue in line loss.

And I realize that there isn't much business sense on the other side of the House, but what they've done is they've interfered and have—*[interjection]* Why? Because the line losses are going to be tremendous on this line. And they will—when there is more line usage, when they run more power down the line, the more power run down the line, the more the line loss, and it's going to add up to millions and millions of dollars in lost revenue, which could be put back into Manitoba taxpayers if—given back to Manitoba taxpayers in forms of cheaper rates and more sales to the corporation, but this—and I realize that many

members opposite don't realize the impact that this line is going to have when you run through agricultural—through land.

**An Honourable Member:** What about Lac du Bonnet?

**Mr. Pedersen:** Well, I don't think there's a lot of agricultural line—area north of Lac du Bonnet and yet they seem to be able to—and it's needed. They're building a road in the—on the east side which is very much needed and which we support. But if you can build a road, surely you can build a hydro line because the footprint of the hydro line will be much less in terms of building and in terms of ongoing—through time, the footprint of the hydro line is much less than a road.

\* (11:10)

But when you're going to build a hydro line through agricultural area and you're going to come through my constituency, the constituency of Carman—and perhaps members are not aware, but we have a great deal of potatoes being grown in my constituency.

One of the criteria for growing potatoes now is that they must be irrigated, and that—the reason for that is for uniformity of size, and to McCain's—both McCain's and Simplot have this as a requirement. And if you're going to run a hydro line through this area, you very effectively erase the possibility of irrigation on those potatoes, because you cannot run an irrigation line anywhere near this hydro line.

And I have constituents who are growing potatoes. And one of my constituents has already told me that he is—was planning on buying a particular piece of land but that's been put on hold now, because this government has mandated Manitoba Hydro to come through our area. And he is not about to put the money out and put the expense out for potato land with the uncertainty of this project.

And if the government is—was serious about, really, not keeping their own best interests at heart and being afraid of some American lobbyists who don't want a hydro production at all, they would stand up for Manitobans and do the right thing and run this line down the east side. We would be fully supportive of the right thing to do, and yet there's a callous disregard for the agricultural production in my constituency. And this government has shown that they have no concern at all for Manitobans. They're only interested in pulling money out of these

Crown corporations. And I would certainly—although I don't expect it, I would certainly ask the government to take serious heed of this because this is just a couple of the examples that I've given of political interference in a corporation.

These corporations can be run properly. They have been run properly in the past; however, the political interference is not allowing them to run as they should be, and for the benefit of all Manitobans. And with that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I urge government members, at least, to really consider this resolution, and that they need to stop interfering with Crown corporations. Thank you.

**Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk):** Madam Deputy Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise to put a few words on the record. Perhaps I'll get a few more words on this resolution than I did on the previous bill. Some members have commented that was my best speech I ever gave in this House.

But seriously, this resolution has taken hypocrisy to a new high. I mean let's just look at this for a second. They're talking about interference in a Crown corporation. It was the Conservative Party that sold MTS. That was the ultimate act of political interference.

And, you know, what was interesting was they—when they did that—I know that my colleague from the Interlake, he's eager to tell the story as well, but some of the things that they promised at the time when they were selling off one of our jewels, the jewel of our Crown corporations. I recall, I was a critic in the early '90s when MTS, at the time under the—when it was a Crown corporation invested close to a billion dollars in upgrades. And that was in the early '90s, and a billion dollars, you know, was a lot of money—still is, of course, but they put a billion dollars into upgrade the fibre optic system. They expanded calling zones. They did many, many things to upgrade MTS to make it ready to move forward in the future.

And what did the Tories do when they—after they did this? They sold it off. And they claimed, at the time, that they had to because, you know, the technology was changing and the Crown corporation couldn't keep up with technology. Even though we just invested a billion dollars into it to take it up into the standards of the day, they sold it off.

And they sold it off at half price to their friends. You know Gary Filmon is now on the board of MTS.

Other members in this House were also involved in the sale, Madam Deputy Speaker.

And you know what they did? They promised that there'd be no job cuts. Well, in my community of Selkirk, when the—when MTS was a Crown corporation, there was around 150 jobs. Now, virtually none. They sold off the building to another organization. They promised that there'd be no increase in rates, but we know that rates have gone up—would be 30 to 40 percent since the sale of MTS. And they also promised there'd be no service cuts. Well, as I said earlier, we know that—like I said—MTS invested close to a billion dollars. And I think it was one of the members in this House who talked earlier about poor Internet service that we have in this province. In my own community, in my constituency, in Grand Marais, Victoria Beach, they don't have high-speed Internet access there.

And I want to contrast that to what's happened in the province of Saskatchewan where they still own—the SaskTel is still owned by the people of Saskatchewan. Every year, they report profits which the Saskatchewan government, the Saskatchewan Conservative government, take 100 percent—I might add—of those profits, put it into general revenues. But there they have 90 percent coverage in the province of Saskatchewan of high-speed Internet because there is a willingness in the province of Saskatchewan, of the government of Saskatchewan to provide that service to the ratepayers in that province. And last year, in 2009, SaskTel had profits of \$129 million, and over the last three years—in profits over the last three years, SaskTel has provided to the government of Saskatchewan over \$350 million in profits.

Now, if you use that same ratio, if you apply that same ratio to the Manitoba Telephone System, when it was a Crown corporation, it would assume that around a hundred million dollars per year in profits. That would be over a billion dollars—because it's been, now, you know, between 13 and 14 years since MTS was sold—a billion dollars that could be either used for programs or have applied as to our provincial debt. But, instead, it's—the profits that are made from MTS are sold to the people who now own the shares, which is not the province—not the people of the province, but only a few who could afford those shares in the MTS. That's the biggest scandal in the history of this province, Madam Deputy Speaker. The biggest scandal in the history of this province was the sale of MTS.

So this is absolutely ridiculous, the motion brought forward by the member. And, almost daily in this House—almost daily in this House—the Tories stand up and say, we should interfere in the operations of the Crowns. Almost every day there's a question either on—you know—the Hydro decided to put the line down the east side. And now they're saying, after all that work, we'll have to reroute the line down the east side. And I listened to the member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen), who was quite—I mean, you know, we're very pleased with the member for Carman as he's recently released the Conservative platform in the *Carman Leader*, where he said that the Tories will no longer focus on health care, roads, social services, agriculture, rural depopulation and First Nations. He said they'll no longer focus on these issues, Madam Deputy Speaker.

*Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair*

But he was talking about the issue of what the line would mean to his constituents. I know that that's important for him, and I don't criticize him for raising the issue.

But what about the issue of Lac du Bonnet? What about the—or the community of—constituency of Lac du Bonnet, or Springfield, or Steinbach, or even Selkirk? The line may go down there. They've said they've held all sorts of meetings in their areas. How come the member for Lac du Bonnet's (Mr. Hawranik) not held a meeting in Lac du Bonnet? He's not held a meeting in Beausejour. The member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) has not held a meeting anywhere within his constituency to talk about what this line would mean to his own community. They're—they completely neglected their own constituents. I mean, you know, they don't seem to be concerned about the—any of the issues that they raised when it comes to their own community, but they seem to be uninterested when it comes to what this line would mean if rerouted down the east side of the province.

Mr. Acting Speaker, the Conservatives like to call themselves, you know, these great titans of industry, these great, you know—they pretend that they, you know, are the only ones who know how to run anything in this province. You know, they call them, like, the captains of commerce, but what do they do? They bought a money-losing gas company, Centra Gas, and they sold a—sold off a money-making Crown corporation, MTS.

\* (11:20)



You know, these are the great economic minds of the—that ran up deficits here in the province, a record deficit of close to \$800 million. At the federal level, their federal cousins are running debts up to 50 or 60 billion dollars this year, \$160 billion over the term of their government's—or they're claiming over the next four or five years that they will return to surplus in five years, but before they do that, they'll rack up \$160 billion of debt at the federal level. I never heard a single peep out of any of my Conservative colleagues in this House regarding that.

I know the member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) was talking about Greece the other day. Well, Greece, their debt-to-equity ratio is 132 percent. *[interjection]* At—oh, getting there—Japan is 100. The United States, it's 100. Here, we're at 25 percent. When they were in power, it was over 30–33 percent. We have reduced it. We've reduced the servicing of the debt from 13 percent down to 6 percent.

Mr. Acting Speaker, so these are the great economic minds in this—these are the great economic minds in the Conservative caucus. We—not only that, we've also been able to, in terms of Hydro—when they were running Hydro, the debt-equity ratio was 84 percent versus 16. Ours is now 75 to 25. We have lowered the debt-to-equity ratio under our watch, as opposed to when they were in power. You know, we've had record income for Hydro over the last number of years. You know, the Tories have never built a Hydro dam. They've mothballed all these projects. They've opposed the building of the—of a Hydro building downtown. They've opposed, as I said—they've opposed supporting hydro production in the north.

Mr. Acting Speaker, these are the, you know, the mothball party, the Conservatives. For them to stand up here—as I said earlier, almost daily in this House they talk about how they're going to interfere, how we should be interfering in the Crowns.

I have a—remember when the member for Springfield in the early '90s—and members will recall this—every day, he stood up in this House and he was tabling a letter saying that they shouldn't put a hydro line through his riding, and he wanted us to demand that Hydro stop this line. He talked about the fact that studies have linked cancer to the proximity of power lines, so he was demanding every day in this Chamber—I am certain members will remember this—that real demand every day in this Chamber that this line not go through his riding.

Because he wanted us, Mr. Acting Speaker, to interfere in a Crown corporation, which runs complete contrary to what this resolution's all about. Thank you.

**Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West):** After listening to the last debate from the member of Selkirk, is it any wonder, Mr. Acting Speaker, that this province will never be invited in to participate in the New West—in the New West proposals that have been put forward by British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan? Is it any wonder that this government, this NDP government of Manitoba, will never be invited by the other proactive, aggressive, more business oriented governments of the West, and for that matter, those governments of the East, Ontario and Quebec? And we will, in fact, remain this shunned little island unto ourselves because we still think like a 1950s socialist, without having the opportunity to, in fact, to expand our horizons and actually have a business sense on that side of the House.

That's not going to happen. As a matter of fact, after listening to the member from Selkirk, I would think that probably they would much rather nationalize industry as opposed to, Mr. Acting Speaker, look at trying to make industry in this province more efficient and, certainly, provide services for the people of Manitoba in a better fashion.

The resolution, quite frankly, is a very logical resolution, and it just simply says that—urge the provincial government, this NDP government, to end political interference in Crown corporations' financial operations. Well, I have yet to see the fiscal managers over there stand up and give some indication as to their experience with running Crown corporations. I actually have had, Mr. Acting Speaker, some private sector experience. Actually, I actually have looked at the finances from a private sector as opposed simply to a public sector, and I also managed quite a number of people at one point in time in my business career, and I had a very simple management philosophy, and it was a philosophy that I had gained over some years of experience, and that simple management philosophy was—is—let managers manage. Let managers manage.

Now, we have some very good Crown corporations in the province of Manitoba and other provinces, and we hire some very effective people to manage those business operations, and I have to stress business operations. So we hire good people,

and that's really the key to any business enterprise. Surround yourself with good people and the business is going to succeed. But when you surround yourself with those good people and they've got the business acumen to be able to operate the business, then don't interfere in the business. Let those managers manage. That's why you want to have the best of the best, and what this government cannot get through their heads is that they don't know how to manage a business, and they want to continue to interfere in those fiscal operations, and we have too many—too many examples, and we will use the Manitoba Hydro example, obviously, as being the most glaring one, because it could well, in fact, jeopardize the whole operations of a very major Crown corporation in this province.

Manitoba Hydro, for the past 20 years, has recognized that there must and should be a third transmission line in the province of Manitoba. Everyone accepts that. Manitoba Hydro has spent a lot of time and energy in putting in the proposals for a third bipole transmission line. For 20 years, the corporation had identified a transmission route on the east side of the province of Manitoba. For 20 years, they used good, solid management and good, solid management decisions to put it on the east side. It was shorter. It was cheaper. It was more environmentally friendly. It was acceptable and it was planned for.

But it seemed this government and their inability to manage decided one day to make that 20 years to simply disappear, and a letter was sent, and every member of this House has seen a copy of that letter. The letter was signed by the previous minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, the now current Premier (Mr. Selinger). That letter was signed and said, to Manitoba Hydro, you will be directed to change your logical, financially concise decision on the east side. You will change that and you will now do it on the west side.

Now, we've discovered that that west-side decision is not only longer, is going to be more—have a greater impact on the environment in a number of ways, is in fact going to impact a very major economic engine in our area, which is agriculture, and is now going to cost—is now going to cost an additional \$1.75 billion. Now, Manitoba Hydro is not in that flush of a financial position. They cannot afford to throw away \$1.75 billion of borrowed money and try to incorporate that cost into generation of hydro; for now, the cost of generating hydro is higher, really, than what the sale of that

power is, and it's because of that \$1.75 billion insist from the provincial government. That's wrong. Let managers manage. But this government can't seem to keep their fingers out of that one.

\* (11:30)

The same is true with the other Crown corporation. MPI has been downloaded a number of provincial responsibilities so that they can take the displaced dollars that will be saved from the general revenues from the Province and be able to spend it on their own pet projects, whichever they may be. As long as there's a photo op attached to it, I'm sure that there will be money for pet projects.

But the unfortunate part, when you go to MPI and you download those costs, they have to be paid by someone, and those downloaded costs are then paid for by, in fact, the ratepayers of the province of Manitoba. The downloaded costs for an enhanced identification card which, again, cost them 17—probably more like \$20 million, for very few people who, in fact, decided to take up the offer of the enhanced ID.

Then there was the licensing—the driver's licensing issue, where that was a download to MPI, and that was a cost, obviously, again to the ratepayers because we have no other place to go except to MPI, so we have to pay what they tell us. So that was a download of costs. That was the direction that this government had sent to MPI, and it was an interference.

Now, the biggest one, obviously, was the direction from the previous premier who decided that Crown corporations should be contributors to the Human Rights Museum. Now, I don't think there's anyone in this Legislature, they wouldn't agree that the Human Rights Museum is certainly an institution and a facility that's going to be very well received here in the province. But if the Province was the one who wanted to make that contribution, then make it on behalf of all Manitobans, not just simply those Manitobans who have to pay rates to MPI or have to pay rates to Workers Compensation Board or have to pay rates to Manitoba Hydro. Make it as a contribution of the province as a whole.

And I know there was a political contribution, but, all of a sudden, there was a direction, an interference, if you will, by the government of the day, the premier of the day, to make sure that those corporations spent money in areas that they shouldn't have spent the money.

And that's the simple direction that I have—is let managers manage, and that's exactly what this resolution speaks to. Stay out of the financial operations of the Crown corporations. Do not allow government officials—ministers who don't understand the operation—dictating how the operation should be run. It's just not good management.

But, then, again, we can point to many, many, many examples of mismanagement from this government so why should they not extend their mismanagement and their mismanagement practices into the mismanagement of the Crown corporations. They just can't help themselves. When they see an opportunity to mismanage, it's something that they like to take experience from because they just can't help themselves.

Thank you very much for an opportunity to speak to this resolution.

**Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake):** My pleasure to rise today to speak to this bold resolution. And I say bold because, you know, given their record in regard to Crown corporations, and the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) alluded to that and I will as well—the sale of MTS, the greatest political interference in a Crown corporation in the history of our province—it is bold for the member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) to put this forward today, I have to say.

But the member for Carman is a bold man, given the, you know, statements made not too long ago in one of his local newspapers, and I think they—the words bear repeating because for a rural MLA, a Conservative rural MLA, to state that they were going to put less emphasis on rural depopulation—the greatest challenge that we face in rural Manitoba; less emphasis on agriculture—here it's coming from the party that purports to speak for farmers in this province; roads—well, they didn't put any emphasis on roads when they were the government, so it's not surprising that, if they ever did become the government again, that that would be their pattern.

Certainly, this party, this government, having quadrupled the budget and so forth—we care about roads. We also care about health care—the member for Carman does not. We care about social services—obviously, the member for Carman does not, and, of course, First Nations people—well, there's nothing new there. That is certainly not a group that they've paid much attention to in the past and obviously have no plans to in the future either.

So a bold resolution from a bold member for Carman here. Certainly the apple fell very far from the tree of the previous member for Carman, rolled down the hill, fell into the creek and floated off to the ocean, because the former member for Carman was a man of integrity and certainly a man of integrity, a fine speaker. I recall his emphasis on trying to get smoking out of the public buildings and so forth against the wishes of his own caucus for which he was subsequently assassinated figuratively, so to speak, and now we have the current member for Carman, a bold man.

I look at this resolution and at some—it boggles the mind, and I'm looking at the proposal in regard to enhanced drivers' licences. This is really amazing, the stand that members opposite have taken in this regard, you know. This government, our focus on CentrePort—I should speak to that, speak to CentrePort just briefly, because this will be a legacy of this government. When this is fully developed, this will change the face of this province. And, you know, rapid border crossings, efficient border crossings, this is going to be integral to enhanced trade with the United States, and to have an enhanced driver's licence that will speed movement through the border just makes sense. And I just—I'm flabbergasted that members opposite don't get it—don't get it.

And the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), you know—I've been a member of the legislators' forum since its inception over a decade now, and the member for Morris has been on it recently of late, and around that table of legislators from North, from South Dakota, from Minnesota, from Manitoba, we've debated this issue time and again, and the consensus of those legislators was that this was something necessary, fundamental to the improvement of trade. And members opposite just don't get it and want to go backwards instead of forwards, nothing new there, I suppose.

But I don't have much time, and I—we have a new member of the legislator—Legislature that sits next to me here, and he's never heard the story of MTS, the parallel of the sale of MTS to what happened in the former Soviet Union, when Boris Yeltsin, the president of the day, sold off the oil industry, a multibillion-dollar industry to the gangsters of Russia. That's what happened, in essence.

And I was in Russia when it happened and I recall exactly how it played out. They issued—the

president issued stock certificates to every citizen of Russia. Each citizen of Russia got 15,000 rubles in stock certificates, and these were to every citizen so that they could invest in the—these Crown corporations, the oil company. Well, what happened? The next day, the mafia was on the streets. They were offering 20,000, 25,000, 50,000 rubles for these 15,000-ruble stock certificates. And it was at a time when inflation was running at over 1,000 percent, so, you know, things depreciated quickly, so people took advantage of this. And it was over a period of about a year that organized crime managed to buy up all of these stock certificates from every citizen of Russia and, in essence, took over the oil industry.

And now you have a city like St. Petersburg that has more billionaires per capita than any other city on the face of the earth, all gangsters, each and every one of them, Mafiosi of the highest order and worked well with the president of Russia who was from Ekaterinburg Sverdlovsk previously, which was the location of the Uralmash Machine Building complex, where all their super deep oil rigs are made, and it's a plant that's run by one of the most vicious mafia gangs in all of Russia. That's where their president came from; it's easy to see why he played ball with them.

But the Tory government did the same thing with MTS, and I remember when they sold it off. They issued—or they put a limit on the number of shares that you could buy. I think you could only buy, what, \$1,500 worth of shares, and the idea was every Manitoba citizen would have an opportunity to get a piece of that corporation.

\* (11:40)

Well, what happened? The same thing that happened in Russia. The Conservatives of the day—and I know, I remember exactly who was doing it, and I won't mention their names. I will say family members of mine, but staunch Conservatives, every one of them to a man. And they were going around town saying, okay, buy some shares now and we're going to come back next week and we're going to give you \$2,500 for those \$1,500 worth of shares. You can make a quick thousand dollars, and there was no limits in the second round as to how much you could accumulate, and in very short order, you know, Conservative power brokers and monied people managed to buy up this corporation, stole it from the people of Manitoba, just like the Russian mafia stole the oil industry away from the Russian people themselves.

So, you know, it's a story worth repeating, and I know I've told it a few times in here but I just wanted to pass that on to the new member of Concordia because he's going to be here for several decades, I'm sure, and it's something that will be good in his memory, and I hope I've driven it home.

When you look to MTS, you know, the patronage that played out after this—and the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) mentioned it, but I want to mention it as well, how the ringleader of them all, former Premier Filmon, who swore he would not sell MTS—they promised in the election campaign, no way, we're not going to touch it. Well, what did they do? Two months after they won the election, Wellington West was called in to orchestrate the sale—and I think his son is a member of that entity now and, what a coincidence, Mr. Filmon himself now sits on the MTS board.

If ever there was a conflict of interest, if ever there was a scandal, it was the sale of MTS in this province, and it was even further exacerbated in this very Chamber when the debate was curtailed when former—our leader, Gary Doer, was on his feet trying to get the attention of the Speaker and the Conservative-appointed Speaker refused to recognize him. That's how the debate ended in this Chamber. It was not—they didn't invoke closure. That was a scandal as well and a low point in the history of this Legislative Assembly, so I thank the member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) very much for bringing this issue to the table to give us all the opportunity to tell the real story of the sale of MTS and interference in Crown corporations. Thank you very much.

**Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris):** I just want to put a few words on the record in regard to the member from Carman's resolution today and I think it's fairly important to do—to also say that the member from Carman is an honourable member and I think that personal attacks in this Chamber shouldn't be allowed, Mr. Acting Speaker, and I think this just crossed the line just a little bit here. You can talk about the policies; you can talk about the debate, but when you cross and go into a personal attack on character, which this was, I think that's very deplorable for members of this statement—of this Chamber—and I want to say that the member from Carman is a reputable, honest, admirable person who stands up for the members, constituents of his, whether it's on agriculture issues, whether it's on transportation issues, whether it's on health issues, and I think that we all want to commend him for the

job that he does on behalf of his constituents here in this Chamber.

And, Mr. Acting Speaker, I want to just talk a little bit about some of the things that have happened which—when you talk about interference in Crown corporations. You know, just going back not that long ago, the NDP wanted to take \$20 million out of MPI for university renovations. Well, we all know that universities need renovations and primarily that's because the NDP has underfunded universities forever, and it's to the point where they're in a crisis situation now.

But Mr. Acting Speaker, if universities need funding, they should do it through the front door so that all Manitobans know where the money is going. They do not direct Crown corporations like MPI to finance things that are beyond their purview. Manitoba Public Insurance has a mandate to look after insurance in this province and to insure the motoring public, and if there are excesses, then we would expect—Manitoba motorists would expect—that these excesses would come back to them in the form of rebates. Now this just goes to the principle of who knows best.

Well, the NDP, the Big Brother-type government, believes that they know best how to manage for everybody. And I'm sure that they would like to be able to do that—take all the money from everybody and manage everybody and just tell everybody what they need to do.

But that's not the way people think. People would like to have the opportunity to make their own choices. We believe that people should make their own choices and are capable of making their own choices, unlike the NDP Big Brother, big-management, big-government party, who believes that they need to make the decisions on behalf of people because people just, quite frankly, aren't able to make those decisions for themselves. We know better than that. We know and we believe that Manitobans know how to make their own decisions. And when there are excesses in Crown corporations, such as in Manitoba Hydro, such as is MPI, this government should not be allowed to raid those corporations and take money out of them for their own political purposes. That is just wrong.

When you see—when you think about it, I would like to speak to every single member in this Chamber. We all represent motorists. We all represent Hydro ratepayers. Are we not—are those people on that side of the House not going to stand

up for their constituents and say, I think that, perhaps, we should open the books to the Public Utilities Board with MPI, just to see whether the finances there should, maybe, warrant some rebates to Manitoba drivers. *[interjection]* And—well, the last year and the member who's responsible for MPI—is—he should know very well that there were no rebates issued to Manitoba drivers last year, and the reason for that is because the Public Utilities Board cannot assure themselves that the finances in MPI are at the right state, so they cannot order any refunds or rebates because they can't assure themselves of the financial situation.

So we—I would like to say to the members opposite, when you go to your constituents, and they say, well, how come I didn't get a rebate from Manitoba Public Insurance this year? What are they going to say? They should be speaking on their behalf and saying, well, we would like to have the books opened just to make sure that maybe there should've been a rebate. We don't know because the books of MPI aren't open to the Public Utilities Board. Maybe they should advocate it on behalf of their constituents, and when they say, why has Manitoba Hydro rates gone up 19 percent over the last 10 years, maybe they should then say—tell their constituents, because they've raided Manitoba Hydro over the years and taken the money from Manitoba Hydro, which has made Manitoba Hydro borrow money, which has then incurred increases to ratepayers. They represent people in their constituencies who have been suffering because of the increases that this government has allowed to happen, because they have raided and taken money from Crown corporations.

\* (11:50)

You know, the member for—whatever it is, Interlake, I think it is, he's talking about—*[interjection]* I wasn't sure exactly what his constituency was, but it's Interlake. But he talks about the enhanced drivers' licences and he should know—he should know—that this debate has been going on for a very long time and he should know that the reason we look at this issue is because we know that Manitobans were surveyed on this; they didn't want the enhanced driver's licence because, let's face it, a passport does the job. And a passport—passports are good for five years, Mr. Acting Speaker, and you know the amount of money that they've invested into this failed, botched program, they could have taken that money and bought everybody a passport.

But passports are the recognized document; they can be used for flying, and, you know, I had a constituent who went down to the United States—fortunately, with their passport—and had to fly back for an emergency, a family emergency, and he had his passport. But if he didn't have his passport, how would he get back in the country? I also had another friend who was robbed and lost passport and driver's licence and everything while they're away but, fortunately, they were able to go to the consulate and get a passport. So the argument there is a little out of touch with reality.

But I would like to just—I know my time is running short, Mr. Acting Speaker, unfortunately, but I just want to say that when you talk about what is going on in these Crown corporations, they have a mandate. And as the minister—I'm sorry, as the member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) did say, they are given the mandate to manage their corporation. And when the NDP then go in and say, well, I don't care how you manage it, but, you know, I want some money from you, and you backfill it the best way that you can, that isn't fair to the ratepayers of Manitoba. That's just not fair.

That's a backdoor tax and that's not what Manitobans want. They want accountability, they want transparency, and they want to know that their money is being used for the purposes that it's intended instead of being siphoned off and being used for the purposes of the NDP. That's not the way it should work.

So I want to commend the member from Carman for bringing forward this resolution and I do expect that the government will not support the resolution—not surprisingly—but it's unfortunate because it is recommending that there be a fiscal transparency within the Crown corporations—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Altemeyer):** Order.

**Mr. Frank Whitehead (The Pas):** I want to thank the members for speaking on this issue. Well, one thing I remember, right away, when talking about Manitoba Hydro is that Manitoba Hydro is financially stronger than it ever has been in recent years.

In 1998-99, for example, under the PCs, Hydro's debt-equity ratio was 84.16. Hydro recorded net income \$298 million in 2008-2009, third highest in history. The year before, it recorded second highest net income, \$346 million. I think, Mr. Acting Speaker, the record speaks for itself, how Manitoba

Hydro has developed over the years under this leadership.

*Ms. Marilyn Brick, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair*

Now, I want to talk about the north. Northern Manitoba, as you know, 80 percent, or around 80 percent of the natural resources in Manitoba comes from northern Manitoba, including Manitoba Hydro. In recent years the First Nations communities, as well with the other communities in the north, have been actively involved in determining the plans of future developments of Manitoba Hydro, something that was never done before with the previous government during their tenure.

I want to say that in northern Manitoba, where the clean hydro energy power comes from, I want to say that the business that takes place in developing these dams, developing the hydro, goes hand in hand with partnerships that we have developed over the years with the First Nations and Aboriginal communities and northern communities overall.

I want to say that there's been a considerable amount of employment over the years. Four hundred—4,700 person-years of employment will go into the project of Wuskwatim, for example. That project alone has stimulated the economy in the area, in northern Manitoba, but particularly in the immediate area of Nisichawayasihk, Thompson and other communities in that immediate vicinity.

First Nations peoples, Aboriginal peoples in general are actively involved in determining the future of Manitoba, including northern Manitoba. I know that. I can say that because I was part of that process. I was part of the process of building relationships with government and industry and commerce. I was part of that process in laying the foundation for social and economic partnership in the north. I was part of that process in determining what kind of a capacity we need to build Manitoba, human capacity, resource capacity. I was part of that, and so were many other leaders, in my capacity, at that time.

This is not—developing partnerships in social and economic activity in the north is nothing new that just started last year or the year before. This has been building for the last 10 years. And I'm very proud of that fact, that this government provided that opportunity for northern Manitoba communities and Aboriginal peoples in general.

The partnerships we have been developing and fostering is based on a mutual goal, and that is to get

people involved in that decision-making process. At my level, when I was formerly the leader of Opaskwayak Cree Nation, for example, we were actively involved in the discussions in many consultations processes. Whenever there was a consultation, we were actively involved, adding on to the plans, adding on to the potential policies that will come from those plans that are being developed. That, to me, is a sign that the people from northern Manitoba are enthusiastic, they want to get involved, they are getting involved, and this government has provided that opportunity for them.

I want to also say that the Aboriginal people in northern Manitoba have had many, many mountains, many swamps and rapids to negotiate in recent years. But, this government has allowed us to negotiate those barriers, those, you know, ruts in the trails, to be more fruitful for everybody.

I'm not just talking about the First Nations benefiting from—not just the First Nations to benefit

from all of this. I'm talking about all Manitobans, because, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, when you have the oppressed, when you have social and economic repressed, politically repressed people rise up again to be part of a—to be actively involved in determining the future of Manitoba, including Manitoba Hydro, there is a sense of hope, there is a sense of willingness, the need to get involved. We have developed that, that state, that new state of mind. And it is through this government here that we've been able to do that.

Manitoba Hydro, in our opinion, has been very, very fair in determining—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) will have three minutes remaining.

The time being 12 noon, the House will now recess and reconvene at 1:30 p.m.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Thursday, May 6, 2010**

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