

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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<i>Vacant</i>	Morris	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, July 11, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Good morning, everyone. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Are we ready to proceed with Bill 205?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. Bill 214, are we ready to proceed with that one?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Yes? Okay.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Mr. Speaker: We'll call Bill 214, The Cyberbullying Prevention Act.

Bill 214—The Cyberbullying Prevention Act

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen), that Bill 214, The Cyberbullying Prevention Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of the House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: And it is a pleasure to put some words on the record regarding Bill 214, The Cyberbullying Prevention Act, with the hope that the House will agree to move it to committee prior to 11 o'clock this morning, Mr. Speaker.

All of us, I think, are in agreement, all members of this Legislature, that cyberbullying, and bullying in general, is a serious issue. And it's a serious issue

that needs a serious response. I think all of us have heard cases, not only the very public and high-profile cases that have occurred both in Canada and in the United States about cyberbullying, where it not just impacts young people's lives, in many cases, it takes their lives.

And all of us, I think, are touched by those stories and all of us have heard individual stories from constituents about young people who are bullied in their schools, either cyberbullied or otherwise. And I think all of us, as well, have our hearts go out to those young people and to their parents, the situation that they're dealing with.

But it's incumbent upon us as legislators, as MLAs, as elected people in this House, when we are confronted with a serious situation, to take it seriously and to bring forward to the extent that legislation can reduce bullying to do something that's effective, Mr. Speaker, not just to do something for the sake of doing something.

And when I look at legislation across North America—and I've said it in a different context in this House—I've had now the opportunity to review all or parts of legislation right across the United States and across Canada, and what I've seen is that there are a number of common things within the legislation of cyberbullying or bullying legislation where there is effective legislation. There are a number of common principles within the legislation that is effective across North America and across Canada, and one of the key principles is ensuring that victims of cyberbullying, in this particular case, are given some power, that they are returned some power because too often those who are victims of cyberbullying report—and we can understand why—that they are powerless, that they don't feel that they can do much.

So this bill provides them some power. It's different than the provisions in other jurisdictions that allow for protection orders on cyberbullying in that it allows for a person as young as 16 to bring forward their own application. It's distinct and unique from other pieces of legislation in Canada that have protection orders for kids who are being cyberbullied because it allows the kids themselves up to the age of 16 or to the age—at a minimum age of 16 to ask for and apply for their own protection or it gives them that power, Mr. Speaker, returns the

power that's taken away from them by those who are bullying them, from those who are cyberbullying, and those protection orders have a lot of different measures within this particular piece of legislation.

It would allow the police, for example, to seize the means by which the cyberbullying is happening. So, whether that is computers or cellphones or whatever means the cyberbullying is happening, it would allow police to seize those mechanisms, Mr. Speaker. It would allow police to put restrictions on the use of the Internet or other means of cyberbullying that a person who is cyberbullying might be using. And so that's the second issue. That's the second key ingredient in effective legislation that we've seen across North America is that it provides the tools to the police. It provides them the ability to take action on those who are cyberbullying.

The third issue, Mr. Speaker, is parental responsibility or parental engagement, and that is the third element of effective cyberbullying legislation that I've seen across North America and in Canada because we know that parents need to be engaged, and whether they are the birth parents or whether they're the guardians of individual youth, they need to be engaged in the lives of these young people. And where parents or guardians, those who are in care and control, know that a young person is cyberbullying, there needs to be an onus for that parent to act. There needs to be an onus for that parent to take responsibility, and that is a critical part of it.

Too often—and this will be surprising, I know, to many people in the House, Mr. Speaker—but too often parents themselves are aware of the cyberbullying, and by doing nothing or saying nothing, in some ways they condone it. There are rare cases—and I hope that they're rare—but there are rare cases where the parental figure is actually involved with the cyberbullying, and that was the case with Megan Meier in the United States.

And I had the opportunity to meet with her mother, Tina Meier, and she—I had the great fortune to speak to her about the kinds of legislation that can impact cyberbullying, and she moved me I think in many ways to look at different things that are effective and at different things that can work when it comes to cyberbullying.

And she acknowledged that legislation may not have saved her daughter's life. Her daughter committed suicide as a result of a cyberbullying incident at the age of 13, and she acknowledged that

her daughter might not have been saved by legislation. But she knows that there are daughters and there are sons who will be saved by certain pieces of legislation, and so she said to me as a legislator that it's incumbent on all of us who have authority and who have power is to bring forward legislation to do what we can. Not that it's ever going to eliminate bullying or cyberbullying—that's an unrealistic expectation. But where there are abilities to do something, where there are abilities to make a difference, then we need to take those opportunities to do that.

* (10:10)

My criticism of other pieces of legislation, when it comes to cyberbullying, Mr. Speaker, in this Legislature, is that when I read it—when I read legislation that's been tabled by the government, it lacks those three fundamental principles. It lacks the principle of giving empowerment to the individual who is being victimized, it lacks the ability for parental involvement—doesn't have the parental engagement and it doesn't provide police with those additional tools. It's not effective in that way.

And I think we do a disservice, Mr. Speaker, by allowing legislation to come forward and to put out into the public that it's somehow going to make a significant difference in the lives of those who are being bullied. It's false expectations; it's false hope. And in this particular case, when you have somebody who is already the victim of being bullying, that false hope is almost like being victimized a second time—it's almost like being victimized a second time.

So, to me, the importance is that we need to have legislation that's effective, that is going to make a difference and that doesn't give false promises but gives some hope, Mr. Speaker. And I would never suggest that this legislation or any legislation is going to be a silver bullet for bullying. I think if any of us knew what silver bullet there was to stop bullying or cyberbullying, we would do that; we would all take that measure. So that is not what this bill is purporting to do, but I do think that it looks at best practices. It looks at some of the most effective legislation in North America and Canada and it puts that into place. And if we can't look at those best practices and use those best practices, then I think we're doing a disservice to those young people and others who are being cyberbullied.

So it's brought forward with the expectation, Mr. Speaker, that if it's passed into legislation, that it isn't going to eliminate bullying or it's not going to

eliminate cyberbullying—I would never try to suggest that. I would never suggest that it's going to be a cure-all. I wish it would be, but it's not going to be. That's just the nature of human nature, unfortunately. But it is our nature to—and it's our—important that we, as legislators, do the best that we can; that we find the best tools that are available and we bring those forward in legislation the best way that we can; that we strike a balance between what we think can be effective in many ways, but not to unnecessarily give false hope. And I think that this bill does that.

So, it's the reason why I've looked at different jurisdictions. It's unique in some ways where we've changed certain parts of the legislation compared to where it's been in other areas in Canada and the United States, Mr. Speaker. But I do think, ultimately, it is something that is important. I do think it's something that can be effective, and I don't think it will give false hope, but I do think it will give some hope. And, ultimately, that is something that all of us, I think, should take responsibility in and look at very effectively in terms of how we get legislation through this particular process.

So, I'm looking forward to hearing the comments of the government, the members opposite, about this legislation. If they have suggestions, I'm sure that they'll put forward those suggestions, and perhaps there can be some discussion around those, Mr. Speaker. But, ultimately, this is the kind of legislation, I think, that can help young people and that can hopefully prevent a tragedy. The challenge is, of course, we never know what's been prevented. We'll never know what's been averted, but we know that if we don't take measures, that we can't avert those sort of tragedies.

So I hope that the government will look at this in the intention that it's brought forward and pass it on to committee. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): I do want to thank the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) for bringing this bill forward, because I think this is an optimistic day in the Legislature. I think that we are finally moving towards talking about solutions, and that is a good day, and I want to welcome him to the discussion about solutions.

The bill that is being discussed this morning was introduced yesterday. It's been in front of the Legislature for just over 20 hours, and we're going to take some time to look at that bill carefully. I think it's a very substantive bill.

I listened to the member opposite talking about other jurisdictions and the research that he's done to bring forward the bill, and we're also going to do some of that analysis. I know that there are certainly—on a brief examination of the bill, there are some implications for how the courts are used, for how children would be going to court to get protection orders. I think that bears some very careful discussion and consideration.

And we welcome him to that discussion, and we look forward to having some of that discussion—not only in the House, but there's also lots of opportunities outside the House to have those informal discussions to talk about what his ideas are for having a complementary antibullying strategy. So we look forward to doing that.

One of—a few things that I also want to talk about, when we talk about a complementary strategy on bullying, we know, and I think the member opposite touched on it also, that the prevention of bullying has to be an objective of our legislative approach.

And what we know from much of the research into bullying and harassment, and other kinds of crimes like that, is that for every person who is taking part in bullying, there are sometimes literally hundreds of bystanders. When we talk about some of the horrific situations of cyberbullying that we've heard about in the news, situations where there will be—and I don't actually think bullying is a strong enough word for some of the things that we have seen occur—situations where we've heard about sexual assaults taking place, being filmed and that film being passed around. Those kinds of—those things are not just bullying, those are crimes, those are criminal acts. And we need to continue to work, as I know the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) has been doing with his colleagues, as the premiers have been doing together, to ensure that we have strong Criminal Code provisions to deal with those situations.

But we also, I think, it's incumbent upon us to ask ourselves, what can we do to create a culture where when you see somebody being sexually assaulted, your reaction isn't to take out a camera and film it. And part of what we can do, I think, is to create a different kind of culture, within our schools, within all of our institutions. And part of doing that is empowering students to take action. And some of those actions do entail coming together, coming

together into groups and organizations, sponsoring activities that look at things like gender equity.

We know that when sexual assaults take place, when sexual harassment takes place, in our schools or any institutions, that is an act that takes place because we don't yet have gender equality in all of our institutions. And so one of the things that's present in Bill 18 is saying that we want our schools to accommodate students who want to come together and do activities and promote organizations that promote gender equity.

We know from some of the campaigns that we're engaged in right now, looking at how we stop and prevent violence against women, that empowering men and boys to be part of that solution, to take responsibility, not only for their own actions, but also to take responsibility to interrupt some of the attitudes that they hear every day from some of their friends and colleagues. We know that empowering them to do that is going to have a tremendous effect on preventing violence against women.

We also know, and anyone, I think, who has been in a school or a high school in the last 20 years or beyond that, and we can even think back to our own high school experiences, knows that homophobia is alive and well within those corridors, even still today, even though there's been tremendous gains made in equality for gay and lesbian and transgendered people. We still do know that schools—a school for a gay kid can be a terrifying place. That is true, Mr. Speaker.

And we've heard many of those stories. And I know members opposite have heard many of those stories. And, certainly, we need to have in place tough sanctions for when those things happen. But we also need to have in place ways to encourage our kids to prevent that kind of attitude.

And we talk about some of the courage that young people have shown in coming together to try to change some of the culture, some of the harassments, some of the bullying that they see around them.

One great example, I think, that all of us in this House have embraced, is Pink Shirt Day, which came about because a young man in a high school witnessed another young man being teased because he was wearing a pink shirt. Now I think all of us in this Chamber know what was behind that teasing, why a young man is teased for wearing a pink shirt. And that—what that young person did in response to

that, was to come to school the next day wearing a pink shirt, and to encourage all of his friends to come to school wearing pink shirts, to show that there are more of us standing together with those who are victims of bullies than standing with bullies.

And one of the things that that story reminds me of is, I think it was the king of Denmark, and his reaction to the Nazi regime in the—during World War II, when there was an order that came out that all the Jews should wear the Star of David to identify themselves. And the king of Denmark, the next day, also appeared with a Star of David, and the people of Denmark all appeared with the Star of David.

* (10:20)

And I think it's based on the premise that if we stand together, the bullies lose, Mr. Speaker. If we stand together, if we support each other, if we have solidarity with those in our society who are victimized, the bullies lose, and that is also an important part of a strategy.

So I think there are very interesting ideas in this bill. I think there are things that can be part of a complementary antibullying strategy. I look forward to having that discussion and that debate. I want to assure the members opposite that we won't take eight months to have that discussion and debate. We will treat these ideas in this bill with more respect than they have treated Bill 18, I want to assure them of that. We will take an honest look at the ideas and we'll have an honest discussion with the members opposite about these ideas. And I think that if we can work together, I think that we can craft an antibullying strategy that's going to be good for all Manitobans.

And it's going to both have the kind of sanctions that the members opposite have talked about, it's going to creatively and innovatively use the tools at our disposal, but it's also going to say to the kids who are standing up for each other that we stand with you—we stand with you. We got your back. We don't stand with the bullies. If you want to form a gay-straight alliance in any school in this province, we stand with you—we stand with you. If you're going to take—if you're going to be courageous and stand up against sexism and homophobia and racism in your school, we stand with you. Mr. Speaker, that's the side that we're on.

And so we're going to look forward to hearing more comments today. I do think that this bill is

substantive and has some merit and it's going to take more than 20 hours to take a look at and consider it. Just has is the case, certainly, when we introduce government bills, usually the situation is that there is a time of briefing, a time of discussion, a time of study of that bill before we would ever expect members opposite to comment on it. Sometimes even after several months and briefings have been offered, we still aren't able to move the debate. But we're going to treat this with seriousness. We're going to treat this with respect, and we're going to treat it, I hope, in the spirit that it's been offered, which is finally—finally, Mr. Speaker—some spirit of co-operation in working on the very difficult issues that are in front of us.

So I want to thank the member for the bill. I want to thank him for the sincerity in which he's brought it forward, and we look forward to continuing the discussion.

Mr. Speaker: Any further debate on—honourable member for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk briefly about this bill which I want to, first of all, thank the MLA for Steinbach for bringing forward. It's clearly taken a significant effort to look carefully at what legislation is in other jurisdictions, and I think that this is a really good starting place for looking at prevention of cyberbullying effectively in our province as part of a larger antibullying strategy. And, certainly, I would hope that this bill can, if not today, as soon as next week, come back and move on to committee stage and to second reading.

I think that the—that this is certainly worthy of merit. It is a pretty important subject today, and we have had, you know, instances of, for example, Gary Hansen in Russell, who committed suicide after being bullied. Now, that wasn't at that point, at least as I'm aware, cyberbullying, but there certainly have been cases, Amanda Todd in BC and Rehtaeh Parsons in Nova Scotia, where there has been cyberbullying with devastating effects and suicides and loss of life. And so it is something that we need to address in a very serious fashion and look to some pretty strong and effective solutions.

And so, as I have already done, I want to compliment the MLA for Steinbach for bringing this forward, and I think it's got a lot of merit, and I would like to see this move on to committee stage so that, in fact, we can have a broader range of input from the public and from people who are interested

and from—I would suggest it would be pretty important to have some high school students with experience related to cyberbullying come in and testify. And I think that, you know, we can learn a lot in this sort of situation from people who have been in the trenches as high school students are today, dealing with a cyberworld, dealing with the Internet and social media and sharing their experiences and sharing their thoughts on the respective clauses on this bill.

So I would hope that this can move forward, and, you know, perhaps it will move forward in complementary fashion to Bill 18, and so that we can have more than one bill, with more than one measure, effective in reducing bullying in Manitoba. Thank you.

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): I move, seconded by the member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun), that debate be now adjourned.

Mr. Speaker: And moved by the honourable member for Selkirk, seconded by the honourable member for Rossmere, that debate be adjourned. Is that agreed?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of adjourning the debate will please signify by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to adjourning the debate, please signify by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: Opinion of the Chair, the Ayes have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Goertzen: Recorded vote, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Recorded vote having been requested, we'll call in the members.

Order. Order, please. The one-hour allocation for the ringing of the division bells has expired. I'm instructing that they be turned off and we'll now proceed to the vote.

The question before the House is the adjournment of Bill 214.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Allan, Allum, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Blady, Braun, Caldwell, Chief, Chomiak, Dewar, Gaudreau, Howard, Irvin-Ross, Jha, Kostyshyn, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Pettersen, Rondeau, Saran, Selby, Selinger, Swan, Wiebe, Wight.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Let's have decorum here during the vote. It's difficult enough to go through this process, especially for our young pages here. And I'm asking for the co-operation of honourable members.

Nays

Briese, Cullen, Driedger, Eichler, Ewasko, Friesen, Gerrard, Goertzen, Graydon, Helwer, Maguire, Mitchelson, Pallister, Pedersen, Rowat, Schuler, Smook, Stefanson, Wishart.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Yeas 31, Nays 19.

Mr. Speaker: Debate is accordingly adjourned.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: We'll now proceed—the hour being past 11 a.m., it's time for private members' hour. We'll now proceed to private member's resolution. And the resolution we have before us this morning—order, please. Is the House ready to debate private members' hour?

An Honourable Member: Yes, we are.

* (11:30)

Mr. Speaker: Then let's have some order in the House, please.

It's now time for private members' resolutions, and the resolution we have before us this morning is titled "Equal Access to Services for all Manitobans", sponsored by the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 23—Equal Access to Services for all Manitobans

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I move, seconded by the member from Agassiz, that,

WHEREAS provincial government offices, including Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, known as MAFRI; Education; Infrastructure and Transportation; and Conservation and Water Stewardship serve a vital role in communities across Manitoba; and

WHEREAS the provincial government intends to close, merge or consolidate at least 20 provincial government offices by the end of this year; and

WHEREAS the provincial government's plan to consolidate offices hinders access to government services in a timely manner and requires Manitoba families to commute outside their local area to access services; and

WHEREAS the provincial government did not consult the public before closing, merging or consolidating provincial government offices.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba acknowledge Manitobans have a right to access provincial programs and services in a timely manner within a reasonable distance from their community regardless of their location; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to conduct public consultations on office location changes and share with the public a needs-for-and-alternatives-to analysis of services before opening, closing, merging or consolidating provincial government offices.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, seconded by the honourable member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese),

WHEREAS provincial government offices, including Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Ewasko: Oh, okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With all the brouhaha that's been going on here this morning and, of course, the government side not allowing the bill brought forward by the member from Steinbach to move forward, it's been a bit of an—

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

I'm trying to keep some order in the House here this morning, and I would appreciate the co-operation of the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet. We're dealing with the private member's resolution Equal Access to Services for all Manitobans. And so I would encourage him to confine his remarks, if he will, to that particular private member's resolution that he is sponsoring.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will proceed with the resolution. The main purpose of the resolution today is the fact that the government of the day is choosing to close or consolidate or move various offices around the province, not only rurally but also within the various cities, here in Winnipeg, Portage, Brandon as well, and many, many communities outside of the city, as well.

In regards to the various departments, as well: Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Conservation and Water Stewardship, Infrastructure and Transportation and, of course, Education, Training and Trade. These offices, Mr. Speaker, they serve a vital role in regards to community services for various people and Manitobans within this great province of ours.

The various offices that provide the education and the leadership and the various business developments and training for employment, supply services for farm production, rural economic development and they protect the biological and ecological health of Manitoba's water systems among many other things. These government offices are integral to the survival of rural communities across Manitoba through the range of services and programs they offer. Frequently, they are the only government support in the rural areas.

This NDP government announced that they would be closing at least 20 offices in Manitoba with plans to consolidate or move several other offices. The move affects all Manitobans and impacts Conservation offices in Mafeking, Grandview, Leaf Rapids, Deloraine, along with Agriculture offices in Fisher Branch, Starbuck, Boissevain, Stonewall, Treherne, Shoal Lake and Neepawa. Infrastructure and Transportation offices in Minnedosa and Virden and the education and training centre in Beausejour for support of employment, Mr. Speaker, as well as various offices right here in Winnipeg.

Office closures across Manitoba are going to make it more difficult for people in rural communities to access government programs and services. One more example, Mr. Speaker, just

yesterday I believe the MAFRI office in Stonewall was closed and so the impacts is the fact that accessibility for these people that access these programs are getting further and further apart and a little more centralized I would say, and what that means is that they're making it more difficult for these people to access these services that the government once was supplying.

I know that for the Beausejour the education and training facility received news from the NDP government that they would be forced to close by the end of this year, and the rumour mill is that it's going to be even sooner than that. The supportive employment office in the Beausejour area or right in the community of Beausejour services a population of well over 3,000 people and the 3,000 people we're just talking mainly in the Beausejour—in the Town of Beausejour, but there—also the catchment area of that office is quite a bit larger than that. We're looking at probably closer to about 9,000 people. On average the Education and Training Centre in Beausejour handles roughly 80 clients per week, Mr. Speaker.

So with these offices being moved I know that some of the government's fixes or strategies I guess to sort of compensate for that is to provide one of the workers to come in to do a little bit of the work, you know, once or twice a week type of thing. But, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that once you start pulling away some of these services and making people drive fair distances for these services, what ends up happening is people stop looking for these services, and why is that? Because it just makes it that much tougher to get to these various places. So then these people then tend to possibly give up.

So I'm actually looking forward to listening to what some of the comments from the government side. I know that I have, you know, some questions for all the ministers on the other side in regards to why they would be neglecting to do some of those public consultations, Mr. Speaker, as far how is this going to affect the everyday, hard-working Manitoban, or even those Manitobans that are looking for these services that do not possibly have a job and they're looking for those extra help to get their feet back on the ground and to get going again.

* (11:40)

What worries me, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that with these services closing or moving away from these communities, is that these people walk down to these service centres or training centres and they access them for not only their computer usage, but

also for their knowledge and guidance in regards to how these people will be needing to move forward with whatever questions or concerns that they possibly have, whether it's agriculture, conservation, training and trade or various other ones.

So some of my questions to the government ministers is, where are their stats to prove that these offices are not viable or not necessarily needed? Mr. Speaker, what are their stats? Did they actually have the decision making—were they capable of making those decisions? Who were they listening to? Who were they talking to? When you cut services you're hurting various degrees of all Manitobans, and it worries me that the lack of consultation—and also the fact of the lack of respect.

I know that just—with just over two and a half minutes remaining, I'd like to speak a little bit on the consultation piece and also on the respect. I know that in Beausejour alone it was the NDP premier of the day, Mr. Ed Schreyer, that helped bring the government office into the town of Beausejour, and it's this NDP government that's quickly trying to shut that building down, for lack of a better word.

Mr. Speaker, there's more and more offices getting closed, and so what are the expenses? They're saying that by moving these offices they're going to actually save money. I can't see it, and as of today they haven't been able to show how that's actually going to save any money. I can't see it helping any Manitobans. They pat themselves on the back on a daily basis in this House on how they're the government of choice to help the people, the underprivileged. But more and more, as I spend time in this House, within the last 20 or so months I'm seeing more and more evidence that this government wants to make people more and more reliable on this government. They don't want to empower Manitobans and encourage them to move forward on their own. This government wants to hold them under their thumb and make them more and more reliable on these various government services.

So what worries me, Mr. Speaker, is that without the consultation they're going ahead and they're making these closures. The resolution is clear. We're standing up for Manitobans on this side of the House on various issues in regards to the PST increase—again, with no consultation. Municipalities are being forced to amalgamate with fewer than a thousand residents—without consultation again. We heard loud and clear that various other bills that are being brought forward—I know I want to stick to the

resolution—but various other bills that are being brought forward from the government side, they're being done without consultation.

So with this, Mr. Speaker, I think the resolution is clear. We're standing up for Manitobans. I'm interested in hearing what the government side has to say, and please for—move this—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please, the member's time has expired.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand up for Manitobans today to speak to this resolution on equal access to services for all Manitobans. So I thank the member for bringing that forward.

And I guess I can think of a couple of examples that immediately come to mind about equal access to services for Manitobans that we have implemented. *[interjection]* And, yes, I already hear—one of my colleagues must have read my mind, must have been the big print or something—but let's talk about hydro.

Let's talk about hydro and equal access for Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, because there was a time when—*[interjection]* You know, I listened very intently to the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), but the members opposite don't want to hear this. Clearly they don't want to have a debate where they actually hear what we have to say. They want to shout it down because they know that they're wrong in this issue.

Back to the hydro, Mr. Speaker. There was a time when people in Winnipeg paid less for hydro than people in rural Manitoba. So what did we do? We recognized that as a public utility that is available to all Manitobans, that we should equalize the rates for hydro, and we're the government that did that.

Now, I was teaching in rural Manitoba at the time and I was asked to come in and speak to the committee on that and I had every intention of being here, but, unfortunately, my duties as assigned, coaching a basketball game or something at the time, prevented me from doing that, but I was still in the classroom at the time and I remember that discussion around equalizing the rates and how important that was for Manitobans and I'm very proud to be part of a government that did that.

Now, let's talk about equal access to services such as health care. Now, Mr. Speaker, I've said in

this Chamber before and it's worth repeating again, when I was in the 2007—or 2003 election—no, pardon me, let's go back, 2007 election, I remember that we committed to bringing a dialysis unit to the Gimli health centre. And I've said it before, and I'll repeat it again, right after we made that announcement, I was literally accosted by the manager of the campaign for my opposition candidate who said, what the—expletive deleted—are you doing that for? Nobody needs this in Gimli. We can't afford this. Why are you doing this?

That is what the manager of the campaign for the opposition said, while we're providing equal access for Manitobans who need dialysis in the community of Gimli. And I was very proud that day when we opened up that dialysis unit in Gimli and the impact that it had immediately on a gentleman's life who was in tears thanking me for bringing that service to the Gimli community.

So you want to talk about equal access? Let's talk about equal access to health care that we've initiated through a number of different expansions of chemo treatment, taking it out to rural Manitoba, MRIs, CT scans, bringing it to rural Manitoba so people from rural Manitoba don't have to come in to the city. We know that when people are under the duress of dealing with health challenges, and some of them very, very profound health challenges that, hopefully, I will not experience, we know that it's very stressful for those individuals to come in to the city to get the tests that they need. We're taking health care to Manitobans. And we've done that with chemo treatment in community CancerCare programs in Neepawa, Russell, Hamiota, Deloraine and Pinawa, and, not to mention, full CancerCare centre with radiation therapy in Brandon.

Adding new surgical services in rural areas, including cataracts in Swan River, Minnedosa and Portage and hip and knee surgery in Morden-Winkler, we have an incredible list of equal access to services for Manitobans in health care. Now, the member opposite did say, well, the government says that this is going to save money but I don't see how it's going to save money. Well, I can tell the member opposite that we have a \$1.49-million saving that has been identified per year on consolidation of services.

Now, he's talking about the employment office. Members are a little bit disconnected in understanding how we would—or why we would scale back on that employment office in that

community. Well, let me tell you why: 5 per cent unemployment, fewer clients coming through the door looking for assistance. In fact, I believe there have been less than 200 people at that office over the course of a full year. That's less than one person per office day. Is that efficient? No. Are there other technologies that perhaps could assist people in this? Yes, I believe it's called the Internet.

And, of course, not everybody in Manitoba has equal access to Internet, and we all know why that's the case. Why do not everybody in Manitoba have equal access to Internet? Oh, somebody sold the Manitoba Telephone System. That wasn't us. So we have Internet access for a lot of the services that are being provided. This is, after all, the 21st century. Now, yes, he actually did concede that we're not abandoning the people that need the services, that we are developing a hybrid that will provide opportunities for face-to-face service with counsellors and employment officers and we're going to do that. So it's a more efficient way of doing the business of government and supporting Manitobans and finding a way to save money.

So that is something that we're committed to, is to find efficient ways to provide front-line services in rural Manitoba.

*(11:50)

And don't get me started on education. Don't get me started. Okay, I'll get started. Too late, too late. I'll get started. I'll get started. The opposition underfunded education year after year after year, and I know the number is about 700 fewer teachers, and there's a reason for that—there's—was a reason for that; because 33,000 people chose to leave the province—33,000 people more—33,000 more people left the province than came to the province in the 10 years that they were in government, Mr. Speaker—700 of them were probably teachers, or the thousand nurses that they hired. And you want to talk about impacts on the local economy in rural Manitoba—teachers, nurses, they make pretty decent salaries, and you're going to take those individuals out of the communities? Because how do they fund health care in the '90s?

Well, let's see. The Tories cut \$37 million from rural hospitals and personal care homes in the 1990s. Now, the member from Morden-Winkler should know that Winkler and Tabor Home personal care home lost \$1.3 million. That was in 1997. Winkler Hospital and personal care home cut \$1.8 million. Let's go over to Portage, where we have the member

from Portage la Prairie. Portage hospital cut \$1.6 million, two Portage personal care homes cut \$1.1 million. Let's go to western Manitoba, a few members from western Manitoba. Riding Mountain–Minnedosa hospital was cut \$1.5 million in '92-93 to '97-98. The Russell hospital, \$366,516 cut. Agassiz—the member from Agassiz is here. Neepawa Hospital was cut half a million dollars. I see the member from Arthur-Virden's probably saying, how much did they cut in my area? Well, the Melita hospital was cut \$182,000—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I want to remind the honourable Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade that, according to our rules, we're not to make references to the presence or absence of any member of the Assembly. I'm asking for the honourable minister's co-operation.

Mr. Bjornson: It's my fault, Mr. Speaker. I'll stick to the script.

The Arthur-Virden hospital—or Arthur-Virden had a cut of \$182,000 to the Melita hospital. Two Virden personal care homes, \$411,000 were cut. If you want to go to Brandon West, \$5 million cut from the Brandon hospital. Eastern Interlake in Steinbach, \$1.4 million cut. Lac du Bonnet, \$147,240 cut. The Pine Falls health centre, \$775,000 cut to health care in rural Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. And I could go on and on, but evidently, I seem to be getting under the member's skin.

If you want to talk about equality of access to services in rural Manitoba, you cannot be cutting those services in rural Manitoba the way the—that the opposition members did in the 1990s.

Now, how else do we have equal access in Manitoba? We invest in infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. And I know, I only have a minute and 50 seconds left. I could use up all that time just talking about the infrastructure investments that we've made in my community alone.

We are the government that has invested significantly in rural Manitoba, so rural Manitobans have access to better roads, better schools, better health care.

And I know members opposite stand in this Chamber every other day and ask for us to invest more money in their constituencies, Mr. Speaker. They do that every day. I believe on the day of the budget, prior to us introducing the budget, I think the ask was for \$138 million in investment that they wanted in their constituencies.

But, you know what? We're the government that delivers on these things. We're the government that invests in rural Manitoba; we invest in infrastructure, we invest in highways, we invest in health care and we invest in the—in our schools.

So members opposite can stand up and talk about equal access for rural Manitoba; they can talk about it. But we've shown, by equalizing the hydro rates for Winnipeg and for rural Manitoba, we've shown by investing in critical infrastructure in rural Manitoba and we've shown by finding efficient ways to deliver services and maintain services in rural Manitoba, that we're the government that doesn't talk about it; we do it, Mr. Speaker.

So I appreciate the opportunity presented by the member from Lac du Bonnet for bringing this resolution to the table, so we can remind him—we can remind him that we are a government that governs for Winnipeg, for Brandon, for rural Manitoba and for northern Manitoba. Perhaps they should start looking through that lens as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, I just want to put a few comments on the record on the resolution brought forward by the member from Lac du Bonnet, being as how my community was one of the ones that was impacted by this move.

The—what the minister is forgetting, is that along with the cuts in personnel, go some cuts in services. And they—I know our Ag office in Neepawa was a very vibrant office with a lot of traffic, a lot of people from—even from the urban community 'atten'—went to that office to get advice, and services were provided out of that office to individuals in their fields and in their homes, in their cattle yards, around their livestock that now won't be provided because personnel isn't there.

The Ste. Rose office, which isn't one of the closures but almost might as well be because they haven't replaced any of the staff either there or in Gladstone as they—as there were retirements. And in both in Ste. Rose and Gladstone they ran grassland programs out of them and test plots and development of a lot of the Crown land and a lot of the ranchland and pasture land which the north end of my constituency is hugely made up of, and they developed—and they were very good programs. Roger Sheldon out of Ste. Rose developed some grasslands plots and monitored them year to year and put some best practices in place that the ranchers in that area have embraced. And that service is gone. Those plots aren't there anymore and we're

kind of back to square one. Instead of having an ongoing program that was beneficial to all the ranchers in that area and in the Gladstone, Plumas, Waldersee, Glenella area, those programs are no longer there because of the cutbacks that have went on.

We've seen cutbacks in staffing in Infrastructure and Transportation in rural Manitoba, and along with that comes some very dangerous practices because of lack of staff in those areas. Dust control on the provincial roads is not done at the levels it used to be, and that's a highly dangerous situation with vehicles meeting each other on a gravel road in a cloud of dust. Snow plowing cut back in the evening hours because—on the provincial trunk highways because the staff isn't allowed to work overtime hours. Mowing along ditches on provincial roads and highways is not done the way it used to be and weed control is a major factor. It's a growing problem. The weeds grow on the provincial road system and blow into the fields that the farmers farm. Water management, blocked ditches—all those things go with the cutbacks in the offices and in the staffing in these communities.

In Neepawa the Conservation office was moved about a half a mile down the street from where it was. The building where they were is still there. Their maintenance yard, their service yard is still there. Now, instead of walking out of the office in—someone comes in and wants a—skunk trap. Instead of walking out of the office and picking it up in the shop, they have to get in their vehicle, drive to their service yard and pick it up for whoever the customer or client is. It seems a little ludicrous. They're still paying for the building that's sitting there; there's just

nobody in it. They're in a different office which they are also renting further down the street. This is cost savings? It can only be NDP math. I can't see it being anything else but NDP math when you maintain two offices for the same thing—one of them sitting empty, of course, and cause some driving and—to access the things they need to access.

I know the time grows short, and with those few words, I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): It's a real pleasure to get up and speak regarding, for the record, equal access to services to all Manitobans.

I think that members opposite maybe need to sit back and look at what agriculture was 20 years ago, what—25 years ago—what services are available today in comparison to what they were 25 years ago.

And I do want to emphasize—the member opposite from Agassiz just indicated that the skunk trap allocation, you've got to drive for it. Well, you know what? I think there's a little bit more priorities in life when we talk about agriculture, skunks play into that in an important factor. I really have some issues regarding the importance of it. Here's a typical scenario where we have members opposite saying cut, cut, cut—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, this House is recessed until 1:30 p.m. this afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, July 11, 2013

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