

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

Vol. LXVII No. 44A - 10 a.m., Tuesday, June 9, 2015

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 9, 2015

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—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. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker. We're seeking leave of the House to move directly to Bill 211, The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act, sponsored by the honourable member for Midland.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to proceed directly to Bill 211? [*Agreed*]

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 211—The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: We'll—I'll call Bill 211, The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act, sponsored by the honourable member for Midland.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), that Bill 211, The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Pedersen: This is the third time that this bill has—this amendment bill has been introduced. It's a small but significant change in family law. I know the previous Justice minister has spoken on it twice, and, reviewing Hansard, he was more or less in agreement with it. But it has never gone to

committee, so hopefully third-time lucky with this one that the government will see fit to support this.

Again, it's a small but significant change in family law, and this particular issue came from a constituent who came to me, and it was a divorce case; a rather bitter divorce case, as what happens often. And I was at first very reluctant to become involved in this because—just because of the bitterness and the emotions that surround divorce cases, but after talking to her I realized that she really did have a legitimate concern here. And this had cost her a great deal of money, never mind the anguish and that that goes with divorces. And, of course, in this divorce settlement there are children that are involved, there is property to be settled.

And so it went to—after the couple could not reach a decision through their lawyers, it then went to court in front of a judge, and the judge heard the case presented by both sides and after that the judge imposed a settlement on—to divide the property assets, the decision on custody of children, maintenance payments, visitation schedules—made all the decisions. And, of course, with the emotions involved seldom does it seem fair by both parties, but it was the judge that imposed the settlement on this—in this case.

Now the ex-husband was unhappy with the judge's terms of settlement so he decided to appeal the case, which was his right. So the case was—then went back to an appeal court and the terms and conditions were reviewed in this appeal court and the judge, in this case, upheld all the terms of the divorce settlement in terms of all—in terms of custody of children, the maintenance payments, visitation schedule, nothing changed in the appeal court.

The only difference was that the appeal judge ordered the ex-husband to pay for the ex-wife's court costs which—in the amount—which—for her lawyer and court costs which amounted to \$15,000. So nothing changed in the original settlement, but in the appeal court the ex-husband was to pay the ex-wife \$15,000 for her court and legal costs, and of—and he refused to do that.

Now, under current Manitoba law, the only way that she, the ex-wife, could recover this \$15,000—when he refused to pay the \$15,000 the only way she

could recover this would be to sue her ex-husband. Now, of course, this entail—would entail more legal costs, money which she did not have. In fact, in order to pay for her legal costs of \$15,000 she had to remortgage her home to pay for that \$15,000 in legal costs from the appeal court.

So, under Bill 211, the amendment that I am proposing in this would—it would give the judge the discretion and the discretion of the judge to include appeal court costs only under the Maintenance Enforcement Program, but this would only happen after a six-month cooling-off period. The terms of the settlement would be decided in—in this case, it would've been decided in court. It would've given them six months—the couple, six months to decide on terms and conditions about paying for these—in this case, him paying for her legal costs of the appeal settlement, but it would take after six months, then the judge would have the discretion to be able to award these costs be sent over to Maintenance Enforcement to be collected.

It wouldn't necessarily have to; every case is individual, I realize that and everyone realizes every divorce case is not the same. But it would empower that judge and empower the court system to be able to collect on her behalf. She had to remortgage her house in order to pay for that appeal court cost and there was no gain in there.

And realizing the bitterness that was happening there and has continued to happen in this particular case, I really would encourage the government to look at this and support this small amendment, small but significant amendment. And I have no doubt that maintenance enforcement is a task with difficult work now, and their—certainly their caseload is very heavy, and this would not add significantly to their caseload. And this only in—at the judges' discretion that the family courts are well aware of the jobs facing Maintenance Enforcement, and we know that accountability is quite often the last thing on the mind of those involved in divorce cases like this, but—and that's the job of maintenance enforcement, to support families in here.

*(10:10)

So this just—this amendment just puts another tool in the tool box in the justice system. It's—it gives another tool and tool box for the court system and, ultimately, for the Maintenance Enforcement Program. And, again, it would only be at the judges' discretion in the individual cases.

But there's something that was very unfair to my constituent in this case, and I would think that this probably would happen once in a while. I—you know, I'm not familiar with how often this particular case would happen as overall in the family justice system. But anytime this happens, and this was a significant burden onto her, caused by a—just from the bitterness from this divorce. When there is no change in an appeal court decision, obviously, we've got two judges agreeing that this settlement was as fair as can be in a divorce, and we have to keep in mind that the animosity and the emotions that are involved in divorce cases. But this also affects the children quite often. Quite often the children are the—take the brunt of divorce cases, so we need to be mindful of that.

And if this—if we can use this case as just an example of where this amendment would fit into the family law system, and had—going back, if the ex-husband's lawyer had explained to the ex-husband that if you lose this, if nothing changes, you may be forced to pay for her legal costs, it may have even saved the justice system some time and money on—and particularly time on this.

And so I really encourage the government to consider this. Like I said, this amendment will not solve all the cases that come before family law; we know that. But it is a current flaw in the system there right now, and this is just, as I used the example, it's just another tool in the tool box to get through difficult times for families. And I would really ask the government—this is the third time I'm come forward with this. This is the same case. It's the—there's—nothing has changed in this. I've asked the government to support this amendment, and let's send it to committee. Let's get it through this House. Let's send it to committee. Let's find out what's happening out there, whether there is support from the public at large, and let's make some changes in here to help families through a very difficult time. So I encourage the government to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): It's a pleasure to rise and talk to this bill today in the House.

The member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) has—while some of his ideas are good, you know, our bill that we're presenting takes it one step further. And it's—actually looks at more of the children and the family issues that we're talking about.

You know, I agree on him on one matter, that Maintenance Enforcement's job is to support

families. But I guess we have to disagree on another matter, because, underneath their proposed hiring chill or their cuts, how would those maintenance enforcement workers help families if they're not there, if they're not employed, because they would have less of them? There would be less people to help the families.

We look at the supports that we've put in place. I mean, you know, when the opposition was in power, the maintenance enforcement payment program, they collected roughly 20 per cent when they were in power, because, you know, there was a hiring chill and they didn't have the workers to actually go around and do the work and collect. Now we see 61 per cent full compliance rate and 86 per cent collection rate. That's a huge increase of 66 per cent in the collection rate underneath our system, Mr. Speaker.

And we have to look at it as the best interest of the child all the time now. And while the member for Midland's (Mr. Pedersen) bill might be well intentioned, he did admit himself that this is one-off case that he had with his constituent and he's not sure that any other cases happened in the province. So maybe we need to do more consulting with people around the province and find out if this is actually a need to bring it to the House for legislation.

I mean, once again, you know, the members opposite, they like to talk about one thing but then they completely support another when they vote against our budgets. You know, when they had their chance, when they were in government, you know, their support to families consisted of them cutting the monthly benefit for children of over \$150 a month, and they, you know—the—for single and disabled people they reduced their payments by \$40 a month, and they reduced it again in '94 and reduced it again in '96.

You know, the—when we took government, we ended that clawback, which costs \$48 million a year to the government. But you know what? It's a worthwhile investment because it goes back to the families and to the children that we're talking about here and protecting, you know, underneath bills, the—under the family enforcement act. You know, we put \$533 a month more into the hands of single parents with two small children.

And, you know, when the member opposite wants to talk about how we're going to do this, I question their motive. I think it's one thing to talk about it but it's another thing to actually put the—

these things into work, Mr. Speaker. When you're talking about having maintenance enforcement but there are no maintenance enforcement workers, how's that going to affect all the families that need it? When they do their massive hiring chill or their giant \$550 million worth of cuts to the system, how's that going to help all the families that need to have maintenance enforcement and that need the programs like the sake—For the Sake of the Children that put—that we have in place?

You know, that program helps families work through the system and collaborate, work together, and is kept thousands of families out of the court system by working with them and having a collaborative approach when it comes to a divorce. You know, sometimes it can't be handled that way and it does have to go to court, but there's a lot of great programs that we've put in place that help families deal with this, you know, tragic time in their relationships, where they actually can work together and work with the conciliation officers, that are free, and help not have the divorce go to court. And that saves families, and that actually puts money right back into the children's pockets. Because when families spend all that money on court fees, then the children are the ones who end up not having, you know, the things that they need to deal with everyday life and with their—with all of their sporting events and everything else, that all that money can be spent on them, Mr. Speaker.

We've made a lot of changes in 2012 to the Maintenance Enforcement Program and, you know, we've gone into garnishing their wages, removing driver's licences. In fact, I can speak from personal example with my wife and her ex where, you know, there was some enforcement issues. He lived in Alberta, and the system here was very great to work with. They worked with my wife and they actually had to take away his driver's licence for a short period of time because he was refusing to make the maintenance enforcement payments. And then he started making—he caught up on his payments, and the—you know, his driver's licence was reinstated.

But our people here work all across the country to try to make it a smooth process for the families. And the end result is that it's good for the children because, you know, all of the money isn't for the parents, it's for the—to raise the children, right? It's for having them in their sporting events and being able to do the school trips and, you know, be able to attend all of the things that children should be able to attend. And I have to say that our system really

worked well with us, to go out and reach out to Alberta and work with their system, and it ended up that it worked out and, you know, the money came back and, you know, then he got his licence back, so. We've worked very hard with all jurisdictions to make this kind of thing happen across the country.

And, you know, we look at not just one-off cases, we're looking at all of the cases, and if the member has more information for us about how this is a problem with—a systematic problem, you know, maybe we can sit down with the minister and figure out how that this can be done. But to admittedly bring a piece of legislation that's widely sweeping for a one-off case, it's—you know, when we do have a system in place to handle all of these things—and we do fund this system. Like I said, I mean, it's one thing to talk about having a good system in place; it's another thing to put the resources there, and we've funded and put resources everywhere for the system.

* (10:20)

And when we talk about what's good for the families it's—we put a lot of funding in place for organizations that help abused women get out of nasty relationships and get them back up on their feet and, you know, get them away from the danger. And every time we've done that the members opposite have voted against it. So while they seem to have some ideas, they seem to miss the mark a lot on these ideas when it comes to actually putting the rubber to the road and funding the organizations, the many organizations and the many different aspects of government that help these families recover that money and move forward with their lives.

You know, we've passed a variety of legislation that ensures that families have—some of the first-in-the-country legislation, Mr. Speaker, like the change that we made to family law for same-sex couples to be able to have the same coverage under the law. We were the first in Canada to do that. We're always looking after what's best for the child, and when we're doing that we're looking after the children. Before that legislation when—in their time in office it wasn't contemplated and it wasn't done, and we were the first in the Canada to bring that in.

You know, we introduced the new Family Law Reform Act which puts children first and that helps children from the same-sex couples that—in the event that there's a divorce, those couples will have to work in the same system that, you know, everybody else works with, and it helps the children in the end. And we are leaders in that in Canada. So I'm sure if

the member opposite had some more information for the minister, you know, some research on how that this is affecting a lot of families, we could—we would be willing to look at some kind of amendment into The Family Maintenance Act and bring forward something. But it seems like there isn't a lot of research done on this topic and on this bill.

You know, and then the other part is, like I've said before, Mr. Speaker, is the resources that we need to put in place, do such things. And when we are talking about resources, every single time we put resources in place the members opposite vote against it. And, you know, we put resources in place in—with Maintenance Enforcement we put a new system in place for the computer system for them, and they voted against all of those things that we've put in place.

We're put forward the money to do this, and they say, no. They want deep cuts. They would rather see the deep cuts, and that is just not the way that is going to help families. You know, we have a very different approach here. We're working collaboratively with families and we're working towards the best interests of the child at all times, and that is what our system is designed to do and that is what it is doing. And, like I said, we are leaders in the country with some of the legislation that we've seen around the family services act and we, you know, we've amended it many times and it's made it better for the families and better for the children of the province, which in the end is our total focus, Mr. Speaker, is the children in the province.

Thank you very much.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I'm pleased to stand and put a few comments on the record and support The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act.

And, Mr. Speaker, in my mind this is a piece of legislation and a minor change that makes common sense. And we listened to 10 minutes from the government side of the House talking about how great we are. We've done all these wonderful things for families and children. It's all about them, and it's not about the families and the individual families that have extreme concerns. I mean, maybe for the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau) \$15,000 out of the pockets of a mother that's looking after her children is nothing and that she should just be able to manage, and she should be able to look after her children and put them—put those children in sporting activities and all the things that he talked about—

because they are so wonderful and they have done such wonderful things for families.

Mr. Speaker, when you've got a good idea that comes forward from a member of the opposition—and there are many, many things in this Legislature that get passed because there is consensus among all members, because they are things that make commonsense. There are many things that we support in opposition and there were many things that the NDP supported when we were in government because they made sense for families, they made sense for our Manitoba community. This is one of these small things that could make a significant difference in the lives of a few families in the province of Manitoba. And if there's a glitch, if there's something wrong with a piece of legislation, those amendments should be put in place.

Mr. Speaker, we're not asking for the world and we're not asking and standing up and saying, oh, bad NDP, they haven't done this and they haven't done that. This is one of those things that we should be able to join together on and say, hey, this makes sense. This makes ultimate sense, to support families and to ensure that the children that those parents are trying to support receive the maximum amount of support, and taking \$15,000 in legal costs out of—away from a single mom that is trying to support her children and her family doesn't make much sense to me.

So I would hope that all members of the Legislature could stand and not say, oh, aren't we wonderful, look at all the wonderful things we're doing for children, but look at the families, look at the issues and say, yes, we can make a small difference in the homes and the lives of a few families and a few children because there is a glitch in a piece of legislation.

And after all, Mr. Speaker, what are amendments to legislation all about? We deal with amendments in every session in the Legislature because there is no law that is perfect. Governments of all political stripes over the years in the province of Manitoba and everywhere else across our country have brought in legislation, have made laws, have passed those laws, and then we find out that they're not perfect. There are changes that could be made to those laws to make them better. And most of the bills that we see in this Legislature are amendments to legislation. They are amendments to pieces of our laws that aren't quite working right.

And we're saying, today in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, that this bill isn't quite working right. We need to put in place something that will make the lives of Manitoba families that are struggling through divorce, which none of us want to see—we all would love to see that every marriage was perfect and that every relationship was wonderful, but that isn't reality. We know that families go through hardship. We know that there's conflict.

And Mr. Speaker, you know, the member talks about For the Sake of the Children and a program that was put in place, and he brags about how wonderful it was that they brought this program in. Well, that program was in place when we were in government, because we understood, and we recognize too—and I think we all did in the Legislature. It wasn't something that I want to take ownership over; it was something that all members of the Legislature supported. It was support for families that needed to have somewhere to go to try to make an unpleasant situation of a divorce or a separation situation a little better for the children.

And if both partners in a divorce or a separation can agree that the children have to be put first and foremost when any decisions are made about splitting any kind of assets, Mr. Speaker, then we've accomplished something. And I don't think any of us in this Legislature think that that's a wrong direction to go in.

And I'm saying here today, Mr. Speaker, that this small amendment to a piece of legislation that might make the situation and the financial circumstances of a family separating a little bit better, then I think it's something that we should all be able to embrace. It ultimately makes commonsense and, ultimately, I would hope that the pettiness that was just described by the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau) could be set aside and that we could put the families and the situations first in this instance and join together and say, let's send this bill to committee. Let's all support it and endorse it. It's the right thing to do for the right reasons, and it's not about getting into the them-and-us situation; it's about what's best for families.

* (10:30)

So I would encourage everyone and, hopefully, there will be other members that stand up and speak. And let's just get this moved on to committee and get it dealt with in a commonsense, rational and reasonable approach for the sake of the families and the children that need our support the most.

Thank you.

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): I appreciate being able to speak on this amendment, and I appreciate the passion from the last member.

The kids—the kids—are important in this, and I just don't think the amendment goes far enough. I think our family law act that will be, I guess, into—will cover many things, and I think we can't just look at one individual incident. I think, when it comes to divorce—and I've, obviously, been lucky enough not to be involved in that, but I think every family is touched by divorce. And I am talking about my sister-in-law at the time, and even though things were, I guess, amicable between her and her husband, the children are the ones that suffer.

And I think divorce—I've got other friends that have gone through divorce, and it was very costly because the two parties couldn't agree on things. And I think what our government has tried to do is look at ways where conciliation, mediation can come into play and less the lawyers and, of course, less the cost. And so want to work on that, and I just don't think the changes to The Family Maintenance Act suggested by the member of Midland are night and day compared to the introduction of the family law act that this side of the House—members.

I think—what also we've got to look at—I know the last member talked kind of about the history, what they did, and I guess we should put on the record, in some ways, what they did. We're ensuring that there's a contrast. There are both services and legal recourse to place to support families, even though there's difficult times.

The Leader of the Opposition has suggested a hiring chill that would reduce front-line service workers from programs like Maintenance Enforcement. And we know that the former speaker just got up and read from her notes, and this is what's going to happen. We're not going to bully anybody into any decision. What is important here is that we think about families, we think about children, we think about what's right.

In the 1990s, the Leader of the Opposition cut services for women, making it more difficult for those who relied on husbands or partners for financial support to get out of abusive relationships and put their children at risk. They suggested—they'd cut nearly \$150 per month from the benefits of the people that need the help the most.

We look at this and we look at what was done in the past. We have to move forward in a way that all people or—and in these situations are going to look at and see that there's advantages to work through divorces and that.

We also put on the record some of the things that we've done in the Maintenance Enforcement Program. We have—you know, in March 2014 approximately \$3.6 million in parental support to offset employment and income assistance. The MEP initiated over 38,000 enforcement acts including but not limited to debtor searches. We've worked in many different ways in this area. In 2012 we made changes to the maintenance enforcement 'proam' that allows for more timely transfer of funds to those receiving support, as well as simple method of paying for those who pay support.

In the case of child support fees, if there's a conflict between parents the maintenance enforcement act offers a court-ordered alternative. Payments are received and disbursed by government third party to ensure they are received on time. And, again, this sometimes can be a problem, but we have laws in place where we can go after the wages of the person, the spouse that is not paying his side of the money.

Another initiative introduced in 2001 provided a legislated authority to seize lottery winnings in excess of \$1,000 and apply the seized winnings to outside—outstanding support areas.

In 2002, a computer link between MEP and Western Canada Lottery Corporation was created to permit the WCLC staff to check lottery winners, so we're looking at ways to make sure there's a fluid way of money to be passed from—for spousal support, and the new Family Law Reform Act, we've passed a variety of legislation to ensure that the family law works for new—or for help to help families.

We made a number of changes in the law to extend the benefits of family law to same-sex couples, which I think is very important because of the change in attitudes in society, I guess you could say. We introduced new Family Law Reform Act putting children first and which, I think, everybody agrees here. I know the member from Midland and the speaker, the last speaker, this is what it's all about, is to stand up for the children, Mr. Speaker, and make sure that the children are first when decisions are made.

We also are working on addressing domestic violence, which, in some cases, is part of the separation that has taken place, and we're working to address other aspects of marriage and family breakdown, including domestic violence. Manitoba is the leader in addressing domestic violence. In a recent family violence in Canada report, Manitoba's tributed as a pro-charging and pro-prosecution jurisdiction that causes increases in arrest rates, so this helps. We don't want anybody in a domestic violence situation, so this is important that we act, not just for the spouses that are involved but also, of course, for the children.

This supports for victims and families, interventions for people with abusive behaviour, prevention, awareness and training. The strategy includes investing \$1 million in capital improvements to shelters and other family violence facilities owned by the Province, working with Aboriginal communities on specific strategies to address domestic violence, providing ongoing stable funding for A Woman's Place to employ a lawyer to assist women affected by domestic violence with legal matters, working with provincially funded organizations to ensure recruitment and retention of quality-qualified staff and providing interpreters to assist those applying for protection orders.

So what we're doing is putting out there—the government's putting out there, I guess you could say, helps for people that are going through divorce or domestic violence so that a reasonable situation can be met and the children are looked after and payments are forthcoming and the—and, I guess, the family can continue on. No one wants to see divorce. No one wants to see domestic violence, and I think all of us have a job in here to work towards making sure things are fair, making sure things are fluid and making sure that things of importance are dealt with in a respectful manner.

I know the former speaker has talked about they want to make changes in the situation. They brought up a case, but it has to be for all Manitobans, and I think when we look at it, I think when you look at our choice and their choice, it's like day and night, and I think our choice gives people the opportunity to work together through mediation, conciliation, and hopefully cut down on costs, legal costs, but also have supports set up so that families can still be together in many ways or looked after. There is no deadbeat parents around.

* (10:40)

We want to work to make sure that the children first and foremost are looked after, and I think when you compare the two choices that we have here, I think our choice is much more inclusive. And, you know, we're here to make choices not just for things that matter about the economics, we're to make choices about people. And this is a very important choice. We've got to make sure that the choice for children comes first, and I think our side has realized that the way we're working is the right way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It gives me great pleasure to stand up today and put a few words on the record in support of Bill 211, The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act, brought forward by my colleague from—the member from Midland. Again, it gives me great pleasure to also second the bill.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I stand here today, and, as I was sitting listening to now 20 minutes put on the record by the members opposite, it's very interesting on how both members stood up and said that their bill, Bill 33—I'm assuming that's what they're alluding to; he didn't really mention it—but how Bill 33 actually goes a step farther than the bill brought forward by the member from Bill 211.

And if we had some additional time, and I think we're going to have some additional time as the summer goes on and the fall, that I would like to eventually ask the two members, the member from St. Norbert and the member from Flin Flon, some questions in regards to—point out in Bill 33 how the amendments brought forward by the member from Midland are addressed in Bill 33. They talk about how, you know, they're going to make improvements and how wonderful, how great things they are doing, but neither one of them actually pointed out to how exactly Bill 33 was going to cover off what the member from Midland is trying to do with this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the member from Flin Flon also talked about the great things that they're doing in regards to family reconciliation and the maintenance enforcement and all that type of stuff. But the point is he did mention lotteries and he did mention the costs and the money that they're spending, but what he also didn't mention is the fact that what they're doing is that they're actually spending hundreds of thousands of dollars mailing out brochures encouraging families to go online and, matter of fact, giving them a credit to go online and do some gambling.

So, on one hand, I mean, the member's talking out of both sides of his mouth. On one hand, they're trying to do things to encourage people to maybe balance their own lives and not spend a whole lot of their own hard-earned money on gambling addictions. On the other hand, they're sending out mail-outs to hundreds and thousands of Manitobans, encouraging them, plus giving them a credit to increase their addiction. And I know that the member from Dawson Trail's saying that those things are going out to adults, but, in fact, if he would take a look at his mail-out, it does not say on the mail-out whatsoever that you have to be 18 years of age or older, Mr. Speaker.

It's quite entertaining to be in here and listen to how the government crows on a day-to-day basis. And where the emphasis should be on families and should be on the children, they continue to pat themselves on the back for things that they're really not doing. If, in turn, Mr. Speaker, they're actually taking the time—they're taking their time in government to try to put more barriers up for families.

This bill is going to increase consistency in the system and stability for Manitoba families. This bill is going to be one step towards a kinder legal system. The cost will only be included in the MEP six months after that money is gone unpaid. This means that the parties have a chance to make an agreement or get them figured out on their own before going to Maintenance Enforcement. Alberta and Ontario already have similar provisions for allowing the legal costs to be included in their equivalent Maintenance Enforcement Program.

And, with that, I encourage the members across the way, in the government side, to support this bill. Let's see it go to committee. Let's hear what other people have to say in regards to the public, and let's help more Manitoba families, parents and children of all—of this great province of ours, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking towards this with experience from a child who came from parents who divorced when I was five years old. So I'm quite aware of the difficulties that families can go through and financial difficulties that families can go through in regards to a divorce which will eventually lead to child support payments.

And there has been 205 per cent increase in the number of paying parents in full compliance with

their child support orders over the past 15 years. There is now 61 per cent full compliance rate and 86 collection—86 per cent collection rate.

And just to share with the House today, I am one of those people who are happily divorced and receiving payments through the Maintenance Enforcement Program, and this has been going on since—I've been happily divorced in 2007.

And, again, the best interests of a child must always be most important and often the only consideration in the area of family law. This is clearly entrenched in the family law act and falls short in the opposition's family maintenance act.

The family act includes strong, new tools to collect child support from parents following separation or divorce. The bill also responds to the need for provincial laws to keep pace with social and technological realities to avoid uncertainty and stress for families.

The costs of court proceedings are only a part of the issues that families face when going through divorce and custody issues. Our government has made many investments in providing support for families going through separation and divorce.

And like I shared before, I believe that I've had a good relationship with the Maintenance Enforcement Program in many ways such as: in 2012 we made many changes to the Maintenance Enforcement Program that allows for a more timely transfer of funds to the those receiving support as well as a simpler method of paying for those who pay support. And, for example, the changes allow us to better track those who fail to pay their child support and spousal support orders and allow us to go after them and garnish their wages. For example, the father of my child, when he moves from province to province, the Maintenance Enforcement Program does a good job and provides me correspondence and tracking down the person who owes my daughter and I that child support. The changes in the program have also allowed Maintenance Enforcement to spend less time processing routine payments and more time going after those who are not living up to their responsibilities, again, another personal experience within my family.

Also, too, in May 2002, just like what my colleague had mentioned, the Maintenance Enforcement Program and the Western Canada Lottery Corporation was created to permit staff to check lottery winners against our—the Maintenance

Enforcement Program database. Mr. Speaker, probably this is the only time I wish goodwill for the father of my child to win the lottery and we can have a bit of that.

So, also, too, I'm also proud working with this government who are 'addressing' domestic violence in a serious manner. This should be taken seriously. We are working to address other aspects of marriage and family breakdown, including domestic violence. Manitoba is a leader in addressing domestic violence. And in a recent family violence in Canada report, Manitoba is attributed as a pro-charging and pro-prosecution jurisdiction that causes increases in arrest rates.

Our new five-year domestic violence strategy is focused on three priorities: supports for victims and families; interventions for people with abusive behaviour; and prevention awareness and training.

I also—proud to be part of this government because we're working with Aboriginal communities on specific strategies to address domestic violence. And this comes in spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation report because a lot of our inter-generational abuse attributes to what we experience today with domestic violence. And as an Aboriginal woman coming from Aboriginal communities, there is a higher rate of domestic violence because of the intergenerational abuse that is usually not reported.

* (10:50)

So, with that, I'm proud to be part of a government that's providing ongoing, stable funding for A Woman's Place to employ a new lawyer to assist women affected by domestic violence and with their legal matters.

So, with this, Mr. Speaker, I truly understand, as a child from divorce, as a single mother who's happily divorced with a child who's receiving child support from the Maintenance Enforcement Program, and I appreciate and respect the correspondence that I do get from this program in order to meet the needs of my child. Thank you.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Hey, hello there. It's my pleasure to rise and share some thoughts on this piece of legislation in front of us here today. I think we have all come to some semblance of an agreement that, you know, we have to put the children first and that divorce is not something that people are thinking about when they get married or

when they decide to start a family. But it does happen, and according to statistics, it turns out elected officials are amongst the most difficult people to live with; we have a slightly higher divorce rate than many other so-called professions. So, you know, there—perhaps this is a timely consideration.

I don't know that—thank you—I don't know that the approach being suggested by the member, however, is going to work. I don't really see that that is going to bring about a better situation, though I fully accept that that is the intention of where he's coming from on this. But I think it's also quite clear that when you compare this legislative offering, Mr. Speaker, to the quite comprehensive overhaul of family law that our government has already introduced, there really is not much of a comparison. We've looked at a whole wide range of issues that have emerged in family law and are attempting to address those that will actually end up with a much better situation than what this particular legislative course of action would achieve.

I would also note, Mr. Speaker, as some of my colleagues have also noted, that with a number of the changes that we have already brought in, the situation for families that are going through a divorce, whether they have children or not in the equation, has improved dramatically.

I would like to think, perhaps naively, that the message is getting out there, that partners owe each other support when a divorce occurs, and that it is inappropriate for the person who earns a larger sum of money to be keeping all of that for themselves. Instead, we need to be ensuring that when families or couples do part ways, that there is an equitable sharing of the assets involved and that a clear plan is laid out going forward so the couples can avoid having to go to court again and again to end up resolving their various issues.

I also want to highlight a really great program that our government has in place called For the Sake of the Children. We had actually made it mandatory that when a couple with children are separated and then seeking divorce, both parents have to go through that program, and it's a very strong and eye-opening reality check, I'm sure, for a lot of folks who get pretty entangled in the dynamics between the two people. And what folks have to do is sit through that program and come to the very quick realization that actually the adult issues are what they are, but the kids' issues are the ones that have to come first.

And the program does a very, very good job of walking the participants through the different ways that parents can inadvertently cause a lot of harm to the children that they so dearly love, and not through any particular fault of their own. It could just be that they are not aware of the impacts that what they are saying about their ex-partner or how they are conducting themselves, how that is viewed through the children's eyes. And the program does a very good job of making everyone aware of that, and it's a group format so no one feels singled out. But I'm sure that is contributing in many ways to some of the improved numbers that we are seeing here.

Mr. Speaker, the plain truth of the matter is that when members opposite were in government, this evidently wasn't much of a priority for them because the Maintenance Enforcement Program collection rate was at a dismal 20 per cent—20 per cent. That means that four out of the five partners who owed support weren't providing it, and there was no effort made to rectify that situation.

I mean, imagine if you are, you know, someone who wasn't in the paid workforce and you're raising kids at home—it's most often going to be the woman, of course, in that situation—and then your relationship falls apart. Under members opposite you had a one-in-five chance. If your ex-partner decided to just skip town or to not pay you a dime, you had a one-in-five chance of getting any support, and with all of the other cuts that they made to the social safety net back in the wretched 1990s that makes for some real hardship and poverty for the women involved.

And through a number of initiatives I'm very pleased to see that we have tripled that rate just on the collection front and—on the compliance rate, and the collection rate is now four times better. It's 86 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And now, to the 14 per cent of ex-partners who are not paying support, they need to get the message. That is just absolutely inappropriate and, you know, hopefully, we will find additional ways to further increase the good side of that equation and to decrease the downside, just as we have on many other fronts.

You know, for instance high school graduation rate. How on earth, if you haven't had a chance to finish your high school and you don't have any money coming from your ex-spouse and you have to raise a couple of kids, how are you going to get back into the classroom? Well, our government's providing lots of supports and that's one of the reasons why the graduation rate has gone from,

again, a dismal 70 per cent underneath members opposite, three in 10 kids in high school were not graduating, and now, similar to this number, we're up to the mid-80s in terms of the graduation rate.

Mr. Speaker, it's really quite remarkable the power of government to make a positive difference in thousands and thousands of people's lives when you have people in charge of the government who (1) have people's interests at the core; (2) know how to use the tools of government to make a difference. And this is yet another example of how our government has really stepped up to make a very big difference in thousands and thousands of people's lives.

And we are talking about real money here. Mr. Speaker, this—these are not insignificant amounts of money and, again, the Maintenance Enforcement Program is not here to pick sides or to pick on one's spouse or another. It is instead there to defend the rights of the child or of the children if they're—if it might be a family with more than one child it—case. And, in fact, just to put some specific numbers on the record here, just between April 1st of 2013 and March 31st of 2014, so the previous fiscal year, our Maintenance Enforcement Program managed to return just under \$56 million—\$56 million—to the children and the spouses who were legally entitled to that money. This is not optional money.

* (11:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) will have one minute remaining.

The hour being 11 a.m., it's time for private member's resolution.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: But before I call the resolution, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today from Brock-Corydon School, we have 26 grade 5 students under the direction of Susan Pereles, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you here this morning.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 9—Winnipeg Pride Festival and Human Rights in Manitoba

Mr. Speaker: Private member's resolution: The resolution under consideration this morning is entitled Winnipeg Pride Festival and Human Rights in Manitoba, sponsored by the honourable member for Minto.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I move, seconded by the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard),

WHEREAS Sunday, June 5, is the start of Pride Winnipeg Festival, which celebrates Manitoba's diverse LGBTTQ community as well as the many obstacles overcome by this community in the history of the province; and

WHEREAS since it began on August 2, 1987, Pride Winnipeg has grown from a one-day event with about 250 participants to a 10-day festival with over 35,000 attendees, one of the largest of its kind between Toronto and Vancouver; and

WHEREAS this year's Pride Winnipeg Festival theme is Evolution and focuses on the history of the Pride movement and the evolution of LGBTTQ rights both in Canada and abroad; and

WHEREAS it is important to recognize the progress that has been made in Manitoba and in Canada, including the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969 and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2004; and

WHEREAS the provincial government believes in supporting continued social change, including fostering respect for diversity in schools and protecting students from bullying through the safe and inclusive schools act, bill 18, and making it easier for transgender people to change documents such as birth certificates and health cards, both measures that were opposed by the official opposition; and

WHEREAS the provincial government also recently banned LGBTTQ conversion therapy in the public health system and has continued to modernize Manitoba's family laws to afford important rights to same-sex couples and their children; and

WHEREAS the federal NDP's private member Bill C-279, currently before the Canadian Parliament, seeks to ban discrimination based on gender in the Canadian Human Rights Act and Criminal Code, a move that Manitoba made in 2012

when the provincial government amended Manitoba's Human Rights Code; and

WHEREAS Conservative members of the Senate made amendments to Bill C-279 to effectively bar transgender people from public washrooms and crisis centres.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba formally recognize Pride Winnipeg from June 5 to 14, 2015, and affirm its support for Pride Winnipeg and its efforts to promote awareness, diversity and acceptance in the province; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, in recognition that there is still work to be done, be urged to continue to take action to help eliminate discrimination and build a more inclusive society and urge the federal government to do the same by reconsidering the amendments to Bill C-279.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Minto, seconded by the honourable member for Fort Rouge,

WHEREAS Sunday, June the 5th, is the start of Pride Winnipeg Festival, which celebrates Manitoba's diverse LGBTTQ community as well—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

Is it the pleasure of the House to consider the resolution as printed in today's Order Paper?
[Agreed]

WHEREAS Sunday June 5, is the start of Pride Winnipeg Festival, which celebrates Manitoba's diverse LGBTTQ community as well as the many obstacles overcome by this community in the history of the province; and*

WHEREAS since it began on August 2, 1987, Pride Winnipeg has grown from a one day event with about 250 participants to a ten day festival with over 35,000 attendees, one of the largest of its kind between Toronto and Vancouver; and

WHEREAS this year's Pride Winnipeg Festival theme is "Evolution" and focuses on the history of the Pride movement and the evolution of LGBTTQ rights both in Canada and abroad; and*

WHEREAS it is important to recognize the progress that has been made in Manitoba and in Canada including the decriminalization of homosexuality in

1969 and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2004; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government believes in supporting continued social change, including fostering respect for diversity in schools and protecting students from bullying through the Safe and Inclusive Schools Act ("Bill 18"), and making it easier for transgender people to change documents such as birth certificates and health cards, both measures that were opposed by the Official Opposition; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government also recently banned LGBTTQ conversion therapy in the public health system and has continued to modernize Manitoba's family laws to afford important rights to same-sex couples and their children; and*

WHEREAS the Federal NDP's Private Member Bill C-279 currently before the Canadian Parliament seeks to ban discrimination based on gender in the Canadian Human Rights Act and Criminal Code, a move that Manitoba made in 2012 when the Provincial Government amended Manitoba's Human Rights Code; and

WHEREAS Conservative members of the Senate made amendments to Bill C-279 to effectively bar transgender people from public washrooms and crisis centres.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba formally recognize Pride Winnipeg from June 5-14, 2015 and affirm its support for Pride Winnipeg and its efforts to promote awareness, diversity and acceptance in the province; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, in recognition that there is still work to be done, be urged to continue to take action to help eliminate discrimination and build a more inclusive society and urge the Federal Government to do the same by reconsidering the amendments to Bill C-279.

Mr. Speaker: The resolution is in order.

Mr. Swan: It's my honour today to introduce this resolution as Pride week is under way in Winnipeg. It is a time to celebrate the advances and the recognition of human rights for LGBTTQ Manitobans, but also to recommit ourselves to continue and to ensure that we fully celebrate and embrace our diversity.

The theme of this year's Pride Festival is Evolution, and that is truly very fitting. The first Pride event in Winnipeg was in 1987, about 250 people participated, and many who marched in the first parade wore masks or even bags over their heads because they feared what might happen if they were identified. At that time, Mr. Speaker, there was no protection for—against discrimination based on sexual orientation because The Human Rights Code did not pass until later that summer.

Mr. Speaker, I've read the debates in the House from the summer of 1987, and let it just be said that we can all be ashamed of comments that were put on the record by members of this Assembly. Fast-forward to today, where the Pride Winnipeg Festival is 10 days long, with over 35,000 members of the LGBTTQ community, their friends, family and supporters. It's now sponsored by many businesses, large and small, as well as by universities, colleges and other institutions representing all of the fabric of our community.

This year's theme of Evolution reminds us to look back and celebrate at how far we've come, but also to remember that there is more work to be done. This Legislative Assembly has been part of that evolution; we now have laws to recognize same-sex marriage. The Leader of the Opposition calls same-sex marriage a social experiment. On this side of the House, we call same-sex marriage marriage.

We have laws now which have been passed which allow same-sex couples, otherwise known as couples, to adopt, the right to claim property or support if the relationship should break down. All laws brought in by the NDP and opposed by the Progressive Conservatives.

Just two years ago the Legislature passed Bill 18 to allow students to support each other by setting up gay-straight alliances brought in by the NDP and, again, opposed by the Progressive Conservatives.

Just days ago we introduced major family law reforms which will make it easier for all Manitoba families, whatever they may look like.

Mr. Speaker, one of the remaining frontiers is the protection of people from discrimination based on their gender identity. And I'm very proud my caucus supported me in 2012 when I introduced changes to Manitoba's Human Rights Code to formally enshrine these protections in the code.

In 2014 we amended The Vital Statistics Act to make it easier to amend sexual designation on

government documents. Again, the Progressive Conservatives, for reasons they couldn't or wouldn't articulate, did not support these changes.

Mr. Speaker, when we introduce and pass laws in this Legislature, we sometimes express our intentions in abstract language. Sometimes we don't know exactly who these new laws will help or impact. And little did I know the first case to advance as a complaint to the Manitoba Human Rights Commission under these amendments would involve a family I've actually known for many years.

Mr. Speaker, about a year ago a young Manitoba student determined that although born into a boy's body, she was in every other aspect a girl. And Bella returned to her classes last fall, where I understand she was not just accepted, but celebrated by her classmates and the majority of staff at her school. Unfortunately, one parent objected to Bella going about her school day as any other little girl would, and the administration of the school considered the complaint of one adult to outweigh the rights of the child. The case will be considered by the commission and, hopefully, will provide relief in this case, but also clarity in the way schools and many other organizations need to adapt to those walking their own path. Bella's now moved to BC with her parents, but continues to be an inspiration not just to others who may be facing similar transitions, similar struggles, but to all of us who believe in advancing of human rights. Bella's videotape presentation at the recent Rainbow Resource gala was just another chance for her to lead and educate all of us.

The challenge in our binary world continues even when there's no malice nor intent to discriminate. All of our systems, whether it's passports or driver's licences or health care or corrections or sports, need to be revisited to ensure that citizen's gender identity does not impact the right to be full participants in and protected by our society.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk this morning about an athlete I know. Not Caitlyn Jenner, her name is Bobbi Nicol. Bobbi doesn't have a reality show and as far as I know she's not related to the Kardashians, but she's making a transition of her own and is an inspiration. Bob Nicol became well known in the Manitoba running community for being a fearless competitor, nicknamed Barefoot Bob for running marathons and even ultramarathons in bare feet. Bob took on all kinds of challenges, including competing in the Canadian Death Race, an incredible

125-kilometre trail race in the Rockies. But maybe the toughest challenge is and will be her transition.

Bobbi has been brave enough to write about her experience, first anonymously and just a few days ago when she revealed much more about her transition. And Bobbi wrote this in her recent piece: I've been living in fear of people finding out for so long. It kind of wears on your psyche and you always think the worst will happen while in the back of your mind you hope for the best. Those feelings alone have kept me hidden away for more years than I want to admit, feelings that unfortunately many struggle with in one form or another. Why is it so difficult for people to see you for the person you are instead of the society desired and portrayed norm? If you've known me for any length of time, you would definitely understand that I am a little out of the box, a bit of an oddity, some may say. I just believe I'm me. Wouldn't it be nice if the world was a little more understanding and allowed everybody to be more than themselves? I think so. Well, I agree, Bobbi.

Bobbi recently completed the Ottawa Marathon with friends. Her pictures are fabulous and I'm quite certain she will not only continue to be part of the Manitoba running community but continue to write about both her unusual approach to running but also her transition.

And with stories like these, one would hope that all the battles had been won, but I'm afraid that's not the case. In 2013, Mr. Speaker, Randall Garrison, an NDP MP from British Columbia introduced Bill C-279, amendments to the Canadian human rights act. Following the lead of Manitoba and Ontario, the bill would protect Canadians from discrimination based on gender identity in areas of federal responsibility. The bill narrowly passed the House of Commons. It was a free vote. Four Manitoba MPs supported the bill: New Democrats Pat Martin and Niki Ashton, Liberal Kevin Lamoureux and Conservative Shelly Glover. The other nine Conservative MPs in Manitoba all voted against the bill, as did all but 17 other Conservative MPs, but the bill still passed.

*(11:10)

But the bill had to go to the Senate. A Senate committee reviewed the bill and made amendments. It's now been returned to the House of Commons, and the Conservative government has taken no steps to move it forward. The bill will die if it does not pass before this fall's election.

Worst of all, Mr. Speaker, were the nature of these amendments and the justification for them. As Rachel Browne wrote in her piece in Maclean's, during its clause-by-clause reading at the Senate, where the bill has been in limbo since 2013, Conservative Senator Donald Plett, who has vehemently opposed the legislation since day one, proposed it be amended to preclude transgender people from entering sex-specific services and facilities that fall under federal jurisdiction, such as crisis counselling centres, abuse shelters, prisons, military base changing rooms and washrooms. This means that any trans person denied access to these places because of their gender identity would not be able to file a federal human rights complaint.

As Maclean's says, Plett justified his amendment by calling on the oldest transphobic tropes in the book, saying it's necessary to protect vulnerable women who could be retraumatized by being in the presence of a biological male in such spaces and against men falsely posing as women in order to sexually assault other women. This act will no longer allow biological males who identify as female to gain unrestricted access to sex-specific facilities, he told the committee.

Even the opposition senators woke up. Senator Grant Mitchell, the Senate's Liberal lead for C-279, told Plett how difficult his proposal is for transgendered people. So someone who looks absolutely masculine, absolutely like a man, and knows that he is a man, would be forced under this amendment to use a women's washroom, and that would be extremely unsettling.

Mr. Speaker, you already know how I and my colleagues feel about the Senate: unelected, unaccountable, under investigation and, maybe today, under indictment. The Senate delays and weakens progressive legislation and rubber-stamps oppressive legislation, but maybe the worst thing as a Manitoban is that the very senator who led the opposition to Bill C-279 is himself a Manitoban, Don Plett. Senator Plett, of course, was the co-chair of the Manitoba Progressive Conservative Party campaign in the last provincial election and we'll hear more today how he did that using public money.

Now, I have Conservative friends, which may be a surprise to some, and many of them have told me how upset they are about Senator Plett's comments and his views. But, to date, Mr. Speaker, not a single Conservative MP, not a single Progressive Conservative MLA have distanced themselves from

Senator Plett's comments or let alone dared to publicly call out Senator Plett. Today's a good day to start.

Mr. Speaker, people like Bella and Bobbi and Rachel and Kael and other Canadians who are making or have made transitions, they aren't deviants or criminals or threats to public morality; they're people, and they deserve full citizenship. And this week, we celebrate diversity but we also see how far we still have to go.

So I do hope that today all members of this Legislature can stand together for human rights and call upon Parliament to do the right thing, stop delaying and pass the bill in the form that the House of Commons supported last year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I'm very pleased to rise today and put a few words on the record with respect to the resolution. And I want to thank the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) for bringing this forward for debate here in the Legislature. I know he believes passionately in this, and I want to thank him for his comments—or some of his comments, anyway, that he made today.

And I think the comments that we need to celebrate today is the comments around this incredible festival that we have in our city, the Winnipeg Pride festival. There are so—there are dozens of events that are going to be taking place over the course of the next 10 days in our city, and we know that this originally started off as a one-day event, with maybe 250 participants. And now it's grown into the festival that it is today, which is quite remarkable for our city. It's the largest festival—Pride festival between here and—or between Toronto and Vancouver, as I understand, and that's a great thing for our city in—for—it's a great thing for our city.

But, of course, these festivals—and now it's grown to more than 35,000 participants, and I'm proud to say that I'm going to be a participant in this, and I'm actually going to be in the Pride Run on Saturday morning. I'm very much looking forward to it. Along with my colleague, the member for Morris (Mr. Martin), we're going to be running the 5K run, and I know the member for Minto is a runner, and I've seen him at various events around the city, other festivals and so on. And we're—we participate in 5-, 10K runs, and I think the member for Minto probably had much longer runs, because I know that he's a marathon runner. But, you know, there's so

many things to celebrate here, and we're very much looking forward to participating this Saturday, Mr. Speaker.

But there are dozens of events around the city that will be taking place over the course of the next 10 days, and I was looking through the Evolution Pride Winnipeg Festival 2015 brochure, Mr. Speaker, and just the incredible events that will be taking place, dozens over the course of the next 10 days, is quite remarkable.

And we know that these things don't happen—it's a great reason for us to be celebrating—and we know that these things don't happen without the tremendous work of hundreds of volunteers around our city and our province and people who come from other provinces to help celebrate here in Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker. And I think that we'd be remiss without thanking the hundreds of volunteers who participate in this incredible festival in our great city here. And so I, on behalf of our colleagues, want to thank—I want to thank those volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank the officers of Pride Winnipeg: Jonathan Niemczak, the president; vice-president, finance, Joseph Cheng; vice-president, communications and marketing, Jeff Myall; vice-president, programming, Mike Mulhall; the directors; the co-ordinators and managers of Pride Winnipeg. We know that they put so much effort into these celebrations, and they should be celebrated for what they do for our great city, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think the unfortunate part about this is that we should be celebrating here. And this is what we should be celebrating. And I'm glad that we'll have, you know, many members of the Legislature will have the chance to get out and celebrate with members of the LGBTTQ community over the course of the next 10 days. And I'm looking forward to that. But I think it's unfortunate that we have to stand here in this Manitoba Legislature with an NDP government that has had a chance to do something here, something positive for our province, but instead they had to play politics with it. And that is the most egregious thing.

This is a time for celebration. It is a time to celebrate the hundreds of people and thousands of people, the volunteers who will be coming out, the 35,000 participants that will be engaged in the various events over the course of the next 10 days, Mr. Speaker. This is a time for celebration. And at that very time, I think what's unfortunate is that we

have a member here and members opposite that have—they can't help themselves, they have to play politics with an issue as important as this. And I think that's really unfortunate.

You know, they bring up Bill 18, and that was a bill that was debated here in the Manitoba Legislature, and that was, again, a bill that was brought forward only for the NDP to play politics, Mr. Speaker. And I think it's unfortunate, because there are so many people in our communities who are falling through the cracks, who are bullying in our schools, and I think what's unfortunate is that members opposite saw nothing but to play politics with that issue. And I think it's very unfortunate. There were so many flaws in that bill, and we mentioned a number of them on the record here.

And you know, but again, you know, members opposite just can't help themselves but to play politics with these issues. And they talk about the Senate. They talk about things going on federally. You know, there's so many things happening right here at home—children falling through the cracks in our child-welfare system, we're dead last in education in the areas of math, reading and writing, I guess, Mr. Speaker, in English. At a time when, you know, there's so much going on here in Manitoba that's negative, they should be focused on the issues here at home. And instead, they're talking about what's going on in Ottawa and the Senate and so on, and they bring that forward in this resolution.

So, you know, it's a time for celebration, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to celebrate all of the hundreds of volunteers and the 35,000—more than 35,000 participants. And I'm proud to be one of them coming up on Saturday. I'm looking forward to the run. And you know, and I'm very happy to be a part of that. But I think it's really unfortunate when members opposite have to play politics with an important issue such as this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (11:20)

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): It's my pleasure to get up and second this motion today. I want to thank the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) for putting it forward. I want to welcome the representatives from the Pride committee who were in the gallery earlier also.

I listened to the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), and at first I was hopeful and thrilled to hear her speak, and I'm glad she's going to

be participating in the celebrations this week, but Pride is more than a celebration, and it's more than a parade. Pride is political. It is about struggle. It has always been thus.

I, this past weekend, participated in Brandon's first Pride march. I was thrilled to see the MLA for Brandon West there, the MLA for Brandon East. And as I participated in that march, I was reminded of a time not that long ago when I lived in Brandon and was part of the founding group of a new organization that was there to support gay and lesbian people and their allies, and in the founding meeting of that organization, when the time came to decide who should go to the credit union and open the bank account, who should go to the post office and get a postal box, I was the only one who had the job security to be able to go and do that, who didn't have to fear that I would lose my job, that I would lose my housing, if I was out. And that is not that long ago at all.

Every Pride march has sought to push forward the rights of gay and lesbian and transgendered and questioning people, and I know the member regrets that we brought up the Senate. It matters what's going on in the Senate with regards to protecting the rights of transgendered people. The member opposite talked about children falling through the cracks, and absolutely, we need to be concerned about every child. But I also want her to know what it means to have protection for transgendered people in this country, what it means that the senator from her party who—I did not hear in her comments once her rebuke that senator for what he is doing to gut the protections of transgendered people in the Senate. I'm glad that she's going to run in the Pride Run. It would mean so much more if she would also use her voice to say, clearly, that she believes that what Senator Plett is doing is wrong.

Because what—you know, for every Caitlyn Jenner that's on the cover of Vanity Fair, there are thousands and thousands of homeless kids in this country, hundreds in this province, who are homeless, who are at risk because they're rejected by their families for the simple reason that their truth doesn't match the body that they were born into. And protecting their rights provincially, protecting their rights federally—it matters to those kids, making sure that they have access to services at the same level as other children, making sure that service providers know when those kids come into shelter, when those kids are in schools, when those kids are seeking to use the bathroom that matches their identity, that

they are allowed to, entitled to do that. You know, transgendered people who go to a bathroom that doesn't match how they look on the outside are at far more risk of violence—are at far more risk of violence than anyone else. And if you talk to transgendered people and listen to their stories, you will hear that over and over and over again.

You know, this last week, we welcomed my second child into the world. My wife and I—*[interjection]* And I thank all honourable members for their well wishes on that. My wife and I welcomed our second daughter into the world. Fifteen years ago, I couldn't say that sentence. Fifteen years ago, although we would have had a family, because same-sex families have always existed, recognized or not, that family would not have had the legal protections that everybody else's family has. In fact, things have changed just since my son was born. My son is three and a half, and when he was born, my wife had to relinquish her parental rights to him so that we could both adopt him so that in the eyes of the law, we would be equal parents. That won't have to happen this time. It won't have to happen because of some of the changes that the Minister for Justice is bringing in in Bill 33 in the family law act that will recognize my rights as a non-biological parent as the same as my wife's rights.

And that matters. What we do in this Chamber matters. What we say and how we vote matters. And I know that there is legitimate debate about the best way to deal with all the differences in our world and how we appreciate and celebrate and take care of each other and respect each other. I accept that. But I think that there is no more room to discount homophobia as just a matter of opinion any more than racism should be discounted as a matter of opinion. I think that we can all and should all say, anytime we're confronted with homophobia in our families and in our political parties, that it's wrong. And it has real, damaging effects not only on queer kids who are coming out, on transgendered people who are coming out, but it diminishes all of us, I think, when we as legislators lack the courage to stand up and challenge that kind of opinion wherever we find it.

My colleague, the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), spoke about some of the work left to do, and it's true, there's much, much work left to do—certainly work on the front of ensuring equal protection for transgendered people. But also there's so much more work for us to do as a country in using our voice and using our stature as a human-rights

champion—a stature that I think is sadly fading—to challenge internationally the persecution of gay and lesbian and transgendered people.

At our wedding, in part of our speech thanking everyone, we also took a moment to reflect on the fact that it is a minority of countries in the world where we would be allowed to get married. It is—there are countries still in this world where it would be against the law for us to be together, where our children could be taken from us, and there are still a few countries in this world where either one of us could be put to death because of who we choose to love. And Canada has a responsibility and a role to challenge that internationally and make that part of our mission when we're working with those countries to challenge those kinds of laws and that kind of persecution and to promote the equality and legal protection of same-sex families, of gay and lesbian and transgendered people everywhere.

So I will be at Pride. My whole family may be at Pride; we'll see how the night before goes. And when I am there, I will be there to celebrate absolutely the progress we've made. And I know that every step of that progress has come about because of activism, because of sometimes the simple and courageous act of coming out. I firmly believe that what has led to the tremendous progress that we have experienced in the last few decades is that gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgendered people all over this country came out, told our parents, told our friends, told our co-workers sometimes at great personal cost who we were. And because of that there is hardly anyone in this country who can say that they don't know one of us. There is hardly anyone in this country that when they hear about homophobic actions, cannot identify someone who they love who could be a victim of that. And I firm—I really believe that it's because of that that we've made the progress.

The people of this country, the people of this province, they've always been far ahead of where we as legislators have been when it comes to recognition and protection of same-sex families. You ask any parent who has a queer kid, even if they may have struggled for some period of time with that, you ask any of them what they want for that child, and they want what we all want. They want them to find somebody to love. They want them to experience the joys and pains of parenthood themselves. And they want them to have a good life and they want them to be safe. And it's because parents want that for every child and because so many of us have told our

parents and our loved ones who we are that I think we've made the progress that we've made so far.

So while I'm going to be proud of that progress and while I'm going to recognize the activism that has led us there and also recognize that it takes activists to push governments to do the right thing and it also takes governments to be courageous enough to do the right thing, both those things have to be in place to make progress, and I'm going to celebrate that. But I'm going to remember that that progress did not come at cost, that there are not people who paid with their jobs, who paid with their homes, who some of them paid with their lives to make that progress. And I'm not going to forget for a moment that my actions this weekend are political. This debate is political. The celebration of Pride is political.

And so please come, celebrate, party with us, but also raise your voices to help protect us.

Thank you.

* (11:30)

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand today in the House and put some comments on the record and actually follow my colleague, the MLA for Fort Rouge. I was just over congratulating her and her wife on the arrival of their daughter, who's added, obviously, to the joy and sleepless nights that now face them.

And we, obviously, talking about family, and this is in large part part of the conversation that we're having is about family and is about recognizing that families are in a state, in a constant state, of evolution. And that's why I think the Pride Winnipeg Festival's theme of Evolution is most appropriate.

And I think of my own children, Mr. Speaker, and I have a young family, and I think all of us go, look to our children and offer them what every parent should offer them, and that is unconditional love. And I have no idea where my children will end up in terms of anything from careers and where they may end up in terms of relationships. But I do know that as I look to them, that regardless of what path they go down and what decisions they make and what decisions are made as part of their own biological drive, that they will have parents that will love them unconditionally and welcome them with open arms.

We have incredible diversity here in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. The LGBTTTQ—and asterisks is actually—which is actually an important part of that label—form an important part of that diversity that we have.

And I think of the changing world that we live in, and I've mentioned before, I grew up on a military base. And as you can well imagine, on a military base, that there—times, I believe, even on military bases, of—I have no doubt that are changing, but when I was growing up there wasn't a lot of tolerance, Mr. Speaker—tolerance for anything outside the norm.

And I think that recently with the news of Caitlyn Jenner and her struggles and her decision to embrace whom she's always felt resided within her and the publicity that it's brought, obviously, to the struggles that transgender people face in our world—anyway, it was interesting, Mr. Speaker, that over breakfast one day, my eight-year-old daughter asked me a question about what is transgender. And I have to say it surprised me to a certain extent, as I reflect on my own upbringing, and I couldn't—I'll be honest, I—as a child, I probably never heard the term transgender before, but here I am with my own—in my own kitchen with my own young children asking me that question. And so I did my best to explain that sometimes that people are born in their—that they're—from the—that who they are on the outside may not actually reflect who they are on the inside. And part of that is a journey for them, and part of that—a key part of that journey—and I think the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) made reference to—in that's—obviously, that that is—it is a—that it is a struggle for that journey.

And so I made a point, because I remember a couple of years ago, Mr. Speaker, watching a video of a couple who had a young daughter, and that daughter—and they put together a video and they put it on YouTube, and it's received millions of hits, and it's about their daughter's journey and their recognition that at I think it was age two, two and a half, that their daughter recognized, self-recognized, that she was indeed not a—that she was indeed a boy. And it was that family's journey and decision, and it goes back to my earlier statement about that unconditional love, that they loved their child regardless of whom that child was.

And it categorized—or, sorry, it catalogued their journey and their son's journey through this transition as they tried to make sure, because they 'seared'

some startling facts when it comes to transgender. And I know these are American facts, but I have no doubt they would actually translate largely to Canada, but I believe that the suicide rate in the United States is around—I believe it's around 4 per cent, and for transgendered individuals the suicide and attempted-suicide rate is almost 50 per cent.

So, I mean, that puts into context the struggle that this community has. But, again, it's more than just the transgender community, Mr. Speaker, and I hear members opposite talk about that we need to speak out, and I agree wholeheartedly. I think we need to speak out when there are homophobic comments made, when there's comments that we as a society find offensive and we should find offensive. And I remember, I mean, that lesson was taught just recently in our own Legislature when the MLA for St. Norbert made some unfortunate comments on the record, and the Premier—and it's one of the times that I'll agree with the Premier (Mr. Selinger)—and he said, you know, we all need to be aware of the homophobic biases in our society, address them, make sure that we don't treat people in any way that's inappropriate.

The Premier went on to say that it's not okay to make those comments in any context, and I think this is an opportunity for all of us to take an honest look at homophobia in our everyday lives and comments we hear that need to be confronted and condemned, and I agree again with the Premier in the context for those comments.

And I know the MLA apologized for his comments and retracted his comments. So, you know—but it gives reflection, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about, again, that word of evolution, when we talk about, you know, the changing views, and sometimes the failure of ourselves—and all of ourselves in how we see other people.

And as we look forward to the Pride festival, and I do look forward to the run on Sunday with my colleague, the MLA for Tuxedo, and I have no doubt that my colleague, the MLA for Minto, will be there as well as will many of us taking part in the 5K run. In fact, when I talked about my family situation, I was very proud of my nine-year-old son, when he heard that I was running in the 5K Pride run on Saturday, asking, you know, can I run with you? You know, absolutely, you can. So my nine-year-old son will be joining me on Saturday morning and he will participate in this run with, again, with my colleague,

the MLA for Tuxedo, and the MLA for Minto, and many, many other individuals, because that's the kind of role model that I have chosen to be for my son and for my daughters, that I want them to see that acceptance isn't just words; it's actions.

The MLA for Fort Rouge knows this all too well and has a perspective that I simply don't have to the full context that she does, and I listened very carefully to her comments, and I'm very supportive of many of her comments, Mr. Speaker, especially in terms when she talks about, again, that this is a struggle. And when she talked about how, you know, how her and her wife and the rights that they enjoy now in Canada when it comes to their ability to marry, their ability to have children and to be recognized as parents for children, aren't fully recognized around the world. And it's quite shocking that we can go to those extremes where, you know, in some areas of this country it's simply just not recognized. But then we go to the other extreme where we're seeing it overseas right now in a shocking video where ISIS is taking over communities, and individuals that have been identified as being gay are being literally thrown off the tops of buildings and lying there broken on the ground, and people would come up and pick up stones and stone what little remains of them.

And so it is hard for us as legislators here in Manitoba to even fathom the violence that can be directed to those in our community that are LGBTTQ—and again, the asterisk.

And so it's shocking when you see those kinds of reigns of terror that are occurring, reigns of terror that are putting such fear in members of minorities around the world.

So, Mr. Speaker, I can say with full sincerity and full honesty that when it comes to the resolution, when it comes to the statement to formally recognize Pride Winnipeg from June 5th to 14th, 2005, and affirm its support for Pride Winnipeg and its efforts to promote awareness, diversity and acceptance, I support that.

* (11:40)

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

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to speak this morning in the Legislature.

We've had some discussions over the last couple of days about the best of this Legislature and sometimes when things don't go as well, Mr. Speaker, and I know that part of that is under advisement as part of a matter of privilege, and so I won't touch on that. But what I do say is that when resolutions come forward in this House it's always interesting not just to look at the final THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED but all the WHEREASes that go before. And when you look at that, you often see the intention of those who are bringing it forward—*[interjection]*

And if the minister for mines and energy would be respectful enough to listen, I'd be happy to expand on that, Mr. Speaker.

An Honourable Member: Why don't you speak, Dave?

Mr. Goertzen: I—and perhaps he'll want to speak himself, but maybe he would allow me to speak without interruption. I would appreciate that.

I do think that when you look at resolutions you can see the real intent of the person who brought it forward, whether they're really looking to have it passed or whether they're looking to have a political debate, Mr. Speaker. And I understand that this is the Legislature so both of those sometimes happen, but it's clear from looking at this motion, not the THEREFORE portion of it, not the final portion, but some of what goes before it is that the government wasn't really—and the member who brought it forward wasn't truly interested in having this resolution passed; they were interested in having some political discussion.

I think that that's unfortunate and I think that those who were likely involved with this resolution and who are impacted by it deserve better than that, and let me expand on that a little bit. In one of the WHEREASes that precede the THEREFORE clauses, Mr. Speaker, it talks about the protecting of students from bullying through Bill 18. It indicates that the opposition opposed Bill 18. And I want to say clearly that students today still continue to face significant bullying, and for the very reasons that we warned this government about during the time of Bill 18, that they were not protecting students in the way they were. In fact, I said at that time, and I mean it more than ever, that we have the weakest antibullying bill in Canada and likely North America because of this government.

This is a government that voted against anonymous reporting of bullying. This is a government that voted against progressive discipline. They voted against record keeping for bullying. They report—they revoted against allowing parents—parents—the right to know if their children were being bullied or if their children were a bully. They voted against those things, Mr. Speaker, and yet they put it in the resolution as though somehow it's a great thing that they voted to not protect children. I don't understand that.

Yesterday, I was listening to a radio show in Winnipeg and I heard a heartbreaking story from a parent, Mr. Speaker. It was a parent of an 11-year-old, an 11-year-old. Now my son is only eight years old and so this hit close to home and she was talking about how her 11-year-old daughter—and she was doing this on public radio so I'm not breaking confidence—her 11-year-old daughter decided to throw herself in front of a vehicle in an attempt of suicide because of the bullying that she was experiencing in school. It was that significant, and she couldn't get action. The parent couldn't get action from the school and within the school to try to stop that bullying.

And yet this government stands up and says, wow, you know—and I hear the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Ms. Wight) and shame on her for not standing up to ensure that we would have the kind of legislations they have in other parts of Canada and in other parts of North America that might actually help those kids, that might actually have some sort of result.

Now, you know, in that particular circumstance would any of those amendments change things? Well, I don't know. But why wouldn't you try? Why wouldn't you try? Why wouldn't you want to have an antibullying bill that protected as many kids as possible? It makes no sense to me, Mr. Speaker, why you would set aside those children and say, well, we're not going to try to protect as many kids as possible. I still don't understand it. I still don't understand how the government could have defeated those amendments, and why we have to have the weakest antibullying bill in North America. And then they say in their resolution that we didn't support the weakest antibullying bill. Well, of course, we didn't, because we think that children should actually have protection. Of course, we didn't.

So when I heard that heartbreaking story yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I thought about today's

debate. And I know that the minister—[interjection] The member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) hasn't stopped talking. He hasn't stopped talking and I hope he's talking out of shame for the fact that he didn't strengthen that bill. I hope that he's feeling that.

We also know that there is a lawsuit, there's a 14-year-old boy whose parents have decided, from Gimli I believe, who decided to bring forward a lawsuit because their child was being bullied on the bus, in the school, he was even being bullied on social media, Mr. Speaker. And so they went to court over that. Now I do believe that in the most significant cases of bullying there should be an ability, sometimes, for parents to be able to take that action, but that shouldn't have to be the first step. That shouldn't have to be the first step that happens. And so those are two stories, you know, the one that we heard yesterday about this tragic case of this 11-year-old girl—and we all wish her all the best, we really do—who attempted suicide because of bullying.

But the 14-year-old whose parents have decided to go to court, and this is the government who said, well, we're going to take good care of it. We're going to make it better. We're going to protect children. Well, then they failed, of course, by not bringing forward legislation that would actually be as comprehensive as possible, Mr. Speaker. And now we have the weakest antibullying bill in North America.

I'm reminded of a constituent of mine who came to my constituency office to tell me about her daughter. Her daughter was being bullied. And this is actually I think very poignant, Mr. Speaker, because she came to the office not because she thought that I could directly change the bullying that was happening against daughter in the school, but she came and she said I want to know about the antibullying bill that was passed last year—because she came and talked to me about six months ago—because I want to know how I can help my daughter. And so she described the situation about her daughter being bullied because of some of her academic grades and I think some physical appearances, and I said, well, actually, the bill wasn't really intended to directly impact your daughter. And we went through the legislation and she couldn't believe that this antibullying bill had been passed and yet she somehow couldn't get any recourse for it.

And so, ultimately, I ended up talking to her a short while later. She had to move her child out of school, out of the school that she was in and into a

private school so that she could get some protection for her daughter. Now she's not from a family that comes from great means, so moving her daughter to this private school was not an easy thing and it posed a little bit of a financial hardship, but, of course, she did it for the best interest of her daughter.

Three cases. And, unfortunately, it saddens me, Mr. Speaker, that I could go on and on and on about case after case of bullying that we hear as MLAs—and I'm sure that members opposite hear as MLAs but they won't talk about today because they wanted to say mission accomplished last year, mission accomplished. We took care of it. We voted against having progressive discipline. We voted against anonymous reporting of bullying. They voted against having—ensuring that you would have actual measures to help as many kids as possible. And they put it in the resolution. They put it in the resolution to try to say, well, they voted against that. Well, we're going to vote against things that don't protect as many kids as possible.

And I want to assure the members that if we're given the opportunity to form government in the future, we're going to look at those measures. How do you ensure that anonymous reporting of bullying is brought in? How do you ensure there is progressive discipline so that bullying doesn't get worse? How do you empower parents so parents know, Mr. Speaker, how it is that their children are being treated in school, or how their children are acting in school? Parents have the right to know. Parents have the right to know about the kind of bullying that's happening in their schools. *[interjection]* Apparently the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak)—he yells, he doesn't think that parents have the right to know. He doesn't want parents to be empowered. I don't know why he's scared to allow parents to actually have some rights. I don't know why he's scared to allow parents to have some rights when it comes to bullying. I say shame on him.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we look at this resolution, the WHEREASes portion, not the THEREFORE because I think, you know, if it was just the THEREFORE portion of the resolution, it would find a lot of support in this Chamber, it would find a lot of support in this House, but clearly that was not the intention of the government. That was not the intention of the member for Minto (Mr. Swan). Their intention was to do something entirely different.

I only wish, Mr. Speaker, I only wish when they had the opportunity, when they had the unique opportunity to pass legislation that would have protected kids, that they would have taken that opportunity. It was a missed opportunity. They have the chance—they still have the chance to accept those amendments. They could accept them this session. We've got to December; let's pass them. I only wish that their intentions would've have matched what they said, because they didn't, and they failed to protect as many kids as they could in Manitoba.

* (11:50)

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Arthur-Virden): Well, Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, the Progressive Conservative Party supports the Pride Winnipeg Festival and has grown from a few hundred people—supporters to over tens of thousands. This year they expect to see attendance is over 35,000. That's amazing. Since 1987—that's when it first started—how much it has grown and how much our society has changed in that period of time. Even myself, my—personally, my situation—you know, I met my wife back in 1990 and my wife is from a Jamaican descent. My mother-in-law came from Jamaica. And when I started dating her, I realized that there was places in the United States back in the 1960s that would not accept a marriage of a white person and a black person. And I think this day and age how much things have really changed and, you know, to celebrate the—our—the gay pride in Winnipeg is amazing and how much our society has changed here in the province.

I—you know, when I decided to buy a business in Virden, Manitoba, one of the biggest things I was concerned about was how would—if I was to take my investment and purchase this business, how would people in rural Manitoba be able to accept myself and my wife—who I married at—that same year—as a mixed couple going into an area of Virden, Manitoba, where there was actually oil. We called some of the people who worked there roughnecks. They called—the industry calls themselves roughnecks. They even have a magazine called Roughneck. And so this was the area that we were going into, and when we got to Virden it was amazing. The people were so great, so welcoming. Starting a business with an existing business owner for the first year, then going into the second year another person approached us and wanted to buy into the business and it ended up being that we actually had a 50-50 partnership.

The community was so great to Michelle and I, and I really honour that the commitment that they provided, the support in our business; it was great, it was overwhelming. And then with the amount of people that were in the town of Virden, we've had a few openly gay individuals in the city of—the town of Virden. And, again, the town of Virden really respected, supported people who—business owners who were gay in our community. And I would say how things have really changed in our society. And to this day, you know, when I was—decided to run for—my—the by-election, the other thing was in my mind was how would the constituencies of Arthur-Virden accept a mixed couple as representative in this society? And the thing was I—when—during the by-election I got over the highest percentage of votes in the constituency of Arthur-Virden, which I thought, you know what, our society has changed. And I feel so proud to be from Arthur-Virden and to represent the people of Arthur-Virden.

Again, I know in my hometown, the birth town of my—of Russell, Manitoba, we have a business there. Again, it's an openly gay couple who runs that business and they are doing very big success in the—servicing the public of the town of Russell. And people go there from all over. I know one of the business owners actually has—does tin artwork and it goes all over the world.

And, you know, to see this all happening in rural Manitoba and to now—to have this event happening and in the city of Winnipeg, it shows—I'm so proud of this province. It shows that we can go forward into acceptance. And when, like I said, when the member from Fort Rouge had talked about her story, it comes—it's really important that people are accepted for who they are in our society who can—you know, if—families are changing in our society, and we've got to change with those.

And one of the amazing events that happened in Ireland which was a Catholic—which I grew up Catholic—a Catholic country who actually voted quite a high percentage of marriage—gay marriages in Ireland, which, again, it shows that the world is changing for acceptance.

And I would also—wanted to say that the Pride Winnipeg Festival, that it's going to take a lot of volunteers who actually come together to put an organization together like this. With over 10 days of events, that's a lot of work that's put into this event. And as a—the tourist critic, I really commend the

work that they have put into it. It's going to bring people from all over the world, and with also with FIFA, the soccer tournament happening here in Winnipeg, too, it's amazing how many people are coming into our city of Winnipeg to come to these events.

And, again, we should be, as Manitobans, should be proud of this. And I really believe that this opposite's—the opposite member—party opposite, NDP, is now putting us into—politicizing this whole event. And I believe that we should be celebrating the difference of support of our Pride Winnipeg. And, again, keep it out of the politics out of this whole thing. Because it's—I think it's so important that we focus on the celebration of gay pride in Winnipeg and focus on the event, not the politics in this House.

And like I said, Mr. Speaker, tourism is so important to our province, and with an event like this, it shows how important that this government should focus on maybe investing in tourism instead of actually cutting back. When you consider the tourist information centre that brings people from western Canada to our beautiful province and to our city of Winnipeg for this event, again, they can't even stop at the information booth to see, okay, if we're going to come in to this event here in Winnipeg, what can we do along the way, going to Brandon, going to places like Arthur-Virden, what attractions can we see. But they come to this tourist information centre, and we're closed for business. How does that perceive to tourists who are coming this way into our great province of Manitoba? How does that promote our province and our individuals who are coming from the gay community coming into our province? Does that promote that we're open for business? I guess not.

And it's so sad to see that, again, we as the province, we actually spend less amount of money than any of the other provinces on tourism. And, again, we have such beautiful attractions for the gay pride week to come to Winnipeg, we have the Human Rights Museum, which, again, is going to be terrific for the rights of gay individuals here in Canada. And we also have the zoo that has been expanded to house polar bears in the northern—the route to Churchill.

Again, our tourism is—dollars are being spent less and less to actually attract to these wonderful assets in our province, and also, our whole province, not just Winnipeg, but also where can they go

outside of the city of Winnipeg. And again, they can't even stop at the information centre to get that information. You know, Morris—actually, sorry, not Morris—but Morden actually has the mosasaurus. And, again, they—it's much like Drumheller, and it's too bad that we don't have that information at the tourist information centre. So it's too bad. *[interjection]* And the member from Kildonan, you know, he wants to talk in the House right now, but it's too bad that he can't promote more of our great province here.

And, again, for the 35,000 attendees, I'm hoping that they're going to have a wonderful time here in our beautiful city of Winnipeg, and, again, hopefully, they can go out to all the different attractions that we do have and some of the assets that we have in our beautiful city, and then hopefully they can go outside the Perimeter, too, and see some of the great attractions that we have at Grand Beach, we have in Morden. Steinbach has a different—a number of museums. Portage la Prairie has museums and

attractions. You know, again, the Interlake, there's a lot of good fishing, and throughout the province of Manitoba. Again, they won't be able to know that unless they have information at our information centre, which is, again, closed.

And, again, I would like to honestly say that from the PC conservative party, we want to welcome the member—the visitors who come to this gay pride festival.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I do want to put a few things on the record in regards to this particular piece of—resolution—

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

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Lakeside will have nine minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 9, 2015

CONTENTS

ORDERS OF THE DAY		Resolutions	
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS		Res. 9–Winnipeg Pride Festival and Human Rights in Manitoba	
Second Readings–Public Bills			
Bill 211–The Family Maintenance Amendment and Garnishment Amendment Act		Swan	1699
Pedersen	1689	Stefanson	1702
Gaudreau	1690	Howard	1703
Mitchelson	1692	Martin	1705
Pettersen	1694	Goertzen	1707
Ewasko	1695	Piwniuk	1709
Lathlin	1696	Eichler	1711
Altemeyer	1697		

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