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DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, September 9, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Mr. Speaker: Bill 203, The Liquor Control Amendment Act. Are we dealing with that?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. Okay.

Bill 204—The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I would move, seconded by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), that Bill 204, The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it's not the first time I've brought forward the Milk Prices Review bill. In fact, this might be the second or third time, I'm not exactly sure. It's one of those issues which comes by this Chamber, or have come to this Chamber on numerous occasions. In fact, I can recall, even in the late '80s, early '90s, when it was then-leader Sharon Carstairs that talked about the cost of living up north. One of the issues that she would bring up was the price of milk, and nothing has really changed. We look to the government to see and to review private members' bills, and that's why we bring forward this bill as an idea that would really make a significant difference. We are hoping that the government will see the benefits.

I know, like anything else, any other bill that comes before us or ideas that come before us, there are always pros and cons, some reasons why one should pass the bill, other reasons why some might want to hold or defer it, and so forth.

I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is one of those bills in which the government can show very clear direction in trying to deal with a multitude of issues that are facing our young people today. Milk is something that is not really an optional commodity. It is something that is very important to

our children. Far too often we see that, and the example that we often refer to is that of Coca-Cola or Pepsi, or just as pop, where in some communities, it's cheaper to buy those types of refreshments as opposed to the good staple of milk, which is much healthier. We could talk about issues such as the negative consequences of drinking so much pop at such an early age, the health-related issues, whether it's nutrition, the high sugar intake and the negative impact that that has.

What always, I suspect, not only gets me but a number of people, when I've talked about the issue within my constituency, is I often bring up the issue of beer, where the Province of Manitoba sees the merits of setting a price on a bottle of beer, and it doesn't matter where you are, you're paying that price for the bottle of beer. Yet, when it comes to milk, we will see that where it's most expensive is, quite often, in an area where there's a very high need, and government needs to, I believe, set the price so that it's affordable for all Manitobans.

I want to be sensitive to some of the arguments that the government might attempt to use, such as the cost factor of transportation. Quite often, if we wanted to assist in diversification of the economy and whether it's on-reserve, off-reserve, in northern Manitoba, having more of a production of milk in these areas I think would be healthy, not only for our children and ultimately for all ages, Mr. Speaker. We all should be drinking milk, but it would also be healthy for economic reasons.

There are so many good reasons as to why it is the price of milk should be set across the province. I think that if the government was to act on Bill 204, I think it would be sending a very strong, positive message to the entire province that we recognize the basic commodity of milk as an essential food product and we want to encourage, in particular, our young people to be eating healthy and drinking healthy because, in the long run, we will, ultimately, not only have a healthier population, we would also be ensuring that our children are given a better opportunity in terms of health as they grow up.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

In previous speeches on this particular issue, I would have more detail as to some of the benefits of doing it. This morning, I thought I would just take the approach of asking the government to give it serious attention. We've had the issue before us far too long. The government's had the opportunity. The arguments are not going to change for or against establishing one price for milk in the province. The arguments really are not going to change. We know what they are. The issue is, is there political will? The only way we're going to find out if there's political will, Madam Deputy Speaker, is if the government of the day allows this bill to come to a vote, and that's what it really all boils down to. It's a question: Do the elected officials in this Chamber support Bill 204? I'm not even saying that they have to give it Royal Assent today. What I'm suggesting, Madam Deputy Speaker, is allow the bill to come to a vote, have a free vote on it, see if MLAs support the principle of what's being talked about so at the very least it can go to committee.

*(10:10)

I believe that if you allowed the bill to go to committee the public presentations that we would have would strongly favour the one price throughout the province. It's something which, I believe, in the long run, is there primarily, and the reason why I introduce it is for the children of our province, especially children in northern parts of Manitoba that, in my opinion, are drinking far too much other fluids outside of milk and quite often it's because of the price point.

It's far cheaper to provide a two litre of Coke than it is a two litre of milk and I don't think that that's right, that the government has to do something. That's the reason why I believe that if the government was to allow it to come to a vote at the very least, let's see if the political will amongst the members in an independent fashion would support the bill so that it could go to committee where I believe the public would in fact get behind the bill.

I can tell you the constituents that I represent, a vast majority of them would support this, and I believe my constituents are a reflection of Manitobans as a whole and the bill would have the support.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope and I trust that the government would support the bill or at least allow the bill to be voted on. I've already heard the arguments as to why it is that maybe it should be continued on the way—the status quo. I'm

not interested in the status quo. The Manitoba Liberal Party is not interested in the status quo. We would like to see action on this particular bill. Thank you.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words on the bill brought forward by the Member for Inkster.

The price of milk in the north has been long a topic of discussion and one that we have worked with northern communities to look at how we can in fact bring other food supplies to the north that are consumed at a higher rate than milk is consumed.

The member has raised this issue a lot of times and I can tell him that I indeed have talked to the milk producers in Manitoba about this issue and I have talked to many northern residents about this issue. With regard to the milk producers there is—the milk producers have done a lot of work and, in fact, with many schools, Manitoba milk producers provide free milk to schools in order to increase the consumption.

There is also work being done and has been done where there's an ultraviolet treated—UHT milk. It's ultraviolet treatment of milk where milk can be put in containers and does not need refrigeration, has a very long shelf life, and this product can be moved into communities in the off season when the winter roads are—during the summertime and can be put on shelves.

I have the same concern with the member about the amount of pop and drinks that are consumed, but I think we have to think as well about the people in the north and their eating habits. I'm told by my colleague from The Pas and my colleague from Churchill, Rupertsland, that milk in fact is not part of the traditional diet and many times there is a lactose intolerance. That could be—is one of the reasons why there is not as much milk consumed, especially in the Aboriginal population.

Many Aboriginal people do not see the consumption of milk important in their traditional eating habits and again, I refer to my colleague from The Pas who tells us many times that he grew up seldom consuming any milk. It was not part of the traditional diet, but the price of the milk that is available in the north is very high. That's why we have to look at other options of what the food supplies are that can be eaten in the north without the consumption of milk.

We have taken an approach whereby we have programs such as Healthy Baby where there is additional money for prenatal moms to have the proper diets. We put in the Healthy Baby community programs, but I think what some of the most important programs that we have put in place to address this and look at other ways to meet the needs of diet in the north is a program that I have long-promoted and I'm very pleased with the work that we have done. There is the Grow North program. It's a northern community gardening program that is in place to improve the price and quality of perishable foods and healthy foods through food development and food growth in the north.

I want to share with members the event that I attended last year where people were growing product in the north. In fact we have put gardening equipment, we've put freezers into communities, gardening kits, potato seeds, different kinds of seeds, rototillers, all of those have been provided in northern communities, but one of the most interesting ones was raising chickens. I happened to be at an event in Thompson where there was a celebration of the growing that they had done last year. In fact they were very proud to be able to serve us chicken that was raised in the north. In fact there is now a goat and goat-feeding program in the north. There are various programs.

I raise these things because I think it's very important that we look at different options. I think it's important that we respect the people that live in the north and respect their eating habits. That's why there has been put in place an Aboriginal food guide that puts in place using traditional local foods, building those into the diet. The guide says: People who do not eat or drink milk products must plan carefully to make sure they are getting enough nutrition. Then they look through the different nutritional products that are in that area that can help replace.

There is no doubt the price of milk is very high, but how do you replace that? If people aren't drinking milk, how do you replace that and how do you do planning with other foods that will give people a healthy diet?

But I think also we have to recognize the work that we have been doing and the increases that we have made in the northern transportation budget. Under the previous administration, there was very little money put into northern transportation and roads. It was like the northern part of the province

wasn't important. That's been changed. We now are putting in a transportation system. With climate change, we know we have to build more summer roads; we can't depend completely on winter roads. As you build roads, then that gives another option to bring in food supplies, but that still keeps the dependency on the food supplies from the south.

So I think, along with the infrastructure that's being built, the roads that are being built, there still has to be the work with the community to empower people to have control of their food supply. Along with the traditional foods and traditional meats that have been eaten for hundreds of years, we also have to look at how we can again empower people to grow products and process products, so that they can indeed have fresh fruits and vegetables grown right in their own home.

*(10:20)

Again, school programs that are taking place in many schools—again, I'll refer back to the event that I was at in Thompson where, I think this woman came from Thicket Portage, and she had brought this lettuce, and they were all so proud of this fresh, healthy, crisp lettuce that they were serving to the whole community, and they had grown it on their own. There are many traditional fruits that grow in the north that can be harvested. Again, we, along with bringing food supplies into northern communities—and for that we need to improve the infrastructure, and our government has spent millions of dollars on winter roads moving to permanent roads, improvements to airports so that product can be moved in more quickly—we also have to continue to empower people. That's why the education program that we have on growing foods, healthy diets, programs like BabyFirst, programs that will get people to take advantage of all of that sunshine that's in the north in the winter months—in the summer months, I should say—where you have a very long growing season. I mean, it's not a very long growing season, but a long day where you can grow a lot and there are a lot of foods.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, the issue of milk in the north is only part of the solution. Yes, milk products should be moved into the north, and we have to look at how it can be moved more cheaply. We have to look at other options like the ultraviolet treated milk, but more importantly, we have to empower people. If I look at the notes, I even see that the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) said it isn't as simple as forcing a price regulation on

milk distributors. I think one has to be careful because suppliers may make less milk available because it is not cost efficient for them, and that's important as well. It must be cost efficient. We must be sure that there's a food supply, but we must also look at other alternatives.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I rise today to put some points on the record regarding the Member for Inkster's (Mr. Lamoureux) private member's bill, The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act. I want to, you know, give him credit for being persistent on this issue. I think it's a very important issue and I support his efforts in bringing this bill forward.

I believe that for many years now, northern and remote Manitobans have suffered the high price of groceries and other items that retail outlets, due in part to the high cost of transportation, but also, you know, there's a role that government has in helping communities address issues and needs. I believe that the minister just spoke about a number of initiatives that are out there, but in a very scattered way, but no definitive action plan. I think that what the Member for River Heights has done, is he's provided an option to pull one piece, one issue that is affecting northern Manitoba—and the health and well-being of northern Manitobans and remote Manitobans—a solution that I think that if they would put their politics aside would see that it is an excellent step forward and would address a number of needs.

I believe that this issue, as has been stated, has been before the Legislature for a number of years. I believe even it is before AMM and they have brought forward resolutions, and overwhelmingly supported by their group. This was done in 2002, Madam Deputy Speaker. So I think that, you know, the past statements are correct. Everybody seems to be overwhelmingly responsive to supporting a resolution of looking at the issues of the high cost of milk and other goods in northern and remote communities, but there doesn't seem to be anybody wanting to take that step forward—and I'm speaking they meaning the government side—in supporting the Member for Inkster, his private member's bill.

So I believe that there are questions that need to be answered by this government. Poor nutrition in northern and remote communities is a contributing factor for poor health and development among

children and adults alike. In many communities in the north healthy foods are just too expensive to buy, and, that's a fact, Madam Deputy Speaker. It's also common knowledge that people will not buy milk because it's too expensive to purchase. I believe that remote and northern communities have raised this issue through First Nations conferences and have asked that governments listen. They have tried to convince governments to factor in the higher costs for remote and northern communities to look at policies that will change issues such as the milk prices issue.

So what I'm looking for from this government is some definitive action. I'm looking for this government to take a position that will make the health and well-being of Manitobans in remote and northern communities and to respond to studies that have been done in northern Manitoba that reveal the rate of tooth decay normally found in the world's most underdeveloped countries are actually statistically found in our northern and remote communities. I believe that there have been dental health experts who have come forward who've said the high cost of milk in northern Manitoba is a part of the reason for poor dental health.

I do know that the Member for Inkster has been part of the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures task force, and that group identified this is a major issue. So I think that the research has been done. The legislation speaks to the need to have this done and I think that, you know, comments have been made in 2002 by the then-Minister of Northern Affairs saying that his department is already looking at ways to solve the food price problem and we're already moving forward in that direction. Well, I haven't seen that direction. I haven't seen those actions being taken, and I question the government's statements from 2002 to current. Here's an opportunity to show some leadership, support a bill that I think will make the health and well-being of remote and northern families stronger and better, and, again, we're looking for a definitive action plan from this government to show that they care about all Manitobans. Let's move forward.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): I'd like to put a few words on record regarding Bill 204 as well, Madam Deputy Speaker, a bill that comes from my honourable colleague from Inkster.

As we all know, milk is a very potent symbol. It's obviously tied in with the young and with

motherhood and so on, and it is something that is universally accepted as important to the health of young children. It has concerned me as a northern MLA, and I'm sure it concerns all members in this House when we find, particularly in northern and remote communities, the price of milk sometime beyond the reach of ordinary people. Very often these people are the poorest of the poor in our province and living on social assistance and have to face prices that are prohibitive, and therefore, because they can't pay these prices so there's healthy milk available for the children, they may well be buying substitutes that are not healthy or not as healthy. It's a serious issue.

I was in Lac Brochet only a few short weeks ago to attend an MKO meeting along with one of my ministerial colleagues, and one of the issues that arose, as it always does, was the price of milk, what is viewed as an excessively high price of milk, as well as the excessively high price of food in northern Manitoba. Sometimes there's a lot of finger-pointing and blaming going on, particularly at northern stores, the assumption being that they make excessive profits. I'm in no position to argue one way or the other, although it certainly seems to me that paying \$12 for a couple of litres of milk is indeed excessive and the people cannot afford it.

I guess I certainly buy the argument that all Manitobans deserve fresh milk—certainly unanimously rejected at the Lac Brochet meeting that we send substitutes, for example, dehydrated milk or milk products from which the water has been removed because shipping is the key cost for milk prices in northern Manitoba and in isolated communities.

*(10:30)

People at that meeting felt, you know, if southerners can drink fresh milk, why can't northerners? Why do they assume we want to use something that's less tasty or that our kids will not like as much? Surely—and the argument has been made over and over again—if we can have alcohol at one price across the province, then we can also have milk at the same price. That is a very interesting argument, and I'm certainly extremely sympathetic to it. In fact, I have spent, in the last several years, on occasion talking with Raven Thundersky, who happens to be a Liberal candidate, but nonetheless, we do discuss frequently the price of milk. I shouldn't say frequently, but we have on a number of occasions. We do agree that it's too high and some

changes are needed. But whether we ought to be going this route or another is certainly a moot point. There may well be more comprehensive and general ways than this focussing on the symbol of milk itself. I think, healthy food in a larger sense, in a larger food basket, I think, is perhaps more important.

The problem is complex. I have, in fact, in the past, attempted to try and solve it, along with people like Raven Thundersky. I have gone and talked to people at Medallion Milk and attempted to get dehydrated milk to the north at cheaper prices. For a variety of reasons, it doesn't work. The biggest one is, of course, that people sometimes don't like the product that isn't a fresh product.

Milk producers are involved, and marketing boards. There are complexities with shipping. Even though you can reduce the volume if you take out the water, it isn't necessarily a guarantee that the milk at the other end will be cheaper, or the reconstituted milk will be cheaper, because you're assuming then that the people that handle the shipping aren't going to jack up their prices. Some people in the north suggest that that happens regardless of what we do.

There are other programs, of course. We have a freezer program for some of the isolated communities. I was very happy to discuss that with the chief of Lac Brochet. It's also happening at Tadoule Lake, Shamattawa and other places, where people in northern Manitoba are able to purchase freezers at a very, very reasonable rate, pay them back over time and thus they're able to store healthy foods in the summertime when there is—or particularly caribou meat, when there is an excess of it, and have it for the winter. As the honourable minister has pointed out only a few minutes ago, there are a number of gardening initiatives which have been well received in northern and isolated Manitoba, including composting equipment and the raising of various animals, such as goats, I believe.

So our government hasn't been standing still. We haven't focussed particularly just on milk alone. Traditional foods, we know, are much healthier and, in fact, it never fails to surprise me when we look at diabetes figures in the communities where they eat traditionally and the communities where they do not, and it's where people eat traditional foods, they seem to be much, much healthier. Of course, anything we can do as a government to encourage the use of those traditional foods certainly will help to lessening the rate of diabetes. It means healthier children and healthier citizens in Manitoba.

I think it always comes back, though, when we talk about the price of milk or the price of food in northern Manitoba, to transportation. Transportation is the key ingredient, is the missing link, if you like. Because if you can get the stuff there cheaply, then, of course, people can afford to buy it. But if it costs an arm and a leg, then people can't afford to buy it.

That brings me back to when I was first elected in 1995. We were putting on the order of 6 percent of the budget into northern Manitoba, which was 6 percent of roughly \$100 million. If we look at that just a few short years ago, or even right now, when we're putting in \$400 million a year, and the north, for a long time, since we were elected, was getting a quarter of that budget, we're talking huge amounts of money being invested into northern roads. The logical consequence of that is that you can then get, once you have decent roads, you can get food to the people of northern Manitoba at a cheaper rate. That's the argument.

For example, we used to have toll roads in northern Manitoba, particularly in the northwest quadrant of our province. I was astounded, because I happened to be, in those years from 1995 on, for a number of years, Transportation critic. I discovered it was the only part of the province where people actually had to pay tolls on their winter roads, and the tolls were enormous. Some of the northern stores showed me bills of in the hundreds of thousands of dollars that they were paying for tolls. Now, it takes no great imagination to realize that those costs would be passed on to the people of the remote communities. Therefore, not only milk was out of range, so was gasoline, so was any other food stuff. It wasn't unusual to pay \$10 for a dozen eggs, or whatever the price was. I don't have the exact number, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it was astronomical.

So when we formed government, one of the first things we did was not only realign the northern winter roads for the possibility of future all-weather roads, particularly in the region that I represent, that is, Brochet, Lac Brochet and Tadoule Lake, and also with an eye towards the future, that is, a road that would eventually lead to Nunavut, which I know is still probably decades in the making. But, nonetheless, those were the directions that we pursued and we did align those roads and straighten them up, and we did get rid of the tolls. In other words, hundreds and thousands of dollars, if not millions of dollars less money had to be paid by the stores and the people using those roads.

So I can only assume, Madam Deputy Speaker—I do not know this for a fact—that prices have gone down at the stores. People don't think so, but it would stand to reason that if a store doesn't have to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in toll fees, they can pass on some of that savings surely to the people who are buying the produce. That's my argument.

I'm proud of the fact that we've removed those tolls. I'm proud of the fact that we virtually tripled the winter-road budget and, as I said, transportation is the key ingredient we're looking at. It is true that we want a healthy diet for northerners, particularly for babies, and milk is a key ingredient, but we want healthy living for all Manitobans, not just the focus to key on milk itself. I think that the Province will continue—I know the Province will continue to work with a variety of partners to allow northerners and people living in remote areas better access to all types of healthy foods, and we've mentioned some of the initiatives: Healthy Baby and Healthy Child initiatives and so on.

But roads and transportation are key. When all is said and done, Madam Deputy Speaker, what we're really saying isn't even necessarily that the price of produce will vary or the price of an ingredient or the price of a grocery item varies from place to place. It does and it's true. It will be much more expensive in the north.

I think what we're really saying is, if there was a commensurate increase in wages or jobs, if people were paid well, then the fact that milk was pricy in northern Manitoba wouldn't be super-critical but the reality is, particularly if you're on social assistance and a very limited budget and the grocery items are extremely high, not just milk, then there are problems, all kinds of diet problems that lead to all kinds of impairments to health.

So I guess what I'm saying, if people had decent jobs, then they could afford to buy the food at the price that the market seems to dictate because of distance and time and so on. That, I think, is an area where we have to seriously look at because economic development of Manitoba is key, not just for my riding but for all ridings in northern Manitoba.

To some degree, in fact to a large degree, this is happening with the Hydro development, particularly right now with the building of Wuskwatim Dam, the involvement of Aboriginal people as partners, the training of Aboriginal and northern people, Métis

people who, once they have been trained and are working on these dams, will have a skill to transfer to jobs in the future. Training people who then will have decent jobs, well-paying jobs, who can afford the price of food in northern Manitoba. That's why I'm so happy that people are not only—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The member's time has expired.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to begin by recognizing in the gallery today Orville and Alice Woodford. Orville Woodford was the Liberal candidate in Rupertsland in 2003 and he's been a very, very, strong advocate for equitable, fair prices for milk all over Manitoba. Thank you, Orville, for publicly getting up and speaking on behalf of all people in Manitoba and Aboriginal people in particular about the importance of having fair prices for milk all over Manitoba.

Orville and Alice Woodford and representatives from the Northern Authority who are here, the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen)—his experience in Lac Brochet shows very clearly that there is a demand from people in northern Manitoba, Aboriginal people, for fair milk prices. The Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk) must have been travelling elsewhere in the world far too long, because she's out of touch with the reality when she says that Aboriginal people in northern Manitoba don't really want milk. The Deputy Premier is just wrong, sadly once again. This is a government which has become increasingly wrong and out of touch.

* (10:40)

I want to say to the Member for Flin Flon who's been in Lac Brochet, it's good that you're listening but it's been nine long years and there's no action on this and you've been the ones who are responsible. Quite frankly, the record is abysmal. This needs to change. We need a policy which has got fairness and justice and common sense. The NDP policy has none of these, and this is what we need, which is a fair price for people in northern Manitoba for milk.

There are far too many young children in northern Manitoba who have dental caries within the first year or two of life and, you know, the record prevalence of caries studied by Robert Schroth, who's with the dental school here, showed a very, very high level of caries. It's extraordinarily expensive as well as very detrimental to the health of children and has an impact later on.

It needs to be addressed and one of the good things that we could do is to have an equitable price for milk. It's not just a matter of whether you can afford it. It's the comparative price of milk and pop, and milk and alcohol when you have a choice that the price of milk has been very high in many communities in the north.

When I was at a community on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, it was \$11 for a four-litre jug of milk compared to \$4 to \$5 here in Winnipeg. In Pukatawagan a couple of years ago, long after the tolls were well gone, there was \$22 for a four-litre price jug of milk, outrageous, extraordinary, terrible situation where it's much cheaper to have pop than milk and mothers are giving children pop instead of milk.

This is an absolute disgrace that this government has not acted in nine long, long years. It's time to change this government because they're just not doing their job. Let's look at this. This is fairness. It is fairness all over the province. No argument except from the government who argues against fairness.

I congratulate the PCs and the MLA for Minnedosa for recognizing this as an issue of fairness. This is an issue of justice. The north contributes a huge amount to the whole province. The contributions of people in the First Nations communities in the north, the contribution of our miners, people in the forestry industries, it is huge both in people and in revenue and they need to be treated fairly. It is just that we act on this bill and support it.

It makes common sense to have a low price for milk in the north compared to what the market would say and to have this to improve the health of people in the north and particularly young children. It makes no sense for a government to be subsidizing the price of alcohol in the north and having a very low price for alcohol and a very high price for milk. This makes absolutely no sense, and this is a government which is behaving with a total lack of common sense in the way that it's acting and not supporting people in northern Manitoba.

The reality is that we can make a difference. We can have fairness and justice and common sense in Manitoba and we can implement this bill, or we can do what the NDP representatives are doing and argue against fairness and justice and common sense. They can keep on doing it. We're going to keep on arguing for fairness, for justice and for common sense.

People in the economic terms often argue about perverse economic incentives, economic incentives which provide very low costs for bad things and very high costs for good things. That's what the NDP want. You know, people like Stéphane Dion have realized that we should be taxing polluters more and lowering income taxes at the same time. This is a different circumstance where we're talking about the health of people, the price of milk and the price of alcohol, but let's bring some common sense here. Let's have the prices of those things which we don't want and cause problems like FASD and extra costs and extra damage and problems in society and let's have a lower cost for things like milk.

The MLA for Inkster and I stand squarely for a better Manitoba, for a Manitoba based on fairness and justice and common sense, and that's why we support this bill very strongly.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise this morning to speak on Bill 204, the proposal of the two independent members in our Chamber.

I have to, first of all, take some issue with the Leader of the Liberal Party in attacking the Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk). Entirely unfair to try and put words in her mouth as he did, to suggest that she has no interests in the north and so forth. That's absolutely untrue and patently ridiculous, if I may say so.

She raised a number of very interesting points in her discussion. One of the benefits of being an MLA and being present in this Chamber is you learn things, and today I learned about this new product, this ultraviolet treatment of milk which eliminates the need for refrigeration and so forth. That's a very noteworthy thing, I would think, because transportation is the key issue here and if you have to refrigerate products as well as transport them that just adds even further to the cost. So, a product of that nature, I think, is very interesting to one and all, and I'm glad that I learned of that today.

So, just as an example for the Liberal members to chastise the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), who was paying tribute and complimenting the marketing boards that administer the production of milk, I think, was patently unfair, to say the least.

She made mention of lactose intolerance in Aboriginal peoples and how the Member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) and the Member for

The Pas (Mr. Lathlin), both Aboriginal people themselves, pointed this out, in addition to the fact that it's not typically a part of the diet of Aboriginal peoples. That's not to say it isn't needed because milk, of course, does have a lot of benefits from a nutritional perspective, particularly from a calcium perspective. But lactose intolerance is an issue and it's, as I understand it, typically milk from cattle that is the issue more so than milk from other animals. I believe that the Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk) did make some reference to other animals such as sheep and goats in her speech, and that is very noteworthy, as well, I think, Madam Deputy Speaker, especially for sheep and goat producers in the province. It's no coincidence that I'm a sheep producer so I pay particular interest to this in the potential—
[interjection]

An Honourable Member: Goat farmers up north, does that help?

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Well, the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) makes mention to the possibility of goat farmers in the north, and I would say to him that is distinctly possible. Why not? Why can't you grow goats or chickens or gardens, as a matter of fact, up in northern Manitoba? It's completely possible, and that's a very, very good point because maybe that's where we should be steering our efforts, Madam Deputy Speaker, as opposed to basically what this bill suggests, which is to impose some type of regulation on freight rates is what it is because it's not just the cost of milk, it's not just milk moving up north. It's all different types of products that go up north and the further you go, the higher the transportation cost is. That's fairly basic. So to suggest that it's just milk that's impacted is somewhat disingenuous.

* (10:50)

But to try and impose freight rates or price controls on freight rates is not an easy thing especially in a free-market system. So the marketplace is going to respond. The trucking companies may not have as many trucks available, for the sake of argument, to go up into the north if you try and impose freight rates on them. So, you know, it's maybe a good idea to try and facilitate that, but to implement, and in a free-market system, somewhat difficult. It reminds me of a former Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who did try and impose wage and price controls on our country and you know, I think history has shown that that was not a successful thing to do.

So I would like to go back to the concept of trying to help northern people, not just Aboriginal people, but Métis people and northerners in general to try and develop programs or policies or ideas to start growing food in the north. I was a member of the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures task force and I recall our trip up into Gods Lake Narrows and talking about the price of foods, it became apparent to me there were no gardens in the community. I didn't see any livestock whatsoever. I saw a lot of places where gardens could be grown.

So if we can focus our efforts in this regard, I think this, in the long run, would be a much more comprehensive and wide-ranging approach to resolving this problem because, you know, calcium is the primary component of milk, as I understand it, which is at issue, especially in terms of healthy babies and so forth, but there are certain vegetables very high in calcium that can also supply this essential nutrient, such as broccoli. I won't list others because I'm not an expert in that by any means, but I do know that growing gardens is fundamental to healthy living.

I noticed one of the things that we learned on the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures task force was that it is an issue for northerners, but it's also an issue for rural Manitobans. I was shocked, to say the least, that rural Manitobans are less healthy than urban Manitobans. I thought the opposite would be the case, living in the countryside and so forth, but the fact is that rural Manitobans are unhealthier.

You know, it's important to try and raise awareness of these issues in the north, in rural Manitoba, where I'm a representative. So, you know, focussing on programs such as this northern community gardens program, otherwise known as Grow North, I think, is not to be underemphasized, although members opposite choose to focus exclusively on the one issue and deliberately try and put across the impression that we're doing nothing on these other fronts is a false premise, to say the least. This gardening program, supplying rototillers to the north, garden kits, wheel barrows, seed potatoes, germinating supplies, water systems, fertilizers, peat moss and on and on, these are the components that are necessary for people to begin the process of putting in place their own gardens.

It's not just growing, but the knowledge how to preserve these foods. Like, we have a program here to supply freezers, but you know, the skills in canning foods, for instance, that I take for granted

because I sit and I watch my wife canning pickles and making relish at this time of year, the berries that we've picked, saskatoons, and chokecherries. She makes a very good chokecherry syrup, I might add, that is in high demand amongst my family members. So, these are skills as well. Drying foods, for instance. Drying mushrooms. We can't just assume that people know how to do this, that their skills are passed on from one generation to the next. Sometimes it's incumbent upon governments to intervene in that way rather than trying to intervene in the marketplace. I know we're facing a crisis in rural Manitoba right now and you know, if we were to put in place, for example, hay subsidies, the next thing you know the price of hay would go up and the trucking rates would go up. So this is the reality of the marketplace. I would suggest that taking a more comprehensive, broad-based approach is probably the way to go. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): It is a delight for me to be able to speak against this bill.

I had the wonderful privilege over the summer to visit Gods Lake Narrows. Prior to that, I also had the chance to visit Churchill and right away the problem of transportation loomed so large. With Churchill, at least it's accessible by rail in addition to air but, with other northern reserves during the summertime, it's only accessible by air for those with airport facilities. Otherwise, goods can only be transported during winter with the availability of winter roads.

I find it's natural or understandable if producers or stores in these isolated northern reserves will sell milk at a prohibitive price, because the cost of delivering the product to the area is so exorbitant.

However, I noticed that if you can be creative and practical, there are other alternatives to milk if you just want calcium. I saw in Gods Lake Narrows this school where supplies are delivered. They have several boxes of Cheez Whiz which is also a derivative of milk product containing calcium. I saw lots of bread. I thought without even thinking about this bill that this is a good alternative for milk.

So these children and adults from remote communities who, with this product which could be stored for a long time, these people from the northern communities are not without calcium in their diet. They may not have the actual fresh, chilled milk in the morning, but they have Cheez Whiz and other milk-derivative products that could be stored.

Also, our government has made a point or is keen on providing access to these remote northern communities. In this process, not only fresh produce but also other goods and services could be delivered with less problem.

With federal government support, the Province has realigned a number of winter road systems, particularly in the Island Lake, Lac Brochet and Tadoule Lake areas as well as routes to Oxford House, Gods River and Red Sucker Lake. Over the past six years, more than 25 percent or about 600 kilometres of the system has been moved from lakes, rivers and creeks onto land to further improve safety and reduce environmental risks.

* (11:00)

By the way, as we speak that beautiful, brand new bridge in Gods Lake Narrows may be operational. I have to confirm with the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) if indeed that is true but, when we were there in July, that beautiful bridge was almost complete. So if that were operational, the flow of goods from one island to the next would even be much, much faster, easier and more efficient.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Wellington will have four minutes remaining.

The hour being 11 a.m., we will now move on to resolutions, and we'll deal with Resolution 18, Adopt Jordan's Principle.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 18—Adopt Jordan's Principle

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux),

WHEREAS Jordan River Anderson needlessly and tragically spent his entire life in hospital due to jurisdictional disputes; and

WHEREAS all children in Manitoba should know the comforts of home and their community and should never have to sacrifice these rights; and

WHEREAS Jordan's Principle states that the rights of the child should be considered first in providing health care and social services; and

WHEREAS the absence of timely access to quality health care and social services can lead to sub-optimum child development; and

WHEREAS timely access to quality health and social services is a right, not a privilege, to be afforded to all children in Manitoba; and

WHEREAS Jordan's Principle has been widely supported.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba consider supporting Jordan's Principle and its immediate application in order to provide the best possible care and support for the children of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Member for River Heights, seconded by the honourable Member for Inkster,

WHEREAS—Dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, Jordan Anderson was born in 1999. He had a series of medical needs which were dealt with at the Children's Hospital in Winnipeg and, after a period, he was ready to go back to his community, his home community of Norway House.

Sadly, there were arguments and jurisdictional disputes between the provincial and federal government which resulted in Jordan Anderson never being able to go home. These arguments were over as small an item as the cost of a shower head and, cumulatively, they resulted in this very sad story of Jordan who was never able to go home to his community.

Jordan died in 2005 and his memory has been kept alive by many who have sought to have justice done in Manitoba and across Canada with the implementation of Jordan's Principle, that the child be considered first and governments do their arguing afterwards.

I have been, Mr. Speaker, to Jordan's grave in Norway House this past summer. I was in Norway House this summer when there was a big discussion about Jordan's Principle and the need to move urgently to implement Jordan's Principle on a broad basis. The Norway House situation is such that they have had 37 children who are similar to Jordan in one way or another, and they were not getting support. They had to provide the support. Fortunately, there was a temporary agreement

between the federal and provincial government which came to provide support on a temporary basis.

I understand there was an announcement made Friday that there is going to be a permanent implementation of Jordan's Principle for children with complex medical needs. I am pleased that the government has been able to achieve this, and we certainly support that. We are going to be watching very closely.

Right now it is very clear that Jordan's Principle is not yet implemented. Right? There's only an announcement. I had calls yesterday afternoon from people in the north saying, what's the procedure? We hear there's been an announcement, but it's not yet implemented and we don't know what's going to happen. This is important.

So I am hopeful that the government members on their side will talk a little bit about what the procedure is and how they will implement Jordan's Principle.

We believe, and I think that all—I hope all members of the House will agree to support this resolution because we have certainly had verbal support for this, even from the Premier (Mr. Doer), who said that he supported the resolution. So I would be extraordinarily surprised if we can't unanimously pass this resolution, and in a spirit of moving forward.

We also need some clarification, and I would hope the government would provide this, in terms of what they will use as a definition for complex medical needs. In Manitoba, there has been a tendency in the past to treat complex physical needs very differently than complex mental health issues, and it is time that both, in fact, are included and included in terms of matters like this Jordan's Principle and its application. It's time to end the inequity of treatment between physical and mental health needs.

I give you an example with Jordan. Complex physical needs and others. Visually it's very apparent that there is a matter which has to be dealt with. A child with FASD may have very complex mental health needs but all too often will likely be passed over with Jordan's Principle unless it's very clear, unless there's a determination that children with FASD and other mental health issues which are not quite so obvious to those who are not trained observers, shall we put it, that these children should be included. It will require some assessment, clearly,

which also needs to be done. But certainly a child with a complex medical need where it is a mental health issue should be included, and we hope that the government will provide some planning and explanation of what they're hoping to do in this regard.

It has now been three years since Trudy Lavallee wrote eloquently in a pediatric journal about Jordan's Principle and the need to bring it forward. It has been three years since I first raised the issue of Jordan's Principle in this Legislature. I've raised it many, many times since, and I hope that we will achieve unanimous support today in supporting this resolution. Thank you.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I'm privileged to rise today to speak to the member's resolution concerning Jordan's Principle, and I want to say, at the outset, that I congratulate the member for continuing his passion on this issue. It's a very important one for children and families in Manitoba, indeed for children and families in Canada, and I will reiterate for the member that we, of course, support the concepts in Jordan's Principle and agree how important it is that the children of Manitoba come first.

I think it's reasonable to acknowledge and I think that we can all acknowledge, whether it has been us personally or people with whom we're professionally associated, that there are good reasons why arguments exist between governments. It doesn't matter which government really, but governments get cross with one another particularly when it comes to money and when it comes to funding what other governments believe to be their responsibility. That is just a fact that exists historically. I hope it doesn't exist in Health or any other file into the future, but I don't suspect that will be true. But there are good reasons that disputes exist.

We might cite, for example, issues concerning ambulance bills in Manitoba that had been owed by the federal government as far back as 2003. Those bills had been left unpaid and were causing a lot of pressure on the EMS system and on transport generally. It was within the context of that problem that Manitoba stepped right up and said, we're going to pay those bills and resolve this problem later. It's an enormous bill that even today we know the federal government has a responsibility to pay.

* (11:10)

So, while we can see that there are reasons that these arguments exist between governments, we know that when it comes to the care of our most vulnerable children that these arguments must be set aside and that the child and the care of that child must come first.

So I believe that we sing from the same songbook in that respect and in many respects concerning health care, though you'd never know it in here, but we do, and so that is why we worked very carefully with advice from the people of Norway House in particular, Jordan's home town, with First Nations, Métis voices on this subject and will continue to do so, of course, because they really have the most important knowledge to impart to us on these files. We worked with the federal government to reach an agreement last Friday that there will be no child in Manitoba that goes on the journey that Jordan went on ever again.

We know that we have been able to achieve this by getting the federal government to agree with us on the need to have a definition of complex medical needs. The member has cited some good examples about why coming to such a definition wasn't such an easy road and will continue to be a complex one.

In speaking with my provincial counterparts last week at the federal-provincial-territorial meeting of ministers of Health, it was easy to see why the situation of Jordan came to happen in the first place. I listened to my colleagues say, well, this isn't the file of Health in my jurisdiction, it's the file of Family Services, or, it isn't a minister's file, it's a first minister's file. And listening to discussions about are we talking about a child that needs a ventilator or are we talking about a child that needs speech pathology?

The whole essence of Jordan's Principle and the argument came to bear on the national stage, and for good reasons. Other jurisdictions were not ready to come to an agreement with the federal government, but we knew from the lessons that we have been taught in Manitoba, that by being able to agree on a definition, to have a beginning on addressing those children with complex medical needs, those children like Jordan, we would actually be able to propel this file forward instead of the situation, the stasis that we're seeing in other jurisdictions. I think B.C. is making some progress, but other jurisdictions are still exploring this issue in ways that we have worked on for three years.

We were able to get the federal government to agree on the importance of having a definition for complex medical cases and those final details are being worked out with senior officials as we speak. We got the federal government to agree on what the member opposite has cited, and that is the importance of case conferencing. There is no cookie cutter for the situations that we see with these complex medical needs of children in northern Manitoba. Every child is unique and special, and getting the federal government to agree that that is so and the importance of having a case conference to determine the best care going forward was critical to our path. I believe that the member opposite agrees with that. I don't want to put words in his mouth, but the importance of looking at the uniqueness of these situations.

We know that we need to go forward at the same time that we're addressing children with complex medical needs with disparities that exist in service for children living on-reserve versus children living off-reserve with what I would call less complex medical needs but important ones. Issues like speech pathology, for example, where we want to make sure that all children in Manitoba, on-reserve, off-reserve, are gaining better access and quicker access to those services that will mean so much to the development of that child and to the development of that family.

We want to work with the federal government, and we were able to get agreement from them, for which I am very grateful to work concurrently on defining case conferencing and, most importantly, funding children with complex medical needs while we're concurrently working on the less complex needs, but needs nonetheless, and addressing those gaps that exist for children that live on-reserve and children that live off-reserve.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the federal government has worked with us at some times more quickly than others, but we were able to reach that agreement at last, that this will not happen to another child in Manitoba. But we know that the federal government also showed good faith in coming to the table in funding their share of dealing with an interim solution with some of the challenges and problems that were existing and solving those challenges in Norway House. I believe that that is a show of very good faith going forward, that we will be able to put the money first, the child first and the dispute second.

The other thing we were able to get the federal government to agree to do is to agree on a dispute resolution mechanism. Certainly it is my hope that we never have to use such a mechanism, that there will be no disputes going forward. But if, in the rare case, we do find ourselves in a situation of dispute, we will want to ensure that we have an agreement on how that's going to go forward.

The last thing I would say, Mr. Speaker, is this—and there's much to say on this issue—that while many of us have read, whether it's Ms. Lavallee's blockbuster article in the *Pediatric Journal* cited by the member opposite, whether it's an advisory note, whether it's an article in the newspaper, many of us have read about Jordan Anderson, but last year at the Aboriginal Health Summit here in Manitoba, we were able to meet Jordan Anderson as best we could on video, and learn that this was not a child that existed on a piece of paper. He was a beautiful child that ended in tragic circumstances. There is no one on the government side of the House, or anyone in Manitoba, that should ever say any differently. This was a tragedy. And it's a tragedy that our government, and that I believe all members of this House can agree, ought never happen again in Manitoba. We're committed to do that with our partners in the federal government, with our best teachers, the First Nations and Métis people of this province, and we're committed that this will never happen again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I wish to put some words on the record on the resolution that has been put forward by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and speak to Jordan's Principle, also known as the child first principle.

We saw the announcement on Friday that the province and the federal government had finally come to an agreement regarding Jordan's Principle. We think this is certainly a step forward in the right direction, but we have some questions about the agreement, and given this NDP's record when it comes to children in care, we are cautiously optimistic about this announcement. Today's resolution is very timely given the importance of this issue.

Jordan's Principle is named for the five-year-old Jordan Anderson of Norway House who died tragically in a Winnipeg hospital. He had a rare muscular disorder, and he spent most of his life in hospital, in a wheelchair and on a ventilator with a

feeding tube. In 2001, doctors decided to discharge Jordan so he could be placed in a specialized foster care near his home. But jurisdictional bickering between the federal Liberals and the provincial NDP governments meant that Jordan passed away 500 kilometres from his home, still in hospital. Neither government could agree on who should pay for his care or transportation. It is an absolute tragedy that a young, sick little boy died so far away from his family because of jurisdictional arguments between governments.

We all agree that Jordan's story is tragic, but we need to remember today that it is Jordan's case that is one of so many more disputes. We are told that there are hundreds of similar cases of children whose health care and well-being are currently up in the air while this government decides whether or not to pay for the services they need.

Last year we learned from a band councillor in Norway House that there were 37 families with severely disabled children in Norway House. These families were told that the government would not pay for the care these children needed and that the funds that they needed would not be there, and the families had no choice but to consider foster care. That could be a part of the reason that the number of children in care has skyrocketed in recent years, and surely it must cost the provincial government much more in staff resources and costs to place a child in foster care than to pay up front for the care of a child and their needs and to take it up with the federal government later. That says nothing of the emotional costs that these families, these children, must face by being apart from each other for years.

* (11:20)

A child's well-being should never suffer because two levels of government can't agree, and that's the idea behind Jordan's Principle. Unfortunately, this NDP government has dithered for years on this issue. Even though Jordan Anderson was a Manitoban, this government repeatedly pointed a finger at Ottawa.

We've raised the issue in this House before and, in June of this year, we asked questions about Jordan's Principle. This Premier (Mr. Doer) stood up and predictably laid the blame at Ottawa's feet. In addition, the Member for River Heights during Estimates process in May of 2008, asked the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) for the status on Jordan's Principle and the work that was being done or should be done within our province. The response was, we see this as an on-reserve

service. It's an on-reserve service. The last time I challenged the member, Mr. Speaker, was he advocating the provincial jurisdiction now get involved in providing medical services on reserve, because that would be a quite remarkable position to take and one that I know would be of interest to all provinces and premiers across the province. In a sense, it was just a brushoff. It was a brushoff and, again, it was a pushback from this government in trying to deal with an issue which, we believe, is significant. And, again, that was as recently as May of 2008.

But that's not what families need, Mr. Speaker. They're looking for leadership and a clear response from this government. They're looking for definitive answers, and last week we got a response. But it was anything but clear and it does not share a definitive action plan. The announcement made on Friday seems to be a step in the right direction, but it is not clear exactly what this agreement is going to do or what it will mean for families, especially those hundreds of families who are dealing not just with heartbreaking, health-care problems and challenges, but they're also dealing with issues of who's going to pay for the care of their child. These families need to definitively know what last week's announcement means. Will this government be addressing their children's needs immediately?

Sadly, this government's track record on such issues, they fear that this announcement is little more than a dose of false hope. They have reason to believe, based on this government's record and the language that they've used in this news release, that their child may be just put off for an indefinite period of time. So the question is: When is the NDP going to commit to Jordan's Principle? Are they committing to commit or are they taking immediate action? When it comes to putting a child's well-being first, sadly, this government doesn't have a great track record.

We've seen review after review of our child welfare system and hundreds of recommendations, and, after each revelation, we witness this government's pledge to overhaul or not-to-let-this-happen-again syndrome. But children continue to fall through the cracks—financial irregularities, lack of training, overburdened social workers, and the list goes on. The most tragic consequence of this utter mismanagement is the failure to protect our children.

Just as this government refuses to take responsibility for its role in this system, this

government for years refused to be accountable for its responsibilities with regard to Jordan's Principle. So, with this announcement, we are cautiously optimistic, but mindful of the fact that this government has more things to change the more they stay the same.

So I would like to thank the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for bringing this important resolution forward. We will be watching this government and holding them to account for the promises that they have made. The families and children impacted by Jordan's Principle need and deserve a definitive answer from this government's commitment. Thank you.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): I stand up and I say, as we have for many, many months, for two years now, we support Jordan's Principle. We've shown it and we've proven it time and again with our efforts to continue to negotiate with the federal government, to engage First Nations communities, to hear their stories.

I myself have had the privilege of visiting many First Nations communities where we talk about Jordan's Principle and the need to ensure that services are being provided for children with complex medical needs. We're sitting at the tables. We're listening. We're problem solving. We're working together, all jurisdictions.

You can see by our record. You can see through our commitment of initiatives specifically to supporting children through Healthy Child Manitoba. The investments we have made have gotten attention from across Canada, and we'll continue to do that. When Norway House came to the provincial government and they said, we have approximately 35 children in need of services, will you help us, we were at the table. We were at the table with the federal partners and we put our money down and we said, we will support you, we will work with you. The officials have continued to work with them and provide adequate services for those children.

I was in Norway House for York Boat Days and on that occasion we had a parade. That parade was in honour of Jordan Anderson. It was an emotional day as we all walked through Norway House hand in hand, singing our support for Jordan's Principle and our willingness to work together.

The three levels of government were there. First Nations communities came together. We had support from Saskatchewan as we went forward and talked

about what we needed to do. We learned the specifics; we got to meet Jordan Anderson's family. The pain that they went through as they struggled through that debate, that's a pain we don't want families to go through again and that's why we signed—the first province in Canada to sign an agreement with the federal government, that we have a resolution and we will continue to ensure that services are provided and the bills will be paid. If there's a dispute about how the bills will be paid, there will be a mechanism to resolve that, but the most important part is that that child and that family will receive that service.

I was very proud when the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) for the Province of Manitoba and the federal minister of Health stood together and provided that information to all of Canada, that we support Jordan's Principle.

We have been a government that has taken action. I was challenged when I was in Shamattawa that talk was cheap, and so I've taken that to heart. Since that experience, through all of my information and gathering, that is what I do. I ensure that we are taking action to ensure that the appropriate services are adhered to.

I had the privilege of being in a press conference today with Grand Chief Ron Evans who stood in front of many cameras, in front of a room full of people, and he commended the Province of Manitoba to be the first province to sign an agreement with the federal government for Jordan's Principle. Grand Chief Evans stood in our support.

We're taking the action that's needed. We're continuing to work with all First Nations with the federal government. We want the services to be available for children with complex medical needs. As we work through this, we'll continue to support, to listen and to encourage all partners to come to the table. We understand the importance; we understand Jordan's Principle. We have many examples of our government coming and showing initiatives, through initiatives that we've done on First Nations communities.

We also have a really good example of what we did last year. There was a bill for \$11.7 million, owed by the federal government to the City of Winnipeg. We stood up and we paid that bill. We paid that bill because we felt that it was important that those services still be provided to those community members. So as we did then, as we do

now in supporting Norway House and as we did the last two years, we support Jordan's Principle.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the minister's last statement: We support Jordan's Principle. If the government supports Jordan's Principle—and, yes, they can reflect on the past and they could say, we're moving in this direction; here's something that happened on Friday, then you get the minister making the statement that she just finished making.

Then the question becomes: If you support it, why not put the idea ahead of the party politics, recognize what the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) is putting forward before us today and allow for the resolution to be voted on and passed? Again, much like I talked about the fixed prices on milk, I think sometimes we need to put the party politics aside and look at the issue that's before the Legislature and vote accordingly.

The government has a wonderful opportunity here in acknowledging that it really understands what Jordan's Principle is all about and get behind the resolution and vote in favour of it. We have an opportunity where it could pass, this particular resolution, I believe, unanimously and the only way that that will not happen is if the governing caucus decides to talk it out.

* (11:30)

I suspect, Mr. Speaker, that government would say, well, we have a number of people that would like to address the resolution. We are all familiar with the process. We know that at 12 o'clock, Mr. Speaker, you're going to stand and you're going to say we're now adjourned, and if the vote doesn't occur before 12 o'clock, then this resolution will not receive the unanimous support of this Legislature.

I know, speaking on behalf of my leader, that we would be more than happy to allow any member that would like to be able to speak to this resolution speak. We would be more than happy to give the leave that's necessary in order to allow people to speak to the bill. I suspect that you'll find that there would even be support with the official opposition if it was only a question of allowing members the opportunity to speak. So I don't necessarily want people to believe that the resolution is not going to pass because there were more members that wanted to speak, Mr. Speaker. We know that that's not the case.

If this resolution does not pass there's only one real reason and that is because the government of the day has chosen not to allow the resolution to pass. I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, then, if that is the case, that the government is sending mixed messages. We heard something positive about Jordan's Principle only last week. It is indeed a very timely resolution. It is a resolution that gives affirmation to what members of this Legislature believe in regard to the Jordan's Principle and the need to ensure that it doesn't happen again in the future.

There are periodically issues that I have noted my leader really take a stand on and I would suggest to you that this is probably one of those issues, you know, internally, one-on-one in the discussions that I have with my leader and I don't think I can betray any sort of confidence. This is one of those issues that I would find very difficult to come up with something other than an issue like this where my leader has been so passionate about, not only publicly but also privately.

You know, when the idea of the resolutions and what sort of resolution—because we're not given very many, I think my leader's had maybe three in how many years since '99, in terms of being able to ensure that it's being debated inside this Chamber—he was adamant that this had to be the resolution, that this is something that's so important to Manitobans and he's taken it on as a mission. I've seen press conferences, I've had so many discussions on this particular issue and I look around and I say, well, there are other types of issues that we could be talking about, but this is a very passionate issue, I know, that goes even beyond just party politics.

I listened to the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and he made reference to the fact that he's been out to the gravesite of the late Jordan and it just adds to what, I believe, I know, is a very important issue not only to him but to all Manitobans. I believe that we have an opportunity to be able to demonstrate—and I notice that we have individuals in the public gallery, most, in part, I believe, are here because of the debates that have been occurring this morning, whether it was setting the price of milk, or now, Jordan's Principle. They've taken an interest in the issue. They wanted to hear in terms of what it is that the politicians of the province of Manitoba have to say on the issue but it's more than just talking, Mr. Speaker. It's allowing things to be able to come to a vote so we know where members of this Chamber are.

You know, prior to this resolution, I introduced a bill and it was more out of frustration in the sense that I've seen the milk issue for so many years and it frustrates me that government has not recognized the value of having that one price through the province. So I thought I would try something a little bit different by suggesting that let's just allow it to go to committee. You know, you don't even have to say you support the bill or you're opposed to the bill. Just allow it go to committee. All you have to do is just stop talking about it and then it would be able to go to committee.

Mr. Speaker, this is, I would have thought, as a New Democratic Party in governance, that they would look at good, progressive social issues, see the value, and at least provide the opportunity for some of these ideas to be voted on in a bill. We could have brought the bill out.

We could have had committee go out to northern Manitoba and listen first-hand about what Manitobans are saying, as a legislative committee. How often does that happen? I've been here for 20 years. I had a bit of a sabbatical, involuntary, I must say, but I had a sabbatical for a couple of years there in the late '90s, but, having said that, you know, it would have been a wonderful opportunity to take the issue and use the setting of the price of milk as the issue, take it up north. MLAs sitting in a committee. Hear what people have to say about food in general, along with milk. Wonderful opportunity. We lose that opportunity because the government just chooses to talk it out. I hope that they won't do that, Mr. Speaker, on this particular resolution.

They say that they support it. Well, now they have an opportunity to do more than just talk about it by voting on it, Mr. Speaker. There is concern that the case conference can be used to avoid an agreement. For Jordan, it was four years of case conferences instead of a decision to get Jordan home. Again, I believe, the MLAs are familiar with the issue. The time for further discussion and debate, I would suggest to you, is not necessary, especially if it's going to prevent something positive from happening. So I'm going to conclude my remarks by saying that all of us, I believe, at least I'd like to believe, support the principle. We have an opportunity to do something, not just talk about it, to do something. Let's join together in an apolitical fashion and make a very strong statement by voting unanimously in favour of this resolution. I look to my colleagues on the left and right and ask them to

respect what's before us and pass this resolution. Thank you.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): I'd like to begin with some background. We know that Jordan Anderson was a member of Norway House Cree Nation, born there on October 22, 1999, with complex medical needs. In order for Jordan to receive services, his family had to place him in care under a voluntary placement agreement. In 2001, doctors decided that Jordan could be released from hospital, provided that he remain close to the Health Sciences Centre. A medical foster home was located.

The federal and provincial governments could not decide who would pay for Jordan's foster home care. Jordan passed away on February 2, 2005, in a Winnipeg hospital. On May 18, 2007, the House of Commons unanimously voted for the Jordan's Principle bill to put children first, funding arrangements second.

This private member's bill, Bill 233, Jordan's Principle Implementation Act, establishes the right of children to have timely access to quality health care and social services regardless of jurisdictional disputes. It also recognizes the right of parents and guardians to receive information about the services for their children.

I'd like to make it clear that we support Jordan's Principle. However, making Jordan's Principle a reality in Manitoba requires a dispute mechanism to make sure that the federal and provincial governments can agree to immediately fund services on an interim basis, knowing that the responsible level of government will eventually be made to pay its bills. Instead of putting a meaningless bill forward, we have relentlessly pushed the federal government to find a resolution to Jordan's Principle, and we are pleased that, after two years, we have finally come to an agreement with the federal government on how to proceed with negotiations and deal with jurisdictional issues as they arise. Therefore, I don't think there's a real need for this bill. We have an agreement already.

* (11:40)

We have an agreed-to terms of reference to move ahead on implementing Jordan's Principle. We expect a final report in the new year. We are putting in place an immediate interim solution to deal with all jurisdictional disputes regarding medically complex children. The Province and the federal government will appoint senior officials to resolve

case issues as they arise which could not be resolved through normal processes. If these officials cannot agree to a solution, governments use funds from existing programs to ensure that First Nations children get the services they need.

While we worked to make Jordan's Principle a reality we showed good faith, putting taxpayers' money where our mouths are. Last year we paid \$11.7 million in unpaid ambulance bills owed by the federal government to the City of Winnipeg. Those bills were left unpaid when the federal Liberals stopped paying its bills in 2003. Last May we paid our share of \$75,000 for special needs services in Norway House even though the jurisdictional dispute with Ottawa remains unresolved. We are pleased the federal government stepped up and agreed to pay its share too.

We are encouraged by the federal government's announcement to also support the children in Norway House but have largely been disappointed by the foot-dragging of the federal government when it comes to our work on the larger issue of Jordan's Principle.

We do have a number of problems with Bill 233. A bill such as this is very difficult to enforce when the core problem involves three levels of government: the federal, provincial and First Nations. The bill only applies to the provincial government and its agencies, and so it can have no effect on the federal government. I think that's a major limitation of this bill. The bill requires the determination of what constitutes the best health care and the best social services and what timely access means. These are all a matter of opinion, and experts can differ on their meaning in a given case. The law is not the best instrument to be used in dealing with issues such as those underlying Jordan's Principle as resolution of issues requires the commitment of three levels of government, and only one of those can be influenced by a provincial or federal law.

Despite the fact that there is not currently a dispute mechanism in place for Jordan's Principle, last May we honoured the principle by entering into an interim funding agreement to maintain a pilot program in Norway House for children residing on reserve who require medical assistance and disability supports to live at home with their parents. The Province contributed \$75,000 to the program at Norway House, and we will continue to fund the program jointly with the federal government at Norway House until we reach final funding

agreement. Currently, this project is serving 37 children residing on the reserve who require medical assistance and disability supports. There are another 29 children on the waiting list.

Funding for the project ran out at the end of May 2008. The Norway House project for children began with special needs funding from the federal government. But those three years of federal funding ended in December 2006. This was followed by two years of band funding. The band is now seeking federal and provincial commitment to a solution.

You know, this is kind of a re-occurring theme. If you study what happens in the delivery of social services, you will notice that, yes, the federal government has an announcement. They introduce a program, maybe a pilot project, maybe a one-year or a two-year or a three-year, and what happens after one year? What happens after two years? What happens after three years? Well, the money runs out, and what happens to the federal government? They don't renew it. What do they do? They expect the provincial government to renew the funding. This happens over and over and over again.

What happens to the people who are delivering the service or the program, or the people that were the recipients of the program or service? They come to the provincial government, and they say, we want you to fund it when it was started with the federal government and they cut their funding. The current federal government is no different than their predecessors. The Liberal government did the same thing. In fact, I think the current Tory government followed the model of the Liberal government in Ottawa and replicated what they saw. They said, oh, this is a good idea. We'll steal this from the Liberals. We'll fund this program for two years and then we'll cut the funding, and we'll expect the Province of Manitoba to pick it up. Guess what happens? People expect us to pick it up. But why should we if the federal government—*[interjection]* Well, we do. We shouldn't, but we do, frequently we do. We end up funding it. *[interjection]* Yes, and one way of summing this up is the feds are there to cut the ribbon, but not to close the door. Well, I think they did close the door when they closed the door on funding at the end of the program.

You know, we've seen this over and over again. I wish I had some specific examples, but you could probably find news clippings. You could do some research. You could find dozens of examples of how this happens over and over again.

An Honourable Member: The Province does this to municipalities, too, Doug.

Mr. Martindale: We have joint agreements with municipalities.

But getting back to the pilot program in Norway House and the federal government. Though our government maintains its position that these services on reserves should be fully funded by Canada, with this pilot project we have offered to pay a share of the special needs services in Norway House while it is determined which level of government is responsible for funding the program. Now, just this morning I was at a very exciting news conference in the office of the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh) and we announced new funding for FASD and guess what. We're going to be providing services on some First Nations communities. We don't have to. In fact, some people would argue that we shouldn't do that; it's totally a federal responsibility. But, in spite of that, we are going to be funding services for FASD on reserve.

We've done this in a number of areas. Even though we don't have to, we have extended funding to citizens on reserve. I've heard the Premier (Mr. Doer) say, on some of these occasions, that they're all Manitobans and so we should fund them even though, according to treaties and history and tradition and protocols we don't have to, but we do.

We have stated, rather than risk having children placed in care or moved off reserve on a without-prejudice basis, Manitoba is prepared to provide one-third of the total cost, with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada providing one-third and Health Canada providing one-third over the next year.

I was outside the Legislature talking to one of the people who was at the news conference, and he said one of the most frustrating things is that they can't even get meetings with the federal government. So you can understand how frustrating it is with a provincial government. In fact, I was at a provincial-territorial meeting where the federal minister wasn't present at all. They don't come to the table. They're very arbitrary. But, you know, people will pass judgment. We're into a federal election, people can decide whether the federal government is being fair with Manitobans or not, and we'll wait and see what the outcome is.

I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to put all of my remarks on the record, but I'm sure that some of my colleagues are prepared to do so soon. Thank you.

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, I'm just wanting to take an opportunity to join my colleagues in putting a few words on the record regarding this resolution. Again, I think that the most important aspect of this is really to consider the fact that yes, on September 5, we already signed something, so this is—it's a done deal. It's a fait accompli. We have a working understanding. This is really an unnecessary formality or detail. The t's have been crossed, the i's have been dotted.

Again, we really need to think about the essence of this and how again the idea of Jordan's Principle is something that is very important and, again, things have been put in motion. But you have to remember, too, that this is something that is part of a larger problem that goes back to the very roots of colonization and the jurisdictional issues faced by First Nations in this country, that, unlike any other group of citizens, they are literally a part of the laundry list of section 92(1) of the Constitution and that, while we did have constitutional reform and section 35(1), that really, this is about a relationship between federal and provincial jurisdictions and cannot necessarily be legislated the way the member opposite would like to have it done because it comes down to federal responsibility. Sadly, the track record for federal governments over the past hundred-plus years has been a tragic one in dealing with First Nations responsibilities.

So we have to consider the fact that this Province has really stepped up and in so many places. As has been mentioned previously, we've gone on reserve. Rather than waiting for various federal governments to take their responsibility and move forward with it, this provincial government has said we can't sit around and wait, we need to go forward. So services have been provided. The best that can be done has been done, but again, it's part of a relationship and one that is negotiated and if only one group of people at the table is negotiating and moving forward while the other changes their minds or does various things, you can't make the other half go forward.

So again, I appreciate the spirit that is behind this resolution, but at the same time, we have already gone forward on this. So, again, we do need things like dispute mechanisms. Really, in some respects, it's a tragedy that we even need to have got to this point, that in a sense, because of the way the Constitution is worded, that really, in a sense, the federal government at various points never should have dropped the ball. It never should have got to the

point where there's jurisdiction issues with provincial government having to step in. But, the point is, we have stepped in and we've done what we can as best as we can under those jurisdictional issues.

* (11:50)

Again, we know that the track record is here for the kinds of support that have been put out to First Nations. One of the things that I know from my own background, having worked with Aboriginal students and taught in Aboriginal communities for the past decade, my involvement on reserves, in the intercity social program as part of the Aboriginal Child Welfare Initiative, having worked for Southeast Tribal Council, having worked for the University of Manitoba and working with, for and along side Aboriginal people, is how much they appreciate what has been done by this provincial government when at various times federal governments have washed their hands of them, things like the ACCESS programs that have got Aboriginal students into things like the Child Welfare Initiative.

You know what? It's a case of we need to recognize what's there and what's been done. Aboriginal people in this province do respect what has been done by this government. They are aware of it. It's a case of, Mr. Speaker, we really need to realize that, again, things have been done. This government has moved forward and it's too bad that there are so many naysayers that would rather heckle and do whatever to move forward something that really again we've already done. This is already done. This is too little too late.

You know what? Heckle all you like. The point is we're actually on this side doing something and I know the work has been done. I spent those years in a classroom, listening to students tell me about the wonderful programs they were able to get through, that got them off the reserve or out of a community situation, all because of various provincial programs that we put in for First Nations, Aboriginals, Métis and Inuit people in this province, people who are technically under federal jurisdiction. But we weren't going to sit around and let them waste away, waiting for the feds to come in and do what they were supposed to do. I had students tell me how important it was.

Part of the reason why I sit here now and I'm able to speak in this House is because of the work that I have done for First Nations and Métis people and because they encouraged me to be here, because what I was doing in the classroom they found

beneficial, but they said it would be more beneficial if you take those ideas, those things that you've been teaching us in class, that history, that knowledge, that perspective and bring it into the Legislature and work with a team.

We have a team here that understands that, and I hope that as someone that has come from that experience, even though as my students referred to me—I was the white chick from the burbs—but I was the white chick from the burbs that got it. So they had no problem with a non-Aboriginal instructor giving them history lessons from an Aboriginal perspective and giving them the Aboriginal side of history that had been so denied them in mainstream environments.

So I now come here and advocate for them as well as the neighbourhood that I represent. The point is that in doing that kind of advocacy, I know that again I've signed on with a team that's going to get the work done.

Gee, like I said, wait a minute. September 5, we got the work done, so why is it here—oh, wait a second—on the 9th, we're discussing this. It's again *fait accompli*; it's already done. Really it's a case of we support the principles; we're moving forward on the action. You know what? Again, it's putting a rubber stamp on something that's already done.

You really just have to worry about this idea that we're moving forward. The point is, for all the talk, for all the things that get put on the record here by various people for various reasons and agendas, we're getting the work done. That's the bottom line. That's what matters. That is what matters to the families who are in these jurisdictional quagmires. That is what matters, that the work is getting done and that somebody is advocating for them.

Like I said, as of September 5, something was already signed, sealed and delivered. It's part of a larger negotiating relationship with another level of government. Hopefully, should things change the way members on our side would like to see on the 14th, I see that there could probably be some better negotiations as of October 14, but that's a personal thing there. We could really move forward on this issue. Jordan's Principle could go at an extreme speed forward if we were working with a team that was moving forward.

That's been part of the problem over these past years. If you look at the inaction of the past several

years, we can only move as fast as those on the other side of the negotiating table are willing to move. We have seen over this past year or so that there really hasn't been any movement. You can only push somebody so far when they're digging their heels in.

Again, we are the first province to secure an agreement with the federal government. Again, we are on the leading edge of this and, as I said before—put this on the record—I don't know how many times, September 5, this was already done. It's all over and done with, and we really just need to move forward and actually do the work and, again, recognize the kind of work that this government has been doing for First Nations. I am proud to have been part of various organizations and teaching teams that have worked to empower Aboriginal people. Part of that issue is really around these kinds of health-care and education issues. We are moving forward on these things and we keep moving forward. This is really just part of a larger process. Again, I appreciate the fact that members opposite have concerns in this area and that they're aware of it.

Thank you for being on board with this. But, again, we're already leading the way on this, as, again, we are the first province to secure a federal agreement. So, really, it's about thank you for being on our side. Thank you for recognizing what this government has accomplished. Again, you brought it to the table a little late, but, again, thank you for seeing what was already done September 5 and that what our ministers will keep working on with the federal jurisdictions to keep moving this forward the way they continue. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to put this on the record.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): It's a pleasure to rise and to speak to this resolution. You know, after a summer of being in the community, of travelling around the province and travelling elsewhere, you forget exactly what the dynamics are in this building, and I think this morning is a tremendous example of that.

I heard a very impassioned speech by my friend, one of the most experienced members of this House, the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), who is a passionate man, but who is even more passionate talking about some of the frustrations—

An Honourable Member: He's talking about a bill, not the resolution.

Mr. Swan: Well, if the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) will just be able to control himself for a minute, I'll get to him.

So, indeed, the Member for Burrows had a very passionate speech. It's a speech coming from the heart, from his experience as a United Church minister, from his work in the north end of our city and, certainly, from his 18 years as a tremendous member of this House.

Of course, you thought, how could you top that? But, indeed, the Member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) got up and, again, spoke from her heart and spoke from her experience, and, really, I think, encapsulated the frustrations that members of this government have had in some of the difficulties between the federal and the provincial governments.

This is an important issue, and, certainly, I'm very pleased that I have a chance to rise in this House and put some comments on the record. There are many more of my colleagues who also want to have the chance to put their comments on the record.

So, indeed, what do we hear? We hear the Member for Inkster, the independent Member for Inkster chirping from his seat, the very member who will have hunger strikes, who will have half-baked protests, who will call to anybody. If there are three people assembled, he will consider this a platform to talk about how he does not have the rights to stand in the House and say what he wants. Well, today, indeed, he's had his chance to speak; he's had his opportunity.

Certainly, I and my other colleagues are taking advantage of our rights as members of this Legislature to talk about a very, very important issue,

and it's about leadership. It's about this government moving ahead with difficult negotiations with the federal government. There's no question we've had differences of opinion with the federal government on this issue. I'm very pleased that our government was able to show the leadership and was able, just last week, to strike a deal with the federal government, which is now going to create what I would call a mature relationship when dealing with individuals who are in First Nations, who should, constitutionally, historically, ethically, be properly treated by the federal government that, unfortunately, over the past decades of Liberal and Conservative federal governments, we have a federal government which has not stood up to its obligations.

I am very pleased, frankly, that we've been able to enter into a more mature and appropriate relationship with the federal government and, certainly, it's to this government's credit that were able to solve a problem which arose through, if I could say, just one other symptom of neglect of our First Nations by successive Liberal and Conservative federal governments. That's why I hope—there's a nice breeze blowing out there. I don't know if it's the warm breeze that Andy Anstett spoke about, but, certainly, it's a breeze of change in this country. I hope the First Nations people will get out to the ballot box and they will remember what has happened.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable minister will have 6 minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, this House is recessed, and we will reconvene at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, September 9, 2008

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