

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

Vol. LXIII No. 62A – 10 a.m., Tuesday, June 14, 2011

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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<i>Vacant</i>	Lac du Bonnet	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 14, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): I wonder if there's—if you would canvass the House to see if there's a will to proceed to Bill 213, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement to proceed to second reading of Bill 213, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Gift Cards)? *[Agreed]*

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 213—The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Gift Cards)

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I, seconded by the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurshou), that Bill 213, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Minnedosa, seconded by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie, that Bill 213, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Gift Cards), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mrs. Rowat: I rise today in the House to put some words on the record with regard to an important bill that will prohibit fees on gift cards, including cards issued by malls, except fees for replacing or customizing a card or if the card was free.

Mr. Speaker, this is the second time that members from this side of the House have brought forward this bill. The member for Portage la Prairie

did bring this bill forward prior, and, again, we're going to try again to see if this government will actually take this bill and move it to where it belongs, to committee, and then through to law.

A few years ago, the government had moved to eliminate expiry dates and service fees on gift cards but at the time chose to exempt mall gift cards from that legislation. So a consumer who receives a gift card directly from a retail outlet is assured that the value on the card is, in fact, the value on the card and won't go over time nor will it expire. Consumers who receive gift cards from malls are not so lucky, Mr. Speaker, and we've heard from several people in Manitoba who were very surprised to learn that the cards that they had purchased, either for themselves, for their family, as gifts actually did have an administrative fee that reduced the value of the card and in some case made it actually worthless.

So what we would like to see is gift cards that are issued by malls to receive the same types of scrutiny as gift cards from stores, Mr. Speaker. We have heard from constituents who have raised the issue. We believe that when people put their money out to purchase a gift for a family member or a friend, they would like to see that value actually go towards what it is intended, and that's to provide a gift for an individual.

Let's look a little more closely at the background of the Manitoba's gift card legislation, and that will give us some background, and then we'll move forward on where we would like to see this legislation go through our amendment.

On November 1st at 2007, the NDP government introduced a bill, the consumer amendment act, which prohibited expiry dates and fees on most gift cards and ensured the consumer would be fully aware of the conditions on the gift card that was put into effect.

However, Mr. Speaker, this government failed to include all gift cards. They left out mall gift cards. So, in 2006, the former Minister Selinger said, and I quote, we think that these gift cards are leaving a lot of money on the table that consumers are losing. Well, that is still happening with regard to gift cards and malls. The legislation prohibited expiry dates

and fees on most gift cards, but, again, mall cards were not included.

So we would like to know why the government did not include all gift cards when they made this careless legislation that left many Manitobans with questions and concerns and, actually, heartbreak to some Manitobans, which I'll get into in a short period of time.

The NDP said that they're protecting Manitoba's consumers and their families. Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we have a situation where we have a number of Manitobans who have come forward and indicated that they're just not seeing that. There was a situation that was in the paper, I guess about a year and a bit ago. A young woman—a young girl, Avery, who had been saving her mall gift cards to purchase a gift for herself, she was—she understood the value of money. She knew that she wanted to raise this money on her own to purchase a gift at a mall, and little did she know that on the back of the card, in fine print, it indicated that the mall would be deducting \$2.50 off of her mall card every month. So the result was that Avery had much less money on her gift card, and her father had to pay the remaining expense. Well, it takes the lustre out of saving for a long time if you have to spend it within a year, was what Avery's father had indicated, and I agree with him.

Here was a situation where a young girl was actually very proud of how she was saving money to purchase something. It taught her the value of money, the value of saving to purchase a gift, and this young person, actually, learned a different lesson, that you can't always believe what you hear with regard to government spin. And we believe that she needed—or she deserves to see this legislation expanded so that she can see that justice can be done, and that in the future, individuals like herself who have raised money to purchase a gift, no matter where they get the gift card from, would know that there's a total value on that gift card.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government frequently states that they're in support of families and young children, and I think that if they support Bill 13, this would also show to Avery, a young woman who's fiscally aware, that, you know, there are ways that you can actually address shortcomings in legislation, as this government had done—had introduced a few years back.

* (10:10)

Mr. Speaker, in 2008, the Saskatchewan government passed a bill amending their Consumer Protection Act to—in order to include prepaid purchase cards. The amendment applies to every prepaid purchase card issued or sold on and after the date the legislation comes into force. The act includes all gift cards, no matter the fee, the company, seller or expiration date.

Malls in Saskatchewan still offer the gift cards. So this government, you know, if they're concerned about how this will have an effect on mall cards, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has shown that there is no need to worry, that their economy is going strong and their mall cards are being accepted and used and respected.

So this government I believe should support Bill 13 and help make Manitoba a leading province as well in being transparent about their legislation and then about supporting Manitoba families and young people who are saving for special items.

So, Mr. Speaker, Bill 13 will enhance consumer protection, and with these comments today I urge the NDP government to support all Manitobans by supporting Bill 213 to prohibit fees on gift cards, including those sold at malls. Thank you.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): I want to read into the record of the House a petition. It says: Dear member of the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly, as a constituent in your riding, I wanted to contact you about an issue that is important to me—consumer choice in the gift card market.

It goes on to say: Shopping centre provided gift cards are a consumer friendly product. The gift card program offered at my mall currently charges no upfront fees and has no expiry date. The program only begins to collect a small fee of \$2.50 per month 15 months after the card has been activated. For me and I suspect most other consumers that is more than enough time to spend the complete balance on the gift card.

It goes on to say: As my local MLA, I am asking you to speak and write to the Premier and Minister of Service Nova Scotia to request amendments to Nova Scotia gift card regulations which would allow mall cards to continue offering non-branded cards with small dormancy fees. This specific regulatory allowance was provided in New Brunswick, British Columbia, Ontario and Manitoba.

That is on the website, bring back our mall gift cards. In other words, if this legislation was to go into force, there is certainly a risk that this would kill our popular mall gift cards, and, indeed, that is a popular choice for consumers. We lost Polo Park because we brought in the expiry date regime. I understand Polo Park has come back in. I wouldn't want to see us lose more malls offering this choice. So if—perhaps the legislation should be renamed the end of mall gift card act, because it appears, Mr. Speaker, with the risk inherent, to be hostile, in fact, to consumer choice.

The rest, of course, is largely redundant in the act because most expiry dates are long gone in this province, having been brought in I think it was in 2007, as a result of very intensive consultations both with consumers and with those who provide gift cards.

Next year, Mr. Speaker, in 2012, is the next round, however, of consultations on the gift card regime in this province. It's very important that we hear from all of the stakeholders. It's important to know the impact of bringing in regulations that, while primarily intended to protect consumers, may have an unintended consequence to actually reduce the choice for consumers in the marketplace. And, as you can see from the example of Nova Scotia, and it's not alone, the impact of legislation like this can be felt by consumers when they go to their mall and find out that the gift card program has been cancelled because there are no dormancy fees anymore.

I take it, then, from the legislation that there hasn't been the consultation that the government has done when it brought in its gift card regime, and when you have no consultation, you can sometimes get legislation exactly like this before the House this morning. There has to be a balance and that was what was attempted to be achieved when the regime was introduced in 2007. We do not want to hurt consumers by moving forward with regulations like this. But we always want to look to see what the current thinking is in the marketplace and if malls are prepared to continue with their gift cards if dormancy fees are eliminated, and that is a discussion, as I say, that has been scheduled for 2012 in any event.

The member opposite says that there's many, many cases—this has been brought to their attention by constituents. I'm told by the Consumer Protection Office that their complaints of this nature are very, very few and far between. And, in fact, we're only

aware of one case that was on one of the television channels.

But what I do want to end on is we do hope that the Legislature will support the consumer-friendly and, we believe, business-friendly Let's Make a Better Deal strategy components that are before the Legislature and are currently in circulation here in Manitoba. For example, the protection of consumers when they go and purchase a cellphone: that legislation has been—has proven to be very popular and supported widely by Manitoba consumers. And, in fact, even the providers of cellphones, the companies themselves, are divided on this one, and although the association takes the view that it is entirely federal law and the Province has no business, our constitutional lawyers, who come second to no one in this country, are very firm in their view that what we are doing is clearly provincial jurisdiction. And some of these companies say they welcome the introduction of cellphone contract protection, particularly when it comes to regulating the amount of cancellation fees.

But, as well, we, of course, have legislation before the House as a result of consultations when it comes to real estate transactions, the buy and sell—sale of property. We have legislation before the House that is largely promoted by the sector itself, and that was when it comes to prepaid funerals. And, of course, there is an awareness campaign going on on the buses in Manitoba to alert Manitobans to the new protections they have when it comes to purchasing funeral services. And, of course, we know that the purchase of funeral services is always at a time of immense grief for a family and when consumers can be particularly vulnerable. And so, the code of ethics now is going to work for Manitobans, but only, of course, if they're aware that it exists and can call on that code of ethics when they have questions. They are provided, of course, by law by the funeral directors of Manitoba, but consumer protection is best assured by consumer awareness, which leads to a debate on the consumer awareness legislation that's also before private members' hour.

But condo buyers and condo owners, as well, are seeing new protections in a monumental piece of legislation, the modernization of The Condominium Act of Manitoba. And, as well, we've ushered in a new tenant protection package with new protections for renters and particularly when it comes to condo conversions, but also, when it comes to upgrades of their property and, as well, when we look at the rent regulation scheme in Manitoba, which has assured

people in this province of protections against gouging in the rental market. And a recent independent study has confirmed that, in fact, Manitoba's rent regulation scheme, while continuing to incent investments in multi-family housing, does protect against sudden spikes in rental costs that one often sees in the case of a low vacancy rate.

And we also, of course, have just launched a new consultation with Manitoba consumers and the travel industry to protect Manitobans when it comes to the purchase of travel packages: to make sure, for example, and this is what we're interested in discovering, all-inclusive pricing, so that people aren't surprised by hidden fees when they buy their travel package; so that we can look at the viability of a compensation plan in Manitoba when people are stranded as a result of a bankruptcy, for example, or something gone terribly wrong and perhaps due to a fraud by a travel agent; and, as well, to make sure that our travel agents are among the best trained in the country when it comes to providing information and advice to consumers.

So those are some of the efforts that are ongoing but they're all ongoing as a result of intensive consultations and, indeed, partnership and, in some cases, like with the travel-package protections, leadership by the sector affected, because they understand that what's better for buyers is better for business. Confidence in the sectors are critical to ensure that people, when they go to the marketplace and buy a product, can rest assured that when it's bought in Manitoba, it has the backing and it's fair. Families are busy these days, Mr. Speaker, and they need the protections that the Let's Make a Better Deal strategy is providing. Thank you.

*(10:20)

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to have the opportunity to rise this morning and participate in second reading debate regarding the honourable member for Minnedosa's (Mrs. Rowat) private member's Bill 213, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act, which the honourable member introduced into the House for first reading on May the 4th of this year.

I have listened to the ministers who is responsible for this area within government and I'm left wondering as to whether or not the minister even read the bill because the comments that were made said that it was—it lacked in research and that the bill itself was obviously crafted without consultation.

That could not be the farthest thing from the truth. The honourable minister from Minnedosa did extensively research and provided for significant consultation with not only those directly affected, as consumers, but also those that provide the issuance of the cards.

The situation that existed prior to legislation in Manitoba back in 2007 was very much wide-open buyer beware, and many persons were disappointed when they learned of administrative fees and expiration dates that were not clearly defined or disclosed to them. And the legislation in 2007 did, in fact, bring forward legislation that addressed these concerns, with the exception as it pertains to multi-retail outlets, i.e. malls. Now, the malls effectively said that it was a marketing tool that they did not want to be encumbered with and there would be a time-expired—need for time expiration on this. But it has been since learned that basically there is no reason for a time expiration nor administrative costs because once the entry's placed into the financial records of the mall, there essentially is no direct cost related to upkeep or maintenance of that account, because once it's stated it remains and in this computer era and bookkeeping—in bookkeeping there really is no need for further attention until the card is used, and this is very, very straightforward.

Other jurisdictions, one can very easily look to the legislation in Saskatchewan because our neighbours to the west have included malls within their legislation, that there be no expiration or administrative restrictions on gift cards, and it's working just fine. And with the economic activity that Saskatchewan is seeing I say—dare say that this is—the retail sales have not been encumbered by legislation, and as the minister said that this could be the end of malls if we pass this legislation this morning, which is such a stretch, such beyond comprehension that I am very disappointed that he made such a statement.

This is in protection of consumers and I don't see why we, as legislators, are not on the side of consumers when it comes to a very straightforward transaction, and the minister, I wish he had perhaps done a little investigation and 'spock'—spoke to the young 10-year-old that, indeed, was being very frugal with her money and saving from her birthdays past so that she could acquire a significant purchase, and then to find that the mall's administrative charges had eroded and basically eaten up all of the value of the gift card which someone had provided to her. You know, it's very disappointing. And I don't see

why members opposite are not supportive of young people that in the case of Avery showed a great deal of self-discipline in keeping and collecting money year over year so that she could spend it when she choose—she chose, and this is—this government it seems that they're not interested in doing so. They're saying, hang on, we'll wait for the election. When we come back into government, we promise that we'll now address it. Well, Mr. Speaker, they've been in office now 11 years, and if they haven't seen fit to address an issue such as this one, I wonder whether or not they're really, truly ever going to address issues such as this.

You know, they come out so late in the third term that they want now to—let's make a deal with consumers and are really showing an interest, at least in the media, of wanting to have persons' inputs. And then to stand here in the House today when we have a known problem which is easily resolved. This legislation, as proposed by the member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat), is well researched, well written and, indeed, addresses a situation which we all aware is not in the best interests of consumers, and, indeed, it is really not of any encumbrance on malls because they issue the card in the first place and once—and it's computerized—and into their bookkeeping system, requires no maintenance or upkeep, and honestly, I don't see why the government is negative towards legislation that addresses an issue and is so well written and researched and, indeed, engaged with the public through a great deal of consultation.

So all of the comments that were made by the honourable minister this morning, indeed, leaves me to believe that he and perhaps his staff did not even take the time to read the legislation and to research behind the scenes as far as the necessity for it.

So I want to take this opportunity to compliment the honourable member for Minnedosa for introducing this bill this morning and to giving us opportunity to address an issue which we all are aware exists. Mr. Speaker, thank you ever so much for the opportunity to participate in second reading debate of Bill 213, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Gift Cards). Thank you.

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Mr. Speaker, I probably would have never imagined, 11 years ago when my daughters were born, how many gift cards I would end up buying over the years or exactly how many birthday parties would be regularly scheduled into, well, my

agenda, because I have to plan for those birthday parties that they seem to get invited to and then figure out what to buy all these children. I sometimes think that my daughters spend most of their day just going around meeting new people who will invite them to birthday parties at some point in time.

It used to be a little bit easier. When they were younger, I could probably get away with buying My Little Pony or a Barbie or a Littlest Pet Shop for whoever's birthday party we were going to, but it seems that as we're hitting the tween years, it gets more and more difficult to figure out what to buy an 11-year-old girl. And so, therefore, the last couple of years I have bought a number of gift cards on a very regular basis and I can say that I'm quite grateful that there is a lot of choice out there.

In August 2007, we did take the steps to protect consumers by not allowing expiry dates on most gift cards—and I think that was really an important move—and eliminating most of the fees including the purchase fees. At the same time as we brought in those rules, it required the stores to disclose the limitations and conditions and restrictions related to their cards. So when you buy a gift card now, you can flip it over and you can see exactly what the rules are with this gift card that you've purchased.

But, as I was saying, I think it's really important that we have choice, and, unfortunately, I'm sure the member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) saw that when she did her research, that when they—when the legislation came in in Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia that also included mall gift cards or multi-vendor gift cards in that legislation, well, instantly, within 10 days Nova Scotia's abandoning their inactivity fees, three major shopping malls announced that they would no longer offer the multi-store cards and have started an online campaign to change the legislation, while in Saskatchewan, the malls have announced that they will sell the existing cards that they have in stock, but will no longer be making those available once that stock is gone.

* (10:30)

And so I remember when we had these discussions—at the time, I was the legislative assistant to the Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs—and we discussed, well, how do we provide the most choice for consumers? And we agreed that consumers should be able to have the choice of the multi-vendor card or the single-vendor card and that, in order to ensure that consumers in Manitoba would

continue to have that benefit, this was the way, it was determined, to go.

We know that that is also the way that it's gone in other provinces who have similar legislation and similar legislation for multi-vendor cards as well, knowing that, certainly, it's up to the malls if they want to offer a multi-vendor card or not. Should they choose not to, as they have in Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, that leaves less choice for our consumers.

Now, I find, because I live in Winnipeg, that I can buy the multi-vendor card for the various and endless birthday parties that I seem to shop for, because we live close to a mall and it is convenient for people to get to it. But I understand that if someone doesn't live in Winnipeg and doesn't live, perhaps, near the mall that the gift card was purchased for them, that it is a little bit more inconvenient to them. I understand that, but it'd probably be more inconvenient to not be able to offer—or not to be able to buy the card whatsoever.

In some cases, I don't buy the multi-vendor card; I just go straight to the particular store that I know one of the youngsters that I'm shopping for might enjoy, and in that case, then, of course, there is no expiry date on the single-vendor card. There is an eliminating of most fees, including the purchase fees. And I have to say, Mr. Speaker, because sometimes I decide to go straight to the single vendor, I feel at this point I probably should have shares in the Claire's store in the St. Vital mall because I seem to buy a lot of gift cards there and a lot of trinkety jewellery as well.

We know that when we banned purchased fees in 2007, and at that time included malls, Polo Park stopped selling the cards for three years, so multi-vendor cards were not available at Polo Park. So, you know, I understand the situation, but also think that the best way to offer choice is to understand that the malls can choose to offer these gift cards or not. It really is in their decision, and we've seen, in the cases of Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, that when they are forced to sell the card with no expiration date, then they just don't sell them at all. They don't offer them to their consumers.

It does take a year before the expiry date kicks in, and we have found that only about 5 per cent of cards aren't used within that 12 months, but, again, as I said, if you know you're purchasing for someone who may have a difficult time getting to a mall, they may not live in an urban setting, then, certainly, I

would probably recommend that they would shop at a single vendor store and perhaps you can narrow it down to a store that the person would enjoy and then they wouldn't have to worry about the expiry date whatsoever.

We have reviewed the legislation in 2009 and found that most consumers do use a gift card within a few months of receiving it, and we have found that fewer and fewer cards are going unused as consumers get more used to them. I'm sure you've seen, Mr. Speaker, you can find gift cards everywhere. The mall has them, but also, as well, in the grocery store you can find an entire display of different cards, which I can find is very convenient when you have a last-minute gift to buy for.

We also know that the Consumers' Bureau gets very few complaints about gift cards. I think a number of years ago, this might have been a new idea, maybe everyone wasn't familiar with how it worked, but it seems over time—and perhaps it's because every other parent is buying as many gift cards or receiving as many gift cards as I am at all the various birthday parties—that we're all getting more used to it.

BC, Alberta and Québec do allow purchase fees for multi-vendor cards, the same as we do here in Manitoba. This is sort of the trend, and I think it's a— it's because people are all agreeing that choice is good for consumers and that, certainly, you can eliminate the fee for the mall card, but then, unfortunately, the malls eliminate the card and that's the result in it.

Ontario also allows an inactivity monthly fee after a certain amount of non-use.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the work that this government has done on let's make a deal—Let's Make a Better Deal. We're know that it's important to make the marketplace more fair for buyers and for business, that everybody is benefiting, because we know that buyers who feel confident in the marketplace spend more money and that benefits those who are running the business as well.

We know that it's important to have a consumer education, and we can see that, in the case of gift cards, because we see fewer and fewer going unused and we certainly are not seeing complaints at the Consumers' Bureau, that we know that people are feeling confident about it and understanding it.

We think that it's important to have a balanced approach, that the rules have to protect consumers,

provide a level playing field for business, and not to stifle business creativity and innovation. We want to find the balance between both, because better informed buyers spend more money, and that's good for business. That's good for the economy. That's good for all of us. But we also think that the laws have to be fair to businesses and enforceable by government and understandable by consumers.

Now, this is a situation where, certainly, you can enforce it; that multi-use cards have an expiry—have no expiry date. But we know that how business responds to it is to discontinue those cards, and I don't think that is the best choice for consumers, as well.

We also have legislated that Manitobans know the full cost and terms and conditions of their loans and mortgages, including rent-to-own. We've done a number of different initiatives to be fairer in the marketplace, to both consumers and to business, as well. We are the first in Canada to legislate, and strictly regulate, payday—to induce—introduce legislation, rather, to strictly regulate the payday loan industry. We've also set maximum rates to cash government cheques, such as social assistance or child tax credits, employment insurance and worker's compensation.

And, Mr. Speaker, we have legislation that enables Internet shoppers to cancel their purchase if the seller has not complied with disclosure requirements, or has not delivered the goods within a set amount of time by the law.

All of these things, of course, go towards making a stronger and healthier economy here in Manitoba. We also allow Manitobans to participate in class action lawsuits, should a vendor take advantage of a number of people. And we are providing information to people on reverse mortgage disclosure. Right now, we're looking at fair and clear cellphone contracts as well. We know that that's another area where I haven't started making any purchases for my children, but I understand that that's coming in the next little while. And we're looking at all the areas where people are making large purchases, whether it's in travel, and making sure that travel is fair, understanding warranty disclosure and plain language in whichever contract you sign.

So, Mr. Speaker, I do want to just say, again, that I think it's important that we broaden legislation to protect consumers about expiry dates but, also recognizing that, should we put in legislation against

multi-vendor cards, then the malls will just pull out those cards and not make them available, as they have done in Nova Scotia, and are planning to do in Saskatchewan.

And I believe that the way that minister—family service and consumer affairs has approached the situation has allowed for choice in the marketplace and a fairer plan for both buyers and business. Thank you.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I do want to take this opportunity to put a few words on the record with respect to Bill 13, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act.

And I want to start, Mr. Speaker, today, by thanking the member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) for bringing this important piece of legislation forward, as well as the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurischou), who, I know, had previously brought this forward in the Legislature. And so I want to thank them for the work that they've done, the work that, essentially, this government didn't do, in their background work, when they introduced a bill a few years ago, Bill 4, in this House.

And I think what's unfortunate about Bill 4 is that, you know, the NDP didn't get it right that time, Mr. Speaker, and that's—that is why members on this side of the House have brought forward this important piece of legislation. And I know, one example, certainly, was last night in committee, where we heard from a number of presenters to a bill, I believe it was 48, last night, where a number of presenters came forward, and they were very concerned about the lack of consultation that this government did with respect to that bill.

And I think there's a common theme in—with this NDP government, Mr. Speaker, where they don't do their homework, they don't consult with people, with businesses in the community. And this is what happens when they don't do their homework, is that then the opposition has to come forward, bring forward the—their bills in order to clean up the mess of this government.

So, I think it's unfortunate. I think their—what a common theme of this government, that where they don't do the proper consultation in the community, you know, then they come forward with bills that is nothing more than, perhaps, window dressing, and there is much more that could go into the bill, Mr. Speaker.

* (10:40)

So I think it's extremely—I'd like to thank my colleagues for bringing this very important issue forward. And I know the member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) had talked about the number of gift cards that she received, and her kids have received. And I can—I certainly understand where she's coming from, because I go through the same thing, Mr. Speaker. Where my children are getting a little bit older now, they're nine and seven, and rather than going out to Toys "R" Us or going out—actually, a number of people now, which is a wonderful thing, a number of the children are choosing themselves, rather than going out to—and rather than asking for gifts for themselves, they're choosing, instead, to give it to other organizations. And I know my daughter, one year, in lieu of gifts for her birthday celebration, she chose to make a donation to the Siloam Mission. And I think this is something going forward that a number of these kids will start to do, which is wonderful.

But, certainly, gift cards are a big thing, and it's a very important thing, and when you do receive a gift card, I think it's very important that people are able to use it and go to the vendor of their choice. And what this—what the previous legislation that the NDP brought forward just wasn't enough to cover all of those areas, Mr. Speaker. And so, again, I want to thank the member for Minnedosa for bringing this forward and I encourage all members opposite to support this legislation. I think it's an important piece that was left out of the initial work that was done by the NDP government. So I would encourage them all to support it today. Thank you.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the opportunity to stand today and put a few words on the record and add my few words to this debate that we're having in the House with regards to this particular act and this particular bill. And I appreciate that we've now had a significant amount of time where we've had the opportunity to speak a little bit about these kind of consumer issues and these sort of pocketbook issues which, I think, are relevant to all Manitobans. And I can certainly speak on behalf of members of my community and my constituency who feel that these are the issues that affect them on a day-to-day basis and, of course, are very important and very relevant to their lives and to their day-to-day living.

So I appreciate that we've had the opportunity to speak a little bit about this and to have a debate here in this House, and I think what we're doing here is we're—really, we're talking about many of the issues

that this government's already looked at and already addressed. And I think that this is a bill brought forward by the member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) that really expands or really looks to adjust what's already been looked at by this government.

And I think what we've done here in—with the Minister for Consumer Affairs in—and his department is to look at how to balance several different issues and several different interests. And, of course, we know that this—first and foremost we need to protect consumers and we need to look at the best way to protect their interests, but we also need to balance that, of course, with the interests of business. And we don't want to stifle business, of course, here in this province and we want to encourage and to enact the best policies that will, again, not just protect consumers but encourage business.

And we know that when we're looking at these balances that there's no easy answers and there's no simple way of looking at things, and I think that the existing legislation that this government has enacted with regards to gift cards has shown that we have that sense of balance and that we've looked at all angles and that we've tried to be fair and tried to be reasonable in what we have proposed and what we've enacted. And that's really what's come forward so far.

Now, with regards to this particular bill, Bill 213, we're looking at, specifically, multi-vendor cards, and these kinds of gift cards, of course, apply to multiple different vendors within a location such as a mall. And it's important to recognize that these sorts of cards are different than your regular gift card and that there are—there needs to be some sort of incentive for malls or for businesses, for that matter, banks, who are promoting these sorts of cards. We need to make sure that they have some sort of incentive to offer these sorts of cards and, of course, we realize that these cards are beneficial to consumers, because consumers then don't need to simply just choose one store over another, not one product over another. They can provide a gift to somebody that really is as wide-ranging as we could possibly make it.

So when we're talking about these consumer and these pocketbook issues, we realize that this balanced approach really needs to be something that is a focus and that is a primary goal of this government. And what we've done is we've said, well, you know, we realize that people don't rush out right away always and use their gift card

immediately but that there is an expectation on the consumer that they do use the cards and that they are anxious to use those, so that what we've said is that there will be a period of one year, one year that they can use the card with no penalties or no sorts of any kind of penalties at all charged to them. And what we found, Mr. Speaker, is that only 5 per cent of cards are actually aren't used within that first 12 months. So we realize that this does apply to some, but, really, a very small portion of the people who are receiving these cards.

And what people, I think, in general, consumers in general, and specifically here in the province, have realized is that—they've seen the Let's Make a Better Deal campaign. They know that the government is looking for different ways to make business fair and to make their consumer transactions fair. And I think most consumers are more educated nowadays, and especially when it comes to gift cards. I think gift cards are something that has—have evolved over the last number of years and people are more aware of how they work and their value and the idea that they need to use those within a set period of time.

And we've done a lot here in this government to educate consumers and to educate them through this Let's Make a Better Deal campaign and otherwise to make sure that they understand what their rights are and what the expectations on them are, again, making sure that we have that balance and that we balance the interests of the businesses that want to offer these cards but really would have no incentive. And, again, as has been mentioned a number of times by my colleagues, that when this has been enacted in other provinces, in Nova Scotia, that several malls just found no incentive whatsoever to use these cards, so they just simply stopped providing them for consumers. And, again, we want to make sure that that balance exists and that consumers have that choice and they are able to use those cards or have access to those cards if they wish.

Now, what we find is that, as I said, the Let's Make a Better Deal campaign has done a great job in terms of educating consumers and making sure that they know that we want to make sure that their transactions are safe and appropriate and that they know that there are regulations on businesses, that, if they are out there in the marketplace, that they are protected, because, of course, we want to make sure that the free market operates as best it can, and in that sense, providing consumers with a safe place to purchase and to make their consumer transactions is a positive thing.

Now, what we've done is we've created several guidelines that will enhance the multi-vendor cards and to allow them to be—those consumers to be protected. We've put in place fairly hefty fines when it comes to adhering to the regulations. Penalties range from \$1,000 to \$5,000, so this is no small impact on a business.

We've also said that if a multi-vendor card isn't used for a whole year, then there is a small charge, a \$2.50 per month charge, inactivity fee. And this is really just, again, to give some sort of incentive to our consumers to make sure that they do use this card within that 12 months, but if they don't, they're still eligible to use it, and, of course, these cards can be any amount of money and so \$2.50 per month is perhaps a small price to pay.

And we're not alone in this, of course. British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Québec, they all allow purchase fees for multi-vendor cards. So what we've done is we've looked, really looked at what the best, sort of, mix is across the country.

And we've said that we're going to revisit this legislation. We certainly want to keep improving it, but we don't want to perhaps take a hasty approach to it or to make decisions that really would impact businesses negatively and, again, ultimately, consumers.

So the consumers, the rules, really, what we're looking at is they must protect consumers and provide a level playing field for businesses, and we just don't want to stifle business creativity and innovation. And that's really been the focus of this government, and I want to commend the Minister of Consumer Affairs (Mr. Mackintosh) for taking on this fairly large process, because this has not been a—one thing, a gift card or, you know, or even just a cellphone contract or—this has really been a broad-ranging package that has been presented to Manitobans that really affect them, as I said, where it counts: in the pocketbook.

*(10:50)

And we want to make sure that we can educate consumers, we can give them the best information possible and allow them to make the decisions that will be best suited for themselves, without the fear of being ripped off or being manipulated or taken advantage of by businesses.

And again, I don't think that most businesses are out there—I don't think any vendors are selling these multi-vendor gift cards with the intent of charging or

not having them used. I think most vendors want the business and want to encourage people to come into their stores. And I think it's just another level of protection and another level of incentive for those businesses to adhere to the guidelines that they already would adhere to and the fairness that they want to provide for their customers. They want to make sure that people feel comfortable, of course, in their place of business.

So, with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this and again to further the debate on consumer issues, which I think affect, as I said, all Manitobans and certainly the constituents of the members here. And so I appreciate that we've had a bit of a balanced discussion, and I appreciate the opportunity to put those few words on the record. Thank you.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I do want to thank the member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) and the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Fauschou) for bringing this very important bill forward for debate this morning. And it, you know, as people join us in the gallery, they'll maybe be surprised to learn that there's some holes in legislation that has been brought forward previously by the NDP government. And what this particular bill does actually allows to fix or repair some inadequacies in that particular legislation that was brought forward a few years ago.

And I know the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) talked about maybe having a look at this legislation down the road. You know, why doesn't the government embrace some positive changes that would actually protect consumers?

And I think this is the essence of this particular bill. It's a bill designed to protect the best interests of consumers here in Manitoba, and that's exactly the intent of the bill. And you know, obviously, we're hearing about this government going out and spending money on campaigns, Let's Make a Better Deal, trying to educate Manitobans. Here's a simple way where we could actually protect Manitobans, Manitobans that are using these mall gift cards.

You know, the member for Concordia talked about the fees that people will find on their cards, once—if they haven't used their card for a year; \$2.50 per month is the fee, so it is a fairly substantial fee. So, in a case where, you know, a young student may have had this gift card and maybe forgot about it, goes to the mall to try to purchase a gift or something and realizes at the time, well, there's

service fees on there. And, obviously, they could lose a substantial portion of the value of that particular gift card. I think it's something that the government should be aware of. If they're really serious about protecting the interests of consumers here in Manitoba, they would start making a move to this regard.

You know, back even in 2006, the former Finance Minister at the time said, and I quote: We think that these gift cards are leaving a lot of money on the table that consumers are losing.

Now that Finance Minister is now the Premier (Mr. Selinger), and I'm sure the Premier would like to have the money in the pockets of consumers.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at this particular situation, I draw a very same analogy to what's happening in retired teachers. You know, as teachers go through their career, they have an expectation that, you know, the government's looking after them, that their pension will be there, a full pension will be there when they retire, and then once they retire and start receiving that pension payment, they realize that the full value of their pension isn't there. And, in fact, over the last few years under the NDP government, they've actually been losing more and more money as they move forward.

And this is the same situation with these mall gift cards. You know, if people aren't using their gift cards, they will, in fact, be losing the equity and the value on that particular card, and the longer they go, the more money they lose. And that's the exactly the same situation that retired teachers find themselves in. The longer we have the NDP government in power, who don't address the fairness and the equity in pensions here in the province of Manitoba, the more money retired teachers lose as they move forward.

So I think this particular bill will address a very important gap that the government has ignored, maybe chose to ignore in their recent legislation. And hopefully they will have a serious look at it.

I'm sure if the government went to consult with Manitobans, Manitobans would be on their side, and we know the government likes to do what is politically correct and they want to be on the side of the consumer. Well, here's a really good opportunity for the government of the day to be on the side of consumers, Mr. Speaker, and why not have a look at this particular bill. We've got very little time left in this particular session, so I'm hoping that the

government will take a real hard look at this particular legislation and hopefully they will move it forward on behalf of the consumers here in the province of Manitoba.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to put that on the record, and, hopefully, the government of the day will move forward and over the next few minutes we could move this legislation forward. Thank you.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, just by coincidence I'm reading a very interesting book called *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* by David T. Koyzis and I'd like to read a paragraph which I think is relevant for this debate. And I will quote from page 58: As a result of these seemingly inherent tensions within liberal faith and practice, many adherents in the 19th and 20th centuries began to move in a different direction from that of their classical forebears, thereby shifting liberalism into its third stage with the arrival of the regulatory state. Belatedly coming to understand that possible abridgements of individual freedom could come not only from government but also from private concentrations of power, these reform liberals began to conclude that governmental power might be legitimately brought into the service of freedom. This requires a certain re-envisioning of the place of government in human society. Whereas the early liberals viewed government as the principal threat to individual freedom and sought to restrict it to a minimal number of tasks, later liberals, like their socialist compatriots, concluded that government might actually protect such freedom from the infringements of non-state centres of power. This would require considerably larger state apparatus than that envisioned by Locke and Smith.

Now members opposite might want to ask, how is that relevant to the debate today? And I think that would be a very good and legitimate question. Well, I'll tell you, and in fact Conservatives opposite might be interested to know that this kind of liberalism describes them quite well. They probably haven't thought of themselves as liberals, but in terms of classical political philosophy they are, and I don't want to go on at too much length about this because it's probably not necessary or all that relevant. However, what we're really talking about here is the difference between how much a particular industry should be regulated, and that's what the real debate is, and so, philosophically, we're actually not that far apart.

What Bill 213, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Gift Cards), wants to do is, except in select cases, this bill would prohibit a person who issues or sells a prepaid purchase card from charging a fee to the holder of the card for anything in relation to the card including an activity fee or service fee. And there are exceptions: a person who issues or sells a prepaid purchase card may charge a fee for replacing a lost or stolen card, for customizing a card or if the holder provides nothing of value for the card when it is issued.

Our government's position is that in August 2007, we took steps to protect consumers by prohibiting expiry dates on most gift cards and eliminating most fees, including all purchase fees. At the same time, we brought in new rules that required stores to 'disclose' all limitations, conditions and restrictions related to their cards.

The member's bill should be called the mall gift card elimination act because it will put an end to mall gift cards just like it did in Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia. Within 10 days of Nova Scotia banning inactivity fees for multi-vendor cards, three major shopping malls announced that they would no longer offer multi-store cards, and they started an online campaign to change the legislation. In Saskatchewan, malls have announced that they will stop selling the cards when their stock runs out.

We heard the same thing in Manitoba. After we banned purchase fees in 2007, Polo Park stopped selling cards for three years. During our consultation in 2009, mall management told us, we believe that there would be little or no incentive for financial institutions to issue multi-vendor cards—

* (11:00)

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

The hour now being 11 a.m., we will move on to resolutions and we'll deal with Resolution No. 18, Improving Education and Helping Students Succeed.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 18—Improving Education and Helping Students Succeed

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Radisson (Mr. Jha),

WHEREAS nothing is more important to our children's future success and to building a knowledge-based economy than education; and

WHEREAS promoting excellence and academic success is the most important goal of our educational system; and

WHEREAS this year's education funding announcement brought the total increase to \$363.7 million since 1999, representing a 47.2 per cent increase in overall support, compared to the 1990s when school funding was either frozen or reduced for five consecutive years; and

WHEREAS the Minister of Education has introduced legislation to raise the compulsory school age to 18 because it is important to not give up on any of our kids; and

WHEREAS the Province is developing a parent-friendly report card written in plain language for use in all public schools to help parents get the information they need to be full partners in their children's education.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Legislative Assembly commend the teachers, principals, parents, school divisions and all educators for their dedication to student success and for their strong partnerships with the provincial government which has resulted in a 14 per cent increase in the graduation rate since 2002.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the provincial government of Manitoba be urged to continue investing the necessary resources to ensure that every student in Manitoba has the opportunity to succeed and to build a good life here in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, the resolution's in order.

It's been moved by the honourable member for Flin Flon, seconded by the honourable member for Radisson,

WHEREAS nothing—dispense?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Jennissen: Mr. Speaker, nothing is more important to us than our children. All of us want our children to succeed. We want them to succeed and become happy, productive members of society, to become fully engaged citizens who will continue to make this great province and this great country, Canada, even better. And what could play a greater

role than education in that great process of building productive citizens, citizens who have self-esteem and generosity, citizens who become civic leaders, citizens who can continue to build this country and who will continue to make this country the envy of the entire world?

My wife and I were fortunate, Mr. Speaker, for both of us chose education as our profession, and what could be a nobler profession than educating and guiding children, to draw out of children all that is the best in children, to make those seeds inside grow and expand? In fact, the term education comes from Latin, *ducere*, to draw out, to pull out. And that's what it's all about, pulling the best out of children. Of course, it takes special people to do that and special systems to do that if you want to have optimal success.

As I think over my own educational career, Mr. Speaker, which spanned from the '60s until well into the '90s, I can only reflect on the many positives. There were bumps and hiccups on the road as well, but there were many, many positives.

It's a privilege to teach children, Mr. Speaker. What do our other partners in education hold most dear, that is, parents, particularly? What is most dear to them? What's most precious to them? And, of course, it's their children. And as teachers, we act or try to act *in loco parentis*, which means we are the substitute parents, the other parents for the children. And like all good parents and proud parents, we are happy when we're entrusted with this responsibility, and we're even happier when the children succeed.

But it's a special relationship that's between children and teachers, Mr. Speaker. It's a powerful relationship that shouldn't be taken lightly. And we must remember also that children teach us. It's not just a one-way street; it's a dialogue. We grow richer as we teach children and they teach us.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And, in fact, in my own career, Madam Deputy Speaker, I found it almost impossible to comprehend how a few teachers—not many—would always teach the same course exactly the same way, because it seems to me every time you interact with children, things change, so the next time around you have a different view, a different perspective. It becomes a different course, at least it did in my own life.

To mention again, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's a special dialogue between teachers and children. It's a two-way street and it can be a great journey together

if it's done properly. If everybody works together—the system, the school, the parents, the community, the students, the teachers—if they work well together, if it's a collaborative effort, if it's done properly, it can be a beautiful journey and a very successful journey.

My own history as an educator, Madam Deputy Speaker, started in Saskatchewan, and I taught farm children, and some Aboriginal kids, as well, but mainly farm children, in the Wadena School Division in the Rose Valley. But I wasn't there very long, just a number of years, and then I moved into Manitoba, into Frontier School Division, No. 48, in September of 1972, and that's really when my teaching career began.

Because it was a different world and it was a world in which I really eventually learned to fit and became part of my life, and I couldn't even dream of being apart from the north any more; I'm obviously a northerner. And I'm very happy to say that when I entered Frontier Collegiate Institute in 1972, I never thought in my wildest dreams that I would be returning to this institution this coming—the end of this month, to attend my 39th graduation ceremony. It seems like a dream. It seems like just a few minutes, but it's been 39 years.

It was a wonderful place, Frontier Collegiate Institute in 1972. It had been started in the mid-'60s as a radar base location that we wanted another use for and we chose—the province chose education. And so children from all over the north, from isolated communities—I'll just name a few of them: Brochet; South Indian Lake; Norway House at that time didn't have a road, it was included; Cross Lake. But also further south, Bissett and Hollow Water, Manigotagan, Crane River and Duck Bay and Moose Lake and Cormorant and on and on and on. Children from all over the north and some remote areas from the south as well, came to this school.

So many wonderful students, so diverse, most of them Aboriginal and Métis, many of them—or some of them not. Didn't make any difference. It was great to teach them but it was a different, I guess, kind of relationship too because we had those children in the evening as well, and at night because it was a school with a residence. And my job after hours was to run the trappers club, and I thought I could teach young Aboriginal kids at the time how to trap. Well, I soon learned different. They taught me a lot about trapping. I didn't know much about trapping at all.

I have some wonderful, fond memories of being an educator, Madam Deputy Speaker, and some of

the grads I meet everywhere. They've been chiefs and councillors and school trustees and teachers and doctors and nurses and on and on and on, and some of them have made great names for themselves. Others have not, but I'm always happy to see them and they're always happy to see me.

Just to name a few of the important ones, and by no means they're the only ones, but that are currently very active that you may see in the news: Konrad Jonasson, who is now the interim president of UCN, was a student of mine. I remember him well in grade 10 English. Great kid.

Garrison Settee, now the chief of Cross Lake, really loved working with Garrison, great musician, also became an educator, spent a lot of time at my house, wonderful friend.

Phillip Buck, from Moose Lake, also a chief, also a great friend.

Peter Kulchyski, I think in grade 9 and 10 I virtually raised him in my home because he was a shy kid from Bissett who's now the head of the Manitoba Native Studies Department, and I think he taught some of our esteemed colleagues here.

Oscar Lathlin was a graduate from our—from Frontier Collegiate Institute, the great Oscar Lathlin, a great mentor for me. Ironic, although he attended our school and graduated the year I came, he became a mentor to me later on.

So age didn't matter. But Oscar was one of our great graduates as well, and there were many, many, many others.

Now cynics and bean counters sometimes do not see the importance of education, Madam Deputy Speaker. They talk about cost and they emphasize cost, but we should see it as an investment. We can never look at it as purely a cost. That's a market model. Let's be a little careful here. Actually, there is a saying that goes something like this: If you think education is expensive, try ignorance. I believe that might have been spoken by Tommy Douglas, and if it didn't, he should of. It sounds like him.

We can't nickel and dime education, Madam Deputy Speaker, and we must not treat teachers as expendable commodities and items either. It's not a good idea. I was there in the '90s with the cutbacks and the zero per cents, the freezes, when the government always seemed to be at war with teachers or with doctors and nurses and government employees. It was always an adversarial relationship

because of that total market model of which certain important things in our society became allegedly dispensable, and they're not dispensable. You don't sacrifice education or health care because times are tough or there are recessions. You have to work around that. You have to have your priorities straight and only a social democratic government appears to have their priorities straight.

* (11:10)

Market-driven ideologies sometimes like to fool with the books, and then they pretend, let's say, for example, by cutting doctors we're going to improve health care. Well, how do you do that? Cutting nurses, you're going to improve health care. You can't do that. Cutting teachers, you're going to improve education; freezing education, cutbacks on education, that doesn't improve anything.

Helping students succeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, means more than just good teaching. It also means necessary capital investments. I'm happy to say that this government has done many positive things, and, apparently, I won't have time to mention all of them, but there's been a 14 per cent increase in graduation rates since 2002. This is commendable and astounding. Since 1999, the total increase to educational funding has been \$363.7 million, and that's a whopping 47.2 per cent increase in overall support.

There have been other great initiatives, Madam Deputy Speaker. Bill 13, the stay-in-school-until-18-years-of-age bill, is a very important bill. At one time, the high school diploma was sort of the ultimate. It was a—you're a finished product at 18. A lot of girls got married, got a job; guys taking on the farm, ready to take over. You were a finished adult human being at 18. At least that was the belief. Of course, it wasn't quite true.

But, nowadays, you're not. You have to stay in school until you're 18. Today things are different. The knowledge base has expanded. Our kids are very savvy on social media, electronic media. They know all about iPods and cellphones and computers and tweets and Twitter and Facebook, and so on. They even dragged me into the world of Facebook. Unfortunately, I discovered that if you say confirm the friend's request and you push the button and you're a friend of that Facebook person, the next day you have 138 requests, and it becomes almost impossible to deal with.

But our young people are living in very stressful times, a whole knowledge explosion out there and they need more time to incorporate that. They need more time in school. I'm very glad that this government sees the wisdom of that. It is a much more complex world.

I also like what this government does with regard to the no-fail policy.

The parent-friendly report card, Madam Deputy Speaker, is also important. I spent a lot of time working with report cards and how to report back to parents and doing that in a sustainable, smart, clever way so that parents understand what's going on. Whether you use numerical, anecdotal or percentage system, it doesn't matter, but parents need to know what's going on. There are—

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

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I do want to thank the member for Flin Flon for bringing forward this resolution this morning.

It's certainly interesting to hear his perspective and some of his history in his teaching days over the years. I know when you're interacting with students, you're always going to have a lot of stories to take home at the end of the day, so I certainly appreciate his insight. I always marvel at his ability to weave Tommy Douglas into any story or any presentation he gives, and I noticed that again in his presentation this morning.

Madam Deputy Speaker, certainly there's some issues here and some things in this resolution that we certainly agree with. When we look at education across our great province here, there is certainly a lot of stakeholders involved in education, and a lot of those stakeholders play very important roles in the lives of our children.

And, certainly, Madam Deputy Speaker, we, as Progressive Conservatives, we recognize the value of education. We recognize that great education is going to lead us into the future and has tremendous opportunities for our youth here in Manitoba.

But at the foundation of our future, we have to have our youth and our children educated, and I'm not necessarily talking about, you know, kids, once they graduate, off to university or college or whatever the case may be, but there are so many other opportunities for them today in Manitoba. You talk about the trades and a lot of the kids are getting

kind of directed into the trades, and they can make some pretty good money in the trades, and, obviously, we need those sorts of jobs here in the province of Manitoba.

Now, I do want to talk a little bit about stakeholders in particular, and, obviously, we do want to commend the work the teachers and principals do across this great province, and, certainly, that speaks to part of this particular resolution.

You know, we're looking at several thousand active teachers here in the province of Manitoba that do great work. I know the association that represents Manitoba teachers, Pat Isaac is the past president who's just retired from that position now. Paul Olson is the new acting president for the Manitoba Teachers' Society, and, certainly, those people, you know, have first-hand knowledge of what teachers do in the classroom day in and day out.

And those challenges in the classroom have really changed over the years, and the education system in classrooms now are becoming more of a—almost like a social venue where we're having to deal with a lot of different social issues. I can tell you that—you know, my wife's a teacher as well and teaching elementary school, and it's amazing the stories that she comes home with and some of the issues that you deal with with kids and sometimes you deal with with the parents, and sometimes the thought process, I think, has changed a little bit with the parents over the years as well. So that adds a different challenge to it. You know, and we're dealing, of course, with special needs children in the classroom as well and, obviously, there's a lot of support needed in that regard.

I do want to talk a little bit about the retired teachers too. You know, we have probably 14,000 retired teachers here in the province of Manitoba who have committed their life to teaching here in Manitoba. Certainly had a lot of conversations with Richard Benoit, who's the president over there at the Retired Teachers Association—the good work they do lobbying on behalf of retired teachers. And, you know, we've had debate about retired teachers and retired teachers' pensions here in the Legislature. I think that's some place that, you know, we still need to do a little bit of work in terms of pensions for retired teachers and some of the more senior retirees and some of the financial strain that they're on when they look at their pension.

And I think it's incumbent upon us as legislators to make sure that the retired teachers and the teachers that are going to retire soon are adequately compensated because in a lot of cases, you know, if you work through your career, you have that mindset that that pension's going to be there for me, and I'm going to have that full cost of living and I'm going to be protected into the future and I'm going to, you know, retire at 55 and everything is going to be great.

But, you know, as teachers retire, they find out, boy, you know, those—the reality's a little different than my expectations. So that's where we, you know, we as legislators have to make sure that, you know, we're doing our share to make sure those types of pension issues are addressed, you know, in a fair and equitable way for all retired teachers, because they do play an important role in terms of shaping our youth.

I also want to mention, as far as stakeholders, you know, the parents' role in education. You know, very important that the parents are engaged in education. And it's pretty clear that if a parent or parents are engaged in a communication with their child, with their—and with their spouse in a lot of cases, and that's part of the challenges we're fighting with—you know, split families, it gets a little difficult for teachers to deal with the student if there's issues with the student having to deal with parents that may not have a relationship. So it makes it a little more difficult.

But, obviously, parents play important role. And if the parents have a good relationship with, you know, with their children and with the teacher, you know, they can move things forward and do good work. And I think it's incumbent upon the parents to, you know, instill the idea of education in their children, that education is, you know, a very important piece of their life. So, obviously, parents play a very important role in that regard.

And it's good to talk to, you know, people that are involved in parent advisory groups in various schools. You know, they want to take an active role and make sure that everything is there for their children and that there is a good relationship between the school, the children and the parents, and I commend them for that. Nice to have a chat with the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils, Judith Cameron and Naomi Kruse, who are doing great work there to make sure that there's relationships across our great province.

And we get into the administration side and we talk about the role of school boards here. Obviously, the school boards play an important role in education and they're the ones that have to make some of the tougher financial decisions in terms of how many teachers we're going to have and what some of the courses are going to be and make decisions in terms of what the priorities are going to be at the local level.

And that really is their job—is to sort out what are the priorities for our local communities. And that's an important role that school boards play here in Manitoba. And we need that, you know. As the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) said, there's different issues in northern Manitoban than there is in southern Manitoba. And there may be different priorities in terms of teaching and—at those various levels and in different areas around the province, so that's where that local knowledge and the local ability of the school boards to implement those different types of programming for their students, and it's their job to make sure that the facilities are there and any of the assets that are required by the teachers are there so that the teachers can carry out their responsibility as well.

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And the other thing too, we talk about the principals, you know. The principal is a—he's—she or she are in, sort of, the situation where they have to be jack-of-all-trades. They have to be the enforcer, they have to be the supporter as well, and they're also challenged with making sure that their school is run. And they also have to make sure that they have a really good dialogue with not only the teachers, but have a really good dialogue with the parents as well. So it's certainly an interesting task that those as principals and administrators have to carry on.

You know, obviously, we're in that time of the year. Superintendents and principals will be sitting down, having discussions about next year, in terms of what the curriculum's going to look like, who's going to be teaching what, what the agenda's going to look like, and how to get all those components working together so that everybody's happy at the end of the day. So it really is a challenging time of the year for those in administration. But, as we know, the clock's ticking. Here we are in the middle of June, and two weeks from now, or over the next two to three weeks, a lot of our students will be graduating from school and looking forward to that next step in life.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I know the—part of the resolution talks about graduation rates, and I know the government wants to pat themselves on the back in terms of their graduation rates. We do believe there's a long way to go here in terms of improving our graduations—graduation rates in Manitoba. When we compare ourselves to other jurisdictions across the province, using the method that Stats Canada use, you know, we're second worst across the province, next to Québec, in terms of graduation rates.

So there is, certainly, a lot of work that we have to do here in the province of Manitoba. And a lot of that work involves communication with the stakeholders that I talked about, going forward. And, you know, we, certainly, on this side of the House, look forward to having that dialogue with all the stakeholders across our great province that, at the end of the day, we're all interested in trying to get the best education, the best opportunities for our children as they move forward through the school system, so that they are ready for the challenges that life presents them later on.

So I do want to thank the member for bringing forward this resolution.

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): I am delighted to rise here to second this bill, and I thank the member from Flin Flon for bringing this, which is of a great value to all of us here. And I see no reason why anyone would make any negative comment about this bill, which is beautifully written.

And, as it says, Madam Deputy Speaker, that let the Assembly commend the teachers, principals, parents and school divisions and all educators for their dedication to student success, and for their strong partnership with the provincial government, which has resulted in a 14 per cent increase in the graduation since 2002.

The government of Manitoba is urged to continue investing the necessary resources to ensure that every student in Manitoba have the opportunity to succeed and to build a good life here in Manitoba. And, as the member from Flin Flon stated very well, that this goes for every student. And I'm very happy to stand here to think and understand how the developing societies, when he was mentioning about our aboriginal children, that they are being educated with the dedication for our—by our teachers and our stakeholders in the government, in the remote communities. And this is commendable to see how we build societies by bringing education.

And that brings me to a particular interesting event only a few days back. I emphasize this word, "every student," and I am delighted to say that my family—I come from a very, you know, absolutely, I would say 90 per cent are educators. My father—late father, was vice-principal of a college, my late brother was a professor in the University of Winnipeg, I have one other brother who is a professor, my son, who is a medical doctor, chose to be a professor, so it's—teaching is something—a passion in my family, and I—delighted to see that culture had brought us into understanding the world better.

And education is something which is so fundamental for our society to build, as the member said, that it is something we cannot really ignore. And I commend and thank the government for making education a priority for Manitoba.

And, as I was mentioning, my daughter-in-law, Harmeet Jha, she's a teacher in Toronto. She was a teacher in Manitoba, went to school here. And she gave me an example of—a few days back, I was spending the weekend with her. She gave me a little certificate, hand-crafted by an immigrant girl, 9 years old, thanking her in the broken English she wrote—she has been in Canada for only two years. And she wrote that: Mrs. Jha, I thank you very much for your love in teaching me English—English was spelled wrong, but—you are like my mother and I love you for that. I love to be learning. And then she signed there. And that was such a great certificate that Harmeet has framed it and put her in the living room to say this is a great certificate for the satisfaction that she gets as a teacher.

So we have to commend—this particular bill says that we have to commend the teachers, principals, parents and the school divisions. And I would say, absolutely, yes, because when you look at that teacher who comes after teaching the kids in the school, and they take some of the burdens of being the parent, being the counsellor, being the educator, and being discipline, you know, monitors, to come home and be satisfied with the job that they do in building our society. It's not turning a few nuts and bolts in a machine. It is something that goes beyond. You're dealing with children. You're dealing with the future of our society. I think that it's extremely worthwhile for us to think how this particular bill encourages us to encourage those who are in the profession and those who are all the stakeholders. They do that.

I would also like to say that here it says that we have to better prepare our students for the realities of a dynamic and successful future. We have introduced Bill 13. Bill 13 talks about making the students to go up to the age of 18 compulsory, mandatory in the school system. And I think it's a very practical, yet a very, very innovative bill to make it mandatory. Otherwise, society—as we see, all we need is some excuse to really not do what we ought to do, and it's a discipline that we need to really encourage to say to families, you must put your energy and efforts in bringing up your children. Send them to school, and it absolutely should be illegal for children not to be given an education. It's a fundamental right of each and every citizen of this world to get educated.

So I would say that this particular bill, giving the age to 18, also is very innovative, and I also say that the participation by our government, our attitude to encourage educators and students and parents has been remarkable. Since my election, 2003, I have spoken several times on this particular aspect of education, and I think that recently we had a meeting with the trustees of the River East Transcona School Division with the member from Transcona, the member from Concordia and the member from Elmwood. We were all there, and we were talking about some of the things that they need to share with us, some of the problems, some other things, and we worked together with them to make the situation in the school divisions worthwhile for them to keep efforts and try to get—because we are encouraging a lot of immigrants to come into this country. And we need to understand the dynamics of those immigrant students. They become citizens and they become leaders. I mean, you—I can cite several examples of immigrant, you know, people who have been educated, have brought here, and now they're premiers and they're leaders of society and contribute heavily in building Canada as a wonderful nation on this earth.

So I think education becomes a very important element and how we, the government, encourage the school divisions, encourage parents, encourage teachers to be participants, it is remarkable.

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So I would say that our commitment—I would say that the total increase to \$363.7 million since '99 representing a 47.2 per cent increase in overall support is commendable. It speaks volumes about our commitment and our value of education. We have announced \$94.2 million investment in public

school capital projects to address priorities such as planning new schools, building gymnasiums and child-care facilities which, again, is very innovative, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I know that there is an elementary school being planned in Sage Creek, which is very next to my constituency, and I'm delighted to see that these are some of the things are being built with our investment and something that we are very proud of. And making the multiyear gymnasium construction inside the schools, that is, again, a very remarkable thing that I believe that we should be all proud of here.

So I would like to say that we can work together. We can build this society together, but education is absolutely a very, very important element that we must know. Actually, I must share with you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and our colleagues here, that some of the ancient societies, if you go and see, like China and India and even Egypt and other places, they gave education an absolute priority. A parent would perhaps not live luxuriously but make sure that education is given to children. And I remember when the children come to the Leg. to meet, I mention to them there are unfortunate societies that the children walk two to three miles to go and attend a school. How fortunate are we to have governments like us, Manitoba, provide that facility to our children to go to school, and we should be very proud of that. Children should be thankful—our society should be thankful for the policies and for the values that we bring.

So I would say that I'm very proud to endorse this and I absolutely suggest that we all be united in supporting this bill. As my father used to say that there is—this is the wealth of knowledge that will never be stolen. If you have a diamond ring, and you can lose it; but if you have an education, that's in your mind. And I call—myself, I call education, Madam Deputy Speaker, education is the soul of our mind. Thank you very much.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I'm pleased to speak to this resolution because, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a topic that's close to my heart, always has been, and as the former minister, I certainly feel compelled to put a few comments on the record with regard to this resolution.

Madam Deputy Speaker, although this resolution has some aspects to it that I totally endorse, there are some that I cannot support. First of all, when we talk about the people who are involved in the education

field at the school level, I have to say that they are—these are outstanding Manitobans who dedicate themselves to teaching our children each and every day. And I have watched these people work and I have been part of that system where, you know, the hours of work and the dollar that you earn from your work are not the key motivators in providing the services that these people do to our children and our parents and to our province.

As a matter of fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, what is really at the heart of this is the dedication of these people to a cause, to learning, to providing for the students in this whole province an opportunity to enhance their ability to read and to write and to become productive citizens within our province. And whether it's the teacher or whether it's the principal or whether it's the teacher's assistant in the school systems, these individuals are very dedicated and extremely valuable to our society.

So in that respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, I agree with what the proponent of this resolution has put forward with regard to promoting excellence and success through supporting the parents, the teachers and the educators within our system. And we need to give them the kind of support that they deserve. But over the last 11 years, we haven't seen that to be the case. As a matter of fact, I'm quite disappointed in how the current government has addressed some of those important education issues and has lacked in providing the kind of leadership that other provinces are providing in the field of education.

Now, I know the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) may be somewhat appalled by my statement but, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have to tell you that, in fact, Manitoba, even by unbiased statistics that are gathered on Manitoba, show that, in fact, Manitoba lacks behind—lags behind other jurisdictions when it comes to the performance of our students in the system. And it isn't the teacher and it isn't the principal and it isn't the educator that's at fault here; it's the policies that come out of the leadership of that department, and that is the ministers and the government, and we could do so much more, in terms of supporting the educators out there. We could do so much more in ensuring that we utilize the expertise that is out in the field, utilize those experts in the field of education to actually show us the way and to allow them the freedom, if you like, to be able to implement some of those practices and some of those approaches that will lead our students to be the best in this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that's what we need to do. It's called empowerment, and if we empower our teachers, rather than stifle them, rather than give directives from the top which make, in some instances, very little sense, what we need to do is to empower, and not to give just lip service to teachers and to parents and to the people out there. We need to provide the kind of leadership that shows that by empowering the people who work in this education system, we are going to create one of the best education systems in this country and beyond.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have watched the kind of wedges that have been driven in by this government between the educators and between retired teachers, as an example, and that should never be. Every one of us here in this House when we retire—in the next few months, I'm going to be retiring, and when I do I'm going to get a pension that is indexed, and so is the member from Flin Flon. He's going to be retiring and he too is going to enjoy an indexed pension. Why would it be that our retired teachers can't enjoy that same privilege in this society and in this country? Why is it that they have been segregated out? And in the language that has been used out there in the field, we can see that that wedge is being driven between the active teachers and the retired teachers, and yet they are one and the same. They worked in the same field, and why should it be that all of a sudden one sector of our society isn't given the opportunity for a indexed pension like most of us are going to receive when we leave here? That's unfair, and that's just one tiny example of the kinds of policies that have been misdirected by this government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this government tries to posture when it comes to things like report cards. Now, report cards are an important communication device, if you like, to make sure that the parent understands what the student is achieving or not achieving in the system. And who are the best people to develop that communication device between the school and the parent? Is it the minister? Is it bureaucracy? Not likely. It's probably the people who are closest to those students, closest to the parents and people who worked every day to enhance the opportunities for those children, and we can put some standards out there. We can say that— from an administrative perspective, from the minister's perspective, these are the elements that we would like to see as the administrators, the government, the leadership of education in a report card.

But beyond those standards, the way to communicate between you and your parent, and it's going to be different in northern Manitoba than it is in southern Manitoba. It's going to be different in a city environment than it is in a rural environment. But we want to make sure that there are some standards in place. But the communication device is that of that school—of that school division because they are the true leaders in education. They are the ones who understand how to best communicate the message of how that child is achieving or not achieving in the school system.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, I could go on and on and on about this topic because this is so close to me and to my family, of course, and to the fact that I was a teacher in the system for a number of years.

When I look at what kinds of policies that have been coming out of the government as it relates to education, sometimes I have to shake my head, because, Madam Deputy Speaker, it shows this—the philosophical approach of this government is now trying to be instilled in our education system.

The education system should be free of that. The education system should be pure. The education system should incorporate the principles of education, Madam Deputy Speaker, not politics. And we should not shape our education system based on the philosophy of a given party that is in power at the time.

I have watched the system, both very closely and from a distance, and I have to tell you that in Manitoba, we probably have some of the best educators that you will find anywhere in Canada or North America. These people are not only professionals, they are dedicated to the cause. They understand, Madam Deputy Speaker. They want to improve themselves and you will find that teachers go beyond the call of duty when it comes to professional development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when the funding formula was put in place back when I was minister—and it's still the same funding formula today, with a few little tinkering—there was an element in that funding formula that put money into professional development. Now, later in the—in government, that element was stripped away to some extent and then it was put back in, but the element of professional development is very key to supporting teachers who want to enhance their skills.

And I contend that if, in fact, this government were to change its approach and to put education back into the hands of the professionals, where it belongs, and provide the leadership—and I'm talking about leadership from the department that sets the broader parameters, the broader goals, the broader standards and allows the education system to do what it's supposed to do—the results that we have, that we fall behind on, when it comes to graduation rates, would improve immensely, because our students, Madam Deputy Speaker, would then achieve their ultimate and their best potential because their teachers would be allowed to bring that potential out in them. Thank you.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): It's certainly an honour, as the Minister of Education, to have an opportunity to speak to this private member's resolution this morning in the House: Improving Education and Helping Students Succeed.

We are very proud, Madam Deputy Speaker, of our record here in the province of Manitoba, of investing in our public education system. We believe that you cannot have an economic strategy unless you have a solid education strategy. That is, the underpinning and the core of an economic strategy is providing a sound public education system so that people can succeed academically and move on into careers and post-secondary education and technical-vocational training.

We're very proud to be a government that was the first jurisdiction in Canada to have a Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet that looked at early investments in young people and, actually, not—so young, we actually have a program that everyone knows about, the Healthy Baby program, where funding was provided to young mothers because nutrition is so incredibly important to the health of a baby before they're born and when they're born. The incredible programming that we have done because all of the research that has been done by Fraser Mustard in regards to early intervention and how, in some components of learning, children learn more in the ages from zero to three in some learning than they learn in the rest of their lives.

So we know how important that early education is in our public education system and we have been steadfast in that. I'm delighted to have just announced, a couple of months ago, the Early Childhood Education Unit that is in my department. It's a unit that will focus on the investments that we've made as a government and will continue to

focus on research practices internationally and nationally and provide support to school divisions and to community stakeholders in regards to the programming services that we can do to work with our educators and our administrators in regards to providing programs and services where young people can succeed and go to kindergarten ready to learn.

We're very, very proud of the work that we have done through the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, and we believe the Early Childhood Education Unit, working in co-operation with the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, will be an excellent resource and an excellent initiative as we move forward.

Last September, I had the privilege of being invited by Premier Dalton McGuinty to a education conference in Toronto and it was by invitation only because of the work that has been done in Ontario in regards to education reform. And it was probably one of the highlights for me as a minister of Education in regards to a conference where I heard speakers. I heard Finland, the minister of education from Finland, speak about the education reform that they have done there, the deputy minister of Australia. It was an opportunity to hear speakers internationally in regards to what they'd done in education reform, but everyone at the conference—and there were over 1,500 people there—were totally taken by Premier Dalton McGuinty's speech because he talked about education reform and what they had done in Ontario.

And he said the very first thing they had to do before they launched on education reform is they had to build trust with teachers. They had to build trust with the education community because the government before them, the Progressive Conservative government in Ontario, had been so divisive and had been so critical of the education community and the teachers that they could not do any education reform in Ontario because of the toxic environment that they inherited from the Progressive Conservative government.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

And when he talked about that, it resonated with me because in 1999 when we became government, we inherited the same kind of environment where, you know, years and years and years of cutbacks by the Progressive Conservative government, the underfunding of school divisions, you know, 700 less teachers in the system because of the underfunding

of students, of teachers and divisions. And we faced the same situation, Mr. Speaker, so it was our responsibility to build back that trust with our education community before we could continue to move forward with our public education system here in the province of Manitoba.

And I'm very proud of the work that we have done in regards to increasing graduation rates. Since 2002, we have increased our graduation rate by 14 per cent and we have decreased our dropout rate by 29 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And we have done that in co-operation with the educators and the administrators in this province. We—and we have done that with parents and we have done that with communities all across this province, because they are on the same page as us. And I'm very honoured to have the opportunity to work with so many incredible, talented professionals in our education system and so many dedicated parents throughout this province who care deeply about our public education system and don't want to turn the clock back to the '90s when no one cared about our public education system.

We're very pleased, Mr. Speaker, with Bill 13, our stay-in-school legislation. We need to keep young people in school. We need to engage them in the public education system. They need to get a high school diploma. They need—the high school diploma is their ticket to success in a modern economy. They cannot go on to succeed in jobs or technical vocational training or post-secondary education unless they have that high school diploma.

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And, you know, not every student fits into a traditional classroom. And we know that because we've seen so many incredible examples of school divisions across this province who have created programs for young people who don't fit in the traditional classroom and they need an alternative school that they can go to. They may be single moms. They may be young people that have two part-time jobs and they've dropped out of school and they need a place where they can go where those individuals know, those teachers know their personal circumstances and they know the struggles that they're having. They know—they have a personal relationship with them, and they provide support to them and they help them get those credits. And they don't have to get them, you know, in two weeks or

three weeks. They get them as soon as they can, and it fits in with their working life and their responsibilities that they—and their family responsibilities at home. And that's the kind of support they need.

And, you know, we have so many wonderful examples of that throughout the province of Manitoba, and it's to the credit of the administrators and the educators that we have in this province who realize how important these kinds of programming—that this programming is to the success of young people, to families and to our communities all across this province.

And I would like to just talk about our parent-friendly report cards. I'd like to congratulate the oversight committee who is made up of all of our education stakeholders. They are so impressed with this process, Mr. Speaker, that they have asked us to keep this process in place. The oversight committee will stay in place to oversee the piloting and the implementation of the common report card. But they've also said to us that this was such a wonderful process and such a meaningful process that they would like it to be in place so that other issues that we have to deal with in education, we can deal with them in partnership with all of the stakeholders at the table.

And, you know, I just want to say once again, I know the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) was going around and having meetings with people trying to figure out what he wants to say about education, and a former retired superintendent told him that he should do a common report card, and he, quite frankly, told that retired educator that he was not prepared to do that, that it was too political, that it was too controversial and he was not prepared to take that on.

But we took it on and we took it on with our stakeholders here in the province of Manitoba, and we're going to be launching that report card in the fall in 13 schools with 11 school divisions, and we've got school divisions clamouring, calling us, saying we want to pilot the report card. They are so excited about it, Mr. Speaker, and it's so exciting to have done this work. For the first time in the history of this province, we are going to have a common report card that is a communication vehicle for the parent and the teachers so they know what their students need, they know what supports they need. They're

going to know how they're going to achieve academically, in regards to succeeding, in our public education system.

We will continue to invest in our public education system and work with our partners, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I, too, wish to speak to this private member's motion.

In the 12 short years that I've been an MLA here, I'd have to say one of the most disgraceful times of this Legislature was when the NDP government and the former member—and the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson), the former minister of Education, decided that they were going to attack 14,000 retired teachers and their pensions.

Those years, Mr. Speaker, are now referred to as the pensionator years, where teachers who had worked hard, contributed, had actually negotiated away certain things out of their compensation package, and, in turn, they were going to be given a fair cost-of-living increase.

That's the kind of thing that happened in the '90s, the sunshine and happy 1990s, and then we entered the dark years of the 2000s when, upon being elected, the retired teachers, the 14,000 retired teachers, were thrown under the bus, and retired teachers decided that they were going to approach their NDP government.

A lot of the retired teachers actually worked on various campaigns. When they came in front of the committee, they said, oh, well, member for Inkster, member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), you know, I worked on your campaign. Why have you turned on us like this? Why have you decided to attack education and former educators like this? Well, needless to say, members opposite sat shamefully silent, their heads down, pretending they were working on their BlackBerries, pretending they were doing work, but they never had an answer for the 14,000 retired teachers.

And so when the minister gets up and she talks about consultations, she talks about working with, and she talks about—in fact, in here there's—the title says, improving education. Attacking 14,000 retired teachers and their pensions is not improving education. In fact, there is a ramification for that, and we are seeing it today.

But I'll take this House back to when we had committee. Did they have committee in the fall? Did they have committee in the spring? No. What they actually did, this NDP government, is they jammed committee right into the middle of summer in the heat of summer. Did they sit during the day? Oh, no, Mr. Speaker. What they did is they forced people to sit from evening till the wee hours of the morning.

And let me explain to this House the kind of individuals that came forward: predominantly women. Because at that time, early years of the growth of Education Manitoba, it was predominantly women that were the educators. Those were the retirees. A lot of them came with some health ailments. There were many who came in with canes, walkers, wheelchairs, with various forms of ill health, and they were forced to sit all night in the hot Legislature, waiting for their opportunity to speak. In fact, it is probably one of the most spoken-to pieces of legislation in the history of the Manitoba Legislature. Never before have we seen so many Manitobans riled up, wanting to speak to their government and saying to them, could you please give us the respect, could you please show us the respect that we have so earned by educating young people throughout the years? Would you please give us the respect and let us have a fair cost-of-living increase?

And the NDP, those that retired teachers had often helped get elected, sat shamefully silent with their heads down, and not one of them would speak or had an answer. In fact, the member for Gimli often wouldn't even look at them, often wouldn't even address them. It was up to the critic, the member for Springfield at that time who was the critic for Education, who had to thank each and every one of them for having come out and presented.

And it was often myself who had to then apologize to them for the kind of conditions that members opposite—the member for Radisson (Mr. Jha) sat and did nothing, never spoke to them, kept his mouth shut, never acknowledged the fact that these retired teachers had to come late at night, in the middle of summer, under the cover of darkness and try to plead and beg for a decent pension. That is the NDP workings on education. They will pass all kinds of legislations. They will put out all kinds of press releases, glowing about what they plan on doing. But the proof is always in the pudding, or, as the member

from Brandon East always says, the devil's in the details.

And the devil in the details, Mr. Speaker, is when members opposite actually show their true colours. That's when the biggest hacking and slashing in the history of this province where 14,000 retired teachers had their pensions slashed away from them; their cost of living was taken away. That's what we get in reality.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we see platitudes like this, we don't trust them and neither do educators. We don't trust them; neither do retired teachers. We don't trust these kind of platitudes; neither do parents or students or grandparents. People are tired of these kind of platitudes. People are tired of the NDP running around and getting tennis elbow from patting themselves on the back. They are tired of the kinds of words and press releases and the hollow legislation that comes through. When rubber hits the road, when they actually face reality, that's when this current NDP government slashes those who need protection the most, those who need somebody to

stand up for them, the retired teachers who were so callously slashed, all 14,000 of them.

That's when members opposite should have been standing up and trying to defend them and, Mr. Speaker, we don't need any lectures from members opposite when it comes to education. We gave retired teachers a fair COLA. We stood up to the commitments that were made, and they were made by the Schreyer government. Those weren't even made by a Conservative government, but we stood up to those retirees. We stood up for them, and said, absolutely. In the wonderful, sunshiny days of the 1990s, these people got their cost-of-living increase.

So, Mr. Speaker, this resolution rings hollow. It rings fake because when the NDP actually does do something, they hack and slash, unlike—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter's again before the House the honourable member for Springfield will have three minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 14, 2011

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