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PROCEEDINGS

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Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 29, 2010

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

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on House business.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): I seek leave to go directly to Bill 221.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave to go directly to Bill 221? *[Agreed]*

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 221—The Domestic Violence Death Review Committee Act

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I move, seconded by the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), that Bill 221, The Domestic Violence Death Review Committee Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Driedger: It is with mixed emotions that I rise today in support of this bill. I am saddened that I have had to reintroduce it, and the fact that this bill is needed means that domestic violence remains an ongoing problem in Manitoba. I am further saddened that I have had to reintroduce this bill because that means two other things: first, that the NDP wouldn't allow it to proceed the first time it was introduced; and, second, that in the two years since I brought this legislation forward, the NDP government has done nothing to move this issue forward.

A committee of experts to review domestic violence deaths in Manitoba is necessary. This idea

was first put forward by Dr. Jane Ursel, someone with whom members opposite should be familiar. Dr. Ursel is the director of the RESOLVE family violence research centre at the University of Manitoba.

She first made this suggestion back in 2008, after the death of Shannon Scromeda, a 25-year-old mother who was murdered by her boyfriend in their home. Ms. Scromeda's killer used a hammer to murder her. She died of blunt force trauma.

Mr. Speaker, I would note that, in 2008, when I did bring this bill forward the first time, there were a number of members on the other side, on the government side, that actually did rise and speak about the importance of doing more around the issue of domestic violence. They all acknowledged that it was something that was important. It was a topic that needed to be better addressed in Manitoba. And their comments all told me, that this was an issue that they cared about. I know it was the current Minister of Labour (Ms. Howard) that spoke at that time. It was the current Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) that spoke at that time. It was also the member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) who spoke at that time. And they all did acknowledge and did seem to have an understanding of this issue. So I was very disappointed at the time that it didn't go forward because I think that perhaps they might have wanted to see more happen with it as well. So that was disappointing.

The committee that this bill would establish would, as per Dr. Ursel's recommendation, review the circumstances surrounding all domestic murders to identify trends, risk factors and patterns. This would help prevent similar tragedies from happening in the future because we could identify issues that lead to abuse. The committee would also be able to identify gaps in resources and make recommendations to help prevent similar tragedies from happening in the future. This committee and its expertise, I think, Mr. Speaker, are needed in Manitoba, particularly so.

Statistics Canada found, a few years ago, that Manitoba women are at a higher risk to be murdered by their male partner than women in any other province. It's hard to fathom, but between 1974 and 2004, Manitoba had the highest average homicide

rate for women. Our rate is 50 percent higher than the Canadian average for that period.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's easy to turn away, turn down the radio, turn off the TV so we don't have to see the images or hear about someone abusing or even taking the lives of their spouse or their children. But I would say that we can't afford to turn away. We owe it to families to pay attention. Ending domestic violence is about paying attention to details, to the signs. When it's too late and we've missed the details, we owe it to the victims of domestic violence to examine their story and what we may have missed before the tragedy struck.

I would note that Dr. Jane Ursel said, and I quote: One of the saddest things is that often the people who get murdered are the people who never reached out for help, end quote. Mr. Speaker, I think that's why this particular bill is important, because it allows us to learn from past history and to find ways to reach the people who maybe don't come forward and to find ways to prevent domestic violence.

And that's what this committee would do. It would be able to identify the signs that domestic violence is happening and provide opportunities for educating the public. Reviewing all deaths resulting from domestic violence is the least we can do for the victims and their families. If we can learn something that can help prevent other deaths in similar circumstances, we ought to seek out that information.

Mr. Speaker, this bill requires a government to establish a multidisciplinary committee to review the circumstances surrounding deaths that occur as a result of domestic violence and to make recommendations to help prevent future deaths in similar circumstances. Its reports would be provided to the ministers of Justice and Family Services, along with being posted on the government's Web site and tabled in the Legislature. The committee's findings will help guide government decision-making with respect to the prevention of domestic violence and will help guide decisions about how best to educate women about domestic violence. The main goal is to gain insight into what prevents abused spouses from seeking help.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Dr. Jane Ursel, the director of the RESOLVE family violence research centre at the University of Manitoba, had called on this Province to establish such a committee more than two years ago. She feels that a review process would reveal whether police

are properly laying charges in domestic disputes, who is reporting domestic disputes, and whether anything could have prevented the tragedy. Such a committee would help identify gaps in programs and responses.

* (10:10)

Now, in looking at the Ontario report, because this legislation is modelled after something that they do in Ontario, and in Ontario they have had this since 2003. It has not been an issue for them as to, you know, whether it should be there or not. They have had this and their annual reports are very, very helpful.

And, in fact, when I look at the sixth annual report of Domestic Violence Death Review Committee in Ontario, and it's put out by the officer of the chief coroner, Province of Ontario, and in the 2008 annual review it does address an issue that perhaps may be a stumbling block here, and that is related to privacy issues.

And on page 2 of the report it says, and I quote: All information obtained as the result of coroners' investigations and provided to the DVDRC is subject to confidentiality and privacy limitations imposed by the Coroners Act of Ontario and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Unless and until an inquest is called with respect to a specific death or deaths, the confidentiality and privacy interests of the decedents, as well as those involved in the circumstances of the death, will prevail. Accordingly, individual reports, as well as the review recommendations, and any other documents or reports produced by the DVDRC remain private and protected and will not be released publicly. Each member of the committee has entered into and is bound by the terms of the confidentiality agreement that recognizes these interests and limitations. End quote.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do hope that this is something that this government will positively support today. I think it's a really important private member's bill.

One of the things that the Ontario report identifies is common risk factors that lead to domestic violence and death, and some of them, you know, are fairly common. And the first one, the highest percentage one which, you know, is something that needs to be paid attention to because it tells us that, for instance, in 2008 in Ontario, the actual or pending separation in 87 percent of the

cases, that was what was a factor in leading to the domestic death.

History of domestic violence—that may sound—something that we would expect and yet that is specifically one of the things that came out, that in reviewing any of the deaths, that in 93 percent there was a history of domestic violence, and it lists all kinds of risk factors. It would really help us here in Manitoba before we, you know, spend money on very expensive inquests or inquiries, or even if we don't get that far, something like this is invaluable in helping us look at the situation.

The recommendations that they have in the Ontario report are so very helpful and I really would encourage the government today to move forward with this and support this legislation. I think it's really important for Manitoba women. And I hope that, with this second introduction of this private member's bill, Bill 221, I really hope that this government will support it and will vote in favour of it today. And I would encourage all of them to do that. I think it's really important for the women of Manitoba that are in these situations. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to start off by thanking the member for Charleswood for her ongoing interest in the issue of violence against women. I do think it's something that members on all sides of this House can agree that we need to do more to prevent, we need to do more to address and we need to do more to support women who take that courageous step of leaving abusive situations.

I do, however, want to just correct the record. She'd said in her statement that nothing has happened on this issue. Nothing could be further from the truth, Madam Deputy Speaker. We did commit to setting up a domestic violence death review committee. And as she pointed out in her speech, one of the issues surrounding the formation of this committee, that they had to address in Ontario, are the issues of privacy, and that has taken some time to address. My information is that that work on addressing the issues of privacy is now coming to a conclusion and so the committee will be moving forward.

And I know, you know, sometimes we hear the word privacy, we don't understand really, fundamentally, what that can mean. But we would—I don't think any member of this House would want us to put at risk the prosecution of an offender because

the privacy issues were not taken into account during the review. I don't think any of us in this House would want to give a defence attorney one scrap of reason to throw a case out because we didn't take those privacy considerations into account. And I don't think anybody in this House would want to put a victim at further risk because privacy issues were not completely resolved in the formation of this committee. So I understand, and I know that this has taken a while to complete, this privacy impact assessment, but it is crucial to the formation of this committee.

In getting ready to set up this committee and working on that we have engaged a group of experts. We have included Dr. Jane Ursel in that group. In fact, we think so highly of Dr. Jane Ursel that she sits on our Manitoba Women's Advisory Council and she provides tremendously good advice, not only to me, as the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, but to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan), to the Minister responsible for Family Services. She is renowned as an expert in the issues of domestic violence and we take her advice very seriously, and we're very fortunate, I think, in Manitoba, to have somebody with that kind of expertise here to work with us.

I also just want to point out for the House that another issue that we have to resolve in setting up this committee is the fact that we do have a different model than Ontario. Ontario has a coroner system. We don't have that system. So there are some complexities that have to be worked out. But in setting up this committee we have also had our officials sit and talk to officials in Ontario to understand how that system works so that when we set up our committee we can make sure that we've addressed the issues that they've come into contact with.

I would hate to leave on the record the impression that nothing is going on in terms of preventing and working on the issues of violence against women. So I'm going to talk about some of those issues that we're also working on. We certainly—and in this session even—and I know the Minister of Justice may speak more about this, but we've introduced legislation to start making the links between issues of domestic violence and issues of custody and family breakdown, so that children who are exposed to domestic violence, so that those issues can be taken into account when custody matters are at hand, and that is going to be groundbreaking legislation, and it's going to be critically important

for a lot of kids and a lot of families who go through that horrific experience of being exposed to domestic violence.

In addition, you know, we have been recognized internationally, and it's our work, but it's also the work of the former government who did a lot of work to address violence against women and I completely recognize that and recognize the work of the former minister of Justice, Jim McCrae, who I knew when I lived in Brandon and knew his daughters, and knew that his interest in this issue came from the fact that he was the father of four daughters.

In 2006, our government and the chief judge accepted an award from the United Nations for Manitoba's groundbreaking Front End Project. This is a system that cuts trial delays for domestic violence charges almost in half, and that's very important when you're trying to prosecute domestic violence because the longer time between a charge and a resolution the less likely it is for that victim to follow through and testifying. The more time you give for the offender to continue the abuse and the less likely that you can bring that case to a resolution.

I also want to talk about other kinds of prevention that we've been involved with. One of them is the WISE project, which some members may be familiar with, and this is a work between my department and other departments where we provide resources to trainers who go out to workplaces to talk to workplaces, to talk to supervisors and other people, co-workers, about looking for the signs of domestic violence. What you do when a co-worker discloses to you that she is a victim of domestic violence. How you can help her. Because often, Madam Deputy Speaker, in my experience, a woman may make that disclosure only once, and how that disclosure is handled, whether she's listened to, whether she's believed, what kind of advice she gets in moving forward, that can determine greatly the success she has in leaving that relationship.

So I'm proud of the fact that we are working with workplaces. We are working with women's organizations and shelter organizations to get the message out more broadly about the signs of domestic violence and what we can all do to help women who experience that to leave those relationships.

* (10:20)

I also know that we are working very hard to support the shelter system that we have in place in Manitoba. I'm very fortunate to have Marlene Bertrand chair the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council, and all members of this House will know her and the work that she has done in Manitoba historically to strengthen and build that shelter system. And we were in discussions the other day about shelter systems in all parts of Canada and the United States, and she reflected for me in her work with other provinces how the shelter system in Manitoba is one of the best funded and the best run and the best equipped to deal with the abused women and children that come seeking shelter and seeking help.

Part of that is a partnership with Housing, where Housing looks after the conditions of those shelters. Many women who run shelters in other provinces spend a lot of their time figuring out how to find the money to fix the shelter, to fix the doors, to put in security systems. Here in Manitoba, Housing takes on that responsibility and works with shelters in a partnership to accomplish that.

But when we talk about preventing domestic violence, really at the heart of it we have to talk about strengthening the status of women in society and strengthening the position of women in society. Now, when you talk to women who are leaving abuse and violence and when you talk to women who are in a shelter and looking to make that next step, one of the greatest barriers remains the lack of affordable housing. And that's why I'm very proud of the work that we are doing to create more and better affordable housing and housing at—all kinds of housing, housing for families, housing for single people, housing for people that are difficult to find housing. I think that that work in creating more affordable housing is going to open up the choices for women who are seeking to leave abusive situations.

It's also very important when you speak to women who are leaving or who have left about what helped them to do that: things like having access to education, knowing that they weren't going to be cast into poverty if they left their relationship. So the work that we have done to strengthen post-secondary education and training, the work that my colleagues in Family Services, ministers in Family Services, have done to reform the EIA system so that people aren't penalized when they go into a job, so that they can keep the benefits that they have for their families when they go into a job.

All of these things work together to strengthen the status of women and to help women who are in abusive situations leave them but also to help women avoid being in those kinds of relationships.

So what we have I think is a co-ordinated approach to domestic violence prevention. Can we do more? Absolutely, absolutely. I think none of us in this House sleeps soundly knowing that any woman is at risk, and we are moving on this domestic violence death review committee. I want to absolutely assure the member opposite that we are moving forward, but we're moving forward in a responsible way to ultimately protect those victims and look for what we can do in the future to prevent the deaths and the abuse of women and children in our community.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I rise today to put a few comments on the record in support of Bill 221 which was introduced by my colleague, the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), that requires the government to establish a multi-disciplinary committee to review the circumstances surrounding deaths that occur as a result of domestic violence and to make recommendations to help prevent future deaths in similar circumstances.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's mirrored on a legislation that was introduced in Ontario and appears to be providing some good information and recommendations that can improve the lives and the circumstances of those that have experienced and-domestic violence and for those in the future that may experience that kind of activity within their family situation. And if there are recommendations that can come forward from a committee that really cares about the issues of domestic violence, I think that just makes our society so much a better place to work and to live.

And I go back, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the days when we were in government in the 19-late 19-late '80s and through the '90s when one of my colleagues-and that was Gerrie Hammond-undertook the women's initiative and travelled right across the province of Manitoba and listened to women and came back to our government with several recommendations that were implemented at that time. And she went on to become the Minister responsible for the Status of Women in our government when lots of good things happened in the area of domestic violence. And it was a result of her consultations and discussions and her passion for

the issues that affected women in our Manitoba community that many of the things that she heard in her consultations were implemented.

And I know we have a proud history in those days, through difficult economic times, where we put in place stability and funding for the shelter system. That was one of the things that wasn't there when we took government in 1988-and stability of funding for second-stage housing for women.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm very proud of Gerrie Hammond and the work that she did, and the work that our premier Gary Filmon and our government did in the late '80s and the '90s to ensure that we could do whatever possible in those days and those circumstances to ensure that women that experienced domestic violence and were victims had places to go and had programs in place to support them.

And, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, it didn't stop when we left government in 1999. I know that there were things that this government continued to do and programs that were expanded on, and I commend them for the work that they did in the early part of this century. But it's disappointing when we see a piece of legislation like this, that makes a lot of common sense, not being supported by the government today, and I know that the minister now presently responsible for the Status of Women did talk about this government's record. And I'd just like to refer to a pamphlet that was put out by Manitoba Equality Report Card 2010, and it is a report card that gives the government an overall C-plus on Manitoba Equality Report Card for women. And it also gives the C-plus in the report for domestic violence and violence against women.

But I think it's important that I put some comments from this report card on the record. And I want to just, at the outset, read who members of this organization are, and they are: Equal Voice, LEAF Manitoba, Manitoba Status of Women, P.E.I. Status of Women, University of Winnipeg Students' Association, West Central Women's Resource Centre, West Coast LEAF, Marianne Cerilli, Jennifer deGroot, Shawna Dempsey, David Jacks, Jackie Hogue, Suzanne Hudson, Susan Prentice, Kelly Ross, Muriel Smith, Gerry Thorsteinson, Lorna Turnbull, Jane Ursel and Susan Wadien.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is what they say in their report card, and I quote: Up to 2006, Manitoba would have received an A or an A-plus grade for its creativity in responding to the needs of

victims and offenders in the area of family violence. In the past five years, however, the Manitoba government has cut back—and I hope members on the government side of the House are listening—the report says that they have cut back critical programs and made announcements that they have failed to follow through on. In 2008 the Manitoba government announced that it would be forming a committee to examine the feasibility of developing a domestic violence death review committee. Several meetings were held in late 2008, but since then there have been no further meetings and nothing has happened.

*(10:30)

So I beg to differ with comments that were just put on the record from the Minister responsible for the Status of Women when she says things are progressing. When those that have been involved and were asked to come to the table back in 2008, are saying that nothing has happened, that things have fallen through the cracks with this government, it appears, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we have a government that is just paying lip service to the issue, and they think if they talk the talk, that's good enough. Well, I think they need to look at walking the walk.

And I, again, go on to quote—I'd like to go on to quote from what the women and the organizations that belong to Manitoba Equality have said, and it's important that members of the government listen very carefully. I quote: In response to the growing public concern about murdered and missing Aboriginal women, the Manitoba government announced last fall the creation of the Manitoba Action Group on Exploited and Vulnerable Women.

This was to be a collaboration of the Manitoba Action Group on Exploited—[*interjection*] This was to be a collaboration of the departments of Justice and Indian Affairs with a number of Aboriginal agencies. Six months later, no further announcements have been made, no policies developed, and nothing has happened, despite the fact that Aboriginal women continue to be at heightened risk of interpersonal violence and homicide.

In Winnipeg, a woman in distress has to wait seven weeks, on average, in order to get an appointment with a counsellor. This retreat, from the previous progress, means that Manitoba is not living up to its commitments to women, under the CEDAW, even though important steps had been taken previously.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these aren't my words. These are words of women in the community that are expressing extreme disappointment that this province is going backwards, not forwards, when it comes to the issues of domestic violence.

And I would hope that members on the government's side of the House would stand in their place today, put some action to the words that they speak, and pass this legislation, so that we can move forward again, Madam Deputy Speaker, not backwards, which seems to have happened, and that's what women and organizations that support women in our community are saying.

Listen to the words, Madam Deputy Speaker, and let's not see our rating go down rather than up as a result of this government's inaction. Thank you.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Certainly domestic violence is a serious issue for all Manitobans. Domestic violence is an issue that this government takes very, very seriously, and that's why we've been taking steps to improve our system, to make things better for victims of domestic violence and to reduce the number of victims of domestic violence in Manitoba.

I'll speak generally about the things that this government has done and then we can speak specifically about the domestic violence death review committee, and I can put some information on the record about where we stand.

Manitoba is a place which takes a hard line on domestic violence. That's something we can say, but it's not just our word when you look at objective evidence across the country; for example, the 2008 Family Violence in Canada report. This report, Madam Deputy Speaker, notes that Manitoba is a pro-charging and pro-prosecution jurisdiction which causes increases in arrest rates.

And here's what the report had to say: Difference in charging practices across the country may be attributed to variations in the application of pro-charging and pro-prosecution policies, as well as police resources. Manitoba, Ontario and the Yukon, for example, have implemented specialized domestic violence courts which have been linked to increases in arrest rates and court case volume and more effective intervention compared to general courts. Ten years ago, an objective report found that Manitoba had the highest rate of domestic violence homicide in all of Canada. A recent report showed that Manitoba now has the lowest rate of domestic

violence homicide in western Canada. There's more work to be done.

I think the members opposite should maybe read those reports. If they don't accept what I have to say, then they should go and read the objective evidence and educate themselves before they put incorrect facts on the record.

There are many things this government has done, and I would point out, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in 2009-2010, the last year, Manitoba is providing—Manitoba provided \$13.5 million in funding to family violence prevention programs.

And as a matter of fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, that's three times the amount of funding that was available to victims of domestic violence in 1999.

So we're continuing to make important investments, and those investments are across the system—additional funding for security measures, additional funding for agencies like the Winnipeg Children's Access Agency, which assists victims of domestic violence and making sure that exchanges of children are not marked by violence and intimidation and harassment. Additional money for shelters, additional money for agencies, additional money for groups and centres is part of—at the root or—for children's programming.

And it was just a couple of months ago, I stood with Jackie Hogue at the West-Central Women's Resource Centre as we celebrate the new building the centre will be moving into, thanks to the investment of the community and thanks to substantial investment by this provincial government, which is working to empower women in our communities across the province.

I should also point out that through victim services, which is part of the Department of Justice, a woman can be seen within the week for an appointment, whether or not charges have been formally laid, if she believes that she is the victim of domestic violence.

It used to be that domestic violence victim services could only be obtained in five communities where the court was sitting. We've now expanded those services to all of our 63 court and circuit court locations, to put more services in communities where people truly need those services.

In 2005, we made amendments to The Domestic Violence and Stalking Act to allow more victims of domestic violence eligible for protection orders,

including people dating but not living together, and abuse within families, even where relatives haven't lived together.

These amendments also allow designated people, other than lawyers and police, to assist victims to apply for orders—for example, women's shelter workers—and now approximately 70 of those designates have been trained across Manitoba.

We passed other legislation to make it easier to enforce court orders from other jurisdictions to ensure that the police can act to enforce orders that have been imposed by judges elsewhere.

In 2006, our government and the chief judge of the provincial court of Manitoba accepted an award from the United Nations for Manitoba's groundbreaking Front End Project to reduce trial delays for domestic violence charges almost in half and make sure that justice happens more swiftly.

We've also expanded the mandate of victim support workers to help victims obtain civil protection orders even before formal criminal charges are laid.

So there are many things that we've done. Most recently, I was proud to introduce new legislation into this House to strengthen protection measures by amending The Child Custody Enforcement Act and The Family Maintenance Act to require courts to assess the risk of domestic violence. And I expect that we'll have co-operation from all members in this House to get that law passed and clarified for judges, that domestic violence is a very, very serious matter which needs to be taken into account.

Now, with respect to the domestic violence death review committee, I do want to speak a little bit about where that stands. Of course, we had announced that there would be a committee struck to look into the establishment of such a committee. That committee included representation from victim services, from the prosecutions branch, from other government departments, from the Family Violence Prevention Program, from the Women's Advisory Council, from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, from the Winnipeg Police Service and RESOLVE represented by Dr. Ursel.

And a couple of things became clear from the work of that group. No. 1 is that it was in the interests of everyone that they have the best possible information available to them when considering situations where there has been a domestic violence

homicide. But balanced with that, is the need for the protection of privacy.

We do have strong privacy laws in this province, and it was made very, very clear from the people with expertise around that table that the last thing that anyone wants to do is to have an issue with privacy revictimize the family of a victim of homicide. And that came through loud and clear, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that's why more work has had to be done to do a privacy impact assessment, to make sure that only the right parties are sitting around the table.

* (10:40)

So very soon there will be further steps on getting this committee up and running, but what is likely to happen, Madam Deputy Speaker, is there will be, effectively, two stages. There will be a general committee which will serve as an advisory committee and there will be specific members who actually can have access to the information, who will then go forward and do the work to determine recommendations, and come up with ideas for how we can make our systems work more effectively, and how we can do more to prevent domestic homicides from occurring in Manitoba.

Once again, for the members opposite information, Manitoba has taken tremendous steps to reduce domestic violence, to reduce domestic violence homicides in Manitoba, but we know that there is more work to be done. We know that there is a lot of expertise out in our communities that can assist us in getting there. That's why we're going to listen to their advice. That's why we are listening to their advice. And that's why we'll be moving ahead with this committee to ensure, first of all, that they have the proper information but, second of all, the information they receive is still protected by privacy to respect the families of domestic homicide victims.

I'm looking very forward to this committee doing its work and I hope, frankly, that in the years to come they have very little work to do. Unfortunately, as of today, we know that there are still cases which occur that are tragic, that I think every member of this Legislature wants to avoid but we'll keep moving forward into the future to have better systems in the province of Manitoba.

So those are my comments on this, Madam Deputy Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the very, very real and very important issue of domestic violence in Manitoba. Thank you.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to put a few words on the record in regard to Bill 221, brought forward by the member from Charleswood.

And this bill requires the government to establish a multidisciplinary committee to review the circumstances surrounding deaths that occur as a result of domestic violence, and to make recommendations to help prevent future deaths in similar circumstances.

I—when I look at the intent of this bill, I can see absolutely no reason why anybody would not support the intent of this bill, Madam Deputy Speaker. Anything that we can do, whether it's a government or an opposition, to improve the safety and the networks that will provide supports for domestic violence victims, is something that we should all take seriously, and look at it very seriously.

It's not a matter of one party having the best ideas. Ideas are not monopolized by the government, although they like to monopolize, but ideas can come forward, which are good ideas, and should be supported, and should not just be not supported because it's not their idea, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I want to just say a few things about the record of the Conservative Party in taking action to help reduce violence against women, both in government and in opposition, Madam Deputy Speaker. This domestic violence is an issue that all too often gets attention when it's too late, after women have become victims of violence at the hands of a partner or a close associate, and that's why education and prevention are essential.

Women need to know that resources are available to them and that help is available if there is a situation that is unsafe and unhealthy for them. And I'm very proud to be of the—I'm very proud to be in a party with such a good and strong record on having reduced and prevented domestic violence in Manitoba. But there's, of course, as the member has said, there's always more to do. But rather than just keep saying there's more to do, we'd like to see some action on getting it actually done.

And I know that the member from Charleswood has spoken very passionately on this. She did introduce the same bill a couple of years ago in 2008, and the government has had the two years now to look at this bill, and to move it forward. I can't see any reason why a government would not support

supports for people that are suffering from domestic violence, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I also—I listened very carefully to what the member from Charleswood said and also what the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) said on other people's comments about how this government has had a lot of time to put supports in place and to adopt this legislation. But they have dropped the ball on this issue, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that the Attorney General (Mr. Swan) spoke about privacy issues, but if there's a will to resolve these issues, that can be done. We know that, in 2003, Ontario was able to resolve those issues. So, if one jurisdiction can do it, it can be done. But there is just not a willingness on the part of this government to move this forward.

I also want to say that Dr. Jane Ursel, the director of the RESOLVE family violence research centre at the University of Manitoba, has called on the Province to establish a committee, and this is more than two years ago, Madam Deputy Speaker. She's actually called on this government to establish the committee that would review the circumstances around deaths that occur as a result of domestic violence.

Now, I would just like to read from a publication entitled—University of Manitoba research, and this is from—the publication is *ResearchLIFE*, in winter of 2010. So this is very recent.

And I'm quoting from the magazine now: "Ursel's latest push is for the creation of a domestic violence death review committee here in Manitoba. Such a group already exists in Ontario and is made up of experts like coroners, academics and police investigators with the goal of determining how to prevent further fatalities. 'One of the saddest things is that often the people who get murdered are the people who never reached out for help,' Ursel says."

And I'm still quoting: "It's unclear whether domestic violence is on the rise in Canada or if the growing number of reported assaults simply reflects a greater number of women coming forward. 'There is probably nobody around today who hasn't had it touch their life, whether it was a friend, family member or a neighbour. We've become increasingly aware of how pervasive the problem is,' says Ursel, who has a history of tackling the issue head-on. 'When you help a woman turn around her life and the life of her children, when you see a man who has been abusive and has participated in treatment programs and has changed, it's so rewarding. You

know you can make a difference and I guess that's what keeps people working in a really harsh field.'" Unquote.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are many women out there that recognize the need for this committee to be established that would review the circumstances surrounding the deaths that occur as a result of domestic violence and to make recommendations to help prevent further deaths in similar situations. I believe, very strongly, that this is a very, very important bill and it's a very good bill. We have a bill brought forward, for the second time now, from the member from Charleswood. We have a number of people that have been supportive of this bill, just by what has been said here today, quoted by member from Charleswood, by the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) and by myself, just what other people, what other women have said is necessary here.

I don't really understand why the government is speaking against this bill, Madam Deputy Speaker—

An Honourable Member: They're not.

Mrs. Taillieu: —and I don't understand why they won't support the bill.

The member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) said they're not speaking against the bill. So, by that, I am very encouraged that they will support this legislation and this bill will be passed today on to committee. As the member from Kildonan has suggested that they're supporting this legislation, I'm very encouraged by that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

* (10:50)

So I'm very encouraged to hear that the government is going to support this legislation, because it hasn't sounded like it to this point. So I'm very encouraged that they will, and we will see this bill pass today and through to committee, because at committee I'm sure we're going to hear all of the people that have supported this legislation come forward and put their views on the record and encourage this bill to be passed in a very expedited way.

I'm very encouraged, but I'm a little sceptical still to see whether the members will vote for this legislation, because, two years ago, they had this opportunity to vote for this legislation and they did not. They chose not to support women who have had their lives disrupted by domestic violence. They chose not to support that bill. Now there's another

opportunity with this bill to support this legislation, but from what I've heard from the speakers on the other side it doesn't really sound like they will. They don't like supporting legislation that has to do with bettering the lives of women who are the victims of domestic violence, and if they do support this legislation, reviewing the circumstances that occur as a result of domestic violence—I'll read this again—what the member from Charleswood wants is the government to establish a multidisciplinary committee to review the circumstances surrounding deaths that occur as a result of domestic violence, and to make recommendations to help prevent future deaths in certain circumstances. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, how could anybody vote against that? Thank you very much.

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): It is a privilege to speak on this matter as the issue of domestic violence has been both a personal and academic interest for several decades. Like many people in this Chamber, it is not something foreign to my own life experience and—as well as my own academic background. With doctoral research in women's studies, one of my specific interests was research around domestic violence, more specifically identified academically as intimate femicide, one of the most violent forms of death on the planet.

And the use of violence against women is a systemic global issue, and I have to say, as a feminist, I am very proud of the work of this government, because the work that has gone forward has been very progressive, and that I think there is a clear misunderstanding from members opposite regarding, what I would say, perceptions around the black-and-white nature of this issue. They seem to think that if one does not side with them that they are against supporting women in domestic violence situations. That somehow the support of this bill and whether it is voted on or not is an indication in a black-and-white, one-way-or-another perspective and, unfortunately, the issues of domestic violence are not so simple. They are complex. They do not function well in a facile world of black-and-white understanding.

Domestic violence issues are complex. They are based on a variety of issues, everything from systemic societal issues, socialization and enculturalization issues, and if some would like me to go run and find a dictionary for members opposite on some of those words, I'll gladly provide it at a later date. The point is is these are larger issues that involve psychological, psychosocial, socio-economic

issues and that the pursuit of justice in this area cannot be reduced to simply one particular bill brought forward by a private member.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

This is about a long-term vision that has been backed by several things, and I have seen the progress in the past decade that this government has brought forward in the safety, security that they have provided for women in this province, and that, again, one of the most clear-cut facts that represents that is the fact that we have gone from the highest average of domestic homicide to the lowest average rate of female domestic homicides in our term in office. That is the actual tangible results of really doing work, and I—and, Mr. Speaker, I'm also a firm believer that actions speak louder than words. So we can have all the words we want in this Chamber, but what we have had is a decade of action on improving the lives of women.

I spent 15 years in a classroom analysing policy, analysing practice, and analysing social justice issues around domestic violence and as it was reflected in government policy and practice, and always looking at things with a critical eye as to what could be done better, and this government can be proud of what it has done.

It does not mean the job is anywhere near to over, but the point is is that this government has backed its words with actions. We have done things and continue to do things, and, yes, it is important that a domestic violence review committee is established, but it must be done with due diligence. It must be done properly. It is not something that one cooks up in the short term and crosses their fingers and hopes that it works and then picks up the messes of the mistakes later. You have to work with all the parties involved. You have to work with victims and those that work and support victims. And that is not easy work, because when someone is a victim of domestic violence, they have many things going on in their lives, and it's not like you can just sit them down for five-minute interview: Hey, how—what would you like? We're trying to go through this little checklist here. They are juggling so many things and have to work on so many issues in their own lives that in order to work with them properly, to get what they need, this needs to be done with experts, with people in the community, with victims, and it needs to be done properly.

So, yes, it's something that I'm sure most of us would have liked to have had done yesterday, but the

point is is if you're going to do it, you do it right, because there are too many privacy issues. There is too much at stake in terms of revictimizing not just the direct victims of domestic violence but the family and those in their immediate lives. Domestic violence has a ripple effect and we need to deal with it in a serious, ongoing and systemic way.

And there is so much that has been done in this regard that, again, I have to say that, as a feminist, I am proud to be a part of a government that actually embraces a feminist ideology where there is not just words but there are actions. So we have increased things like the mandate for victim support. We have done different things that make tangible results in women's lives and in the lives of their families.

And so to go on to do this kind of committee work requires thoughtful, sensitive, caring, prudent, cautious and compassionate work. It cannot be rushed. It must be done with the utmost consideration for the implications on the lives of every person who is touched by domestic violence. So we must do it, but we must do it well, and sometimes to do something well, you must do it over a long period of time, consulting, getting feedback, working with those organizations who are on the ground, in the trenches with these women, trying to extract women from domestic violence situations, provide them and their children with supports.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, I think that really what members opposite have to understand is that this is not a black and white issue. There are so many different layers here, that this is not about what happens on this one day with this one bill, because the issue is so much larger, so much more complex and requires so much thought and preparation to do proper justice to the victims of domestic violence and especially to those who fall victim to the worst of all possible crimes, intimate femicide, because those women we will not get back. Children will not get their mothers back, and to do them true justice we need to do this properly, and if that means taking extra time, we take extra time. If that means consulting and working with those groups, if that means continuing our work with Dr. Jane Ursel, then we do so, and we do so in the name and the memory of those women who we will not get back. We have to do them justice, and to do them justice is to do no less than 110 percent on their behalf.

So we cannot cut this short for the sake of expediency—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have one minute remaining.

* (11:00)

And the hour now being 11 a.m., we will now move on to resolutions, and we'll be dealing with Resolution 5, Protecting Jobs in Powerview-Pine Falls.

House Business

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on House business, in accordance with rule 31(9), I'd like to announce that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on Political Interference in Crown Corporations, sponsored by the honourable member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen).

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with rule 31(9), it's been announced that the private member's resolution that will be consider next Thursday is the resolution on Political Interference in Crown Corporations, sponsored by the honourable member for Carman.

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, again on House business, and I'll seek leave of the House to withdraw the existing—the private member's resolution printed in today's Order Paper and also leave to substitute it with another resolution on the same topic.

Mr. Speaker: Is there will of the House for the honourable member to withdraw the resolution that's on the Order Paper and to substitute it with another resolution? Is there consent in the House? *[Agreed]*

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 5—Protecting Jobs in Powerview-Pine Falls

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Pembina, that

WHEREAS nearly 300 workers at the Tembec paper mill in Powerview-Pine Falls lost their jobs when workers were locked out on August 31st, 2009; and

WHEREAS the community of Powerview-Pine Falls and the entire eastern region of the province have been greatly impacted by this closure; and

WHEREAS in late 2009 Tembec put the plant up for sale, and a senior executive from Tembec has

publicly stated that the plant will be closed if a buyer is not found; and

WHEREAS the Sagkeeng First Nation and former Tembec workers have expressed an interest in a purchase of the plant; and

WHEREAS the Province of Manitoba has provided \$1 million to establish a community adjustment committee, with representation from the Province of Manitoba, the R.M. of Alexander, the Town of Powerview-Pine Falls, Sagkeeng First Nation, paper mill employees and community economic agencies; and

WHEREAS the community adjustment committee has supported efforts to determine the viability of the mill purchase and other economic opportunities in the region; and

WHEREAS five–15 years ago the government of Manitoba provided a \$30-million provincial loan to the employees who purchased the mill; and

WHEREAS the government of Manitoba should do what it can to protect jobs in Powerview-Pine Falls and to assist the workers.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider providing a Manitoba Industrial Opportunities Program loan if a viable proposal to purchase the mill comes forward from a purchaser who has the financial means to purchase and operate the mill but needs loan assistance.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, seconded by the honourable member for Pembina,

WHEREAS nearly 300 workers—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, I take great pleasure in moving this motion, this resolution, because I think it's extremely important that we take a look at this particular issue, because it affects almost 300 workers in Powerview-Pine Falls and likely hundreds of other workers all across eastern Manitoba who have supplied wood fibre to the mill in Powerview-Pine Falls, whether they cut down trees in order to provide the wood chips that were necessary to produce the paper or whether they were involved in trucking the chips to the mill or other peripheral jobs, including the fact that all of these

employees now obviously don't have the funds to purchase what they could have done before, and all the businesses in eastern Manitoba, as a result, are suffering.

In terms of the background, Mr. Speaker, it's clear what happened. It's very clear what happened, and the employees knew what was happening very early on and now that the mill has been shut down—has been closed—now that the mill has been shut down, the fact remains is that the employees who were involved in this dispute were correct, right from the beginning.

It's been quite a hardship for people in Powerview-Pine Falls, including all of eastern Manitoba, and all of it stemmed from the fact that the collective agreement of the employees was due to be reconsidered—to be renegotiated as of August 31, 2009.

So what was happening prior to that? About a year prior to August 31, 2009, the company was, in fact, operating sort of half time. What they would do is they would shut down for two or three weeks and then hire back the employees for two or three weeks, thereby creating a situation where it would ensure that employees didn't have enough funds to support their families and they needed to deal with that situation very early on.

That situation continued for about a year until August 31, 2009, when they were presented with a proposal by the company for a wage reduction and benefit reduction of 35 percent. Now this offer, the employees said early on, was that Tembec knew that the employees could not and would not accept that kind of proposal. They knew that and, as a result of the rejection by the employees of that particular offer, Tembec locked out the employees.

What that did was to cut off all employees from any income source whatsoever. They had to depend on their own savings. They had to depend on their own retirement savings, in fact, to support their families. They were in a position where they were hoping that Tembec would come back to the table and negotiate fairly. It didn't happen. The end result was—is that a lot of employees waited months and months and waiting for the plant to open and it did not. And all in the meantime, the employees under a lockout were not eligible for employment insurance. They weren't eligible for all kinds of other benefits that they might normally be entitled to and, as a result, they depleted their savings and their retirement accounts.

There was no certainty at all within the community. People were very supportive within the community. They were very supportive across eastern Manitoba. In fact, most Manitobans were very supportive of the employees and the position they took. But their families needed to be supported and that's why they had to go to other sources of income in order to support their families.

They couldn't get jobs as a result, either, because in order to get a job, there would have to be some certainty by any employer who hired them that they would stay. The end result is that employers were demanding some of the employees, before they would hire them, they demanded, first of all, that they would quit their job and not go back to work. And some of that did happen. Some employees did do that. They received employment up in the Bissett gold mine; they were looking for workers about an hour and a half away from Powerview-Pine Falls. Some of them left the province and went to Alberta. Some of them left the province and went to Saskatchewan. Others found jobs within the province, even with Atomic Energy of Canada in Pinawa. A few were hired there. Some have been hired at Milner Ridge Correctional Centre.

So, many of these people, some of these people, were absorbed into the other jobs that were available outside the mill and outside the community. Some people moved outside the community. They moved to other provinces. The difficulty is, Mr. Speaker, is that in a situation like that, if the mill ever opens again, what's going to happen is they're going to need specialized workers in that paper mill, and many of these specialized workers, because of the demand for their skills, they found jobs elsewhere. And so, even if it were to open, it's going to be quite a challenge to get that mill operating again.

The families needed to be supported during all that time, Mr. Speaker, and I know some members, some MLAs in this Chamber, when the food bank opened temporarily, we hoped, in Powerview-Pine Falls as a result of this closure during the Christmas season, several MLAs, and I applaud them for doing that, asked for food to be delivered to their constituency office and then they delivered that to Pine Falls to help those in need, and that's myself included. I did the same as many—as a number of MLAs did within this Chamber and I applaud them for that, and the community helped—community applauds them for it and thanks them for that.

* (11:10)

In addition to that I purchased about 75 hams, actually, for the food bank as well, out of my own pocket, and—I know many of these people, and that's why I did that. I know many of them personally and I was there for them. I was there at least on a bi-weekly basis during this whole ordeal, Mr. Speaker. Often I go out twice a week just to talk to the community and talk to the workers who were affected by this lock out.

In fact, on one very warm day in September, and we did have a fairly warm September last year, on one very warm day in September, I brought water and soft drinks to the workers and they appreciated it. One cold day in October, I made 20 gallons of homemade soup. And I pride myself as being a bit of a gourmet cook and I do a lot of cooking at home, and I made 20 gallons—20 gallons of homemade soup and bread and so on and they really appreciated it.

I brought my outdoor cooker out to the picket line and I—right in the tent, and I made the soup there and they really enjoyed that. We had a great time; in spite of the fact of all that hardship, they were still laughing, and they were still in good spirits. So I was really happy to see that and helped them in their decisions and—it helps sometimes to talk about those kinds of things. They're very difficult to talk about but once they started talking, I think they felt a lot better.

The problem is that there was no certainty, Mr. Speaker. We—they didn't know when that lockout was going to end or if it would end at all. And the trades, of course, started leaving their jobs for other communities. They started leaving their jobs in Tembec for other communities. Some moved to other provinces, I indicated before. Others found employment in the area. I believe, out of about 270 employees now, approximately 70 of those existing employees have found jobs now that the lockout was ended in terms of—in January, many of them in fact—and the mill was shut down and put up for sale. Many of them, in fact, are collecting now employment insurance but that, of course, as we all know, that only lasts so long.

But there is hope, Mr. Speaker. A number of buyers have surfaced and, most likely, the buyer of that mill is going to be the employees themselves and perhaps, with them, Sagkeeng First Nation, and possibly other First Nations communities in the province. There is some hope and they're hoping that they do find a buyer and that it is a viable operation. And my hope, as well, is that the government passes

this resolution, as I believe they will. We'll all vote for it, hopefully unanimously. And, hopefully, we'll pass this because what it'll do is give the community some hope knowing that the government of Manitoba is going to be there for them in the event that there is a proposal that comes forward to purchase the mill from a purchaser who, in fact, has the financial means to purchase and operate the mill, but who needs loan assistance to ensure that that happens.

For that reason, it's an extremely important resolution in this House, it's a votable resolution and I'm pretty certain that the government will support the resolution and then we move forward and hopefully the community will recover in the long term, and those jobs that were lost, hopefully, they are restored.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Labour and Immigration): And I want to thank the honourable member for bringing forward this resolution and I want to thank him for also working with us on a resolution that we will, indeed, support today.

I want to tell him—and in his remarks he talked about the incredible strength and resilience of his community and the things that he has worked with them on and other members of this House have worked with them on. And I want to tell him that I've been pleased to meet with members of his community a number of times on this issue. And he has every right to be proud of that community.

This has been a devastating hardship for those families who were first locked out, and now facing the uncertainty of what's going to happen next with that mill that is the primary employer for that area.

He should be proud of his community because of the way they've banded together, because of the way they've worked together with Sagekeeng, with the First Nations partner, to shore each other up and to work together on this issue.

I also want to commend everybody who has helped to support that community. The member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) spoke of some of the initiatives. I also know that members of the Manitoba Federation of Labour and other unions also took part in delivering food and coming out to talk to those workers and be with them as they were faced with the lockout. So this has been—there's a whole province working with this community.

On the resolution—on the conclusion of the resolution, I want to assure all members here that we have, from the beginning, when it became clear that this mill faced closure, worked with the community on what could be done to deal with that. We immediately went to that community. We provided a million-dollar fund to the community adjustment committee to work on options. That fund, part of it, has been used to look at the viability and feasibility of a purchase of that mill, and we have been part of that community adjustment committee. And all the way along, we have assured them that should a purchaser come forward that has the means to operate that mill, that we would absolutely look favourably and consider absolutely the kind of support that was given in 1994 for that purchase of that mill.

I met with the community adjustment committee representatives on Monday evening with my colleague, the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Blaikie), and we again assured those community leaders that should a buyout proceed, should that plan go forward, that we would absolutely consider being there with funding equal to what was provided in 1994. So that assurance has been given from the beginning, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to talk about that lockout. And the member spoke about the fears and the concerns of the workers in that lockout, that they were faced with an employer who had no interest in negotiating. And we saw those folks locked out for almost four months, which is an extraordinary amount of time. We haven't seen lockouts like that in Manitoba for some time, but for me it illustrated very well why the changes that we brought into The Labour Relations Act were necessary.

We brought in changes to that act early in our mandate to deal with the potential of lengthy lockouts and strikes. Hopefully, in collective bargaining, Mr. Speaker, you have a situation where both parties are engaged in the process and both parties have an interest in coming to a conclusion. Most of the time that's how it works. Occasionally, you have a situation where that isn't the case and you're faced with a lengthy strike or a lengthy lockout. And we know that once people are out for a period of time, it becomes very, very difficult to bring the sides back together.

We were there on the ground, throughout that process, with our conciliation and mediation staff, who are some of the best in the country at resolving

disputes, and whose work pretty much goes unnoticed and unrecognized, but I think we need to take a moment to thank them for the work that they do. But at the end of the day, the only way that lockout ended was because the union applied under section 87(1) of The Labour Relations Act, a part of the act that we brought in for arbitration.

They were able to apply single-unilaterally for that arbitration because of the length of the lockout. The Labour Board took a look at the dispute and they ordered an end to the lockout, and they imposed collective agreement that is still in effect. And what that meant for those families in Pine Falls is that they were now eligible to apply for employment insurance. They had been ineligible while they were on lockout, and they were now eligible because that lockout ended because of the ability of the Labour Board to end that lockout. So that is an important example of why making those kinds of progressive changes to labour legislation is important.

I also want to assure members opposite that in our discussions with the group that's working on a possible buyout, we've also been very clear that we would not support any move to reduce, to diminish, or to put at risk the pensions and benefits of those workers. We have heard from the beginning of this issue the very serious concerns of workers there about their pension funds being at risk. We sent out our pension experts earlier this month to meet with workers there to give them the kind of information that they need to make the decisions that they're making about their pension plan. And certainly as we look at any potential purchase, we will be keeping that front of mind, that the pensions of those workers not be put at risk in any potential purchase.

I want to share with the House the information that has been made available to me, that when we talk about a buyout of this mill, we are looking at a potential price of over \$100 million to make the mill operational and to get it to a point where it could be profitable, so this isn't a small task.

* (11:20)

And I will say that the folks who are engaged in this process are very well aware of the fact that they are facing an industry in decline. And that is—you know, part of the story here is the pulp and paper industry in this country, the newsprint industry, is seeing a massive change. The demand is down for that product. There's an overcapacity in the market and that has led to the partial or complete closure of 10 of 27 of the mills that produce newsprint in

Canada. So this is a national issue that is going on with this industry.

I also want to share with members some of the other things that we're doing with that community to prepare for changes in the economy, and one of those things is investing in education and learning opportunities. We have announced a provincial contribution of \$600,000 towards retrofitting and upgrading the Winnipeg River Learning Centre. We're pleased to have the participation of the federal government in that project, in that program. We think that will be very important to expand access to training programs in the region.

I also want to take a moment to thank and commend the Community Unemployed Help Centre that's been working with those workers on their appeals for retroactive employment insurance payments. I know all sides of this House have banded together to implore the federal government to reverse its decision to disentitle those workers to EI payments during the lockout. Those workers were out of work through absolutely no fault of their own. Not one worker left that job voluntarily, and so we commend the work of the Community Unemployed Help Centre, Neil Cohen and the capable folks there who are taking those appeals forward. And we are very hopeful that they will make some progress, not only for the workers that experienced this hardship in Pine Falls, but for workers everywhere who are falling through the cracks of the employment insurance system.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank the honourable member for his co-operation in bringing this resolution forward and bringing a resolution forward that we can all support. I think it is important at moments like this, when communities in our province are in need, that we find a way to cut across the partisanship that so often characterizes this House and express together our support for Manitobans who are facing these kinds of hardships. Thank you very much.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I, too, want to commend the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) for bringing forward this important resolution.

It's pretty clear from his passionate speech this morning that he recognizes the impact that this shutdown had on the families of eastern Manitoba. And in fact, you know, when we have a shutdown of this significance, it impacts not only those families, but it also spreads through the business community

of the region as well. The business community and other businesses are also impacted by the shutdown, and it's pretty clear the member for Lac du Bonnet recognizes the important role that this industry has played in this part of the province.

And I commend him for not only bringing this resolution forward, but for also taking the time over the last several months to acknowledge what the families were going through during that time. It's above and beyond the call of duty to take 75 hams, to put together 20 gallons of soup and deliver it to those families in need. So I certainly want to commend the member for taking those important steps.

I think, as he pointed out, too, when families are going through these difficult times, they do need a source of someone to talk to, to talk to about their issues, and someone to give them hope that someone is there, supporting their cause. And in this case, we, as a government, are there to support them.

It was, Mr. Speaker, somewhat unfortunate that it took some time for the government of the day to recognize the issue out in Powerview and Pine Falls, and it took them quite some time to get to the table to try to reason with the parties involved. And it was unfortunate that that took some time. It took the government some time to acknowledge it.

On the other side, you know, now that we've gone through the process, the member for Lac du Bonnet has brought forward this important resolution, it is encouraging to hear the government support this resolution. So we're certainly hopeful that someone will come forward to purchase this mill here and, hopefully, we can move it forward. And, certainly, we're hoping now that the government of Manitoba will be there to support whatever proponents do come forward and, hopefully, they will be significant proponents that will have the capability to operate this particular plant.

It should be encouraging to the government—in fact ironically, this morning, in *The Globe and Mail*, a headline indicates from Tembec that there's a strong pulp market in the near future. So we're hoping that, you know, with a strong market for pulp that this will lead to some real serious discussions about Powerview and Pine Falls and how that will play out in that particular mill.

Mr. Speaker, it's very important across rural Manitoba that we have a positive economic development, and it's very important for families across the province that they recognize that the

government is there to help them work through some of the economic development opportunities that they may have.

It is somewhat frustrating, from our perspective, when we look at the provincial budget that was just brought down by the NDP government, and pointing back to the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, where that particular budget was cut by 4 percent. And, in fact, I quizzed the minister responsible for that department, and we think rural development is a very important part of what happens in Manitoba. And we think there's tremendous opportunity in—for development in rural Manitoba. And certainly Tembec is just one part of that economic development opportunity.

But when I quizzed the minister on a specific group that had—put—been put together to look at the feasibility of purchasing a rail line in southern Manitoba, we've been waiting for several months for a response from the minister on that REDI application. And to date, we haven't heard a word from the minister. And it's really, it's a small amount of money—in this case, \$25,000—that we're looking for, for feasibility into some real potential economic development in rural Manitoba, and I wish he would have a serious look at that because what's going to happen is, in this case, this particular rail line is going to be dismantled and never be replaced again. So we're just simply looking for a sign from the government that they're interested in what does happen in rural Manitoba.

And, again, this is the case about Tembec. This is really about economic development in this part of the region, and we're certainly hoping that the government of the day will support this resolution. We look forward to, hopefully, having someone come forward, purchase this particular mine, and the government of Manitoba work co-operatively with that organization.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to, again, thank the member for bringing forward this important resolution. Thank you.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): I'm pleased to stand today to put a few comments on the record with regard to this motion that's been put forward by the MLA for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik).

But, prior to doing that, I certainly want to take the opportunity to comment about how the legislatures across the land, of course, have a built-in

system, of course, that is quite often at odds with each other, the political parties; it's an adversarial system. But there are times where people work together, and when we see Manitobans facing the kind of hardships that happened in Pine Falls, it's imperative that we all come together and do whatever we can to help those citizens.

What I'd like to do is, first of all, take the opportunity to—and I think we all should—not only pass along our thanks to the MLA for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) for, once again, raising this issue, but also the MLA for Fort Rouge and the Minister of Labour (Ms. Howard) and all the hard work that she has put in to work not only with the company, but with the unions and with the, more importantly, I guess, the workers, and—of the particular mill.

And I really want to take the opportunity to thank her and also the former minister of Labour, actually, for bringing in many different provisions to The Labour Relations Act and changes that she was responsible for making along the way.

* (11:30)

We know that the lockout caused a great hardship for the workers and their families, and we have been actively engaged in assisting them. And the lengthy lockout—it was over about 135 days and—approximately 135 days, and had a devastating effect on the workers, their families in the town of Pine Falls and the region. And being one of the elected MLAs on the government's side from eastern Manitoba, as we know in Manitoba, not unlike any other province necessarily, but relatives and families move across the province and our—in different communities throughout this province are related to many of those people that were working at the mill and are from Pine Falls and—no different than my community or my constituency—have people that are friends and have relatives that were affected by the lockout.

The workers themselves were unable to apply for unemployment insurance benefits during this time. And adding to the negative effects of the lockout, the federal Employment Insurance Act exempts workers from receiving benefits during a work stoppage. And so immediately following the termination of the lockout, the employer laid all—laid off all workers at this time. And the workers applied for employment insurance benefits—initially, were denied benefits.

So it took a lot of effort, not only from the union and all workers, but from the provincial government, and working with the unemployed help centre and the federal employment insurance officials. They reconsidered the issue, and the workers were able to qualify for and receive benefits beginning from the time the lockout ended.

So, Mr. Speaker, this, for many of the people in Pine Falls, was very, very tragic. The—you can imagine if you have a very good-paying job and, all of a sudden, you're locked out of your place of employment. And the families are looking to buy clothing for their children for school. They're looking to buy hockey equipment for their children or ringette equipment or different sports that their children participate in. It put a great deal of stress and strain on families.

Now, often it takes a long time for families to recover from tragic events like that, because it creates not only the stress between spouses and family members, but often the strife and stress it causes on children and their families. And that, certainly, hasn't been overlooked or missed by anyone in this Chamber. No matter what political stripe, people are very much aware of the kind of hardships it causes.

And, I know, people—and this resolution, I believe, states and "THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED," talks about a MIOP loan that, if a viable proposal to purchase the mill comes forward from a purchaser who has the financial means to purchase and operate the mill, but needs loan assistance—I mean, I believe that's a very, very important condition—that in order for this mill to work, in order for this business to continue and to be viable, that a purchaser has to have the financial means to purchase and operate this mill. And the reason MIOP loans are there is to provide loan assistance, when needed. And I'm really pleased to see that House Leaders and—working with our Minister of Labour (Ms. Howard) and the MLA for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik), were able to come to an agreement that our side of the House, the government's side, could support such a resolution. And I think that's really important for the people there to know.

Many of us met personally with many of those workers. It's tragic to see—well, it's tragic to see anyone crying and being upset because their families are going through such hardship, but to see men who have had good-paying jobs for so long, in the foyer

or the Rotunda, crying because they're so upset that they've lost their jobs. They don't know where to turn. And for many of us, we—I'm sure we can appreciate it. When you're in your fifties and then you lose your job, and you've been working in a particular job for many, many years, and you don't necessarily have other training to go into anything else, and all of a sudden you're out of work, you're trying to provide for your family—and where do you go?

And it was certainly emotional talking to many of these workers that were going through such hardship, and I know the MLA for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) not only provided out of his own pocket, and—he won't say it; I will, but it takes a lot for someone to come forward like that. It's more than just being a politician. It's more than just doing it for crass politics. It's caring about your neighbour. It's caring about families in your area, and I have to commend him for that, because it's—it truly was very and still is devastating for a lot of those families until this can turn around. So we thank him for bringing this forward.

As was mentioned by the Minister of Labour (Ms. Howard), we're very pleased to be able to support such a resolution like this to—looking forward to many, many more positive days for those families in the Pine Falls and in the—actually, the region, because it's not just the people from Pine Falls that work there. There are people from outside of Pine Falls and Powerview that work in that particular mill.

I know others may want to put comments on the record, but I just want to say as an elected official, an MLA from the east side of the province, and many of the people in my community and my constituency have relatives and family that were affected by what took place and the lockout that took place with regard to this mill at the Tembec paper mill. I just wanted to take the opportunity to put a few comments on the board—on the record, to make sure that, certainly, I thank the MLA for Lac du Bonnet, but also the Minister of Labour that took this under her wing and did everything she could to make sure that there would be options looked at and there would continue to be options looked at.

I know the MLA for Lac du Bonnet mentioned that there is some interest in a new owner, but we certainly hope that that new owner comes—the new purchaser comes forward with the financial wherewithal and the means to purchase and operate

this mill, and I know our government will certainly look at a MIOP loan that will provide loan assistance as long as everything else fits. But I just wanted to take the opportunity to certainly wish everyone that works at Tembec to—it's a brighter day actually now than it was a while back, but those benefits only last so long and they're going to run out—so we certainly hope that a new ownership comes forward and provides employment for these people that are hardworking Manitobans and deserve better than what they've received. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): I, too, would like to put a few comments on the record about this very good resolution brought forward by the member for Lac du Bonnet.

I was up there at Pine Falls shortly after the lockout began, with the member for Lac du Bonnet and our leader, and it's one thing to hear about it on the news or read it in the newspaper, but when you're actually there and you're talking to the employees that are affected, that's when it really hits home just how serious the effect on individual workers and, in larger part, the effect on the community because we know that in our rural communities, and particularly in this case, where it was—you could tend to call it a one industry town where this is such a major impact on the community that this closure had on the entire community.

Its—the workers were affected obviously from lost wages. Because they were locked out, they were not eligible for employment insurance, and many of the employees were telling us how they were using their savings, their—going to the food banks and depending on donations to—just to get by to feed their families, and it was—had a great impact to be there, and it—the impact on the communities with the stores—your local stores will feel the impact right away from this. The local economy is hit. The—everything from the loggers bringing in the logs to the community stores, this had a huge impact, and I think this resolution is very important for the community.

It gives them a confidence, a vote of confidence that when they come up with a viable proposal, and I really think that—I know the newsprint industry has seen some very difficult times. I think it was mentioned how many mills are closed. But, ironically, the amount of paper that this place goes through—and we're talking about a pulp mill and paper mill—we need it for this place alone probably.

* (11:40)

But, you know, quite often the opportune times to get into a business is when it is at the low point. We've had mill closures. We've had an excess inventory of pulp across the country, and now just might be an opportune time to come in, if they can buy at an opportune price—if I can call it that. And so having this—having the ability of a MIOP loan available, provided it is a viable proposal, and that's what the resolution says, and this is a vote of confidence—confidence for the community, to be able to have this as backing.

The—it's just unfortunate that this had to go on as long—the lockout had to last as long as it did until there was a closure. Many people saw it as an—inevitable that it was going to come to a closure in order for these workers to be able to get employment insurance, in order to get to the next step of being able to have someone come in and make a viable offer on this mill.

And so that's—we're through that now. We've got to the place—the mill is still, as I understand it, is still capable of being run because they've—it would require a major shutdown if it was to be abandoned entirely. So that the mill is still very capable of running. I know when I was there the workers were telling me—and I am certainly no expert on making pulp—but the workers who are experts at this tell me that they've got some very high-quality equipment in there. They're very efficient—at their cost per tonne of pulp was very competitive.

So there is lots of opportunity here. We need this in our rural communities. We need to keep these jobs to create—bring back these jobs that were there and help the local economy come back from this. We know that the worldwide economy on pulp was taking quite a beating in the last year and a half or two years but, as I said before, this just may be the time for these people to—for someone to come in and pick up this mill.

So I think this is a terrific resolution that the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) has brought forward, and it is an opportunity to show confidence in the Powerview-Pine Falls community and the people there. And given what they've gone through, just any bit of confidence in them will help their—help them get through this.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to put this on the record, that I think this is an opportunity for this Legislature to show confidence in this project and, in the larger picture, all across rural Manitoba we've got a lot of viable projects out there that could use this

type of boost. And it's always based on being a viable loan. We're not—we did kind of question when they threw out the—the government threw out the million dollars as to what that was really going to do. I'm not sure that the—on the results of that million dollars that they put out there. Obviously, it was used with the community adjustment committee, but it's—when you look at the long term, you always need to look at the long term on these projects, and the availability of a MIOP loan for them will help their community in the long run. And, hopefully, this can be a precedent for many more rural initiative projects across the province.

So with that, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I urge everyone to support this resolution.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to put a few words on the record in regards to this resolution, and to start off by acknowledging the member from Lac du Bonnet in bringing forward this resolution has done a great favour, both to this Legislature and to the community in which he represents. In fact, one could ultimately say that the member from Lac du Bonnet was very persistent in trying to ensure that members of this Legislature were aware of the situation when it first arose.

And I know that quite often that it's easy from a media perspective that when leaders, political leaders, tend to grab hold of the issue, it even heightens it that much more. I know for example, my own leader, the Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party, the Leader of the Official Opposition, had followed the lead from the member from Lac du Bonnet in terms of raising the issue. Both leaders, in particular, the Manitoba Liberal Party Leader, I know, had taken the time to go out to the area, Powerview and Pine Falls, and meet with workers and local residents to try to better understand the situation, and I think that most, if not all, members of this Legislature can sympathize with the workers and the plight of that particular community at a time in which you have a lockout of this nature occurs, has a very profound and dramatic impact and—on a community, especially on a community that is so dependent on the paper mill. Ultimately, at the end of the day, what we want to be able to see is those jobs preserved in one way or another.

When politicians go out into the communities and talk to the local residents and to the employees, what, in essence, we're attempting to do is to provide

some hope. People need hope, and whether it was the member from Lac du Bonnet or those that followed in terms of meeting with the local area residents and employees, I think that it went a long way in letting these residents and employees know that here in the Manitoba Legislature that people do care, that you don't have to live in the community to understand and be sympathetic as to what is going on.

Now we have before us, again, because of the efforts of the member from Lac du Bonnet, a resolution that once again has received support from this Legislature which makes a strong apolitical statement to the community that has been so impacted by this paper mill, that we, in fact, do care and do want to provide hope where we can. And this resolution talks about a commitment to materialize in a very real fashion and we want to see the resolution pass today, Mr. Speaker, but we want just to join with the member from Lac du Bonnet as the Manitoba Liberal Party coming forward and saying that this is a community in which we feel very passionate about, want to be able to see this community prosper into the future, as we want to see and recognize the impact that it has had on our province as a whole and look forward to a positive outcome so that the employees, their families, and the local residents will benefit today and going forward, and, indeed, all Manitobans would benefit by something positive coming out of Powerview-Pine Falls.

And with those few comments, we're prepared to see the resolution pass. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No other speakers? Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Ready.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is the resolution brought forward by the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik), Protecting Jobs in Powerview-Pine Falls.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the resolution? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, Mr. Speaker, let the record show that support for the resolution was unanimous.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, the record will show that support for the resolution was unanimous by the House.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I think if you canvass the House, you'd find there might be agreement to see the clock at 12 o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House for the Speaker to see the clock at 12, at 12 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

So the hour now being 12 noon, we will recess and we'll reconvene at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 29, 2010

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