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of the

**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**

**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report  
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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Thirty-Sixth Legislature**

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CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
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## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 4, 1998

The House met at 10 a.m.

### PRAYERS

#### Introduction of Guests

**Madam Speaker:** Prior to commencing Orders of the Day, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have this morning one hundred and twenty-seven, I believe, Grade 9 students from Charleswood Junior High under the direction of Ms. Barbara Fitzjohn. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

Also, thirty Grade 6 students from Hayes Elementary School under the direction of Mrs. Nonie Struthers. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk).

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you this morning.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

**Madam Speaker:** As previously agreed, this morning we will move to Private Members' Business for two separate one-hour private members' hours.

### PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

#### DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS— PUBLIC BILLS

##### Bill 201—The Crime Victims' Bill of Rights and Consequential Amendments Act

**Madam Speaker:** On the proposed motion of the honourable member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh), (Bill 201, The Crime Victims' Bill of Rights and Consequential Amendments Act; Loi sur la déclaration des droits des victimes d'actes criminels et modifications corrélatives), standing in the name of the honourable member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau).

Is there leave to permit the bill to remain standing? [agreed]

#### DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS— PRIVATE BILLS

##### Bill 301—An Act to Amend an Act to Incorporate the Dauphin General Hospital Foundation

**Madam Speaker:** On the proposed motion of the honourable member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers), Bill 301 (An Act to Amend an Act to Incorporate the Dauphin General Hospital Foundation; Loi modifiant la Loi constituant la Fondation de l'Hôpital général de Dauphin), standing in the name of the honourable member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer).

Stand? Is there leave to permit the bill to remain standing? [agreed]

### PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

#### Res. 37—Aboriginal Housing

**Mr. Eric Robinson (Rupertsland):** Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), that

“WHEREAS the condition of existing housing and shortages of proper housing in First Nations communities has reached crisis proportions; and

“WHEREAS the number of people afflicted with diseases, such as tuberculosis and pneumonia, amongst others is increasing in many of these communities due to overcrowding and the poor condition of many of these houses; and

“WHEREAS overcrowded conditions routinely force two or more families to live in two bedroom houses, often without running water or sewage facilities; and

“WHEREAS at the Mathias Colomb First Nation, for example, over sixteen hundred people were living in less than two hundred homes; and

“WHEREAS similarly, fewer than half of the houses in Shamattawa have indoor plumbing; and

“WHEREAS housing shortages in most reserves and in Northern Affairs communities force many residents to live in third world conditions; and

“WHEREAS the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, in documenting such conditions, has called upon the Federal and Provincial Governments to work in partnership with Aboriginal governments to develop innovative housing projects that are suitable to the local climate and workforce.

“THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Premier to consider establishing a Cabinet Committee to coordinate a housing strategy with the Federal Government and Aboriginal governments to greatly increase the quantity and quality of housing in Aboriginal communities, and

“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly be directed to send a copy of this resolution to the Federal Minister of Indian Affairs.”

**Motion presented.**

**Mr. Robinson:** Madam Speaker, I will be brief in my remarks. I believe that the resolution speaks for itself. I believe that all members are quite familiar as elected people sitting in this Chamber with the unfortunate situation that many aboriginal people have to face in the province of Manitoba with respect to the housing conditions that they have to live in.

I refer back to a matter that we raised back in March of 1997 with the community of Shamattawa where we had over 825 people living in 122 houses. Even though the situation has been somewhat addressed in that community, nevertheless this is just one example of the circumstances that aboriginal people are faced with in the province of Manitoba. It was told to us also in the community of Shamattawa that at least one person is airlifted to either Thompson or Winnipeg because of intestinal and other medical problems caused by poor water, and of course we can attest to this and revert to the poor housing conditions that many of our people are forced to live in, in many of these Manitoba communities.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, of course, made several recommendations that Ottawa

should make funding available over a 10-year period to address the shortages and conditions of existing houses and housing with the participation of the provincial and territorial governments, and that is the reason why we have proposed this resolution.

The housing crisis on many reserves is well documented. There has been a series of reports over the years indicating that both the shortage of houses and conditions facing aboriginal peoples on and off reserve situations. An example of this is the 1991 Health Effects of Housing and Community Infrastructure Report on Canadian Indian Reserves stated that much of the excess mortality and poor health status of on-reserve aboriginal people has been attributed to substandard housing and infrastructure, and also it has been documented particularly in the last few years that a variety of health problems are being associated with poor housing conditions. The rates of respiratory, skin and eye infections and a disease that has again been reintroduced to our communities and to our reality in the province of Manitoba is tuberculosis, something that we thought we had conquered some years ago.

Of course, meningitis and measles have been found to be higher in crowded households in many of our communities, and as the resolution indicates it is not uncommon sometimes where we have 30 people sharing a two-bedroom house in some of the reserves in northern Manitoba, not only in northern Manitoba but indeed throughout the province of Manitoba.

Hospital admission rates for intestinal, skin and middle-ear infections as well has become an everyday reality for every age category among the aboriginal population as well as burns, appear to be related to crowding. Crowding may be an even greater threat to mental health than to physical health itself. Crowding has been shown to contribute to interpersonal conflicts within the community. Housing might be linked to also high suicide and the homicide rates that most reserves are experiencing. The inadequate and often questionable water supply is related to many of the intestinal and skin infections amongst other health problems. Indoor health quality has also been linked to respiratory infections and problems.

These health concerns have been known for more than a decade, and no federal government has shown

any interest in doing more than tinkering with the backlog of housing that exist in many communities.

In April of 1996, the provincial government cut rates by 21 percent for single people, and the federal government, of course, followed suit on July 1 of that year. The effect upon single adults living in remote communities was extremely serious. Unemployment rates on most reserves averages well over 70 percent, but the cost of living is about twice as high as it is in the city of Winnipeg. In some communities it is not uncommon to face a situation where people are experiencing 95 percent unemployment.

\* (1010)

Under pressure, the federal government agreed to keep the millions they saved from the welfare cuts in Manitoba and put it towards housing rather than keeping it in Ottawa. However, we have all seen that the rate of progress actually in improving housing conditions has been very minimal. The Sayisi Dene, for example, at Tadoule Lake were not able to get any housing material shipped to their community in 1997 due to some red tape that was experienced.

This year the mild weather blocked the construction of a winter road. As a result, once again, no construction materials were able to be sent to the community as of this date. Shipping by air is costly, so that the number of units would be cut in half. Attempts to have the situation declared a disaster, so that the shipping costs would be covered, have not been successful as of the moment. Many other communities from Shamattawa to Moose Lake and Gods River, Red Sucker Lake, virtually all the reserves in Manitoba, have had similar problems getting through bureaucratic red tape to get to the limited construction materials that were committed. In no case does the amount of construction match the past needs. Housing budgets at best reflect an attempt to tinker with the problems.

On the 10th and 11th of December, 1997, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak held a special conference on First Nations housing. Among the issues raised, there was an agreement between Manitoba and Indian Affairs concerning shelter allowance. The provincial policy of paying shelter allowance on the basis of bedrooms, not

occupants, created a problem that still exists. CMHC uses the same shelter allowance rules as the province; as a result, tenants on and off reserves are unable to access CMHC housing or assistance leading to short-falls when First Nations attempt to construct rental housing projects on reserves.

Now, coming up very shortly on the 11th, 12th and 13th, there is going to be an Assembly of First Nations chiefs committee meeting at the Opaskwayak Cree Nation to deal with the very issue of housing. Our AFN National Chief Phil Fontaine will be addressing the conference along with the AMC Grand Chief Rod Bushie and the MKO Grand Chief Francis Flett. Also, Chief Phillip Buck of Moose Lake, who like many others, is also concerned about the issue of housing, will also be addressing the issue at that special meeting that has been called for by the Assembly of First Nations.

Now let me revert back, before I conclude, Madam Speaker, to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples which was released in November of 1996. The First Minister of this province promised to strike up a cabinet committee to review recommendations. He may have done that, but we are not aware of it on this side of the House, to review the recommendations. The province has a role to play in improving housing for First Nations in this province. Better housing conditions would involve a great deal of economic activity that would benefit the provincial economy overall. It would also cut health care costs and improve the quality of life significantly for thousands of Manitobans.

Repeated attempts by this government to suggest that aboriginal people do not count except for federal transfers of revenue cannot be tolerated any longer. A plan of action to deal with the housing crisis is a matter that deserves attention now as a priority. So I am asking that members support this resolution, because this government indeed can show leadership in this Legislature by agreeing to work in partnership with First Nations and our national government to address this very vital issue. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. David Newman (Minister responsible for Native Affairs):** Madam Speaker, I want to

congratulate the member, the honourable member for Rupertsland, for bringing this particular issue to this House. It is an issue which needs to be discussed; it is an issue which needs action, and it is an issue which needs action as quickly as we can possibly mobilize it in ways that are going to bring meaningful, measurable results.

In responding to the points raised, I want to begin by saying that we have no basic disagreement with the message. As always, sometimes when there is an effort to get a particular focus which has some political aspects to it, it makes it impossible for me as a member of this side of the House to agree with the resolution as written. We have struggles trying to amend resolutions. But I want to participate in a meaningful way in the discussion on this issue with a view to coming to a resolve as to how we might work together, as all honourable members of this House wish to, from time to time, on issues that override, are larger than partisan politics.

It is very interesting to see, Madam Speaker, I believe, how through the past over 125 years the policies relating to aboriginal people and indeed legislation like the Indian Act have caused probably far more harm than good to the aboriginal people in the province of Manitoba. There is an increasing, I think, understanding of that by all Manitobans, but there is a lot more work to be done in educating the general public about the challenges faced by an aboriginal citizen, aboriginal Manitoba citizen. I think it is very helpful to look through their eyes and through their hearts, their emotions, into the morass of complex jurisdictional problems that confront them at every turn when they try and achieve progress on something as fundamental as housing.

It starts, of course, with the chief and council, with the, in effect, local form of government closest to them. It is not as simple, like most of us in this House, as deciding we are going to buy a lot, or we are going to rent a piece of property, we are going to buy a lot, we are going to build a house, or we are going to buy another house and own the property—it just is not that simple. You are immediately into a political process when you want a house. This does not just apply on reserve; it is an issue that applies in a Northern Affairs community, an unincorporated community where a

substantial amount of Crown land is there and a lot of housing is on Crown land or is owned by a body like CMHC or Manitoba Housing through the rural and northern housing.

We have created a culture of dependency on bureaucracies, people that manage that kind of housing, and in many cases in political ways. We have created a culture of dependency on that system. And with that culture of dependency also goes, Madam Speaker, a lack of, sometimes, control to a great extent over one's own destiny. That means control over even one's capacities, freedom and capacity to be healthy, freedom and capacity to get an appropriate education, freedom and capacity to be effective parents. Housing is in many cases, of course, the immediate environment within which families relate, families jell and values are instilled.

So there is nothing but impediments through the first level compared to the way we go about fulfilling our own destiny, as in the case of most citizens in this province. Then you move beyond the local community, and then you embark on determining whether or not it is the federal government or the provincial government that is responsible, and if so, what agency is responsible. The bureaucracy that runs—a body like CMHC is a national organization run out of offices outside this province. They have regional representatives, sure, but they are governed by policies and budgets that dictate where CMHC will go and what sort of housing they will develop. They also are the ones that determine whether it will be public housing for rent, creating a tenant culture, or whether it will be for private ownership and therefore creating a private ownership kind of culture, the foundation of enterprise kind of culture.

In relation to some of the different communities, they relate to provincially owned housing or through an agency of the provincial government, again, another bureaucracy. In some cases, there have been delegations. There have been delegations of managing properties to several of the northern communities, and that has been done through the auspices of CMHC, the federal agency. There has been a delegation of some of the rural and native housing to the Manitoba Metis Federation, and they manage, but, again, it is another outside bureaucracy that is large that may or may not be

servicing the needs of the individual human beings and families who want to live in those houses.

Walking through this morass, when you decide whether you want to make an improvement or make a repair, make an investment and getting results, getting results that are tailored to your own individual needs is of course difficult and many times unpleasant. Many times you just give up because you cannot individually overcome policies which are of a universal nature and not custom-tailored for your needs.

So that is the context within which we have a problem. The challenge is to overcome all of those barriers, local, and the local, as I say, is often not just the local chief and council, the local mayor and council. It can also be the broader political organizations. It can be AMC, it can be MMF, it can be AFN. The goal is to make them part of the solution, not part of the problem. Similarly, the provincial government and through its agencies, the goal is to make the provincial government part of the solution rather than part of the problem, and the same with the federal government and bodies like CMHC.

\* (1020)

So how do we do that? Well, the approach that was taken by this minister and this government and me, as an individual member of this House who is acting absolutely in accordance with his own conscience and his own independent thought on this issue, has been to try and mobilize, try and synergize, try and break down the barriers between those kinds of organizations and governments which have been barriers to solutions rather than as a means to a happy ending.

The fundamental approach that was taken by myself when I went to Quebec City to discuss socioeconomic issues and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and aboriginal youth issues and economic development on May 20, when ministers of Native Affairs from across the country and the federal Minister Jane Stewart and federal Minister Ralph Goodale and the territorial representatives got together, the approach taken was to try and come up with a comprehensive approach to dealing with issues like housing.

Madam Speaker, I was very proud that the way we participated in that event, trying to practice what I am

speaking to today, was that we had a delegation of eight members representing Manitoba to this ministers' meeting and we were the only jurisdiction represented there who had by far the majority of our delegation being not just aboriginal people but being non-governmental, people who were not part of our government, as representatives of Manitoba aboriginal people.

We had David Chartrand, the president of the Manitoba Metis Federation. We had Chief Ron Evans of Norway House. We had Garry McLean, the executive assistant to Grand Chief Bushie. We had Mary Richard, the co-chair of the North Main Task Force and president of the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg. We had Joe Guy Wood of the AMC, who was there. Harvey Bostrom, of course, the director of the Native Affairs Secretariat, part of the department I represent as minister, was there.

We are very pleased at the conference news release. The communique that emerged made the following points which I want to put on the record: Demographics demand that all ministers and aboriginal leaders work together to address the urgent challenges facing aboriginal youth, and begin the development of a national aboriginal youth strategy. Participants confirmed the importance of accelerated measures to facilitate social and economic development for aboriginal communities and efforts to enhance aboriginal self-reliance.

Madam Speaker, these points sum up Manitoba's approach and practice respecting aboriginal issues and the importance we attach to the issues raised in Quebec City. One of those issues was housing for aboriginal people. At Quebec, I believe our Manitoba delegation helped to demonstrate to the rest of Canada that the development and implementation of solutions for aboriginal issues requires a willingness to look beyond jurisdictional boundaries and to work with other levels of government and aboriginal organizations.

Manitoba, I believe, has succeeded in establishing good working relationships with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Manitoba Keewatnowe Okimakinak, the MMF and the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg. We have a number of initiatives underway with many government, aboriginal and business partners with a variety of objectives in the health, social service, child

welfare, education and training, career, business development, access, recreation, justice and early childhood development fields, to name only some.

We believe housing is a critical issue that could and should be approached co-operatively and multilaterally. We recognize that improving the housing of northern Manitobans is a shared responsibility between the federal government, Manitoba and the residents of northern communities. Our role and responsibility for managing and operating housing in northern Manitoba may change significantly. It is also clear, however, that Ottawa has a major and continuing role in the co-operative development of housing strategies for meeting the needs of all Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, as the honourable member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) knows, we have no jurisdiction over housing on First Nations reserves. However, I would like to look for a few moments at the housing situation in off-reserve northern Manitoba communities.

The need for housing in the North, particularly in non-Status and Status aboriginal communities, is a priority that residents of those communities reiterate regularly. This need relates to both construction of new houses and rehabilitation of existing houses. In order to improve conditions overall in northern and aboriginal communities, proper housing will be an essential component in the process of ensuring sustainable healthy and self-reliant communities in the North and for securing an adequate infrastructure for economic development.

Madam Speaker, in closing, my time being up, I just want again to congratulate the member for Rupertsland for bringing this to the floor of the Legislature, and I welcome listening to the continuing debate on this resolution. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased that my colleague the member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) brought this resolution forward because it is a great need that we have that we see day in and day out and we have seen for years. It is slowly improving, but there still is a great deal that has to be done. I am encouraged when I heard the Minister of Northern Affairs talk about the shared responsibility

of federal, provincial and the aboriginal leaders and the organizations, and if the minister is willing to meet and work with the aboriginal communities and the aboriginal leadership, and also with the federal government, and encourage the federal government to do something about the inadequate housing and the living conditions that a lot of our aboriginal friends and families are living under. All you have to do is visit some of these communities on a regular basis especially the remote communities, for example, Island Lake area, Shamattawa, Tadoule Lake. You will see, because of the cost of housing in those communities related to transportation, increased costs that not a lot of homes are able to be built to accommodate all the families.

It is not a rare sight, like my colleague from Rupertsland was saying, to see 30 people in a small two-bedroom house. When you have two, three families sharing one home, it is pretty hard to maintain a real family unit. I am sure that we all appreciate that. We all understand that, and we would just imagine how we would feel with our immediate families if we constantly had two or three families sharing our same household on an everyday basis, whether it is sitting down to eat or trying to use the bathroom to wash or whatever.

\* (1030)

In a lot of those communities, when we talk about inadequate housing, one of the major problems is, like I mentioned earlier, the high cost of transportation, but also a lot of the houses that were built in the past by outside contractors were designed and built to meet southern standards. So when that design and the standard to meet the south tried to be implemented in extreme cold northern communities, it just did not work, because there was not enough insulation, and you did not have your proper windows in some of the houses. What you had was you would have leaks coming in, you would have frost build up in the walls, and then you started to have rot. That is why a lot of the homes do not last very long.

But I am very encouraged to see that a lot of the communities now take the ownership and try to build the houses on their own. So, when I hear the minister talking about shared co-operation, I would like to remind him that there was an apprenticeship program



and a training program that was designed to meet the northern needs through the Limestone training. That was purposely done to increase trades people in northern Manitoba, who hopefully would go back and work in their own communities to help meet those needs. If you go around the North, you will run into some of the individuals who now have their trades papers and are qualified in carpentry, electrical, plumbing; but there are so few. If the government would bring forward a program which the training is under provincial jurisdiction and enhance training and apprenticeship programs for northern people, then you will see where a lot of people building their own homes will be able to hopefully design and build according to northern standards. Because if you take a community in Tadoule Lake, even where I grew up in Churchill, you have to have extra insulation. You need different windows, and it is a whole different structure, but if you try to build to the southern standard, those homes are very, very, very cold.

So, if the government would even look at that—because I know with the possibility of working together with the provincial government, the federal government and aboriginal leaders, there would be a great interest in training and encouraging apprenticeship programs to deal with buildings and entrepreneur programs in a lot of the northern communities. For example, if you look at Shamattawa, the only way to get material in there is through the winter road because trying to fly it in is just too costly. When my colleague was talking about the Sayisi Dene and trying to get their building products to Tadoule Lake, they could not get them through because of the winter road, and now they are going to lose one year and they are going to be backlogged in constructing those homes. That will put them behind one year, but next year, hopefully, if they can get all the materials through and make up those homes, we will see an increase.

But the minister is absolutely right. One level of government cannot do it. The federal government alone cannot do it; the provincial government alone cannot do it; and the aboriginal leadership and the organizations that we have in place that we have elected to represent and speak out and push forward positive programs for the aboriginal people in Manitoba cannot do it alone. It has to be a commitment, a strong

commitment and a real belief that, yes, we can do it if we work together and it has to be shared.

No one in Canada, I think, would like to see the housing conditions and living conditions that the aboriginal people have to live under in the 1990s. That was the way it was done years ago, but we have to progress ahead. I am encouraged when I hear the minister speak about shared responsibilities and shared commitment. What I heard was the willingness to move forward, not to go backwards, but the willingness to move forward. It is easy to say, well, we cannot do it because it is a federal responsibility. The federal government says, well, we cannot do it because it is a provincial responsibility. The aboriginal leadership says, well, we cannot do it because we do not have the funds. That is the easy way out, but the thing to do is what the minister said he is willing to do, to work together to say: okay, here are the barriers; how can we overcome these barriers for the betterment of aboriginal people in Manitoba? For instance, the province says it has no jurisdiction to put money in for building materials and stuff like that, but the provincial government, for example, could put dollars in for training and apprenticeship programs to build the skills that are needed in those communities. So there are always ways of getting around barriers, and I hope that will happen.

We are in 1998, and a lot of the homes that are in these communities have no sewer and water, still do not have sewer and water. If you have 30 people sharing one household, could you imagine the inability even to have a bath? You have no running water to turn taps on, which we take for granted. We just jump in the shower, and we have our shower or we have a bath any time we want. But there it has to be a planned ordeal. I remember that, when I was growing up in Churchill, there were 12 children in our family, and at any one time—well, I remember anyway, there were at least five to six of us. We used to have a round tub that we all had our little bath in. I am sure other members in this Chamber have had to do that; it is not unique to me. I remember lining up, one of five or six children—later on it was seven, then it was eight. It was from the oldest to the youngest, and we all lined up. We had to melt snow, we melted ice. We warmed the water on our old wood cookstove, and we had our bath. If you were last, it was not the cleanest

water in the world, because you could not change it. We did not change it very often.

But that is the example that I hope that each member in this Chamber will put in their minds and see. I am talking about five to seven children having to do that, melting snow, melting ice and trying to boil enough water to wash all of us. Now, imagine trying to deal with that on a continual basis with 25 to 30 people in one household. It boggles me, yet that is happening in 1998.

We are not a Third World country. We all believe in sharing and giving of what we have. So why should one community have to live under those conditions? No, it does not have to be that way. We have to find solutions to problems to make people's lives easier and better for all the individuals. I really believe that a big key to that will be in the whole training, education and apprenticeship programs, because when you have qualified people in your own home communities doing the work and employment opportunities, then you will see the standards of houses will be greatly increased and more money coming into the communities for other things. So you will see a stimulation.

\* (1040)

You see, like, what is happening now is a lot of the aboriginal community and a lot of the aboriginal people are starting to get the support and get the assistance in order to move ahead into employment opportunities and even business opportunities. There is going to be a graduation tomorrow at the Aboriginal Centre for aboriginal entrepreneurs. I see that as a tremendous positive start. If you look at some of the individuals graduating and what their goal is at the end, they vary from a Lucky Dollar store to a home daycare centre to promoting aboriginal arts and crafts, and on and on.

That is encouraging. That is stimulating to me, because we can do it. It is not because of the funding and commitment of just the federal government or the commitment and funding of just the provincial government or the commitment and support and funding from the aboriginal organizations. That is an example of all three governing bodies getting together and saying what can we do. That is what we have to do.

So I am really pleased that my colleague brought this forward, and I hope that good things will come out, because a lot of the communities, it is not surprising to see 90 percent, 95 percent of the people unemployed. If you have employment opportunities, you are going to have people who are going to be building their own homes. I am talking about out of the reserves but in Northern Affairs communities, even in Winnipeg, because our housing conditions in Winnipeg for aboriginal people I do not feel are adequate. I visit a lot of those homes, and a lot of the individuals are having to live under conditions of slum landlords, but the individuals who get the training opportunities, get into their own business, get employment, will start purchasing their own homes. Now, would that not be nice to see, more aboriginal-owned homes in our great city? That will mean more pride and upkeep of those homes, and it will benefit all the families, but it will benefit us as a province because we will have individuals paying taxes to help us to bring more programs to help everybody.

So I thank my colleague for bringing this resolution forward, and I hope that he gets the support of all members of this Chamber. Thank you.

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** Madam Speaker, it is significant to me that the first private member's resolution that I am speaking to as a member of the Legislative Assembly is one about which I feel very strongly. Ensuring that our aboriginal communities are living under healthy and sustainable conditions has been an important element of my previous careers as both a nurse and a children's advocate. Therefore, I am pleased to be able to continue to pursue this course in my new career here in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

Let me begin by stating that I support the basic tenets of this resolution and that I do not have any disagreements with the intent of the resolution. Along with the Minister of Native Affairs (Mr. Newman), I believe that adequate housing is a basic requirement of all families. In fact, as a nurse, I had two weeks of training on a reserve, and I am familiar with the housing needs of aboriginal people. We need to work together with the federal government and all Manitoba aboriginal groups to improve aboriginal housing throughout Manitoba,

ensuring a specific focus is maintained on Manitoba's remote northern communities.

The members who have spoken to this resolution today have all identified the need for the co-ordination of a new strategy with the federal government and aboriginal governments for improved housing in Manitoba for non-Status and Status aboriginal communities. Moreover, the residents of these communities themselves consider the need for more adequate housing as a priority to maintaining a good quality of life.

Ensuring that all of our aboriginal families have adequate housing will serve as an essential element to the improvement of the health and welfare of all residents of these communities. We need to continue to lobby the federal government to meet its commitment to provide adequate housing to First Nations people on reserves, especially right here in Manitoba. Without adequate housing, it is hard to maintain good levels of health, as I learned first-hand during my many years as a nurse. Moreover, studies show that individuals who are receiving the basic necessities of life are more apt to focus on other areas of their lives, such as maintaining levels of education and pursuing fulfilling employment opportunities.

Madam Speaker, as all members of the House have heard today, our government is committed to assisting our northern communities to become more self-reliant. This means we have to join together with all levels of government to provide a more acceptable standard of living to aboriginal communities throughout Manitoba. In order to develop healthy communities, we need to recognize the interdependence of social and economic conditions in a community, the physical health of community residents, the levels of education obtained by members of each community and the physical environment in which residents live. All of these factors combined contribute to a community's quality of life. We are aware that, in northern Manitoba especially, housing is an essential component in securing sustainable and healthy communities.

We know that a positive by-product of healthy sustainable communities are communities which are prosperous and therefore are conducive to the advancement of the economy. There are steps that the

government can take in partnership with aboriginal groups across Manitoba and the federal government to improve housing in Manitoba's aboriginal communities. I would suggest that a primary step would be to establish priorities among and within the communities which are in need of such assistance. Once the levels of need have been assessed, resources from local, federal and provincial sources would have to be identified. Common sense dictates that a large percentage of local involvement would be sought in the construction and upkeep of any homes built under the program. I imagine that something similar to the programs run by the Habitat for Humanity or the work of the Mennonite Central Committee could be applicable to our northern communities in need of more adequate housing.

Naturally, before any program is agreed upon and is in place, consultations would have to take place not only with the departments of Native Affairs and Manitoba Housing but also with the Department of Energy and Manitoba Hydro. It would be vital to ensure that the cost of this housing would be kept as reasonable as possible for future owners. Moreover, consultations with Manitoba's aboriginal people are a necessary prerequisite to any such program being implemented.

Our end goal is to improve housing for residents of northern communities, both Status and non-Status aboriginals. By encouraging pride in ownership and imparting the responsibilities of housing maintenance, hopefully a heightened sense of satisfaction can be created for members of these communities. People who have pride in their communities and feel a sense of ownership tend to be healthier, more active people who possess a very strong sense of self-worth.

I have spent the last three years working closely with members of the aboriginal community. I recently had the opportunity of spending a few days in The Pas, Manitoba. Much of the time I spent there was with aboriginal children during school time and with members of the aboriginal community in the evenings. My trip there allowed me to see the effectiveness of community commitment and partnership, which has strengthened the development of that aboriginal community.

I have witnessed the resilience and the tenacity of aboriginal colleagues who happen to be single mothers to work hard, to strive diligently and to succeed in providing for their children. Their persistent endeavours to improve their lives, not only of their own children but also for many members of their community, encourage me to strongly urge the federal government to continue to improve its relationship with our First Nations people.

Another spin-off of implementing a project similar to Habitat for Humanity would be the involvement of the community in the construction of new housing units, thereby creating a new generation of employment for the local economy. Moreover, individuals involved in the construction phase would be gaining valuable skills that could be used for future employment.

Madam Speaker, we want all Manitobans to enjoy a good quality of life. We need to help people to help themselves. By encouraging projects similar to Habitat for Humanity's housing starts, we would be engaging the communities in creating a better quality of life for themselves.

I believe that by helping people to help themselves we are fostering a sense of self-reliance which in turn generates healthier communities.

Recently I had the opportunity to attend the unveiling of the plans for Neeginan. The word "Neeginan" is Cree for "our place," and it embodies the spirit of our aboriginal people making a place for themselves at the centre of Winnipeg. This aboriginal centre will include a roundhouse, a multipurpose centre for young people, an art gallery, a sweat lodge, a fabulous park, and an outdoor market. Neeginan is the perfect example of our aboriginal community joining together to carve out a future for themselves at the heart of Winnipeg. Neeginan will contribute not only to the well-being of our aboriginal peoples but also to the betterment of the city of Winnipeg as it helps to revitalize the Main Street district. It is projects such as Neeginan which help contribute to the health and well-being of a community.

Madam Speaker, when considering a resolution encouraging the development of new housing strategy, it is important that we also consider the impact that this will have on children in Manitoba. We know that a

child's social and economic environment as well as their physical environment can have an impact on their health and their overall development.

\* (1050)

All of the determinants of a child's health and well-being are intertwined. We cannot consider one without also considering the others. That is why, in many discussions of developing a new strategy for northern housing, I encourage full participation of the members of the communities in question.

They know what their children need, which cannot be overlooked. Our children really are our greatest resource for the future. We need to equip them with the skills and the knowledge to thrive in today's ever changing global economy. I have no doubt that any new northern housing strategy would also take into account what benefits there may be for the children of the communities in question.

It is important that our children have healthy environments in which to grow and learn. I do indeed support a resolution that encourages and pursues this goal.

As I have already alluded, this cannot be done alone. The co-operation of the federal government and Manitoba's aboriginal groups will be required to develop a new strategy to construct more housing in aboriginal communities and to improve existing housing in these communities. I am hopeful that, as the federal government works to mend and improve its relationship with the aboriginal people of Canada, this project will also find its way to the agenda.

We are seeing the co-operation of aboriginal groups, business leaders and provincial leaders in several sectors of government, but especially in areas of economic development. For instance, at this year's Rural Forum, northern community and business leaders, northern youth, First Nations leaders, aboriginal organizations and government representatives met to identify long-term strategies and short-term grassroots actions to support business and youth development in our northern and aboriginal communities.

I am pleased, Madam Speaker, that co-operation is taking place among the provincial and federal levels of government. Just last month, provincial and federal aboriginal and government leaders met in Quebec to discuss issues of importance to Canada's First Nations people. Representing Manitoba were David Chartrand, president of the Manitoba Metis Federation, Chief Ron Evans, Gary McLean, executive assistant to Grand Chief Bushie, Mary Richard, co-chair of the North Main Task Force and president of the Manitoba Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, Joe Guy Wood of the AMC.

The provincial aboriginal leaders have a number of initiatives underway with many government and business partners. These initiatives include a variety of important objectives in the health, social service, child welfare, education and training, business development, justice and childhood development, to name only a few.

The basic agreement reached at the Quebec conference was that a comprehensive approach to these issues and initiatives would, in fact, be best. Such an approach assumes that governments can overlook their differences with respect to their policy perspectives and work together to help our First Nations people find effective solutions. My understanding is that the participants at the meeting in Quebec City are ready to embark on a new course for federal, provincial, territorial relations with aboriginal people.

Madam Speaker, members opposite are aware that the provincial government does not have jurisdiction over housing on First Nations reserves. Nonetheless, we can encourage the federal government to try to find a comprehensive, effective way to develop healthy sustainable housing for Manitoba's aboriginal communities. I must, however, stress that this would have to be done in complete consultation with members of the Manitoba Status and non-Status aboriginal groups.

Manitoba is committed to assisting northern communities to become healthy, self-reliant and sustainable for future generations by helping to provide an acceptable standard of living to residents. In order to meet this end, we must continue to focus on shared and growing economic prosperity as well as the

provision of essential services such as health, education and support to families.

I am pleased, along with my colleagues on this side of the House, to support Resolution 37. I, too, urge the federal government to increase the quality and quantity of housing in aboriginal communities across Manitoba. Thank you.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster):** Madam Speaker, I did want to just say a few words with respect to this resolution. It is a very positive resolution. I know, no doubt, like many other members of the Chamber, they have had the opportunity to travel to some of the different reserves that are out there. I was quite shocked and dismayed with the types of housing conditions that I had seen when I had the opportunity to go out to reserves. I think that there is a role for us to assist where we can, and what the resolution is asking for seems to be a very responsible approach in trying to address a very important issue to so many. Housing is one of those basic rights that are necessary in today's society, and what we can do to assist in improving housing conditions, I think, can and should be acted upon.

What the member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) is, in essence, asking for is for the government to take the initiative in forming a working group, if you like, of cabinet members to then go to Ottawa, working with the aboriginal leaders in trying to address the issue.

It has been a couple of years since I have actually been on one of the reserves, Madam Speaker, but I am surprised to the degree that this problem has persisted and somewhat disappointed. One would like to think that an issue of this seriousness could have been dealt with, and I do not think it is any one group or level of government that is fully to blame. I think that we all have to take responsibility and take the types of actions that are necessary in order to work together, as the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickey) points out, to improve a very serious situation that is having many negative impacts.

The member for Rupertsland makes reference to the different types of diseases that are caused as a result. Many Manitobans would be so surprised to find out the lack of indoor plumbing in many of the homes that are

out there, Madam Speaker, for we take it for granted far too often, and the resolution appears to be a step in the right direction.

\* (1100)

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) will have 12 minutes remaining. As previously agreed, we will now move to the second hour of Private Members' Business, Resolution 38.

### Res. 38—Flood of 1997

**Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition):** I move, seconded by the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), that

“WHEREAS the Flood of '97 was Manitoba's biggest flood on record affecting 28,000 Manitoba residents; and

“WHEREAS the volunteer efforts of Manitobans, the support from the Canadian Army, the dedication of service agencies and the generosity of Canadians from coast to coast exemplified the principles of cooperation and good will throughout the flood crisis; and

“WHEREAS since April of 1997 the Provincial Government has been called upon to waive the deductible, prepare advance payments, look at replacement costs for essential items such as furnaces, deal with Crop Insurance and livestock issues and do everything possible to ensure that flood victims would get timely assistance to rebuild their lives; and

“WHEREAS the Premier responded that residents of the Red River Valley had to take some responsibility for living on a flood plain; and

“WHEREAS on three occasions since June of 1997, flood victims came to the Legislature asking to meet with the Premier to address issues including water management, assessment errors, delays in claim settlement, lost files, the costs of depreciation and deductibles, lack of information on flood proofing, and the general frustration and stress they were experiencing following the flood; and

“WHEREAS the provincial government waited until late October to change policies on deductibility and depreciation; and

“WHEREAS 200 flood victims will be out of their homes for the winter unlike the 1950 flood where timely compensation packages saw flood victims back in their homes by October of that same year; and

“WHEREAS farmers continue to lose income because of delays in assistance.

“THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Provincial Government to consider immediately settling all flood claims including reviewing affordability of the flood proofing program for individuals and families in the Red River Valley; and

“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Assembly condemn the Premier for his statement that residents of the Red River Valley had to take responsibility for living on a flood plain as not in keeping with the community spirit shown by Manitobans during the 1997 flood crisis; and

“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Assembly urge the Premier to meet directly with flood victims to hear and learn from their experiences; and

“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Assembly urge the Provincial Government to consider presenting to this Assembly a comprehensive water management plan and Disaster Assistance package that would mitigate the plight experienced by this year's flood victims in the event of future flooding.”

### Motion presented.

**Mr. Doer:** I thank the Assembly for the opportunity to put these issues before us today.

Madam Speaker, we believe that the flood and the action of the government is a very important issue for all of us in terms of the values we hold as a community, the spirit of co-operation we have as a community, and the breakdowns we have had as a community in terms of the provincial government and its action with flood victims.

Madam Speaker, you will recall, and members of this Assembly will recall, that we in this Chamber together worked in a co-operative way during the crisis. I can recall the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau) and the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh), among many others, working to co-ordinate the efforts to prevent the flood. I would say that, on most measures that the government took to prevent the flood, we worked in a co-operative way with the government because we thought there was no such thing as opposition members in a time of crisis and disaster. There was only one Legislature with one party, and that was all of us working together on behalf of our neighbours and our communities to prevent as much as possible the damage that took place eventually in this flood and did not take place as a result of other action that was taken on behalf of citizens.

Madam Speaker, we have saluted in this Chamber the efforts of Duff Roblin last year and the foresight of other governments, the Schreyer government to continue the implementation of the Shellmouth Dam and the Pawley government to extend the diking programs that were initiated after the '79 flood of the Lyon government. The New Democratic Party did vote for the floodway. It moved an amendment on the expropriation of land, but did vote for the floodway, unlike members of the Liberal Party, who, at the time, voted against the floodway expenditure and the capital decisions for the floodway.

Madam Speaker, in our co-operative way, we had also proposed a year ago—over a year ago, we had identified a number of deficiencies in the compensation package that was going to be available for flood victims well before we knew how many flood victims they were, and we had put forward a number of positive proposals that virtually amended the manual that was printed by the government and ready for distribution on April 1 of 1997. We acted in a very, very responsible way because we had, during the time of the crisis, not only co-operated with the government to cancel votes and to work in a way that could get us out in our communities, we also worked in a way that evaluated what was going on across the country, the \$30,000 limit, the issues of the federal government and what it would compensate.

We said, for example, that the \$30,000 limit was no longer a policy in most provinces in Canada, and that in

fact the federal government would be willing to go to a much higher limit, whether it was in the Saguenay region or the Alberta disasters. We put forward as a positive alternative the lifting of that limit because we knew and we could anticipate that the damage that would be incurred by people and individuals would be much higher than that, and the cost to rebuild their lives would be much higher. The concept of community pooling in a national way would allow us on a national basis to change those policies.

We also raised at that time the situation of deductibility and depreciation. We pointed out that the kind of latitude that was available to the government's former Disaster Assistance Board was being restricted by the new policies that were printed and put in a manual dealing with the strict interpretation of deductibility and depreciation. I have to say, when we raised those issues in the Chamber last year, on two occasions the minister responsible for this program said that the door was open to looking at these issues. I remember twice that the minister said the door is open, and my dispute is not with the minister responsible who probably will today defend the government's action. My concern is with the Premier who then on two separate occasions closed the door to those flood victims, closed the door that the minister had opened up generously and basically slammed it in the faces of the flood victims regrettably after the flood damage had been incurred.

Now, we thought the decisions the government made at the time of the flood, the Brunkild dike, they built it in four days, was the appropriate decision. The government should have and did try to put devices into place that would protect the greatest number of people that were at risk, but that also, that the kind of attitude, the kind of can-do attitude to prevent flooding should have been the can-do attitude to deal with the flood victims that were left behind.

How come in Alberta after a disaster they can have claims, people have the authorization and the authority to settle disaster claims immediately? If there is a discrepancy between the paperwork and the administrative considerations and the technical details, they will go back on the some 5 percent where there is a difficulty rather than having the kind of Napoleonic Code of victims' assistance here in Manitoba where you

are guilty until proven innocent as opposed to the attitude that you are innocent victims until you are proven that you have abused the guidelines, the few in the minority that will, the numbers of people that will be in the minority. The whole attitude of the program should in our view have been changed and administered differently.

Now, again, I know the minister responsible is not responsible for what happened last year, because what happened last year was a decision made by Treasury Board and the Premier and the Minister of Finance. Mr. Jules Benson, the Finance minister and the Premier, who seem to make all the decisions in government, and they wrongly, in my view, took the Disaster Assistance Board of Manitoba and the Emergency Measures of Manitoba and squashed it into one body prior to this last flood. We lost our capacity to have people like Sid Reimer, who had expertise in disaster assistance, working directly for the provincial government putting into place disaster assistance plans for victims. At the same time, EMO, which has the expertise to prevent disasters, was working as hard as they could to prevent the disasters.

\* (1110)

This was not the minister responsible who did this, again, the minister who generously tried to open the door twice. It is the Premier who slammed the door and his henchmen in the Treasury Board that made an ideological decision, a very narrow decision, in my view, a very shortsighted decision, in our view, and of course then the minister had to carry the responsibility, but he did not have the authority to make the decisions that were made. It was the Premier and it was the Minister of Finance and the secretary to the Treasury Board, Mr. Jules Benson, that were the people who showed shortsighted thinking and, unfortunately, the 28,000 people had to then pay the price.

Now, this view and this value system was displayed in this Legislature and outside in the hallway by the Premier when he said that people that choose to live outside of the flood protection area must bear the responsibility for the damages that were incurred.

Well, Madam Speaker, does he want every farmer in the Red River Valley to move to Linden Woods? Does

he understand that you cannot build protective dikes around every agricultural location? Talk about Perimeter vision, I have never heard a member in this House display such urban arrogance towards people living outside of the floodway and the Perimeter Highway as I did when the Premier made that statement in the cavalier way he did to the people that lived outside and south of the floodway.

Can you imagine if Duff Roblin had taken the same view and this Legislature had taken the same view, when they were getting ready to build the floodway? Can you imagine if the fundamental theory was that we all chose to live in a flood plain?—which the majority of Manitobans have, whether you live in the Red River Valley or the Assiniboine Valley or adjacent to the Shellmouth Dam or the Swan River Valley. We have all chosen to live in a flood valley of one form or another. Can you imagine if our predecessors had taken the same callous, narrow, Darwinian, ideological view as the Premier?

To say the people chose to move out of the flood protection areas to get a “savings of taxes,” this is the same government that subsidizes much of the Capital Region at an alarming rate. When one considers that people in Ste. Agathe have lived there literally for decades, years and years and years, three and four generations; in fact, some of these people are the first settlers after our aboriginal people had settled our valley and our communities some six to 8,000 years ago in this Red River Valley area.

So, Madam Speaker, I have asked the Premier on a number of occasions to apologize. He was wrong. He was wrong to those flood victims to say that they chose to live in a flood plain, particularly when you know that the government cut Highway 301, the government cut the Avonlea Road, the government built the Brunkild dike. I mean, Madam Speaker, God may have created the water moving to the north, but man did create some of the flows of the water moving to the east. Ste. Agathe was not flooded from the riverside. It was flooded from the protective road cut area on the other side.

A lot of these issues of who is at fault would have been, in my view, not an issue of debate if we had a no-fault approach to rebuilding the lives and rebuilding the



communities that were flooded and rebuilding the situations that people were in. Why do we have to wait until October for us to change a simple policy like the depreciation on furnaces? We told you last April that if you depreciate a furnace over five years, an individual would be left with \$300 or \$400 to replace a furnace that costs between \$1,500 and \$2,000 to replace. You cannot have a situation—the Premier said, oh, these are items like rugs, you know, you have depreciation. Well, a furnace in Manitoba is not like a rug. I am sorry. It is an essential item. You cannot go through the winter without a furnace. You can go through the winter perhaps without a rug, but you cannot go through a winter without a furnace. I do not understand what planet the Premier was on except the stubborn planet and the vicious planet when he basically said you choose to live in a flood zone and you therefore have to bear the consequences.

Madam Speaker, a lot of these issues would have been dealt with if we had taken an approach of saying we worked as a community to prevent the flood. We did a good job in co-operating as a total community aided by the country. To rebuild the lives of people who are victims of the flood, we will again work as a community with the single objective, just like the building of the Brunkild dike, built it in four days to protect the city. I say the Premier could have provided the same authority, the same leadership, the same direction by saying people whose lives have been destroyed by the flood, the government's responsibility, and we as a community, we will rebuild their lives and allow people to rebuild their lives with certainty, with dignity, and with the expeditious kind of decision making that would allow people to make decisions in June of last year and July of last year, rather than having to wait till October to have a change and November to have another change, and January, people were not able to get back in their homes. A year after the flood, we still did not have a situation where every flood victim knew exactly where they stood. With all this technology and with all this national will to help Manitoba, why did we still have people out of their homes last winter when in 1950 everybody was back in their homes?

I say, Madam Speaker, that we did well to co-operate together to prevent the flood. I have said to the Premier (Mr. Filmon) he has made the right decisions to prevent

the flood. In many of the decisions he has made, I have supported him, but I wish, when the minister responsible for this issue had opened the door, the Premier had not slammed it in his face and, more importantly, had not slammed it in the face of flood victims here in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, I regret we had to move this motion in this Legislature. I would have preferred to keep the high notes of praising a person like Duff Roblin and other governments like Schreyer and Pawley and Lyon and flood proofing, rather than having a situation where, regrettably, we still have angry people that feel that their government and their Premier (Mr. Filmon) has let them down.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Frank Pitura (Minister of Government Services):** I am pleased to rise today in response to this resolution and to put a few remarks on the record.

I think at the outset, Madam Speaker, I would like to indicate my personal feelings with regard to the comments of the opposition about our Premier (Mr. Filmon), and that is the fact that from my standpoint there was probably no other individual whom I knew and had discussions with during the event who understood and was concerned about the impact of the flood on individuals and their families. His compassion and empathy with everybody out there was certainly felt by myself. I personally want to thank him for his support and his leadership that he demonstrated through this whole process.

Madam Speaker, last year in Manitoba, Manitoba fought the worst flood in the province in more than 160 years. Before, during and since the flood period, the government and the Manitoba Emergency Management Organization prepared and responded in keeping with the unprecedented nature of the event. Since the waters receded, MEMO's Disaster recovery program has been critical for helping Manitobans recover from the flood.

Madam Speaker, the flood produced the largest emergency response in Manitoba's history. It lasted over six weeks, affecting 20 municipalities, numerous government agencies at all levels and 150,000 volunteers. As we all know, a critical part of the

response was the largest deployment of Canadian Armed Forces staff anywhere in the world since the Korean War, and, of course, that has since been surpassed by the response of the Canadian Armed Forces to the ice storm in Quebec.

Our flood response and Disaster Financial Assistance program tried both to anticipate actual events and respond to actual need. Furthermore, the Disaster Financial Assistance needs of Manitobans have prompted a number of changes to ensure that the response provisions were appropriate.

Let us look at some of the changes that have been made, Madam Speaker. We raised the maximum compensation per claim from \$30,000 to \$100,000; as well, allowing separate claims for homes, agricultural operations and businesses. This means that claimants could be eligible for a maximum of \$300,000 in assistance. We have treated the cost of evacuating and long-term temporary housing as independent of a person's Disaster Financial Assistance claim. In previous programs, evacuation costs were always included as part of that claim. We also waived the 20 percent deductible for claimants with unsalvageable homes and for participants in the federal-provincial Flood Proofing Program. We removed and replaced the depreciated value with average replacement value for structural items such as furnaces, water heaters, flooring and common household items such as appliances.

\* (1120)

Madam Speaker, we are continuing to do further research and discussion continues with the Emergency Preparedness Canada people and other provinces. We want to further refine this aspect of the program. We want to try and keep that part of the program as simple as possible in terms of being able to calculate it. As an example, we ran into some individual items that were not coverable with the Emergency Preparedness Canada.

I will give you two of these examples, Madam Speaker. The first is they would not allow that cowboy boots be covered under the DFA claim if they were destroyed in the flood. Yet many, many people in the Red River Valley wear these types of foot attire on a

daily basis. Also, another very important example is the fact that children's playground and play equipment were not covered under the EPC policy. So those are things that we want to certainly address for future events and to try to come to grips with being able to cover them.

For the first time, we allowed structural damage to basements as an eligible cost and included preflood temporary dikes as also eligible for assistance. We also reduced the municipal share of eligible DFA costs for 1997 flood expenditures to 5 percent from the normal 10 percent because of the undue financial hardship that municipalities were having in meeting those expenses. Besides these enhancements of the DFA program, the government and MEMO made important changes in policies and processes to make the program more efficient in operation and to speed up the delivery of assistance to flood-affected residents of the Red River Valley.

Madam Speaker, the DFA program began to gear up well before the flooding ended. MEMO trained 41 inspectors and strengthened its use of information technology. Later, 120 claim evaluators were hired from across Canada and the United States to help in the process. We made 1,408 advance payments of \$2,500 each to help people with cleanup and repairs once they returned home, and our inspectors began in some parts of the flooded area as early as May 5, when floodwaters began to recede.

Most homes and businesses were inspected within two weeks of receipt of a claimant's assistance application. By the end of June, we had completed 4,300 inspections. Within two months of the start of inspections, we were issuing award letters.

After the 1979 flood, to keep this in mind, this process took almost 10 months. It is also important to note that the government and, notably, the MEMO staff, made great efforts to give and update information on the DFA program and furnish information about people's claims.

Our information efforts also included streamlining of the application and assistance process to reduce paperwork for claimants. We succeeded in this.

A vital part of this initiative was the flood recovery information offices set up in Letellier, Rosenort, and St. Adolphe. Madam Speaker, these offices are still in operation. They have had staff from MEMO, Natural Resources, nongovernment organizations such as the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, and trauma teams working in or based there helping flood-affected residents throughout the Red River Valley. At these offices, flood-affected residents have been able to obtain services, assistance, and referral, get answers to questions, obtain information and application forms, and deal with specific organizations and branches of government.

We made significant changes to the claims processing that permitted faster turnaround time. MEMO developed a replacement agreement between claimants and the government that made possible a four-day turnaround time for payment to a claimant. Claimants were able to pick up cheques and drop off claims information at the flood offices.

Through the flood offices and other special initiatives, MEMO made it possible for the united efforts of government and community organizations to work together to meet the needs of flood-affected residents. We helped families who had been forced out of their homes to relocate to temporary housing. Although 99 percent of the people who experienced flood damage are back in their homes, 81 families still remain in the province's temporary accommodation program. Some of these families are now experiencing mould problems in their homes or are deciding whether to move to another permanent site.

I am also pleased to announce that, as of today, 62 families have indicated to us occupancy dates for return to their homes, and we are working on a very regular basis with those remaining families to help them in coming to the decision as to what they would do.

We are still providing temporary housing at full government cost and will work with municipalities on this matter until all permanent housing needs are met. This is a commitment that this government has made to those families that, if they have to require temporary housing, those costs will be covered until they can determine when they can return to their homes.

To ensure there is no gap in services to people in need, Madam Speaker, a flood recovery committee was formed that comprised nongovernment organizations in the community: Manitoba Agricultural Credit Corporation, the Red River trauma team, Natural Resources, Agriculture, Emergency Preparedness Canada, the Manitoba Association of Native Firefighters and Western Diversification. EMO is still working closely with other agencies to ensure continuity of service and response. We are also working with Health and Environment on the problem of mould in some flood-affected homes and have distributed information to homeowners on how to disinfect and mould-proof their homes.

We have reviewed and amended our emergency—one more thing with regard to mould-infected homes. A decision that we made early on in this process was that if anybody had gone through the recovery process, put in repairs to bring their home back and had moved back into their home, and then were subjected to problems with mould, it was our decision to open up a new claim for that particular family if they found mould and had to clean up the mould. So, therefore, if it was not covered under the previous claim, it would be covered under a brand new claim.

We have reviewed and amended our emergency plan to reflect current departmental plans, now including dike breach guidelines and other relevant additions. We are also incorporating recommendations into future training developments and programs so as to include the Union of Manitoba Municipalities as representatives of a large part of our client base. Madam Speaker, we are working very closely with the group of municipalities, UMM, MAUM, and, as well, there is a Red River coalition group that we are working very closely with in regard to putting into place future emergency preparation plans, and so we have relied on a lot of their input to help us with the formation of policy.

MEMO is also working with the City of Winnipeg to develop a comprehensive emergency evacuation plan to respond to a major disaster such as a dike failure. We are also developing a support plan for a large evacuation of the city if necessary. We are also reviewing accommodation and technical requirements for MEMO and the provincial emergency co-ordination

centre. With the advent of new technology today, it is important that any kind of emergency operation centre involve that technology and also have the appropriate spaces at the table for the various departments and agencies at all levels of government.

Madam Speaker, the government appreciates the many needs that still exist in the flood-affected regions of Manitoba. Our programs and special offices are still assisting clients and claimants. We will continue to make necessary changes to ensure that our assistance programs will effectively meet the needs of flood-affected Manitobans now and in the future. Starting in January 1997, we worked to co-ordinate the activities of three levels of government to ensure that emergency preparedness plans were current. Community meetings were held to respond to questions from municipal authorities. Plans were made to move agricultural produce, survey crews provided flood levels, meetings were held with transportation sector to identify alternative routes, and many other tasks were performed prior to the flood.

During the flood, MEMO worked around the clock to co-ordinate the delivery of resources and equipment to flood-affected communities. They are still continuing their special efforts in the recovery phase. In the field of community assistance, three flood recovery information offices were established in Letellier, Rosenort and St. Adolphe and have been open six days a week since last summer. These offices act as a central location for flood victims to obtain support and information about programs. Agencies at those offices, such as the Salvation Army, the Red Cross trauma teams and the federal programs have made it possible for one-stop shopping for flood victims. Until recently, the offices were fielding an average of 692 calls a week.

\* (1130)

Madam Speaker, I would like to confirm with this Legislature today that those flood recovery offices will remain open as long as necessary to aid in the recovery process. Any changes that we make with those flood recovery offices will be done in consultation with the R.M.s in those areas. So, if the R.M.s feel there is no longer a need for the offices, then we will consider closing them; until that time, we will keep them open.

We have about 80 families in temporary housing, and we have made long-term housing available at government expense to all families who are not in their homes. There are families out there that have proceeded to move within the ring dike communities, whether it be St. Adolphe, Morris, Letellier, who are staying there and trying to debate as to whether they would return to the rural farmstead that they had their home on. So these people are trying to go through that decision-making process. Often they involve the extended families in this decision process, so it takes time for these people to be able to make that decision as to where they are going to locate, either at their previous home or at their new home and location.

Also, I share with the Legislature that in the communities of St. Jean Baptiste, Morris, Letellier that a number of rural farm residents have now made the decision to relocate their homes within the ring dikes of those communities, which makes a lot of sense because they can now drive back and forth to their businesses, and they can be assured that they are going to be protected from future flooding. If they have their grain storage bins up on pads, then they are going to be well protected for the future.

Madam Speaker, we have gone through one of the most major flood events in the history of this province, and there is no doubt that in many aspects, certainly it could be argued that things could happen. Anyway, I appreciate the time to say a few comments on this resolution.

**Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River):** I, too, want to put a few comments on the record with respect to this resolution, Madam Speaker. I have to say that most of us live in areas that are prone to flooding at one time or another. I happen to live in one of those areas where the flooding that we face is much different than what people in the Red River Valley face. Where we live, it is very swift, and water comes up very quickly and leaves within a couple of days, but the damage can be just as devastating as what people in the Red River Valley felt and can carry over for a long period of time.

People in our area, when they face flooding, also face the same problems that these people face with regard to government's understanding and government's lack of sensitivity in dealing with the issues. I remember the

people in the Assiniboine Valley who flooded a few years ago and were looking for compensation and were not able to get it.

Most of all, Madam Speaker, I want to begin by commending the many people who worked together and the tremendous volunteerism that we had across the province. To have 150,000 volunteers show their support is very good. I know people from my area of the province came to help with sandbagging. People from some of the flooded areas came to stay with families in the Winnipegosis area, and bonds have been built that will be there for years to come.

I found it interesting to hear the minister indicate that he found that the Premier (Mr. Filmon) was very understanding and compassionate through all of this flood. Well, I have to say that although he may have felt that the Premier was very understanding and compassionate towards him, that is not what the people felt. I remember a rally here on the steps of the Legislature where victims of the flood came for some answers, and they wanted appointments with the Premier. They wanted to speak with him, and they were not able to get those appointments, Madam Speaker.

The other thing that I found strange was that the minister should say that the Premier was compassionate and understanding. I do not think that someone who says to the residents of the Red River Valley that they have to face the consequences, they have to take some responsibility for living on a flood plain, is somebody who is compassionate or understanding.

Madam Speaker, those people did not just move out to that area. It is families that have been living on the flood plain for years and years, families who, historically, if you look back at their records, probably some of the families over 100 years. It was not by choice—or some of them maybe were by choice—but it is where they make a living, and all of us have to make a living somewhere.

Madam Speaker, those people who live in that area, particularly in the Ste. Agathe area, recognize that they were sacrificed in order to save a larger area, to save the city of Winnipeg where there is a much higher population. It makes sense that you would want to save

an area where there is more population, where there would be greater losses, but what the government has to do or should have done is recognize that because of actions that were taken, another group of people was then suffering the consequences of it, and the government should have admitted and recognized immediately that this was going to happen and should have ensured that those people who were affected were treated fairly.

That certainly has not happened, Madam Speaker. We met with people from Morris last fall who were telling us about all the red tape that they were facing, farm communities, farmers who were saying that adjusters would come out and not provide them with adequate information, and along with having lost their income, they were having to struggle through paperwork and through the bureaucracy.

The minister talks about all the offices that are open. Certainly, work has been done, but there is a tremendous amount of burden that has been put on these people, and we should work as quickly as we can to ensure that people get their lives back in order as quickly as they can. On the anniversary or very close to the anniversary of the flood, we saw people who were still struggling, people who still are not back in their homes. This puts a tremendous amount of pressure on families, young children who are not back in their communities, people who are not able to make a living again, people who have had tremendous bills build up because they cannot make a living, and we have to be more sensitive to people than we are.

Madam Speaker, the farming community suffered greatly. Some of them were certainly able to put in a crop after the flood, but the losses that they faced, losses in income because they had to disperse their hog operations, move their herds of cattle, all of these are very serious issues. Nobody expects that government is going to replace all of your income. That does not happen. People realize that some of the responsibility is their own, but you have to have more compassion than what we have seen from this government. We have to have an understanding.

So, Madam Speaker, I think it is fair that in this resolution we are calling for the Premier (Mr. Filmon) to meet with victims of the flood, meet directly with them and hear about their experiences, and I think that

the Premier should be apologizing to these victims for saying that they chose to live on a flood plain. A year has passed since these people have been in a crisis. There has been no apology from the Premier. Would it not be a wonderful gesture on the part of the Premier to indicate, yes, I made a mistake? It would certainly help them.

Madam Speaker, one of the issues that the minister responsible said was that they raised the level of compensation from \$30,000 to \$100,000. I remember in this House members of our caucus urging the government to do that. I believe it is because of urging from this side of the House and bringing to the attention of the government that compensation in other provinces was much better than what we had here in Manitoba that the government decided to make the change, because the government already had their handbooks, their brochures, all ready to be distributed, and in that brochure, the level of compensation was listed at \$30,000. It was through pressure from members of this side of the House that the government realized that their level of compensation was not adequate, that we should be getting the best compensation that we can. Victims of flooding in Alberta, victims of flooding in Quebec had much better compensation than what our residents of Manitoba were facing.

\* (1140)

But there were many other things. I recall when members of this side of the House continued to lobby the government to waive the deductible of the compensation package. We called on the government to waive the depreciation on essential items. Again, there are items that people can live without, but there are items that people need, that are essential for us. If you have a flood in Florida and your furnace goes out, well, you might be able to live quite easily without that. Here in Manitoba you might be able to live without your furnace for the summer months, but, come winter, it is an essential item.

The level of depreciation that was being put forward resulted in victims of the flood getting very, very little and having to bear the burden of the additional costs. That was very difficult for those people because many of them were without employment. I think of the people who were operating the greenhouses, their

employment and their income wiped out; farming community, income wiped out. Those people who were working in business, whose businesses were shut down, again, their income was wiped out. [interjection]

I hear the member opposite urging me to complete my remarks. I just have a few more comments that I would like to make, and I will let him then have his time. But this is a very important issue. On this one, again I would urge the Premier (Mr. Filmon) to recognize that what he said was wrong. People do not choose to live on a flood plain. All of us live on a flood plain. It is like any other time when you are in a situation of distress and you hear some negative comments to you making it seem as if you are to blame for it. It wears very heavy on you. This is one opportunity for the Premier to retract those comments and show a good sign to the people who are victims.

I would encourage government to do the right thing and immediately settle all the claims that can be settled. As the minister indicated, there are still many people who are not in their homes. There are still claims that are unsettled. It is well over a year. I would encourage the government to take all the necessary steps that have to be taken to ensure that those people can get on with their lives and into their homes. Although I hope we would never have another flood in any part of this province, that is unrealistic. We are going to have other floods. I would hope that when that comes we will have much better planning in place; that when the flood arises we would be open with people; and that, when one group of people has to be sacrificed to save another group of people, we let them know what is happening and treat them fairly because there are people who were sacrificed and now are still struggling to get on with their lives.

But, Madam Speaker, most importantly, the resolution calls for an apology from the Premier and also settlement of claims and much more planning on the part of the government to ensure that, when this kind of situation arises again, we will not experience the difficulties.

In closing, again I would like to commend all of those people who worked together because there was good work that was done. It was a community that came together. It was a country that came together to support

the people of the Red River Valley, and there were good things that happened. In a disaster, many times that does happen, but also there are things that can be learned from a disaster to ensure that the next time it happens that we handle it better. I would hope that next time we face this kind of a situation, the Premier would be much more sensitive to the feelings of the people who are caught in the situation and realize that all of Manitoba is a flood plain. We all live here. We all face that risk. When there is a disaster, it is not only the responsibility of the victims; it is the responsibility of all of us in this province to ensure that those people can get on with their lives.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources):** Madam Speaker, I will be brief because I have a couple of colleagues that would like to put some comments on the record as well.

I am sitting here listening to the comments from the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), and I would be quite happy to put about an hour's worth on the record of things that occurred during the flood and the response of this government. Unfortunately, she has chosen to dwell on a couple of things which are part of the preamble of this resolution, and I can understand why she might want to address the preamble.

I find it interesting that only just a couple of weeks ago, when we were discussing the Headingley issue, one of her colleagues hurled across the room at me "well, they chose to live there" at the very time when we were discussing whether or not they had any opportunity for sewer and water and an opportunity to raise the standard of living that they wanted in their community. One of her colleagues chose to ridicule that position by shouting across the floor of this Chamber. It was the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) saying they chose to live there.

When the member reflects upon the integrity and the sincere concern that was expressed by the Premier (Mr. Filmon) during this flood event, then I have to respond to remind her that there was no one who put in longer hours and who spent more time making sure that an appropriate response was put in place and that the flood-fighting effort went as well as it could, in fact,

exceeded, I would say, expectations from almost everyone. The Premier is responsible for making sure that that happened, and the concern that he expressed about the devastation, the loss of property and the loss of opportunity that occurred throughout the valley has always been conveniently ignored by the members opposite.

Might well want to contemplate that the media did some research, and they found that there were 400-and-some sites in the valley that were built below recommended flood-proof levels. I did not nor did anyone else in government seek that list, nor did we look to see whether or not there were reasons why they might have been better protected that might have well been reasons to deny claims. That is not the way this society works. That is not the way our community should work, and those people were willingly and supportively given a positive response to their flood claims. They were not all houses, I am sure of that, but nevertheless let us not accuse this side of the house of not having caring and concerned attitudes toward what happened in the valley.

You know, something that I think the employees of Natural Resources and Highways and MEMO sometimes feel a little bit neglected over is the issue that everyone points to the excellent efforts provided by the Canadian Armed Forces, efforts for which we are grateful, efforts for which we are thankful, and efforts with which the flood fighting would not have gone as well if they had not been here. They conveniently ignore—many times, because they choose to criticize government—the efforts made by civil service in this province and the work that they did. What about the employee of Highways whose hair turned gray within two weeks because of the workload that he was carrying when he was managing the construction of the Z-dike? What about the Natural Resources officers that had to be ordered out of their position because they were literally suffering from battle fatigue? Those people need to be recognized for the work that they did.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Cummings:** The members are unfortunately becoming a little excited. I did not accuse them of criticizing those people. I am saying that they are conveniently ignoring, in their response to what

occurred during the flood, the work that was done by some very hardworking people on the Manitoba response to the flood. They can be at liberty to criticize politicians and political response—I would expect nothing less from them—but they had better be sure that in doing that they do not inadvertently turn their back on the efforts of some very good people that put forward the superhuman effort on behalf of those within the valley.

\* (1150)

Madam Speaker, I would only like to add very briefly a couple of other comments that I think need to be on the record. That is that we have responded to 5,200 private flood claims and 68 municipal claims that were made during this flood. The number of changes in policy that were made in order to recognize the significance of the damage that was occurring during this flood event was of a very large magnitude. In many circumstances, despite claims to the contrary, the only way that response could be put forward to some of the problems that people in the valley were having was if the province took the lead and then went back later to negotiate the response and the support from the other levels of government. Municipal liability was cut in half in recognition of the extreme level of damage that occurred in the flood event.

This government put forward \$30 million for flood proofing at a time when a flood proofing agreement was not in place. If the member wishes to look at the response that is presently occurring in the valley to protect people from future flood events, they might well consider that there are over 20 ring dikes that have already had their pre-engineering completed, and the magnitude of that project is absolutely astounding when you put that in the context of what is needed throughout the valley.

So I leave those remarks for the record, and I believe my colleague would like to enter the debate.

**Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (St. Norbert):** Madam Speaker, I would like to put just a few words on the record today. I understand we are running short of time, but I am sure that, when this matter comes before the House again, my other colleagues—I know the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Sveinson) has a good

portion that he would like to put forward. I know the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), who was greatly affected by the flood, would like to put his words on the record.

Today I would like to say just a few words, and they revolve around watching what happened during the 1997 flood. Madam Speaker, I saw you out in the boat bringing sandbags out to a certain operation one day, and that is one of the pictures that I will always remember, Madam Speaker standing at the front of the boat and looking like she was holding the flag going over the Delaware, and that was actually a market gardener's field. Those are the types of pictures that seem to come by over and over again.

It was interesting because the floodwaters, as nature has it, knew no boundaries. It knew that it had to flow wherever it wanted to. For man to try and stop it, we found out there was only one way to do that, and that was back in Duff Roblin's days when he built us the floodway.

Politics found that those same boundaries did not exist. The boundaries that existed during the flood for politics were not there. We were able to work as a team, and we worked as a team together. Within my constituency and your constituency, Madam Speaker, we had our City Councillor John Angus, who worked side by side with us; we had our M.P. Reg Alcock, who was there and fighting with us day after day, and fighting with us to defeat nature's wonder that was bringing upon us a flood that we had never experienced in our lifetimes, and the one that we probably never will again. They called it the Flood of the Century because we had not seen that amount of water in our province in over 100 years.

Madam Speaker, the people who came out to the community, the members from the opposition who were out helping us, and members of government and my Premier (Mr. Filmon) saw what was happening in the south. So can I agree with my honourable friend from the other side when he brings forward a resolution such as this?

Well, I can agree with the first WHEREAS; I can agree with the second WHEREAS; but I have got problems from that point on—to criticize a government



that was faced with such an immense task, a task that had never been handled by any government to that point, one formidable job ahead. They worked as I have never seen work being done. The people within government, the people in Natural Resources, the people in the City of Winnipeg, the city workers—they were out there day after day. They did not look at a clock. They did not punch a clock. They were suffering from fatigue, as the minister has said, and yet they still came out and had to be ordered off the lines. They had to be ordered to go take some downtime.

To see the involvement that we had from the volunteers, the church groups, the Hutterite colonies, from the aboriginal communities—Madam Speaker, it was just phenomenal. We always knew we had sandbaggers in the House, but I really did see those sandbaggers working. They really could throw sandbags. I had the honourable member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) out one day when he was touring my constituency and doing some work on a few of the dikes. It was actually after we had had the evacuation. We trucked him down to the Turnbull Drive area where we were putting in another seven dikes prior to the water coming up another foot and a half the next day, and he had an opportunity to see it first-hand with us. I am sure that he appreciated the effort that the community was putting in.

We had the Premier (Mr. Filmon) working on one of the dikes. One of his comments to me during the flood, because that was the house that we actually lost, was that that was the first night that he had started to work in my community. Well, I wanted to tell the Premier that it was not the area of the dike that he had been working on that collapsed. It was a little further down, and I do believe it was an area that I had been working on.

So, Madam Speaker, the community came out as a whole. When the city ran into the problem of not being able to create enough sandbags, the community got together. The community pulled in. We had at the Fort Richmond mall a sandbagging operation where we were producing 100,000 sandbags in one shift, one day,

a 24-hour period. Well, we ended up producing over 700,000 sandbags at the final count. That was once we started counting.

So I was very proud of that effort, and if you would have seen some of the days that we had, the rain pouring down and standing ankle deep in the water on the parking lot because the drains were not working because they were clogged with sand, and you would have a thousand people all together working with shovels and filling sandbags and tying sandbags and not even slowing down. We had the Robin's coffee out there, and Safeway was out supplying us with the buns and hot dogs, and before you knew it, we had radio stations pumping us out the tunes. I remember CJOB was out, but they were not playing tunes. I think that was just Richard sandbagging again. We also had 94—that is my daughter's station, you see, 94.7 I think it was and 92 and 99, so there were a number of them.

Then, Madam Speaker, the effort of the media during that time was actually something else. The media changed during the flood to a positive thing which I had never seen before. I did not know that they could do those types of stories, but they were very helpful. I only wish they were helpful like that at all times, but they seem to look for the negative side too often. I think if they started working on the positive side, they would find it a lot better.

So I will leave it at that and give my honourable member some time before he can carry on next time.

**Mr. Ben Sveinson (La Verendrye):** Madam Speaker, I would really like to spend about an hour on this, but I do not think I have it. Firstly, I would just like to tell you a little bit about my constituents who at the time of war, which was last year, came out—

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for La Verendrye will have 14 minutes.

I am leaving the Chair with the understanding that this House will reconvene at 1:30 p.m. this afternoon.

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 4, 1998

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