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Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| ALLUM, James | Fort Garry-Riverview | NDP |
| ALTEMEYER, Rob | Wolseley | NDP |
| BINDLE, Kelly | Thompson | PC |
| CLARKE, Eileen, Hon. | Agassiz | PC |
| COX, Cathy, Hon. | River East | PC |
| CULLEN, Cliff, Hon. | Spruce Woods | PC |
| CURRY, Nic | Kildonan | PC |
| DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon. | Charleswood | PC |
| EICHLER, Ralph, Hon. | Lakeside | PC |
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| GERRARD, Jon, Hon. | River Heights | Lib. |
| GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon. | Steinbach | PC |
| GRAYDON, Clifford | Emerson | PC |
| GUILLEMARD, Sarah | Fort Richmond | PC |
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| JOHNSON, Derek | Interlake | PC |
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| KINEW, Wab | Fort Rouge | NDP |
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| NESBITT, Greg | Riding Mountain | PC |
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| WHARTON, Jeff, Hon. | Gimli | PC |
| WIEBE, Matt | Concordia | NDP |
| WISHART, Ian, Hon. | Portage la Prairie | PC |
| WOWCHUK, Rick | Swan River | PC |
| YAKIMOSKI, Blair | Transcona | PC |
| <i>Vacant</i> | St. Boniface | |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 10, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Please be seated. Good morning, everybody.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Madam Speaker: Shall we proceed with debate on second reading of Bill 300 this morning? *[Agreed]*

**DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS—
PRIVATE BILLS**

**Bill 300—The University of Manitoba
Students' Union Amendment Act**

Madam Speaker: So we will proceed, then, to Bill 300, The University of Manitoba Students' Union Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview—has seven minutes remaining.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and good morning to you and to all members of the House.

I want to begin by saying that we're pleased that the government brought this bill back this week. It was a bit of a test to see just how committed they were to it. Oftentimes, bills get presented and then you—and then we never see the light of day of it again. So I think it confirmed for us that this was a bill that they were serious about and wanted to proceed with. And, for that, we're pleased.

And, as I said in my comments to begin last week in the few minutes I had to speak, that no one at any point was saying no to this bill, but we have a right and responsibilities as MLAs of this Chamber to debate bills and to think about them carefully and to deliberate on them. And we also are given, in this case, 10 minutes to be able to get up and speak to a

bill. And I, personally, Madam Speaker, not prepared to sacrifice the democratic right that I have, that privilege that I have as a member of this House, not to be able to speak on a bill that has some significant consequences, not in and of itself, maybe, but broadly.

We're aware. We recognize that this is a public bill. This is not your standard bill. We recognize, further, that the member for Fort Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard) is merely the sponsor of this bill and that brought it forward on behalf of UMSU. We recognize further that this is a bill that is internal to the operation of UMSU, and I think that that's—that all of those things are important considerations when deliberating and debating the bill, and we respect those kinds of characteristics. But we also—they're elected; members of UMSU are elected representatives within their constituency.

I'm also an elected representative with my own constituency and so it's up to myself and members on our side, as well as all members of the House, to spend some time carefully thinking and deliberating the bill, and in fact, debating it. And though the member from Radisson last week made it crystal clear that we should just be quiet, sit on our hands and not say anything, I don't actually agree with that kind of way of proceeding in a legislature or in a democracy. It is uncharitable, at best, to put that kind of thing on the record. It is certainly undemocratic, at worst.

So we, as I say, we're quite prepared today to let this bill proceed to second readings and to have—let it go to committee and to public hearings, where we can get a broader appreciation of what may be multiple voices who have something to say about it. I know that my friend from Concordia did spend some significant time talking to students in the aftermath of last week's debate—UMSU in particular, but other student representatives as well. And that's only fair and right as it should be, Madam Speaker.

He said in his speech last week that we need to listen to students, and so that's—he went out and did precisely that, as did other members of our caucus. I heard from students, as did other members of caucus, and so we spent the week trying to ensure that we understood the bill, that we understood what

the premise was, what the consequences may or may not be, and so that's right in this Chamber.

And so we'll see this bill proceed forward to public hearings. I don't think that was ever, ever in question, despite what the member from Radisson conveyed to members of UMSU and was a—as an academic myself, I can say that was one of the poorest tutorials that I'd ever seen in my life.

But I also wanted to say, Madam Speaker, that when we think about issues affecting post-secondary students today, we can hardly ignore what has been nothing less than an attack and an assault on universities and on colleges and on students and on families since this government came into power.

Who could forget that this is a government that intervened in collective bargaining at the U of M, quite possibly in the most egregious manner, and, as a result, were fined for those activities? We can hardly separate some of these issues, Madam Speaker. We can hardly separate the fact that this is a government, at the first opportunity, eliminated this tuition-rebate program that helped students pay for their education after the fact, although there was some earlier ability to utilize it.

But after the fact—I've talked, as former minister of Education and Advanced Learning, to literally several—I don't want to say thousands, but lots and lots and lots of students who told me that that program, in and of itself, was indispensable for them to start a life in their—after they graduated. This government, in a snap of their fingers, that was gone.

We can hardly forget, Madam Speaker, we can hardly separate this bill from a government that has, instead of keeping university affordable, has raised tuition in this province, and we'll see across-the-board raises at the U of M itself, upward of 6 or 7 per cent. That's not right.

That's not a vision of a strong, thriving post-secondary educational sector, but that's in fact an opportunity and a decision to off-load costs, off-load the burden of an education onto students and their families. We never agreed with that approach, Madam Speaker, and so when we think about this bill, we think of it kind of like the students are getting the pepperoni, but they're not getting the pie, and consequently, there's no pizza at all.

And so, while we'll see this particular bill go forward to public hearings, what we want to hear from students, what we want to hear from other

interested parties on this, and we'll likely see this bill go forward.

Let's be honest. This is a government that has spent the last two years attacking students, families and the post-secondary education sector.

*(10:10)

Mrs. Colleen Mayer (St. Vital): I am not quite sure where to begin. The fairy tale told by the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) sounds very similar to one of the three bears. It's too hot some days; it's too cold. Oh, maybe in the last two seconds I heard, maybe it's just right. It's too bad they didn't do their work last week to honour UMSU membership that's here in the gallery today. So disrespectful, Madam Speaker.

But I'm going to put a few words on the record regarding Bill 300, the UMSU amendment act because I think it's important to reiterate some of the facts that have got—transpired last Tuesday but also what's transpired over the last days leading up to today. So to give it the respect that it deserves, I'm going to just put the fact that UMSU had petitioned the government for this amendment to the UMSU act. It's a private act. We all know that. We heard that very clearly by the member for Fort Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard) who presented it last week.

The rules of Legislative Assembly stipulate that any changes or amendments to this act must follow through with the private-backed amendment process. More specifically, it must be brought forward by the MLA of the constituency in which the organization is based. So thank you very much to MLA from Fort Richmond for doing that and working with the students of UMSU.

Another fact that's very clear that I want to put on the record, that last week after the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) gave his speech—and, you know, the member for Fort Garry-Riverview calls it an aftermath. Well, I call it quite disturbing, actually. He went up to the gallery and spoke with representatives from UMSU and tried to talk to them about his thinking and what his plan—and that he planned on talking out this bill so that he could bring it back in the House himself, so he could try and take credit for the work that my colleague has done and so has UMSU done. However, but what he wasn't aware of was that one of the people in the gallery that he spoke to was one of our PC caucus staffers, Madam Speaker, who was in the gallery hosting other guests.

And so he alluded to, you know, how he was going to make it stronger and strengthen. And it was just unimaginable, the stories that I had heard. But you know what—what's really important? I can't imagine how deflated those students felt when they heard those words and how he talked to them in that fashion.

And I'd like to reiterate to that member and to the opposition as a whole that there is no—

An Honourable Member: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: Point—the honourable member for Concordia, on a point of order.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The words coming out of the mouth of the member for St. Vital (Mrs. Mayer) are disturbing, to say the least. They don't represent the facts. However, I understand that a point of order should not reflect a dispute over the facts.

What I will say, Madam Speaker, is that I know, as well as every other member in this House, that a private bill needs to come forward in the name—as has been mentioned by the member for St. Vital—in the name of the member whose constituency the organization resides in. I understand that, of course. We understand that it's been brought forward in the name of the member for Fort Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard) because of that reason.

And so for her to suggest that I would stand up in front of students and say that I would bring the bill back in my name is totally false, makes no sense under the rules of our House and I would ask that the member for St. Vital retract those statements—St. Vital, is it St. Vital? *[interjection]* The member for St. Vital retract her statement and stop with this kind of absolutely false accusations which she knows to not be true.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield), on the same point of order.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Acting Government House Leader): Yes, on the same point of order.

Madam Speaker, it's clear to everybody in the House, except, perhaps, the member for Concordia, there is no point of order. This is a dispute over the facts. He's being called out, and that can feel uncomfortable sometimes. There's no point of order.

Madam Speaker: I have listened very carefully to the comments made, and I would indicate that it is not a point of order and that it is a dispute over the facts, and that points of order should not be used for debate.

Also, I would indicate that—and caution the member for Concordia. He further made a comment saying that the member for St. Vital knows this not to be true. That, in fact, is probably a more serious comment that was made, and I would caution the member that that is coming very close to being unparliamentary because it is the putting forward words that could be reflecting that somebody is not telling the truth.

So I would caution members to be very cautious with their language here, and—the honourable member for Concordia.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I just wanted to take the opportunity to apologize for using that language. I think we all just want to get this bill moving forward, as do the students in the gallery.

Madam Speaker: Thank you to the member for Concordia for that.

* * *

Mrs. Mayer: Well, you know what, I'm glad to hear those words come out of the member for Concordia's mouth.

So what I'm going to suggest is, let's put—see if it's—if they—if their words stand up, and let's call the vote, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 300, The University of Manitoba Students' Union Amendment Act.

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

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, wondering if we could actually recess 'til 11. I know that we had—*[interjection]*—no—

An Honourable Member: Call it 11.

Mr. Micklefield: Call it 11? Okay, that's fine.

Could you canvass the House please, Madam Speaker, see if it is the will of the House to call it 11?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to call it 11 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 6—Eye See, Eye Learn

Madam Speaker: The hour now being 11 a.m., and time for private members' resolutions.

The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Eye See...Eye Learn, brought forward by the honourable member for St. James.

Mr. Scott Johnston (St. James): I move, seconded by the member from St. Vital, that it be resolved—the member from Emerson—sorry, Madam Speaker—

WHEREAS one in five children will enter school with a vision disorder that is not readily apparent; and

WHEREAS many of these children accept poor vision and other eye problems because they are unaware that their vision is not the same as their peers; and

WHEREAS 80% of a child's learning is based on vision, meaning that excellent sight and eye health are critical to doing well in school; and

WHEREAS the Manitoba Association of Optometrists is part of the national vision program Eye See, Eye Learn, working to get the message out to parents of all children that a thorough eye examination by an optometrist is a key to greater learning.

That it be resolved that the Manitoba Legislative Assembly recognize the important work of the Eye See...Eye Learn program and encourage all parents to take their children for regular eye examinations.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for St. James, seconded by the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon),

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Manitoba Legislative Assembly recognize the important work of the Eye See...Eye Learn program and encourage all parents to take their children for regular eye examinations.

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, it is important that all parents know to take their children for regular eye examinations.

This might come as a surprise to many of us here today, but one in five children entering school has a vision disorder. There is no better time to take your child for a comprehensive eye examination than when he or she is starting school.

* (10:20)

The Manitoba Association of Optometrists is part of a national vision program, Eye See...Eye Learn. This program has been offered by the Manitoba Association of Optometrists since 2008. In 2017-2018, the program helped send over 10,000 packages to Manitoba's public and private schools. Currently, 18 public school divisions and 12 private and independent schools participate in this program.

These packages get the message out to parents that all children should have a thorough eye examination by an optometrist before they enter school. Participating school divisions are asked to distribute this information to incoming kindergarten families to encourage them to take their child to an optometrist. An eye examination should take place prior to the beginning of kindergarten or during the kindergarten year.

The informational packages include an eye examination form, information on children's vision needs and how they relate to learning and tells parents that eye examinations for children are covered by Manitoba Health for children under the age of 19.

Even if children have already gone through a vision screening, some problems cannot be detected without a thorough, comprehensive eye examination. If a child has an eye problem, it will best respond by being treated when the child is young. Many of these eye problems can't be corrected if parents wait until a child is older, or if left unchecked, serious long-term effects can result. Even by ages eight to 10, there are some eye problems that cannot be corrected.

Considering that 80 per cent of a child's learning is based on vision, excellent sight and healthy eyes are imperative to a child doing well in school long term. Reading, learning and even behavioural problems can be related to undetected visual problems. Parents know how important regular doctor appointments are, and the same thing should be applied to eye health. I am proud to stand here today and bring forward this important resolution, recognizing the work of the Eye See...Eye Learn program.

Manitoba optometrists association has done a great job so far in getting the message out about eye examinations to both schools in the—to all schools in the province. Their association is doing amazing work, ensuring that Manitoba families know how important it is to have their children's eyes checked. Their communication with schools and divisions is helping getting—is helping to get the message to parents that all children should have thorough examinations by optometrists before they enter school.

Starting kindergarten is, of course, a very exciting time for children. It's also the perfect time to take children in for a comprehensive eye examination. This is because the wiring between the eyes and the brain develops in the first five years of life. Before a child begins school, it is important to assess their visual development to ensure there are no issues that will affect the child's ability to learn and succeed in schools. Vision is linked to a child's learning, with 80 per cent based on vision.

Unfortunately, children sometimes accept poor vision and other eye problems because they're unaware that their vision isn't the same as other children. Some young children may not be able to verbalize problems they're experiencing with vision. If these problems are left unaddressed, serious long-term effects can result, as well as a lack—as well as children experiencing a lack of confidence. Parents may think their children's vision is fine if they don't complain or they're already gone—or because they've already gone through a successful vision-screening process. Unfortunately, sometimes these screenings are limited and do not assess their near vision, eye health and how well the eyes work together.

It's important for parents to know the possible signs of vision problems for children. There are many symptoms that parents should be aware of that could indicate a child's visual problem: headaches; double vision; red, itchy or watering eyes; a drooping eyelid; lack of concentration; skipping lines or losing their place while reading; tilting the head or unusual posture.

To be as safe as possible with your children's eyes, it's recommended that children have their first eye exam at six to nine months of age, then at three and then finally before starting school. This is what the Canadian Association of Optometrists recommends and what the Manitoba Association of Optometrists recommends.

The Manitoba Association of Optometrists is a regulatory and licensing body for the practice of optometry in Manitoba. Every optometrist who works in Manitoba must be registered with this association. Their mission is to ensure safe and ethical delivery of quality eye health and vision care throughout the regulation of optometry in Manitoba. In addition to this, their promotion of optometry through advocacy and education is their top priority. I'm sure many of us here today have been helped by an optometrist in Manitoba.

The Eye See...Eye Learn program originated in Alberta and has become an important program in many Canadian provinces. It is currently available in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick.

One of the reasons that I bring this resolution forward is based on some of my own experience. I wear corrective lenses, as well as contact lenses periodically, and, Madam Speaker, when I was a young man starting school my vision problems were not identified. I went through an awful lot of elementary school being challenged to see the chalkboard in those days. And also, to young children, anything that's different, they tend to not want to identify—wearing glasses, et cetera.

So these are things that have to be identified in today's day and age when the opportunity exists—should be endorsed and should be promoted.

My son also, Madam Speaker—fortunately, my wife and I were able to identify a visual problem that he had, and due to due diligence by seeing an optometrist, he went through what's called a patching initiative, where—as I indicated in my comments, the connection between the brain and eyes, up to five years old, is very important. That patching creates a situation where patching an eye forces the brain to act a little stronger and therefore can correct some visual problems.

So I've first-hand experience in understanding and seeing some of the benefit of, certainly, dealing with an optometrist.

So, Madam Speaker, I thank you for my opportunity to present this resolution.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held, and questions may be addressed in the following sequence: the first question may be asked by a member from another

party; any subsequent questions must follow a rotation between parties; each independent member may ask one question; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

* (10:30)

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I appreciate the member from St. James bringing this forward and sharing a little bit about his personal experience, his personal situation. Obviously, as a parent of two very young children, this is something that I think is very pertinent to their experience.

I just wanted to ask him if he can give me a sense of what other provinces across the country are doing with regards to this Eye See...Eye Learn program.

Mr. Scott Johnston (St. James): Thank you to the member for that question.

As I'd indicated, currently the provinces that are working diligently with the see eye–Eye See... Eye Learn program are British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba as well as Ontario and New Brunswick. And there are certainly a number of initiatives that different provinces take under this program. Alberta, in particular, has been very, very aggressive in support of this program as well as offering, certainly, some concessions–

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): I certainly would like to take the opportunity to thank my colleague for this resolution–touches an important issue, of course, one that those of us who do not have these particular challenges may not be aware of.

My question, though, is, don't children already receive eye examinations at schools? Maybe some people are already under that impression. I'm wondering if the member could clear that up for us.

Mr. Johnston: I thank my honourable friend for that question. It's a very good question. Screening does take place in schools. The provincial government does have a manual which indicates the proper procedures for screening. The screening that takes place in schools is at the discretion of school divisions, and some school divisions do it on a divisional policy; other school divisions allow the schools the discretion to proceed.

The difference between the screening program and the program that is being identified in this resolution–

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, we keep getting cut off for the answers here, Madam Speaker, because both of those questions and the answers–I was listening diligently, waiting to hear what the member has to say. So, hopefully, he has a time to fit it all in this time.

I just wanted to expand, then, on that answer. So he was talking about school divisions. Can he talk about what school divisions throughout the province are doing already with regards to this and some of the successful programs?

Mr. Johnston: I thank my honourable friend, and I will try to do a little more due diligence in answering quickly.

As I indicated in my comments, there are 18 school divisions that currently do utilize it: Border Land, Brandon, Garden Valley, Hanover, Kelsey, Lakeshore, Lord Selkirk, Louis Riel, Pembina Trails, Pine Creek, Prairie Rose, Prairie Spirit, Red River Valley, Seine River, Sunrise, Western and part of–a partial of the Winnipeg School Division. There are a number of private schools that are also listed here, and I'd be happy to share that with the member outside. Thank you.

Mr. Micklefield: Again, I do want to take the opportunity to thank my colleague for this important resolution. Appreciate the questions that have been asked so far. I'd like to add to that. Wondering if there is any kind of legal requirement or regulatory requirement for parents to have their children's eyes tested. Is there anything in place currently that would require parents to take that initiative? Is it solely on the schools? Or are parents mandated to do this for their own children? Just wondering if there's any clarity on that issue that the member might be able to provide in light of this resolution that he's putting forward this morning.

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, there currently right now is not a criteria in place that directs parents to proceed with eye examinations. That's why this resolution, in my view, is so important: to continue to try to identify real opportunities to address these problems with children at such a young age–and done through the professionalism of an optometrist. And I think that's key to the whole thing, is education. That is our best tool right now with parents to ensure that this is met.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for–actually, Assiniboia.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for St. James for his dedication to his riding.

The Eye See...Eye Learn program—the purposes of this motion is clearly to create awareness.

I wonder if the member has considered the scope of the whole spectrum of what would cause eyes or vision to be imperfect, things around detrition, socio-economic issues, and if there's other things across government that can be done to empower people to see.

Mr. Johnston: And thank you to my honourable friend for the question.

The depth of that question is a little difficult for me because I'm not an optometrist. However, I do fully understand that there are circumstances that do exist that create vision impairment, and the member brings up a very good point because in today's society, right now, with all of the dependence and usage of devices, whether it be cellphones, whether it be computers, that are now used at a very, very young age, utilizing those under dim lights, et cetera, do create a very significant stress to the—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, I see our time is getting short here. I do have a few more questions.

He had mentioned, I think—I believe in his first answer with regards to some of the provinces, and I think he may—I didn't hear quite right, but it might have been Saskatchewan—he was talking about some resources that they put towards this, and I just want to get a better sense of—he was talking about how this was a very robust program, and I wanted to get a better sense of that. If he could just take some time to explain that.

Mr. Johnston: And I thank the honourable friend—my honourable friend for that question again.

When this program had initially started in Alberta, that's when the program was not only the same type of program that existed in Manitoba, but the Alberta government also, too, had offered some programming and assistance for vision tools such as glasses, contact lenses, things like that.

So that province was actually going over and above the program in their contribution to the children that need eye help. I hope that answers the question.

Mr. Nic Curry (Kildonan): We're able to talk about this important issue. As someone who needs corrective lenses, this is a very valuable conversation to have.

I'd like to ask the member, especially himself being a former school trustee: What kind of people did he consult before bringing this resolution forward for us to debate today?

Mr. Johnston: And I thank again my honourable friend from Kildonan for that question.

This actually stemmed from a presentation that was made to, I believe, all members of the House, but I could be—stand corrected. About a year ago, the members of the Manitoba optometrists association did make a presentation and I was following it up—with that association. That's been the primary contact for me in presenting this resolution.

I've also talked to some of my former colleagues, both in the school division I represented as well as other school division trustees, superintendents, as well as the Department of Health, Department of Education, and—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wiebe: The member was—another answer that he didn't have, I think, enough time to quite get out early on in the question period, was with regards to before school. And he talked about the importance not only of early years in schools, but even before that and the importance of identifying vision problems early.

I'm just wondering how this particular resolution would apply to those students—or, those children who are not yet in school.

* (10:40)

Mr. Johnston: I'd like to thank my honourable friend. That's a very good question. And in the discussions that I've had with the Manitoba optometrists association, they not only provide information to the school divisions and independent schools, they have also branched out to offer the packages and information to nursery and early-years education. So that's a little slower coming. However, that is within the plan.

Madam Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise this morning to debate this important resolution here before the House.

I do appreciate the member bringing this issue forward. As he mentioned in his opening remarks, and as I acknowledged in my—one of my questions, that, you know, he was able to talk about this from a very personal place and how this is something that he comes to, you know, as a father and as somebody who has experienced this in his own family. But I also respect his perspective as a former school trustee and as somebody who obviously works very closely with the school system and has a lot of experience and, I would imagine, has seen this firsthand, as he mentioned going to schools, going to classrooms, talking to teachers and hearing directly from them.

And I think there's a lot of value to doing that. I—as I mentioned, I also—I have two young children, so I spend a lot of time in the school that my children go to and have a lot of time, obviously, speaking with the teachers and the educators there in the school. But also, in course—of course, in our role as legislators, we also have an opportunity to go throughout the schools to talk to those educators directly in their classrooms and get a perspective, I think a wider perspective, of some of the issues and challenges that they're facing.

And one of the things that I've now been—that's been brought to my attention by a number of educators is with regards to reading and the importance of the Reading Recovery programs, the importance of that extra support that's available for students. And I think there—maybe not as much awareness, you know, in amongst the general population, amongst average Manitobans, or even amongst those parents whose children do not have the challenges that some do about how much work goes in before and after school and how many resources are put towards making sure that all students are at a level that they need to be with regards to literacy.

And that's a considerable amount of resources that goes towards that, and I give absolute props to those teachers who spend the extra time and do that extra work, and it's incredible to talk to them about the amount of progress they can make with students in making sure that they're on the—at the right level with regards to their reading.

But what's interesting, when talking to them—and as the member said, we had the opportunity to have

the optometrists come in, I think in the last year here to the Legislature, and we sat down with those folks in our caucus. I believe others did, as well. And what we learned from them is, is actually just how important that is, the vision issue is, with regards to the reading and how closely connected those two issues truly are. And it was really surprising to me, in fact, as I've kind of delved a little bit more into this issue, to learn that a large percentage of those students who are in the Reading Recovery programs and other assistance programs actually have vision problems as part of their—as part of the challenges that they're facing.

And so, you know, when our caucus talks about the importance of moving upstream, about spending government dollars in a way that, you know, is forward thinking and forward looking and identifies the root causes of the problem, rather than simply just dealing with issues as they come up as symptoms, what we find is, is that this is one of those programs that when properly invested in and properly supported, you know, there's a lot of value in getting those—that vision care to those students who need it, that they may not need to go into that Reading Recovery, they may not need that extra help and they may not need those extra resources within the school system.

So this is the kind of resolution that speaks directly to that, and I applaud the member for bringing it forward to address that.

The other issue that I—and I did try to ask these questions, and I think I've got a little bit better understanding from the member, so I appreciate that—with regards to what other provinces are doing and, as I said, other school divisions because I know there's been some success across the country in doing this exact thing, moving up the stream, making sure that students have access to proper eye screening and eye testing at an earlier age. And even here in the city, in Winnipeg School Division, there was a pilot project that was started that has been—now been expanded. I understand—I was just talking to some trustees last week who were talking about the success of this program.

And what this program actually does is get into the schools, and it sort of takes the process right through from start to finish. And that is not only proper testing in the schools, a real testing by an optometrist in the classroom rather than asking parents or others—caregivers—to take the student then out to a different location—doing it within the school

and then helping them to connect with the resources that are out there with regards to the testing and then corrective lenses.

And this is the real key that we're finding in many of our schools. Once a parent is alerted to the issue that there might be a vision issue with their student, that's where the involvement of the school division or the school usually ends, right? So the problem is identified; the parents are alerted. And I understand this is to ensure that there's a better understanding by parents. But then it really comes down to the parents and their ability to address that problem. And what we found, especially in some of our more challenging school environments where students just don't have the resource—parents don't have the resources to connect with those corrective lenses or whatever else needs to be done to correct the issue—that's kind of where it ends. It just stops; the process stops. Whereas, in Winnipeg School Division, they are actually connecting students with the proper avenues and the proper support programs that are out there. And even better than that, they're bringing in private enterprise and private companies who provide the eyeglasses and saying, look, this is a way that you can be a part of the solution. You can help the vision issue of these students and you can be a part of the solution. And what we're seeing is a real uptake of the private sector partnering with school divisions, partnering with the government.

The issue is that this requires resources. This requires real support from the government. And so, with all due respect to the member from St. James—and I do appreciate that he's bringing this forward—what I maybe would have preferred is that it was, rather, the Minister of Education who was standing in this place and bringing this forward in a way that actually brought resources from the government to support this program and to expand some of these pilot projects that have been done here in Winnipeg—that expands the projects that have been done in other provinces and actually makes a real difference with real money on the table for school divisions to address these problems, because, you know, the minister has stood up time and time again. He's talked about the importance of literacy and numeracy by this government. He's talked about plans that they have to improve literacy in our schools and yet, when we have a program like this where you can actually put the money in, you can partner with private enterprise, you can partner with other levels of government, you can really make the money multiply and actually address a problem, as I said,

upstream rather than waiting until there's a literacy problem downstream—the minister has been silent on that.

So I do hope that this is something that the minister is listening to carefully, that he listens to the debate that happens here today, that he appreciates that the member for St. James (Mr. Johnston) sees this as a real issue and understands that this is something that we could, as a House, really move forward on and that we could actually make a real difference for—not only for those kids, but for our overall education system and for the future of our province—but that it will require more than just a Tuesday-morning resolution from a member—that this, in all reality, should be coming from the government as a substantive bill, as something that supports this kind of work in our school division, supports our teachers and, as I said, makes a real difference in literacy in our province.

* (10:50)

I think there's a lot of opportunity here. I think this is a first step, and I think we can all take some time to take a look at this and learn more about it. This is great that we've had an opportunity to talk about it here in the House this morning, but we should move forward on this. And I hope that as we do that, as we push for more resources, that the government sees this as a priority, listens to the member from St. James, listens to others, I'm sure, that will put words on the record with regards to this, and supports this going forward.

I know, as I said, as a parent of young children, this is something that is a No. 1 priority for me, making sure that our students are all at the level they need to be. And I certainly hope that this is something that we can move forward on.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Nic Curry (Kildonan): I thank my colleague from St. James for bringing this important resolution for debate. I'm also very happy that—not a lot of people remember what was happening this time a year ago, but it's about—it's almost 11, and at about that time, my father-in-law was going to meet his granddaughter for the first time. So a year ago, Sophie Elvira Curry was born. It was a long weekend that happened. We're so happy to have welcomed her a year ago today. I know—she's the most important person I've ever met, and I'm so glad that I get to share this last year with her and many, many more.

The thing that often people notice about me, I'll have—my car is blue, I have a few blue suits. And people go: Oh well, Conservative; you must love blue. Well, my connection to that colour was that my mother has blue eyes, and it's something that my mom—she was very, very astute at making sure we took my brother and I to eye exams when we were kids, and eventually, it was determined I needed glasses. But now, not only do I get to share with my mother our blue eyes, but little Sophie has beautiful blue eyes, and so three generations of us get to look at each other.

And the first time a baby really starts to recognize their parent's face, you have nothing but tears to return to them because it's a wonderful experience. But sometimes, that experience can be very difficult for a lot of parents and a lot of families because their children have difficulty looking at their parents' faces. They have trouble recognizing shapes, they have trouble interacting with peers.

My wife, Ellen, needed glasses when she was very young, and it was something that was difficult for her many years. Now, her beauty, well, it goes well past her wonderful brown eyes. But it goes more to her ability to persevere through very difficult times, through very great times—to share, that we've been able to have, especially this last year. And it's something that both my wife and I know, that there's a good chance one day Sophia's going to need glasses. We know that's going to be a difficult experience. We know it's going to be very difficult, not just for us identifying but also for her acclimating to that need for glasses.

Now, many of us, as legislators, we have that experience where we need the use of corrective lenses. But not too long ago, having glasses was almost stigmatized. People who would need glasses would receive vitriol and scorn from their peers for no other reason but they looked a bit different. And I'm glad we live in a society now where if my daughter will need corrective lenses, if she's able to use the—this program—the—if she has trouble with any health needs, I know that things like Eye See... Eye Learn are going to be there to help the families, help her, and help my many neighbours and friends in Kildonan.

We have such a wonderful community in the North End. We have so many young families, both new Canadians and people who have been here for many, many generations. We have many people who hail from our First Nations, who have chosen the

North End as the place they'd like to live in the city when they're here, away from their communities, and especially northern Manitoba. And we know that many of them, with their children, also know that one day they may need these programs.

I'd like to also say a great thank you to Dr. Shannon at the See Eye Clinic on Leila who has helped me over the last few years with my needs for my corrective lenses. It's not always been that easy being able to, you know, check up, sometimes going back many times in a month to make sure we can get the right fit. I have a great pair of glasses, and thank you, Dr. Shannon, for all the work you do.

It also reminds me that it happens later in life as well. My brother inherited my father's—much of his hard work and ingenuity, but he also inherited some of his degenerate eye disease. My brother, after high school, has needed to routinely get work on his eyes and is, I know, something he has struggled with.

It's something that has sometimes been a difficulty for him, but it speaks to his strength that my brother, William Curry, who is one of my personal heroes for his constant perseverance in the face of some of the challenges he's had to undergo and needing corrective lenses is one of them.

This is something that, if it's not clear yet, is close to my family. It's close to my concern to make sure that we get this awareness out, and I thank members opposite. They spoke well to this, especially my friend and colleague from Concordia whose family is very close to my own, myself having grown up very close to Concordia Hospital and we've spoken many times about being young fathers, having to go through many of the joys and sometimes the lower points. I thank him for those words.

It sounds that we're relatively in support of this. It's—this is a—something that many people can get behind because at the end of the day, and it's something that my friend from St. James had mentioned, that awareness is one of the most important things. We speak many times to what you may accomplish through law and legislation, but when we're able to debate resolutions, of course a big part of that is that we can get greater awareness. To paraphrase President Theodore Roosevelt, to use the bully pulpit to the advantage of our communities is sometimes one of the greatest tools, especially members outside of Cabinet can do, to use the semi-celebrity that we have, where we see our faces on bus benches once in a while, and if a young

student who maybe one day will need the eye-see eye-care program will see, hey, I saw—you're that guy on that bus bench and you're that person on the bus bench and, you know, I heard you talking about this program and my parents invested in it. Now I have the corrective lenses. If this is something—if we can have one family have their child have better eye care, better vision to go through the trials and tribulations of life, well, this is exactly the best part sometimes of what we can do.

It's something that's relatively low impact in many respects, where we debate this, yes, but it's something that will not need much of a bureaucratic implementation, something that essentially also already exists that we're able to promote through our means, whatever they be. For the people who listen live now, the people who will, say, study this in years to come in graduate study classes, as myself having gone through many a Hansard across the Commonwealth countries and, of course, Canada as well, one day people will hear this and, hopefully, they are looking into how we can see better at getting people to see better. How we can work on processes and advocate for organizations that are doing the hard work that it needs.

Of course, when we speak to seeing optometrists, it's not always the most fun. I know the glaucoma test is something that always scared me as a child, and I know that a lot of people have an institutional fear sometimes of going to see the optometrist and having any—or, see any health-care practitioner, the idea of white coat-it-is. I have a cousin who has anxiety every time they go to see a physician.

Now, this is something that is common enough, and with programs that better prepare people or better encourage people to see the necessary health-care needs that are provided by wonderful practitioners, like optometrists, is something that is going to help all of our communities to better promote this.

I know that it's something, growing up, being in sports especially, it was very difficult as I was younger to get the corrective lenses needed to participate in sports like rugby, but later in life when I was in the military, I was fascinated by how important the stressing of making protective eyewear for members of the military was and that you could get corrective lenses imbedded in protective eyewear. And we know many workplaces nowadays are incredibly safe in their practice of encouraging

and enforcing practices that people maintain safe eyewear, protective eyewear when in various vocations, something that didn't exist many, many years ago, decades ago, because people did not treat their eyes with, say, the security and safety that was needed to make sure they could have full vision and a full life of not suffering the disabilities of that.

I know—I'd like to make also a special note. A constituent of mine, he ran against me in the provincial election, Steven Stairs, has had eye problems for many, many years. He's someone who has advocated for various methods to maintain his limited vision but he has done great work. He and I don't agree on many policy things. We don't agree in a lot of our politics, but we are both fathers; we both live in Garden City. We both love the North End and we both are people who need corrective lenses and I am impressed with—that he can do what he is able to in his advocacy and his work for his community, that he can do that with that disability.

* (11:00)

I, again, want to touch back on the importance it is to, you know, all of us that sometimes, here in our Chamber, we can't always agree on many facets of life. Again, we divide in politics often. This is true. But I hear from members opposite, I hear that there is a desire and encouragement. This is a good thing that we can discuss. It's a good thing that we can all support.

I look forward to seeing my colleagues opposite support this resolution. We can bring this to bear and we can show the people of Manitoba that we all can stand up and agree that keeping our eyes healthy, that the Eye See...Eye Learn program is something that we can use into the future, that we can encourage greater use of it.

I know it's something that all of us can get behind, and I thank my colleague from St. James for bringing this forward. I thank all my colleagues, that we will vote in support of this very shortly.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: We have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce to everybody here. Seated in the public gallery we have Ms. Laureen Goodridge, the executive director of the Manitoba Association of Optometrists, and also Dr. Selena Friesen, who is a Manitoba optometrist,

and they are both here as a guest for the member for St. James (Mr. Johnston).

On behalf of all members here, we welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

* * *

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

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

I declare the resolution carried.

The honourable Government House Leader? No? Oh, the honourable member for Rossmere.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Acting Government House Leader): I appreciate that, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

Wondering if you could canvass the House to see if there's leave to call it 11:23, or 12 o'clock, whichever you would prefer.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to call it 12 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

The hour being 12 p.m., the House is recessed and stands in—recessed until 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 10, 2018

CONTENTS

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Debate on Second Readings—Private Bills

Bill 300—The University of Manitoba Students'
Union Amendment Act

Allum 1147

Mayer 1148

Resolutions

Res. 6—Eye See, Eye Learn

Johnston 1150

Questions

Wiebe 1152

Johnston 1152

Micklefield 1152

Fletcher 1153

Curry 1153

Debate

Wiebe 1154

Curry 1155

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<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>