

April 25/90

The Assembly met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you, and through you to this Assembly, some international guests in our gallery today, and they are Mr. George Liu, who is currently resident in Vienna, Austria; Mr. Joseph Chan of Hong Kong; and Mr. Herman Poon and Connie Tsang. And they are in the front row in your gallery today.

They have come from all parts of the world to visit us in Saskatchewan and explore business opportunities. Mr. Liu has an international trading company operating out of Vienna, Austria, does world-wide business, and is here in Saskatchewan exploring business opportunities in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chan and Mr. Liu are both involved in a company that is also in hotels. Mr. Chan is the vice-president of a corporation that, among other things, is building a 29-storey hotel in Beijing, China, which will have more than 500 rooms and will be one of the largest hotels, if not the largest hotel, in Beijing when its construction is completed in the next few months.

Connie Tsang is now a resident of Canada, has lived in Canada for nine years, and is involved in real estate in British Columbia. And these people know each other through business and they're here exploring business in Saskatchewan. I would like people to give them a warm welcome. I would encourage the media to talk to these people and get an understanding of the world business that these people do. So I introduce these individuals, and would they please rise in the gallery. And I ask everybody to give them a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Martin: -- Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce three distinguished guests who are also in your gallery, seated in the second row, Mr. Speaker. I will ask them to stand in a moment, but first I'd like to introduce them.

They are Madge McKillop of Saskatoon, and Ted and Elsie Azevedo of Nipawin. Miss McKillop is the newly appointed chairperson of the Saskatchewan senior citizens' advisory council. She's recently retired as the Saskatchewan representative of the National Advisory Council on Aging, and I was fortunate to have convinced her to serve on our provincial council before she turned her energies to other areas.

Miss McKillop is well-known in Saskatoon, of course, not only for the many activities on the volunteer basis throughout that area, but also having been the head of nursing at the University of Saskatchewan hospital, and very active in fund raising for the YWCA in Saskatoon. She chaired the seniors' council meeting the past two days.

Mr. Azevedo is well-known in this province for his tireless work -- over 13 years -- on behalf of seniors and the seniors' council. He's been the chairperson since 1983. Last year he was awarded the Saskatchewan Order of Merit and has just returned from Ottawa where he received a citation of citizenship from the Government of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, our three guests have been in Regina over the past few days for the regular council meeting. I've been able to spend considerable time with them and would like the people of Saskatchewan to know how much I and the government and all the people of this province appreciate their wisdom and their guidance. We see seniors as an integral part of the family, certainly an obvious part of the family, Mr. Speaker, and that'll certainly be a profile that the council will be taking during the next few months and throughout the years to come.

I would ask them please to stand: Madge McKillop and Ted and Elsie Azevedo for the seniors council, and please welcome them.

Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Muirhead: --Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the pleasure of introducing students to you for four days in a row, and today, Mr. Speaker, I wish to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a group of students sitting in the gallery right above me here. They are from Schell School from Holdfast, Saskatchewan, and also there is an exchange students from Nova Scotia with them. There are 49 in number, and 25 of these students are from Halifax.

I'd like to take this opportunity, especially to the Nova Scotia students, on behalf of the Assembly, to welcome you to Saskatchewan and hope you have a very good time here in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I've already met with them for drinks and lunch and questions, and I must say to the Assembly that it has been one of the best question periods I've had with students. We discussed mainly the Meech Lake accord, and if we can get some politicians some day from this group, I think our problems could be solved, because I really appreciated their questions and I hope they appreciated some of my answers. I did the best I could. I really appreciated them.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce who is accompanying them, is their teacher from Holdfast, Mr. Achyuthan, and two teachers from Nova Scotia, Mrs. Bev Williams and Mr. Cecil Solomon. And also accompanying them and bringing them here today is a bus driver from Dilke, Gary Grund.

And I would also like to say, Mr. Speaker, that the Holdfast students, in approximately the end of May, are going to Nova Scotia for a week to 10 days -- I believe it's maybe eight or 10 days -- and I wish them a successful trip.

And now I ask all members of the Assembly to join with me in welcoming the students from Nova Scotia and the students from Schell. Thank you very

much.

Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you, and through you to all members of the legislature, 43 grade 8 students who are visiting from Buena Vista School in the constituency of Saskatoon Nutana. They are presently in the east gallery. They are accompanied by the vice-principal, Donna Hrytzak, and their teacher, Earl Francis.

On a special note, Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome Jenni Cvek who is a member of the grade 8 class. She is my next door neighbour. Her family have been wonderful neighbours. And I welcome all of the grade 8 students, and Jenni, to the Legislative Assembly, and I will be meeting with them at 3 o'clock this afternoon. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Ms. Smart: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the critic for seniors' issues on the New Democrat side of the House, I'd like to welcome Madge McKillop and Mr. Ted Azevedo and Mrs. Azevedo to the legislature this afternoon.

I'm delighted to hear that Madge McKillop will be taking over in the provincial council chair because I know from her work on the National Advisory Council on Aging that she brings a great deal of experience and wisdom to this position.

I also want to congratulate Mr. Ted Azevedo for the fine work he's done in the province and for the honours that he's won both in his service to the seniors and to other people in the community and as Madge McKillop's MLA, I'm really pleased to welcome him here in that role as well. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Speaker, I would like to join my colleague also in welcoming Madge McKillop and Ted and Elsie Azevedo. When I was minister of Social Services and minister of Health, I had a very close working relationship with all three of them. And particularly I want to thank Mr. Azevedo in helping me launch the home care program where his advice to me was that it's much better to keep people in their own homes, give them a comprehensive program, rather than have them going to nursing homes. And I thank him very much for that.

Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Privatization of SaskEnergy

Mr. Romanow: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today, through you, sir, is to the Premier and it concerns the Premier's

main economic policy, a policy of privatization which the Premier has indicated to the Legislature and the people of the province of Saskatchewan is at least for the time being, on hold.

Now, Mr. Premier, I have here in front of me a copy of a recent Leader-Post story quoting the president of SaskEnergy, Mr. Oscar Hanson, on the question of privatization of SaskEnergy as saying that he feels, "as strong as ever about this," that SaskEnergy must be privatized, according to this story.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is straightforward. Isn't Mr. Hanson really giving a glimpse to the Saskatchewan people and the legislature of the real strategy of privatization as regards SaskEnergy, namely stop talking about it before the election, but right after the election go full steam ahead with it and finish off the job. Isn't that the real strategy behind this statement and your government?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: -- Mr. Speaker, as the minister responsible for SaskEnergy, I do have some difficulties, because yesterday the member from The Battlefords said that the president of SaskEnergy and several others were brain dead, and so whether he's a competent spokesman and . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. Yesterday at the time when the member made those remarks, I asked him to refrain from making those remarks, and now I'm asking the hon. minister to do so in whatever context he uses it.

Hon. Mr. Lane: -- Sorry for so accurately quoting the member from The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker.

But having said that, the policy with regard to SaskEnergy was stated some time back: that SaskEnergy would not be privatized unless there was public support for the privatization of SaskEnergy.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Romanow: -- Mr. Speaker, I have a new question, and I have the greatest of respect for the Minister of Justice; he's the minister in charge of SaskEnergy. But I would direct this to the Premier, because privatization is such a pivotal question . . . (inaudible) . . . and a pivotal question of the government that it really requires the Premier's answer. It's a pivotal policy of this government, and so therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the Premier as follows, as a preface to this new question.

Clearly Mr. Oscar Hanson is just not an ordinary employee at SaskEnergy. He's a person of senior position. He is the president of SaskEnergy and he's a member of the board of directors of SaskEnergy, and he says you're going to privatize . . . he wants to privatize SaskEnergy.

Now you can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Premier. Either Mr. Hanson is talking out of turn or he's letting the Saskatchewan taxpayers know the true strategy that is behind the government's plans on SaskEnergy.

Can't have it both ways.

My question to you therefore, Mr. Premier, and I wish you would get up to answer this to assure the House and the members of the public at large: is Mr. Hanson speaking for the government or not when he says that SaskEnergy is to be privatized? what's the position?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: -- First of all, he did not say it was to be privatized. And the hon. member, as he is wont to do, is taking some artistic licence with what he had before him.

But I do find it somewhat humorous that the member from Regina Centre says the NDP aren't sure what they're going to do about potash if they were government. The member from Regina Rosemont says they're going to renationalize potash and make potash the sole, the potash corporation the sole potash producer. And you are trying to have it both ways when the people are asking what your policy is on the potash corporation. You have avoided and the press have gone to some of your members.

Now we've said what our policy is with regard to SaskEnergy. That is the policy: is that we would not privatize SaskEnergy unless the public supported the privatization of SaskEnergy. That's the policy that we've stated. The bigger question is the one that they are asking around the province is what would the hon. leader of the NDP do with the potash corporation?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Romanow: -- Mr. Speaker, I have a new question to the Premier. I suspect that the Premier will not give me the courtesy by answering this question but I'll direct it to the Premier in any event. And I will say, Mr. Speaker, through you to the Premier, that we have had the assurances by you, sir, and the members of your government before, that the policy of your government was not to privatize SaskEnergy, and yet within months . . . and SaskPower, and within months of having given that assurance to this House and the public of the province of Saskatchewan, you betrayed them and you betrayed your word by moving to privatize SaskEnergy. You did that a year ago. And now we have the same assurances purportedly given by your colleague, the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, my question is this: in the light of the fact that your government has already transferred the shares in the ownership of SaskEnergy from SaskPower to Crown investments corporation, isn't it correct to say, and also in the light of the fact that you betrayed the confidence in the word a year ago on SaskEnergy, isn't it a fact to say that this transfer of shares over to CIC (Crown investments corporation of Saskatchewan) is the condition precedent for selling off the shares from CIC to private shareholders, the private people who can afford the ownership in SaskEnergy, right after the election's over. Isn't that the case?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: -- It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP now on two occasions today have heard what the government's policy is, and on two occasions today I have given the Leader of the NDP the opportunity to say what their policy is on the potash corporation. And on both of those occasions he has refused to come clean with the people of the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, as to what he intends to do or what he wants to do with the potash corporation, should on the very outside chance he ever forms government.

So he's had two chances. I've given our statement as to what our policy is with regard to SaskEnergy, Mr. Speaker. We've made it clear. I think it's time for the Leader of the New Democratic Party to bare his soul and come clean with the people of the province and tell them what his grand designs are for the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Romanow: -- Mr. Speaker, I have a new question to the Premier. And I say, Mr. Premier, with the greatest of respect, the question is very simple and straightforward. And your government is digging a bigger hole for itself than it's already in by this kind of an answer given by the Minister of Justice.

I'm asking about the SaskEnergy sale. I'm asking about the fact that you transferred the shares from Power to CIC, and I am asking you, sir, to get up right now and tell this House unequivocally and clearly that the next step won't be, as I suspect that it will be, the transfer of shares from CIC to the private shareholders of Canada and North America. Tell us yes or no. Isn't that the real game plan that you have in mind?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: -- Mr. Speaker, I have indicated now on three occasions what the game plan with regard to SaskEnergy. Natural gas and electricity are competing forms of energy, Mr. Speaker. They should not have been under one roof in the first place, because what happened as a result of having them under one roof is that the New Democratic policy of using natural gas and requiring it to be sold to SaskPower, buying it from Alberta, in effect meant that the people of Saskatchewan, one, did not have adequate access to natural gas; and secondly, we didn't have a natural gas industry in this province which is now drilling hundreds and hundreds of wells, now exporting natural gas, Mr. Speaker, for the first time in this province's history.

Having said that, I have now on three occasions said what our policy is with regard to SaskEnergy. It will not be privatized unless the public supports it. For the fourth time today, Mr. Speaker, I'm giving the New Democratic Party leader the opportunity to come clean with his policy on the potash corporation. And having heard, Mr. Speaker, of a very secretive speech in Prince Albert by a member from . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. I am going to remind the Hon. Minister of Justice that when I ask him to discontinue that he should do that and not continue speaking for several seconds after I've asked him to discontinue.

Mr. Romanow: -- Mr. Speaker, I have a new question for the . . . I'm going to keep after the Premier. Believe me, Mr. Premier, you can't duck this; you maybe can duck it in the House but you're not going to be able to duck it outside with the voters and the electorate so you may as well get used to answering these questions.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Romanow: -- Unless you intend to campaign in the next election with the Minister of Justice chained to you and answering these questions all the time. Mr. Speaker, my question . . . although I might add that if he did have the Minister of Justice chained, he'd probably have a little more sense to the answers that have been given, but . . .

My question to you, Mr. Premier, is very simple and I want to make this clear. Your Minister of Justice has said that the policy as of today on SaskEnergy's privatization is that the government is not going to privatize SaskEnergy until the public has a change of heart in this regard and would be more accepting of privatization.

My question to you, Mr. Premier, is this: isn't it correct that, translated in another way, and in a real way, what your Minister of Justice is saying on behalf of you and your government is that if you should win the next election you will have that public support and you then will finish off the job of privatizing SaskEnergy?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: -- Mr. Speaker, I again, for the fourth time, urge the Leader of the New Democratic Party, because he says that he's going to make the issue of the privatization of SaskEnergy a corner-stone of his election.

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that more and more of the people across this province are asking New Democratic members, one, what is your policy? More and more people are asking, what do you really plan to do with the potash corporation? And now, Mr. Speaker, after seven years of . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. The hon. member is using the document he has as an exhibit, and he knows that is not permitted.

Hon. Mr. Lane: -- My apology, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep it secret and keep it down here that the member from Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker, has in the city of Prince Albert, called for reinstatement of the land bank. And, Mr. Speaker, that, Mr. Speaker, is contrary to what they've been trying to hide for the last seven years. They've always down-played it, said they wouldn't do it. He has, Mr. Speaker, some pretty big baggage to carry into the next election, let me tell you.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Romanow: -- Mr. Speaker, I have a new question to the Premier, and I want to tell the Premier that as much baggage as I've got to carry, it's nowhere near as heavy or as onerous as the baggage of the attempted privatization of SaskEnergy and the misdeeds of this government. Nowhere near as onerous.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Romanow: -- Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier . . . this will be my last question on this topic because other members on this side have some questions to ask of you, and I will give you one more chance, sir, to answer it.

Mr. Premier, and Mr. Speaker, my question is this. You know that a few months ago what happened was by order in council, secret cabinet order in council, was a transfer of shares in the ownership . . .

An Hon. Member: -- It's a public document.

Mr. Romanow: -- Oh yes, the document, sure, the document -- the Premier is yelling at me saying that the document is public. The document is public. The decision was made, however, in secret, not in debate in the legislature. No debate here. Now what you did -- just hang on, Mr. Premier -- what you did was you passed an order in council, Mr. Speaker, transferring the shares, the ownership of SaskEnergy from SaskPower to the Crown investments corporation. You said it at that time . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. I have to ask the hon. member to put his question. Order. Would you allow the hon. member to put his question.

Mr. Romanow: -- Mr. Speaker, I will endeavour to answer the question but I thought you were getting up because I couldn't hear myself ask the question because of the Premier's intervention.

The Speaker: -- Order, order. From time to time there are people in this House who do intervene. I think if we just put the question, question period will flow more smoothly.

Mr. Romanow: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the greatest of respect, I think I try to do that as much as any of the members of House. I will put the question to the Premier again; I want to rephrase it. Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is simple. They transferred the shares, the ownership of SaskEnergy from SaskPower to Crown investments corporation. They attempted to justify it on the basis that it was to improve the financial position of SaskPower and SaskEnergy. The annual report of SaskPower said, just a few days ago . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. I know that the hon. member will agree with me that the preamble is getting very long, and I've certainly allowed it to go on quite a long time. And he's extremely competent at phrasing questions; I now ask him to do so.

Mr. Romanow: -- Mr. Speaker, I want to honour your ruling but I want to phrase the question, and in order to phrase the question I have to paint the background. And the background is very simple, sir. They transferred the ownership of SaskEnergy from SaskPower to the Crown investments corporation, and they said that it was because it was to improve the position of SaskPower and SaskEnergy.

My question is: that in the light of the SaskPower annual report tabled a few days ago which disputed that answer, what could be the real reason for doing this, other than getting away with, or an attempt at getting a way of the privatization of SaskEnergy in a quick and efficient way right after the election? And that's my question.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: -- Mr. Speaker, I'll preface my remarks by saying that the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the New Democratic Party, said that this would be his last question on this. I was hoping it wouldn't because he has another few minutes to try and give his policy to the people.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, on December 31 we did transfer the assets from SaskPower to SaskEnergy. Even the press knows about that, Mr. Speaker. It was done at that time. It wasn't secret, and orders in council are not secret, Mr. Speaker.

Secondly, the legal separation took place over a year ago, Mr. Speaker. Again that was public, not in secret. Let me restate, Mr. Speaker, the policy of the government is that SaskEnergy will not be privatized unless the public supports it. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, secondly . . . I know full well I'll never convince the NDP of that.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, he has now had some 25 minutes to state the New Democratic Party policy on the potash corporation and to deny that his member from Prince Albert has said publicly, Mr. Speaker, that the New Democratic Party will bring in the land bank. Mr. Speaker, he had the chance to refute that, and the people are asking more and more and more, Mr. Speaker, what the NDP policies are. Now we know.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Privatization of Saskatchewan Government Insurance

Mr. Lingenfelter: -- I have, Mr. Speaker, a question to the Premier, and it deals with the important issue of privatization, and we'll try to get some answers out of him on another issue.

But it seems to me that Oscar Hanson isn't the only Crown corporation head who is talking a lot about privatization these days. The headline in the Leader-Post today: "SGI president just waiting for privatization." And the article goes on to say, and I quote: "I'd hate to see it (the opportunity to privatize) missed because it's become a political issue."

Now, Mr. Premier, I want you to tell this Assembly why it is that your heads of the Crown corporations continue to talk about support for privatization and the plan to privatize while you're trying to get the people of the province to believe you that you have quit privatizing. Can you tell us why the corporate heads continue to talk of privatizing at this time?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: -- Mr. Speaker, let me repeat for everyone here, let me repeat that the government will not sell SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance). However, it may be prudent in a business manner to expand that corporation. And when the president of SGI says that it is good business to expand SGI into other provinces, I suggest that the members opposite and everyone in Saskatchewan should take notice because that individual knows how to run that corporation. For three years he has shown a profit, he is respected Canada-wide, he is being recruited by other private insurance companies, and if I don't raise his wages he may leave. So I would rather have him expand the company than go to eastern Canada.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Lingenfelter: -- Mr. Speaker, the minister says that no privatization is planned by Mr. Wilde, but here in the Leader-Post it says the "SGI president just waiting for privatization."

Now even if you would do your research by reading the Leader-Post, you would know that SGI is being set up to be privatized by the corporation, and I say with cabinet's approval and support.

My question to you, Mr. Minister, is this. It's stated in the article as well that there has been polling and focus groups done outside of the province on the new privatized corporation. Mr. Minister, this is being done at a time while you're saying that no privatization is going to take place. Can you tell this Assembly the cost of the polling that was done, and the focus groups, and will you release the results of these polling results to the people of the province along with the costs?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: -- Let me say it again, Mr. Speaker. The government will not sell SGI. However, we are exploring the possibility of expanding the general insurance company across Canada.

I can say this, that in the polling and focus testing results, this company has checked in other provinces and we can say this: that the people in Alberta would be favourable to purchasing insurance from an expanded insurance company based in Regina. They understand SGI is a good company.

The people in British Columbia are favourable towards SGI expanding into their province. The people in Ontario and Manitoba are favourable towards this company doing business in their province. Only the NDP are opposed to SGI expanding into those provinces. Why don't they want that money to come

into Saskatchewan? Why don't they want those head office jobs in Saskatchewan?

They wanted the potash corporation to have its head office in Saskatchewan but they don't want a larger insurance company to have its head office here. Why? Because they think small, Mr. Speaker, that's why.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Lingenfelter: -- Well, Mr. Speaker, another question to the . . . a new question to the minister. But it seems to me that there were a few more than the members of the opposition opposed to privatization when we submitted 100,000 names on a petition here in the House last year.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Lingenfelter: -- Mr. Minister, Mr. Wilde is quoted as well in the final paragraph of the article saying:

The timing is very good right now. If the political decision was made tomorrow, it could be done this year (referring to privatization). It's sitting on the shelf, waiting.

Now, Mr. Minister, how do you square that with the comments of yourself and other ministers and the Premier who say that privatization is not ready to go. It's sitting on the shelf waiting to go. Privatization of SaskEnergy is on hold. Isn't it true that they're waiting until immediately after the next provincial election? If you are lucky enough to win, the privatization of SGI would start the next day and SaskEnergy the day following. Isn't that the simple fact?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: -- Mr. Speaker, with respect to SGI, the people of Saskatchewan are going to have to make a serious business decision. This corporation has peaked. Under conservative business management it has made as much profit as you can squeeze out of this little company doing business in 4 per cent of Canada only. And therefore we have to decide. There is no way up for this company. It has peaked. For this company to grow, it must expand around this country.

People from around the world are doing business in Saskatchewan. People from Saskatchewan must do business around the world. London Life would not be as big as it is if it were just in Ontario, and I can give you other examples. This company must grow.

The members opposite are opposed to creating new jobs in Saskatchewan, at least 50 new jobs for our young people immediately. They're opposed to it, paying corporate taxes in Saskatchewan. They're opposed to the spin-off. They're opposed to its new head office which it would need. They're opposed to everything. I really don't know what their purpose in life is.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Closing of Rural Post Offices

Mr. Koskie: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to direct a question to the Premier. As the Premier will know that his buddies, the MPs of the Tory Party, on a committee, a parliamentary committee, recommended the privatization of the postal service across Canada. And last night, Mr. Premier, last night at Cadillac in the Shaunavon constituency, over 200 people rallied to save their postal services.

I want to ask you, Mr. Premier, where was the Tory member of parliament? Was he there, helping the people? Where, why -- why was the local MLA of Shaunavon so silent on the issue? Why isn't he speaking up, Mr. Premier?

And, Mr. Premier, I ask you. Mr. Premier, the people of Saskatchewan are demanding action. We are demanding action to help the people of Saskatchewan to preserve this service. I ask you, will you stand up and fight with the people of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Devine: -- Mr. Speaker, I always stand up and fight for the people of Saskatchewan, and I -- thank you, thank you very much -- and I really appreciate the admiration of the opposition and my own members, Mr. Speaker. It's very nice to get almost a standing ovation, Mr. Speaker, from the members opposite; I really appreciate it.

I always stick up for the people of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan people come first. Right now we're after \$500 million for Saskatchewan people from the federal government. And if we could only get the support of the NDP, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure we could have it here much faster than we have lately, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

The Speaker: -- Order, order.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

National Consumer Week

Hon. Mr. Klein: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I passed a copy of this statement to my critic before question period. And I wish to bring to the attention of the Assembly that this week is being observed as National Consumer Week in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Together with the federal department and the Consumers' Association of Canada, Saskatchewan Consumer and Commercial Affairs is celebrating the first ever National Consumer Week.

Last fall, provincial, territorial, and federal ministers of Consumer Affairs all agreed upon the importance of focussing national attention on the market-place for a special week each year. It is important that we pause to consider the fundamental importance of the market-place for all

Canadians, something which is often taken for granted. The theme of this special week is: team up for a stronger market-place. Consumers, businesses, and government are partners in the market-place. By working together we can make the best use of our combined resources. National Consumer Week is an opportunity to build a relationship among these three market-place partners, based on mutual respect and understanding. National Consumer Week provides an opportunity to make this team stronger and the market-place stronger. We can all team up for a stronger market-place by working together to make the best use of our resources.

By working together, Mr. Speaker, consumers, business, and government help Saskatchewan's economy grow and diversify. National Consumer Week is a time to celebrate and encourage market-place innovation, like the self-administration models which Saskatchewan has pioneered in the insurance and real estate industries.

National Consumer Week is also a time to celebrate individual growth and to enhance the market-place skills of our citizens through the consumer education programs and resources which make Saskatchewan the envy of other provinces.

It is fitting that in Saskatchewan Branch of the Consumers Association of Canada are holding their annual meeting this weekend in Saskatoon, and as the Minister responsible for Consumer and Commercial Affairs, Mr. Speaker, I will have the honour of addressing that meeting on Saturday.

During National Consumer Week in our province, I urge the hon. members, consumers, and business people to join with Saskatchewan Consumer and Commercial Affairs in building market-place confidence and integrity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Calvert: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to join with the minister today in recognizing National Consumer Week in Canada, the first of such national weeks in Canada. And with the minister, I would like to recognize the very valuable work that the Consumers Association of Canada, and particularly at Saskatchewan branch, is doing in this nation and in this province.

And, Mr. Minister, I too look forward to being with the Consumers Association this week as they meet in their annual meeting. I look forward to meeting with them tomorrow evening as a matter of fact.

But, Mr. Minister, I would point out to you today, and to all members of the House, that if there are issues facing consumers in this province today you failed to mention them in your statement. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan consumers today are concerned about the proposed sell-off of SaskPower. They're concerned about the proposed sell-off of SGI. They're concerned about the proposed closures of their post offices. Consumers in Saskatchewan are concerned about that.

But, Mr. Speaker, the number one consumer concern in Saskatchewan today is

the new Tory tax, the goods and services tax that's going to cost 7 per cent increase for all consumers in this province, a tax that's going to create major headaches for Saskatchewan small-business people, a tax that obviously is going to be inflationary. So, Mr. Speaker, I propose if this House wishes to mark in an appropriate way the celebration of consumers week in Canada and in Saskatchewan, then this House tomorrow should deal with a motion that condemns the federal government for its introduction of the goods and services tax. That's what consumers in Saskatchewan would like us to do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

MOTION UNDER RULE 39

Closure of Rural Post Offices

Mr. Koskie: -- Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day, I rise pursuant to rule 39 to seek leave to move a motion of urgent and pressing importance. As members will know, Mr. Speaker, that recently the federal government has been closing a lot of hospitals throughout the province . . . post offices, pardon me. And recently, Mr. Speaker, Progressive Conservative members on a parliamentary committee have now urged the government for the complete privatization of Canada Post. This is going to have drastic consequences on services in rural Saskatchewan, indeed all of Canada. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move:

That this Assembly urges the Government of Canada to reverse its decision to close rural post offices, not to privatize Canada Post as has been recommended by the Progressive Conservative members of the parliamentary committee, and to maintain and improve postal services in rural Saskatchewan and throughout rural Canada.

I so move, seconded by my seat mate from Humboldt.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Leave not granted.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

The Speaker: -- Order, order. We can't hear the Clerk. I can't hear the Clerk and she's only a few feet from me. We're under government orders. Would you allow the Clerk to address the House. Member from Regina Elphinstone, please, and whoever else is involved. Would you please repeat that; I haven't had the opportunity to hear you.

(1445)

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 3 -- An Act respecting Custody of, Access to and Guardianship of Property of Children, Child Status and Parentage and Related Matters

Hon. Mr. Lane: -- Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Children's Law Act. This Bill will replace The Infants Act and will provide clear rules with respect to child custody, access status, parentage, and guardianship of their property.

However it will not change the basic principles of legislation regarding children. Parents are joint legal custodians of their children and guardians of their children's property with equal rights, powers, and duties. When the court must make a decision which will affect those rights, powers, and duties, the overriding consideration is the best interests of the child.

The new provisions of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, relate to child custody, access, and status. Part IV of the Bill establishes extensive remedies for the enforcement of custody and access orders and agreements. Currently the only remedy available is to have a person disobeying a custody or access order found in contempt of court.

Parents who have been forced to take this drastic action in the past have been frustrated by its limitations. The greatest problem, Mr. Speaker, is that this remedy does nothing to assist parents in exercising their custody and access rights. It is merely a punishment against the other parent.

By establishing these new remedies, Mr. Speaker, the focus is no longer on punishment of the parent who is disobeying the custody or access provision; instead assistance is provided to the other parent to ensure that the custody or access order or agreement is honoured. For example, the court could order that access be supervised. It could order that a person who has been denied access be given extra periods of access as compensation. It could order that security be given for the performance of the obligation to give the other person access. It could order a person to pay expenses incurred by another as a result of a failure to comply with the terms of a custody or access order or agreement.

Where a parent is not allowed to remove the child from Saskatchewan, the court could order the parent to post a bond or deliver up the parent's passport or the child's passport. In extreme cases, the court could order that a child be apprehended or that a parent be restrained from harassing the other parent.

With respect to child status, this proposed legislation will also repeal The Legitimacy Act. A person's status as a child of his or her parent is declared to be the same whether he or she is born inside or outside of the marriage. Current Saskatchewan legislation which treats legitimate and illegitimate children differently is amended in the consequential amendments to this Bill.

Provision is also made, Mr. Speaker, for the court to make an order recognizing parentage. For this purpose, presumptions of paternity are established. The court is given authority to order blood or genetic tests to the child and possible parents, and to allow the test results to be admitted in evidence.

This, like The Family Maintenance Act, encourages mediation. It allows the court to order that the parties attend at least one mediation session. A consequential amendment to The Department of Justice Act authorizes the minister to appoint a manager of mediation services, who can provide mediation services to the public on a fee-for-service basis. The parties are, of course, free to choose their own mediator. However, because the mediation industry is unregulated, it is desirable for the courts to know that they can have access to qualified mediators.

Also this Bill includes uniform provisions which have been adopted in other provinces with regard to jurisdiction of the court in custody disputes, as well as the recognition of custody orders, access orders, and declarations of parentage made outside of Saskatchewan.

Provisions with respect to guardianship of children's property are for the most part unchanged. The law is clarified with respect to the distinction between guardians and trustees, and any person can appoint a trustee to hold money which he or she is giving to a child, either during the person's lifetime or by will.

Guardians of the property of the child, which in most cases will be the parents, can by will appoint another person to be the guardian of the property of their child on their death. The person who is appointed guardian will be in the same position as the parents with respect to their authority.

As the law currently provides, a guardian of the property of a child, after furnishing whatever security the court may require, has the care and management of the child's property and the right to receive money belonging to the child.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, and the proposed Family Maintenance Act which is also currently before this House, make dramatic improvements in family law in Saskatchewan. I'm pleased to move second reading of An Act respecting Custody of, Access to and Guardianship of Property of Children, Child Status and Parentage and Related Matters.

Mr. Prebble: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have several concerns about this Bill. I want to say at the outset that we will be supporting the legislation but that we will be proposing several significant amendments in two important areas. And I give notice to the minister of these intentions at this point so that he might consider them, Mr. Speaker.

This is a very complex and important Bill, as the minister has outlined. And I think there are two important issues that need to be addressed by the government that the government has not addressed in this piece of legislation.

One is the question of assurance of accessibility to mediation services at a reasonable cost in the province of Saskatchewan. And right now, as the government well knows, the predominant deliverer of mediation services in

this province, Mr. Speaker, are lawyers. We're talking about a private sector contractual arrangement that two spouses who require mediation services need to enter into, usually with a private lawyer. Some mediation services in the larger urban centres are delivered by community-based family agencies, and in the case of Saskatoon, some mediation services are provided by the unified family court.

But predominantly in this province, Mr. Speaker, families requiring mediation services have to deal with private lawyers. And in many cases, Mr. Speaker, as many people watching the proceedings of the Assembly today will know, there's a great deal of expense in obtaining these mediation services from private sector lawyers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what we are proposing today to the Minister of Justice is that he amend this Bill; he bring forward further amendments to the legislation that would in effect guarantee families access to mediation services in the province of Saskatchewan -- and this is particularly a concern in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker -- and guarantee not only a guarantee to access to mediation services, but a guarantee to access to them at a reasonable cost, Mr. Speaker, at a reasonable cost.

Now what we are proposing, Mr. Speaker, is that the provincial government fund positions for mediation officers who would work in the major court centres throughout the province. And the services of these mediators would be available upon request to provide help in informally settling custody and maintenance disputes, thus helping to save on legal fees and on court time.

Mr. Speaker, we urge the government to look at such a system. We think it would be cost-effective. We think it would be a significant saving to the many parties who require mediation services over the years, Mr. Speaker. So we think that both from a cost point of view, and from the point of view of encouraging these disputes to be settled in an informal manner rather than before the courts, would be highly advantageous.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to a second area that we consider to be extremely important, and that is with respect to the question of the protection and security of children and the rights that children have to such protection and security, that we do not find to be guaranteed to them by virtue of this legislation.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to urge the Minister of Justice and the members of the government to reassess this piece of legislation in light of the fact that Canada is about to be one of the signatories to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. This is a very major convention that Canada has played a significant role in establishing. Canada will obviously be one of the early signatories to this convention, Mr. Speaker. And not only will the Canadian government be asked to sign this important convention on the rights of the child, but it will sign with the understanding that provincial governments across Canada will adhere to the terms of that convention, Mr. Speaker.

And I might add, Mr. Speaker, that this will require a number of important

legislative changes by the government opposite, because there are a number of areas in which this provincial government does not adhere to the proposed United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

But I want to focus today, Mr. Speaker, on the question of the protection and security of children in this province, that one would expect this piece of legislation would address and yet which this piece of legislation does not adequately address, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to say, first of all, that we urge the Government of Saskatchewan to bring forward a proposal in this Bill and in The Family Services Act that would establish an office of a children's advocate in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, an office of the children's advocate -- an office, Mr. Speaker, where the children's advocate and his staff would basically have the responsibility for ensuring that children's rights with respect to their protection and security are guaranteed, Mr. Speaker.

And I will not comment on this point, Mr. Speaker, about how that might be done with respect to The Family Services Act, other than to say that, among other things, the children's advocate would ensure that children's voice is heard in the court, when there is a question relating to child custody or where there is a proposal with respect to The Child and Family Services Act, that children may be placed in a foster home or removed from their parents.

Here, Mr. Speaker, in this piece of legislation we're dealing with the question of child custody. And we believe, Mr. Speaker, that the children's advocate could play a very important role in making sure that in custody and access disputes, the voice of children and the desires of children are heard in the court.

The Bill that the Minister of Justice has brought forward and has given second reading to, Mr. Speaker, provides no such protection and guarantees no such rights for children at all, Mr. Speaker. They have no voice in the proceedings of the court and they have no advocate on their behalf, Mr. Speaker, no children's advocate who would work on their behalf.

So I want to specifically turn to section 8 of the Bill, which is an important section and which deals with considerations relating to the making or rescinding of an order for custody; and say, Mr. Speaker, that we recommend to the government with respect to this section, that they amend this section in such a way that a court . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. I don't think you can refer specifically to clauses in the Bill, and you will have to wait until we are into Committee of the Whole to make those kinds of detailed explanations and amendments. So I'll have to ask you to refrain from that.

Mr. Prebble: -- It's not my intent to specify a long list of sections of the Bill. This is quite a pivotal section; I just wanted to make a brief reference to it. But in light of your ruling, let me simply . . .

The Speaker: -- Excuse me. I'm not preventing you from making a general

reference to it and certainly you can, but it sounded to me like you were making a detailed reference with a specific amendment attached to it. So certainly you can make references to the section.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Speaker, I want to say with respect to section 8 of the Bill that it has a number of shortcomings. And for one thing, I think it fails, first of all, as I mentioned, to address the question of the need for a children's advocate in the province of Saskatchewan.

And we believe, Mr. Speaker, that the Bill should permit the court, in the case of a custody and access hearing, to hear a recommendation from the children's advocate who would basically be providing a voice for the child and be considering the best interests of the child and be making those recommendations known to a judge and known to a court, Mr. Speaker.

I also note with respect to this section that there is no guarantee that a child have the right to be heard by a judge before the courts in the case of a custody and access hearing, Mr. Speaker. This doesn't mean that a judge cannot provide a child with the opportunity to be heard, but it means that there's no guarantee for the child to be heard, Mr. Speaker. And once again, we are of the view, Mr. Speaker, that a child should automatically receive the right to be heard by the court if the child has reached thirteen years of age or more, Mr. Speaker. Now that right is not provided to children in this Bill, and we regret that, Mr. Speaker.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we believe that the Bill should provide a child the right to receive advice from legal counsel. And yet once again, Mr. Speaker, there is no such provision in this legislation, and we find that to be unfortunate.

(1500)

Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on the mediation process as outlined in this Bill and say that once again, with respect to mediation, children are not assured the right to be represented in the mediation process, Mr. Speaker. And it seems to us that once again, if a child has reached thirteen years of age or more, children should have the right to be represented and involved in the mediation process.

Mr. Speaker, I find it somewhat ironic that for many purposes of family law the government opposite considers a child to be no longer a child when they reach 16 years of age, and yet even for 16- and 17-year-olds this Bill provides them with no rights with respect to being heard in a custody dispute before the courts, or to be involved in the mediation process, Mr. Speaker. And we really find that quite alarming, and it is, Mr. Speaker, I might add, very much out of sync with the new United Nations covenant on the rights of children, Mr. Speaker.

So I urge the Minister of Justice and I urge his government to look at that charter and to look at that covenant and to bring in amendments to this Bill which reflect the spirit of that U.N. covenant, Mr. Speaker.

I want to comment on another section of the Bill which is very important,

and that's section 4, which permits a parent to appoint one or more guardians as legal custodian of the child, to take effect on the surviving parent's death until the child reaches 18 years of age. In other words, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: -- Excuse me. Excuse me. I don't think you're understanding my ruling. It's been a tradition of this House, and it's nothing new, that we can't quote clause by clause, discuss the Bill clause by clause. We can discuss the Bill in a general way.

And I know you have some points you wish to make, but it seems like you're quoting clause by clause and then referring to that specific clause and discussing the Bill that way. And unfortunately that's out of order.

And I know you can discuss the Bill in a general way very well. I realize. I know that.

Mr. Prebble: -- Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'll abide by your ruling.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, among other things, deals with the question of the appointment of legal guardians, legal custodians for a child, and deals with the question, Mr. Speaker, of the surviving parent's rights to appoint such a legal custodian in the event of their death.

And, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that again the Bill makes no provision for, is an opportunity for a child who has reached 13 years of age to have some input into the question of who their legal custodian would be, Mr. Speaker.

And we believe, Mr. Speaker, that there should be a requirement, in fact, under the law, under this Act, The Children's Law Act, Mr. Speaker, that would guarantee a child who's reached 13 years of age the right to have an input and in fact to agree on who their legal custodian should be before that legal custodian is appointed, Mr. Speaker.

Surely this is reasonable, Mr. Speaker. A 13-year-old or a 15-year-old or 16-year-old is quite capable of making a judgement, Mr. Speaker, about the appropriateness of the appointment of their legal custodian. And yet the government, Mr. Speaker, provides absolutely no assurance that a teenager would have any say in this appointment whatsoever. And we find that to be disappointing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation also deals with extradition orders. Once again, the United Nations covenant requires that there should be no extradition without children having the ability to participate in the decision-making process. Yet, Mr. Speaker, we find no such provision made under this piece of legislation.

And clearly again, Mr. Speaker, it's our view that a teenager or a child who's reached 13 years of age or more should be given the right in law to state their interest before a court order is made on the matter of whether a child should be returned to another province.

So, Mr. Speaker, again we're surprised that not only does the child not have, by way of this piece of legislation, the right in law to state their interests before a court, but they're not provided with a guarantee to legal counsel, Mr. Speaker. And surely a child that's facing extradition should have the right to legal counsel. And surely, Mr. Speaker, a child who's reached 13 years of age should have the right, in the case of an extradition order to another province, to be heard before the courts. And yet no such rights are provided in this Bill, Mr. Speaker.

I invite the minister too, to review the Bill as it pertains to the International Child Abduction Act because this Bill, Mr. Speaker, states clearly that where the legislation is in conflict with the International Child Abduction Act, the latter Act prevails.

And yet, Mr. Speaker, the minister knows full well that the International Child Abduction Act makes no provision for legal counsel for children. And this is important because children in this situation are after all, Mr. Speaker, arrested and usually placed in detention prior to being returned to the parent who has custody of them overseas, Mr. Speaker.

And again, Mr. Speaker, we think it's important that children in these circumstances who are 13 years of age or more have access to legal counsel and, Mr. Speaker, this Bill does not guarantee that, and we are very disappointed that there are no such guarantees.

Mr. Speaker, also as the Minister of Justice made reference to, this Bill deals with the question of a guardian's authority in managing property held on behalf of children and with the security that a guardian must provide. Mr. Speaker, there is no requirement in law for the guardian to provide a child with information about how property is being managed on their behalf. And this Bill does nothing to correct that inadequacy, Mr. Speaker. Rather, Mr. Speaker, what the guardian must do is account for the way the property has been managed once the child becomes 18 years of age. And, again, Mr. Speaker, we think that this is inadequate. It is inadequate protection and security for a child, who in effect has no say on how their property is managed and is provided with no information about how their property is being managed until their 18th birthday, at which time they are required by law to have a reporting of how that management has taken place.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we say that's not good enough. We say, first of all, that children 13 years of age or more should be entitled to information from the guardian on a regular basis about how their property is being managed.

And we also say, Mr. Speaker, that, and I think here, more importantly, that again the children's advocate has an important role to play here; that all guardians who are managing property on behalf of children who have lost their parents, Mr. Speaker, should be providing every six months a report to the children's advocate on how that property is being handled, Mr. Speaker, and yet no provision for that is made in this Bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, if I can summarize, let me say that these are the inadequacies that we find with this legislation. First of all, with

respect to the question of mediation, this legislation, Mr. Speaker, while it provides some improvement in terms of the mediation process in the province, doesn't deal with the central issue and that is, particularly in rural Saskatchewan, the lack of access that two spouses who require mediation services have to mediation services, Mr. Speaker, at a reasonable price.

We are proposing, Mr. Speaker, that the government establish by way of this Bill, assurance, Mr. Speaker, that parents will have access to mediation services at a reasonable price. And, Mr. Speaker, moreover, that mediation officers be established by this government in the major court centres around this province. And of course those mediation officers would be available to offer mediation services to any spouses that may require such services so that disputes can be informally settled rather than those parties having to spend a great deal of money settling those disputes before the courts, Mr. Speaker. That's the first key issue.

And the second key issue, Mr. Speaker, is the question of the rights of children as it pertains to their protection and their security. The failure of this government clearly, Mr. Speaker, to review the United Nations covenant on the child before coming forward with this legislation -- its failure, Mr. Speaker, in many cases to adhere to the spirit of that covenant in this Bill, Mr. Speaker.

And therefore we are saying, Mr. Speaker, that in our view, in sharp contrast to the government, we believe that it is incumbent on the government to guarantee the protection and security of children, and to particularly guarantee rights in regard to protection and security if children are 13 years of age or more.

And we say, Mr. Speaker, that that should pertain with respect to a child having voice in the courts during a custody dispute; that the child should have access to the advice of the children's advocate; that the child at 13 year of age or more should have access to legal counsel during custody disputes.

And we're saying that that same principle, Mr. Speaker, should apply in a number of other areas: the child's right to be involved in the mediation process if the child is 13 years of age or more; the child's right, Mr. Speaker, in the case of a guardian managing their property, to have access to information about how that property is being managed if they've reached 13 years of age or more; the importance, Mr. Speaker, in the case of a guardian managing property on behalf of a child, for that guardian to be reporting on a regular basis to the children's advocate regardless of the age of the child, so that there is some third party ensuring that the guardian is properly managing the child's financial interest, Mr. Speaker.

And we're saying that that same kind of principle with respect to children's rights in terms of their security and protection should apply with respect to extradition, whether it's between provinces or whether it's an extradition order that involves taking a child, holding them in custody and detention, and then returning them to their parent outside of Canada, Mr. Speaker. And we're saying that a child who has reached 13 years of age

should have right to legal counsel in those kinds of circumstances.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, we're saying that a child who's reached 13 years of age surely should have some say in the appointment of the legal custodian who will be their legal custodian until they're 18 years of age, Mr. Speaker. And we're asking the government to review the rights of a child in light of the fact that when it comes to the provision of family services for children, a child is no longer considered to be a child, as the Minister of Social Services well knows, when the child becomes 16 years of age. And yet even 16- and 17-year-olds in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, are not provided with any rights with respect to their security and protection as it pertains to the children's law. And we find that to be unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice to the Minister of Justice that we will be pressing these issues in Committee of the Whole; that we will be moving amendments on these issues in Committee of the Whole. And what I want to say now, Mr. Speaker, is that because this is a very important Bill, I would like to have the opportunity to consult with a number of organizations that are interested in the question of the rights of children as it pertains to their protection and security, and I will therefore adjourn the debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 5 -- An Act respecting Child and Spousal Maintenance and Consequential Amendments resulting therefrom

Hon. Mr. Lane: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of The Family Maintenance Act. The law in Saskatchewan with respect to child and spousal maintenance has become inadequate to deal with all of the family relationships that exist today. The Children of Unmarried Parents Act was passed in 1973. The Deserted Spouses' and Children's Maintenance Act was passed in 1950. Maintenance provisions are also found in The Infants Act and The Queen's Bench Act.

Despite amendments over the years, these laws have failed to keep pace with the needs of families, and they will be replaced by the Bill that is before the House today.

The Family Maintenance Act establishes principles and procedures for the courts to apply in making maintenance orders for children and spouses. The Act ensures that children will be provided for, whether or not their parents are or have ever been married to each other. Every parent has an obligation to provide maintenance in accordance with the child's needs and the parent's ability to pay.

This parental obligation extends to a person such as a step-parent who has demonstrated a settled intention to treat the child as a child of his or her family. Where a child is unable to maintain himself or herself after age 18 because of illness or disability, a maintenance order can be made or extended past that day.

With respect to spousal maintenance, courts have in recent years attempted to assist separating spouses in severing all economic ties between them wherever possible. This Bill recognizes that principle by providing that a maintenance order should whenever possible promote the economic self-sufficiency of each spouse within a reasonable period of time. A maintenance obligation is established for unmarried spouses where they have lived together for at least three years, or have lived together in a relationship of some permanence and are the parents of a child.

Mediation of family disputes is viewed by many as a preferable alternative to litigation. This Bill, Mr. Speaker, encourages mediation in two ways. The court is given authority to refer disputes to a mediator. Provision is also made for an agreement for maintenance to be filed in court and enforced in the same way as a maintenance order. These provisions ensure that there are fewer impediments to the resolution of outstanding issues when a family unit breaks down.

Mr. Speaker, I'm confident that together with the proposed Children's Law Act, also currently before this House, this Bill will substantially improve family law in Saskatchewan. I'm pleased to move second reading of an Act respecting Child and Spousal Maintenance and the Consequential Amendments resulting therefrom.

Mr. Koskie: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want only to make a few comments in respect to the Bill, and I can advise the minister that we've had an opportunity to review it, that we are in concurrence with the provisions of the Bill and would indicate that there are some significant improvements which we will deal with in respect to clause by clause. There are a couple of concerns that have been pointed out, which we will be pointing out, and perhaps the minister will take into consideration the possibility of those recommendations.

But the general thrust of the Act we certainly are in agreement, Mr. Speaker, and are prepared to support it and allow it to proceed to third reading or Committee of the Whole.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Speaker, after consulting with the Opposition House Leader and because of the event that we will be experiencing, it was felt that all members should have the opportunity to participate in the portrait dedication ceremony of the previous lieutenant governor and so therefore I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Assembly adjourned at 3:18 p.m.