

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise once again on behalf of concerned citizens for the province of Saskatchewan with respect to the closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The names on this petition are from the small communities of Milestone, Penzance, Cupar, and a number of names from the city of Regina. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bjornerud: — I also would like to present petitions of names throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider the closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The communities that names came from are Regina, Estevan, mostly the city of Regina and through southern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise to present names of people throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Canora, Theodore, Herbert, Moosomin, and a number from Roblin, Manitoba.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well on behalf of citizens concerned about the impending closure of the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

All of the signatures are from Regina. And if I knew the city better and the addresses, I'd be sure they'd come from Regina South.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to present petitions of names from people throughout southern Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon.

Assembly may be pleased to reconsider the closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by concerned citizens, of course, of Regina, as well as surrounding Regina, and that of Glenavon, Mossbank, Montmartre, McLean as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

And those people who have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Wood Mountain, Rockglen, Assiniboia, Limerick, St. Victor, Fir Mountain, and also Gravelbourg, and Glentworth, to name some of the constituents.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present petitions of names from through Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed the petitions, Mr. Speaker, they're mostly from Regina here. We have two pages full. And we also have people from Macoun and all from throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on day no. 41 with my colleagues and the people all throughout Saskatchewan in their efforts of trying to save the Plains Health Centre here in Regina. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed this petition are almost all from the Regina area. In fact many from Regina Victoria, Regina Coronation Park, of course Regina Albert South, Regina Elphinstone, Regina Northeast, and Regina Dewdney, in particular.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly, not one but two groups from Regina Coronation Park. Seated in the west gallery are 48 O'Neill High School grade 12 students accompanied by their teacher Rhonda Barnes-Pitka and Roger Sylvestre. I ask all members to join me in welcoming the grade 12's from O'Neill.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Thank you. And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, in your gallery there are 26 students from Elsie Myronuk School and these are grades 4 and 5 students. And their teacher is Anca Toma and chaperons include Mrs. Morrison, Mrs. Olson, Mrs. Wilson, Mrs. Wacker, and Mrs. Hamilton.

Now I want to while we're welcoming these groups, just announce that room 218 is our territory; we'll call it Regina Coronation Park territory for the balance of the afternoon because I'm meeting with these groups back to back there. I ask all of my colleagues to join me in welcoming the groups.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce 14 guests from Thailand accompanied by Mr. Ron Veller, assistant director of education for the Kerrobert School Division, and his wife Rae. A total of 60 people from Thailand are visiting Canada over the three-week period from April 18 to May 10. And most of our Thai visitors here today are teachers and administrators involved in elementary and secondary education.

Some people from government, university, and technical levels are also here as well. The Kerrobert School Division, Mr. Speaker, is hosting our 14 guests during their stay in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Canada and Thailand are two of 54 participating countries throughout the world who are members of the American Field Service. I look forward along with the Minister for Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, and the Education critics in the opposition, to meeting our guests in the members' dining lounge at 3 o'clock and I would ask all members of the legislature to join me in welcoming our Thai guests.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you, sir — although I don't think you need the introduction, or many people in the legislature need the introduction — the presence of a former premier, a distinguished premier of the province of Saskatchewan, my predecessor, Mr. Allan Blakeney, who served as premier of this province from 1971 to 1982 and then in opposition from 1982 to 1987, I guess it was, Mr. Premier. And with his wife, Anne Blakeney.

They have accompanying them, Mr. Jeff Caville of Ottawa. I hope I'm pronouncing the name correctly. Jeff is the grandson of Mr. Allan Gilmore who's the first executive director of the Wascana Centre. The Wascana Centre, as you know, is the joint

enterprise of the government, the University of Regina, and the city of Regina in the hundred-year project which beautifies the surrounding area. And I know that Al Blakeney was very much active when he was a minister, before taking over the leadership and the premiership of the government, in the development of Wascana.

Mr. Speaker, would you please join me and all the members join me in welcoming a very, very distinguished Canadian, his wife, and Jeff Caville to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to welcome this afternoon Mr. Blakeney to the legislature here, on behalf of the Conservative opposition. We too are keeping an eye on the Premier, the current Premier, Mr. Blakeney, and we just want you to know that as well.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we would like to extend our welcome as well to the visitors from Thailand. The American Field Service organization has been successful at helping individuals from all over the world understand each other's culture and history.

I am pleased that the first delegation ever to visit Saskatchewan are being hosted by the Kerrobert School Division in my constituency. It's exciting to have 14 friends from Thailand touring our beautiful province for the next three weeks. Our guests have experienced quite a bit since arriving here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, including a touring a Hutterite colony, an oil plant, a buffalo ranch, a dairy farm, several local art galleries and museums, and of course many local schools.

It's true that the world is getting even smaller, Mr. Speaker, and it's through such important exchange programs that we can continue to expand our knowledge of other countries and cultures to the benefit of us all.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to also welcome our very special guests here this afternoon and wish them wonderful weeks here in Saskatchewan visiting here in our great province.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too, on behalf of the Her Majesty's Official Opposition, would like to extend my welcome to not only our international travellers, but to our former premier of this province. And I might just add, Mr. Speaker, he looks considerably younger than he did when he sat in the House. But I want to wish them very well and a welcome here as well on behalf of the official opposition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to you and to members of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce a constituent and a friend in the west gallery today, a gentleman who had a long career in the education field and is

now in retirement active in terms of the cooperative movement, Angus Addley, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

NATO Delegation

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express our gratitude on behalf of all Saskatchewan residents for the many volunteers and military officials who today are doing their utmost to provide a warm welcome to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization delegation visiting 15 Wing Moose Jaw. These officials, representing airforces from member NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) countries, are touring the city of Moose Jaw and the base to assess it as a possible site for training NATO pilots as part of a billion-dollar contract. The Moose Jaw effort is part of a three-community bid to attract this important training to Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Moose Jaw has had a long and proud tradition of training pilots to defend democracy. Pilots trained there valiantly and fought in the Second World War, and in more recent times, they have delivered precious aid to innocent victims of conflicts around the world while serving on United Nations peacekeeping missions.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, we wish these dignitaries a warm visit to our province and we hope the Canadian aerospace training project personnel are successful in securing these jobs for our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Regina Economic Development Authority Launches Web Site

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I introduced a new high-tech word to the legislature — cybrarian. Well today I want to announce another more economically directed advance into the world of high-tech — an announcement, Mr. Speaker, that shows we are doing far more than just talking about preparing for the new century.

Last Friday at the University of Regina software technology centre, the Regina Economic Development Authority officially launched its own web site. For the cybernetically challenged, this means that Regina is now on the Internet. We can now be surfed and trolled.

The Regina Economic Development Authority's web site will greatly increase our city's exposure to the world. It will translate into economic benefit for Regina and for the province. Potential residents, businesses, employees, and executives will be able to quickly find the information they need to relocate or do business here.

Also, Mr. Speaker, this newest high-tech development is yet another example of partnership of governments and private

sector companies working together. Both federal and provincial governments contributed to the project under the Internet access application development fund. The Regina authority will administer the site and it was designed by Digital Mediaworks of Regina.

Mr. Speaker, increasingly Saskatchewan is at the head of the class when it comes to info technology, an industry that hardly existed a few years ago. I'm happy to see this new example of partnership in my home city.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Recognition of Heroic Actions in Blizzard

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would appear that our seven-month winter has now finally reached its conclusion, we can only hope. It was an extremely harsh winter, in terms of the budget, cold temperatures, and severe blizzards.

One such blizzard in early December brought out heroic actions from a number of Arm River residents in rescue efforts. And although it is several months after the fact, I would today like to recognize these people.

When Brownlee area farmers John Beck and Maurice Eberle learned that Mortlach teacher Marilyn Knaar, who had been following a school bus to guide her home through the blizzard was missing, they put their own lives in jeopardy to begin searching for Ms. Knaar. After spending seven hours trapped in the cab of her truck, Marilyn Knaar was found by Maurice Eberle. John Beck had twice been within 200 metres of the teacher's truck.

During the same blizzard, students in two school buses in the Eyebrow district spent several hours stranded on rural roads awaiting rescue. Area residents Dan and Cindy Devine, Grant Torgerson, and Terry Leggott, risked their lives in rescue attempts which fortunately proved successful.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask all members in the Assembly today to join me in congratulating these folks in their heroic efforts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Student Internship Program at Estevan Comprehensive High School

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report that a new program at Estevan Comprehensive High School will mean increased and enhanced links in communication between education, skills training, and jobs in the community. The student internship program will mean that the school will supply student interns whose skills and training match those that have been identified by the business community.

The intern will work 165 hours, arranged at times agreeable to the employer and the student. The student will work for a class credit and a work experience, and in return will want to be considered for future employment.

The goal of the program is to create pathways to employment

for students who are in grade 12. These new channels of communication will create opportunities for employment or on-the-job training such as apprenticeships, or a better understanding for students of what they may pursue in post-secondary education.

Student internship will also give community employers the opportunity to select and assess the suitability of student workers for employment. As a result of this interaction, courses at the school will more closely reflect the needs of the community.

Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of cooperation and community spirit that we have outlined in our *Partnership For Growth* strategy and this is where jobs will be created for our children. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Whitespruce Youth Treatment Centre Closure

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was disappointed to receive a government news release a few minutes ago detailing how many jobs will be lost at the Whitespruce Youth Treatment Centre. Sixteen positions will be transferred to the Calder Centre while 41 Whitespruce employees will receive lay-off notices effective July 31.

Mr. Speaker, this state-of-the-art facility was the first of its kind to treat youths suffering from drug and alcohol addictions. Mr. Speaker, there were always a waiting-list . . . or was always a waiting-list to get into the facility, and young people came from across the province. And certainly I've had many concerns raised from my own constituency, the constituency of Moosomin, as people felt this facility provided a very great place in helping young people overcoming their addictions. One other thing we have to be proud of is the number of young people that came from other provinces to use the facility.

My sympathies to the Whitespruce employees who will lose their jobs; to the city of Yorkton that will experience a loss of several full-time jobs, and the local economy that will feel the loss.

However, Mr. Speaker, I'm more concerned that addicted youths receive the same or better treatment, including the continued class time, gym program, and several other aspects of treating youths that no other facility could provide.

Many concerns have been raised by professionals, Mr. Speaker, including mixing addicted youths with adults at the Calder Centre, and since I share those concerns, today's news was not good news. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

La Ronge Health Centre's Official Opening

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, on Friday, April 26, I was joined by the Premier and the hon. Health minister in participating in the official opening of the new La Ronge Health Centre.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — The grand opening was a community celebration and was attended by chiefs and mayors and local sponsors, corporate sponsors, and residents from across the North.

The new health centre is meeting the needs of our people in the North by offering a wide range of integrated services including home care, public health, health education, mental health counselling, alcohol and drug recovery, speech and language pathology, dental health, early childhood intervention, a resource centre, a holistic healing room, as well as acute care and long-term care.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the people of La Ronge and area for their tremendous and outstanding involvement in helping this project to completion. I would like to also thank the local businesses and organizations, as well as the corporate sponsors including Cameco, COGEMA, Weyerhaeuser I'd also like to thank La Ronge hospital board, northern health services branch, and Saskatchewan Health.

A youth choir from Churchill High School, Senator Myles Venne School, Pre-Cam Elementary School, and Gordon Denny Elementary School sang "O Canada" at the grand opening. I found it appropriate that elders and young people were able to participate in an opening because the La Ronge Health Centre will be meeting their needs in the future.

Again this is an outstanding example of cooperation and partnership in the health area between the government, the community, and the corporations as we face the challenges of the 21st century.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Cypress Hills Regional College Graduation Exercises

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday, April 26, I was happy to attend, along with the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, the annual graduation exercises of the Cypress Hills Regional College in Swift Current.

The regional college system is a uniquely Saskatchewan institution. Cypress Hills College, like the other regional colleges, offers a variety of programs including home care and special care, office education, business, adult secondary education, adult basic English, English as a second language, and the first year of university. As well, Mr. Speaker, the college has partnered with various international organizations to offer a literacy project in Tanzania, a project which has gained international recognition.

During the evening ceremony, 23 Swift Current service clubs and businesses presented over \$4,000 in bursaries and awards — a true partnership of community and college.

Another note: 12 of the 13 graduates of the home care program are already employed; 13 of the 15 office education students are employed.

Not only Cypress Hills Regional College, but all the regional colleges are noted for their flexibility in offering courses which respond directly to the needs of the community and the students.

My congratulations to Emily Rempel, acting principal; Terry Gove, program administrator; Spencer Wooff, chairman of the board; and all the board members and staff, on a job well done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Whitespruce Youth Treatment Centre Closure

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We just heard a little while ago from the member of Moosomin about another closure in rural Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, this morning I too was dismayed to receive the government's news release outlining 41 job cuts to staff at Yorkton's Whitespruce Treatment Centre. In this release, the Minister of Health says, I quote:

The loss of jobs is an unfortunate consequence of the decision to consolidate treatment programs.

What is truly unfortunate is that the cabinet minister from Yorkton is defending this government's decision to slash services and jobs in his constituency. We see the same thing happening in Moose Jaw and Swift Current. The gutting of services continues, affecting the people who are the backbone of Saskatchewan. And where do the remainder of these jobs end up? In Saskatchewan's two major cities.

Will the minister of SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) tell us if the options under consideration for the Whitespruce Centre will replace the same number of jobs being ripped out of the Yorkton area?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to just report and advise the member opposite that I too, as he is, and the community of Yorkton, is always concerned when you have job losses to a community.

And in the past couple of years we've experienced some of those same kinds of losses in other areas, Mr. Speaker. And as governments consolidate their services, as did Morris Rod-Weeder, who moved some of their senior management staff and their sales people from Yorkton to Saskatoon; as did the Dairy Producers, who moved better than 80 of their employees from Yorkton, consolidating some of those services, government does the same sorts of things.

And today, Mr. Speaker, what we're finding is that with the major federal cut-backs that we've experienced in this province over the past year, our government is rationalizing our services. And part of that is to ensure that we can provide solid services to adolescents in this province and the consolidation of the programs were required.

And I want to assure the member opposite that we are in fact finding other uses for the Whitespruce facility and are currently

working with a number of players to help accommodate that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, we continuously hear the government talking about back-filling what the federal government has cut. They are not back-filling; they're excavating. It's the federal government who believes in rural Saskatchewan, that back-fills by opening up a Canadian Grain Commission service centre in Melville. That's back-filling. Yours is excavating; ripping out jobs.

Changes to Security Guard Legislation

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, my next question is for the Minister of Justice. And I'm sure any one watching the news last night felt a small part of the heartache suffered by the Nicolichuk family of Saskatoon. They lost their son Jason last fall when he was murdered. Alone on duty as a security guard, he was not equipped with any type of security device. Yesterday one of his killers was sentenced.

Mr. Speaker, in an October 5 article which appeared in the *Star-Phoenix*, registrar Pat Styles is quoted as saying, "The Private Investigators and Security Guards Act is under review." That was 6 months ago. Yesterday, Mr. Justice Wright declared his astonishment that the government didn't mandate this type of communications equipment in its regulation.

Does the minister not agree with the family of the victim and the judge in this case when they say these changes are needed now, not later?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. The former minister met with the members of the UFCW (United Food and Commercial Workers), the union involved with this, as well as some members of the industry. I met with some of these people earlier this year.

The process of changing the Act and the regulations . . . The Act is The Private Investigators and Security Guards Act. We are working on that. It's in the planned agenda for next year's legislative changes.

The process is one of consultation with the industry and with the various people that are concerned because we're in a stage where we don't want to set up government bureaucracy that steps in and monitors this. We want to work with the industry so that they set positive, good standards for what they are doing. We're working very closely with them.

This process is ongoing. In fact there's a scheduled meeting set tomorrow setting up the whole consultation process with the industry.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, it appears that the Justice department is working at the same lightning pace as it is on the

pedophile issue. The Private Investigators and Security Guards Act has provisions that are nearly two decades old. Many security guards complain of inadequate training and lack of supervisor backup on job sites. Updating this legislation could very well save lives in the future.

The session is on now, and now is the time to make the changes. Will the minister commit to proposing updated changes to The Private Investigators and Security Guards Act during this session?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the second question about this.

We are in the process of trying to set up the system whereby the industry works together with us. And as we've seen before, when we proceed in a way that doesn't deal with all of the problems, we sometimes end up with legislation that doesn't work that well. And we're in a situation here where there are very many difficult questions. Our government and I personally have a great deal of sympathy for the Nicolichuk family. But I also appreciate that they have identified some of the positive things out of this incident that can help other people, and we are very willing to work with them, and any suggestions they might have, and also with the UFCW union who is very concerned about this issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Future of Eaglestone Lodge

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, last week we brought to the attention of the House the recent closure of a seniors' home in Leroy which occurred because of this government's lack of commitment to health care.

This evening, residents of Kamsack will hold a public meeting to discuss the status of Eaglestone Lodge in their community. Because of this government's funding cuts to the local health districts over the past few years, this lodge will close if the facility cannot be sold by May 17. Because of the importance of this meeting, and because I know the minister wants to truly be in touch with local health care issues and hear their concerns firsthand, will he indicate if he plans on attending this evening's meeting?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say that in response to what the member said about the Leroy lodge situation, I did look into that matter, and I found that the Leroy lodge was an army barracks built in the 1940s. That's why that building is being shut down. And the couple that was referred to by the member from Kelvington-Wadena is going to be housed in the same facility, albeit in a different town. But they're both going to the same place unlike what was implied in the Chamber last week, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of the Eaglestone Lodge, I want to tell the member that

there are extensive requirements for that lodge to continue to operate as a special care home, including: changes to get it up to fire code which is very important for the safety of the people; an extensive sprinkler system is needed; a fire alarm; new corridors in making the building wheelchair accessible.

But I want to say to the member that one of the things that people will be looking at in Kamsack is whether the Eaglestone Lodge might be suitable for a personal care home. We're just in the process of changing the regulations and I'll be talking to the community about that in the very near future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — I realize that you're in discussions right now, Mr. Minister, but that isn't really good enough.

Mr. Speaker, a group has expressed an interest in buying Eaglestone Lodge; however changes must be made to The Personal Care Homes Act which would allow the facility to continue operating as a special care home. Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that this Act will not be reviewed until June, which would be too late. The minister does not appear to realize that the Eaglestone Lodge is not only a well-run facility, it is a cornerstone of the community of Kamsack.

Will the minister make a commitment in this House today to intervene, hold up the possible closure of this facility until such time as the community can examine all possible options?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the member is simply incorrect when he says that regulations will allow the Eaglestone Lodge to be operated as a special care home. The issue is whether it can be operated as a personal care home. The member is incorrect when he says this issue cannot be examined until June. This issue will be examined very shortly. And when the personal care home regulations are updated and amended, I will be talking to the health district and to the residents of Kamsack.

But I want to say to the member, just for his information, that the amount of funding for home-based care in that health district is increasing by close to 6 per cent. And the amount of funding increasing for supportive care, long-term care, is increasing by 3.1 per cent.

There is more money going into that health district, Assinboine Valley, for care of senior citizens, Mr. Speaker, which is a far cry from what the federal Liberals are doing who are cutting back on health care spending by \$50 million. A far cry from the Nova Scotia budget just introduced that cut health care spending by 30 million. A far cry from the Conservatives in Manitoba who just cut health care spending by 37 million. But the New Democrats are . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

SaskTel Tentative Agreement

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my first question this afternoon is for the minister responsible for SaskTel. Madam Minister, we've received a leaked copy of the

tentative SaskTel agreement. It includes provisions like an enhanced medical program and a \$500 RRSP (registered retirement savings plan) each year for permanent employees.

Madam Minister, how much additional monies are these provisions going to cost SaskTel and can we afford these types of bonuses during this time of restraint?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, it has not been our practice to carry on collective bargaining in the legislative Chamber, and I think that's an appropriate practice and we won't start now. I would just comment in a global way on the tentative agreement and its provisions, Mr. Speaker, in that they are calculated to come within the overall mandate set for collective bargaining for the last five years in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Agreement with Intercontinental Packers

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my remaining two questions are for the Minister of Economic Development. Mr. Minister, yesterday you told us that nearly 200 jobs have already been created at Intercon: 130 in Moose Jaw and 60 in Saskatoon. Today we find that that's simply not true.

We have been in contact with Maurice Werezek, the president of the union at Intercon. He checked with the personnel office this morning and he told us that there are actually fewer people working at Intercon today than one year ago.

One year ago there were 834 people working at Intercon in Saskatoon. Today there are 753 — that's 81 less jobs in Saskatoon, Mr. Minister, not 60 more like you led this House to believe yesterday.

Mr. Minister, why did you provide the wrong figures to the House yesterday? Why are you creating these phantom jobs to cover the real reasons behind your \$5 million give-away to Intercon?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear to the member, as I did yesterday, that I said that there were 130 people being trained for the plant to be hired by July of this year.

So just remember and keep the story straight and don't try to twist it to create even more gloom and doom than you're apt to do.

On the issue of Saskatoon, I want to make it clear that our consultation with Intercon in Saskatoon is that there are about 60 more people working today than when the deal was signed and ratified last year. And I stick by those numbers.

Just get it straight — 130 being trained for the jobs in Moose Jaw, to be hired by July of 1996, new jobs, and 60 more than when the deal was ratified, in Saskatoon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, that isn't what you said yesterday in the House. In fact you said, and I quote from *Hansard*, April 29:

The fact is that under the deal 130 new jobs will have been created by July 1 in Moose Jaw and 60 jobs have been created in Saskatoon.

That isn't the facts, Mr. Minister. Yesterday you said that by July 1, 130 new jobs would be created in Moose Jaw. The union fellow that we talked to tells us that they are not new jobs at all. They are existing jobs that have been simply transferred from Saskatoon — 60 slaughter positions have already transferred and 65 to 70 more processing jobs are to be transferred on June 14.

Mr. Minister, when a job moves from Saskatoon to Moose Jaw, it's not a new job, even though I can see why you'd want to say that given your dismal record in job creation.

Mr. Minister, why are you playing this shell game with the job numbers? Isn't it simply a feeble attempt to cover up the real reasons behind your \$5 million give-away to Intercon?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear to the member that the agreement that was made with Intercon has been made public. We have agreed that if new jobs are created and as they are created, the loan will become forgivable at a rate of 12,500 per job.

If the jobs aren't created, the loan will become due and payable. It's a wide-open process.

But what I want to say, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious how we got to being \$15 billion in debt with Tory mathematics. This is simply adding and subtracting; not very complicated. One can understand how they would get into the dilemma that they got into in the 1980s, when they had to deal with big numbers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Workers' Compensation Board

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question, Mr. Speaker, today is to the minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Board.

Now, Mr. Minister, yesterday the auditor's report contained some very disturbing news about the finances and the attitude of the Workers' Compensation Board. Your hand-picked board has been extremely unwilling to cooperate with the Provincial Auditor. In fact last December the board's private auditing firm said that the Workers' Compensation Board specifically asked them not to provide the auditor's office with the reports he was looking for — not to supply them.

Mr. Minister, the auditor makes two very specific recommendations in his report. He recommends that the

government direct the Workers' Compensation Board to adopt the recommendations of the public accountants committee task force. And he recommends that the government direct the Workers' Compensation Board to cooperate with the auditor's office. Doesn't seem too unrealistic to me, Mr. Minister.

Would you demand that your board follow these recommendations? And if they refuse to do so, will you fire your board and replace them with a board that will cooperate with the auditor?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Well this is an independent board, Mr. Speaker, and firing might be what the members opposite do in an overreaction to a problem that they perceive to be there.

I would say that the Workers' Compensation Board have an appointed auditor. The appointed auditor is KPMG. They do their due diligence by generally accepted accounting principles. They've spent several months just completing the audit at the Workers' Compensation Board. And the Provincial Auditor has not actually directly asked us for information. I understand there's a meeting tomorrow between some people at the Workers' Compensation Board and the Provincial Auditor to sort this out.

What we want to know is, why can't the Provincial Auditor rely on the information supplied by the professional auditing firm that's in there now. They have actuaries at their disposal; they're a nationally recognized, professional accounting firm; and if there's something that the Provincial Auditor cannot rely on from the professional auditor, we'd like to know what it is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a supplemental question for the Minister of Labour. Mr. Minister, it's really quite simple. If you want to straighten things out, have the Provincial Auditor do it.

Mr. Minister, the Workers' Compensation Board finally did provide the auditor with the reports he was looking for, just last month. Now after reviewing these reports, he found problems in the Workers' Compensation Board's financial management system and he decided that it was necessary to examine the Workers' Compensation Board's financial practices directly. That audit will begin on May 1, the first time since 1988 that the auditor has conducted a direct audit into the Workers' Compensation Board. It's far overdue, Mr. Minister.

There are clearly problems in the financial management of the Workers' Compensation Board. Every employer in this province knows it. Administrative costs are rising and getting out of control and the premiums are sky-rocketing for the people that are using the process. And now the auditor has confirmed that he has serious questions about the financial practices of the board. No surprise to anybody, Mr. Minister.

Will you guarantee that the Workers' Compensation Board will comply fully with this audit and the results that are coming from that audit? And will you commit to taking whatever steps

are necessary so that the recommendations from the auditor are put into place and these problems are then corrected?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know why the member opposite would come into this Legislative Assembly and attack the credibility of a professional accounting firm.

I've said that KPMG is the appointed auditor at the Workers' Compensation Board. The appointed auditor has found nothing wrong with the systems in place for guarding the contributions of employers to make sure that working men and women are protected in Saskatchewan by the workers' compensation system.

That appointed auditor has done their due diligence; they've worked by generally accepted accounting principles. And I would submit to the member that if there's something wrong, that the private sector accounting firm would have in fact found that to be the case.

The process has been quite clear for some time, Mr. Speaker. If the Provincial Auditor wants information on any of the agencies, departments, or Crowns where there's an appointed auditor in place, they should request that information through the appointed auditor.

We have put the information into the hands of the private sector auditor who has obviously passed on this information to the Provincial Auditor. There is a disagreement between accountants in this case. We're going to get it sorted out, but I don't know for the life of me why he'd come in and attack the accountant.

The Speaker: — Order, order. The Speaker's having some difficulty hearing when the minister was providing his answer, and I'll simply ask for the cooperation . . . Order. I'll ask for the cooperation of all members of the House to allow the question to be heard and the answer to be heard.

Unfunded Pension Liabilities

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, when the Provincial Auditor released his spring report yesterday, he identified a number of concerns including the issue of unfunded pension liabilities. The auditor indicates there are many significant risks in managing unfunded pension promises of over \$3 billion.

Mr. Speaker, there are many people who have already retired or are approaching retirement and need to know that their decades of pension contributions will be there when they need these funds.

Will the Minister of Finance explain how she intends to address this growing concern?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member opposite for the question. I think there's a couple of things that have to be kept in mind. First of all, we are accounting for the liabilities on our summary financial

statements, unlike provinces like Manitoba. We are managing the pensions; that is, we are paying the pensions as they come due.

And I guess the final point is that we have made the necessary changes. It's ironic that Premier Blakeney would be here today, because it was under his regime in 1978 that the pension schemes were changed so that they are fully funded, the ones that have come into place, and they are modest.

And I think the most important thing is that the member opposite not create unnecessary anxiety. People who are owed pensions in this province will be paid their pensions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, what we've heard here this afternoon again is a clear misunderstanding that the Finance minister has concerning unfunded pension liabilities. And I refer here to an article today in the *Leader-Post* where the Minister of Finance is quoted, with respect to unfunded pension liabilities, as saying, "Once everybody who is in that old unfunded plan retires, the problem quite literally is gone."

Well this just is not the case, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago this government said it planned to form a commission to study its pension plan obligations. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommended such a body be established in October 1994. The Dominion Bond Rating Service also recommended a plan to erase this liability in March 1995.

Will the minister explain why this government has done nothing to address an issue that has a direct impact on 133,000 people who are members of government-administered pension plans, and in fact has a dramatic effect on every taxpayer in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I would say to the member once again: the key thing is that the decision was taken wisely in 1978 to change all of the pension plans so that every person who signed on to a government pension plan since 1978 is in a fully funded plan and in, I would also stress, a modest pension plan that is kind to taxpayers — a taxpayer-friendly pension plan.

And I would just say to the member opposite, we are managing our pension liability. As pensions come due, we have the capacity to pay them. We will continue to do so. And it's important to reassure people that yes, this is an issue, just as the debt of the province is an issue, but we are managing it and we will continue to do so.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Workers' Compensation Board

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, this government just seems to forget the importance of the independence of the Provincial Auditor.

Last fall we experienced firsthand the mess that the Workers' Compensation had gotten itself into. They had proposed rate hikes up to 565 per cent. After hundreds of business people implored this government to do something, the Premier actually stepped in. His solution? An Ontario actuary.

Mr. Speaker, this actuary simply swept the problems of the Workers' Compensation Board under the rug. The WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) still can't explain why the annual adjustment for '94 to the liability compensation fund exceeds \$28 million.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Labour understand that this has tremendous negative impact on business and job creation in this province? Will you admit that the WCB is a mess and is still facing important questions? And will you get the mandatory review under way immediately and who will be appointed to that review board?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Well there's several questions involved there, Mr. Speaker, surely more than I can answer in a minute. The board of review . . . the committee of review will be appointed shortly and they will perform the committee of review function.

I will not admit that the Workers' Compensation Board is a mess, as the member describes it. We should be proud in this province of the Workers' Compensation Board. They have the only funded program in any jurisdiction in Canada. They have had consistently for a number of years. They make sure that workers receive the benefits when they're injured on the job. Employers pay among the lowest rates of compensation premiums anywhere in Canada.

Instead of preaching doom and gloom . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Now I'm having a great deal of difficulty being able to hear the minister put his response to the question, and I will ask for the cooperation of all members on both sides of the House to allow the Minister of Labour to complete his answer.

Order, order. Order. Order. All members will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Mr. Speaker, I think the members opposite are allergic to the truth, is what they are.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that they continue to preach doom and gloom about successful programs in Saskatchewan, one of which is the workers' compensation program that is one of the best programs of any workers' compensation program anywhere in Canada, if not the best, and all people in Saskatchewan, employers, legislators, and working men and women, should be very, very proud of.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ROYAL ASSENT

At 2:22 p.m. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the Chamber, took his seat upon the throne, and gave Royal Assent to the following Bills:

- Bill No. 6 - An Act to amend The Community Bonds Act
- Bill No. 13 - An Act to amend The Department of Social Services Act
- Bill No. 14 - An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Income Plan Act
- Bill No. 34 - An Act to amend The Electrical Inspection Act, 1993
- Bill No. 37 - An Act to amend The Water Corporation Act
- Bill No. 22 - An Act to amend The Radiation Health and Safety Act, 1985 and to make Related Amendments to The Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1993
- Bill No. 15 - An Act to amend The Child and Family Services Act
- Bill No. 32 - An Act to amend The Local Government Election Act
- Bill No. 35 - An Act to amend The SaskEnergy Act
- Bill No. 40 - An Act respecting Pharmacists and Pharmacies
- Bill No. 41 - An Act to amend The Mental Health Services Act
- Bill No. 50 - An Act to amend The Personal Property Security Act, 1993 and to make a consequential amendment
- Bill No. 12 - An Act to amend The Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act and to make consequential amendments
- Bill No. 4 - An Act to amend The University of Regina Act
- Bill No. 27 - An Act respecting Architects
- Bill No. 61 - An Act respecting the Practices of Professional Engineering and Professional Geoscience and to make consequential amendments to other Acts

His Honour: — In Her Majesty's name, I assent to these Bills.

- Bill No. 81 - An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of Money for the Public Service for the Fiscal Year ending on March 31, 1997

His Honour: — In Her Majesty's name, I thank the Legislative Assembly, accept their benevolence, and assent to this Bill.

His Honour retired from the Chamber at 2:25 p.m.

The Speaker: — Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Minister, I wish to ask leave of the Assembly to proceed with private members' public bills and orders, second readings, item 15, Bill No. 78, An Act to enable Northern Municipalities to Name Airports within their boundaries, and to ask for leave to revert thereafter to the seventy-five minute debate.

Leave granted.

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce two very good friends and constituents from Lucky Lake, Lindy and John Buhr who are in the west gallery. They are community leaders and farmers in the area and long-standing friends, and I welcome them here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 78—An Act to enable Northern Municipalities to Name Airports within their boundaries

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I appreciate the government's cooperation in dealing with this non-partisan private member's Bill to put into Saskatchewan law the right for northern municipalities to name airports that lie within their boundaries.

Mr. Speaker, there is a spirit that lives in the heart of northern Saskatchewan people and this spirit is grounded in the culture and the history of our northern communities. For so many years strong native and non-native leaders have helped shape the colourful character of Saskatchewan's North. Elders, trappers, fishermen, business people, teachers, leaders, and countless others have made invaluable contributions to the lifeblood of communities throughout the North.

People like Jonas Clarke, one of La Loche's respected leaders. As an elder, a fisherman, and a trapper, he led the people of his community with dignity and fairness. Jonas Clarke was an excellent role model for people throughout the North. It was this man who blazed a trail to the Cluff Lake mine site with his hard work and perseverance. Mr. Clarke has passed on but he had left behind him a legacy of respect and admiration.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I won't go on to list the names of all the people who have helped carve out the northern character. Mr. Clarke was one of them.

We don't have the time for one thing, but for another thing I don't have the knowledge to name every person who deserves a mention in the long line of people who have contributed to individual communities throughout northern Saskatchewan. I cannot say whose name should accompany the spirit of communities because I don't have the same knowledge and understanding that those people have.

Each community is moulded by unique histories, and I cannot speak with authority on behalf of those communities. And with all due respect, Mr. Speaker, neither should the government. It's for this reason that I've introduced this Bill, An Act to enable

Northern Municipalities to Name Airports within their boundaries.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a Bill that I dreamed up this session. This has been an ongoing effort by communities for years, long before I became a politician. I want to make it clear that I'm bringing this Bill forward on behalf of my constituents and on behalf of the people of the North who would like to see their heritage preserved. I hope the members of this Assembly will understand this and support it without tarring it as a politically partisan Bill.

Mr. Speaker, in the Act that I propose, municipalities would have the legal right to name airports situated wholly within or immediately adjacent to their boundaries, whether or not that airport is owned, operated, financed, or controlled and regulated by that municipality. Right now, there is no clear policy on this subject.

(1430)

The Bill that I'm bringing forward would make it mandatory for airport owners and operators to consult with the northern municipality before naming airports in northern communities. This would give the people of those communities a chance to pay tribute to people who helped shape their towns and villages.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not suggesting an extensive overhaul of the system. I'm not suggesting that pilots be forced to identify an airport by its new name immediately. I can understand that pilots prefer to identify an airport by the community in which it is located.

What I am suggesting is a way for this government to give northern people a chance to preserve some of their heritage. I know it doesn't seem like a gigantic step, but even something as simple as having a plaque commemorating a person would have deep meaning to the people in these communities.

Mr. Speaker, I don't believe there is anything controversial about the Bill I propose. I am not trying to make radical changes that would deeply affect our province. What I am trying to do is give the people of the North one more avenue to show a deep pride in their heritage and to share their lively and vital history with the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 78, An Act to enable the naming of northern municipalities Act . . . to Name Airports within their boundaries be now read a second time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to say just a few words about Bill 78. We have had our officials in various departments look at this Bill, and questions have come up regarding the constitutional ability of the province to legislate on this issue, as well as a few other questions.

We will need time to investigate this question further, Mr. Speaker, and I therefore move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Partnership for Growth

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to have an opportunity to once again address the House about the excellent economic development opportunities which are available in our province and are certainly adding to the strong growth and renewal of our economy.

At the end of my comments, I'll be moving a motion to encourage people to continue working with the government in achieving the goals and objectives set out in the *Partnership for Growth* document of the Department of Economic Development.

I want to start perhaps with just providing members with a bit of an overview of what this strategy provides. This is the second phase of this government's economic development approach. In 1991, when the government was elected for the first term, it provided a unique opportunity for Saskatchewan businesses and people to sit down and talk about how we would get our economy growing again.

For five years prior to that we had seen a terrible situation, as the economy began to spiral down, largely because of uncertainty caused by policies of previous provincial government, including an oppressive tax regime and a serious problem in terms of its debt building.

When the government came in in 1991, late 1991, it decided to start to turn that around. And it did so by sitting down with businesses, with working people, and with various other groups in the province to talk about what kind of an environment we would need to build in order to create a better, more positive Saskatchewan economy. That initial report, called the *Partnership for Renewal*, served as a foundation for the government's economic development approach.

In its first four years we saw 10,000 new jobs created, not by government, but by private industry in cooperation with the government, who had provided a series of positive initiatives. Today, as we enter our second term of government, Mr. Speaker, we have once again gone back to the business leaders and the community leaders in our province to talk about how we now move that economic development agenda forward again.

The result is an action plan called the *Partnership For Growth: Building on the Renewal of the Saskatchewan Economy*. This paper has been pulled together by the Minister of Economic Development, and it targets a 21-point plan to create 20,000 new jobs by the end of this century. That's a very positive initiative. It's a very proactive and straightforward opportunity for us to come together as a provincial community to restructure our economy and start moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, there are three important points that I think we need to acknowledge in this Assembly that this plan does. First, it focuses in on cultivating a positive environment for economic growth. Secondly, it strives to build upon existing strengths and realize growth opportunities available in our economy. And

finally, it seeks to develop partnerships and programs to seek full employment.

There's been a lot of talk over the past several years about a jobless recovery. I'm very pleased that in Saskatchewan we have in fact seen job growth accompany the economic recovery of our province. I think that the government has a lot . . . they can take certainly a lot of credit in terms of providing the sort of partnerships which have helped business start to generate more jobs.

In terms of the three points that this plan addresses, cultivating a positive business environment for economic growth, I want to just highlight some of the pieces that are being looked at here. This is not simply a document full of platitudes and rhetoric. In fact it is very much the opposite of that.

This document provides a comprehensive plan with achievable targets for economic growth and job creation. It outlines clearly here that we want to set a positive climate for business, including a four-year financial plan and debt management plan. The Minister of Finance has introduced that into this House. It's under debate in the Assembly currently, and it provides a very positive look at how this government is getting its own financial house in order. And for that very reason, business feels comfortable.

We are also striving, as the Minister of Economic Development has said, to establish a program to reduce government regulation and the regulatory red tape that often accompanies government initiatives. We were striving to reduce this red tape by over 25 per cent in the next 10 years.

But, Mr. Speaker, the issue which the members opposite keep telling us we need to focus more on is taxation. They tell us we need to take a look at this. They . . . according to them, everything is gloom and doom of course; we keep hearing this in the House. What they refuse to recognize is the partnership we have struck with local businesses, with the provincial business community, to take a look at the tax system.

Now it says here that we will be introducing a long-term tax plan to promote productive investment and greater job creation. I'm going to repeat that again so that the members opposite can write it down, so they can refer to it in their notes later — introduce a long-term tax plan to promote productive investment and greater job creation. That won't simply be an academic review; it won't simply be a review done by bureaucrats in our government; it will be a review done in partnership with the business community because that's what we believe in.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, we're also going to be building on existing strengths to realize growth and opportunities. And this is where the real good news of our provincial recovery is.

This program contains more than — I count half a dozen points — to expand the agri-food industry, to expand forestry, to expand the growth in mining, to expand the growth in energy, to embark into new ventures in tourism and the cultural sectors,

and to build on information technology. Very, very positive areas, particularly tourism and culture, the cultural sector. This is a great opportunity for us to take advantage of a positive business climate, not only here in Saskatchewan but across Canada, as we see the exchange rate play into our favour and the positive environment that we have for business to invest here.

Take a look simply at the film and video industry, which is a very new industry, a very exciting part of our — particularly Regina's — local economy. A few weeks back, I had the opportunity to remind the House just the total size of this industry. What we're talking about is a new industry that provides 581 new jobs last year — 581 new jobs — more than \$15 million in direct investment and \$46 million in spin-off benefits. This is a very positive new industry.

Mr. Speaker, the third point that we're working on is developing partnerships and programs to seek full employment. Job creation is an extremely high priority for this government. We're not afraid to put out a plan which says that we believe this economy will grow strong, it will grow quickly, and it will provide real job growth.

The members opposite continue to harp about how bad things are, and yet we've seen the positive growth. Over the past three years we've seen more than 10,000 new jobs created. We're confident that business will create another 20,000 jobs by the year 2001. But it's going to do this not only — as we heard today in question period, where the Leader of the Opposition was attacking this government for its job creation efforts — in the large cities. This will happen on a regional basis, largely because of our community-oriented plan of regional economic development authorities.

This is the sort of innovative ideals that this government is putting forward and putting into action. It is going to support new small businesses through reasonable, single-window initiatives. Not the grand plans and the give-aways of previous governments, but by very simple, straightforward initiatives.

We're also going to make sure that other people have an opportunity to participate, both in terms of exports, in terms of maximizing opportunities for aboriginal people, and in terms of looking at new technologies such as emerging technologies in agriculture, agro-biotechnology, and info tech.

Mr. Speaker, this plan is extremely positive and we can see that it's already working. Building off of the *Partnership for Renewal* that occurred last year and moving into the *Partnership for Growth*, I look only at my home riding of Regina South to see the positive initiatives here. Since the election in 1995, in June of '95, no fewer than a dozen new businesses have opened in my riding — a dozen. Now these are not simply expansions. These are brand-new businesses who are creating real jobs in my community. In total here I see a dozen. I've got in front of me a list of a dozen businesses all in the retail sector, creating more than 106 new jobs in Regina South for Regina people. And I think that's an extremely positive statement. This is not something created by expanding the government bureaucracy or through government hand-outs, but is a sure sign that consumer confidence is returning to our

economy and that the business community is feeling extremely positive.

Now you may say, oh well, another example of this strategy working in Regina; what about the rest of the province? Well, Mr. Speaker, as I was flipping through the news clippings the other day, I've come across no fewer than 150 pages of good, positive economic news in the months of February and March alone. Now if the . . . I trust . . . and I know some members have cautioned me on this on our side, but I trust the members opposite can read and in fact do read the newspaper periodically. And if they did, they would find some of the good-news stories that are in here.

Just flipping through I see, here's an item out of the *Wakaw Recorder* that says: "Humboldt company develops high output used oil processing system."

An Hon. Member: — Bet it's in big print, though.

Mr. Thomson: — I'm quite certain they're only able to read the headlines, so I'll just quickly scan through so that they don't lose their attention here. "New bed and breakfast wishes guests a safe journey." "Economy expected to grow." No you never hear them talk about that. "COGEMA gets green light to expand operations." Well of course they don't want to talk about that; that sounds like job creation to me. "Wascana Energy and the band to sign deal." Well once again here it appears that this is a partnership happening; of course the opposition wouldn't want to bring that up.

(1445)

Mr. Speaker, as I flip through these clippings, I see throughout Saskatchewan a business community that is feeling confident. It is feeling comfortable and is anxious to get on with the business of creating jobs and helping to make our economy strong. I would certainly make my clippings available to any member of the opposition that's interested in actually reading what's happening out there in real Saskatchewan outside of the gloom and doom of the Liberal caucus office.

Mr. Speaker, apart from the news clippings and the look around at the individual communities and the real projects that are happening, we can see on a macro level that this strategy is also working. In the April 23 *Star-Phoenix*, there's an article says, "Bankruptcy decline positive sign for Saskatchewan." and I want to read just the first two paragraphs. It says, Mr. Speaker:

Saskatchewan was one of only two provinces to see a drop in business bankruptcies last year.

As well, it is only one of two provinces to continue to experience a decline in bankruptcies so far this year.

Business bankruptcies are down. Business incorporations are up. The result of that is going to be increased job activity in our province. So the members opposite should take note of this. The strategy that the provincial government has put into place back in 1991 and has renewed in 1995-96 is working. It is good for business. It is good for jobs. It is good for our economy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we can move on beyond simply taking a look at business bankruptcies and talk about what exactly is happening for the businesses that continue to work within our communities and grow.

Let me tell you a tale of two governments. Back in 1991, early '91, there was a regime sitting on the treasury benches, headed by the Conservative Party and Grant Devine. It was a regime that bought into a concept of tax harmonization. It's great scheme of the day was to harmonize the GST (goods and services tax) and PST (provincial sales tax). Now the argument was it was good business.

You know what happened, Mr. Speaker? As soon as they put it in, the retail economy went into the sewer. It wasn't good for business and it ended up causing a recession. We saw a real drop in retail sales.

The first act of this government, of this administration on the treasury benches today, was to repeal that harmonization. And as a result, consumer confidence, business confidence, and the economy started to return and rebound.

Let me take a look at what it meant for some of the hospitality industry in this province. In 1991 we had a hotel occupancy rate in Regina and Saskatoon of only 55 per cent. Today, Mr. Speaker, that has risen to almost 70 per cent — 70 per cent occupancy. I think that speaks well not only of the positive nature of the retail industry but also very positively about the tourism potential for our province as well. Now you may say 70 per cent, not a big deal. The fact is is that puts Regina among the top four cities in Canada in terms of occupancy in its hotels, which is a positive sign for our tourism, right up there with Toronto, with Calgary, and Vancouver.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite may say, oh well the hoteliers, they're this government's friend, of course they're going to help them out however they can. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that the tourism-related jobs are big business in this province. More than 20,000 people depend directly on the food and beverage industry for their jobs. Another 8,200 depend on the accommodation industry for their jobs. There's another 1,600 in venture and outdoor rec; transportation, another 6,700; attractions, 3,300. More than 40,000 people in Saskatchewan earn their living from the hospitality industry.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this government understands the importance of these sectors to our economy. We understand the importance of these sectors to creating jobs, and we understand the importance of those jobs to helping people live productive lives in our society. That's why many of us have a great concern about the lack of attention being paid particularly by the federal government right now on some of the initiatives that they are undertaking.

The new harmonized GST is a particular problem, and I won't belabour the point except to say that this government . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. The member's time has expired and if he wishes he must put the . . . if he wishes to move his motion, he must put it now directly without any further debate.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's why I would move, seconded by the member for Battleford-Cut Knife:

That this Assembly encourage Saskatchewan businesses, workers and communities to continue to work together with the government to achieve the goals outlined in the *Partnership for Growth*.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murrell: — Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to have an opportunity to speak on such an important issue — economic growth. I live in rural Saskatchewan, residing on a mixed farm near the village of Senlac, 10 miles from the Alberta border. It never fails to amaze me that the members opposite continually refer to Alberta and its wonders, because I, sir, live 30 miles from Provost and over the 28 years I have resided in this area, have seldom shopped there. It is expensive and has little more to offer than my own village.

On the other hand, I also live 30 miles from Unity. It is my main centre for shopping, banking, and more important, it is where the majority of my area go to the doctor's, the dentist, and the optometrist.

Mr. Speaker, I am a strong advocate of my rural area and today I would like to tip my hat to our rural businesses. The constituency of Battleford-Cut Knife is a diverse area with flat farmland, rolling hills and trees, and an abundance of wildlife; agricultural and the oil industry are the largest economic factors of our area. But, Mr. Speaker, you will see that the ingenuity, diligence, and intelligence are the innate qualities of the industrious people that make this area such a wonderful place to live.

The people themselves are responsible for taking the initiative to make our area viable and vibrant — people who are busy with our families, with our communities, and with our businesses; people working together, diversifying, and improving our quality of life and who are creating jobs.

I want to highlight these businesses and acknowledge the contributions they are making to our communities and who are maintaining an important part in our viability. G L M Tanks of Battleford opened its doors in 1981. It is a steel fabricator, manufacturer, who constructs storage tanks to supply oilfield industry, liquid fuel storage, pulp and paper, chemical and mining industries. In 1994 it expanded its fabricating shop and this year expanded another 2,500 square feet for a paint job. Mr. Speaker, this manufacturer employs 80 people working around the clock in three shifts.

We have Sifto Canada located in Unity. It has been operating since 1949 and employs 80 people. Its major products are table salt, food and fish processing, highway de-icing, chemical manufacturing, and agricultural salt, and markets its products from Thunder Bay to the Pacific coast. Remember the next time you add salt to your meal or to your water softener, that it is mined and manufactured in Unity, the largest employer in this area. So make sure that the label says Sifto.

Years ago people farmed the land, planted basic crops, raised cattle, hogs, and chickens. Today we have farmers doing all that, plus raising ostriches, bison, elk, and deer, and many are into specialized crops. This has created spin-offs for many enterprisers in agriculture. In our local areas we have seed cleaning plants, we have seed farms, we have liquid feed suppliers, and we have fertilizer companies.

For example, Big Yield Ag Services of Wilkie opened their doors in the mid-80s. It has continually expanded and now has 12 employees supplying fertilizer to customers from Wilkie and the surrounding area within a 60-mile radius.

Located in Marsden, we have the Palmer Ranch, Canada's only bull display centre, raising 300 bulls of all breeds, and is a worldwide promoter of Saskatchewan.

Unity is becoming a major grain trading centre. Saskatchewan Wheat Pool terminal has the first export grain cleaning facility to be put into a concrete elevator in Saskatchewan. It will also be the pilot project for training for the operation of this plant. Nearing completion is the community-owned north-west terminal which will also be constructive in creating jobs.

Not only in agriculture have we this spin-off, but we are benefiting from oil. In Macklin, jobs are being created through servicing, drilling, vacuum, water and pressure trucking, with companies opening their doors such as Blue Moon Oilfield Services, B & G trucking, and Marshall's Welding.

E & L Holdings, a residential and commercial construction business, relocated to Macklin from Primate in 1993. Eric Scherger employs 16 people and does a good business interprovincially.

In Senlac, Muffer-all Services is doing reclamation, not only restoring the land but vitality into the community with job creation. We also have Senlac Manufacturing Ltd which manufactures both agriculture and oilfield-related products. Also nearing completion is the CS Steam Plant which will also generate jobs for our people. Many of these businesses are established, believing in themselves and our province. Daily we have new people with new ideas opening new businesses to complement the diversity in our area.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce you to a few of our small-business people, the fibre of our communities. Ron and Carn Kelly have been operating an abattoir and custom cutting and wrapping meats from their farm near Cut Knife for some years but now, with their son Tim and daughter-in-law Carla, have expanded and opened Kelly's Meats in Unity. It is a new counter service offering not only fresh cuts and speciality meats, but also has an eat-in or take-out soup and sandwich counter. Kelly's Meats employs four full time and three part time with plans for expansion in the future.

A bold new entrepreneur is Hal Hepting of Unity who in May opened Maverick Tannery. The hides of mostly birds such as rhea, ostrich, emu, and some goat hides come from across Canada and come from as far as Texas. They are processed in finely ground bark from various areas of the world as well as other natural products, an environmentally friendly process

developed in Europe. This new business employs two full time, as well as Hal, his wife, and his son, with plans to expand and employ up to three more.

Wilkie is an important link in the CP (Canadian Pacific Railway) freight network and driving replacement crews to work and bringing off-duty crews home created a business for Larry Risling. This minimizes the amount of time CP staff spend away from their families. Risling and his hired drivers shuttle the train's engineers and brakeman between three communities in style in seven white cadillacs.

And more and more good news. Women are striving to promote and develop new businesses, seeing a need for a service or a product. In May, 1993, Shannon Powell opened the Hair Nook in Unity with two stylists. Everyone needs a haircut, but Shannon thought women should be pampered — and well we should be — and now has expanded her business to five stylists, a pedicurist, a receptionist and a masseuse. An appointment at the Hair Nook is a girl's best friend.

If you are planning a wedding, drop in at Pearls and Lace Wedding Boutique in Battleford. The manager, Wendy Steel, offers all consultation and preparation services. You can get your wedding dress, all formal wear, your caterer, bartender, your cake, and your stationery. This business opened last week and is also preparing to expand.

NuTec Crests, owned and operated by Carmelle Coward, opened in Battleford in 1994. This company manufactures jackets, wind suits and outer wear with computerized embroidery for custom designing.

It is presently working on a contract for wind suits for Summer Games. This business, Mr. Speaker, has tripled in two years and employs one full-time, three part-time seamstresses and one part-time embroiderer.

Country Charm II opened in Senlac under the ownership of Yvonne McGregor. When Yvonne left our area, she sold the business to Debbie Francis. When Debbie's personal status changed, she moved to Macklin, taking Country Charm II with her and opened on Macklin's main street. But there was a need for a store like Country Charm, so Sharon Cooper opened the Village Trading Post in the same location. Now we have two unique stores selling birthday and wedding gifts, T-shirts, jeans, and much, much more.

(1500)

Mr. Speaker, Battleford-Cut Knife constituency has five first nation bands adding to our diversity. Land entitlement purchases are in progress for all bands. Little Pine is developing oil and gas for employment. The store at Sweetgrass has reopened. Poundmaker has an interpretative centre opening this spring, which will house artefacts and historical information for the tourist industry.

Red Pheasant has a healing lodge employing first nations people and helping first nations people. There are many good-news stories in my area, but time does not permit me to speak on everyone's achievements. By supporting development

of the agricultural industry, new doors will open and expand leading to new jobs.

The Speaker: — And the member's time has expired.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to add my two cents' worth in this debate over the motion proposed by the member from Regina South. Because, Mr. Speaker, I believe this motion, once again, proves the member from Regina South, like all the members over there, are just missing the point again.

Mr. Speaker, in this motion the member encourages business people and communities to continue working with the government to promote job growth in our province and, Mr. Speaker, my first reaction to this motion is to ask the member: are you joking? Or can you be serious?

I guess the member is saying, Mr. Speaker, that it is the business community of Saskatchewan, it is the workers of Saskatchewan, it is the communities of Saskatchewan, who are to blame for the zero job growth we're seeing in this province today. That's why I ask the member opposite how he can possibly be serious about this motion, because it is my view, Mr. Speaker, it is this government who should work with the business community of Saskatchewan, with the workers, with the communities, to better cooperate in their job creation efforts. It's time to stop calling the kettle black because, Mr. Speaker, at every turn efforts to create jobs in Saskatchewan are stymied by this government's policies of high taxation and high utility rates. Job creation is discouraged by this government through its own doing.

And the member from Regina South has the gall to stand in this House and say it is the employers, the entrepreneurs, who have to do more. I mean how much more can they do? Those who have managed to survive under this government's anti-business, anti-job creation policies have done so by the sweat of their own brow, not because of any help that this government has provided.

Members opposite have even stated on occasion it is not governments that create jobs. I agree with that. But, Mr. Speaker, as we've seen, governments can sure kill jobs. And sadly that's the course taken by this government as it continues to choke the life out of our business community.

I ask the member from Regina South, what does he expect the business community to do when your government releases a document like the *Partnership for Growth*? Are they supposed to fall at your feet and thank you for all you've done for them? Because I don't think there's a lot of thanks in their hearts, Mr. Member. You know what they might say to you? I think they might say to you, thank you, Mr. Member, for taxing me to death. Thank you, Mr. Member, for raising my utilities again and again and again. Thank you, Mr. Member, for supporting your Finance minister in her refusal to even consider lowering the sales tax. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Mr. Speaker, of all the things I've heard in this legislature, of all the rhetoric, of all the motions we've debated, this is the first

one that actually made me laugh when I read it. And I'm sure the member opposite must have gotten quite a chuckle too when he wrote it because you have to have quite a sense of humour to swallow the political nonsense being shovelled by the member from Regina South.

Mr. Member, everyone in this province knows the job creation strategy of your government is a joke — it has been since 1991 — everyone perhaps but the members opposite. Well I shouldn't say that. I'm sure there are several on the back-benches over there that know it's a joke as well. But again, Mr. Speaker, they can't say that. The muzzle comes out once again. Every time I think one of them over there will have the fortitude and stand up and tell the Premier he's wrong about his job destruction strategy, wrong about his high taxation policy, wrong about writing-off rural Saskatchewan, they sit there like highly paid mannequins. They sit there mute. And, Mr. Speaker, they must be deaf too because they don't actually seem to be aware of the despair that is growing, particularly in rural areas.

This government talks about back-filling. In fact what they're doing in rural Saskatchewan is a full-scale excavation. Services and jobs are being ripped out of rural Saskatchewan, replaced with nothing but empty houses and boarded-up shops.

But of course the member from Regina South would know nothing of this. He sees none of the destruction his government's policies have caused across this province, comfortable as he is in the confines of the city. Before that member puts forth motions slapping his government on the back I invite him to tour the province; go to the towns that have lost their service centres, their government offices, their court-houses, their hospitals, their schools. Travel to those communities where the loss of even a handful of jobs is devastating. Travel across this province, talk to these people; see how impressed they are with your government's job creation strategy.

Talk to your colleague from Swift Current, a city that's been devastated by job cuts. Talk to the member from Yorkton that's lost Whitespruce. Talk to the former members from Melville that's seen so many of its government services and jobs ripped away. Then, Mr. Member, you may finally have a grasp on reality. You may actually come to know the people of Saskatchewan; I mean the real working people of this province, not the civil servants and patronage appointments he's used to hanging around with.

But, Mr. Speaker, what's the point? I could talk until my hair turns grey and the member opposite won't grasp that reality. And even if he does, what can he do about it. This cabinet doesn't listen to dissent, doesn't hear criticism, they just tune it out or find someone else to blame for their own mistakes and their own choices.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan and the business community have always been willing to cooperate in any way to create jobs for our province. It's now time for the member from Regina South and the rest of this NDP (New Democratic Party) caucus to participate in that cooperative spirit. Then and only then can some hope return throughout this great province of

ours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Before I recognize the next speaker, I do want to remind all members of the House that the rules of the Assembly do require that the debate is directed through the Speaker. And I think it just best serves the dignity of debate if all members will cooperate with that.

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to try and set out for the opposition what we're trying to achieve. There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding on that side of the House, and I don't think they know where this government's trying to get.

The economic development concerns everyone in this province. When we embarked on a long-term economic strategy three years ago, we formed a partnership with business, working people, cooperatives, communities, and aboriginal peoples, to get their input and advice about what should be the strategy, and their commitment to achieving the goals of the plan. This approach was successful and is being carried on in the next phase, *Partnership for Growth*.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — To update the strategy, we had to determine how we can foster economic growth while balancing all of our needs. We turned again to the Saskatchewan people, who helped us develop *Partnership for Renewal*. We held consultations with more than 550 businesses, Mr. Speaker. We held them with community leaders, representatives of economic groups and organizations in 20 locations across this province — some probably even in the opposition's home ridings.

Through the government's *Preparing for the New Century: MAKING CHOICES — for Today and Tomorrow* exercise, we asked for views on economic policy and advice about how we could incorporate these views into the *Partnership for Growth*. The consultations helped us develop these initiatives.

People in Saskatchewan have told us that prosperity and security come from having a job. Employment means independence, a feeling of personal worth, and the ability to provide for oneself and one's family. On a larger scale, jobs are essential for the long-term viability of our communities and our province. High employment means more people are able to lead independent lives in relative comfort.

In addition to providing for themselves, they keep the economy moving by spending their income on local goods and services. High employment also spreads the wealth around. The taxes paid by working people are used to provide health, education, and social programs for all of the Saskatchewan people.

What I hear from the opposition, Mr. Speaker, the third party in particular, is they talk about Alberta. They want us to be like Alberta. Alberta's created more jobs than we have. Well maybe, Mr. Speaker, if in our first year we had laid and hacked and slashed like the Alberta government, we could hire them all

back in the last term and say we're creating jobs too.

The other thing that the opposition doesn't seem to understand is that the population of Alberta is twice as big as ours. They also have the Rocky Mountains. Now maybe the third party would like to take some of that \$14 billion deficit they ran up and move a couple of those mountains over here so we could have skiing and golf and all the activities that the tourists go to see in Alberta.

But right now they seem held up on another little problem with their economy. They want us to put in right-to-work legislation. They say, what good . . . how is this going to help the economy? I came from one of the constituencies, Mr. Speaker . . . Whoops. I came from a constituency, Mr. Speaker, where the average income is very high. It's not that the working people have high incomes, Mr. Speaker; it's because we have a disproportionate number of millionaires, and those people help to bring up your average income. And that's what happens in the right-to-work legislation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — Anyway, throughout these consultations we heard a number of strong, clear messages. The main one was that although there are many challenges ahead, people are hopeful about Saskatchewan's economy. They see opportunities flowing from concentrating our efforts on our existing strengths — our people, our communities, and our world competitive economic sectors.

Throughout consultations and on implementation of the REDA (regional economic development authority) initiatives, communities, development organizations, and other stakeholders shared the view that there must be more that they could do to generate activity and employment, and that their roles probably revolved around supporting local initiatives and fostering a culture of development. REDAs can provide those core functions and services and support development.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I join this debate on the motion moved by the member from Regina South and seconded by the member from Battleford-Cut Knife, because it really is an important issue and an important topic.

And it strikes me is that we keep always talking on these discussions past each other, because it always is implied by the members opposite that all we're talking about is gloom and doom, or that all we're talking about is the government's incompetence. And while there's a great amount of that happening in the government, I have to publicly say that not everything that you do on every topic is totally out of a good point.

And I will give you credit for a number of them in this debate this afternoon. For example, the member from Regina South pointed, and I think quite correctly, to a component of this

whole economic development initiative that is positive, and that's the whole question of regional economic development authorities.

I come from an area where one is just being established, and I believe that the local communities are looking on this as very positive and that it's a very positive way for communities to work together and to build those economic opportunities that are possible by natural advantage in that community.

And so I do give the government credit for their work in helping communities establish these regional economic development authorities. But it is also unfair for the government to take credit for everything that these regional economic development authorities then subsequently are able to do. It simply is no more practical when there was a whole lot of things that the former Conservative government could be blamed for rightly.

They also could not be blamed for the fact there was a summer or two where it didn't rain. It wasn't possible to blame them as well for economic climate that was happening worldwide. Some of the things that happen in the world of economics is simply beyond what local, provincial, and even national governments can control.

(1515)

And a great concern that I think all of us have, looking into a deregulated society with a lot of free trade, is being able to function in that reality when we're not going to always be able to control these things.

So when I say, but, it is unfair for the government to take credit for every good thing that these economic development authorities do. It's also unfair, for example, for the Minister of Economic Development to get up in this House constantly and tell the House about all the wonderful jobs that, for example, Bourgault Industries is creating in St. Brieux and for the government to take credit for each and every one of those jobs.

The simple truth of the matter is the people that are largely responsible for any of the jobs created in this province have very little to do with what we do in this House, but are done on the farms, in the villages, in the towns, in the workplaces across this province, by people who have the commitment to make economic development and job creation and profit happen for themselves, their families, and their employees.

And so I think we've got to take this all in context because quite often government gets very fast and loose with blaming everything on the federal government or the former Conservative government and taking credit for everything, and it is simply not that easy to do and nor is it fair for the government to do that.

While this whole document on economic growth has some very nice platitudes in it, the fundamental thing that the members opposite have failed to understand is that it will fail in its objective of creating 20,000 jobs. And I first of all would like to point out that the Saskatchewan statistics show that from 1992 to the present time, there are the same number of people

working in this province — not 10,000 more than there were four years ago — the same number.

So we're starting firstly with no new jobs being created in the last four years. There might have been some new ones created, but for every one that was there was an old job lost, and so we sit at the exact same numbers. And so we're not now saying 20,000 new jobs, falling back on the promise of 30,000 four years ago. We are starting from ground zero and there are no new jobs created and nowhere in my opinion, unless the government fundamentally addresses some issues that it has to, will there be no new jobs created in this province.

Now what we have is a situation that on one hand the government says we do not want to interfere, we do not want to take this very direct role in creation of jobs, like the Conservatives did with the big money thrown at things. They're not going to do that. And I think that that's fair ball. But what you have done on the other side, is you've created an atmosphere that makes it very difficult for business to create the jobs.

And I'll cite examples why I say that you've done this, and sometimes I think you're unaware of the ramifications of decisions you made. For example, the workers' compensation is something we were talking about today. Can you explain to me how in your foggiest imagination, when we came through this situation last fall, where there were rate increases proposed in ridiculous percentage numbers, in ridiculous actual numbers, that would've amounted to over 20 million extra dollars to be paid for business in this province, how that in any way creates a positive economic atmosphere for business.

And I know that we got Mr. Neville in and he reviewed everything and said, well let's not deal with this for a year. Let's put a 10 per cent cap on it. Let's shove this mess under the rug and hope that it'll go away.

Well businesses know it hasn't gone away, and unless we deal with the underpinnings of this kind of outrageous situation, it will never go away. And so we have an atmosphere created because of the actions of the WCB that is very negative to business.

Last year as well occupational health and safety had a whole great number of new regulations put into place. A KPMG report looked at those regulations and it was reported that there was \$18.3 million extra cost to business to implement them.

Now no one, there's no one in this province, employee or employer, who will say we should ever put employees' safety at risk. But somehow we've got to do it in a way that is cost-effective, and reasonable, and practical for businesses or it just creates another negative type of incentive.

The Minimum Wage Board has been appointed for some time, and particularly the small businesses and the businesses in the hospitality industry that the member from Regina South talked about, are very concerned about what's going to happen. And it's not because they have some type of moral problem with paying people more, but what they need to have is a level playing-field so that their industry and their businesses are not

put at great individual disadvantage to others.

We have a situation with the Labour Relations Board. The government has appointed a chairman to this board who has an incredible academic background in law but has absolutely no experience in the practical, real world. And rulings that this board are making are creating a great deal of hardship for businesses that want to come into this province.

And so I hear from people in the business community, through people that I know because I'm in the business community, who say daily, almost, that they would like to come to Saskatchewan to do business, to create jobs and create opportunities, but they're very fearful about the atmosphere that's created by the fact that people in regulated agencies that have an incredible amount of power and authority are taking the labour standards in this province to places that this legislature would never have considered possible when it passed the legislation.

And so we end up with a situation that an atmosphere is being created by regulation that we would have never dared to do in legislation. And that is why we're not going to be able to create jobs into the future. Unless we're prepared as legislators not just to pass legislation and say to heck with the regulations, who cares about the regulations, the regulations and the interpretation of those regulations by people in authority can tremendously disadvantage the business community.

And so while there is great platitudes in this whole effort and the whole opportunities for jobs and all the rest of it, unless the government opposite is willing to look at all of the ramifications of decisions that they've made, not only in this legislature, but in fact then, Mr. Speaker, I know that you will fail in the ability of government to create jobs. And in four years the people of this province will hold you accountable for this dismal failure.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — If there are no further speakers, then we will proceed . . . Is the hon. member standing to speak?

Mr. Belanger: — Yes. I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I was writing notes. My friend made some very valuable comments in reference to the *Partnership for Growth*.

Just one point that . . . couple points I wish to raise. Northern Saskatchewan again; we'll drive past P.A. (Prince Albert), we'll drive past Meadow Lake, and we'll drive further north than Lac la Ronge, and we'll go to the smaller northern Saskatchewan communities. These communities, and I talk about communities — La Loche, Buffalo Narrows, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Beauval, Pinehouse — all the smaller communities with a thousand or 1,500 people that seem to be constantly forgotten in reference to any planning that the provincial government get under. Northern Saskatchewan has been so severely under-funded for so many years, and if the government wants to truly create substantial jobs for the people in the North, it'll have to start at the bottom, at the community level, and work its way up.

With regards to funding social programs, system of education, with regards to accessibility incentives in health care system,

we all know those are all integrated with the sense of the word of community. And if you have an economic plan and it doesn't address the whole community development aspect, Mr. Speaker, then it isn't a plan intended for rural or small northern Saskatchewan communities.

Yes, in northern Saskatchewan I think the majority of people are saying, develop northern Saskatchewan resources. But the key thing that they're also saying is that part of northern Saskatchewan are the people themselves. At this point in time, many northern Saskatchewan communities have houses and people. Basically there's nothing there happening socially and very little happening economically. And this *Partnership For Growth* does not begin to address those problems, Mr. Speaker.

When you go into a northern community, the *Partnership For Growth* document should be very, very comprehensive. It should look at how people interact socially, how people interact economically, and what services are available. I think northern Saskatchewan do want to encourage larger companies to come into the North and develop the resources. But we also want to be partners with these certain companies who are able to access jobs. We're able to decide which areas to be developed, we're able to decide the decisions of this venture, but equally, Mr. Speaker, we're able to participate in the profits of such a venture. And the *Partnership for Growth* really doesn't begin to talk about that in the least bit.

Small northern communities at this point in time, Mr. Speaker, cannot develop their economies on their own. We have no capital. Where many of us have no economic base, we have no tax base. Our skilled workforce is very small in numbers. We have no expertise. You look at the tax system; you look at the cost of living in northern Saskatchewan; it makes it very difficult for the economy to develop at the local level in northern Saskatchewan. And certainly the *Partnership for Growth* doesn't specifically address that, Mr. Speaker.

There has to be, of course, and I'm encouraged to see, some type of effort being undertaken, but I think we have to go deeper than that, Mr. Speaker. There needs to be more coordination with other government departments. They all need to work together.

Again, I go back to the model of community development. In northern Saskatchewan one of the biggest disincentives is the welfare system. One of the biggest disincentives is the housing system, Mr. Speaker. If you want to have a person work in southern Saskatchewan — I'm going back to housing again — obviously many of us have mortgages and we pay into a house and that house payment is an investment. In northern Saskatchewan, because the banks don't recognize the North as a safe place for investment, there is no housing market there. The government is forced at times to build houses, you know, through the social housing program.

And if you want to have a job in northern Saskatchewan, if you want to get involved with the economy, well the system penalizes you because 25 to 30 per cent of your gross income goes into the social housing rents that you have to pay as a working person. So in essence you're putting 7, \$800 into a house each month but you're not getting any equity in that

house because it's simply rent, Mr. Speaker. And this is the big problem.

So I go back to my point, is there has to be a lot more coordination in northern Saskatchewan when it comes to developing the economy because there is a system of disincentives, a system that hurts any effort at community people and government working hand-in-hand to stimulate the economy at the local level.

I think we have to simply encourage business and communities to work towards full employment and economic development. We need to understand the problems facing different sectors of this province and work together to find a way to foster economic growth; to specialize for different areas of this province.

And what I'm pointing at that . . . with that point, Mr. Speaker, is we've got to be able to see how the rest of the province work. Like, how do we know that the products we're developing in northern Saskatchewan — be it in forestry or be it in tourism — whether there's markets for that. So obviously we have to keep in tune with all sectors of the provincial economy to really begin to pinpoint where's the best hope of our efforts in terms of developing jobs and profits for northern people.

Again we need to make sure the Department of Indian and Metis Affairs have as much influence and much effort with the Minister of Economic Development in terms of developing the economy for the northern Indian and Metis people. Again I'm talking about the Saskatchewan population, and again I go specifically to northern Saskatchewan.

I think we look at other things. I've mentioned housing, Mr. Speaker. When you look at again a northern community, a northern isolated community, you're looking at things like the justice system as well. The justice system is severely overworked. It's strained. It's not effective. It's not following any of the . . . you know, it's not successful in the least bit. And the reason being, Mr. Speaker, again you look at the interaction of a community, of how you have a severely economically and socially depressed community, you're going to have . . . your RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) cost will be high. Your justice system will be high. The social costs will also be increased.

So really I think the point I'm trying to make is that when you talk about economic development and you talk about a *Partnership for Growth* when it comes to northern Saskatchewan, this document does not address that, Mr. Speaker, because it's got to be more comprehensive. It has to be in tune with what northern Saskatchewan people want, and it really has to begin to look at the whole system of disincentives that operate and are certainly prevalent in northern Saskatchewan.

When you drive into a small community — say Beauval or Pinehouse or Ile-a-la-Crosse, communities I'm familiar with — many people ask me when they drive in is, what's in Ile-a-la-Crosse? Or what's in Pinehouse? What keeps people here? And that's a really good question to have coming from the outside, Mr. Speaker. And really again, I go back to the

point of people and houses. What keeps people here? And we have 1,500 people in certain communities; the question you get from visitors is, what keeps people here?

(1530)

And, Mr. Speaker, they can't find the answers, but the answers lie with the northern people themselves. We believe — again I go back to the point — we believe, for true economic development of northern Saskatchewan, we must direct finances to local economic development authorities. Direct financing by using proceeds of the development of the non-renewable industries in northern Saskatchewan, the large corporations and large companies operating in northern Saskatchewan making tremendous amount of money for the Saskatchewan government — we must begin to take a portion of those dollars and direct-finance local economic development authorities so that they can decide what type of effort and what type of economy that they can begin to develop on their own. This is the key thing.

And when people ask me what's in Beauval, what's in Pinehouse, what's in Ile-a-la-Crosse, it's the same as what's in Watson and what's in Saskatoon. We have dreams and aspirations. We have plans. And I think the key thing is here, is what can we develop in these small communities? Mr. Speaker, we can develop local saw mills to employ 10, 15 people. Mr. Speaker, we can look at developing the fish industry by having fish hatcheries and by having fish processing plants in northern Saskatchewan. We can look at the wild rice industry, Mr. Speaker. We can develop a wild rice processing plant and you can get wild rice really developed at a fast pace.

We can look at tourism, Mr. Speaker. We have land galore. Half the province of Saskatchewan consists within the northern administration district, so there's lakes, rivers and streams and forests and fish and on and on and on and on and on. I think we look at manufacturing as well, Mr. Speaker. Let's look at agriculture. These are industries that we're not totally familiar with, but with the *Partnership for Growth* strategy, would it not be in the government's interests, Mr. Speaker, to pass that expertise on to the northern people?

So really the essence here is, I'm saying that we must become more aggressive in our economic development strategy. We as government must make a significant difference for the grass roots people, people that live in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Beauval, Patuanak and Dillon.

And how can we do this, Mr. Speaker? I'm just absolutely tired of giving ideas here, but I'll continue doing so. We could establish a new northern development fund, and from that fund we could easily have the northern large corporations contribute to the fund, and then direct-finance our local economic and social development agencies.

But, Mr. Speaker, I see my time is up. We have a heck of a lot more we could say, but I'll hold at this time. Thank you.

The Speaker: — The member's time has expired. The debate will continue. If there are no further members wishing to address the question, we will then move to the 10 minutes of questions and comments by members. The floor is open for

question and comments.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the comments from the members opposite. But I noticed that they forgot to address the question of sales tax harmonization, and so I want to address my question to the Leader of the Opposition. Would you please now stand and tell us exactly where the Liberal caucus is on the issue of harmonization of the GST...

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order, order. Now the members will be reminded of course that this is private members' debate, and if the hon. member would like to direct the question to a member in his capacity as private member, he may do so. And so I'll simply ask him to put his question into context, otherwise I'll go to another member.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess my question then is to the member for Melville. As he is also the Leader of the Opposition, I was simply using a larger title. But would the member for Melville please advise the House as to what his position is on the harmonization of the GST?

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to respond by inquiring what sort of consultation was done with the people along the west side of the province, the business community on the west side of the province, with respect to our provincial sales tax. Let's worry about that before we go on into something else.

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, my hearing might be not so good, so I'll move off the member from Melville. I'll ask the member from Melfort what his position is and whether he supports the federal government's harmonization of the GST proposal that's currently before the government.

Mr. Gantefer: — Well I certainly can speak to that, but it'll take longer than a simple question, and we can do that later. As you recall, that there was a time in the provincial economy where there was harmonization, where we had both taxes shortly there, and the government opposite removed it.

I think that on this issue you're going to end up with two problems. One is you're going to have some people in the business community that is going to look favourably on harmonization of the sales tax. Because if you apply the same rules that apply to the GST, the advantage for business is that that becomes a flow-through expense, so it's an advantage to business because they don't pay the 9 per cent extra cost. And that's the reason, that's the reason that I understand that the Maritime provinces has accepted this.

In terms of the other side of the argument, because you're now putting the tax on a much broader base for consumers, it's a much greater cost. My position personally is, is that I think this has to be looked at in its full context and weigh the full ramification of this to the provincial economy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noticed this motion was put forward by the member from Regina Albert

South, I believe is the constituency, so I would like to put a question to him.

When I take a look at this motion and it talks about, you know, workers, communities working together with the government to achieve some goals in partnership, but what we're talking about is some of the economic benefits that go to or don't go to the communities when in fact you don't have this cooperation between workers and communities and government.

So the question is, why on earth did this member, in the election, take the position to save the Plains Health Centre, yet time after time when it's brought forward . . . because, Mr. Minister, there are jobs, lots of jobs in Regina and in his constituency, that he's not sticking up for. And if that isn't a benefit to this city, then what is?

And now he's completely changed his position on this, Mr. Speaker. So we can talk about economic development all we want but . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now I want to ask the member to put his question directly and . . . Order. And I want to remind the hon. member that, under the debate rule 17, questions must be put related to the content of the speeches. I'm not hearing that, and I'll give the hon. member an opportunity to put his question directly, but remind him it must relate to the content of the speeches, according to rule 17.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question directly would be, why is this member changing his position now, when so many jobs and the economic importance of those jobs is so great to Regina? Why did he change his stand?

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, my position today is the same as it was during the campaign. I believe that it is important to have community consultation. I do not believe governments at any level, including elected health boards involved, people who are decided to make these decisions . . . these decisions should not be made in private. That is why I continue to have the same position I did in the campaign, and that is why I support this government in its consultation efforts.

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the member for Athabasca. I noted with interest in his speech that he referred to the importance of community development in terms of regional economic development. I totally agree with him.

And I would like to know how he squares that need for community development with the fact that the federal government is cutting \$2.5 billion in social programs which surely strikes at the very heart of community development. And yet they have \$1 billion to pay off the Maritime provinces for harmonization. How does he think that this is going to enhance regional economic development and most particularly the community development he speaks of?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the question I have back . . . And I thank the member for that question. I

think the key thing here is this is not a thing that developed overnight. This issue, in terms of the treatment of northern Saskatchewan, has been happening for 20 to 30 years. Northern development resources have been happening for 20 to 30 years. And 20 to 30 years ago, there was no federal cuts that affected us drastically.

And today the question I put back to the member is, exactly how do you perceive that we can do things differently in northern Saskatchewan as related to the *Partnership for Growth* document, as opposed to blaming Ottawa for some of these problems.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member for Athabasca knows full well, under the rules of the 75-minute debate, I can only ask questions; I can't answer them. So I would be more than pleased to discuss this with him out of the House.

I would though, at this point, like to . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . the member from Melfort . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . in his speech about the very positive aspects of REDAs, regional economic development authorities. But he did say that there is some uncertainty over tax regimes. I would like to ask the member from Melfort how he feels, that since the federal government is cutting \$2.5 million in social transfers and they have \$1 billion to transfer to the Maritime provinces for harmonization, how that is going to help any uncertainty over taxes.

Mr. Gantefer: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I certainly would feel that it's important to debate the issues that are before the federal government, and I look forward to do that the first time I get an opportunity to as a Member of Parliament.

However, what I have to talk about and what the issue was today was not what the federal government is doing but the choices and decisions that your government is doing. And those are where I pointed out areas that are great negative incentives . . . or disincentives to the economic development of this province.

These are issues that are totally within the control of this government. They relate to Workers' Compensation Board; they relate to occupational health and safety; they relate to the Labour Relations Board; they relate to the type of people that you appoint in charge of arbitration, and all of those sorts of issues. Those are choices that your government has made and they're the ones that we should be dealing with in this legislature.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I want to again remind all members to direct questions and comments through the Speaker, as is befitting the rules of the House and dignified debate.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question will be directed to the member for Battleford-Cut Knife. I note last year when the Economic Development minister was in her riding

with respect to cross-border shopping, he's on record as stating that he considers that immoral, to cross-border shop. Now I know the member referred in her speech . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I have just recognized that the hon. member is not in his seat and is improperly recognized by the Speaker.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And now in the member for Battleford-Cut Knife's address she mentioned how she seldom shops in Alberta herself. And I guess the issue here might not be one of how many times, how frequently, you may shop but in terms of what type of items might you purchase when you're in Alberta. And I would just ask the member for Battleford-Cut Knife: does she purchase any high-ticket items in Alberta, whether they be for agricultural or personal use?

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you. I personally shop very little in Alberta. And when I do it might be because my husband was there at the bull sale, and I might pick up a few things if my store was closed. Other than that, I don't feel that there is anything available.

An Hon. Member: — Oh sure . . .

Ms. Murrell: — I said that I do not shop . . . And one of the things that really concerns me is that we hear this all the time. I live 10 miles from the Alberta border, and what there is in Provost to appeal to people there is beyond me, so if you can buy it in your own area where they give us the best service, I would prefer to shop locally. And I stress that.

Motion agreed to.

(1545)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 6 — Hospital Closures

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will at the end of my remarks be moving a motion, and I'll read the text of that motion at this time:

That this Legislative Assembly condemn the government for the ongoing closures of long-term and acute care hospitals across rural and urban Saskatchewan as this contributes to the loss of accessible health care for all people of this province and causes the health care professionals to seek employment elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, every week, there isn't a week goes by, in fact there's hardly a day go by in this House, where we don't raise health care issues. And of course we're not raising them for the political reasons that the Health minister would like to accuse us of. We're raising them on behalf of the people that contact our caucus, that contact our members, knowing full well that they can't get health care in this province any longer unless they go through this process of perhaps embarrassing the government into finding them a bed and to finding them some way to get their mothers or their fathers or their uncles or aunts into long-term care facilities. And it's all happening, Mr. Speaker, because of policy, the policy of this government.

For years we had plenty of nursing home beds in this province. Acute care wasn't the concern it is today. And it's not that all, you know, all the small town hospitals that that government — the 52 in particular that that government decided to close — were doing major, acute care operations. They weren't. But in fact they played a significant role in health care in rural Saskatchewan, gave people many . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, a level of comfort that they don't have today.

When we take a look at what's happening in rural Saskatchewan today, especially after this health care reform was brought forward by the NDP government, it has been just going down, downhill, never ending.

And what's happened since the beginning of the health care reform when they closed these 52 hospitals? We have now seen where in fact they're gradually closing more each and every day. There isn't a day goes by when we don't talk about nursing homes that are getting closed or hospitals.

But you see what they're doing? They're not taking them on in a big group any longer because of course that created too much stir throughout the province. Now they're individually picking away, one at a time. They're under-funding health districts, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ensure that the longevity of these facilities, the health care and the seniors care needs, aren't being met in rural Saskatchewan.

When I take a look at my own community, the Shaunavon lodge, we have a level 1 and 2 care home, which we know all throughout rural Saskatchewan, these homes were filled with level 3, and some cases, level 4 patients. That's what they were filled with.

The care homes, the light level care homes have been playing a much larger role for years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And really that's been quite a savings to the provincial government because they fund it at a much lighter level of care.

And another one is the Ponteix manor which was, you know . . . and what's happening with these communities? They're being told that their doors are going to close or you can find a buyer. I mean it's really the government completely pulling away from senior care.

In fact earlier in the House today we had my colleague, the member from Saltcoats, raise an issue about the Eaglestone Lodge in Kamsack. Now this is another facility slated for closure unless it can be sold by May 17. And when I take a look at some of the notes that we have had back from the Kamsack mayor, Bernie Rink, stating as long as the government keeps taking away money from these health districts, health care districts, more of these facilities will be closed.

As a result of this government, 18 seniors in Kamsack are living in a state of anxiety and stress because they do not know whether they will have to leave their home, their families and friends. This is certainly not the compassionate health care system the people of Saskatchewan were promised by the NDP.

That's a record that you should be ashamed of, those members across the way. When the people of Saskatchewan, people of

rural Saskatchewan, have to have these feelings and say these type of things to make you aware that, you know, they're . . . You look at it as an economic problem; that there isn't the funding. And we look at it, you know, from a perspective that if people need care in this province, whether they be sick or the elderly, we must find a way to take care of them. And that's where the two parties differ so much, is that in fact there's no . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I can hear the people across the way heckling continuously, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but in fact it's not me that they have to answer to. It's going to be the people throughout Saskatchewan and in fact the people in their own ridings that they'll have to deal with.

Take a look at some of the other cuts, and we're continuously raising these concerns, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the under-funding in health care. Here we have the Pipestone Health District — they have a hospital funding pool was decreased by \$291,000. We have the Prairie West Health District — they have some \$273,000 cut in acute care services. And you recall, you know, we've raised these so often, so many times in this House, every few days. So our comments on this side are going to be brief today because you have never had an opportunity to explain your actions and today's a perfect time to do that.

South Central Health District Board has voted to close acute care beds in the Pangman Hospital effective May 1; they're short \$450,000. You recall some of the other ones we've raised before: Swift Current running a \$500,000 deficit; I think it was the East Central Health District, \$3.6 million deficit. It is just never ending. It goes on and on and on.

But you know what they do have money for? It's been showing up, it's been showing up all too often, and of course we've raised these too, Mr. Deputy Speaker. District support branch, they have lots of money for people that. You know, in many cases the member for Moose Jaw has raised where they've let . . . the health districts have let people go because they don't have the funds and yet the Department of Health is running around picking these people up. Not only are they getting severance but the Department of Health is picking these jobs up.

But they're not picking up the nurses and the doctors that are leaving. We have doctors leaving on a weekly basis heading to the States, because it's pointless, it's pointless to stay in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that's the problem that we're having.

Well the member from Regina Albert South is just enjoying himself heckling here today, but you know he has a lot to answer for if he recalls his election material sending out that he was going to defend the Plains. Where is he at today?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in one week we tried on two different occasions to bring forward emergency motions and this government wouldn't debate the Plains Health Centre. So I mean you can heckle all you want, it's not me you have to answer to. I don't vote for you, and if I lived in your constituency I wouldn't vote for you.

The fact of the matter is, you're going to have many people that

you're going to have to answer to. And you can sit there with a big grin on your face but I don't think it's going to bode well for you in the next election.

We take a look at some of these kind of salaries that are being paid for district support branch. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, keep in mind what many of these people are doing. They're the ones that are delivering the bad news to the Regina Health District Board. They're the ones that are delivering the bad news to each and every region or district board throughout the province that in fact there's no funds and in fact they have to change their ways, they have to cut back services.

But who's doing it? Well we have people here that are earning 69,000; 83,000; 68,000; 58,000; 67,000. Look at the sort of increases they've had in one year — 10, \$11,000 increases in one year to their salaries. Those are the sort of issues that we've been raising, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And you know what it all, what it really, comes down to in the end is what is really happening to the people out there. There again you recall so many of the issues that we've raised in the past couple of months. The fellow in Moose Jaw . . . Well I won't get into every case. I mean here's one where the lady laid in the Saskatoon hospital with a broken leg for, I believe it was a week. Is this health care, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I think not.

Now if you're proud of that, well so be it. We're going to differ. We're going to differ on whether or not that's health care in Saskatchewan, because that's what you've brought it down to. You've destroyed what people before you worked so hard to put into this province — a safe and reliable health care system.

What are they doing in other provinces, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We raised this only days ago, the fact that the B.C. (British Columbia) government . . . And they admitted, publicly admitted that they made a mistake; they should not have followed the way of the Saskatchewan NDP. They have been sucked in. What are they doing to correct it? A \$100 million boost to acute care services in B.C.

An Hon. Member: — Table it.

Mr. McPherson: — Well I did table it.

An Hon. Member: — Well table it.

Mr. McPherson: — Well I did table it. We tabled it . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we're going to allow them to heckle, at least I might as well send a copy over to them so they can read along. Can we send this to them? I mean surely you can't dispute the *Vancouver Sun*. I mean you won't . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I must remind the members that it is not . . . private members do not have to table documents when we're into private members.

Mr. McPherson: — Oh, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't mind them having . . . if I can help that member learn anything, if I can help him bring his own career along, even though it isn't going to go past the next election, but at least if he can make it

up to that point without completely embarrassing himself on a daily basis . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . they have had it. Read along.

At this point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm going to cut my remarks short because obviously, obviously there are so many on the other side I can tell by their constant chirping that they would just love to get into the debate and explain to the people of this province why it is that they've done the shameful acts they have in the last few years.

At this point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move:

That this Legislative Assembly condemn the government for the ongoing closures of long-term and acute care hospital beds across rural and urban Saskatchewan as this contributes to the loss of accessible health care for all people of this province and causes the health care professionals to seek employment elsewhere.

Seconded by the member from Arm River.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I sat here and I listened for several minutes . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . perhaps too long as my colleague says, to the remarks from the House Leader of the Liberal Party. And all I can say is I'm quite amazed, Mr. Speaker, at the confusion that continues to persist over on the front benches of the Liberal caucus.

Mr. Speaker, the member is utterly confused in his understanding of what has happened in the health field and the changes that have gone on. I think, Mr. Speaker, that I really . . . it is incumbent on us to take this opportunity to take some time and explain some of the changes that have gone on.

The member has some difficulty with changes — has some difficulty with changes, and what happened was he has been spending a lot of time changing parties and now changing leaders and I think this is perhaps just far too many changes, far too many changes for him to put up with.

But, Mr. Speaker, when I look at the entire health system and I look at its effect on the people of Saskatchewan and the progress that we've made, it is without a doubt in my mind that the changes in place will end up . . . we will end up seeing in the statistics when we look back several years from now, that people will end up living longer lives and will end up living better as a result of the changes that are going on right now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1600)

Mr. Kowalsky: — These changes were put into place because we had to prepare for the 21st century, Mr. Speaker.

The old system was just not sustainable in the way it was put together, and that's understandable. Because it was put together in the times when there were far more people living in rural Saskatchewan and fewer people living in urban Saskatchewan. There's been a tremendous shift, ongoing shift, in population. There have been tremendous shifts in technology. There have

been things . . . There is equipment and technology available now that was not available when the system was put into place. And it was simply time for a change.

And I want to just indicate, Mr. Speaker, very quickly, a brief look at just how we've come in these last three years. For one thing, three years ago we didn't even have a health district, let alone an elected health district. Now we have 30, and they're all elected. Except for the member . . . In addition to that, we have members that are appointed by the government to serve on these health boards.

Three years ago we only had a fraction of the home-based and community-based services that we have here today. Three years ago we didn't have a provincial palliative care program, and the respite care program was in its infancy. We didn't have a network of first responders that now covers the province. We didn't have a school-based immunization program for hepatitis B. We didn't have an AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) strategy. We didn't have an AIDS assessments. We didn't have a Provincial Health Council. We didn't have needs-based funding.

Two years ago we had only the beginnings of a stroke research centre in Saskatoon. Yet in September of 1995, this stroke research centre was recognized by the World Health Organization as a collaborative centre, the only one of its kind and quality in the world.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we have 1,800 fewer people on waiting-lists for surgery than we did two years ago. Our cataract replacements in Saskatoon are up by 20 per cent and our pacemaker implants are up by 16 per cent. It's moves like this — along with the back-filling that we did when the federal government cut the funding to the Canadian Health and Social Transfer funds to Saskatchewan — it's moves like this that have prompted people like Allen Backman who is a health policy specialist and professor of management and marketing at the University of Saskatchewan to say this in *Maclean's* magazine in July of 1995. This is what he said — and I quote — referring to the Saskatchewan health reform initiatives; and I quote:

"This is the model that all the provinces should move towards if they want the greatest efficiencies in the way they spend their health dollars." Impending federal cutbacks "are going to devastate provincial health care systems. Saskatchewan is more advanced than any other province in preparing to deal with that crisis."

That was Allen Backman. There are numerous articles in newspapers appearing daily and weekly, Mr. Speaker, that do comparisons of what's to happen in Saskatchewan, what's happened in Alberta, what's happened in other provinces; and inevitably it's a Saskatchewan model that comes out up front. I'm proud of that, Mr. Speaker.

I want to spend a few minutes giving some background so that the members might be a little more advised about how this all came about, and have a better understanding of why things were done. So they can go back to their communities and help out — and help out; help with the reform process which is very, very necessary.

Mr. Speaker, when we formed the government in 1991, we had a very, very hard look at the health system. It was a system which had grown willy-nilly over the years. In fact it was hardly a system at all. What we had was lots of hospitals. And I say, political hospitals. We had lots of physicians and they're providing health services in an outmoded fashion.

As a result, in Saskatchewan we at that time had over 400 different boards overseeing health services — 400 for the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And we had more hospitals than any other province. In fact we had almost as many hospitals as Ontario to serve a population one-tenth the size of Ontario. And health costs were growing at an alarming rate. Spending on health had doubled in just 10 years and it was showing no signs of slowing down.

We had a funding system which provided money to health institutions based on care statistics and previous spending. It was a system that was inefficient in many ways. And yet change was not possible within the existing governing structures. So if we were going to preserve publicly funded medicare for the next generation, for the 21st century, we had to change the system, and we had to have a system that could manage health spending. And we wanted to know that the money we were spending was going to actually improve people's health and not just to treat them when they were sick.

When we embarked on a fundamental change, we had some key decisions. Number one, cost containment should not be an end in itself. We needed to develop a better, more responsive health system. Change should be comprehensive and systematic. And third, we had to involve stakeholders and communities in a meaningful way.

So let me describe briefly what has changed in our province since health renewal began in 1992. Our plan was constructed in two distinct stages. Stage one involved structural reform, and stage two involved changes to service program and delivery systems.

A little bit about stage one — in the summer of 1993, we formed 30 health districts across the province, replacing the over 400 separate health boards. Boards composed of local residents were appointed to manage the new districts during an interim period, and a commission was set up to recommend the board election process. As part of this structural change, we reduced funding to acute care in order to shift the emphasis to health services in the communities and at home. We eliminated acute care funding to 52 rural hospitals which were converted to community health centres. We also reduced the funding base to all remaining hospitals by 6 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, this was a move that did two things. It helped the treasury, and it also helped . . . this transfer was important in making a new, modernized, up-to-date health system.

It is true that these changes have not been easy for the communities involved. In many cases, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of agony tied to these type of changes, and we all want to recognize that. It's not easy to see a building close down in your home town or your district. And the people who had jobs there

found that this was a difficult thing to do. But by and large, after a lot of thought, giving it a lot of thought, they would agree that yes, it did have to be done and they helped in the process.

Smaller hospitals simply cannot provide the care people need when they are sick. And with today's technology, more of the services people need can be provided in a community setting or even at home. People are finding that community health centres can offer a much wider range of the health services they need, from education to physiotherapy and nursing care. And when hospital care is needed, modern facilities are usually no more than an hour's drive away.

There were other structural changes to Saskatchewan's health system. We changed the way we provided funding. Instead of providing funding to a hospital or a nursing home to keep the institution running, we now provide funding to districts based on the population and their health needs. This means that the health resources are shared more equitably among communities, according to the health needs of the district, not according to the number of institutions they have.

Another innovation was to set up the Health Services Utilization and Research Commission — HSURC for short — an independent body to provide analysis of outcomes of health services and recommend effective health practices.

Now this is a key point. It is well-known that many medical procedures are carried out when they have questionable value, or even may harm a patient. We can make the system better. We can make better use of resources by getting more information about which health services are truly needed.

For instance, a study by HSURC found that many young children are undergoing tonsil surgery unnecessarily. When these findings were published, tonsillectomies to children under four dropped significantly. Not only did this free up operating rooms for people who really needed surgery, it also means better care for our children.

We also established the Provincial Health Council, another independent body, to advocate health goals which go beyond the realm of insured health services. We think it's time to recognize that there is a lot more to health than doctors and hospitals. To truly change the health status of people, we know we have to address economic and social factors which influence health.

And once these new health structures were in place, responsibility for a comprehensive range of health services was then transferred to the districts. Districts were made responsible for acute care, for long-term care, ambulance, and home care services.

In addition, community-based services such as mental health, public health, and addiction services, which have been provided directly by the Health department, were transferred to the districts. This meant the reassignment of more than 1,400 staff to the district health boards. The way we did this, working with the unions involved, demonstrated our government's commitment to cooperation rather than confrontation.

I might mention, Mr. Speaker, that in this budget the funding equivalent for 135 people has been shifted from people in the Department of Health to the user end in the districts — a rather significant downsizing of the department as a result of the district boards' infrastructure being put into place.

So bringing this whole range of services under the direction of the 30 district boards was a very, very important step. This structure made it possible to set up services across boundaries; for example, coordinating hospital maternity programs with public health nurses so that new mothers can return home from hospital sooner and get the services they need right at home. Districts can also fully integrate preventative services into the health system. Prevention of injuries and disease and health promotion are recognized as priorities, alongside the treatment system.

Instead of knocking on dozens of doors to find the health services they need, we think people should have to knock on one door, and it shouldn't always be the hospital door. In fact in many cases these days, the health workers are knocking on your door, bringing services to the homes of people who need them.

Now a little bit about stage two, Mr. Speaker. Stage two of health renewal is under way. We are now expanding community-based services and making the system more responsive to the community. The money that's been saved by reducing the cost of acute care has been put into community alternatives. Since 1991, funding to health service in communities has grown by 41 per cent. Funding for home-based services alone has increased 90 per cent. There's a wider range of home services, more respite and support for families and other care-givers, and home services have been reduced in cost, all of which makes it possible for more people to remain in their homes longer.

Health districts have funding to enhance services like home physiotherapy and to provide 24-hour access to home care. Quality of care coordinators are being placed in each district to respond to consumer complaints and concerns, to act as advocates to people using the health system, and to recommend improvements. And many of these are now in place.

We've taken steps towards more community control and accountability in our health system, because as of last October, Saskatchewan held the first district health board elections in the country, Mr. Speaker. This means better accountability and more public involvement in the health system.

(1615)

In a few short years we have accomplished a lot in Saskatchewan. It has not all been easy and there will continue to be challenges ahead. But the most important thing is that we have secured medicare and saved it from the certain erosion which would have taken place had we not taken action.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to refer to some of the evidence that demonstrates that health renewal is working in Saskatchewan. First I should say, Mr. Minister, that spending has been stabilized while other services which we now have are

better than before or at least equivalent.

The number of surgeries that we now have has been relatively stable. There are some interesting changes when you look at some of the statistics. Some of the procedures which are in high demand, including cataract removal, hip and knee replacements, and coronary bypass, increased from '91-92 to '94-95. For example, cataract surgery, as I mentioned earlier, increased by 25 per cent. Hip and knee replacements increased by 12 per cent. Coronary bypasses increased by 9 per cent.

At the same time, I've already mentioned that tonsillectomies have decreased, and other procedures, shown through utilization and research, have also decreased. And I have in this notice, in the statistic, that says that the number of Caesarean sections have decreased by 16 per cent.

So we've got quite a shift in funding and where the demands are, Mr. Minister.

Home care services have increased by 38 per cent across the province, from '91-92 to '94-95. Saskatchewan actually spends just slightly more per person on health today than we did in 1991. It's the shift that's occurred that is very significant.

Funding for home and community services increased by \$40 million in those four years, whereas the savings in acute care were decreased by \$42.6 million in those years. A lot of this came about because there was a change in technology and a change in medical practices.

The day surgery system and the same-day admission for surgery has resulted in much shorter lengths of hospital stay than used to be. Actually we found that when you compare the years '91 to '94, day surgery actually increased from 50 to 55 per cent of all surgeries for urban residents. And for rural residents, the proportion of day surgeries increased from 40 per cent of all surgeries to 50 per cent at the same time.

Now these are significant things to look at, Mr. Speaker, when you're trying to measure a health system. You need to have a way of accessing whether or not things have been improving or have not been improving. And I do believe that some of these statistics tell us that the health changes that we've put into place actually helped a great deal.

Right now, the way the system works is more people can be served using the same number of hospital beds. That is . . . or the same number of people can be served with fewer beds. And over the period from 1991 to 1994, we've had a reduction of 375,000 hospital days. And while at the same time the number of hospital bed days . . . that is, at the same time the number of surgeries has remained stable. Mr. Speaker, I think that that's rather an amazing statistic, and that our health care-givers — our doctors, our nurses, all of their assistants, and the administrators of the hospitals — really ought to be congratulated on that effort. It's quite amazing, and it's one of the things that's going to help us save medicare.

We know that the patterns of nursing home use are changing as well. And while these changes have all occurred, I want to emphasize that there is no indication whatsoever that the quality

of health services has been affected. One of the ways to measure quality of health services is to see what happens in the case of readmission rates to hospitals. When somebody leaves the hospital, do they have to come back within a day or two or a week or two, because something has not healed properly? The statistics show, Mr. Speaker, that the provincial rates of readmission within 30 days of discharge have remained very, very steady. In 1991-92, 13.99 — nearly 14 per cent of patients — were admitted to hospital again within 30 days of discharge; 13.99 in '91-92. However in 1994-95, that has gone down slightly to 13.26 per cent.

Now that statistic in itself, Mr. Speaker, decries any claim that anybody might have that the procedures that our doctors and our nurses are using in the hospital are not thorough and are not effective.

Now what we're finding is, in addition to what's being done in these big centres, that actually in the community health centres the services that they have now are much better than the hospitals that they replaced. And I've been speaking to some people in places like Meath Park, Birch Hills. And I find that where they have changed the total nature of the services provided . . . and they're quite pleased with what has happened, Mr. Speaker, because they have now the best of both worlds. They've still got access to the best technology in the bigger hospitals, and then they've got the first responders care and respite beds right in their own district.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just take a moment and give a couple more statistics about what's happening in terms of patterns of usage, how people are . . . what people in Saskatchewan are doing when it comes to utilizing the health system. We know that more and more rural residents now work and shop outside their home communities, and in many cases, they leave their districts to do their shopping and their working.

And we're finding that they're doing exactly the same thing when it comes to obtaining health services. There are seven districts that provide most of the province's hospital services. These districts are Battlefords, East Central, Moose Jaw/Thunder Creek, Prince Albert, Regina, Saskatoon, and Swift Current. They only contain 61 per cent of the province's population, but the stats show that they do 94 per cent of all surgery. And they do 77 per cent of all hospital in-patient and day surgery services, and they do 79 per cent of all deliveries of newborns.

Mr. Speaker, in 1994-95 there were 31 hospitals which admitted fewer than 10 people per day on the average and now . . . as compared to 25 in 1993-94. So these rapid trends continue to change.

Mr. Speaker, I want to give you an indication of something that's happening in my own home town with respect to this type of change. And I want to refer to the Prince Albert Health District report of February 1996, volume 5. And in here they talk about how nursing services have changed. They say that nursing services have increased from 5,000 in 1991-92 to a projected 15,000 in the current fiscal year. Mr. Speaker, if the health board was not given the autonomy to do that, these changes would not have come about. And if the funding

formulas had not changed, these changes which are so important to people and people's health needs would not have come about. This was a tripling of nursing care services.

And they also say in this report that homemaking services have increased by 40 per cent from almost 33,000 per year to 46,500 per year. They have added \$1.1 million to their home care budget to take care of these services, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that if we had done nothing in 1991, we could have been spending \$400 million a year more over the '95-96 budget than we are this year. If we had not acted to change the health system, the funding crisis would have continued, and the result would have been an erosion of universal medicare and a threat of a two-tiered privatized health system.

There are those after all who are not unhappy to see a funding crisis in public medicare. For people like Ralph Klein, it fits right into their agenda. And as Ralph Nader has pointed out, the giant private health care industry in the United States would be happy to see the subversion of Canada's universal medicare system in order to make way for profit medical services. Mr. Speaker, their argument goes something like this. Private clinics will take the pressure off the system. They won't harm medicare; they'll simply make more services available and keep specialists in Canada.

So in Alberta, we have a company called Hotel de Health who is trying to make inroads into two towns in Alberta, the town of Galahad and the town Islay. They want to lease some hospitals for \$160,000 a year, and then they want to sell procedures to Americans and Canadians, procedures including gall bladder surgery, stomach stapling, anything that people will pay money for on their own to jump the queue. Along with this, Mr. Speaker, it would bring in health insurance companies, American style. This would be just a simple foot in the door. And to that we say no, Mr. Speaker.

The truth is that private clinics cannot keep the overall costs of medicare down. When someone has private surgery, they pay a hefty fee over and above what medicare pays, so the overall costs go up. The costs go up to cover the profit in the system. And it follows that health services will be based on where the profit is and not where the need is.

So the costs of the system will go up, and the needs of ordinary people will suffer. And it won't be too long before the people who are paying more for private services just aren't interested in maintaining a public, tax-based system. Mr. Speaker, the two-tiered health system is like a cruise ship with an upper and lower decks. The people on the upper deck can afford the fine dining-room, and they simply aren't very much concerned about the quality of the fare in the cafeteria below.

The truth is that privatization cannot save medicare. Saving medicare requires the kind of health renewal we have had in Saskatchewan. We have changed the system to make it better. We are putting in place health services based on the needs of people, and we are managing the system to get better value for health dollars. We are working to improve people's health and keep them well, instead of just fixing them when they're sick.

And we're preserving our publicly funded system of universal, accessible health services of the highest quality for everyone in this generation and the ones to come as we prepare for the 21st century.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this time to give my thoughts on the current changes in our medicare system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1630)

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm happy to stand in my place and speak against the motion moved by the member from Wood River. Mind you, considering the history of the Liberal Party and their lack of constructive support for medicare, I am not surprised to see this negative, regressive motion proposed by that member.

After all, my oldest daughter was born in 1963, and I will never forget the antics of that party and of their leader, Ross Thatcher. Etched in the memories of my mind is Ross Thatcher, the then premier of this province, kicking at the door of the legislative buildings like a child. Also etched in the memories of my mind since 1963 was the KODs (Keep Our Doctors committee) and how the Liberal Party supported them. Also etched in the memories of my mind are the user fees that they put upon the people of this province when we were trying to get medicare going.

We see in these present Liberals the same lack of cooperation in developing an effective — effective — efficient, preventive health system. Again they have to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into health renewal. They're not interested in building a good health system. They're interested in scoring cheap political points.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, of all the 1967 . . . 1966-67 health budget has been protected from full impact of the federal Liberal transfer reductions. There will continue to be changes and challenges due to the continued emphasis on community services as my colleague, the member from P.A. said, and the rural to urban migration pattern of people using the health services.

The communications challenge is to reassure the public that the government is demonstrating its commitment to protect health services and that changes are a continuation of health renewal, which will take us towards the sustainable health system. And as my colleague was saying previously, that was our objective. Home and community-based service will continue to improve, and the location of hospitals will reflect the needs of rural and urban residents.

Health renewal is working. People in Saskatchewan are among the healthiest people in the world. More illness prevention and support services are available at home and in the community, and more health services are being delivered now than ever before, without costing more.

People told us health services are a priority. Medicare is a priority with people in Saskatchewan. We have reduced Saskatchewan health administration, reviewed all programs in

order to protect health district funding from the cuts that we got from their Liberal cousins. And our overall funding will be protected, and health will remain in good repair.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all across Canada people are debating the future of our national medicare system. The debate results from several trends. Rapidly growing health costs have affected every province, not only Saskatchewan. And in Saskatchewan, for instance, our health budget nearly doubled between 1981 and 1982. I think that's worth repeating, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our health budget nearly doubled between 1981 and 1982. Ageing populations, changing health needs, and rapid technological change have created a consensus that the health system needs to adapt to new realities.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would ask for leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you, and to members of the Assembly, some special people seated in the west gallery, and I'd ask them to stand when they're introduced. From Swift Current and from REM Manufacturing — a well-known company in the south-western part of the province that manufactures grain vats which the Deputy Speaker, being a farmer, would be well aware of, and also spring tines for a number of harrow operations, as well as springs for some of our main air-seeders producers — is Frank Rempel from REM Manufacturing. Frank, if you would stand up, Leanne Rempel; and George Adair. George, if you'd stand up and be recognized.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure all members will want to join with me in welcoming representatives from REM Manufacturing to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 6 — Hospital Closures (continued)

Ms. Stanger: — Just to go back, Mr. Speaker, so that we have some continuity in our thought . . . All across Canada, people are debating the future of our health and medicare system. That debate results from several trends, and these are facts not something that I made up in my mind. Rapidly growing health costs have affected every province. In Saskatchewan for instance, our health budget nearly doubled between 1981 and 1991. Ageing population, changing health needs, and rapid technological change have created a consensus that the health system needed to adapt to new realities.

There's a growing recognition that health is more than just health care, a realization that our health depends much on jobs, on housing and supportive communities, as it does on the number of hospitals and doctors. A total shift in the mind set of people has to take place.

And finally, health systems are facing financial pressures resulting from the need to eliminate government budget deficits and reduce public debt. And remember, this is a fact in no matter what province that you live in.

Preserving medicare is the ultimate goal of the changes to Saskatchewan's health system that we call health renewal. We think of it as health reform, a more familiar term which has been used to describe changes to health systems across the country, but I like to refer to changes in Saskatchewan as a health system renewal. In Saskatchewan our goal is not simply to reduce costs but to renew the health system and to make it affordable, sustainable, and appropriate for the next century. We are involved in a fundamental, structural renewal of the health system which is transferring the way services are delivered.

And I would ask the members opposite to join with us to build one of the best health systems in the whole country of Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Stanger: — Together we can work together to build a constructive, effective, efficient system that will serve our people well into the 21st century. Ultimately the issue is not how much we spend on health; the issue is how to spend our health dollars to provide the best results.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in December 1995, this government took some polls. Contrary to the members opposite, 80 per cent of the people of Saskatchewan that responded believed the current level of health services provided in Saskatchewan is good or excellent. It's also particularly important to note that almost three-quarters, 74 per cent, of respondents rated the quality of health service they or their family have received over the past year as good or excellent. In other words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, three-quarters of respondents who actually used the system, actually used the system, were happy with the health services available to them.

And I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I use the health system, when I use the hospital in Maidstone, I am proud that it was my father, my grandfather, and people before us that built this system, and we are going to sustain it despite the whining and the reduction . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Thank you, Mr. Deputy Premier . . . despite the whining and snivelling of the members opposite and despite the cuts of the federal government. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After that dry speech, I'm a little thirsty. Mr. Speaker, we've heard the members opposite bemoaning the fate of the federal government and how they continue to hurt the province and blame the province . . . or blame the federal government for their cuts in health care spending.

Mr. Speaker, I'm just wondering when this government will realize some of the benefits that they can get from the federal government, such as the announcement made this morning about the hospital in La Loche. And I'd like to, Mr. Speaker, if I

could, quote from a newspaper clipping with the headline: "Macklin big winner." And in it, it states the town of Macklin is the big winner in a Canada-Saskatchewan infrastructure works announcement Thursday on health care spending. About \$4.1 million will be spent there to construct a new facility.

Mr. Speaker, the article goes on to talk about Vanguard where they're going to spend \$545,000 to expand and renovate the existing health centre which houses some long-term care residents. It also goes on to talk about Neilburg who will get an \$808,000 health centre and one in Norquay that will get a \$600,000 upgrade. A lot of these projects, Mr. Speaker, are funded by federal funding.

We also go on, Mr. Speaker. We talk about 58 million in total from the Government of Canada under the Canada infrastructure works program. Mr. Speaker, that's \$58 million — \$58 million, Mr. Speaker, from the Government of Canada under the Canada infrastructure works program. The program has triggered investments totalling more than \$270 million through 1,183 local projects, and generating some jobs for the province of Saskatchewan.

We can go on and on, Mr. Speaker, about the money that the federal government has pumped into Saskatchewan to bolster up this government, to bolster up this government when they're not doing their job for the province. I talk about \$125 million in the heavy oil upgrader, so the federals' funding goes on and on, Mr. Speaker.

If I go back to the start of health reform, Mr. Speaker, of which I was involved a bit in the local community and through the province, we talk about the way health reform was started in this province. Mr. Speaker, we go back to health reform at its outset, under the guise of the wellness model, Mr. Speaker, and how the process was started, so that we can arrive at today's scenarios that we're at, where the health care system in Saskatchewan is just about at the verge of collapse.

We went back . . . and when this government started its wellness model, they went about it by splitting the sectors into three groups so that they couldn't get agreeance on any particular issue. And of course when you have long-term care and acute care and the home care sector all competing for dollars and for turf, it fit right into this government's health reform policy.

Mr. Speaker, it went so far as to split communities, as they tried to fit into the picture, into districts, so that they didn't have to lose any services for their community, which is very understandable and certainly not the way that the health reform should have come about.

As the member from Wood River stated — it seems like hours ago — that the small communities in Saskatchewan don't have the luxury of having two or three facilities in their communities, and therefore services are being provided out of one facility.

For years and years, we have not done what is, under I guess the strict definition of acute care, done that in rural Saskatchewan, but we've provided the services for the people in the province in a small community and to meet their demanding needs.

What has happened since then with some of the closures to some of these small facilities — and I can quote from headline after headline: “Hospital closures”, “Moratoriums”, “Acute care beds close”, “Long-term care next to hit the axe.” I could go on and on, Mr. Speaker, but I won’t.

The point is that these small facilities that we had in rural Saskatchewan provided a very valuable service and continue to do so, as long as we can keep this government’s budget axe away from them.

Again, as the member from Wood River mentioned, Mr. Speaker, only tonight there’s a issue on the eastern side of the province where a town is fighting to keep its home open. Yes, and I’ll just quote from an article in the *Leader-Post*, Mr. Speaker, of April 30:

“From our perspective, it isn’t doable — the district can’t afford to continue to operate the home,” Pederson said. “We’re not blaming anyone, but difficult choices had to be made.”

Currently what we have here is an example of where the provincial government is lacking in its duty of providing necessary funding to the districts so that they can meet the needs of their community. This is one example. The member from Wood River gave many, many; I’ll just give the one.

(1645)

The problem that we have is one of petty politics, Mr. Speaker, as pointed out by Murray Mandryk on Wednesday, April 24 when the opposition questioned the Health minister on many serious issues such as waiting-lists, closures, and all those types of things.

The minister has continually shrugged it off, almost laughed at the people of the province and blamed the federal government for everything. Finally, as we suspected, it caught up with him, and the media and the people of the province . . . and I’ll just quote from Mr. Mandryk’s column:

There again, petty politics is the one thing Cline does seem to have a healthy working knowledge of, which is about where his problems begin.

But the minister’s short tenure has brought about a politicization of . . . (inaudible) . . . level we haven’t seen . . . Tory days, Mr. Speaker. The Health minister finally realized this week in the House that he cannot continue those antics and actually tried to answer a question on Monday.

As our small facilities try and survive, Mr. Speaker, we also have what we have called in this province the Health Services Utilization Research Commission, called HSURC, who have been doing some studies on long-term care, acute care, and some other issues. They did a study on long-term care some two years ago and when questioned on the study, we found out that the survey that they had done was very small and only included a small portion of the province.

When they talk about our small communities not utilizing their facilities for what they were for, they’re absolutely right. Because as I stated earlier, that our health facilities, which were formerly called integrated facilities, provided many services to the people of the province. It provided acute care — what we formerly called acute care. They provided long-term care, Mr. Speaker. They provided lab and X-ray.

They also provided some respite beds, as the member from Prince Albert talked about being relatively new, but it’s not. It’s something we’ve had to use in rural Saskatchewan for years, and it’s been a valuable tool in relieving the stress from our families when they have loved ones that need extra care.

We also provided many out-patient services, Mr. Speaker, and continue to do so.

So when the HSURC Commission stated that these small hospitals are integrated facilities and not doing their role because we were doing many, many things, they were right. Except the problem is, is that’s exactly what we need in rural Saskatchewan and should be striving to reach that and create more of them instead of closing them down.

As I said, together with these multifaceted agencies that we had, Mr. Speaker — certainly met the needs of the community and continue to do so — and we need to work toward creating more of them and not less.

I talked about the long-term care being a problem and where the next, as the members opposite talk about, the next phase of health care . . . and I’m a little worried about what’s going to happen to long-term care beds in the province, in particular to our small facilities out there, such as the one that we’re talking about tonight in Kamsack which is under the axe.

To quote from the *Leader-Post*, back in the winter, where Bill Doskoch speaks of long-term care . . . and in this issue, Mr. Speaker, there’s a chart that shows the decrease of long-term and acute care beds since 1991-1992. We’re in 1994-95; we’re down to 9,743 long-term care beds, and we’re down to 3,383 acute care beds, Mr. Speaker, from 10,141 and 4,671 in 1991-92.

Mr. Doskoch goes on to say:

‘Long-term care will be the next hot spot in health reform,’ predicts the chairman of the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations or SAHO (Mr. Speaker).

The chairman of SAHO goes on to say they haven’t the money they need to break some new ideas. So here you have the former chairman of SAHO stating that some new initiatives, some new ideas, some new programs to meet the changing needs, moving into the new century, they don’t have the money for. And this government isn’t prepared to fund them, it appears.

The article goes on to say:

Susan Wagner, a University of Saskatchewan nursing

professor (and chairman of the Saskatoon Health District Board, by the way) agreed with McPherson that shrinking funding is going to force districts to eliminate nursing home beds.

Now here's the chairman of the Saskatoon Health Board talking that we're going to have to close beds in the small communities strictly because of funding, has nothing to do with the needs of the community or needs of the people, Mr. Speaker. It's all on funding.

She goes on to say it will likely lead to the closing of whole facilities because so many districts have small homes with 10 or 15 beds that are uneconomical to operate. Economics seems to be the driving force . . . Well it is the driving force of this government's health reform, Mr. Speaker. And the needs of the community and the needs of the people, the needs of the people in the rural areas, are not being met. They're not even being considered, Mr. Speaker.

I would hope that I would have a few more minutes here, Mr. Speaker. I'll try and be brief as I can to allow some of the other members opposite to talk about health if they can.

We go on to talk about health care was top worry. Another *Leader-Post* article from January, Mr. Speaker. Another Dorskoch article where he goes on to say:

Anxiety about health care in Saskatchewan reached a higher point in September than any other point in recent polling history."

Now the member opposite from the North talked about what their polls show and how people are so happy with health and health services, Mr. Speaker, that I'm just wondering what survey she was quoting from because it seems to be quite a variance, quite a variance in opinions on the surveys, Mr. Minister.

As I said, when the government started the health reform and the wellness model, they split the sectors, they split the communities as they were trying to fit into the system. And in fact I understand, as I read through *Hansard*, the Minister of Agriculture, who's now from Watrous, stated in his maiden speech that small hospitals, small health centres, should have even more services, should have more power and more money to do some of the things that they need to do in small communities. I wonder where the minister was when the cabinet made the decision on health reform in this province.

As we're seeing the dollars for health being segregated to long-term care, and acute care, and home care, and the districts not being able to shift money from the institutional side to the home-based services, is creating many problems for a lot of the districts where they're trying to meet the needs of their people.

They also based it on everything being done in the home. Home care, as we all know, home care is a wonderful thing if we can keep, especially our elderly, and, Mr. Speaker, in the homes as long as we can. We all want to see that happen. And that's most appropriate. Unfortunately it's very costly to keep people in their own homes in rural Saskatchewan. It's miles and miles

apart, Mr. Speaker, from health workers to these homes, and it's very costly.

Now this government based the health reform model on . . . based health reform . . . their wellness model on . . . based their reform on home-based services, Mr. Speaker, and continue to try and strive toward that. Unfortunately it was an unproven area and it still hasn't been proven that that's the most cost-effective way to provide services, let alone being able to afford to provide those services, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I'd like to quote again from the *Leader-Post* on February 24, and if I can, this is the report from the former president of the SMA (Saskatchewan Medical Association).

"People get sick," Dr. Roberta McKay, president of the Saskatchewan Medical Association, said sardonically.

That's one of the problems that we have, Mr. Speaker, is that people do continue to get sick whether the beds are there or not and whether this government thinks everybody can be treated in their home. Mr. Speaker, they can't be — they can't be treated in their home, Mr. Speaker. They need the beds. And as our population ages and ages and ages, we're going to find the need for some of these long-term-care beds even more important.

The former president of the SMA goes on to say when talking about the district process and the health reform, Mr. Speaker, and in evaluating it, which the start of health reform there were no yardsticks put up, Mr. Speaker, and so we don't have anything to relate that to from '92 until the present time.

Unfortunately, Dr. McKay goes on to say:

It begs the following question: Wasn't it a bit bold to stake a major part of health reform on something that no one is sure works better than the old way?

Absolutely, that's the problem.

She goes on to say:

"That's what we've been saying, that this is a massive social experiment (with people's lives and) with no evidence (that) it will work or be less expensive," . . .

Just as I pointed out, Mr. Speaker, that there is no proof that it will work. We're seeing in fact that it isn't working. We're seeing it's costing us more because we're having to close down beds; we're having to reduce services in particular rural Saskatchewan, and it's causing all sorts of problems for our rural people.

One other point, Mr. Speaker, before I close, is we talk about the stress line that we have in Saskatchewan. The calls are up. People talk about having a happy . . . talk about a happy farming climate.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest to this Assembly that things aren't so rosy in agriculture in rural Saskatchewan. That there are many, many problems out there and we're going to continue to see more of them as we move into the next two or three years when some of the farm foreclosures come to fruition as we see some

of the lenders of last resort moving out of the province such as ACS (Agricultural Credit Corporation of Saskatchewan) . . . will create further hardship for many of these farm families, and without a health system to support them, it can only get worse and be detrimental to the province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to support the motion put forward by the member from Wood River. There's been many good points made on his behalf, through him and through some of the other speakers on this side of the House, and with that, Mr. Speaker, I will sit down.

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seeing as it's now 5 o'clock, I ask that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:57 p.m.