

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 of the province of Saskatchewan with respect to the closure of the Plains Health Centre in Regina. The prayer reads:

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 Wood Mountain, Glentworth, Rockglen, Lisieux, Flintoft, Saskatchewan; and Weyburn, and other small towns and communities in southern Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The communities these people are from, Mr. Speaker, are numerous southern Saskatchewan communities.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today, Mr. Speaker, to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the closure of 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 petition are from Alida, Redvers, Manor, Maryfield, and Regina. I so present.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise today to present petitions of names from Saskatchewan residents regarding the 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.

The people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Assiniboia, Pilot Butte, Cupar, Bengough, and a number from Roblin, Manitoba.

Mr. Gantfoer: — 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:

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 are from Indian Head, Vibank, Regina, Melville, and throughout rural Saskatchewan.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present petitions of names of people from throughout 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 this petition are from Regina, and many of my friends from Lintlaw, Saskatchewan.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise, too, today to present a petition 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 closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by concerned citizens from Regina.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present petitions of names from throughout, in this case southern Saskatchewan, with respect to 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 who have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from centres like Weyburn, Moosomin, Elbow, Swift Current, Lancer— we do have Regina on here as well — Stockholm, Marquis, Kipling, Mankota, Canora, and a number of other centres.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present petitions of thousands of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains health care 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 petition, Mr. Speaker, they are from Regina here, they're from Arcola, they're from Moose Jaw, they're from Moosomin, they're from Fort Qu'Appelle, they're from The Pas, they're from Wood Mountain, they're from all throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

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.

Respecting the closure of the Plains Health Centre.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 47 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for SGI: (1) how many claims has SGI received as a result of deer damage to vehicles in the fiscal year 1994; (2) how many of these claims have been settled; (3) what was the total expense to settle the claims made in the fiscal year 1994?

Mr. Speaker, I also have two subsequent series of questions worded identical except for the year 1995 and 1996. And with leave, I would present those without reading them.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you and to all members of this Assembly, I'd like to have you welcome a former MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from Nipawin who lives in my constituency now. So I'd ask everyone here to welcome Tom Keeping.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House, someone who you may even know seated in your gallery — Ms. Linda Friesen of Moose Jaw, who's the event coordinator for south Saskatchewan first World of Women event.

It's an innovative trade show being held in the Regina Centre of the Arts from May 10 to May 12, and it's an opportunity for southern Saskatchewan women to explore a world of ideas under one roof.

Education and networking is the purpose so I ask the House to join me in welcoming Linda today and wishing her well with the World of Women event. Thanks, Linda.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today on behalf of my colleague, the member for Regina Victoria, to welcome a group of grade 12 social studies students here who are seated in your gallery. These students are from Balfour Collegiate here in the city and they are accompanied by their teacher, Ms. Pauline MacDonald. So if you'd join with me in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Missing Children's Month in Saskatchewan

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the month of May 1996 has been proclaimed Missing Children's Month in Saskatchewan. Each year about 2,000 cases involving children are officially registered as missing by police in Saskatchewan. I cannot imagine many experiences in life more painful or heartbreaking than to be a parent or a guardian of a missing child.

On the letterhead of Child Find Saskatchewan are the words, "A Missing Child is Everyone's Responsibility." Indeed, ensuring the safety and well-being of every child is a responsibility we all share as caring members of the community. Often however the public is unaware of the magnitude of the problem or how we can help.

During the month of May, Child Find Saskatchewan, in conjunction with their national office, will be conducting the 5th annual green ribbon of hope campaign. The campaign raises awareness of the problem of missing children, not only in Canada but throughout the world. Proceeds from the campaign are used to assist in continuing the search for missing children.

I encourage each of us to take a few minutes during Missing Children's Month in Saskatchewan to think about what it might mean to wake up each morning to the knowledge that your child is missing. Perhaps by thinking about this problem in a personal way, we can more fully understand and appreciate the words, "A Missing Child is Everyone's Responsibility."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to recognize the month of May's designation as Missing Children's Month. To have a child go missing is every parent's nightmare. No one could ever understand the suffering and the painful questions that parents with missing children experience.

When a child first goes missing, there is an initial media and police investigation. But if the case remains unsolved, quite often the issue disappears from the headlines, leaving the family to cope alone. That's why it is extremely important for all of us to think of missing children as more than a face on a milk carton or poster. We must think of the child and the families behind those faces and how we can help.

I hope that these green ribbons and this month's designation as Missing Children's Month will call attention to the unsolved tragedies hundreds of families are coping with. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the PC (Progressive Conservative) caucus, I would like to join with my colleagues on both sides of the House in acknowledging the commencement of Missing Children's Month.

Mr. Speaker, I think the very words "missing children" are ones that send a chill down the spine of anyone fortunate enough to be a parent. As individuals and as a society, nothing is more precious to us than the safety of our children. The loss of a child by a family is a tragedy that can hardly be described in

words. Any parent would agree that such a loss creates a stark and painful void in the lives of those who knew the child. When a child goes missing, Mr. Speaker, what in effect is happening is that we are losing an invaluable piece of our society's future.

Our caucus wants to extend our best regards and full support to Child Find Saskatchewan for the important work that they do in finding and recovering these lost treasures.

On behalf of my caucus, I would urge all members to pay due regard to this serious cause, not only during Missing Children's Month, but throughout the year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tourism Saskatchewan

Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Speaker, tourism is the fourth largest industry in Saskatchewan, generating \$1.1 billion in visitor spending within our province. Tourism is also the fastest growing economic sector and employs some 42,000 people.

The major players in the industry in Saskatchewan know that there is value in sharing their expertise, something the government is encouraging through the regional economic development authorities and in other ways.

That is why today the Saskatchewan Tourism Authority, Tourism Industry Association of Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council will be joining forces to create Tourism Saskatchewan.

This merger will combine experience, expertise, and the strengths of these three groups to form one central organization which will be dedicated to the success and continued growth of the tourism industry in our province.

Mr. Speaker, by combining their efforts, these groups will be eliminating any duplication and Tourism Saskatchewan will be able to provide programs and services that will be more efficient and effective. As a result of this move, annual savings to the industry are expected to reach \$300,000.

I congratulate these organizations for their wisdom in preparing for the new century and beyond. By the year 2010, tourism is expected to be the largest employer in Saskatchewan.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Accomplishments of La Loche

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize the positive developments taking place in the community of La Loche. Although this community has made headlines recently for the deplorable conditions in its hospital, there are many positive new achievements in the community generated because of the people who live there.

I would like to commend all the people working for and in the alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre. I'd like to commend the groups who have devoted so much time and money and effort to establish a safe house in that community for victims of domestic abuse.

La Loche Town Council is doing an excellent job in planning and developing the community in both the economic and social sense, including fighting for a new highway to Fort McMurray. I'd like to also recognize the business being generated by the Clearwater Dene Nation in the mining sector.

And although this community is well-known as a sports hotbed, producing high calibre athletes and teams in basketball, hockey and volleyball; yes, the people of La Loche do face many, many challenges but they often do not receive any recognition for the spirit and effort that they are making to meet and rise above these challenges.

I ask all the members of the Assembly to join me in recognizing the positive developments of this community, and commending the people as well. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

United World College Scholarship

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate a high school constituent of mine who has just won a prestigious scholarship. Raynell McDonough, a student of Bishop James Mahoney High School in Saskatoon will, next September, begin a two-year baccalaureate program at Lester B. Pearson College. Pearson College is a United World College located in Victoria, British Columbia, Mr. Speaker.

The scholarship was granted partially on academic merit and Raynell's overall average is exceptionally high, Mr. Speaker. And it is based on her contribution to school and community, which is also exceptional.

This is a great honour for Raynell and a splendid opportunity for her to learn firsthand about the variety and complexity of the world we live in, beyond her local community and school.

Students from over 70 countries attend the college. In each dormitory room there's representatives of four continents.

Mr. Speaker, United World College scholarship has a dollar value which doesn't need to be mentioned; but the real value is in the international experience Raynell will gain in her two years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Massacre in Tasmania, Australia

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today to extend my condolences to the dozens of families suffering the tragedy of the bloody massacre in Tasmania, Australia. On Sunday, a 29-year-old gunman went on a

shooting rampage at a busy tourist site, killing 34 people and injuring 18 others. At least two Canadians were among the injured.

I find this horrific event, along with the shootings in Vernon, B.C. (British Columbia) and Dunblane, Scotland, to be terribly disturbing. In all cases the victims were innocent people going about everyday activities but ended up being the targets of senseless and vicious crimes. I pray that these terrible killings are not becoming a deadly trend.

On behalf of my colleagues, I wish to extend my condolences to the victims' families as they try to move on with their lives.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Labour Day

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a special day for working people all over the world. Today is May 1, in many countries, the international working person's holiday.

It is also, Mr. Speaker, a very misunderstood day. This is not the day to celebrate the Russian Revolution of 1919. This day has nothing to do with Lenin or Trotsky. It is true that today has more significance in Europe than in North America, and it is true that over the past years it has become more associated with eastern European countries and within many trade unions over here.

Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, in my constituency where many of the original coalminers were European immigrants, May 1 is still actively observed. But in reality, the day began as a commemoration of a North American struggle, a struggle involving railway workers and the Pullman railway car company. The basis of this struggle was the eight-hour day — a dream then and an accepted reality today.

Today we observe and honour the continuing quest of workers around the world for justice and equality in the workplace. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Spinal Health Care Week

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this week from May 1 to May 7 is Spinal Health Care Week, a national week that is sponsored in the province by the Chiropractors' Association of Saskatchewan.

During the week, the association promotes spinal health through education. Schools throughout the province receive posters and instructional materials aimed at the grade 3 level. Through this program, 13,000 Saskatchewan children are educated annually about proper posture, diet, exercise, and rest.

Mr. Speaker, spinal disorders such as low back pain and neck pain are very common in our modern sedentary society. It is estimated that 80 per cent of our population will have significant back or neck pain sometime during their lifetime, and that 20 to 25 per cent of the population is experiencing pain

at any given time. Unfortunately children are not excluded from these figures. Children do suffer from back pain and that is usually caused by reduced flexibility brought on by a lack of physical fitness. Healthy lifestyles, physical fitness, and good nutrition help to prevent chronic back pain.

The chiropractors' association teaches students how the spine functions and emphasizes the importance of regular exercise. Healthy lifestyles, physical fitness, and proper nutrition should be promoted wherever possible and as early as possible. I would like to commend the association for this important initiative and wish them well in their endeavours this week. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I don't want to be in competition with you, but with leave of the House what I would like to do is revert to introduction of guests for a short 30 seconds if possible before question period.

The Speaker: — We have had an understanding and an orderly conduct of the House that we would withhold introduction of guests after passing that until we had got to orders of the day. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason that I rise is that I'm sure that we would all want to acknowledge a special guest in the Speaker's gallery who may not remain for the balance of question period. Although I'm quite sure that he would be fascinated by the interesting nature of question period.

Mr. Speaker, I want to introduce to you and to the members of the House, a former Speaker, a former cabinet minister of the Legislative Assembly, Mr. John Brockelbank, a long-time MLA of the Assembly for Saskatoon Westmount and for Saskatoon.

If my memory serves me correctly, I think John was first elected in 1964, if that's the case, and has served with great distinction, and comes from a very, very distinguished political family in the province of Saskatchewan. His father of course, J. H. Brockelbank, was part of the Tommy Douglas government in 1944 and was also an outstanding civil servant.

Mr. Speaker, would you please join me, and all the members, in welcoming the return and the visit of John Brockelbank.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Child Poverty

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as this House is aware, Sheila Copps resigned her seat in Parliament

today. The Liberal MP (Member of Parliament) . . . this Liberal MP demonstrated courage, honour, and integrity by stepping down because she could not fulfil a promise. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order. Now obviously the hon. member has an interesting question and is stimulating all kinds of desire to respond. However the Speaker is having a great deal of difficulty hearing the question being put, and I ask for the cooperation of all members.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Liberal MP demonstrated courage, honour, and integrity by stepping down because she could not fulfil a promise.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP's (New Democratic Party) 1991 election campaign document contained a number of promises, many of which have not been kept. Among these is a pledge to eliminate child poverty in their first term in office.

Mr. Speaker, this government is now in its second term in office, and the problem of child poverty is greater than ever. The latest figures from the National Council on Welfare indicate that 59,000 or 22.4 per cent of Saskatchewan children live in poverty.

Will the Minister of Social Services indicate in this House today that he is prepared to live up to this commitment? And if not, will he demonstrate the same level of honour and integrity as Sheila Copps and announce in this House today that he is resigning his seat?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, in response to the member from Humboldt, who begins her question by talking about the Deputy Prime Minister who has resigned today over a broken commitment to Canadians regarding the GST (goods and services tax), it would be my suggestion, and she may want to pass this on, that that whole federal Liberal government should resign on the basis of that commitment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — And, Mr. Speaker, if that federal government should not resign over that issue, they should go to Canadians — they should go to Canadians — and explain how it is that a Liberal government supposedly committed to the benefit of Canadians coast to coast would, in this most recent budget, cut most significantly — most significantly — in their spending on health, education, and social services, Mr. Speaker. That's the issue that every province across Canada is facing with, that's the issue we've faced in Saskatchewan. We've back-filled every dollar that the federal Liberal government has taken out of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gross Revenue Insurance Program Overpayments

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP government has demonstrated little honour in its dealings with the farmers of Saskatchewan. This government has unilaterally

cancelled GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) contracts and taken \$188 million from the GRIP surplus. Last spring the Minister of Agriculture stood in this very Assembly and promised farmers that they would not have to repay the GRIP wind-up. This is a promise that the present minister has broken, demonstrating once again this government's contempt for the producers of this province.

Will the minister indicate, Mr. Speaker, today, if he is prepared to honour this promise, and if not, will he do the right thing — the same as Ms. Copps did — and resign?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think the problem with the Liberal members is they can't differentiate the truth from something other than the truth. And I think this is a case for this member.

What I want to ask this member, Mr. Speaker, is why he continues to mislead farmers in this province who, every one of them, will pay their GRIP bill when and if they can — every one of them. But why he continues to mislead the farmers by saying, in a writing of a letter a few weeks ago, that there was going to be a review of all of the cases which was not the truth; asking them to send his bills to this legislature; misleading them that they might not have to pay those bills when they know that's not the truth. I ask the member to be a little more credible and have some respect for the farmers of Saskatchewan and quit trying to mislead them for cheap political purposes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Video Lottery Terminal Revenue Sharing

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before I start I want you to know this question comes right from my heart. Mr. Speaker, the issue of honour is something the minister in charge of Municipal Government could take a lesson in. The minister made a promise last year to return 10 per cent of VLT (video lottery terminal) revenues to local governments, a promise she also has broken.

Will the minister indicate if she is prepared to honour the promise; and if not, will she demonstrate the level of courage and integrity as Sheila Copps, and announce in this House today, she will be resigning her seat?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that the commitment was made to return money to communities of Saskatchewan. The money has been returned to the consolidated revenue fund and is being returned, Mr. Speaker, to the communities of Saskatchewan in spending on health care, education, and social services, back-filling — back-filling — the cut-backs by the federal government in those areas.

Using the money in that manner, Mr. Speaker, reduces the taxation at the local level and goes right into the pocket of every ratepayer in every community of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Education Funding

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier of this province stated in a news item in 1990 that, and I quote: “Increased education is a priority for the NDP. All I can say is we simply have to find more money”.

Since coming to power this government has cut more than \$24 million from the education budget, and they also plan to cut post-secondary education and job training by \$10 million over the next three years.

In addition, the Minister of Education has broken a promise to increase funding in the K to 12 system by 2 per cent this year. Mr. Speaker, this doesn't demonstrate a commitment to education or a commitment to keeping a promise.

Will the Minister of Education indicate that she is truly prepared to honour this promise and a true commitment to education? If not, will she announce in this House today that she will be resigning her seat?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I think I've indicated to the members opposite that our government believe that we were now on a sound financial footing. Mr. Speaker, we did not know a year ago that the federal government was going to remove \$114 million in federal transfers for health, social services, and education.

As a result of the inability of the federal Liberals to be transparent in terms of the information they provided the provinces, we had no alternative but to re-examine our entire provincial budget.

Consequently, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report that we were able to back-fill every single dollar cut by the federal Liberals.

And, Mr. Speaker, I find it appalling that these provincial Liberals — cousins to the federal Liberals — would have the gall to stand up in this House and ask us to resign when they haven't uttered one peep on the part of provincial taxpayers that the federal government has cut billions of dollars to provinces and territories from coast to coast to coast.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Providence Place

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's see the stuff that another minister of this government is worth, what they're made of here. Mr. Speaker, you know the people of Moose Jaw and district put forward a great deal of time, money, and effort to ensure the construction of Providence Place. They did this because of this NDP government's promise to fund a state-of-the-art geriatric unit at that facility. In spite of a written promise, the Health minister claims that a commitment was never made and is breaking a promise made to the people of Moose Jaw and district.

Will the Minister of Health indicate if he's prepared to honour this commitment, and if not, will he demonstrate the same level of honour and integrity as Sheila Copps and announce in this House today that he will also be resigning his seat?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm resigned to one thing — I'm resigned to the sad realization that when those members took their oath of loyalty when they become candidates in the Liberal Party, that they also took an oath of loyalty to the Liberal government in Ottawa.

I want to say to the member that we don't believe that we're in breach of any commitment to the people of Moose Jaw, Mr. Speaker. And I believe that it's well within the district budget that the Moose Jaw/Thunder Creek District receives to put some money into geriatric assessment and the Chair of the health board has expressed that wish. And I think we need the Providence Place and the health board to work together on this issue. That is much more likely to resolve the issue than the member playing politics in the legislature, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Democratic Party Campaign Promises

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Time for a little bit of a recap here to examine some of the other promises that have been made by this government only to be broken. The creation of 30,000 new jobs; tax relief for Saskatchewan residents; the development of a fair revenue-sharing program with municipalities; fair labour laws; fair and open tendering for government contracts; the development of an energy conservation strategy; the implementation of a sustainable economic development plan for our northern people; and the elimination of patronage.

And, Mr. Speaker, the Premier stated during the 1991 election campaign that, and I quote: “We will make no promises we cannot keep.”

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Given the examples that my colleagues and I have just raised in this House, it is clear that many of the promises have not been kept. Given this fact, and the subtle encouragement for an early retirement, will the Premier now stand in this House today and do the honourable thing and resign?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I was worried I wouldn't get the question because the way things are going I would have lost all the cabinet, and all the caucus, and I would have been left alone here to sit in the legislature.

But I want to say if these people opposite ask these kinds of questions and they think they do it with credibility, they've got another sad think coming to them. This is the Liberal Party of

the province of Saskatchewan who in the House of Commons here and in the legislature stands up and speaks like one voice.

They defend Jean Chrétien, they defend all of the Liberals who are attacking our health care program, our education program, and they talk about resignation. What kind of resignation were they referring to? The kind of resignation that they imposed upon their Liberal leader? Is that the kind of resignation you have? Are those the standards that you have?

We know in this province of Saskatchewan that you will never be elected to political office because you have never kept a promise that you ever made in your entire life. That's why you've been out for over 30 years and why you're going to be out for another 30 years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Independent Prosecutor's Report

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, my questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, last year the former minister of Justice secretly referred a case involving his former law partner and the Premier's former law partner to an independent prosecutor in Alberta.

The prosecutor's secret report was returned to the deputy minister of Justice right in the middle of the last election campaign. And nothing was ever said about it. Mr. Minister, what are you and the former minister of Justice trying to hide? Why did you never announce that the Mattison case was referred to an independent prosecutor, and why has the prosecutor's report never been released?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Leader of the Conservative Party for that question. The justice system as a rule does not announce that individuals are under investigation. Similarly, information that's collected by the police in their investigation and then assessed by prosecutors is not released as well.

The whole situation here was dealt with without any preference, without any concern. It was dealt with in the normal course. The police investigated. They requested the assistance of our prosecutors in determining this. It was further determined by the deputy minister that there should be outside assessment. That outside assessment was taken. The lawyer advised that this matter . . . there should be no charges.

For the information of the legislature, the report was received by the department on June 28, 1995.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, you say and the deputy minister of Justice says that these reports are not usually released when the decision is not to lay charges. Well that's simply not true, Mr. Minister.

When the former minister of Justice was investigated, the investigation was announced, and the report was released. When Phoenix Advertising was investigated, the investigation was announced, and the report was released. When your

department's handling of the Milgaard case was investigated, the investigation was announced, and the report was released.

Why all the secrecy surrounding this investigation, Mr. Minister? Mr. Minister, we think you need to come clean on this investigation. We need to see the mandate the independent prosecutor was given, and we need to see his final report. Mr. Minister, will you release that information today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for the further question. The matter here involved a private citizen. It was not in the nature of a matter of investigation of a previous minister. It was a situation where the allegations were made. They were investigated appropriately by the police. The police had further questions. They went to prosecutors who sought outside advice. It's not my intention to release this report.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskTel Tentative Agreement

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today, Mr. Speaker, is for the minister responsible for SaskTel.

Madam Minister, the leaked copy of the SaskTel agreement we obtained yesterday clearly shows that the overall benefit package far exceeds your stated guidelines of 1 per cent a year for three years. Now in fact when everything is considered — wage hikes, RRSPs (registered retirement savings plan), medical coverage — the total package appears to be at least double the standard guidelines that you yourself, Madam Minister, set.

So, Madam Minister, why have you exceeded your guidelines that you set out before this dispute took place? And, Madam Minister, isn't it going to set a dangerous precedent when your government has to negotiate new contracts with other government employees in the future?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I would say that it is inappropriate for me to comment on the details containing the tentative agreement while voting is taking place. We respect that democratic process for the members of the union to express their wishes at the ballot box in terms of the contents of the tentative agreement.

I would further say though, that looking at the headlines today in the paper and so on and the comments that have been made by the member opposite, that anyone who would give any credibility to the arithmetic of members in that party whose voodoo economics put this province \$15 billion into debt should be seriously questioned, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a supplemental question for the minister in charge of SaskTel. Madam Minister, I won't ask for your resignation because the electorate will take care of that for us.

Madam Minister, you have exceeded your guidelines, and it's taxpayers and SaskTel customers who will wind up paying the bill for your mistakes. Of course you also exceeded the McDowell commission guidelines of \$4,400 per MLA and the taxpayers wound up paying for that as well. So you're setting a precedent, Madam Minister, and many people are going to question the extremely generous medical coverage that you have given to the unions. You are basically covering everything that your government has de-insured for every other taxpayer, things like prescription drugs and vision care.

Now, so not only do taxpayers have to pay for their own prescription drugs and their eye glasses, now they're being asked to pay for those things for SaskTel workers — prescription drugs, eye glasses and all those other things. In recent weeks we have brought forward cases of elderly people who have had their oxygen supplies cut by this government through the Health department. Yet you have given . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. The hon. member has been quite lengthy in his preamble and I'll ask him to put his . . . Order! Order. I'll ask the hon. member to put his question directly.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, is it fair — is it fair — that SaskTel workers get medical coverage that most Saskatchewan people are not any longer entitled to have?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, it's not really surprising, coming from that side of the House, that members opposite would talk about fairness to workers, Mr. Speaker.

What do we hear from them? What we heard in the context of this current situation is back-to-work legislation, right-to-work legislation. We have . . . Every progressive labour provision that's been brought before this House has been opposed by both parties on the opposite side of the House.

They advocate, Mr. Speaker, Alabama North for the workers in this province, and they criticize us for being generous with workers. Shame on them, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Northern Highway System

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the minister responsible for Northern Affairs. Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the conditions of roads and highways in northern Saskatchewan is appalling. These roads have been ignored and under-funded for years, and this government does not seem to be prepared to change its precedence of ignoring the people of northern Saskatchewan.

There is some concern on the part of the people in my constituency over the talk of a possible construction of a superhighway that will link Fort McMurray, Alberta to Meadow Lake. This highway will bypass over a dozen smaller communities that desperately need improved highways and methods of transportation.

Mr. Speaker, for years the people in my constituency have been fighting for a road into Garson Lake and on to McMurray. Construction of a highway from Meadow Lake up towards Candle Lake and Dillon is already done. And this road continues travelling towards Alberta, bypassing Garson Lake and currently has no roadway connecting it to the rest of the province.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister assure this House and the people of Athabasca constituency that construction of this superhighway will not continue, and that the funds will be directed towards the construction of a road to Garson Lake and towards the great need in improvements of the highway that concurrently connects Meadow Lake to Beauval to Buffalo Narrows and on.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, today the member ought to apologize in the House for making too many negative doom and gloom statements about people in northern Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — And today in regards to the roads, I'd like to report this, Mr. Speaker. When you look at the situation in northern Saskatchewan, the Tories completely neglected and devastated northern Saskatchewan. The Liberals, with their \$114 million cut — Mr. Speaker, we could have raised five hospitals in La Loche with the \$50 million cut by the federal Liberals.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, a housing 100 per cent cut by the Liberals in Ottawa. Mr. Speaker, when you look at the situation in highways, the Cumberland bridge is going up in northern Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — The road to Grandmother's Bay is being made — for the first time, a connection to Grandmother's Bay.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — In his own constituency, Athabasca, road is going up . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question.

Natural Gas Exploration in the North

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people in my constituency are not only concerned about the superhighway that may bypass many of the communities that desperately need roads, they're also concerned about the possible exploration of natural gas in the north-west corner of the province, near the Alberta border.

Mr. Speaker, the impact that this type of exploration will have on the people in this area in the province is astounding. I want to make it clear that we're not against exploration of natural gas and growing economies, but we do want to make sure that people in the area are consulted before any development occurs. They want to be consulted so their outlook for jobs and the communities will see some benefits of having this industry operate in their own backyards.

Will the Minister of Northern Affairs assure this House and the people that we represent that no natural gas exploration will occur in the Canoe Lake, Primrose Lake weapons range without consultation and approval of the people who live there?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, this person should be apologizing, you know, for development. On the one hand, he says he's for development; on the other hand, he says maybe and maybe not.

Mr. Speaker, on his previous question, on Carson Lake, although the Liberals have cut \$114 million and although they have cut \$15 million in our education budget, Mr. Speaker, we hired 20 people from the La Loche area to build 5 kilometres of that road towards Carson Lake. That is a lot better than what the Liberal government are doing. All we got from the Liberals is gun control in northern Saskatchewan and all of those cuts, Mr. Speaker.

I would say that the person should be looking at this government in regards to our development strategy in mining, with 50 per cent employment, and looking forward to the developments in that area in regards to oil and gas, for greater employment and greater benefits for the people of the North.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Traditional Gathering Rights for Northerners

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since the forestry management Act was tabled in this House some time ago, there has been considerable concern on the part of the Metis and native people of the North with regards to their rights to pick berries and medicinal herbs and gathering of firewood. They have been told that as long as they're picking these things for their own personal use, as they have for centuries, that no permit or fee will be required.

Mr. Speaker, many elders in my constituency pick berries and sell them by the jar. Many also gather firewood and sell it to people who need it. Medicinal herbs are often used for healing others, not just the person who picks them. Will the Minister of Northern Affairs assure this House that these people will be exempt from this piece of legislation, and allow them to continue their way of life, as they have for centuries?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I attended a trappers' convention. The MP from Churchill River was . . . Kirkby was dancing up a storm and a jig telling the trappers, yes we will

support you when we get elected. When he gets elected, the trappers, all they got was gun control.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — When we were in power, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you this much. Most of the developments in northern Saskatchewan in regards to the firewood, the collection, making sure that there are no permits — we have listened to the people. The legislation will have that. And this is a government that listens to the people of the North, and that's the way we will continue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 82 — An Act respecting Health Facilities

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill respecting Health Facilities be now introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day . . . order, order. I'll ask hon. members to come to order, please.

Before orders of the day, I wish to table, in accordance with The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Act, the 23rd annual report of the Provincial Ombudsman, and the report of the Children's Advocate.

I advise members that both reports are within the same document.

Why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Before orders of the day, with leave, I have a couple of motions I'd like to move.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Leave of Absence to Attend Commonwealth Parliamentary Conferences

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move, seconded by the member from Regina Elphinstone:

That leave of absence be granted to the member for Saskatoon Northwest from Friday, May 10, 1996 to February . . . May 17, 1996 inclusive to attend the 8th Commonwealth parliamentary seminar in Hong Kong on behalf of this Assembly.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move, seconded by the member

from Saskatoon Idylwyld, that by leave of the Assembly, that leave having been granted:

That the member for Redberry Lake, from Wednesday, May 8, 1996 to Friday, May 24, 1996, inclusive be granted leave to attend the Commonwealth parliamentary visit at Westminster on behalf of this Assembly.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Hon. Mr. Shillington:— I table the answer to question no. 79.

The Speaker:— The answer to question 79 is tabled.

Question 80 is converted to motions for returns (debatable).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 71

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mrs. Teichrob that **Bill No. 71 — An Act to amend The Rural Municipality Act, 1989, and to make a consequential amendment to The Municipal Board Act** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjornerud:— Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome this opportunity to speak on The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, and as a former reeve I've been actively involved in rural government and I believe there is definitely room for improvement in provincial legislation.

Still, I am not sure that this Bill gets to the root of what is troubling rural municipalities. I'm afraid that troubles are far deeper than the reaches of this Bill and I would hate to think we are skirting around the real issue in this Assembly.

The reforms we make to our laws should be tangible and accomplish something positive for our province. Do these changes make a difference? Will they help alleviate some of the current problems? And why are we making these changes?

It is these kinds of questions we must answer before we could make any decisions about a Bill affecting rural municipalities. Because, Mr. Speaker, under the legal terminology and under the clauses and subclauses of this Bill is an Act that has serious implications on all Saskatchewan's towns and villages.

This Act deals with assessment and, as I am sure the members opposite realize, assessment is a major topic of concern in rural and urban areas. Mr. Speaker, the government would have us believe that this Bill brings us one step closer to what they call

fair value assessment.

Any time the word fair is used with the NDP government, the people of Saskatchewan should sit up and take notice because I'm highly sceptical of how this government defines the word fair. They say their budget and their actions are fair to rural Saskatchewan.

Do they mean shutting down hospitals and forcing health professionals to leave our small towns is fair? Do they mean that cutting back on education funding to rural school boards, forcing school closures and program losses, is fair? Do they mean that taking money out of rural communities and funnelling it back into cities is fair?

Because, Mr. Speaker, if this is what the NDP government considers fair, this province is in deep, deep trouble. Mr. Speaker, we agree that the assessment system does not need to be more equitable . . . does need to be more equitable. For example, the farmers have been protesting for years that their property is worth eight to ten times the assessed value. The new assessment system will apparently have updated productivity indexes for the agricultural land.

These will use factors like soil type and ability to grow wheat and grains, to compare one quarter with another. Range land and pasture land should also increase in assessment value. And in many cases there are positive steps forward. In an article in *The Western Producer* last fall, SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) is quoted as giving its approval to a government tax policy that needs to be in place if the new assessment system begins in '97.

But that doesn't mean individual municipalities don't have some concerns about these changes. In a letter to the editor, the reeve from the RM of Buckland outlines some of his concerns. Mr. Speaker, he says at the end of this letter that the people of Saskatchewan have a right to know what these changes will mean to them. And we couldn't agree more.

The people of this province are getting tired of government's back-room policy-making sessions. How many times does this government have to be told that people want to be consulted before the policy is made? We do have some concerns about the vast power the government has to make regulations which will determine how fair value is to be determined, even though we admit that different percentage values for different classes of land may bring about a more equitable system. We want to assure that rural municipalities are treated fairly by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the members opposite understand our hesitation in coming out in full support of this Bill. After watching rural communities so carelessly destroyed by this government, it's no wonder that we are reluctant to jump on the government bandwagon. It's no wonder that we are not willing to pass any legislation without ensuring that the views of the RMs (rural municipality) and towns are indeed represented in this House.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I have all been talking with our constituents about what changes this Bill could mean to rural

municipalities. We can sit in this House and pick apart a piece of dry legislation, or we can take this legislation out to the communities and transform its legal jargon into valid community concerns.

If you ask me, Mr. Speaker, it is the people on coffee row in our towns and communities that should have a say in this legislation. Because it doesn't affect most of the members in the government's cabinet, the only interest it has — most of the ministers — is that a piece of legislation they pass through the Assembly . . . They don't know rural Saskatchewan, and quite frankly from their actions these past five years they've been in power, it seems obvious they don't care about rural Saskatchewan either.

(1430)

Mr. Speaker, in her budget address this year, the Minister of Finance talked about working with rural municipalities to deal with a number of fundamental issues. She said:

We must find common solutions to the challenges of future fiscal arrangements, the three provincial levies on the local tax base, and the funding needed for key roads and infrastructures.

Again, Mr. Speaker, whenever the government says they will work with third parties, I become very cynical. I can't forget that in the same budget address, just seconds before, the Finance minister said that the revenue-sharing grants for municipalities will be reduced by \$20 million in '97-98. I have a feeling, Mr. Speaker, that this was not determined by working with municipal governments.

There are some areas of this Bill that lead me to believe that the government doesn't understand the workings of rural municipalities. There is something we touched on when this Bill was read a second time. For example, this Bill allows rural municipalities to pass a by-law providing that businesses will not be assessed if the building is vacant or has been vacant for some time.

Mr. Speaker, from the way this Bill is presented, it seems that separate assessment and taxation of business occupants will be optional. In municipalities where a business assessment is retained, it will be calculated using a percentage of property value set by provincial regulations. It will also be the provincial regulations that establish how much can be raised for other taxing authorities such as school divisions where a municipality chooses not to continue with business assessment and taxation. As we stated when we spoke on this Bill in second reading, we want to be sure that occupied businesses are not forced to shoulder the tax burden. We can't do anything further to penalize businesses in rural Saskatchewan.

Maybe the members opposite haven't noticed, Mr. Speaker, but in small towns throughout our province, businesses have been forced to close their doors. We are seeing a steady stream of people leaving rural Saskatchewan — not because they want to, but because this government is ignoring their concerns.

Don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. I'm not saying urban

businesses are faring much better under this government's oppressive tax and labour policies. All we have to do is compare Saskatchewan's bankruptcy and business start-up rates with Manitoba's, and we can see that Saskatchewan businesses are getting the short end of the stick from a government that promised job creation. And I don't know how long it will take before this government gets the message.

The only way to keep Saskatchewan alive is create a positive economic climate, and no, that doesn't mean poaching jobs from other provinces or moving jobs from one city to another within the province. This means establishing policies that help foster business growth in all areas of our province. It's a simple message, Mr. Speaker, if only they would listen.

Mr. Speaker, we also want to touch on the changes on the appeal process as they are outlined in Bill 71. As I understand, the appeal process lets people challenge assessments if they believe errors have been made in calculating property or business assessments. These people can appeal at the local board of revision which is often made up of municipal council members. The second level of appeal, the Saskatchewan Municipal Board, is appointed by the provincial government. The government apparently believes that, with amendments offered in this Bill, the entire process could be better streamlined.

Some of the main changes listed include full disclosure of information by all parties to an appeal. All decisions of the board of revision must be in writing. And the time for business and property owners to file appeal will be extended from 20 to 30 days, and that written materials must be filed by, and provided to, all parties to an appeal 10 days in advance of a hearing, and that the board of revision can establish a number of panels to hear appeals, and municipalities can jointly create district board of revisions.

Mr. Speaker, I don't see much of a problem with these changes. I think it provides clear guidelines for board of revisions to follow, and that's important. In my experience with local government, they want to be seen as open and accountable. But unlike the provincial government, who also says they want to be seen as open and accountable, I think the municipal governments really mean it.

When it comes right down to it though, the government-appointed Saskatchewan Municipal Board still holds the power. This Bill also clearly states that the SMB (Saskatchewan Municipal Board) may adjust assessments up or down in its decisions.

This comes as no surprise to our caucus, and it probably comes as no surprise to the people of Saskatchewan who have seen this government's need for control in all areas of governance. Since the day they were elected in October of '91, this government has been bound and determined to control Saskatchewan people. For example, they have continued to prop up Crown corporations with political patronage appointments, as we have seen much of lately. Just look at SaskTel and Don Ching. Or how about SaskPower with Jack Messer at the helm? I must admit with Mr. Messer I am not sure whether the government is controlling him, or in many cases, he is

controlling the government. But either way the NDP is keeping tabs on a huge industry in this province.

And it's not just the Crown corps this government is trying to control. And I can bring it up again and again, and I still don't think I can emphasize enough how this government is trying to control municipalities themselves with the introduction of The Service Districts Act.

All along, municipalities were insisting they could come up with the creative solutions to help back-fill the offloading by the provincial government, and they have been doing that since this government came to power in '91. The people in the towns and villages throughout the province were telling the Minister of Municipal Government that they did have the answers. Still, the government stubbornly persisted. The minister and the Premier made thinly veiled threats. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that these threats were a very clear indication of the government's control.

Now we hear that the minister has finally started to listen to the people who will be affected. Does this mean they are willing to give up their tight-fisted control and put power back into the hands of the people who deserve it? I hope so, but I will only believe that when I finally see it.

Mr. Speaker, I still have only started to touch on the implications of this Bill. My colleagues and I are still talking with people in our constituencies and trying to determine public reaction to this Bill.

We cannot pass this Bill off lightly because, Mr. Speaker, we are not only talking about a value placed on a parcel of land in a rural municipality. We are talking about tax increases that will have to be paid by the people of the municipalities.

Before I conclude here today, Mr. Speaker, I would like to read a part of an editorial that appeared in the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* on October 23 in '95. He or she writes:

SAMA, rural and urban municipalities, school divisions and the provincial government are currently formulating the new system, supposedly keeping in mind the best interest of the ordinary citizens and businesses.

However, with slightly more than a year to go before the tax notices start arriving in our mailboxes, some fundamental issues have yet to be settled.

Municipalities haven't been told how the province will define property classes and set percentage of value to apply to property assessments. Without that information, cities and towns can't calculate the impact of reassessment.

Even with the new system local governments are expected to keep the local tax levied at current levels. But how the reassessment affects taxpayers isn't clear because municipalities still don't know which "tax tools" they'll be given to set levies. These tools include variable mill rates and minimum taxes.

While these and a myriad of other issues are being settled

behind closed doors, what should concern taxpayers is so far they know little about who is influencing the deliberations.

It goes on to say:

If these are some of the concerns being addressed behind closed-doors, when do ordinary taxpayers get an opportunity to present their case?

Has anyone raised even more fundamental questions such as whether . . .

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

Mr. Kowalsky: — With apologies to the member opposite who was going on with a fine speech, Mr. Speaker, I ask for leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the gallery opposite, in the west gallery, we have with us today a special guest, a man who has taught for several years in north-eastern Saskatchewan and has worked very diligently within the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation organization, is currently acting as president. And I would like members to welcome Dwain Drew to the Assembly this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — And why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Krawetz: — Also to introduce guests.

Leave granted

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the official opposition and the education critic, I too would like to extend our welcome to past-president Dwain. And I know we've had the opportunities to share many a conversation and idea, and I look forward to your continuing support for education in the province of Saskatchewan. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 71 (continued)

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member opposite for his comments, and I also appreciate the break.

While these and myriad of other issues are being settled behind closed doors, what should concern taxpayers is so far they know little about who is influencing these

deliberations.

It goes on to say:

If these are some of the concerns being addressed behind closed-doors, when do ordinary taxpayers get an opportunity to present their case?

Has anyone raised even more fundamental questions such as whether property taxes are the best way to fund municipal services?

These and dozens of other questions need to be asked, and asked soon.

Waiting until our 1997 property tax notice shows up, demanding that we fork over 20, 50 or 100 per cent more, will be too late.

This is one time our eyes shouldn't (be) . . . (glazed) over when "reassessment" is mentioned.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, people need to be concerned about changes in our legislation, and we as their representatives need to bring their concerns forward and make sure that any new laws or changes to existing laws are in their best interests.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is too important to the people living in rural municipalities to treat it as housekeeping and ram it through the House. Mr. Speaker, until we have gathered more information and talked in greater depth with the people of rural Saskatchewan, we cannot decide whether we will support this legislation as is.

Therefore I move that Bill 71, The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, again be adjourned. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 46

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Teichrob that **Bill No. 46 — An Act to amend The Municipal Board Act** be now read a second time.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased again to have the opportunity to address this House on the changes to The Municipal Board Act that are proposed in Bill No. 46 which is entitled The Municipal Board Amendment Act, 1996.

Mr. Speaker, the first change proposed by Bill No. 46 is a reduction in the quorum on the board from two members down to just one member. This is found in section 3 of the Bill. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Municipal Board has an important function, and I really question whether it's a good idea to have a quorum of only one member. Remember, Mr. Speaker, that it is here that the Saskatchewan Municipal Board hears and determines assessment appeals under three municipal government Acts: The Northern Municipalities Act, The Rural Municipality Act, and The Urban Municipality Act, as well as several other Acts. Surely a tribunal such as this should have a quorum of at least two as is presently the case.

Is it really a good idea to leave an important appeal in the hands of just one person? The reduction in the required quorum from two down to just one is another sign that this government does not really like the consultative process.

The next major change in the law proposed by this Bill is the addition of classification appeals to the jurisdiction of the board. The board already hears assessment appeals, and it seems to make sense to expressly state that classification appeals are included in the jurisdiction of the board. That change is found in section 4 of the Bill.

Also in section 4 of the Bill, we find the addition of appeals under The Condominium Property Act, 1993 and The South Saskatchewan River Irrigation Act to the jurisdiction of the board. This sounds like it would be logical, but one has to wonder who has been hearing appeals under these two Acts up to the present time. If the Saskatchewan Municipal Board has been hearing appeals on assessments and classifications from the condominium legislation and the South Saskatchewan River irrigation legislation over the past several years without any real authority to do so, then have these appeals been valid? Is the general curative section necessary in order to make these board decisions valid, which would otherwise be void?

(1445)

Section 4 of the Bill also completely revokes the jurisdiction of the board to hear assessment appeals under The Assessment Management Agency Act where the grounds of the appeal is that the manual used by the agency is contrary to that Act or any other Act. It would appear that the government is no longer going to allow that type of appeal to be heard in front of the Saskatchewan Municipal Board but only to the Court of Queen's Bench.

Mr. Speaker, I must question this move in view of the massive project underway presently to conduct reassessments of the lands and buildings in this province. There will surely be an enormous number of reassessment appeals filed in the next year or two regarding the reassessment manual prepared by the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency and by the municipalities which opt out of SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency) and conduct their own reassessments. It is not fair to expect such a large proportion of the reassessment appeals to be heard by the Court of Queen's Bench when the procedures and the expenses are so much greater.

Mr. Speaker, I fully realize that the change away from the Municipal Board and towards a Court of Queen's Bench relates only to appeals where the basis of the appeal is that the manual used by the assessment agency is inconsistent with the law governing the agency. None the less, I expect that the number of such appeals will be great in the next year or two.

And it is disappointing, to say the very least, to see that the Minister of Municipal Government is so determined to force up the cost and inconvenience of such appeals that she will take away the jurisdiction of the Municipal Board to deal with them and place jurisdiction with the courts. It's effectively the same as saying that she intends to make appeals essentially

unavailable except to the very rich and the very powerful. The ordinary citizen, in effective terms, will have very little hope of ever having such an appeal heard if this section of the Bill goes through.

Mr. Speaker, the next matter that concerns me about this Bill is section 6 which completely repeals the mechanism which allowed the board to rehear applications related to financial or debt matters. Under the existing rules, the board, upon receiving a written request from a local authority as well as on its own initiative, may reverse its decision or review its decision. When circumstances change, the board would often review and alter, change or vary its decision. Now all that will be gone.

I say that's a shame. I realize, Mr. Speaker, that the mechanism of a new section 40 is designed to replace this process, but I must confess, Mr. Speaker, that I have a great many doubts as to whether this new process will function as effectively as the old one did.

The next section of the Bill which needs to be addressed is section 7 which deals with appeals by way of stated case. Here there is a massive shift in the burden of work and the burden of costs from the board to the litigants. The new rules may be workable for the larger cities, but I again have a real concern about the financial ability of smaller municipalities and private litigants to bear the financial burden of this change.

Firstly, the party that dislikes the decision of the board must seek leave from the Court of Appeal to proceed with his appeal to that court. Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the planners behind this Bill have any idea of the cost of an application for leave to a Court of Appeal.

Next, the Bill removes the role of the Municipal Board as a flow-through mechanism for appeals. This was a valuable role for the board to take in that it could assist people with their preparation of their documents for their appeals. Under this Bill, the workload is shifted entirely to the litigants. Mr. Speaker, this is another example of this government's capacity to offload its financial burdens onto those who are least able to bear them. The entire responsibility for the preparation of all their documentation, rather than preparing it in conjunction with the board's staff, will be that of the litigants.

This will mean more legal fees, more staff time, and consequently higher salaries and expenses. Maybe Regina and Saskatoon can afford the increased costs, but I am certain that many of the smaller towns, cities, and rural municipalities cannot bear this additional cost. And what will be the result? The result, Mr. Speaker, is that the mechanism becomes unavailable to all except the wealthy and the powerful.

The next change is the new section 33.2. This provision states that the appellant must serve the Saskatchewan Municipal Board with a copy of the application. And then the board delivers the appeal documents to the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Speaker, I find this astonishing. In one breath we are asked to eliminate the board as a flow-through mechanism, and in the next breath we are asked to pass a Bill which requires that all appeal documentation still be filed with a board which then

must deliver it upon the court. It seems to me that the board's meaningful role in helping people with their appeals is being abolished, but the board is keeping its role as a glorified document storer and a delivery service. Mr. Speaker, I ask you; what is the sense in this?

Next, in the next line we find section 33.3, and this new section provides that if leave to appeal is granted, then the order made by the Saskatchewan Municipal Board is held in abeyance until the Court of Appeal rules otherwise. This sounds logical and fair, but I remind you, Mr. Speaker, that the appeal process is now two stages, not just one.

Furthermore, it is moved from the comfortable and familiar environment of the Municipal Board to the formal and austere environment of the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal. Mr. Speaker, I have the utmost respect and admiration for Saskatchewan's Court of Appeal, but as anyone who has ever been involved in appeal litigation knows all too well, that the cost of appearing there and being represented by counsel can be enormous. The procedures are quite formal and regimented, and the time frames can be long and onerous. Sometimes the waiting times for a hearing in front of the Court of Appeal can extend into years — not just months or weeks but years.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to comment on the new version of section 40. This is largely a rehashing of old section 19(3), (4), and (5) of the existing Act, but there is an important change. There will now be a new route for the decisions of the Saskatchewan Municipal Board to be reviewed by the board itself. Under this Bill, the board will be able to review its own decisions within one year if there was any error of clerical nature. The power of self-review will also exist if there was a mistake in calculation or incorrect information supplied by a person or an organization.

This may sound logical at first glance, but are they truly logical, Mr. Speaker, or are they open to abuse? Mr. Speaker, I reluctantly conclude that they are open to abuse, and thus they concern me greatly.

Mr. Speaker, when is an error of clerical nature? Sometimes when I listen to the speeches from government members in this Chamber, I wonder whether the entire text might be a clerical error. When is information correct and when is it incorrect? That depends on who you're speaking to. And as you know, Mr. Speaker, in this party it's quite often we hear the public told about information which the government shells out which we think is incorrect. That's our job while we are in opposition.

The point I'm trying to make is that these additional grounds for re-hearing an application before the Saskatchewan Municipal Board are open to abuse because they are shamefully unclear.

Mr. Speaker, I think the net effect of this Bill may well be well intended, but the side-effects, especially in terms of costs, are negative in the extreme.

Mr. Speaker, the *Public Accounts* for 1994-1995 show that the Saskatchewan Municipal Board spent \$755,000. I suspect that the attempt to shift the burden of costs for appeals onto the litigant is an indirect attempt to offload provincial

responsibilities for municipal government onto the population and onto the municipalities themselves, without anyone taking notice.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we have taken notice. We have taken notice, Mr. Speaker, and we see what is wrong. This is a province where many of the municipalities are small and financially strapped. It is a province where people are accustomed to getting a fair hearing initially and a fair hearing on appeals. A fair hearing means that you're not going to be bankrupt by legal fees and you're not going to be overwhelmed by complicated and overly formal procedures. It means a fair hearing in a comfortable forum. It means a hearing in a forum where citizens can present their case with the help of a lawyer, if they choose to hire one, but a forum where a citizen could choose to represent himself, if that's what he wishes.

Mr. Speaker, the definition of fairness seems to have gone out the window with this Bill. If this Bill is passed, a great many of the appeals that can be expected as a result of reassessment will go by the wayside because of lack of finances or a lack of legal training on the part of the people affected. Mr. Speaker, that could be shameful.

That concludes my remarks on second reading.

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

Bill No. 39

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Anguish that **Bill No. 39 — An Act to Promote, Develop and Sustain Irrigation** be now read a second time.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to be able to address Bill 39, The Irrigation Act

The impact of Bill 39 will be of course far-reaching for Saskatchewan producers who are involved in irrigation right across the province, and certainly others who must administer irrigation methods across the same province. It's a very comprehensive piece of legislation that will replace The Irrigation Districts Act and The South Saskatchewan River Irrigation Act and The Water User's Act, Mr. Speaker.

While I recognize that no legislation is perfect, I feel that Bill 39 has several major problems that should be addressed. Since this Bill was first proposed, we have consulted with many stakeholders, Mr. Speaker, stakeholders who will be affected by these new laws and regulations. And I will of course be raising some of these concerns on their behalf.

Bill 39 proposes the establishment of irrigation districts across Saskatchewan to administer the laws, set fees for the users, and to collect those fees. Many of the parties I have spoken with are quite concerned that the irrigation districts will be given too much power. While I do believe that the government intends to streamline the administration relating to Saskatchewan irrigation, I think that possibly this legislation could achieve exactly the opposite result.

Here once again, we are seeing the creation of districts at the local level. This seems to be a favourite habit of this government. We saw it with health. Now the push is on for municipalities to form service districts, and the same type of reform is being pushed onto school divisions. And here we see it happening with irrigation associations.

Some of the parties affected by this Bill are worried about the section in Bill 39 that will allow the boundaries of irrigation districts to be defined by land area instead of being defined by the members. These parties feel that this criteria may not be practical when dealing with the back-flooding situation. For example, Mr. Speaker, I guess if you had someone that was not wanting the water to be back-flooded on them, they could hold up the complete project, and it would affect some of the other irrigators' crops that do need the water at certain times of the year.

While section 17 does allow for the irrigation district to set the fees, all of those fees would still have to be approved by Sask Water. Sask Water would also control the amount of money the irrigation district would be allowed to borrow. If the government does intend to streamline the process, why does it feel the need to create another Crown corporation? Part V of this Act sets out the sections needed to establish Saskatchewan Irrigation Projects Association. So while the government spends thousands of dollars this spring to tell the Saskatchewan people while fiscal restraint is so necessary, they will see more funds being spent on another Crown corporation.

(1500)

Mr. Speaker, just about everyone I spoke with regarding the new legislation has some problems with it. I think many in general — I know many of the irrigators of course along Diefenbaker Lake and the Saskatchewan River are in my constituency in the Outlook area — a lot of them, were consulted but a lot of them also had many concerns.

Of course one of the major concerns is people are feeling that they will be relinquishing some sort of control while the government would take on an additional control. Of course the added burden of extra bureaucracy is forefront in everyone's minds, as we're trying to cut down on bureaucracy and red tape in this province. Here again, we could be just setting up another level of it.

Some of the comments, Mr. Speaker, that were made to me by irrigators were that well, this new legislation is no worse or no better than the legislation it replaces. There certainly were people that were adamant that they did not like the legislation at all. There are others that said they did like it. There were others that said that they would want to see more of . . . more information on the Act. Many said that when they asked questions, that there were no answers and were told that those would be set out in the regulations.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, that's the problem that we've identified in this House several times over the course of this session, that many of the problems that we have with legislation is through the regulations and they should be clarified at the

outset so that people feel more comfortable with the legislation.

As we know, when that happens, when the government is upfront with the people and explains things without the regulations in the legislation, it does make it a lot easier for a government to proceed with an Act or a piece of legislation or a consolidation as we see here, if the people are onside and agree with it. And one of the easiest ways to get people onside is to communicate with them and educate them as to what the government views are, be upfront with them. And certainly the people involved with this Act — the irrigators of the province — would like that opportunity. And unfortunately to this date they haven't had it.

I know, Mr. Speaker, for a fact that the last thing Saskatchewan farmers or of course the municipalities want to deal with is more red tape, as I said earlier. I'm sure they told the government the same thing and they just indicated they had. And certainly once again, as we've seen before in this Bill 39, the government, or at least the bureaucrats, are not listening to what the people out there are saying.

Mr. Speaker, section 76 of this Act does provide for a new appeal process for producers unhappy with their irrigation service to take their cases to the Court of Queen's Bench. While it is encouraging to see that the producers will be able to have an independent body hear their complaints, taking appeals to the Court of Queen's Bench could be quite costly for producers. And most times when that happens, you see that that process is not continued.

Under Bill 39, unless they are extremely well-versed in the legal process, they will have to hire a lawyer — and we all know the costs of that, Mr. Speaker. Surely in this day and age and as we move into the new century, there's got to be better ways to deal with the things than constantly having to run and hire a lawyer and go to court over the whole process.

The problems that we have is that people don't have that kind of money to throw around. And when they're dealing with the province, and the province of course is using taxpayers' money, it's a little hard for an individual to fight a government who has all sorts of taxpayers' dollars to use in their high-priced lawyers.

The costs of processing appeals through the Court of Queen's Bench could be a deterrent for some producers, as I've stated — and it will be. And once again, those same court costs are costs that the taxpayers of this province have to pay.

I believe that the appeal process must be acceptable to all. We certainly would wish that this would happen all across the piece and that everyone in the province certainly has an affordable process to make an appeal.

Another inadequacy of Bill 39 is that section after section refers to powers of the irrigation districts, Sask Water, Saskatchewan Irrigation Projects Association, and other bodies as defined by the regulations. This is because of the implications of this Act — to promote, develop, and sustain irrigation — will affect all Saskatchewan producers relying on irrigation.

There again the question . . . it begs the question: why is so

much left out of the Act and put into the regulations which have not been developed to this point for the Act. Once again I can only stress, Mr. Speaker, the importance of having these regulations up front so that these producers know full well what they're getting into.

One of the concerns expressed to me by many of the irrigators, particularly on the west side of the province, was we need to slow down the process of this legislation so that these regulations can be set out and that the irrigators are fully aware of what the implication of some of those regulations might be. And one of the things that they've asked me to do is to try and impress upon the government side that this is an important part of this Bill that needs to be looked at. It needs to be fixed immediately before we proceed too much further with this Bill.

The impact of the changes proposed in Bill 39 cannot be understated. But without all the changes laid out before us, we will never get a chance to debate them in the House. This is consistent with what we've been saying, Mr. Speaker, in regards to regulations — that we're being asked to support a piece of legislation without knowing the detail. And we all know where the devil is, Mr. Speaker.

I guess it begs a question again that, why does the government insist on leaving so many of the changes in the regulations. If it is not afraid to debate those changes in the House, then bring them forward, and we can discuss them and see what they're hearing from producers out there would compare with what we're hearing with the same people that we're talking to.

I'm pleased to see though that much of the changes to irrigation service proposed in Bill 39 will be gradually phased in over a five-year period. However, Mr. Speaker, there is a problem with some of those in that some of the people that irrigate or live within an irrigation district or have land within an irrigation district do now pay irrigation fees and have not irrigated their land for as high as, I understand, 15 or 16 years. However, they continue to have to pay irrigation costs, and of course as this is phased in over five years, they will have to, you know, they will have to continue paying for that amount of time.

On the other side of the argument, of course, is the irrigation district itself in that they have to, of course, budget for their expenses and their costs. And without some sort of rule that allows people to . . . or districts to keep people within their district and charge them fees, it makes it a little tough for anyone to budget as we know.

The new regulations and laws are so complex, Mr. Speaker, it's important that these Saskatchewan irrigators are given adequate time to make the adjustments triggered by these changes. We all know that a lot of times when things need to be changed that we're all a little reluctant to move ahead in an area where we're not sure what's going to happen, how it's going to work, and that's understandable. However again, if the government through its bureaucracy, can be upfront with these producers and these irrigators in Saskatchewan, a lot of these changes can be made in a positive note rather than having everyone fighting it to the bitter end, which in this case could be for a number of years.

Over all, I guess, Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed to see so much irrigation authority being transferred from the hands of Saskatchewan farmers into the hands of another government corporation. Of course the unique needs of every Saskatchewan irrigator relying on irrigation services must not be lost in the new bureaucratic structures created within this new Act. I've stated a few of them, Mr. Speaker, and we talked about flood irrigation, where there are extreme circumstances that would not relate to irrigators that use a sprinkler system or other types, that have to be looked at. And conversely I guess, Mr. Speaker, there are things that sprinkler irrigators do that certainly wouldn't affect flood irrigators.

There are not a lot of flood irrigation projects left in this province, as many of them have moved to the sprinkler system for a variety of reasons, many of them which have to do with land. And as we all know, farmers are one of the greatest supporters of the environment and the land that we have in this province and we'd hate to see that any of their role of keeping of the land is deferred to bureaucracy.

I guess, as you can see, Mr. Speaker, that I have a problem with seeing many of the improvements that the government aims to achieve with Bill 39 and again I can only stress upon the government to be upfront with the irrigators of the province.

And I would note that, as well, I am one of those irrigators, Mr. Speaker. I do not belong to a district. We didn't have the same opportunities on Last Mountain Lake as were afforded to the producers on Lake Diefenbaker and the Saskatchewan River system. However, you know we have some concerns as private irrigators as to where we're moving with water restrictions, what will happen to those of us that have long-term agreements with the Water Corporation . . . that those of us that pump our own water and have our own expenses.

We know we're always a little bit leery, as I stated, when we're moving into areas and new Bills are being proposed. I can only hope that the Bill as it relates to private irrigators that don't have the luxury of being in a district or near a district will be looked after, and that there isn't anything hidden in here that we certainly haven't been made aware of.

I'm sure that a lot of these concerns that I've raised today on behalf of irrigators across Saskatchewan — and many of them again residing and irrigating in the constituency of Arm River — will be addressed by the government and their bureaucrats. And hopefully, Mr. Speaker, that when we get into Committee of the Whole that the government will have some of the answers that the irrigators are asking for. And with that, Mr. Speaker, I would adjourn my debate and we can move into the Committee of the Whole, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The motion to adjourn is not in order, although I'm not certain that's what the member intended to do. Having previously adjourned debate, the hon. member is not permitted to adjourn. If he's simply wishing to take his place, then proceed. Perhaps the hon. member would like to clarify his intention.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just finish my remarks, the wording of the Bill, and I will take my seat at this

point.

The division bells rang from 3:14 p.m. until 3:42 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 28

Van Mulligen	Mitchell	MacKinnon
Shillington	Tchorzewski	Whitmore
Goulet	Lautermilch	Kowalsky
Calvert	Koenker	Trew
Lorje	Teichrob	Nilson
Cline	Serby	Stanger
Hamilton	Murray	Langford
Wall	Kasperski	Ward
Sonntag	Jess	Flavel
Thomson		

Nays—9

Osika	Aldridge	McLane
Draude	Bjornerud	Krawetz
Boyd	Heppner	Goohsen

The Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.
(1545)

Bill No. 17

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Serby that **Bill No. 17 — An Act to amend certain Acts respecting Highways and Vehicles** be now read a second time.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to join with other members of this House in debating Bill 17, The Highways and Vehicles Statutes Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister in charge of SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) said in this House when he moved second reading of the Bill, the automobile is in fact a wonderful invention; but more than that, it is now an integral part of our lives. Without the ability to drive, many of us would find it impossible to work or even to live. That's especially true given the vast distances between communities in some parts of our province.

But, Mr. Speaker, too often people forget that driving is not a right; it is a privilege extended to us by our fellow citizens. In extending that privilege, our neighbours, our friends, our families, are saying to us they trust us to do what is right behind the wheel of that car. They trust us to consider the safety of others as well as ourselves when we are making use of the public roadways. They are trusting us to know what is right and what is wrong. And, Mr. Speaker, most of us take the trust placed in us very, very seriously.

Most of us are responsible drivers, responsible citizens. We may forget to put on our seat-belt once in a while, we may even exceed the speed limit from time to time, we may run a yellow light here and there; but, Mr. Speaker, for the most part we take

care that we are not endangering ourselves or others when we are behind the wheel.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, not all of our citizens are responsible. Not all of those people we have given the privilege to drive take the rights of others seriously. Because, Mr. Speaker, while driving is not a right, a person's right to know he or she is safe to drive, safe to walk down the street, must be a solemn right. We must know that our society is doing everything in its power to maintain the safety of the innocent, the safety of those who do follow the rules set down by our society.

And, Mr. Speaker, that is what Bill 17 attempts to do. It attempts to make our streets, our roads, our highways, safer. And we as a caucus commend any action that tries to do this.

Many portions of this Bill are straightforward housekeeping items. There's an aspect that further restricts the speed motorists can travel when passing work crews. And of course that makes perfect sense.

And there are other changes as well, changes that affect rules concerning school buses, changes concerning traffic lights, changes concerning the rights of police officers. And we have some questions on most of the aspects of the legislation, questions we will ask when we eventually get to Committee of the Whole. And my colleague from Kelvington-Wadena has already spoken on some of our concerns here, concerns that again we'll bring up in committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, obviously the part of this Bill that has received the most attention is the aspect that deals with enforcing stricter rules on drivers who choose to drink. Before I go on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell the House that I, probably more than anyone in this House with the possible exception of the Sergeant-at-Arms, have seen the graphic results of drivers who don't know when to say when they should be driving or when they should not; drivers who not only have no regard for their own safety, but for the safety of others.

As a member of the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) for nearly 25 years, I attended many accident scenes where alcohol was a definite factor — accident scenes where people have been hurt and killed. And the worst part of these scenes is not the death or injury of the person that was drinking and driving. It may sound harsh, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but after you've seen enough of these accidents, it's very difficult to muster up much sympathy for those who climb behind the wheel knowing full well they're endangering themselves and others by doing so. You can feel sorry for their families, their friends, whatever, but that same sympathy is hard to come by for them personally.

But it's a different story for those who are the innocent victims of these people's reckless disregard, the people who are responsible, those who take their privilege to drive very seriously indeed, those who do have regard for others — these are the people you remember at night. And you think of their families; you think of the widows; you think of the children who are without one or both of their parents because some jerk

got behind the wheel drunk. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you never forget them. Those are the people we owe; those are the people who deserve to know they can be safe once again.

Everyone in this House, I think, agrees that we must do everything in our power to ensure that we clamp down on drinking and driving and drunk driving. Mr. Deputy Speaker, for several years our province has had the dubious distinction of having the most drunk drivers — at least the most drunk drivers caught. Saskatchewan enjoys being number one in many categories, including being judged as the best place to live in North America — climate aside, I would suggest — but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite all the things we have in Saskatchewan to be proud of, this drunk driving statistic is a huge scar across the heart of this province.

Before I move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say a few words about those people in our province that have committed so much of their lives to trying to curb this horrible statistic, the people who are working so hard to make sure our roads are safer for all of us. In particular I want to commend the Students Against Drinking and Driving organization for their dedication. It makes me so proud to see young people devoting so much of their time and energy to such a worthwhile effort.

I, along with the member from Arm River, recently met with Jason Dubois of SADD (Students Against Drinking and Driving) to discuss his thoughts on this piece of legislation. I can't begin to tell you how impressed I was with this young man's eloquence and dedication to the issues that concerned him. It is people like Jason and the many others involved in the crusade against drinking and driving that have alerted the people of Saskatchewan and the legislators of this House that something has to be done.

I also want to recognize the methods that were used to craft together this particular piece of legislation. Of course the process was started with suggestions made by the Saskatchewan Interagency Committee on Impaired Driving. Then two years ago an all-party committee was struck by this House to further study the problems and recommend solutions to curbing the growing problem of impaired driving.

This committee travelled the province and took suggestions from the people and many of the suggestions that committee heard have been incorporated into this Bill.

Out of all the provisions regarding drinking and driving that are incorporated into this Bill, the provision that lowers to .04 the limit needed for policemen to suspend a licence for 24 hours has received the most attention from the media and people we have talked to regarding this legislation.

And I'll go into detail on what we've heard just a little later on, but I feel that another important aspect of the Bill and in my view a far more vital aspect is the penalty imposed on those who have been caught exceeding the .08 blood alcohol limit. I feel it is these penalties that are the key to making our roads safe for our citizens again. And I know, Mr. Speaker, that .08 limit is not universally accepted by everyone, and in a letter received by my colleague from Kelvington-Wadena from Aaron Shroeder of the SADD group, I get the impression that many in

our society and members of SADD feel that limit should be changed and, I assume, lowered.

That's fine. But let's face it — any legal limit you place on drinking and driving is an artificial line in the sand. At .079 you're all right; at .081, you're not. It's an artificial border, as artificial as the painted line down the centre of our highways, but as an artificial line that is necessary. Because unless you bring in laws that make it so any level of alcohol in your system — even the smallest amount — illegal, you need that artificial line. While a zero tolerance policy would be ideal in a perfect world, it is not practical in our world.

So we have to keep in touch with reality and ask ourselves how do we best enforce the laws we now have. We'd have to ask ourselves these same questions if the legal limit were dropped to .06, .04, or even .02 because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those limits, while lower, are as artificial as .08.

As Aaron Shroeder writes, alcohol affects different people in different ways. That's why any set limit is not perfect. And that's why no legislation regarding this issue is perfect. That includes this legislation which I don't think is perfect. I know I'll receive criticism for daring to utter that, but it's not perfect. It has good intentions — no question about it — but I'm not so sure those intentions will be met through this Bill.

It's not a question of opposing the Bill because I don't think anything would be served by doing that. It is a matter of pointing out some of the problems in Bill 17 with what is included and, most importantly, what is not included.

But before I digress any further, I want to again focus for a moment on the penalties for those caught exceeding .08. I feel it is these provisions that have to be as tough as nails before we succeed in getting drunk drivers off the road. And I admit this Bill does go some distance — albeit a small distance, in my view — in addressing this particular issue.

Under this Act, the statutory licence suspensions for drunk drivers has been increased. As I understand the Bill, for the first offence that suspension is now one year, up from six months. The second offence goes from one to three years, and the third offence increased from three to five years.

Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in our society where the privilege to drive is such a necessity for most people, these are harsh penalties. But I can't help but think to myself, how many chances should a person be given when they recklessly scoff at the laws set down by our people?

While the minister responsible says these are some of the toughest penalties in the land, I think we as legislators, we as citizens, we as parents, have to ask, are they in fact tough enough? Is a five-year suspension after three or more convictions a harsh enough penalty? I'm not sure it is.

And what are the penalties for those who actually do injure or kill those by driving and drinking?

Perhaps I'm drifting off into what is a federal jurisdiction here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I believe, for a real deterrent, these

penalties, including harsh jail sentences, have got to be reviewed. And I encourage this government to instigate such a review.

I guess what I'm mainly worried about with this Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that it appears to be doing more than it actually does. Groups such as SADD want to see all drinking and driving eradicated. Again, that's a good goal but probably not a realistic one.

That being said, if lowering the 24-hour suspension limit to .04 actually works as a deterrent for those drivers most reckless in their disregard for the safety of others, I'll be the first to stand up and cheer. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm just not sure this Bill is going to target those people that are most guilty.

(1600)

I'm talking about the people who would get into their vehicles regardless of what the legal limit is. These people are not going to be reached by lowering the .06 limit. And I truly believe it is these people we have to get off the roads — these are the people.

Although I know police associations have endorsed this Bill, I have talked to individual officers in private who are concerned it will do little. Some have told me they believe it is nothing but wallpaper to make it appear that the government is doing something. And I'm talking here strictly about the 24-hour suspension rule. And other citizens have related this concern to me as well. Because they see the people who drive when they are well past the legal limit and they know this change will do nothing to stop those idiots.

In committee we'll be asking the government to provide us with statistics which will prove this move will definitely do some good. Again, let me emphasize here: we as a caucus don't think this change will do any harm when it comes to making our roads safer, but we're not totally convinced, as I've stated, it'll do any good.

Once again, it should not be the family who enjoys one glass of wine with their meal that we have to focus on, or the worker who stops in for a beer after work. The people we have to focus on are those who stop in for six or seven or more beer after work. Those are the people we have to stop. Those are the people killing our children or spouses or friends.

We'll be asking the government a number of questions in committee that will deal with the effectiveness of this legislation in all aspects. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is an issue that's simply too important to pass through this House unchecked. No legislation is perfect, Mr. Deputy Speaker. No solution is perfect. But for the sake of all of our citizens, we have to ensure the legislation we pass in this House will do some real good.

With that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, unless my colleagues here, the Tories, have any comments, the official opposition is prepared to pass this Bill on to Committee of the Whole at this time. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I participated in the committee that did the public consulting work that led to the drafting of this Bill and to this piece of legislation.

It was thought at that time that we might get the legislation before the Assembly and put into law before the last election, but unfortunately I guess the issue seemed at that point to be too controversial to bring into legislation and so it was passed over until now, which of course is a year after the election.

That in itself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, tells me that if the government was afraid to put this into effect before the election, that there must be something in the Bill that people are sensing would affect the outcome of an election.

I would digress just for a minute to compliment the Leader of the Liberal Party for his presentation on this Bill. And I think as a new member having come in and not having had the experience of going through the process as we all did over the past year and being involved with at least hearing about the tour that was taken through the province and those kinds of things, I think he has put his finger very genuinely on some of the problems that will result in this legislation.

The process, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that went into this Bill is commendable and our caucus does support the process that we went through to achieve the answers that we got and to come into a situation where you can draft legislation with a lot of public input. And we believe that that's a good process for democracy. However, there are some points of view that never, ever get expressed on a touchy issue where morality is a part of the function that you're trying to solve — or the function of the problem.

The committee was careful to consult broadly with the public and this kind of consultation is important to the formation of any kind of legislation, and it enhances our democratic system. But as I say, we did find ourselves, I think, lacking in one area. And I would be remiss, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I didn't allude to the fact that we had an awful lot of school children involved in the process, and that was good, but we didn't have a whole lot of adult participation in a lot of areas.

I don't know if that's apathy on the part of the public or if it was the fault of the way we organized ourselves to try and get people out, but definitely if we do this sort of thing again, we have to do some concentration on getting adults to express their points of view through a large part of this province.

Likewise in general, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I agree with the objectives of the Bill. The loss of life caused by drunk driving is a tragedy and it is inexcusable in most cases. As legislators it is important that we take steps to prevent it. It is important to send a message to society that drunk driving is not an acceptable behaviour. The faster the cars become, the more powerful the motors, the more reason we have to discipline ourselves as a society.

This Bill does that and our caucus believes that this is a positive step, even though we see that there are going to be some

failings, which I will get to in a minute.

The reduction of the blood alcohol driving limit to the .04 sends a powerful message about how society now views these kinds of offences. Unfortunately though, I believe that when we do this to an adult society, as the Leader of the Opposition has alluded to, we will find ourselves saying that basically the ordinary social drinker, the ordinary fellow who is going to have a beer on the way home from work, is the fellow that's being targeted the most here.

And we might find a situation where RCMP members — who are actually human beings I've come to discover — and who are human enough by nature to probably be worthy of some of the statements that were made in our tour, which went along the lines that all of these people, being human, would use discretion in how they apply the law.

I don't believe personally that we should place the RCMP in the position of having to use their discretion in how they apply the law. The law should be written definitively enough so that they know where they stand. But I realize that there is a grey area in all things.

And I do believe that in this situation we are then going to find members of the RCMP saying that, well this fellow is just an ordinary guy going home after having a couple of drinks and possibly I'll just sort of close my eyes and let him go. Well where does discretion begin and where does it end? It does pose some real serious problems for the enforcement.

Unfortunately when you start to use discretion in the application of law, then pretty soon that discretion becomes the way the law is viewed by the public and people may simply say, well they're not enforcing the .04 so it must really be .06 or something else, and not pay that much attention.

Now however while we agree with the general objectives and the intent of the Bill, I have some concerns that may not have been achieved in a proper balance within this Bill.

Most fatal accidents involving alcohol involve persons with blood alcohol limits far in excess of a zero tolerance or even a .04, and the member very aptly pointed that out. And as a past member of the force, I'm sure that he is absolute in his view of this and correct in noting those facts. And he probably heard some of the statistics that we heard during our tour. And those statistics did genuinely bear out the fact that most accidents are caused by people that consume vast quantities of alcohol.

The most common place for accidents to happen is at 1. something, you know, in that area; it's not even the .08 that the federal law becomes a factor in. And you become reasonably responsible for a criminal offence if you're caught at the .08. And most accidents are caused even with the alcohol levels higher than that.

So what has happened here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that, as has been pointed out, we may be targeting — with a very severe law that sends a very serious message — we may be targeting the innocent people, basically, in our society, the law-abiding citizens who normally wouldn't break the law anyway. And we

may have targeted them and missed the boat on some of the other people that are the serious offenders. And I will get into that as we go.

This legislation puts a great deal of onus on the average, responsible, social drinker, but it does not go far enough to enforce the laws of the extreme drunk drivers. And enforcement of course is the key word here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because on the contrary, the Department of Justice recently made the decision to reduce prison terms for offenders in order to relieve stress on our prison system.

Now it's unfortunate that we have so many people incarcerated in our country that our prisons are overloaded with people, that they're full. I don't know if we should start building some more prisons or if we should start exiling some kinds of criminals to the foreign islands out in the ocean, or if we should try to employ some other kinds of punishment.

I don't really know what the answer is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I do know that if we don't carry out a penalty on a criminal, and we allow them simply to go through the process to be found guilty, and run in the front door of the prison one day and out the back door the next day, there is no message in there that's going to send a clear signal to that person that he shouldn't break the law any more.

And that's where our system, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is breaking down. Therefore penalties for some extreme drunk drivers, who are the people who we are trying to target, may well be reduced in the system as it goes now. If their sentences then are reduced simply because we have to expediently allow for more room to be made in the prisons for the new people coming in, then we missed the boat, I think, with this legislation.

So we have here a great piece of legislation. All the intents and purposes of it are aimed in the right moral directions, and yet it is destined to fail unless we can get our justice system to work in coordination with this type of law.

It is obvious at cross-purposes . . . obviously at cross-purposes of course with what this Bill is trying to accomplish when the justice system doesn't cooperate and bring about the fair sentencing and the carrying out of those sentences. By focusing entirely on the motor vehicle licence aspect of this issue, we may have missed the boat about the real issues involved.

On the other hand you have severely and criminally drunk drivers being treated relatively lightly by the justice system while the average social drinker is treated comparatively harshly by SGI in the licensing system. Because quite frankly when you reduce it to .04 and then you start looking at taking people's licences and those kinds of things, the person that's causing probably the least amount of problem in our society is the one that actually will carry out his sentence. Whereas the serious offender who goes to jail won't be called upon to carry out his sentence or to serve his sentence because the jails are too full.

So again, while our caucus fully supports the objectives and the intent of this Bill, it may well have fallen out of the balance with regards to the problems that really need to be solved in our society. The government should try to address these problems in

the regulations and by consulting with the department on sentencing.

And on the serious issues of minor offences . . . or less serious rather, issues of minor offences, we ought to, I think, find a way to be compassionate. But on the end of the spectrum where people are causing death and causing people to lose their lives, I think we have to be far, far more diligent towards seeing to it that these people pay a penalty of some sort that when they leave a prison they will know in their minds that this is such a terrible experience and such a terrible place to be that I never want to be back there again.

Now I'm not advocating that we become inhumane. I am advocating, though, that we have to have crime and justice balanced. We have to have penalties that are equivalent to the crime to such an extent that people simply will find it more uncomfortable to break the law than it is comfortable to go out and break the law.

In other words we have to — we have to — I think see more of these people serve their sentences. And maybe their sentences don't necessarily have to be a term in prison.

Maybe we have to force some of these people to do some manual labour. Maybe we have to make them work a bit. Maybe that's the answer; I don't know. But we've got to do something to convince these people that their lifestyle is not acceptable.

I've heard of a case very recently where a man had been found guilty for the fourth time of drunk driving — the fourth time. He's now sentenced for two years in prison for his offences. He goes to jail and he spends five days in jail and he goes out the back door because the warden came to him and said: you can go home now; we haven't got any more room for you; we've got too many other prisoners coming in.

That simply is not acceptable, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it simply makes a fool out of those of us who make these kind of laws where we try to actually help society. And it makes a fool out of the law because we didn't keep that person there and make him pay his penalty. And that person has been supposedly reported to me as saying that he simply has no respect for the law and will probably offend again.

(1615)

We need to address our justice system. We can make all the great and wonderful laws in the world. We can go out and we can consult with all of the people in Saskatchewan and we can come up with the most miraculous kinds of legislation or laws that has ever been seen in the history of mankind. But if the justice system does not fulfil its obligation, then there is no way that this can succeed.

And after you look at it for awhile, how could you possibly ask a member of the RCMP to take his job seriously and haul in a criminal if he knows very well that after he goes through all of his paperwork, all of his testimony, all of the things that are required of him in order to put a criminal behind bars, and five days later he watches him walk out the back door and a free

man off to run and do the same things again?

Again, the process by which this Bill came about was commendable, and I think it was a great and wonderful experience for myself and the people that were involved. I only hope very sincerely, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that by passing this legislation we will in fact somehow save more lives.

But I want to address one other issue that I think falls a little short in this legislation. And I address this because I have a son who's the right age. And I would have thought that young people would like to have the opportunity to be able to have a drink and have the freedom to be able to drive and not be bothered by that, but he pointed out one very important thing to me.

He said, dad, in our society we don't allow kids that are 16 years of age who are allowed to buy a driver's licence to go in the bar and drink. We don't allow them to go to the liquor board store and buy alcohol, and yet you're saying to me that I'm allowed to drive with two beers under my belt. Not allowed to buy it, not allowed legally to consume it, except in my home under supervision of my parents — there's always a loophole in the law — but, he said, I'm allowed to be half drunk. And he said, at my age, at .04, he said, I'm quite a ways there.

He said to me if you want to be realistic about your laws and have people respect them, especially young people today who are well educated, then you've got to be consistent.

And he said, if you're not going to allow us to buy liquor, don't allow us to drive with it. He said, when we're under 19 years of age, zero tolerance is exactly what it should be.

I was really proud to have a son that told me that kind of a message when I honestly believed that he would want to have the latitude and the parameters to be able to go out and do what this law is allowing people to do.

So we have missed what the young people told us, and we've allowed this legislation, once again for some kind of expediency, to attempt to soften the blow somehow of the public reaction that may come from that group of young people perhaps, that do at this time drink a lot of alcohol and participate in these kind of activities.

So I think we should have toughened it up, and I wanted to put that on the record not only as a compliment to my son, but also to make sure that people see that perhaps when young people do not respect this law there might be a reason for it — the fact that we haven't been consistent in the way we treat all of these aspects.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to compliment those people that were on the driving committee and compliment the government on the process that they took.

There were people from the Assembly involved. They all did a very remarkable job. One individual by the name of Dave Abbey, and I'm hoping he won't be embarrassed if I mention his name, is truly a trooper. He's truly a brilliant man and I think I've grown to respect bureaucrats more than I ever would

have if I hadn't met him and been associated with him.

And so the effort was good, the people that worked on it were excellent, and the job was miraculously done to one goal, which was a good goal, and that being to try to correct the problem of people dying as a result of drunk driving. I hope we achieved that but I do believe we can do better if we work on it more in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Agriculture and Food Vote 1

The Chair: — I'll ask the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My officials are Murray McLaughlin, deputy minister, just to my left. And on the other side of Murray is Dale Sigurdson, assistant deputy minister. And behind . . . oh, sorry, we've moved; over here to my right. And to my far left is Hal Cushon, the director of policy planning and program development branch. Jack Zepp, right behind me, director of administrative services. Beside Jack is Doug Matthies, general manager of Crop Insurance Corporation. And Norm Ballagh, the general manager of ACS (Agricultural Credit Corporation of Saskatchewan), and Ross Johnson, budget officer for administrative services branch.

Item 1

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I'd like to welcome the minister and his officials here today. I'd also like to welcome the minister back from his extended trip to the far-off shores. And I'd as well like to welcome his new deputy, Dr. McLaughlin, here today as well. And I look forward to some nice dialogue this afternoon in the short time that we have left.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, if we could, while it's fresh in your memory from your trip to some of the Asian countries, I'm just wondering if you could outline for us possibly some of the benefits that we'll see arising out of that trip and if there are any particular contracts that you were able to sign while you were there on behalf of the industry and the producers in Saskatchewan. And possibly, if I could maybe roll three questions into one, any particular area which you would view being most important to agriculture in Saskatchewan.

(1630)

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I would gladly answer that question, and I thank the member for that question.

I'll start out, Mr. Chairman, by saying that what I saw for the

first time, my first trip to Asia, falls in very well with the strategy of this government and the Ag 2000 program. The Ag 2000 program, what we've done is focus our finances away from primary production, as we had to in the '80s and early '90s, to focusing the few dollars that we have to spend on adding value to primary products.

We've got the agri-food equity fund where . . . or agri-food innovation fund, I'll start there, whereby farmers or people — anyone who wants to add value to primary products in a new product or a new way — can go to the innovation fund and get financial assistance.

The ag equity fund, at the same time, provides financial assistance to those people who want to . . . after they've put their business plan together and they want to go into production, the equity fund will help them purchase machinery and equipment or put equity into their project.

And then of course we have the Ag Development Fund, which does a range of projects mainly aimed at value adding to our primary products.

This is outlined in the Ag 2000 proposal and we're focusing and going along those lines today.

In Asia, I was very, very pleased . . . It's too bad the member opposite couldn't have come along, because it's really amazing to see the potential that's being developed, that's developing for Saskatchewan in the Asia region.

We met with a number of people — a company like Zen-Noh in Japan. Zen-Noh is the largest agricultural cooperative in Asia. It has 2,300 member co-ops. It trades annually \$100 billion Canadian. These guys just go out and do business with the world and they do it in a big way.

They trade products. Most, or a lot of their products, are products that we produce. They trade in wheat, barley, canola, beef, pork, potash — which are the five or six major commodities. And they're very interested in looking at Saskatchewan. The same with Taiwan. The same with Hong Kong, which is the link into China, and Korea as well.

Because what's happening in those countries is they're expanding population base is retracting their agricultural base. And the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and the WTO (World Trade Organization) reducing the tariffs around the world have dictated that these countries can now increase their trade because the amount of protectionism through the tariff barriers are being reduced.

They also understand one other thing. They do a lot of trading with the U.S. (United States) in this region. But they also understand one other thing, and that is the quality that Canada and Saskatchewan produces. That came up to us time and time again. Somebody like Lorne Thomson from Thomson Meats has been able to put a product, a packaged product, on the shelf in Japan, in Tokyo, which is unprecedented from Saskatchewan.

Traditionally Tokyo and Japanese bought bulk products. They bought bulk products; packaged them at home. They bought

bulk canola seed and processed it at home. But now they're starting to understand that it's probably cheaper and better for them to know the quality and cheaper to lay the product in if it's processed, partially at least, near the source. And that was one of the constant messages throughout Asia.

There were some deals that are very close to be signed. But let me tell you this: it wouldn't matter . . . let's say there were 10 deals signed . . . (inaudible) . . . signing deals. Let's say there were 10 deals signed on my trip or our trip over there. I couldn't take credit for any of those deals. Because the deals that would be signed, if they were signed when we were there, would have been worked on for at least two years, maybe longer, in order to build up to that signing.

So there were some deals that were very close to be closed or were closed but through confidentiality and requested by the people involved, I can't say. There will be some deals that will be signed hopefully in the very near future, and there will be some deals signed two years down the road from our trip. It's an ongoing process and I want everyone to understand that. And I know that's the thing to do. I used to do it when I was in opposition. How many deals did you sign? How much money did you get out? Well truth be known, it wouldn't be me that did the deal anyway.

But what the government — I want to impress upon you — what the government's role is in all this is one of opening the doors. We had an example of a meeting with a person from Saskatchewan who had been dealing over in Japan. We were there. The person that they were dealing with was at a mid-level of government. Because we were there the senior vice-president came to the meeting, and the Japanese person told the Saskatchewan person that he was really, really pleased because it helped to expose his department — and these are huge companies, remember that — it helped . . . like he would see this guy maybe once a year if he was lucky at the Christmas party, you know.

It helped raise his level in his department in the consciousness of the executive senior vice-president. So I often describe myself over there — I kind of laughed — as a cheerleader because that's what we do. We reinforce. If I sit down to the Japanese government or a Japanese company and say that Thomson Meats is a good company, it's got a good reputation, it's got good quality, that's my job. I don't write the deals. I don't make the deals. I'm not the dealer. I'm government's job . . . And I just can't impress upon you enough the importance of government being there.

The first time you meet these people, you don't do much business, you know, unless there's a deal that's already going on. They get to know you. The second time they loosen up a bit, and by the third time you're getting the deals made. We have people over there who of course know these people on an ongoing basis, which really helps because then it's connected to government. So I outline that to you. There's much more I could say. I'm really excited about Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and mainland China. It's a market that's endless.

We could double our hog production in Saskatchewan and not even begin to fill the void that's going over there. The same

thing with beef or chicken.

So the GDP (gross domestic product) in the region . . . I think it was Taiwan. There was some complaining about the recession they were in. They only had a seven and a half growth last year. Well we would love to have that problem.

In Korea the average farm or the average income from 20 years ago was \$500. Today it's \$10,000. And by the year 2000, it will be \$15,000 — disposable, net income per capita. And remember in Korea, there is very, very little if no income tax at all. So their money goes a long way.

So that growth is just going through the roof. This is an area where all of Canada, Europe, and United States are really focusing on because that's the mouths are being born, and they're hungry mouths. And now the difference is they have disposable income that is rising rapidly to take care of that hunger.

And the Asians spend about 40 per cent of their disposable income on food. So as that rises, we are very well positioned, I think, focusing as we are on ag equity, ag innovation. And ADF (Agriculture Development Fund) will go a long way to supply that market, and hopefully what it will do . . . give value added production a boost in Saskatchewan and provide those jobs we need so badly around the province.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. It sounds like you had a very exciting trip, and I'll be looking forward to seeing some of the fruits of that come to fruition over the next couple of years.

Just one comment that you made earlier, and you talked about how this trip and what's happening over there fits in with your government's commitment to diversification. You'd have to understand that I'm just maybe a wee bit sceptical on that, as it appears to me that there's about \$49 million were taken out of the budget in the area of diversification support. So I'm just a little sceptical about that comment.

However you talked about your strategy and how the value added fits into it and how it relates to overseas as well as in our own province. Could you just maybe outline to me, Mr. Minister, a kind of a . . . I guess a rather precise overview of the mandate of your department, I guess, as it exists today.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — With regards to the budget and diversification, I think what we're trying to accomplish, simply because we're forced into it because of the legacy that we inherited, is that we're trying to make our dollars — keep the budget balanced — make the dollars stretch as far as we can. In order to do that, instead of government trying to do everything, we are partnering with the private sector. The trade export corporation that's being set up now — and it's just being born basically — is one of the ways that we attempt to do that.

Although it's not directly agriculture, I find it hard these days . . . and I'll get to the mandate because it will be in the mandate. I find it hard these days to distinguish between what's agriculture and what's economic development because, to me, they're the same thing because it's developing jobs in rural Saskatchewan, value adding in rural Saskatchewan, and then

having the value added in the cities as well. And one of the nice parts about the trip and diversification is that Mr. Goodale, who initiated this team Canada trip — at least the first half of it that I was on — was very conscious of the fact that diversification will come if we have the investment.

The investment is now starting to come from Asia. And that way, with our trade export corporation combined with value added in agriculture and food products, combined with capital investment from Asia . . . should be a very good partnership on which to build jobs in rural Saskatchewan, and we're very optimistic of that. You know, I understand your role to question that, but I'm saying we're very optimistic that that's going to take place.

So far as the mandate of Agriculture and Food today, of course it's traditional in some respects, and I think new in some respects. The new part is the part I've just described, not really new, but the more emphasized part now on value adding to primary products.

Of course we still have an extension division which does very good work in disseminating information to farmers. We're going on-line computers; we're trying to keep up with technology. But we still have the agrologists in place in, I believe, roughly 32 sites around Saskatchewan, approximately. And we have Crop Insurance division, of course, which we're working very hard on to try to update and modernize in order to fit the needs of the producer in the year 2000, and that process is ongoing.

Of course we are changing the role of ACS. We're reducing ACS because we felt that the lending to the primary producer, while it was important, it seemed to us more important if we want to establish jobs, especially now that the grains economy is starting to swing out a little bit — albeit beef is down right now, but it's starting come back up again — so that we can focus on the value adding through ag equity, ag innovation, ADF.

And of course there are other areas: research and development in the department, policy and planning. But the focus of the whole department, if I were to sum it up today, that is to be an assistant to the producers and the value added industry in Saskatchewan; to assist them in making this economy the best it can be; and — especially now when our prices are up a bit in the bulk sectors — to help them with, you know, through extension with chemicals or farming practices; to assist them diversify into areas such as ginseng, raspberries or whatever, Seneca root, or saskatoons, or horseradish, or whatever they might want to get into, and many of the specialty crops; to give them the expertise to start those crops; to help value add.

And I don't know if I've missed any departments or not, but that's what all the departments are focusing on today . . . is try to get the value added . . . assist the primary producer in the value adding of the products. So in some ways, like I said, we're still in the tradition of extension, tradition of extension but the focus has shifted.

(1645)

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Minister. Since you raised your inheritance from the previous government, maybe you could outline for us what the mandate of your department would have been then in 1991 as you took over from it?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I think when we came into government in 1991, we were coming off a time of poor crops, poor prices. And the role of government then I think was — whether you think it was done rightly or wrongly — it was transferring money from government to primary producers. There were assistance measures. There were assistance measures for . . . there were loans and basically trying to stabilize I think the government. The Agriculture department's role was trying to stabilize the farm numbers by putting in legislation that tried to sort of level out the risk so that everybody took a little bit of the risk.

And the results of that, in some cases, I think worked. And most cases unfortunately, the incomes transfers tended to be capitalized into the operation and sometimes caused more problems than it was to sort of make sure that the farmer was there for a longer period of time.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Since there was a change in the mandate from when your government took power in 1991, could you tell us then, how does those changes take place? What happened? What transpires when you have a change in government? What transpired so your department could gear up to what your mandate was going to be as opposed to what was there in 1991?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Yes, what happened was we looked at what the mandate was, and we saw that there had to be a shift in that mandate for a number of reasons. First of all, there was some budgetary reasons. We were elected in 1991 with a mandate to balance the budget, and we did that. And I don't think the Finance minister some days had many friends, but at the end of the day, we as Agriculture and every other department was asked to meet a certain budget requirement, and we did that.

That was part of it. But the main part is we saw the shifting in focus and the need to value add and grow different crops so that we didn't get trapped in that grain world that we lived in in the '70s that was very good to us. But we became, I think, a little bit myopic.

So we started a process under previous ministers of developing our *Agriculture 2000* program, and that was the . . . It was a long process of consultation with groups, farm groups and individuals around Saskatchewan. And basically what we said, we have to be partners with these people. We can't just be sort of sitting here handing out money and sort of letting things go because we each have responsibility, and if we're going to make it work, we got to work together.

Business bought into that big time. And I think the result of the *Agriculture 2000* are things like the trip, like trade missions, the one we were just on. Things like the meeting we had today with the people who were on that trade mission . . . came to Regina to discuss what the follow-up is and how do we focus on continuing the ball that's starting to roll for us in economic

development in Saskatchewan.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess in light of your last couple of answers, how your mandate has changed, I'd just like to pursue, I guess, a little bit with what transpired upon your administration assuming power then in '91. And do that, I guess, in the context of . . . I believe you were the official opposition critic at that time, and I think a lot of people assumed that you would become the minister, but I guess that wasn't in the stars at that time.

However I guess given your background, I guess we'd have to assume that some of the vision that the government had — because we heard it from the government of the day about some goals and wonderful things they had planned for agriculture — that you would have played quite a role in this procedure. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I hope that's not a trick question, Mr. Member. I'll tell you; I'll answer that this way. I made the final decision, urged by many people, to get into politics. And when I made that decision, I also made the decision to serve my constituency in the best way that's possible because they're number one. And if I was called upon to serve in any other capacity, whatever that capacity be — being on a board or a committee or a minister — I would do that to the best of my ability.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. That's a very nice motherhood statement. So I guess, did I hear you say that yes, you played a role in what direction your government at that time was going to take in agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Yes, I think . . . Let me put it this way. I hope I played a role. I was there, and I was involved. I was the agricultural chair, I was the critic from '86 to '91 and then the chair of agriculture caucus. And if I didn't play a role, I guess I wouldn't be doing my job.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could you then maybe articulate for us some of the goals of the party at that time and some of the election promises that were made back then, as it relates of course to the farming community, I guess, leading up to the election of October '91 and then after that.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well in that whole time, where I hope I was involved in decision-making . . . I'm not going to get into reiterating election promises, but I'll tell you the one major campaign promise that we had in 1991 was to get the budget under control in order that we might be able to create some economic activity in this province.

We had a population drain; we stopped that. We had deficits for 10 years, driving up the debt to 15 billion; we've stopped that. And because we've done that — and we were the first province in Canada to do that — and because we've done that, those decisions led to us being able now in 1996, after trying to clean up the mess the first couple of years and getting the budget under control, to be positioned better, I think, than any other province in Canada — because of our fiscal situation — to take advantage of the opportunity that awaits us, for example, in

south-east Asia. So the mandate was to clean up the mess, balance the books, and then get on with business. We're on the get-on-with-business stage right now.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:59 p.m.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You continually talk about the mess you were left with. Could you maybe just outline briefly for us, in your view, what mess was there left in Agriculture from the Tory regime of the '80s?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well one of the biggest messes I guess was the fact that the finances were out of control. We had a problem in that ACS was used sometimes for political reasons. There were some loans, you know, put through ACS. And what happened was it drove the portfolio up to over a billion dollars.

And much of that debt was not recoverable. In fact we're still — from the spring seeding loan, from the production loan — we're still trying to collect that debt. So I guess maybe I stretched it a bit when we said we cleaned the mess up. We're still cleaning in some areas like ACS. And of course we've made the decision to now depart from ACS and let the banks do the lending, and we'll focus on the value adding. So that was a large part of what I called the mess was.

I think the other thing that's important to mention here . . . and I do this at the risk of being criticized. I'm not immune to criticism; I've been criticized before. But there was one thing I think that happened in the '80s. Now I don't lay total blame on the previous government because I think there were a number of people involved.

An Hon. Member: — Like the federal liberals.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Like the federal Liberals, yes, to cause a problem. What I'm trying to say is that there was a mentality put forward by the previous government that government — even though on one side they were saying government couldn't do anything — that government should do everything, like pulling money out of the Agricultural Credit Corporation for example and pumping it in the same way the federal government was doing it.

And so what happened now, when the budgets are maxed out, we had a mentality that well, if we get in trouble, all we got to do is go to the mailbox, and we'll have a cheque there to bail us out. Gladly people are weaning themselves from that because . . . as governments get their finances together as we've had to and make some terrible tough decisions that were very unpopular at the time, we've been able to help on that weaning process.

I think that's one of the major things we've been able to accomplish. I don't think that . . . I can't take credit for it all. Prices are coming up. The agricultural in general is improving. But I certainly say that this government can take credit for stopping the bleeding — stopping the bleeding — of taxpayers' dollars being pumped into the agricultural industry and the agricultural industry's still in decline. It was wasting money.

So I think that we can take a lot of credit for that, and I believe I was part of that process.