

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition on behalf of the citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about 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 signatures are from Regina, Moose Jaw, Esterhazy, Grayson, Atwater. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the 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 the petition are from such places as Katepwa Beach, Fort Qu'Appelle, Regina, Indian Head, Abernethy, Balcarres, and numerous other southern Saskatchewan communities.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present petitions on behalf of concerned citizens 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, Mr. Speaker, are from Regina, Macoun, Lampman, and throughout the province. I so present.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise to present petitions from Saskatchewan residents 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, Mr. Speaker, are from Moose Jaw, Estevan, and the largest number are from Regina. I so present.

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

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

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Rouleau, Drinkwater, Wilcox, Midale, and Regina.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present petitions of names from people 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, from Kipling, Vibank, Balgonie, Pilot Butte, White City, Grenfell, Moose Jaw — all over Saskatchewan.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today as well to present petitions from concerned citizens in southern Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the concerned citizens of Bethune and community, as well as Chamberlain. Of course both those communities are on No. 11 Highway and in the constituency of Arm River.

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

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

And those who have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from . . . actually they are all from the community of Radville in the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present petitions of names 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.

And the people that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the city of Regina here. They're also from Estevan. They're from Benson; and they're from all throughout Saskatchewan. And I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with my colleagues today to present petitions on behalf of the efforts in saving the Plains Health Centre here in Regina. The prayer reads as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed the petition are all from the Esterhazy area. I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 57 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Finance: (1) what was the total amount of revenue taken in by the province in fines under The Highway Traffic Act for the year ending March 31, 1996; (2) what percentage of this revenue is returned to municipal governments; (3) is the provincial share of this revenue targeted to any particular government program or does it all go to the general revenue; (4) what dollar amount in fines was outstanding as of March 31, 1996?

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 57 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Highways and Transportation with regards to highway maintenance in the North: (1) how many kilometres of road exist in northern Saskatchewan; (2) what is the ratio of kilometres of roads to maintenance staff in the North as compared to the rest of the province; (3) what is the total budget for northern roads; (4) how much of this budget is being spent on administration and how much is being spent on actual maintenance; (5) what is the location of highway depots in northern Saskatchewan; (6) which of these are slated for closure; (7) how does your department determine which roads are a priority for maintenance and which roads are not; and finally (8) has the government considered contracting out road maintenance to communities or private companies?

Thank you.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 57 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Sask Water with regards to the Humboldt-Wakaw water pipeline: (1) where do the funds for this pipeline come from; (2) could you please

provide a breakdown of the \$201,000 that your department has quoted in a letter to the RM (rural municipality) of Fish Creek as the cost to install the additional 3-inch pipeline for treated water; (3) could you please provide a written explanation of why the cost per unit has been set at \$15.22 per thousand gallons of treated water for people in the RM of Fish Creek; and (4) why is this double the price that others pay for treated water from the same pipeline?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly, a group of 13 students from the Tisdale Unit Composite High School. These students are being accompanied by their teachers, Paula Fafard and Lillian Chunyk. I welcome them here and I would like very much to meet with them later, and ask the members to please give them a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure for me to introduce a group of young people in our gallery and it's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the legislature on behalf of my colleague, the member from Saskatoon Northwest, a group of 65 grade 5 students seated in your west gallery. They are from Silverwood Heights School in Saskatoon. They are accompanied by their teachers, Barbara Gallo, Rick Smith, Wendy Nadane, and Jackie Semchuck.

They will be spending some time in the Assembly here, and then going on to have a tour. And I'm looking forward to visiting with them later on. So please join me in extending to them a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you today and through you to the members of the legislature, 11 students from Lakeview School who are sitting in the Speaker's gallery and also down here on the main floor.

They are accompanied by their teachers, Eleanor Desjardins and Karen Riche, and the chaperon Neil Brown. And I'm happy to welcome them here to the legislature and I look forward to meeting with them later. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if my seeing is right I think I recognize a young lady in your gallery, Vicki Lissel, who has been in the Assembly before. A lady that has brought a major concern regarding hepatitis C to this Assembly; we've had the privilege of raising on her behalf. And I'd like the members to join me in welcoming her to this Assembly this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join the member from Melfort-Tisdale and welcome the grade

12 social studies class from Tisdale. And I think with them also, Mr. Speaker, is Shelley McMartin. And Shelley is not in grade 12 but actually in grade 4, so a special welcome to her and to teachers Paula Fafard and Lillian Chunyk.

And I trust, Mr. Speaker, that all members on both sides of the House, especially on the other side of the House, will be of their best behaviour today. So I would like everyone to please welcome our visitors from Tisdale.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, through you I would like to introduce to all members today a very special young woman, Allison Illingsworth, who is seated, Mr. Speaker, in your gallery. Allison is a grade 11 student at Scott Collegiate here in Regina and she has been participating in the executive government mentoring program that her school is involved with.

With Allison today is Brent Young. Brent has served as her mentor and for one afternoon a week for this whole last semester, Allison has been with Brent, understanding how government works, learning about the government workplace and future opportunities in that workplace, looking at how staffing is done through the Public Service Commission.

Mr. Speaker, this represents the close of the program for Allison and so I would invite all members to congratulate her for what she has done and to welcome her here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Police Week

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night on the TV there was an episode of one of the very successful, new-wave cop shows, the kind that are called gritty, realistic, hard-nosed, and so on.

This episode featured a shoot-out on the street. The police hero shot and killed two characters who deserved even more. In that single scene, the American TV police officer fired his gun almost as many times as did the combined police forces of Saskatchewan in 1994. Our number was nine, six of which were fired to dispatch wounded animals.

I mention this, Mr. Speaker, because May 12 to 18 has been proclaimed Police Week, a week during which we might profitably reflect on the comparative peacefulness and civility of our society, a week during which we should take a moment to consider with gratitude that we have a police force which is more concerned with encouraging that civility than in violently enforcing it.

We should recognize as well that when most of us encounter a police person, it is because we were going too fast, colliding too enthusiastically, or partying too loudly; not the best circumstances to meet a new friend, but circumstances where we need reminding of our responsibilities as good citizens.

Finally, and most importantly, we should all acknowledge that the thousand or so police officers in Saskatchewan are human beings just like us except that, unlike us, they do a dangerous and usually thankless job with dedication and professionalism.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Passing of Craig Wright

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend condolences to the Wright family of Prince Albert. Last week Craig Wright passed away after a lengthy battle with hemophilia and AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) complications.

Mr. Wright made himself well known to many members of this Assembly during his campaign for compensation for hemophiliacs who had been infected by tainted blood products. Mr. Wright bared his personal struggles with his illness and watched close friends die while he fought for compensation on behalf of the 27 innocent victims in Saskatchewan. In the end, he lost his life to a disease that shows no mercy.

Because of his perseverance, the survivors of those infected will be somewhat provided for. He maintained that infected hemophiliacs were innocent victims paying for a bureaucratic mistake with their lives.

I ask all members of the Assembly to join me in extending condolences to Craig Wright's family and friends. He will be missed, but his courageous spirit will not be forgotten. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Technology Transfer

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to salute the University of Saskatchewan's first and best national fund-raising campaign. Several months ago, the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina jointly submitted an application to the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council for a grant to fund technology transfer. This initiative demonstrates some of the best of the Saskatchewan spirit of cooperation, enterprise, and good stewardship of financial resources.

This application linked researchers with industry for the next three years with funding for \$147,000. This in turn was then matched by the Royal Bank and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce to provide almost a million dollars over three years for tech transfer in Saskatchewan.

What does this mean on the ground in Saskatchewan? It means that modifications to bean harvesters done by the University of Saskatchewan agricultural engineering faculty will result in the reduction of crop loss from 45 per cent to 10 per cent. It's projected that this alone will increase acreage devoted to the production of beans from 5,000 acres to 50,000 in Saskatchewan — just another example of how Saskatchewan is leading the way in science and technology.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Science Fair

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize two young scientists from Humboldt who are attending the National Science Fair in North Bay, Ontario.

Darren Stroeder and Evan Jenkins had the best overall project at the Carlton Trail Regional Science Fair held in St. Brieux. Their project, "Lighting Up the World", is based on nuclear energy. They compiled data on the pros and cons of nuclear energy, and they developed a computer program to teach the researched facts. The computer program also explains the uses of nuclear energy in producing electricity, nuclear weapons, and in medical research.

Congratulations to Evan Jenkins and Darren Stroeder, and to their teacher, Peter Pavelich. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Agriculture Sciences Month

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May is Agriculture Sciences Month, and an appropriate time to pay tribute to a farmer from Mossbank who has received a special honour.

John Noble has been awarded the Distinguished Diploma Graduate Award for graduates from the agriculture diploma program at the University of Saskatchewan. The university presents this award to persons who make a significant contribution to the agricultural industry and their local community.

Mr. Noble has been a farmer since 1951 and active in Saskatchewan 4-H for more than 30 years. He promoted the motto "Learn to do by Doing".

John and his wife, Joyce, were inducted into the Saskatchewan 4-H Hall of Fame in 1990. They were the first couple ever to be recognized with this honour. John has also worked in the Department of Agriculture and served as a councillor with the RM of Lake Johnston from 1969 to 1982.

He was also agriculture councillor and was on the District Two Agriculture Board and involved with the Mitchellton Wheat Pool Committee for 25 years. I extend my congratulations to John Noble and his wife, Joyce. They are part of the fabric of what makes Saskatchewan the best place in the world in which to live.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Garson Lake

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I rise today to commend the resilience of the people of a small northern community in my constituency.

About 120 people live in Garson Lake near the Alberta border.

It is a Saskatchewan community. This community is managing to survive even though it still needs 12 kilometres of roads to be constructed before it's connected to the rest of the province.

Garson Lake mayor, Donald Laprise, says the isolation of his community is forcing some people to leave. It costs about \$200 for a one-way plane trip into the neighbouring community — that's about \$400 for a round trip. Many people in Garson Lake just can't afford that and are worried about being so far away from health care.

Mayor Laprise says Garson Lake has survived despite the isolation, despite the lack of health services, and despite the fact that the village just got power hook-up three years ago. He hopes his community will realize its full potential for industries in tourism, natural gas, fishing, and forestry.

In the meantime, the people of Garson Lake continue to lobby for all essential services many other people take for granted.

I would like to commend the people of Garson Lake for continuing to pursue their dreams despite the many challenges that they face. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Battleford Business Awards

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to congratulate seven businesses in my constituency that recently received awards of excellence from the Battleford's Chamber of Commerce. The Business of the Year Award went to Canadian Seed Coaters, an outstanding business that has been part of our community for 15 years.

Chris Odishaw, owner and manager of Battleford Furniture Limited, picked up the Young Entrepreneur Award. Milbanke Flowers Limited, a fourth generation business, received the Heritage Award for its longevity and success in the community.

My Friends' Place restaurant in Battleford received the Customer Service Award. Photography by Mark was named the top new business. The Property Appearance Award went to Anderson Pump House Limited of Battleford. And last but not least, G & C Asphalt was presented with the Community Involvement Award.

Mr. Speaker, this is the third annual Battleford's business awards — an event that recognizes the tremendous contribution made by business people to our community and to our economy.

I would like to congratulate the winners and all those nominated for awards this year. I'd also like to thank the Battleford's Chamber of Commerce for hosting the event, SaskTel for being its corporate patron, the city of North Battleford and the town of Battleford for being key sponsors, and the many other organizations that contributed to the ceremony.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Well-known Regina Entrepreneur Dies

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, change is inevitable. We all know that resisting it is futile. But at the same time, it is worth noting that what we get as the price of progress is not always better than what is replaced. As a case in point, I think all Reginaans would agree that popcorn will never taste as good again as it has for the past 50 years or so.

The reason is simple — Harry Alecxe, the popcorn man on Broad Street, was put to rest this week. Orville Redenbacher may have had the corporation; Harry had the product. Not only that, Harry Alecxe was a living embodiment of the kind of entrepreneurship that helped build this country and this province. With no grants, no partners, no shareholders, no market studies, he ran a business that was distinctive and successful. For years it was a landmark, although a shifting one, in downtown Regina. Let us hope that the qualities he embodied will live on and inspire young people today.

Every now and then a death occurs which marks a real passage, the ending of an era, the changing of the guard — not necessarily in large public matters or affairs of state, but simply a change which reminds us that the world of our youth is turning. Such is the case with my constituent, Harry Alecxe, entrepreneur, citizen, family man, example. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Recovery of Government Funds

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The saga continues to unfold. The report of the Chief Electoral Officer has indicated that the new PCs (Progressive Conservative) have come across a \$400,000 windfall that was secretly raised by the party during the Devine era. He further states that he was told the party lost track of the funds, and when they were located, the money was transferred to the party coffers.

Mr. Speaker, prior to the 1991 election, the Conservatives defrauded the people of this province of \$1 million — much of which has never been recovered. Will the Minister of Justice explain what action he is prepared to take to find out if this is part of those monies? How much more money is there out there, hidden in credit unions or safety deposit boxes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to answer that question on behalf of the Premier, who is responsible for The Election Act. I noted in the *Star-Phoenix* this morning the same story with respect to the \$400,000. And I want to say that I think it raises some very serious questions that the Leader of the Third Party needs to answer and account for.

I think some of those questions, Mr. Speaker, are how is it that the \$400,000 that was raised between 1981 and '89 under the Devine administration get misplaced? How do you lose

\$400,000? And why did that money first now show up in 1995? And where has that money been for the past six years? And who in fact was in control of it?

I would ask the member from Kindersley if he expects the people of Saskatchewan to believe that his party had \$400,000 that he was unaware of, laying in a shoebox somewhere. Missing money, funds all of a sudden showing up, contingency funds that no one knew about — Mr. Speaker, this earmarks a party, a new PC Party, very much like the old one.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there are probably about 1 million people in this province who would agree that these secret funds should not be going to the new PCs; rather they should be going to address the sins of the old PCs. And this, Mr. Speaker, is exactly what should take place. Instead of benefiting from this windfall, the PC Party should make restitution to Saskatchewan taxpayers — the only appropriate step to take.

Will the Minister of Justice indicate whether his government is taking steps, all steps necessary, to recover what is rightfully the property of the people of Saskatchewan?

Mr. Minister, will you do your part to begin the healing process between the people of Saskatchewan and their elected representatives.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the member's question, I think that this is under The Election Act. And I think it should be and will be reviewed by the appropriate authorities.

I think as well there may be some question with respect to the statute of limitations Act and my understanding is this is also being reviewed.

The Chief Electoral Officer has an Act that he administers, and under the guidelines of The Election Act will do the appropriate thing and take the appropriate action.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Compensation for Hepatitis C Victims

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it was more than two years ago that this House was introduced to Vicki Lissel, a Saskatchewan woman who contracted hepatitis C as a result of contaminated blood. Ms. Lissel called on this NDP (New Democratic Party) government to come forward with a compensation plan that would allow her and others afflicted with hepatitis C to die knowing that their loved ones would be properly cared for. The former minister of Health, the current Minister of Social Services, stated in this House on May 11, 1994:

... that (and I quote) the condition of hepatitis is a very significant health care risk and a health care problem. And we are treating it in just that fashion. . .

Things are being done.

Mr. Speaker, things are not being done. It has been two years since the former minister of Health made this statement, and Ms. Lissel and others are waiting for an answer. Will the current Minister of Health explain when his government will quit hiding from this issue, take action that was promised? Or is this going to be yet one more promise that has failed by this government?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member, as the member should know, that Saskatchewan was the only province that did not join in the challenge to the Krever Commission which is trying to get to the bottom of what happened with our blood supply in the 1980s. And I say to the member that the role that we have played as a province, in the last several months, is to try to get to the bottom of this issue.

I'm not entirely clear what exactly the member is asking — whether he's suggesting that there should be a compensation program with respect to hepatitis C victims or what, because it wasn't entirely clear. But I want to say to the member that hepatitis C is a condition that can be transmitted through a number of risk factors. And the difficulty, Mr. Speaker, is that in many cases — even for people who have received blood products — it is not possible to determine the source of the infection, and other risk factors exist with respect to hepatitis C. And hepatitis C can be in your system for many, many years before it manifests itself, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, how can you let on you don't know what the people affected with hepatitis C have been asking for? It's a compensation package that your government has promised for a few years — deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, Vicki Lissel and others who have hepatitis C don't want to hear any more excuses like the minister just gave. They are waiting for this government to take a leadership role. And they're not asking for an excessive windfall; they simply want to ensure that their families have one less worry. Isn't it bad enough, Mr. Speaker, that they have to live each day not knowing how much longer they'll be able to enjoy their families?

Let me remind the minister of Vicki Lissel and others are infected with hepatitis C through no fault of their own. If in fact this government has any compassion left, will the minister please make a commitment to bring forward a compensation package for Vicki Lissel and others — not next week, not next month, and not next year — but start today, Mr. Minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, let me advise the member and the House that people with symptoms of chronic infection hepatitis C today, could have been exposed to other risks as long ago as the early 1960s. The majority of hepatitis C carriers may have been infected years ago before reliable tests were available to screen blood for hepatitis C.

The severity of the disease varies greatly among those who contract hepatitis C. Some experience no significant effect on

health. Some show no symptoms for a number of years. Some may develop complications 10 to 30 years after infection.

Mr. Speaker, the difficulty is there are many reasons why people may have hepatitis C. There are various ways that they come into contact with hepatitis C, and that's the difficulty we have with respect to coming up with the compensation package. The difficulty is proof as to the manner in which someone actually contracted hepatitis C.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been one month since I introduced a private members' Bill that would require liquor outlets to post signs indicating that drinking alcohol could be harmful to the health of an unborn child. Mr. Speaker, this would be a small but positive step towards a treatment of the totally preventable problem of fetal alcohol syndrome.

The Minister of Health indicated at the time that this was too simplistic and promised to bring forward a more complex piece of legislation before the end of this current session. Will the minister stand in the House today and explain when during this session he'll be introducing such a Bill?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I need all the help I can get.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — As I indicated to the member last time — and I do thank the members for their applause — we have established a working group which consists of people across the province, people from the community, and they are developing recommendations with respect to fetal alcohol syndrome. Of course the challenge is prevention. To have prevention, we need education.

I've explained to the member that I've asked the community for input. I have not yet received that. When I receive the recommendations of the community, then we'll be coming forward with the response. But I am going to respect the community, Mr. Speaker. I've asked them for advice. I'm going to wait for their advice, and then we'll proceed accordingly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Indian Land Claims Tax Loss Compensation

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in recent days, we have received a number of letters from rural municipalities concerned about senior governments offloading responsibilities onto them. Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, this government really isn't the government they're concerned with. It's the federal government and its handling of specific Indian land claims.

In 1991, the federal government agreed to pay municipalities 22.5 times the previous year's tax bill in lieu of future taxes that

will be lost on land-claim land. The Liberal government has now reneged on that agreement and is offering to pay just 5 times last year's tax bill. Mr. Speaker, this is grossly unfair and inadequate and will result in local taxpayers paying much higher taxes to make up for the loss of tax base within the municipality.

My question is to the Minister of Indian Affairs. Madam Minister, do you support the SARM's (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) position that Ottawa should honour the 1991 agreement to pay twenty-two and a half times the previous year's taxes, and if so, what steps have you taken to pressure the federal government to live up to its commitment?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll just start by responding to the member that yes, we do support SARM's position and have for a considerable length of time. We do believe that fair tax loss compensation should occur and we've communicated this position directly to the Minister of Indian and Metis Affairs, federally.

As well we've met with SARM several times on this issue and made joint representation. The Minister of Municipal Government and myself has met with the federal Minister of Agriculture from Saskatchewan to urge him to deal with this with his colleagues in Ottawa.

We feel that fair tax loss compensation is a critical issue for rural Saskatchewan. I share the member's concern. There's no doubt that in dealing with the historical problems that the land entitlements are our hope to resolve, that it's really important to do this with everybody in support of the effort.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — A further question, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, as you know, this is a very real problem faced by many municipalities throughout the province. The RM of Golden West, for example, has lost over 10,000 acres of their tax base. This is a huge loss for the remaining ratepayers to pick up to provide services and maintain roads which provide access to both Indian and non-Indian bands, yet only the non-Indian landowners are expected to pay the whole bill, which isn't fair.

Madam Minister, this problem is only going to get bigger as more and more of these land claims are settled in the future. Madam Minister, we would like to send a strong message to Ottawa through a motion of this legislature calling on the federal government to honour their previous commitment.

Madam Minister, we will be moving this motion immediately after question period. Will you support this motion?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well of course we will wait to see the motion but certainly support the intent. One of the things I should mention is first nations are also with us on this issue because they understand the importance of municipalities having a sufficient tax base with which to operate because, as the member points out, they do share services in many instances and live within the same community.

So I guess there would be many people that are concerned about this. And I think what we need to join together to help the federal government understand, is that we are united on this. We do care about it and we'd like to see a resolution to this issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Proposed Four-day School Week

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education. School divisions are trying to deal with big cuts in funding. They're coming up with viable, innovative solutions to meet their fiscal challenges while trying to maintain quality education for our youth.

One such proposal came from Scenic Valley School Division, Madam Minister, where local ratepayers voted 93 per cent in favour of a four-day school week, and that's an impressive percentage in favour.

Madam Minister, last week, while announcing your big consultation process regarding school division amalgamations, you said you would listen to local people to find solutions to education challenges. Well, Madam Minister, here's your chance; 93 per cent of the local ratepayers have voted in favour of a four-day week. They have outlined to you how this proposal will improve educational benefits and save up to \$111,000, this coming week.

Madam Minister, will you listen to those local people? Will you approve this proposal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have received a proposal from Scenic Valley about the possibility of a four-day school week. The proposal came in after the end of April, after the mill rate had already been established by Scenic Valley. We have advised the school division of the requirements for consideration in a revised school year, school-day proposal. And we've indicated that in order to consider their proposal, we would now have to wait till the 1997-1998 school year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, that's an amazingly weak excuse not to let a particular school board save some money and provide better educational opportunities for their kids. The Scenic Valley School Division had their school year approved on April 28, two days before the deadline under The Education Act.

Madam Minister, immediately upon hearing how much you were going to cut back in funding, this school division went to work. They held public meetings in each of the towns affected, sent a package of information home with each of the school children, and sent further information to each ratepayer affected, as well as putting together a comprehensive proposal for you. That's the best opportunity and example of

consultation we'll find in Saskatchewan.

They are asking that you approve this proposal as a pilot project, just like you said you would do in front of the television cameras last week. Madam Minister, will you at least allow the division to test their proposal on a pilot project basis?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, in considering any changes for the school year, we always would have to consider the educational interests of students. What I will say to the member is that this proposal is a departure from our traditional school year, and this proposal does have legal, administrative, and other considerations that the department really does need to take into consideration.

What I can tell the member is that we have struck a committee of our various educational partners to engage in a collaborative process so that we can develop a framework from which we will develop educational policy for the school year of the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Education Funding

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are also for the Minister of Education. Mr. Speaker, communities throughout the province are starting to come to the horrifying realization of what government cuts to school boards mean. Look at the Northern Lakes School Division for example — 2 mill increase to ratepayers; complete elimination of all six vice-principal positions; elimination of bus routes; major cuts to supplies, textbooks, maintenance, and equipment; severe cuts to funding for extracurricular activities and special programs.

Mr. Speaker, this government is set on a path to destroy education in this province. But the minister refused to admit it and insists boards will be receiving more funding. This is incredibly frustrating for the people who are forced to deal with the government cuts.

Will the minister explain why school boards are making these drastic cuts if she has been telling the truth about the funding allocations?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, all the member has to do is look in the budget book that was delivered in this legislature when the Minister of Finance delivered her speech. And what we will see is a \$2 million increase. Educational funding in this province increased from \$353.154 million to \$355.154 million. That represents a \$2 million increase.

Now I know that this member doesn't like that fact. I know that this member wants the public to believe that this government cut funding to education. I can tell the member that the Newfoundland government, Liberal government, cut funding to education. The Nova Scotia government, Liberal government, cut funding to education, as did the Nova Scotia government cut funding.

I could also tell the member that we back-filled every single dollar cut from the federal Liberals in Ottawa. And these, Mr. Speaker, are the facts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, either you do not understand the equalization factor, or you don't know why boards have been asked to contribute \$14 million more. The fact is school boards in this province get their directives from the provincial government.

Madam Minister, Northern Lights was just one example of what's going on. Timberline School Division will see 2.5 jobs lost. Kamsack is losing 3.5 teaching positions. Shamrock will see 3.5 positions cut. Nipawin will lose 2.5. Wadena will cut 1.3 positions. And Northern Lights will cut 7.5 positions. The story is the same across the province, Mr. Speaker.

Madam Minister, it is your government that is forcing boards to make these cuts. This is the same government that promised to create 30,000 new jobs by the year 2000, Mr. Speaker.

Madam Minister, will you please stand up in this House and give some degree of hope to teachers throughout the province who are losing their jobs because of your government's actions?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind the member — and he will know this because he is the former president of the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association — that the funding formula in this province is, for the most part, based upon enrolment. And that member will also know that we saw a decline in enrolment in certain parts of rural Saskatchewan, and obviously that has an impact upon the grant.

But, Mr. Speaker, I do want to say to that member that this government recognizes that it costs more to deliver a rural education in this province, and we recognize it in the funding formula. And if you are a student in rural Saskatchewan, you receive a 25 per cent differential for that school board than if you were a student in urban Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Banks' Proposed Entry into Auto Leasing

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the official opposition has received a large number of calls in recent weeks from car and truck dealers who fear that banks will be allowed to enter into the automobile leasing business. Given the fact that leasing now makes up about a third of the business for new-car retailers in the province, their fears are understandable.

Mr. Speaker, there are about 150 dealerships in Saskatchewan. They employ almost 4,000 people and the annual sales exceed \$1.2 billion. Will the minister in charge of Economic Development tell this House what his government is doing to ensure that these businesses are not placed at risk?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, as minister involved with consumer protection and also working closely with the Saskatchewan Motor Dealers' Association, I would strongly encourage the members opposite to contact their federal counterparts because this issue is actually under great discussion within the federal Liberal caucus, and I think it would be very appropriate for any concerns that you have to be directed that way.

We are in consultation with the Saskatchewan Motor Dealers' Association through officials in the Department of Justice. This is one issue that we have been discussing, but I think all of the issues surrounding the Bank Act are clearly under federal jurisdiction.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, we are prepared to take action. We intend to take a resolution to the next Liberal convention in Ottawa opposing such action.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — We understand that the economic benefits that these dealerships bring . . .

The Speaker: — Order! Order. I'll ask the members of the government side . . . Order . . . and from the official opposition. All members will come to order.

Mr. Gantfoer: — We understand that the economic benefits that these dealerships bring to our communities will be threatened should banks become their direct competition in the retail leasing business.

We have expressed our concerns in a letter to the federal Finance minister, which I'll share, and we are prepared . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — We are prepared to work with this NDP government. Will the minister and his government work with us to protect the interest of these Saskatchewan businesses?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to thank the members opposite for their agreement to work with us on an issue like this. I think if I had the time, which I don't, I would list all the other issues they should be working with us on. But today I'm very pleased that they are going to work with us on this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Northern Housing

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is once again to the Minister of Northern Affairs. The minister knows very well of some of the atrocious conditions of housing for many elders and many people in northern Saskatchewan and throughout the province. A call for a complete inspection of some of the houses and a need for housing for seniors must be

undertaken. There is no doubt that this inspection will show major, major problems in housing many elders in northern Saskatchewan and the rest of the province.

Will the minister commit to doing this study and develop a made-in-Saskatchewan housing strategy and program to help seniors live in decent housing, especially in northern Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, what we don't need is another study. We know the devastating effects of Liberal policy in northern Saskatchewan . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — We know the over \$100 million cuts in education, social services, and health. And, Mr. Speaker, we also know that in social housing, they've completely gone away. We've built the last 15 houses, I mentioned yesterday.

Also in regards to off-reserve Indian people, they have completely neglected their treaty obligations and have no housing, you know, off reserve. So when you look at the policy of the federal government, it is indeed devastating in regards to the North for the children and the elders.

And I would like to get the member to write a letter and send a letter to Chrétien and the other people and the MP (Member of Parliament), and quit the jiggling and do some action in regards to housing in northern Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 93 — An Act respecting the Public Disclosure of Information related to Individuals who Pose a Significant Risk of Serious Harm to Other Persons

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill respecting the Public Disclosure of Information related to Individuals who Pose a Significant Risk of Serious Harm to Other Persons 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.

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

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask leave to move a motion pursuant to rule 46.

The Speaker: — The hon. member has requested leave to introduce a motion under rule 46. I'll ask the hon. member from Moosomin to very briefly describe — order — to very briefly describe to the House the reason why he believes it should be considered in a priority way and also to advise the House of the motion that he wishes to introduce.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Indian Land Claims Tax Loss Compensation

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I stated a few moments ago in question period, SARM and many individual rural municipalities are becoming increasingly concerned about specific land claims.

And the fact that Ottawa has reneged on its commitment to provide municipalities with twenty-two and a half times the previous year's taxes for any land purchased through specific land claims.

Therefore I would move, seconded by the member from Rosthern, that:

This Assembly join with SARM in calling on the federal government to honour its 1991 commitment to treat specific land claims in an equivalent manner to treaty land claims and to provide 22.5 times the previous year's taxes on any land purchased under specific land claims.

And further, that this Assembly transmit transcripts of the debate on this motion to Prime Minister Chrétien and federal Indian Affairs minister, Ron Irwin, for their consideration.

I so move.

The Speaker: — The hon. member from Moosomin has advised the House of a motion he wishes to move under rule 46. Leave is required. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will make my remarks brief today so that other concerned members can add their voice to mine. It was certainly a pleasure the other evening to stand in this Assembly and enter into debate with the Minister of Indian and Native Affairs in this province regarding the issue, and seeking guidance of the province at that time, and assuring the minister that our caucus was more than prepared to work with this government in pursuing this matter with the federal government because of the fact that it creates such a major concern to the people of this province.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, being a rural member — and many of the colleagues in this Assembly come from rural Saskatchewan — we're members, ratepayers, in rural municipalities. And as more and more land is eaten up to honour specific land claims and treaty land entitlement claims, Mr. Speaker, more and more of this land falls out of the jurisdiction of rural municipalities and the ability to levy taxes against that land — that land on which taxes were raised for a number of years.

And these taxes were put towards services that were offered by rural municipalities to their residents, such as providing a road service or providing health or even educational services.

And, Mr. Speaker, as we hear SARM, the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, and many local municipalities — especially those who are being seriously and

significantly affected by this lack of inaction by the federal government at this time — it becomes a major concern.

Because what happens at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, is those individual ratepayers left remaining or living in a municipality are — and fewer and fewer acres — are then left to pay a bigger and bigger or a larger portion of the tax, carry the tax burden in those municipalities.

So I believe it's very important that this Assembly, in view of the fact that so much of this land settlement claim is involved in Saskatchewan, that a lot of the land treaty . . . treaty land entitlement lands are involved in this province, affect rural municipalities. And in that case, Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge that the federal government have agreed to a compensation package.

But the specific land claims is the issue that is really coming to the forefront as more and more land is being picked up by Indians on reserves in order to settle specific land claims. And there has been no agreement thus far that would acknowledge the seriousness of the reduction from twenty-two and a half times the last tax assessment to five times.

Mr. Speaker, any RM, any rural administrator — and the rural administrators were meeting in the city just this past week — will tell you that when you're reduced from twenty-two and a half times to five, that that dollar becomes a pittance in regards to the cost to providing the services.

And I would like to just read a bit of a portion of a letter that we received from one RM. And this is what the letter says:

It is not up to the local taxpayers to pay the debts owed to Indian people by the Government of Canada. This is in fact what will occur if sufficient compensation is not made to municipalities for the loss of assessment.

Services still have to be provided to the lands given reserve status as the land is being purchased on a checkerboard basis, which results in small parcels here and there. The municipality still has to provide roads to the lands.

The amount of compensation that is currently being offered to municipalities by the federal government is an insult. Five times the previous year's municipal tax will run out in a very short time.

Mr. Speaker, that is just one of many letters that we have received in our office. And I'm sure that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and certainly the Minister of Indian and Native Affairs in this province has also received copies of these letters that have been sent by rural municipalities to the federal minister bringing this problem to their attention.

And so we want this Assembly, and we've asked the government to . . . and indicated to the government and to the members involved that we're more than willing. I think it's time that this Assembly show the municipalities in this province that we are more than willing to get behind them and to back them in their lobby to the federal government to meet this need. Because as I said earlier, while it becomes a problem to the

ratepayers of the province, it also becomes the problem to taxpayers in general in this province.

Mr. Speaker, on many occasions I have written — myself personally — to the federal minister, Mr. Ron Irwin, and, Mr. Speaker, so far the responses coming back have been anything but positive. In fact they haven't been very supportive whatsoever. And I am sure that even as the minister acknowledged today, at meetings that they have had with the federal minister, I'm sure they're beginning to feel a little somewhat discouraged at the inaction and the way the minister has been dealing with this problem. It's almost as if: well you're from Saskatchewan; you're so far out west. Saskatchewan really isn't a very big player on the federal scene; it really doesn't matter to us. That's your problem down the road.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the problem is not ours. The problem is the federal government's for not having honoured years and years ago these treaty land entitlements and making sure that all of those entitlements were agreed to. That problem is going to become a provincial problem when it should not be, ought not to be.

(1430)

And that's why it is very important that the members of this Assembly stand in their places today and move that everyone agree, and we move this motion indicating that we are in support of our local governments, our local ratepayers, the taxpayers across this province, telling the federal government that they have a responsibility and it's time they lived up to that responsibility. And it certainly would be fair, Mr. Speaker, for them to honour the Swain agreement which was calculated at 22.5 times the previous year's municipal taxes.

What's worse, Mr. Speaker, is that the federal government has threatened to unilaterally declare reserve status even though an agreement has not been reached. And, Mr. Speaker, this is completely unacceptable. The federal government has paid tax-loss compensation to rural municipalities for treaty land entitlement which amounts to twenty-two and a half times the previous year's taxes. Why not on specific land claims?

Mr. Speaker, the tax loss is the same for municipalities in both cases. So why isn't the compensation the same?

One way or another, Mr. Speaker, rural roads must be kept up, services must be provided on or off specific land-claims land. Twenty-two and a half is the minimum required to adequately compensate municipalities for the tax-loss revenue that is necessary to continue to provide the services that are demanded from municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, if the federal government does not live up to its agreement, what will be the result? Local taxpayers will be left to make up for the shortfall lost through specific land claims, and they shouldn't be.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) in this Assembly to stand up for Saskatchewan municipalities and support the following motion, seconded by my colleague from Rosthern:

That this Assembly join with the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities in calling on the federal government to honour its 1991 commitment to treat specific land claims in an equivalent manner to treaty land claims, and to provide 22.5 times the previous year's taxes on any land purchased under specific land claims.

And further, that this Assembly transmit copies or transcripts of the debate on this motion to Prime Minister Chrétien and federal Indian Affairs minister, Ron Irwin, for their consideration.

I so move.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue of great concern to municipalities across the province. Difficulties that municipalities are experiencing just seem to mount on a daily basis, and it's important to note that our debate here has nothing to do . . . or does not discourage specific land claims, of process in general. It doesn't address that issue and was not intended to address that issue.

These are long-outstanding injustices to our native people, and these claims are fair and just compensation to them. However, when resolving disputes in a civil society, we must try to reach a balance. Two wrongs do not make a right. In making our best efforts to be fair to native people, we should not be committing another injustice on another group in society, and that is what is happening with these two different rates of adjustment.

Yet this is clearly what the federal Liberal government is doing. It is not the Indian bands who are undermining the municipalities. It is the federal government that is doing so through its heavy-handed, duplicitous, and unfair approach to negotiating with municipalities.

We've heard a lot in the House over the years about the critical need to restore the public's faith in government. The federal Liberals haven't apparently received that particular message. Time and again the Liberals have shown their willingness to mislead the public. On a larger, national level we have seen them break their word to voters over their solemn vow to eliminate the GST (goods and services tax) and this is just another thing that's been added to that.

It is significant to remember the words of Sheila Copps when she was pressed over her promise to resign. She said, I can't be held responsible for some loose-lipped promise during an election. Well it seems here is another loose-lipped promise and I think someone needs to be held responsible for this one as well.

This is a depressing commentary on the contempt with which the federal Liberals hold voters — promise them anything during the election and don't worry about actually keeping your word. This attitude has reared its ugly head here again with the specific land claims issue. The Swain agreement of 1991 bound the government to pay municipalities 22.5 times the assessment on lands sold through specific land claims.

But the federal attitude is that this is just some broken promise

— promises can be broken and loose lips will continue to wag. The federal Liberals have the gall to call the new formula fair and reasonable. It is simply impossible to understand how they can make this assertion, and call this fair and reasonable when it's okay to go ahead and pay back 22.5 per cent on one area of land claims and not on this one. If it's fair on one, it's fair on both.

If it is fair under TLE (treaty land entitlements), why isn't it fair under specific land claims? Even a minor variation could perhaps be understandable, if for example the federal government had reduced the rate to 20 times the assessment or something in that vicinity.

The new rate of 5 times assessment is just bizarre. It is nowhere even in the ballpark. If what this money is supposed to do is be part of a fund from which municipalities can draw to make up the losses of revenue, there is no way that 5 times the assessment makes up any kind of a fund that becomes anywheres near addressing the problems and the shortfalls that are there.

If anything, the needs of municipalities under specific land claims are even more important than those affected by treaty land entitlements. Specific land claims are not being purchased in large blocks of land, but rather comprise a parcel here and a parcel there. And this creates a situation in which the problems that RMs have to face as they're operating their systems are much greater than they were before.

Specific land claims are not being purchased in large blocks. Under TLE many roads and infrastructure systems would be transferred directly to the control of the bands, thus taking financial pressure off of the affected RMs. Under specific land claims, the RMs will still be on the hook for roads connecting the scattered parcels.

But this is not just an issue of convenience or administration for the municipalities. It is fundamentally a taxpayer issue and an issue of tax fairness. Through the upcoming reassessment process and through the offloading being endured by municipal governments, local taxpayers are already going to see their property taxes rise dramatically over the next few years. So the SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency) situation creates a problem for the RMs.

Along come the situation with the Crow rate being gone, increased use of roadways, the highways, so the RMs have a problem there of keeping up the roads. When we add to this another situation, and that is that the funding that they receive has been decreased, the situation that RMs find themselves in becomes totally impossible. This move by the federal Liberals will dramatically worsen this already grave situation. The RMs will be forced to turn to non-native population to pick up the burden caused by this unfair settlement.

Mr. Speaker, the tax burden that this will cause will make some areas virtually unliveable. We have in this province reached a point where businesses and individuals have become so overtaxed that many have concluded it just doesn't make any sense to continue to live and operate a business here. And when we're concerned about opportunities in Saskatchewan, we're

concerned about rural Saskatchewan and its population. This is just a number of more nails in the coffin, not just one. Now many rural residents will find their land taxes so outrageous that it will be uneconomical to operate even the most prosperous farms.

Mr. Speaker, this move by the federal Liberals will lead to further devastation and depopulation of our rural areas. For those residents left in the affected RMs, it will mean substandard municipal services and an overall decline in the quality of life, which has always been one of the main drawing cards of rural Saskatchewan.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, although this is a relatively touchy subject, it should also be noted that this will also lead to ethnic tensions in our rural areas, as residents see their taxes go through the roof in order to subsidize native land claims which, in this case, the problem belongs totally to the federal government.

The serious implications of this situation cannot be overstated. I would urge all members to send a powerful message to the federal Liberal government by supporting this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would also join the third party. In being a past reeve, I know how difficult this is with the land that is being purchased by Indian bands and then taken out of, removed from, the assessment that would be taxable and the people left within these RMs are left to pick up the tab. Ratepayers left in the RMs will have to pick up the whole cost of services such as building roads, maintaining roads, fire protection, and it just goes on and on. The more land that the Indian bands buy up, the bigger the problem is created for the people that are left. So in that respect we join with the third party and the members opposite, if they see fit to join also.

It is hard for me to understand, as a past reeve, and when I was the reeve that . . . how the federal government could in the first wisdom commit twenty-two and a half times the assessment and feel that that was needed to adequately cover the replacement for taxation that was lost for the treaty land entitlement, and now the second time around, they're offering 5.5 times and considering this was fair.

Being involved in council, there was no rhyme or reason for this at all. When 22.5 times is invested by SARM, as it is in this case, it is adequate to replace the lost taxes. But, Mr. Speaker, 5.5 times doesn't even come close to covering what we would need and RMs would need to go on from there.

So all I really have to say, Mr. Speaker, is that we would join any initiative of the third party and the members opposite, if they see so fit to join, and put pressure on the federal government to compensate all Indian land purchases at the first 22.5 times, including both specific land claims and the treaty land entitlement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to note this rare moment in the House when we're all in unity on this particular issue. And that, I guess, illustrates what an

important issue it is for all of us in rural Saskatchewan.

The matter of the specific claims — I just want to make sure for any members who might not totally understand the difference between specific claims and treaty land entitlements.

Specific claims are just between the federal government and first nations. They arise in situations where the federal government wrongly took reserve land from a first nation, which is different from the treaty land entitlement, in which the province is obliged to provide Crown land to the federal government to help them meet their obligations to first nations, promised through the treaties. So the significance of this issue crossing partisan boundaries suggests that people are very concerned about this issue being resolved.

We had a memorandum of understanding on specific claims that established a steering committee consisting of the secretary of Indian and Metis Affairs Secretariat, the regional director of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, to address provincial and municipal issues arising from the creation of new reserves through specific claims. However as was suggested, this is an issue that has moved off of what we felt to be the original agreement.

Despite the best efforts, senior officials from the Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Affairs Secretariat, myself, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, SARM, have been unable to get any movement on this issue from the federal government. Now we understand the kind of problem it creates for them because of course Saskatchewan is not the only place where these problems exist. And there would probably be some possibility of being some kind of an equivalent solution as opposed to being very hard-nosed about it being an identical solution to the treaty land entitlement issue, because of course our final objective is to help get sufficient infrastructure support to the municipalities to address the kinds of issues that the former two speakers have raised.

So I do think it's good that the members of this House will send a united message. Perhaps all the voices in unison will be able to be heard. And I just want to end today by indicating my support for the motion. And perhaps we would have to sit down subsequently and talk about whether there is further efforts we might make in unity on this issue. So thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1445)

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments on the motion that is presented today in the Assembly. I think the key thing when we stand up and speak on this issue, every effort of helping Saskatchewan communities must be made. And this effort of course is no different. We feel that if there is a legitimate claim to a certain agreement, then we must make sure we follow through with it with those type of resolutions.

I think the key thing that was raised in one of the points here was the issue of ethnic tensions. And I think from the

perspective of being an aboriginal person, I think it's very important that we realize the first thing we must do is you must consult with the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) on matters of this nature, just to make them aware that this is not an anti-Indian move.

And we must also consult with them and to advise them that we understand fiduciary and of course the treaty land entitlement obligations that the senior federal government owes to the first nations. And of course the history is there and there's many legal documentation that certainly justifies their position that they were owed land and that the land should go to them.

And I don't believe that this particular issue deals with that. I think this issue — as long as we understand that nothing in this motion or nothing in the effort of the Conservative Party to promote ethnic tensions is being undertaken in this Bill — then certainly it would be in our interest to support that effort.

Again I talk about obligations; I talk about helping out Saskatchewan communities; I talk about understanding and respecting each other; and I think every first nation member across this province certainly wishes to do that.

The real issue here — and I want to make it clear from the perspective that I understand — is that there has been some disagreement on the compensation of tax loss, from 22 times to 5 times, the federal government's making back to the RMs. And if that's the case then certainly we have to make every effort to support that particular argument.

I urge all people involved, the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, and the NDP Party, to make every effort to stay on top of this issue, deal with the FSIN, consult with them, and make them fully aware of the impact and the potential for this Bill to help all Saskatchewan residents out. If this Bill — or this motion — does not in any way, shape, or form hamper the efforts of the first nations; if this Bill does not in any way, shape, or form penalize the first nations as a result of their settlement and of their obligations owed to them; if this motion does in no way, shape, or form threaten the integrity and the right to self-govern among the first nations, then certainly myself as an aboriginal member of this House will support that.

I think the RMs certainly have a case here. They have a tremendous amount of responsibility to fulfil. We heard the member from Saltcoats indicate the incredible amount of work that they do for their people and for their area.

And the key thing here is again, I cannot stress the degree of cooperation and consultation that must be undertaken. And I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that many people in the first nations community would probably end up supporting this — saying that yes, if there is ways and means that we can bridge the gap of misunderstanding between all of our peoples, then certainly every effort must be undertaken to assure the province of Saskatchewan of that.

So again, in reference to this particular motion, I see nothing significantly wrong with it and certainly I support it as well. Thank you.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't really anticipating getting into this debate today, but it seems appropriate that we should because there's so much at stake for rural Saskatchewan.

I want to first of all thank the member from Athabasca for straightening out some of the misunderstandings that certainly could have gone with this particular kind of an effort, because obviously our intent here is to discuss the obligations for treaty settlements, not in terms of what those obligations are but as a result of what is going to happen after the fact.

We do not want to enter into a discussion at this point about those obligations. Realistically though, when those obligations are fulfilled, as they have been, there are always repercussions on the next parties involved. Things sort of run downhill like water out on the prairies these days.

I want to say that it's very important, Mr. Speaker, because, as I've spent some time recently out in the country talking to farmers and ranchers who have gone through one of the toughest and longest winters that they've had in a long time, and now a very tough and wet spring, the analogy comes to mind that it's a lot like a farmer carrying a logging chain over his two shoulders as he plods through the mud to his tractor to try to pull out a rig that's stuck in the mud. That chain probably weighs about 75 or 100 pounds, and now you've added another 50 pounds of mud to that chain, and it becomes even that much harder to drag along.

And this is the situation that our municipalities are finding themselves in. They're being downloaded upon by every segment of our society, and as they struggle to try to survive and to continue to provide the services and the goods that they've provided in the past, this chain becomes ever more loaded with more mud and becomes heavier around their neck and drags them down even further.

And this is yet another pound of mud added to that load, as we watch the federal government attempt to manipulate and to contrive different ways of wiggling out of their share of the responsibilities that they had promised to take forward in their alluding to these problems in past days when the elections, of course, were closer at hand and it seemed more important to appear to be generous than it does now, after the fact. The elections soon are over and the promises are soon forgotten. And it's too bad, but it certainly is seeming to be more and more that way, Mr. Speaker.

And so we would say to the federal government that wiggling and manipulating and contriving methods of downloading your responsibilities from 22 per cent to 5 per cent is unacceptable, and we in this province have recognized that's exactly what you're doing, and we're saying so. And we're saying so loud and clear. We know it. We understand it.

And we're pointing our finger this time at Ottawa, and we're saying get your act in . . . get yourselves shaped up. Get back into reality here. Don't try to pull the wool over our eyes any longer. We want what is fair and what is right and what is proper.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, just very briefly, that when this kind

of a downloading attack comes on rural Saskatchewan once again, there are all kinds of implications that have to be dealt with and have to be considered.

We've just recently heard that the municipalities are going to be downloaded on with 25 per cent cuts in a lot of their transfer payments for next year from federal to provincial.

We find our municipalities plagued by other problems — the rail line abandonments are definitely now a reality. We're within five or six years of some very significant problems that are going to happen out in rural Saskatchewan as a result of the changes to our infrastructure and the loads that are being transported.

We're seeing SAMA as a major, major contributor to the problems that municipalities are suffering. This major contribution of problems is going to come in part through the changes that we're listening to and hearing about. Those changes such as the corporate windfalls that our oil and gas industries are going to experience as a result of the changes.

And, Mr. Speaker, these are all things that add to that pile on the camel's back. The straw that breaks the camel's back has to be coming very close. And what is it really all about? What are all these cuts to the RMs really all about? What are they going to result in?

Is it going to result in the forced amalgamation of municipalities because there are no more people left? Will it be a forced amalgamation of municipalities because they will no longer be able to sustain the load of responsibilities and no longer will have the money to work with? Will it cause amalgamation simply because there's no other way that you can handle all of the red tape and bookwork of manipulating all of these problems except to have master computers in the big city handling and pumping out all of the information that needs to be assembled? Do we have million-dollar computers sitting in Regina ready to take over all of the rural infrastructure?

These questions all come back to mind, Mr. Speaker, and we've heard them all before. But yet again we find ourselves in a situation where rural municipalities are being unloaded on from atop and from afar now, as well as from nearby. And even though the problem comes from further away, it is no less important. And it is no less important that our provincial government also listen to the lesson that is being discussed here today.

Because as surely as they have alluded to the fact that they will join us in this effort, as surely as they would do that, they must understand that their own downloading is causing exactly the same effects on rural people and on rural municipalities. Now it is no greater a sin from Ottawa to download on rural people in Saskatchewan than it is for our own provincial government to do the very same thing through another context, through another variation.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I think we have to look at this as a very important issue that needs to be dealt with in itself, and will be, and we are glad to hear that the other two parties are going to support this initiative. But we would also extend the olive

branch one step further in the hope that the provincial government will now accept the challenge of recognizing the needs and the concerns of rural Saskatchewan and also cut back on some of their cut-backs that they are passing on to rural municipalities as well.

And so we thank them for their support, Mr. Speaker.

The division bells rang from 2:57 p.m. until 3:05 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 41

Van Mulligen	Mitchell	MacKinnon
Lingenfelter	Shillington	Atkinson
Tchorzewski	Johnson	Goulet
Kowalsky	Crofford	Renaud
Calvert	Pringle	Koenker
Trew	Bradley	Lorje
Teichrob	Nilson	Stanger
Hamilton	Murray	Langford
Wall	Ward	Sonntag
Flavel	Thomson	Osika
Aldridge	McLane	Draude
McPherson	Bjornerud	Julé
Krawetz	Gantfoer	Toth
Heppner	Goohsen	

Nays — nil

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that the records show that this vote was *nemine contradicente*.

The Speaker: — *Nemine contradicente*.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — We will convert question no. 94.

The Speaker: — The question no. 94 is converted to motions for returns (debatable).

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — We table the answer to question no. 95.

The Speaker: — The answer to question no. 95 is tabled.

MOTIONS FOR RETURNS (Not Debatable)

The Speaker: — The motion for return is converted to motions for returns (debatable).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 92 — An Act respecting Elections

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to speak today, and at the end of my remarks I will be moving second reading of The Election Act, 1996.

Canadians all realize how privileged they are to live in one of the world's great democracies. And we are all conscious of the fact that the price of democracy is vigilance to ensure that our democracy remains in good working order and that any circumstances which impede the operation — the smooth operation — of the democracy are addressed and resolved.

If you reflect on the nature of democracy, Mr. Speaker, you are able to easily identify a large number of principles. You're able to identify basic values. And you're able to identify institutions that, taken together, form the heart and soul, the bone, the muscle of our democracy. And at the root of it all — at the root of it all — is the right of the people to go to the ballot box and vote for a representative of their own choosing to represent them in an Assembly such as this.

That is a fundamental right upon which all of the institutions and all of the principles that I referred to earlier are based. The right of the people to vote is a fundamental principle and it is given expression in The Election Act of this province, this country, and all of the jurisdictions in this country.

We have not revisited our election law since 1971. We have amended it on two occasions in material respects, but we have not done a revision of the Act in a comprehensive way since 1971. So, Mr. Speaker, it is high time we did.

And this Bill that I speak to today, all 172 pages of it, represents the product of over a year's work by various officials and by various members of this Assembly in order to bring our election law up to date and to ensure that our citizens' basic democratic right to vote for their representatives is made as accessible and meaningful and true and honest as it is possible to do.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that this Bill represents the result of an intensive process of consultation with my colleagues in the official opposition, with my colleagues in the third party, with the independent member, and of course with colleagues on this side of the House. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that in my 10 years of experience in this House, the level of consultation here is unprecedented, and the cooperative spirit with which these various issues were faced and were resolved is also unprecedented. And I want to express publicly my gratitude, the gratitude of the government, for the approach that the two opposition parties took to the consultation process that have resulted in the tabling of this Bill.

I want to just go beyond that and mention a few of the members who went above and beyond their normal responsibilities in order to produce this piece of legislation. From the government caucus, the member for Saskatoon Northwest, Chair of the caucus committee, spent so many hours on this, Mr. Speaker, that it is mind-boggling. I might also mention, as stalwart workers on the project, my seat-mate from Regina Victoria, the member for Regina Coronation Park, the member for Meadow Lake, and the member for Regina Wascana Plains. Now as

usual when you're singling people out, you probably overlooked somebody, but those are the names that occur to me as I stand here.

And from the official opposition, the Leader of the Opposition, the member from Melville; and the House Leader, the member for Wood River, were very cooperative, came to lengthy meetings and participated in very constructive discussions about this Act.

While I'm talking about the official opposition, I might mention their Liberal provincial party and Emmet Reidy and his staff who also contributed to the discussion and debate.

From the third party, the member from Moosomin was the main contact, as well as the Leader of the Third Party, the member from Kindersley; and the staff of the provincial Conservative Party, Tom Lukiwski and his staff. All of these people worked together, Mr. Speaker, in a collaborative, cooperative way in order to produce the Bill that is before the House today.

Now having said all that, we do not have perfect unanimity on all the provisions. Each of the two opposition parties have a major reservation about the Bill. And they will, in due course, no doubt be bringing that to your attention, Mr. Speaker. But apart from the one issue in the case of each of the parties, we were able to obtain a consensus with respect to the . . . we were able to obtain agreement with respect to the provisions of the Act.

What we have tried to do in this Act, Mr. Speaker, is to draw on the collective experience of all of us working under the old legislation. Many of the people in this Chamber have had a great deal of experience in elections and have encountered problems with the Act. These were identified and we set about trying to rectify them, trying to make the system work better.

(1515)

We also were acutely conscious of the fact that the old Act was not user-friendly in any sense of the term. You could take almost any kind of a simple question and find yourself referring to two or three or four sections of the Act contained in different parts of the Act. And it was confusing, far from clear, and difficult to work with. We have in this Bill attempted to remedy that problem. We've attempted to produce a piece of legislation that is user-friendly.

We think we have here a piece of legislation which, in answer to a question that a campaign worker may have, will produce an immediate answer by referring them to a section number or a page number and the answer ought to be right there. No longer will it be necessary for people to work their way through the Act to try and ensure that they've found all of the sections which may be relevant to a particular problem that they have encountered.

The themes of the Act that we all discussed and tried to keep in mind as this went along were, first of all, democratic reform — which is the thrust of my remarks so far — to ensure that the Act promotes the fundamental principles of democracy, ensures that the right to vote is a right that is accessible, that can be

exercised, where circumstances don't accidentally deprive someone of their right to vote. And I think we've gone great lengths in achieving substantial improvement in the accessibility of the right to vote for the people of our province no matter what their circumstances.

I intend to just refer to a number of those principles a little later on in my remarks, Mr. Speaker, but at this point I just want to say that that was one of the guiding principles that was on all of our minds as we approached this question.

The second theme was the question of accountability, and it was the intention of all of us to ensure that there was increased accountability for all of the people in the system, all the way from the Chief Electoral Officer, through the candidates, to the business managers of the various campaigns, to the provincial parties, and so on. And I think we have made substantial improvements to the Act in that respect.

The third theme that we gave expression to were to enunciate clearer rules respecting expenditures — the expenditures that would be included in calculating the amount of money spent in individual campaigns and clearer rules respecting the entitlement to rebate for election expenses. We have tried as much as is possible to remove discretionary elements from the Act and ensure that the Act itself, without the benefit of anyone's interpretation, will define whether or not an expense is or is not rebatable, is or is not to be included in the maximum expenditure limits.

Those were the three themes, Mr. Speaker. I now want to turn to some of the principles that have been addressed in the Act. And I will briefly refer to some of the most important ones.

In the election of 1995, members will recall that there were forest fires across northern Saskatchewan, and a large number of people were involved in fighting those forest fires. And it turned out that for many of them they found themselves going into the fire before any advance poll opened, not to return to their homes until after the election was over. And the system was powerless to give them a right to vote. Now that was unacceptable to all parties in this legislature and there are provisions in the Bill that address that problem and ensure that, through mobile polls, the Chief Electoral Officer will be able to ensure that people in those circumstances have a right to vote.

We have expanded the concept of absentee ballots from what has been in the Act for some years, with respect, for example, to people in hospitals, to cover all manner of circumstances where people find themselves away from home on election day.

I think as I say that of the people in Sandy Bay in 1995 who, because of a forest fire threat to their community, were evacuated and were in Saskatoon on election day. Under the provisions of the old law there was no way in which those people could cast a ballot that could be counted in that election; they were disenfranchised. They were done so through circumstances entirely beyond their control. This Act, through the technique of an absentee ballot, will remedy that situation.

We have, all of us, encountered situations where a disabled person in a wheelchair is unable to get into a polling station because, no matter how hard we try, there are some polling

stations in this province in each election which are not wheelchair accessible. We have resolved that problem by provisions that will allow the ballot box to be taken out to the individual voter who is in a wheelchair.

I want to mention one other thing, Mr. Speaker, that is a substantial departure in principle from what previously has been the law of this province, and that is the preparation of voters' lists. All of us have experienced the enumeration that goes on after an election writ is dropped and I'll briefly describe it; although as I do so, I know that we're all aware of it.

A lot of people hit the street enumerating. And for about two weeks there is a frenetic — a frenetic level of activity in all the constituencies of this province as they attempt to cobble together a voters' list. The political parties in the meantime are waiting impatiently for this list because so much of the election campaign activity depends upon the presence of a voters' list. And so that's usually not available until the campaign is about half over.

And the system doesn't work to the satisfaction of everyone. We wind up with lists that are unsatisfactory and incomplete. It's not through the fault of anybody; it's just the pressure of time produces that result.

And at the same time we, in our campaigns, are hobbled, are disadvantaged by the fact that we don't have information available to us which is necessary for us to properly conduct our campaign.

The principle that we have embedded in this Act, Mr. Speaker, is that the Chief Electoral Officer, in consultation with all parties in the legislature, may conduct an enumeration outside the period of the writ. And it is our thought that that would be done in advance of an election period so that, say, if an election is foreseen to be in June of '99 or thereafter, theoretically an enumeration could be conducted in March of '99.

And that could be conducted at a more leisurely pace, in a more thorough way, with a more complete briefing of enumerators, and produce a voters' list that is of higher quality than the one we now get; with time to conduct the revisions and the reviews that are necessary in order to have a good voters' list available to the political parties at the time that the writ is dropped.

We also look forward to the day, Mr. Speaker, when voters' lists will be generated in a different way. Not to say that enumeration won't take place, but enumeration can be supplemented by all sorts of other data which lies in databases throughout this province, throughout this country. And wherever possible, I believe we will see access to those databases in order to confirm and supplement and ensure the correctness and the thoroughness of the voters' lists on the basis of which an election is held.

There are many other provisions in the Bill, Mr. Speaker, and it wouldn't be appropriate for me to go into detail during the second reading speech, but we may have an opportunity to discuss some of those in committee.

I want to say one thing, however, and it is that there is in this

Bill a provision for tax credit for political contributions. These provisions are exactly the same as the existing provisions which now exist on the national level. They are not to be proclaimed, Mr. Speaker, and I want to say this on the record: they are not — those provisions are not — to be proclaimed unless and until the federal government repeals the federal provisions.

And if that happens, we think there is a great value to the tax credit system for political contributions, and we want to have legislation ready for proclamation at the provincial level in the event that the federal provisions are repealed. But I want to say again that we do not intend to implement or to proclaim those sections so long as the federal law continues in effect.

So I want to say, Mr. Speaker, in closing, that I believe we offer to this Assembly a piece of legislation which does the job that is required of it. I believe that in consequence our democracy in this province is strengthened because the right to vote has been safeguarded and indeed promoted in the way that I have described, and because the rules are stated in a more clear, more precise manner, not subject to interpretation but spelled out in such a way that everybody will be able to understand what the rules are.

I want to say again, Mr. Speaker, how grateful I and my colleagues are for the level of collaboration and cooperation that we received from the official opposition and from the third party as work on this Bill progressed.

It is my honour, Mr. Speaker, to move second reading of The Election Act, 1996.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, obviously Bill No. 92 is a very long and detailed piece of legislation, so after some brief remarks today I'll be asking for adjournment so that we can have more time to study the Bill in its entirety.

Mr. Speaker, The Election Act has not been updated in a quarter of a century and so we believe it is time to make some much-needed changes in the Act. Most of the changes contained in Bill 92 we are in full support of. Obviously the right to cast a ballot in a general election is the cornerstone of our democracy and anything we can do to make the act of voting more convenient for people should be applauded.

The notion of absentee ballots and mobile polls I believe is a good one since it will give more people a greater opportunity to have their say as we elect our government. And, Mr. Speaker, as the member from Saskatoon Fairview pointed out, allowing the establishment of polls in emergency situations such as we have seen last year with the fire-fighters up North who were unable to vote, or the residents of communities threatened by the fire, and who were also unable to vote, is a move in the right direction.

Any changes that prevent such situations from occurring should be roundly applauded, Mr. Speaker. As well, I like the fact that there is some modernization of the Act. The new Act gives a nod to the advent of computerized technologies that simply did not exist in the early 1970s. It simply did not make sense not to allow these technologies to be used.

As well, we like the idea of enumeration outside of the writ period and the movements towards the establishment of a permanent voters' list. This will not only ensure the accuracy of the voters' list, it will also, I believe, save money in the long run.

(1530)

Mr. Speaker, the official opposition does have some concerns with The Election Act however. One of our gravest concerns comes from the clause that allows Crown corporations to advertise during election campaigns. While the Minister of Post-Secondary Education's reasoning behind the move makes sense, I believe the clause leaves this or future governments open to abuse the Act. I think this portion has to be tightened up.

Yes, we realize our Crowns are in a competitive world, but we must also ensure our electoral process remains absolutely fair. As we've seen with past governments in this province, when you give some politicians an inch they sometimes try to take a mile. So I don't want to see that that . . . I want to see that that doesn't happen. So we'll vigorously debate against that clause.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill also tries to clear up some of the confusion related to election-related expenses. I don't think any of the members of the House would disagree that the provisions in the current Act are confusing and are hard to follow. This has led to some great delays in election refunds to some candidates. I think clearing up these provisions will be a big help.

We were however disappointed to see the government did not take our suggestion to allow election-related expenses incurred outside of the writ period to be eligible for the refund. This would not cost the taxpayers any more money since the allowable limit would remain the same, but it would remove some of the imbalance that currently exists in our system. We believe the current system, that allows only those expenses incurred during the election period, to favour sitting members of the legislature. Therefore, it favours the governing party.

Mr. Speaker, like I said, this is a long and very detailed Bill. The remarks I have offered today only touch on a few aspects of the Bill. We'll have more to say at a later date once we have a chance to study the Bill closer. And now, Mr. Speaker, I move we adjourn debate on Bill 92.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 38

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by Hon. Mr. Anguish that **Bill No. 38 — An Act to amend The Power Corporation Act** be now read a second time.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure you are aware, we have already spoken at length on this Bill. In our previous speeches, we have addressed many of the issues that will have a significant impact on the people of this province. After further consultations, we have not changed our stand.

This Bill includes provisions which are quite simply bad for the people of Saskatchewan. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the more Bills that this government brings forward, the more we are concerned that they are making a calculated grab for control. From the municipal Acts, which put more power in the hands of the minister, to this Bill which gives SaskPower employees more power, this government seems bent on taking control.

I guess this is one instance where the socialist roots still run deep, Mr. Speaker. They certainly don't exist in most of the NDP government's policies. They certainly aren't evident when this government shuts hospitals, cuts back on funding to school boards, and continue to watch thousands of children forced to live in poverty.

Compassion is a foreign concept to this government. It's a word they pretend to understand, but their actions show indifference at best. According to the members opposite, the sick, the elderly, and the children of this province can be casually tossed aside, all in the names of fiscal restraint.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess you'd have to call these New Democrats selectively socialist. They only revert back to the left-wing views when they see a chance to grasp power, and Bill 38 is one of those chances.

Mr. Speaker, as we have previously pointed out, this Bill gives SaskPower employees virtually unlimited access to Saskatchewan households — unlimited, unlimited access. I wonder if the members opposite have even considered what this will mean. Think about it. How would they feel if they came home one night and discovered that a SaskPower employee had been in their house without permission? I think I can answer that — violated. That's how they would feel. And that's how the people of this province will feel, Mr. Speaker.

It's time that this government started to think about people. It's time for them to extend their limited vision to encompass people. It's time they saw the consequences of every short-sighted decision they make.

Mr. Speaker, it's time they realized that being elected government is not the same thing as being elected God. As we know, that position is already filled and I'm sure it's not filled by someone of the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, I'm always curious about the relationship between Jack Messer and this NDP government. There seems to be a whole separate set of rules for SaskPower and I wonder if that's because Mr. Messer pulls the strings behind the scenes. Is this Bill something the NDP brought forward because Mr. Messer decided things needed to change? Because, Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that I can't see any other way that members opposite would have agreed to bring this piece of legislation into this House.

Mr. Speaker, the government can stand up and say that the provisions in this Bill that allow SaskPower employees to enter residences without permission would only be used in emergency situations. And I would like to think that that is probably true. Still, the Bill lists a whole number of circumstances that would also let SaskPower employees enter our houses without permission.

This is where this Bill gets particularly scary. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite should think about this for awhile. Our police don't even have that right. And our police are likely faced with far more circumstances that would warrant this power. But the people want a right to privacy and the police and our criminal law respects this. Is this government so arrogant that it thinks it can vote in legislation that infringes on the right to privacy?

And the other thing I find particularly ironic is the provision in this Bill that allows SaskPower to cut off electrical services if a bill is even 10 days overdue. This from a government who is still struggling to get out from under a \$14 billion debt. Mr. Speaker, 10 days is a ridiculous time limit. What about people who have gone on a two-week vacation and are unlucky enough to have had the bill arrive while they were away? Is it fair for them to come back to a house without power?

It looks like we're back to the compassionate issue again, Mr. Speaker. Once again the government has chosen to treat people like they are nothing more than a set amount of money. While people in this province are desperately searching for job security and full-time, decent-paying jobs, this government has decided to concern itself with power bills. I think it's a sad reflection of this government's priorities.

Instead of looking for ways to create meaningful employment and to live up to the promises made in their Speech from the Throne they choose to pump up their control in provincial legislation. Instead of looking for a better way to maintain health care and education they are voting in changes to make Jack Messer happy. I ask the members opposite, where are your priorities?

Mr. Speaker, it's not just SaskPower employees who are given extra authority. The cabinet gets to play God too. If the members opposite agree to ram this Bill through, the cabinet will have the right to enter anyone's property or to give this authority to any SaskPower employee. What a scary thought.

Mr. Speaker, the government's job, whether they admit it or not, is to represent the people, not to repress them. Saskatchewan people are not puppets. They do not expect nor deserve a government that pulls the strings and talks for them. People want to be heard.

When will this government figure that out? Isn't it enough that they heard people throughout this province protest unilateral rate hikes last fall? Isn't it enough that people continue to criticize their expensive, regressive Crown tendering policies? Isn't it enough that over 100,000 people have signed petitions to protest the closure of the Plains Health Centre?

For any other government the answer would be yes. But this government is different. For some unfathomable reason they believe that they don't have to listen to the people. Do they think they are smarter? Do they think that people can't make intelligent, well-informed decisions?

Mr. Speaker, if that's the case, they're dead wrong. I've a lot more faith in the people of Saskatchewan. I think they will make compassionate, fiscally responsible choices that will benefit the province now and into the future. So this government doesn't need to use an iron fist. The people don't want or need a dictator-based government. What the people of this province do need is a government that puts people first.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot emphasize enough how disturbed we are by this Bill and I know that in the constituencies of the members opposite people would throw their full support behind us on this Bill. Somebody has to stand up for what is right. And once again, the members opposite are unable to for fear of crossing their party lines.

Mr. Speaker, it's frustrating. No matter how adamantly we protest against some of the measures in this Bill, the government will stubbornly stick to its decision. Even if the members opposite believe our point of view is valid, they turn their backs because it is the political way.

Mr. Speaker, we probably can't prevent the passage of Bill No. 38. But we will have a number of serious questions about this Bill in Committee of the Whole and we will continue to plague the government with questions until they think they can justify these amendments.

Thank you, Mr. 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.

Bill No. 87

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Lautermilch that **Bill No. 87 — An Act to amend The Power Corporation Act (No. 2)** be now read a second time.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I regret to say we have another example of this government's misplaced efforts. Earlier this session the government introduced Bill 44, a Bill to amend The Crown Corporations Act. The purpose of this other Bill is to give Crown corporations more powers. In that case, the government wants to give the Crowns more freedom to invest in whatever companies they want, while also allowing them free rein to engage in capital market activities.

Mr. Speaker, in Bill 87, An Act to amend The Power Corporation Act (No. 2) we see much the same thing. The government decided to pass it off quite nicely in the press as just a matter of bringing SaskPower in line with other Crown corporations. That, Mr. Speaker, is a complete waste of effort. It's a waste of effort because we have a government focusing on gaining more powers for its Crowns instead of dealing with

the general crisis in the accountability system for those Crowns.

Mr. Speaker, our Crowns are in a state of limbo, if not a state of crisis. We have a government finally suggesting they will start a review of the Crowns. While I'm concerned about the cost of the review and just how open it will be, the fact the government is undertaking it brings attention to this government's lack of a clear, concise strategy for the role it wants its Crowns to play.

Crowns should be there to serve some beneficial purpose to all taxpayers. But yet this government has no idea of what purpose they should serve at all. Devising one will be an important first step.

(1545)

Unfortunately devising a coherent vision and a set of objectives for the Crowns is only one half of the story. If we want the Crowns to achieve goals, we need to make sure there's a good system of accountability in place to ensure that those goals are achieved.

Mr. Speaker, this system of accountability that's in place is far too inadequate for the current mixed-enterprise nature of the Crowns or even of SaskPower itself. Our Crown sector was once a small group of monopoly utilities joined by a host of export-oriented resource companies. The government owned these companies, and few if any competed with other Saskatchewan firms for business in our province.

Today, Mr. Speaker, things are vastly different. We still own a small number of utilities, but now those companies like SaskPower are involved in a much wider array of activities and are faced with more competition. Often those activities bring the company into projects across the globe. Inherent in this widening range of activities is a greater risk. Mr. Speaker, what the members opposite have to remember is that we are not simply talking about greater risk for SaskPower. We are talking about greater risk for the owners of the company, and those are the taxpayers of this province.

Mr. Speaker, things changed so drastically that not only is there more risk, but the whole web of Crown corporation activity is much more complex. Crown corporations like SaskPower have subsidiaries and are continuing to create more of them. In addition to this, many Crowns take on private partners in joint ventures. While this all seems like modernization of sorts . . . it's fine to have modernization, but with such changes come new sorts of problems and increased chances of abuse. This is not a good situation for the taxpayer, and it should concern all members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, while Crown corporations like SaskPower changed and restructured, the system of accountability set up to allow this House and the public a chance to ensure the company is acting properly and achieving the goals we lay out for it, that system has not been modernized.

That, Mr. Speaker, is a dangerous thing. If this government sincerely wants to ensure that SaskPower changes with the times and serves a useful purpose and meets its objectives, it must be willing to give the opposition and the public the tools

we need to ensure we can hold this Crown and the politicians who run it accountable.

Therein lies the wasted effort. Instead of serving a useful purpose for the people of Saskatchewan, this government is trying to make life better for its Crowns. I say to the members opposite: you're not here to serve your family of Crown corporations; you're not here to make life better for those Crowns; you're supposed to be here to make life better for the average Saskatchewan family.

This government made that mistake back in 1982, of believing that people actually cared about our family of Crowns more than they did our own families. The NDP found in a very punishing way exactly what people really think. If they continue down this road, much the same fate awaits them. That fate could however not end up in some resurgence; it could end up in insignificance, much like that being suffered by their federal cousins in Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, instead of asking for more powers for its Crowns, it's about time that this NDP government began working towards making some badly needed repairs to the accountability system. This measure is key to ensuring that Crowns like SaskPower serve the public good.

Mr. Speaker, I shouldn't be surprised that this government is here asking for more powers for SaskPower today. They can argue that modernization is needed here. I say, no more powers unless those who are given the job of holding the government and SaskPower accountable are also given more powers.

Mr. Speaker, I shouldn't be surprised, as I said, that they're asking for this because their record speaks for itself. Their record with respect to SaskPower shows that these members opposite are not very interested in our families. It shows they are not really interested in ensuring the corporation serves a useful purpose to benefit our families.

I'd like to give the members opposite a few examples of just how misplaced their efforts are. Mr. Speaker, I say that the members opposite put SaskPower ahead of our families. They are doing it in this Bill today by offering SaskPower free reign to make any deal involving personal or chattel property, whereas before they were at least limited by having to get an order in council for any deal over a million dollars.

Mr. Speaker, these members put a higher priority on giving SaskPower these powers, but there is something else involving SaskPower that they put well ahead of our families. Mr. Speaker, this government puts its own political well-being ahead of our families.

SaskPower provides a perfect example of this, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year, they used SaskPower to once again hike our taxes. They raised most power rates in the province for the average family residence and family farm. They also gave us a new tax in the reconstruction charge. They tell us that this has all occurred because they must end cross-subsidization so SaskPower can keep its industrial customers and handle a \$2 billion debt.

Well, Mr. Speaker, some of my constituents are sceptical. They've told me a couple of things like, how did SaskPower get \$2 billion in debt in the first place? They also thought they helped pay to reconstruct the lines each and every time they paid for their power.

Well lastly, Mr. Speaker, while they don't want to see SaskPower lose industrial customers, they also wondered how much of a break to these folks will translate into jobs. So many large companies are now posting big profits while laying thousands of people off. And this is a concern to many of my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, raising power rates was just a more palatable way of raising taxes for this government. When this government should have been clearly defining a purpose for SaskPower and improving accountability, it was busy hiking taxes and devising this Bill to give the company more powers.

That misplaced priority is joined by other examples. Recently we heard that both Jack Messer and Carole Bryant, two NDP faithful who received jobs at SaskPower, got some shameful wage increases. Instead of trying to roll these back and make this corporation more accountable to the public, we find the government letting Mr. Messer head to the auto dealerships to pick himself out a snazzy, little car.

Mr. Speaker, the mistaken priorities in the Bill before us today should come not as a surprise, given this government's recent record. This Bill is short in length, but its significance to our ability to hold SaskPower and this government accountable is immense. It's time this government quit asking for more and start offering the people a chance to ensure there is accountability, and that SaskPower is serving some useful public purpose.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill before us today asks that SaskPower be given free rein to engage in deals involving the purchase and sale of personal property.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let's ask ourselves what this involves. If this Bill is passed, SaskPower may be brought on par with SaskTel and others, but that isn't the point. Bringing SaskTel on par with those corporations is kind of like asking Greg Norman to have a bad golf score. It certainly isn't aiming for much.

Mr. Speaker, if the government gets what it wants in this Bill, SaskPower will be able to invest in shares, sell subsidiaries, make partnerships, and do almost whatever it likes without so much as the approval of an order in council. And that is very worrisome.

Here we have a company which has a broadening range of activities around the world and the government wants to give it free rein to do whatever it wants. The only limitation it will now face will involve real property or anything attached to it.

The company cannot therefore buy land or sell buildings without approval. That however is not much of a control, Mr. Speaker. SaskPower could make arrangements where it could get involved in a project by partnership or shares, lease buildings and space, and make all sorts of deals without so

much as an order in council.

An order in council is not a very strong document but it's certainly better than what is being proposed here. The government could be letting SaskPower get involved in almost any deal and risk an undisclosed sum of our money without any prior approval. And that is a shameful way to treat the taxpayers of this province.

Mr. Speaker, not only could this government be subjecting the taxpayers to all sorts of risk, but they could also be letting the company get involved in projects which are of no material benefit to the Saskatchewan taxpayer.

For example, we now have SaskPower Commercial, which is the international arm of SaskPower. This is a subsidiary which doesn't even present a financial statement to this House. By not doing so, this company doesn't even give us or the taxpayer the bare minimum of tools to hold it accountable for its activities. SaskPower Commercial, under this Bill, could get us involved in risky projects overseas — projects I might add that could provide no real benefit to Saskatchewan residents.

Sure it's fine for SaskPower to get international experience. I would say however that the number one priority should be providing jobs to people back here at home. Before focusing efforts overseas, SaskPower should be providing buried, safe power to farmers. It should focus on providing power at the lowest possible cost. It should be focused on reducing SaskPower's unacceptably high CO₂ (carbon dioxide) emissions and, I dare say, its \$2 billion debt. Mr. Speaker, by passing this Bill, the members opposite will just be creating all sorts of opportunities to increase the exposure faced by taxpayers.

It may be acceptable that the corporation evolves, but the tools to hold them accountable should evolve with such changes, and they haven't. Basically, Mr. Speaker, short of a few esoteric changes to the Crown Corporations Committee, nothing has changed. It's beyond me how the members opposite can ask for more powers for this company without first ensuring it's held accountable.

I mentioned a few moments ago that SaskPower doesn't provide an annual report or a financial statement for SaskPower Commercial. This is not the only corporate subsidiary under SaskPower that is letting the taxpayers of this province down through this sort of behaviour. There are at least four others cited by the Provincial Auditor. Before the members opposite and the minister ask for these powers, I would suggest they hurry up and table these statements and commit to tabling them each and every year that these SaskPower subsidiaries are in operation.

Mr. Speaker, the other major problem with giving SaskPower any more powers at this time is that there is a lack of public debate. About 40 per cent of all government activity is in the Crown sector, and that includes SaskPower. That activity in the Crown sector unfortunately is beyond the realm of the budgetary process, and that is worrisome.

It's bad because it denies an opportunity for public debate over the activities of our Crown corporations on a regular basis. For example, SaskPower cut the wind and co-generation projects

and created an international arm in SaskPower Commercial. These are significant policy decisions, but because these are beyond the budgetary process, there is no chance for the public and this House to debate them before the Crown commits or withdraws money from them.

There is a solution to this, Mr. Speaker. The Gass Commission suggested that all dividends which are now paid to the Crown Investments Corporation, which acts as a holding company for SaskPower and other Crowns, should be paid into the General Revenue Fund.

It also suggested that policies should be devised by the government that define how much surplus, if any, SaskPower and other Crowns should be able to retain on an annual basis.

The commission also recommended a similar policy be developed to determine the extent to which SaskPower and other Crowns could be allowed to finance current operations and projects against future earnings. The net effect of these recommendations would be to return SaskPower spending to the purview of legislative control where the public, through members of this House, could hold them to account.

(1600)

Mr. Speaker, by doing this, people of the province could have their say. Before SaskPower dividends could be returned to SaskPower for any project, the House could at least hear what their intentions were for our money. Well some people say this would be too restrictive because it would reveal corporate secrets. I would say that problem could be dealt with. More importantly as taxpayers, we should question why government is using public money for projects that it can't make public. That's no way to treat your shareholders who are the average taxpayer in this province.

Aside from this, before trying to pass this Bill, the members opposite should consider quickly adopting another recommendation of the Gass Commission. The commission suggested that a clearly defined policy should be released or legislated which outlines how much government money can be committed to a project without prior approval of the legislature.

In this Bill before us today, Mr. Speaker, we see the government asking us to give SaskPower free rein to enter into any deal involving personal property without limit. There should be a limit, Mr. Speaker. If it's not in this Act, then at least it should be in the sort of policy recommended by the Gass Commission. That, by far, might be the most serious flaw of this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I should not be surprised at their complete disregard for this important suggestion laid out by the Gass Commission as it relates to this Bill. I shouldn't be surprised because just a couple of weeks ago in the Public Accounts Committee, the member from Regina South was pretty weak in his support of having the government produce a report to say how it stands on the Gass Commission's recommendations.

Many of these were not implemented, and the member from Regina South didn't appear too keen on the auditor's

recommendation that this government explain why it wasn't going to implement some of those proposals. This sort of half-hearted or phoney support for accountability is a fine example of why this Bill should not be passed.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill deserves no support. It simply makes matters worse. It gives SaskPower more powers to risk our money, but it does nothing to fix an already tattered system of accountability.

Until that system is fixed, giving SaskPower or any Crowns more powers is simply a gross sign of disrespect to the taxpayers of this province. In closing, Mr. Speaker, we will have more to say, but for now I move adjournment of debate. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 73 — An Act to amend The Planning and Development Act, 1983

The Chair: — I would ask the minister to introduce her official, please.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. With me today is Paul Rath from the staff of Municipal Government.

The Chair: — In consideration, the committee has considered this Bill earlier and has agreed to the first six clauses, so we start on clause 7.

Clauses 7 to 15 inclusive agreed to.

Clause 16

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Chairman, at this point I'd like to:

Amend clause 16 of the Printed Bill by striking out the words "or on the minister's own initiative" where they occur in subsection 187(3) as being enacted in clause (b) thereof and substituting the words "the minister shall".

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the proposed wording in the amendment which it says: "or on the request of the municipality" and then "or on the minister's own initiative," the minister's own initiative is meant to be used in cases . . . the buffer strip cases where there is no municipality, it relates to the North. So we could not agree, Mr. Chairman, to the amendment.

The division bells rang from 4:10 p.m. until 4:17 p.m.

Amendment negatived on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 11

Osika	Aldridge	Draude
Bjornerud	Julé	Krawetz

Gantefoer D'Autremont Toth
Heppner Goohsen

Nays — 22

Van Mulligen MacKinnon Shillington
Atkinson Tchorzewski Johnson
Goulet Lautermilch Kowalsky
Crofford Pringle Koenker
Trew Lorje Teichrob
Nilson Stanger Hamilton
Murray Langford Sonntag
Thomson

Clause 16 agreed to.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, with leave, to introduce guests.
Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I see that we've been joined in the Speaker's gallery by some of the executive members and the director of PARCS — being the Provincial Association of Resort Communities of Saskatchewan. And we had a meeting this morning. I'd like to welcome them to Regina and ask you to join me.

I'll just ask them to stand. The chairman is Ted James. The director is Lester Hunt, and John Panio, and John Cameron. Welcome to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — With leave, Mr. Speaker, to also introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to join the minister in welcoming our guests to the Assembly. The bells rudely interrupted our meeting that we were having, but I'm glad to see them join us in the Assembly. And I would again ask everyone to welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: — Why is the member on her feet?

Ms. Julé: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I too would like to welcome you here on behalf of the official opposition. We're very pleased to have you with us today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Pringle: — Mr. Chairman, I'd ask leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much. I want to say a special hi to Les Hunt. Les, of course, is a former constituent, and he also was the principal of Alvin Buckwold School in Saskatoon Eastview where our sons went.

And given that this is Child Care Week, I just want to highlight that Les as a principal was very supportive to the child care centre, the day care centre in the school, the out-of-school program, which was a very important program in the school . . . I think the second one in Saskatchewan for single parents and others who had no way of looking after the children when they were at work and school was out.

So Les was a pioneer and very innovative and supportive of that program, and I just want to acknowledge that, given that you're here and it's provincial Child Care Week. So I'd ask that we join again in welcoming him here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Toth: — With leave, as well, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, I want to recognize a guest, but specifically Mr. Panio. He's a teacher in the Montmartre area. He has the distinction of being the chairman of the zone one regional games and of the meeting in Montmartre when the lights went out when we had our official opening, and it was some consternation we got them going. Welcome, Mr. Panio

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**Bill No. 73
(continued)**

Clauses 17 to 23 inclusive agreed to.

Clause 24 agreed to on division.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

**Bill No. 43 — An Act respecting the Development,
Implementation and Operation of an Emergency
911 System and to make consequential
amendments to other Acts**

The Chair: — I would ask the minister to introduce her officials please.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On my left

is Mr. Ron Davis, the assistant deputy minister of the Department of Municipal Government. Directly behind me is Diana Milenkovic, from SaskTel. And on her left is Jim Brickwell, senior policy analyst in the Department of Municipal Government.

Clause 1

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, I'd like to also welcome your officials here today.

Madam Minister, you talked about your definition of enhanced 911 system in the last Committee of the Whole. Would you please just give us a brief recap of your definition just to refresh our memories and get things rolling today.

The Chair: — Before the minister speaks, I guess I erred. It's the Act . . . It might be cited The Emergency 911 System Act. I introduced it wrongly.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, for clarification, I'm not sure of the question they're asking. I think they used the word "enhanced." Is that right?

Well as you know, in the current scheme the only enhanced 911 systems are in the major cities. These are the systems where when a caller dials 911, the location of the origin of the call comes onto the screen in the call centre. So if the person is unable to speak or hangs up, the location is still known, and a response can be delivered.

In those systems that are not enhanced, someone will answer, and usually there is a response plan, but it's not — and hopefully it's integrated — but there's no locator. So if the caller hangs up, having not given a location, there is that problem.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister. The wording of this Bill in our opinion does not allow for the flexibility to move towards an enhanced system, yet you've stated that you will move towards a system fully enhanced. Could you please tell us how this Bill allows you to do that when it does not describe a fully enhanced 911 system?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, as we outlined some days ago in our previous exchange, we said that our plans are for a fully enhanced system, which is the reason that the money was dedicated to the geographic information system or the mapping work that has to be done in order to provide that information. The proposal now is that the province-wide 911 would provide a single-button transfer to the appropriate emergency response agency — fire, police, or a health emergency. So it's quite clear that the intent is to have that enhancement available throughout the province.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Still on clause 2, Madam Minister, what department do you have in mind in (a)? I think what we're looking for here is what department are you talking about.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — The interpretation here would be the department over which the minister responsible for the 911 system presides, which at the current time is the Department of Municipal Government.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister. What groups do you have in mind that you've included in clause 2(vi), but not in clause 2(i) and clause 2(v)? I think what we're saying is here, who do you mean by this?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, my interpretation of this would be that (vi) would be an enabling clause. It names the standard . . . The police service — this would be a local:

(i) police service or regional police service as defined in The Police Act . . .

(ii) the Royal Canadian Mounted Police;

(iii) a fire department as defined in The Fire Prevention Act . . .

(iv) an ambulance service;

Then the department, Crown, or agency.

Then the sixth one is a catch-all clause, if you like, where it says, "any person, organization or agency . . ." It could be first responders. It could be some kind of a community organization that's been organized at the community level to provide the integrated emergency response. It's just meant to be inclusive in case there is a definition that has been . . . a specific definition that isn't included in the first five, but someone who would be an emergency service provider.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Is, in your opinion, the district health board an emergency service provider within the meaning of (d)? Would you class the health board as an emergency provider?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — This, Mr. Chairman, is the interpretation of the Act for definition. And the district health board has already been defined in The Health Districts Act. So I assume that, depending on the role that an individual health board plays in their particular region, that that interpretation could be made, that they would be defined as such, but not necessarily.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Clause 4, Madam Minister. What other ministers' departments or agencies of the Government of Saskatchewan are being referred to in this section? For example, is the Department of Municipal Government responsible for any aspect of this law?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, we're in the interpretation section of the Act. And a department, agency, or Crown corporation of the Government of Saskatchewan could for example be air ambulance, but without naming the Sask air ambulance service. So again it's a catch-all clause to make sure that if there is any department, agency, or Crown that is providing emergency services, that they're covered under the

definition of emergency service provider.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Would the Minister of Health be responsible for any part of this then?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — No, not as the legislation is written because where it refers to department, the interpretation section 2 of the Act says:

(the) “department” means the department over which the minister presides;

So if, say for instance at some time in the future, the minister responsible for 911 — after some reorganization or whatever — was the Minister of Health, then we wouldn’t have to amend the legislation to accommodate that.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’d also like to welcome your officials, Madam Minister.

On clause 5, under the powers of the minister, it says:

The minister may:

(a) enter into agreements with emergency service providers
...

Is it correct to say that sub-clause (a) of this clause gives the minister the right to enter into agreements with service providers and the municipalities but does not impose upon her any obligations to do so?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — That’s a correct interpretation, and the agreements would be entered into based on advice of the advisory group that will be set up and the technical working group that will be set up.

Ms. Draude: — Is it then correct that under sub-clause (b) it’ll be the minister in consultation with cabinet who will have the ultimate say over which territories will be covered by which public safety answering points?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, essentially that’s correct, and the recommendation would be made after consultations and based upon the advice of the advisory groups that I mentioned.

Ms. Draude: — I guess my question would have to be then, why would the minister, why should the minister, be given this power?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, in terms of developing a comprehensive plan and in terms of taking care of the liability aspects and so forth in emergency service, there would have to be someone — and this Act presumes that it would be upon the recommendation of the minister, after consultation and advice — would recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council the location.

So as the system is developed and expands, areas that are ready and areas where the technology is available would then become

part of the prescribed district where this legislation would apply.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, my colleagues and I feel that — and I’m hoping that you would agree — that maybe it would better to delegate this power to a non-political body, with efficiency and service as their foremost goal.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, in a sense we would be doing that by taking the advice of an advisory council that will be set up pursuant to this legislation. And it does say, the minister may; it doesn’t say, the minister shall.

And certainly I think that in terms of the liability, the other features of this as it unfolds, such as the cost-sharing arrangements and so on, that it’s not inappropriate for the government, based on the advice of advisory committees, to recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council who would prescribe these boundaries.

And I think the input of the technical working group and the advisory committee would provide the feature that you’re suggesting, is as input from the community and input into the design of the system from the users.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Then clause 5, saying the minister may, instead of shall, either gives you the authority or the advisory committee. Is that correct?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — No. It was . . . the minister would obviously rely on the advice of the advisory committee. The advisory committee would not give advice to the Lieutenant Governor in Council. I mean that’s just not the way the system works. The Lieutenant Governor in Council takes direction from cabinet.

Ms. Draude: — So basically you will be relying on the advisory committee and you have the right to, or the minister would have the right to, agree with the advisory committee and take it to the Lieutenant Governor then?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well there has to be, in designing and operating a system, there has to be somebody who is ultimately responsible, somebody’s desk at whom, you know, where the buck stops and who is ultimately responsible. In this case, this legislation is making the minister responsible.

And we’re saying, in other parts of the legislation, that that advice . . . or the discretion that the minister would use would be influenced by the advisory boards in the system that will be appointed.

Ms. Draude: — Does the province-wide answering system envisioned by sub-clause (c) have any safeguards for the confidentiality of addresses and telephone numbers?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the same as in the systems that exist today. And of course technology is improving all the time, even as we speak, but there is confidentiality. And yes, confidentiality would be guaranteed under the computer system that will be used.

Ms. Draude: — I guess then that my question would be, if we have to be concerned, or the minister has to be concerned, about confidentiality and at the same time, safety — so we have to be able to know where this person is calling from and yet maybe they don't want their name and phone number given out — what kind of circumstances do you envision that can overcome these problems?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, it doesn't display the name of the caller, simply the address, the location.

Ms. Draude: — Sometimes the addresses and phone numbers have to be kept confidential. For example, abusive ex-spouses who have threatened violence. Has this been taken into consideration?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, in the 911 system for it to work you must be able to identify a location and that can't be blocked out in the 911 system. If I was having a heart attack I'd want somebody to know where I was.

Ms. Draude: — Who will have access to the addressing system as set out in sub-clause (c)?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the addresses would be entered into the computer software that is specific to this program and it would be secure there, and it would only be displayed if a call was originated from that location. So there is security there. It's a database that's used for only this purpose, so the integrity of the database and the confidentiality is assured.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, under clause 5 subsection (d), you talk about establishing one or more committees to advise the minister. Is there any idea yet of how many committees will be required?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, there are two planned. There may be from time to time others, but the ones we contemplate are the advisory committee that would be composed of users of the system, if you like, like health service providers, fire chiefs, people like that. And then there would be . . . well there are two committees. The advisory . . . a lay advisory committee and then a technical committee.

Ms. Draude: — What would be the purpose of these committees in practical terms?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, the purpose of the advisory committees would be to . . . the technical one would be to advise on, you know, what is possible. Because the advisory committee could meet and decide that they wanted to extend the service into a certain area and that there was addressing going on there and so on. But they might not be aware of how the system works technically, and they might advise something that's not physically possible. So that's why we need the two committees: the one which would advise on concepts and service delivery and the expectations of the users; and then a technical committee to work out or advise on whether the wishes of the advisory committee are technically possible.

(1645)

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Who will actually be appointing the members of these committees?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the minister responsible will be appointing the committees. And of course we've had advisory committees — the Emergency Services Advisory Committee that met until last fall — and other committees. People have been consulted in the course of designing this legislation and the beginning, the initiation, of the system.

And the advisory committee is expected to be composed of elected officials representing local governments — SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), SARM, SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations), FSIN, and representatives from the existing enhanced 911 areas from Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and the south-west region. There would also be senior department officials from Municipal Government, Health, SaskTel, and Justice. And we expect to appoint this committee as soon as the legislation is passed.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Chairman, to the minister, if these appointments are ready to be undertaken as soon as this legislation is passed, then it would mean that you probably have people already in mind for the positions. If so, can you give us the names of these people?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, it's premature to talk about the names of the people, and this hasn't yet been determined, but what the practice sometimes is to ask for nominations from the associations, and then we usually in those cases appoint the people whose names are put forward by the associations.

So I wouldn't know today because we haven't sought, we wouldn't seek, nominations from those organizations until after the legislation is passed.

Ms. Draude: — Has the minister considered or your department considered combining committees and just having the technical advice available?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, there's more advice needed than simply technical advice. If we didn't want more advice and more user input into the design of the system, you know, SaskTel could simply implement it. SaskTel has the technology and they could do it.

That's not the way we see it happening. It's not the way the development has been to date. We've wanted to include in the consultations leading up to this legislation, and we'll certainly will want to follow through after that with constant dialogue with the users of the system, with the people who will help design it, and the people who will help pay for it.

And there are many, many implications. That's why we see this in a three- to five-year time frame, because there certainly are expenses involved for rural municipalities, for example, in

signing major roads and that kind of thing.

So we'll require the cooperation of all these groups. And there certainly will be some financial implications for people that are represented on the advisory committee. And we have to take all these concerns into account as we move forward so that it not only works well and gives the proper response, but is affordable.

Ms. Draude: — If the advisory committee doesn't agree with your vision or you have some differences of opinion on the 911 system — I'm concerned about the location of the call centres — who will end up winning out if there is a discrepancy of opinions?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, that is yet to be determined. There are several options that are being considered and will be put to the advisory committee when it is formed, for their advice.

There are several options — one that we've spoken about previously is the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) option. There are other options. There's a possibility that the communities that now have an investment in the enhanced 911 could simply expand theirs to cover the province.

There's the possibility that some other centres who are interested, some of the smaller cities, have mentioned that they would like to become a calling centre. This is the kind of issue that we will take advice on from the advisory committee.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, I'd like to touch on the call centres for a few minutes.

You stated in the past that this legislation will not do away with the three call centres already existing. Can you point out anywhere in this Bill where these call centres will be protected?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — No, Mr. Chairman. It is seen that this system will evolve based on the advice of the advisory committee. I'm sure that it will evolve in the most practical and cost-effective way possible. And we will listen carefully to the advice of the advisory committee with respect to these matters.

And when you're planning on a three- to five-year time frame for a system that's going to build on the base there is now, and to cover the whole province being the intent, you wouldn't put these features in the legislation. You would rely on the legislation to establish the advisory committee and the other parameters for the work to be done, and then you would want to have the maximum flexibility to develop the whole system. And so you wouldn't put that in legislation. I think that would be undesirable.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister. If we could deal for a moment with the idea of one provincial call centre. You said that you are concerned with the response time. Could you please explain your concerns a little more fully?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — I don't, Mr. Chairman, really recall saying that I had concerns with response time; we didn't discuss that today. If the member could elaborate . . . I'm not sure what

his reference is based on.

Mr. Bjornerud: — I think possibly, Madam Minister, it's . . . if I could just read your answer here the other day, and we were kind of questioning this after, but it says:

Well I think, Mr. Chairman, we're saying exactly the same thing. (And) I'm saying (that) that's possible, with the technology, to have one call centre for the whole province. However, we're recognizing that we already have three centres that (are) . . . fully enhanced and some that are, you know, the basic 911, and we're not proposing by this legislation to do away with those. We hope that at some point we'll . . . be part of (the) . . . system.

Then it goes on down here:

Mr. Chairman, I would assume (that) there'd be a couple of levels of this. The members of the advisory committee . . . would include I would think, service providers . . .

I guess I don't have, Madam Minister, the exact quote that you had said that day. But going back, like I know you had . . . that we had asked the question about having just one main call centre, and you had said that you had concerns with that. Can you explain your concerns then? Maybe it wasn't response time.

What problem do you have with one centre instead of a number of centres throughout? In my understanding it, or the way I look at it, it may be a lot simpler to have one big call centre. And with the technology there is today, I can't see where the response time or anything else would be a detriment to this plan. In fact I think it would be more efficient if we were going to end up with an enhanced plan where trained people were going to be on the end of the line.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I'm really glad that the member opposite couldn't find that reference because I couldn't remember saying it, and I thought maybe I was losing my memory.

We recognize that there's been considerable investment made already in designing of the existing enhanced systems. And I guess we hope to build on that or around that, and certainly not duplicate any efforts that anyone else has made. Although in time perhaps the technology that even is in those . . . being used in those centres may become outdated, and there may be a consolidation of call centres in the future. You know, who knows?

But I think the only concern we would have is that there be training on the ground for emergency service providers, and this has to go hand in hand with the development and extension of the ability to dial 911 and have someone that is trained on the other end. Any delays certainly wouldn't be in the telephone system because the connection is made instantaneously. The concern has to be, as we unfold the system, that the people . . . the emergency service providers are ready and integrated to respond to the calls that are received.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'd like to now ask some questions regarding the effectiveness of the system. Madam Minister, would you not have a professional

assessment done after the system is in place to determine if the system is functioning correctly and meeting the needs of the people in emergency situations?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, of course that would be reviewed on an ongoing basis. And this is the reason why we would rely on the advisory committees. The technical committee would do their monitoring throughout the development of the system and, obviously upon its completion, continue to monitor it.

And the advisory committee, as I mentioned to you before, the proposed organizations that the membership of the advisory committee would be drawn from have that sort of expertise. For example, if you have the fire chiefs or police chiefs on the advisory committee who already have long-time experience in running an enhanced call centre in their own city, then they're certainly in a position to make those assessments at their level.

So already there is a system there established pursuant to this legislation to have that kind of a review on both levels constantly.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move we rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 73 — An Act to amend The Planning and Development Act, 1983

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to on division, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

The committee reported progress on Bill No. 43.

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.