

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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.

The people that have signed the petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from Regina here. They're from Sedley; they're from Francis; they're from all throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding 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 communities that people have signed their petition from are Langenburg, MacNutt, Rocanville, Marchwell, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions of names from people 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 these petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from Alameda and Regina. I so present.

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

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

Most of the signatures on this petition are from Regina, Mr. Speaker, but also from Pilot Butte, Craven, and Balgonie.

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

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon.

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

And those who have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Moosomin, Broadview, Pilot Butte, also Craven, and then many from the city of Regina.

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; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to cause the government to take action to allow an increase on security deposits on rental properties.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 60 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Crown Investments, regarding the Crown Investments Corporation's loan agreements with HARO Financial Corporation: (1) what was the amount of cash flow generated by HARO during 1995, according to CIC's calculations respecting those loans; (2) what was the amount of net earnings or losses generated by HARO in 1995, according to CIC's calculations respecting those loans?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day 57 move an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing:

Minister responsible for SaskPower regarding employees, Mr. Jack Messer, and Ms. Carole Bryant: (1) provide a copy of the employment contracts for Mr. Messer and Ms. Bryant, including details of salary, perks, car allowances, memberships, and travel allowances.

I so submit.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and very proud to introduce to yourself and to the Assembly today, one very special person that has added a great deal of meaning and enjoyment to my life. I ask the Assembly to join me in welcoming my eldest son, Scott Julé, seated in the east gallery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — If there are no other introductions, I would like to introduce 60 guests of mine who are seated in the Speaker's gallery as well as behind the rail. These are grade 4 students from Sunningdale School in Moose Jaw and are

accompanied today by teachers, Trina Templeton, Kathy Sudom-Young, James Johnson, and parent supervisor, Mrs. McDowell.

They will be seated in the gallery until 2 o'clock, at which time they will take a tour of the building. And with the assistance of the Deputy Speaker, I will meet with them as close as I can to 2:30; it may be just a little bit late today. And I look forward to the visit and a chance to take a photo at 3 o'clock. I will ask all members to show welcome to these students from Sunningdale School in Moose Jaw here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Aboriginal Awareness Week

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is Aboriginal Awareness Week in Saskatchewan. This week has been observed to increase awareness and promote the contribution of aboriginal people across Canada. In the province we are very proud of the contribution of first nations people to our province over the many years.

On behalf of my colleagues in the House, I would first of all like to congratulate the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations on its 50th anniversary. The FSIN's (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) work on behalf of first nations people is benefiting all of Saskatchewan. It seems fitting that we recognize the 50th anniversary during this Aboriginal Awareness Week.

There are some 80,000 first nations people in Saskatchewan and the population is comprised of 72 different governments represented by 9 tribal councils. Culturally they represent five different language groups: Cree, Dakota, Nakota, Saulteaux, and Dene. The FSIN is the representative body of the entire first nations of Saskatchewan.

The unique customs, language, and culture of our first nations people is an important part of what makes Saskatchewan one of the best places in the world to live. Besides contributing to the culture of our province, the first nations organizations are major partners in our economy, helping Saskatchewan to grow economically.

Congratulations, Mr. Speaker, to all first nations groups in the province as we recognize their contribution to Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to also add to the following member's statement that this week's designation as Aboriginal Awareness Week . . .

Aboriginal people make up a significant portion of Saskatchewan's population. Our vibrant traditions and languages are a key part of Saskatchewan's colourful history. Over the years, Saskatchewan's aboriginal people have endured many hardships, but today we are looking for ways to overcome

these challenges.

Some perfect examples of aboriginal communities that are trying to equip themselves in the future are from northern Saskatchewan. These people are working to develop their resource industries like tourism, fishing, forestry, and hunting. The aboriginal communities are working to improve relations with government and corporations so that successful co-management projects can be developed.

During this week of celebration, I'd like to commend the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations on its 50th anniversary. FSIN continues to strive for self-government and self-determination for all native peoples.

Finally, I'd like to commend the efforts of the Saskatchewan Metis people who will soon be participating in enumeration. This step will hopefully present an accurate reflection of the population of Saskatchewan's Metis. These new stats will be important when negotiating future agreements.

I ask all the members of the Assembly to join me in recognizing Aboriginal Awareness Week with a common theme and message — that life is too short to spend time negatively focusing on our ethnic differences. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Summer Olympic Skeet Shooters

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even though summer is never going to come to Saskatchewan, I do want to congratulate two young Saskatchewan men who will be competing in the 100th anniversary Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. Kirk Reynolds of Outlook and Rod Boll of Fillmore will compete in men's double trap shooting event on July 24, five days after the opening ceremonies of the Olympics.

Kirk was a double winner last year at the Pan-Am Games, and both Kirk and Rod qualified for Canada's national team at the trials held in Atlanta on April 27. Kirk has spent the last four months training in the U.S. (United States), where it didn't snow every day, and is shortly off to Italy and Germany for the world cup shoots in June. Kirk and Rod will join in Atlanta for two weeks of fine-tuning before the actual competition.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure both Kirk and Rod feel it is a privilege to represent their country and their province at the Olympics. I'm equally sure that win or lose, they'll do us all proud. And I wish them a keen eye and a steady hand on July 24. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Community Spirit in St. Brieux

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, recently the newspaper in St. Brieux carried a thank-you letter from the Arnold Perreault family. The Perreault family wished to thank and recognize the citizens of St. Brieux for their compassion and understanding as they deal with the diagnosis of family

members being HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) positive.

Mrs. Perreault discovered that she was HIV positive during her last pregnancy in 1989. In March of 1996, their seven-year-old child was diagnosed HIV positive. The community of St. Brieux rallied around the family and started an education program in the school and community.

They have received tremendous support from the whole community and it is that banding together in adversity that I would like to acknowledge in the House today. Citizens of St. Brieux, and the Perreault family, we remove our hats and open our hearts to you as you deal with this painful experience. It is my sincerest wish that we as a province can learn from this powerful example that you, St. Brieux, have shown us. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Skating/Curling Arena in Drake

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to report on a tremendous example of community spirit in my constituency. This fall the community of Drake will be opening a \$1 million skating and curling complex and they will do it without going into debt. Just about every man, woman, and child in the community has contributed to the new arena.

Three years ago the community realized that the days were numbered for their old arena and they also knew how important it was to their community. It had become a central gathering place for everyone. In fact it was the heart of Drake in the winter months.

So people got to work. They set up a building committee and a fund-raising committee. And then everyone got involved. A community auction was held, and a sport celebrity dinner was held. Volunteers offered catering service, held garage sales, dinner theatres, and raffles. There were corporate donations, and businesses donated goods and services for fund-raising events. There was a homecoming; bingos. Bottles and cans were collected; money was raised through sporting events; and a long-distance truck lottery was held. And there were numerous individual donations, Mr. Speaker.

And then countless hours of free labour were put into building the arena. Equipment was loaned for the cause. Hot meals were supplied every day, and young people offered free baby-sitting services to adults so that they could volunteer their labour.

Mr. Speaker, this is a tremendous example of community spirit and of doing things the Saskatchewan way. I'd like to congratulate every man, woman, and child in the community for their efforts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Battered Women's Awareness Week

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Wednesday evening in Weyburn, I attended a very moving, a very necessary, and, we all hope, a soon to be ended annual event.

Last week was Battered Women's Awareness Week. And in observance of that week, the Weyburn Committee Against Family Violence and the violence intervention program held a walk, a candlelight vigil, and a brief ceremony at which I was privileged to speak. As well, the Octavius Singers contributed their talent to the evening.

About 75 people attended the ceremony which was built around the theme, Putting the Pieces Together to Stop Family Violence, and a quilt was created by those who attended, based on this theme. And as the week, but certainly not the blight on our society, has passed, it is worth re-emphasizing the fact that violence against women is in fact violence against the whole family. And violence against one family in one generation almost certainly means a continuation into a new generation.

It was very reassuring to hear from Pat, who works with a violence intervention program, how effective and helpful our legislation, the domestic violence Act, has been. Some, but not all, of the pieces to stop family violence are legislation and government programs, societal involvement, and individual commitment. All must work together so that some year soon this week can be removed from the calendar.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Emergency Medical Services Week

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week has been proclaimed as National Emergency Medical Services Week.

The theme for the week is, EMS: It's Up To You. The week provides an opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of emergency medical services personnel, to reach out to potential recruits, and stresses the importance of strong support for the EMS (emergency medical services) system.

It also helps educate the public about the EMS system and its appropriate use, and encourages the prevention of illness and injury. Emergency medical services is a system of care for victims of sudden and serious illness and injury. It depends on the availability and cooperation of many different elements — from the public recognizing medical emergencies, to a network of health care facilities that provide specialized care to the seriously ill and injured.

The other elements necessary to ensure that the system is the best it can be include the 911 number, pre-hospital, police, fire, and emergency department personnel.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government caucus I would like to extend our appreciation to all people involved in the EMS field in Saskatchewan. These professionals provide an important life-saving service and it is through their contribution, along with others in the health care field, that Saskatchewan has the best health care system in North America.

Thank you for your hard work and important service that you provide. It is very much appreciated.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Support for Agriculture

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just on the past weekend there was a major incident at the railway crossing in Whitewood this past week. Unfortunate as it may seem, Mr. Speaker . . . and I think maybe it's time we in this province started looking at agriculture in a more serious matter.

What happened was customs and RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) officials were transporting a number of vehicles that they had seized and unfortunately one of those vehicles came in contact with the train at the railway crossing. And I think, Mr. Speaker, that would not have happened if we in this province would begin to support agriculture.

I'm not sure where our Minister of Agriculture is when we talk about the Canadian Wheat Board, but the fact, Mr. Speaker, that the Wheat Board we're talking of as being Canadian, is strictly provincial . . . Western Canada has nothing to do with Ontario and Quebec, and they get the advantages.

So I think, Mr. Speaker, we need to stand up for the people of Saskatchewan; we need to stand up for the agriculture producers. I don't think . . . we need to stand up and give support to our farmers who are trying to get a fair price in difficult times. And we need to stand up against eastern Canada and the fact that we are a separate pooling system.

So I think, Mr. Speaker, this province and this government and this Assembly should support agriculture producers in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Long-term Care

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a meeting is scheduled to begin shortly in Swift Current in response to a recent announcement that the Swift Current Care Centre is being closed. This move has been described, and rightly so, as callous and inhumane.

Once again it is the sick and the elderly who are feeling the brunt of this government's underfunding of the health system. Because of this closure, 31 elderly residents of the facility have no idea where they will go, while another 40 remain on a long-term care waiting-list in the district. As a result, our elderly are being subjected to a great deal of stress and anxiety as they are left to fend for themselves.

Will the minister explain how his government can force a closure of one senior care home after another when everyone knows how rapidly the population is ageing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, as the member will know, this decision was a decision of the Swift Current District Health

Board. The Swift Current District Health Board has come up with a plan to streamline and consolidate their long-term care, Mr. Speaker, and that board has determined that this private, for-profit facility will not be part of their long-term plan.

The facility, as I understand it, Mr. Speaker, will close on December 1 of this year. It is not closing immediately. And I have every confidence, contrary to what will be suggested by that member and what will be suggested by the opposition, that every one of the residents of that special care home will be placed in good and decent housing, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, let me read a few of the comments from the seniors who are losing their home because of this government.

Eighty-seven-year-old Minnie Woods says of this government's action, and I quote: "... it's brutal, it's cruel ... They're turning us out on the street ..."

Another senior, Irene McIvor, says, and I quote: "My son put me in here because he thought I would be safe."

Vicky Thistlewaite, whose 76-year-old mother is also a resident of the Swift Current Care Centre, says, and I quote: "There's no place for these people to go. Why not just say you have to die at age 65? Is that what the future is like?"

Will the Minister of Health indicate in this House today what steps he is prepared to take to ensure that these seniors are not left to fend for themselves and that they're properly looked after?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I think it's very disruptive for people, including especially I think senior people, when they have to move from one place to another. There is no question about that.

But as the system changes from time to time, facilities are sometimes closed, they're sometimes converted — the system changes. And when the people are moved, as long as they're moved to good homes, Mr. Speaker, the people will be satisfied and happy with the homes that they have.

It is not helpful to the situation of people who may be feeling some anxiety as a result of the change, Mr. Speaker, to have people suggesting that they will be thrown on the streets or that they will not have a home. It is true that some people, Mr. Speaker, will be going from one home to another, but I assure the member and I assure the House that those people will have a good home and a decent home, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, one of the most disturbing parts of this whole issue is the fact that the member for Swift Current remains strangely silent. While this government forces seniors from their homes, he sits by and watches. Has he

forgotten that he was elected to represent and speak for his constituents? Instead of speaking for the sick and the elderly, he chooses instead to defend the actions of this NDP (New Democratic Party) government — actions that cannot possibly be defended. I would encourage the minister from Swift Current to show some guts, defend those . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, order, order. Order! Now I think the word that the member just used is not in order for use in the Assembly and I'll ask him simply to withdraw his unparliamentary remark and to proceed.

Mr. Gantefer: — I accept your ruling and withdraw the remark, Mr. Speaker.

Will the member defend those who elected him? Don't simply cower in the back benches. Mr. Speaker, the elderly people affected by these actions do not deserve to be treated this way. Will the Minister of Health stand in this House today and apologize to the residents of Swift Current for the cut in the funding that is allowing this to happen?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the member should understand that as we go through changes in the health system, occasionally some facilities will close down. The Swift Current Health District Board has decided that this private, for-profit facility will not any longer form part of its long-term plans for long-term care.

But, Mr. Speaker, the board has also said that they're going to consolidate their long-term care beds at Swift Current Care Centre . . . I'm sorry, at Palliser Regional Care Centre and at Swift Current Regional Hospital. And, Mr. Speaker, none of these people that are resident in the care centre, the Swift Current Care Centre, who are understandably feeling anxiety because of a move in December, are going to be left without a good home and a decent home.

And it is not helpful to the debate to have the member and others suggesting to these people and others that anybody is going to be put out on the street, Mr. Speaker. It's not true.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crown Construction Tendering Agreement

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, a great deal has been said in this House about the NDP government's Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. We have all heard and debated the fact that the CCTA (Crown Construction Tendering Agreement) is bad for the construction industry, bad for taxpayers, and bad for business.

Recently a leaked memo from the Economic Development department surfaced, providing proof that fair and open tendering was not what the government was after. The government had a choice. It could have scrapped this ill-conceived plan before it started. Instead, it chose politics over common sense. Mr. Speaker, the jig is up. The Liberal opposition has shown that Sask Water and SaskTel projects are

inflating costs by as much as 30 per cent.

Will the minister come clean on this deal and admit that the CCTA is merely a political pay-off that is contrary to public interest and must be scrapped.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The intention of this government is to implement good public policy wherever the case may be, and that's what we've done.

In terms of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement, I don't want to accept the hon. member's figures as gospel because we know that in the House in the past he's spouted off figures in the area of over \$100 million when during that same period of time only about \$15 million in entire Crown construction agreements had been put out in place. And he said it's costing over \$100 million. So I dispute those figures.

What I want the member to listen to is what I've told him before, this month, in this House, and that is there have been meetings between the Crown Investments Corporation and the Saskatchewan Construction Association concerning the CCTA. Those meetings are ongoing and we expect to have a report some time near the end of this month. And when that report is released, the member, along with the rest of the public in Saskatchewan, will know the results of the review of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, it has come to our attention that Executive Council is discussing the possibility of raising the threshold for invitational tenders. This would allow the NDP to offer tenders to preferred union construction firms. A cynic might suggest that this is a backhanded way for this government to save face and scrap the CCTA while continuing its practice of union preference tendering.

Will the minister confirm if these discussions are taking place, and if so does it mean that the CCTA will be eliminated?

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Well I don't why the hon. member opposite is so anti-union all the time. Unions have a very distinct place in our society, in Canada, in particularly in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan has less labour disruptions than any other jurisdiction in Canada. We have a good working relationship between government and the public sector, unions, the private sector; we think we have the economy going in Saskatchewan.

I repeat to the member opposite, unlike the scattered approach of them when they cut the throat of their leader, can't get their act together on what public policy should be, make false accusations within this House, our attempt as a government — to make sure we always put in what's best, as public policy, for the people of Saskatchewan.

From time to time if we see there is problems, we review the public policies we put in place. Results of the agreement have been announced to the member, that they'll be released sometime toward the end of this month. And we will continue

as a government to implement good public policy for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, the official opposition has brought to the attention of the House a number of examples to demonstrate how the CCTA inflates costs of Crown projects by as much as 30 per cent. When speaking of the total amounts of projects that fell under this agreement last year, the Minister of Economic Development has put forward a figure of \$30 million — a figure that is challenged by the Saskatchewan Construction Association.

Even using this ludicrous figure, that would mean that this government is wasting at least \$9 million a year. Mr. Speaker, \$9 million preserved more than 300 long-term care beds in this province.

Will the minister explain why he is choosing politics and union friends over our pioneers, who are being told that there may not be a place for them?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Well the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, draws a long bow. I hope his string doesn't snap on him when he compares the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement to whether or not seniors needing good public health care within the province of Saskatchewan . . .

The Minister of Health has explained many times that we're still on the leading edge of developing good health care for people within this province, whether they're seniors, whether they're long-term care, whether it's emergency situations that arise. We work very hard in this government of public policy — not like the members opposite in the Liberal Party, and certainly not like the members in the Conservative Party that decimated this province over the years that the Devine government was in office in the province of Saskatchewan.

Where the members opposite falter, is that they never go after their federal cousins in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, when they slash their budgets. And we understand they have to get their deficits under control, but they slash their budgets without any thought to the social programs, the education, the health care, the social services that we have to provide within the province. We have historically been, and continue to be, the best public policy government in the history of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Long-term Care

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, the 70 elderly residents were informed over the weekend that their care home will close on December 1 in Swift Current — right before Christmas. The closure of this facility means 31 seniors literally have nowhere to go. And, Mr. Minister, home care cannot take care of these people because all of them are level 3 or level 4 care, needing 24-hour nursing care, and their families cannot

provide 24-hour care either.

Mr. Minister, you've said over and over again that seniors will not be left out in the cold. It looks like that's exactly what's going to happen. Mr. Minister, it's time you took some responsibility. It's time you personally take some steps to ensure that no seniors are without homes or proper health care. Will you do that, Mr. Minister? Will you personally get involved in this case?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I have every confidence in the Swift Current Health District. What does not inspire confidence with me and what I think is a bit shameful, Mr. Speaker, is that member knows and his party knows and the Liberal Party know that as health reform has progressed in Saskatchewan there isn't one senior who has been taken out of a special care home without anyplace to go.

And I have said over and over again, Mr. Speaker, that it is the plan of the district health board to make sure that every resident of that care home has a good and decent home. These people are good people. They're decent people, Mr. Speaker. And for the members opposite to engage in fearmongering and suggest that people on this side of the House and the Swift Current Health District would not be interested in everybody having a place to go, I think is a bit shameful, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you. Mr. Minister, you can continue to stand up and pass the buck to the health boards. You can continue to say that there are great health care facilities in rural Saskatchewan when there aren't, but, Mr. Minister, we all know it's you that call the shots.

Mr. Minister, you've been invited to attend a public meeting in Swift Current tonight. You can hear firsthand what you are doing to those elderly people in Swift Current. The least you can do, Mr. Minister, is listen to them. Will you at least go to the meeting this evening and listen to the concerns of the seniors tonight? Will you personally attend that meeting that's scheduled for this evening?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member that I will be attending meetings in various parts of the province tonight and every night this week and into Saturday. And the next complaint that will come about next year from the opposition will be the amount of money spent on travel for me to go to these meetings.

But I will not be in Swift Current this evening, Mr. Speaker, but we will talk to some people at the meeting . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the Speaker is having a great deal of difficulty being able to hear the answer provided by the Minister of Health, and I'll ask all members of the House to . . . Order. I will ask all members of the House to provide the minister the courtesy of listening to his response.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — But I'm sure there will be people at the

meeting that will let me know what was said at the meeting, Mr. Speaker.

But what I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is that I just think it's unfortunate that the members want to use what is in essence a simple decision to consolidate long-term care in Swift Current to play politics by engaging in fearmongering, by suggesting that there are people in this province that would not be concerned about seniors having good and decent places to live, when we know that the plan of the health district is to take care of those people, albeit not through the private, for-profit facility where they presently live, but through other institutions in the Swift Current district, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Highway Maintenance

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can certainly understand why the Minister of Health wouldn't want to travel on Saskatchewan's highways, because I saw a very shocking example this weekend of the disastrous shape our highways are in.

On Highway 361 east of Alida, two semi-trailers were stuck in the middle of the highway. One of them was right in front of my farm, so I took some pictures to show the minister. The ruts on the highways were over a foot deep, and I have the picture, Mr. Minister, to prove it.

Mr. Minister, the RM (rural municipality) came out and, at their own expense, patched up the problem, but that's simply a stop-gap solution. And this highway is going to get worse, Mr. Minister. And there are many more . . . how many more semis are going to get stuck on this highway? And how many drivers or passengers have to be injured or killed before you start doing something about the terrible shape of highways in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I want to thank the member for his question, Mr. Speaker. I am sure the member opposite knows the situation this spring, with the wetness and the rain and all the problems that that's created to, not only the Department of Highways, Mr. Speaker, but also to municipal governments in the RMs.

But I want to say to the member, Mr. Speaker, that if his party 10 years ago would have thought of the highway situation at that point in time and spent . . . instead of spending, spending, spending, getting us into all kinds of debt, we'd now have \$851 million in interest that we have to pay each and every year, Mr. Speaker.

Not only that, they sold off most of the highways' equipment; we now have to try and replace that as best we can. So the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, should just look into the past a little bit before he makes those kinds of comments.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Canadian Wheat Board

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also plain that that minister doesn't drive on the highways in Saskatchewan either.

My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Minister, it's not often we see you and the federal Liberals in agreement. But you're sure singing from the same song sheet when it comes to trampling on Saskatchewan farmers' rights.

When David Sawatzky was acquitted on Friday, you and Ralph Goodale should have taken that as a signal that the Wheat Board monopoly needed to change. Instead Ralph Goodale took immediate steps to prevent farmers from marketing their grain as they see fit. And you lined up right behind him, Mr. Minister. In fact you compared a farmer who hauls his grain across the border to someone who holds up a grocery store.

Mr. Minister, do you really believe that farmers who simply want to get the best price for their product are the same as someone who robs grocery stores?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want to answer the question on behalf of the government. Mr. Speaker, this debate about the Canadian Wheat Board is an important one because, as far as this provincial government is concerned, and I believe the vast, vast majority of farmers in Canada are concerned, the single-desk marketing system of the Canadian Wheat Board has served this country and the farmers very, very well.

That's not to say that there can't be made improvements to. There can be made improvements to the Canadian Wheat Board as there can be to any institution. But what we do not support is what the Conservatives in this province are advocating — namely, some form of two-tiering; a breaking up of the single-desk marketing approach, which doesn't make any sense.

Mr. Speaker, almost all the buyers of the world of countries buy from a single desk. The only ones who benefit when you have a multiplicity of sellers are the buyers. It makes no sense to the farmers of Sturgis, Saskatchewan to be competing against the farmers up in Meadow Lake, or the farmers in Saskatchewan to be competing against the farmers in Alberta.

We stand for the Canadian Wheat Board 100 per cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, polling shows that farmers want a change, starting with dual marketing.

Your minister and Ralph Goodale seem to have missed the point on this whole issue though, because your minister kept referring to this as an illegal activity and yet the courts have ruled that David Sawatzky wasn't acting illegally.

Your minister says this ruling shows that the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly needs to change.

The Western Canadian Wheat Growers say you should use this ruling as an opportunity to move towards a dual-marketing system. And a Wheat Board commissioner, who recently

resigned, says the Wheat Board needs to change its marketing practices which he says costs Saskatchewan . . . not Saskatchewan, western farmers \$100 million in barley sales last year. Everyone seems to recognize the need for change excepting the Premier, the Minister of Agriculture, and Ralph Goodale.

Mr. Minister, your own polling shows that the Saskatchewan farmers need more marketing choices. We have introduced a private members' Bill to hold a producers' vote on dual marketing; will you support that initiative, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the best efforts or, if I may say so, the worst efforts of the Conservative Party in this province to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board, you will not get us onside with that mission.

I say that historically and in actual reality the single-desk marketing system in the Canadian Wheat Board has been one of the greatest advances for the farmers and the people of Saskatchewan and this country. It makes economic sense. It's the right thing to do when we meet other competitors in the international market-place. And we're not going to privatize the grain industry . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. Order, order. Order, order. Now the Speaker's having a great deal of difficulty being able to hear the Premier in his response. Order. And I will ask the members of the third party to please be in order to allow the answer to be heard . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Order. I'm not asking for comment about the Speaker's ruling. I'm just asking for cooperation of the House.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I just want to close my remarks by saying that it may be — not may be — it is the policy of the Conservative caucus to be in the hip pocket of ConAgra and the large marketing grain companies international. It is not our policy. We support the Canadian Wheat Board because it's the right thing to do and it makes sense.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan's Credit Rating

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Bond Rating Service and Moody's recently decided not to upgrade Saskatchewan's credit rating. Both firms registered concerns about the province's debt as a reason for not upgrading their respective ratings.

Mr. Speaker, this government continually blames the Devine government for the financial mess that they were left. But the fact remains the NDP has had five years to address this problem, which included a period of above average real economic growth, yet they made very little progress in paying down the debt.

Given the fact that the economy is not expected to continue growing at the same rate, will the Minister of Finance explain why she wasted an opportunity to put a significant dent in this province's debt?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite. I would welcome that question. There is no other province in Canada that has reduced its debt as dramatically as Saskatchewan has. And I'm again amazed that the member opposite would cite the CBRS (Canadian Bond Rating Service) rating because, first of all, we already have an A with both Moody's and CBRS.

But what is absolutely fascinating is what they cite as the major problem the province faced in this budget cycle. The major problem, besides the debt which we inherited from those folks, was a \$220 million reduction in federal transfers over the past two years, they say, which again the members opposite seem to support.

So what these rating agencies are saying is we already have a very good credit rating with them. We're doing a very good job. The problem is the debt inherited from them and the short-term problem from your federal counterparts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, what the Minister of Finance neglects to tell the House today is that last year they had committed that they could handle any reductions in federal transfers, and that was the reason why their credit rating wasn't affected. So I guess obviously what's happened here is they haven't fulfilled that promise; so be it. So now our credit rating hasn't changed.

When the economy was at a high, this government was electioneering with the taxpayers' money rather than putting it towards the debt. The Canadian Bond Rating Service expects economic growth to be about a quarter of what it was in 1994. This does not bode well for growth in our provincial revenues. A downturn in the economy could spell a fiscal crisis.

Will the minister make a commitment in this House today to produce a genuine debt-reduction plan, so the people of Saskatchewan and bond-rating agencies can feel confident that Saskatchewan will not be caught flat footed in the event of a recession?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, everybody else is very optimistic — Conference Board of Canada, recently very optimistic about the Saskatchewan economy.

One of the liabilities we're trying to deal with, though, are the irresponsible comments of the member opposite which is costing this province jobs.

But what I would say again to the member opposite is this is a government that has committed this year to reduce the province's debt by some \$700 million. Going from 1994, the debt, relative to the size of the economy, was 68 per cent. It's going down to 44 per cent by 1999.

There is simply no other government in Canada that has reduced its debt in this way. The federal government still hasn't balanced its books.

But I would conclude by saying this to the member opposite. There is only one province in Canada that has had its credit rating upgraded in the last five years, and it's something the Saskatchewan people should be proud of because the province that got an upgrade last year was Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 94 — An Act to amend The Education and Health Tax Act

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that first reading of a Bill to amend The Education and Health Tax Act 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.

Bill No. 95 — An Act to amend The Labour-sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Act

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that first reading of a Bill to amend The Labour-sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Act 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.

Bill No. 96 — An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Pension Plan Act

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that first reading of a Bill to amend The Saskatchewan Pension Plan Act 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.

Bill No. 97 — An Act to amend The Department of Agriculture Act

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I move the first reading on An Act to amend The Department of Agriculture Act be now introduced and read a first time.

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

Bill No. 98 — An Act respecting the Application to Saskatchewan of the Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction/Loi concernant l'application à la Saskatchewan de la Convention sur les aspects civils de l'enlèvement international d'enfants

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill respecting the Application to Saskatchewan of the

Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction/Loi concernant l'application à la Saskatchewan de la Convention sur les aspects civils de l'enlèvement international d'enfants.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

Bill No. 99 — An Act respecting Co-operatives/ Loi concernant les coopératives

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move first reading of a Bill respecting Co-operatives/du projet de loi relative à la Loi concernant les coopératives.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

Bill No. 100 — An Act respecting the Regulation of Drivers and Traffic on Saskatchewan Highways/ Loi concernant la réglementation de la conduite automobile et de la circulation sur les routes de la Saskatchewan

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move first reading of a Bill respecting the Regulation of Drivers and Traffic on Saskatchewan Highways/du projet de loi relative à la Loi concernant la réglementation de la conduite automobile et de la circulation sur les routes de la Saskatchewan.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

Bill No. 101 — An Act respect Wills/ Loi concernant les testaments

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill respecting Wills/du projet de loi relative à la Loi concernant les testaments.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

Bill No. 102 — An Act respecting the Distribution of Estates of Intestates/ Loi concernant le partage des successions non testamentaires

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move first reading of a Bill respecting the Distribution of Estates of Intestates/du projet de loi relative à la Loi concernant le partage des successions non testamentaires.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

Bill No. 103 — An Act respecting Powers of Attorney/

Loi concernant les procurations

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move first reading of a Bill respecting Powers of Attorney/du projet de loi relative à la Loi concernant les procurations.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

**Bill No. 104 — An Act to facilitate the Reciprocal Enforcement of Judgments and Awards/
Loi visant à faciliter l'exécution réciproque des jugements et des sentences arbitrales**

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move first reading of a Bill to facilitate the Reciprocal Enforcement of Judgments and Awards/du projet de loi relative à la Loi visant à faciliter l'exécution réciproque des jugements et des sentences arbitrales.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

**Bill No. 105 — An Act respecting the Application in Saskatchewan of the United Nations Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards/
Loi concernant l'application en Saskatchewan de la Convention des Nations Unies pour la reconnaissance et l'exécution des sentences arbitrales étrangères**

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move first reading of a Bill respecting the Application in Saskatchewan of the United Nations Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards/du projet de loi relative à la Loi concernant l'application en Saskatchewan de la Convention des Nations Unies pour la reconnaissance et l'exécution des sentences arbitrales étrangères.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

The Speaker: — Before the Speaker takes his seat, can I ask for a little order in the House, please.

Bill No. 106 — An Act respecting the Maintenance of Dependants of Testators and Intestates/Loi concernant l'aide aux personnes à charge des testateurs et des intestats

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move first reading of a Bill respecting the Maintenance of Dependants of Testators and Intestates/du projet de loi relative à la Loi concernant l'aide aux personnes à charge des testateurs et des intestats.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

Bill No. 107 — An Act respecting the Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders/Loi concernant

l'exécution réciproque des ordonnances alimentaires

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move first reading of a Bill respecting the Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders/projet de loi relative à la Loi concernant l'exécution réciproque des ordonnances alimentaires.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

**Bill No 108 — An Act to amend
The Change of Name Act, 1995/
Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur le changement de nom**

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill to amend The Change of Name Act, 1995/Loi modifiant la Loi sur le changement de nom be now introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

**Bill No. 109 — An Act to amend
The Vital Statistics Act, 1995/
Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les services de l'état civil**

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill to amend The Vital Statistics Act, 1995/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services de l'état civil be now introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

**Bill No. 110 — An Act to amend The Education Act, 1995/
Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur l'éducation**

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to amend The Education Act/projet de loi relative à la Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur l'éducation.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be referred to the Standing Committee on Non-controversial Bills.

Bill No. 111 — An Act to amend The Teachers' Life Insurance (Government Contributory) Act

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to amend The Teachers' Life Insurance (Government Contributory) Act.

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

Bill No. 112 — An Act to amend The Teachers Superannuation and Disability Benefits Act

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to amend The Teachers Superannuation and Disability

Benefits Act.

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

(1430)

Bill No. 113 — An Act respecting Wascana Energy Inc.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill respecting the Wascana Energy Act.

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

Bill No. 114 — An Act respecting the Establishment of a Crown Foundation for District Health Boards and their Affiliates

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that The Crown Foundations for District Health Boards Act 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.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — Question 99 is converted to motions for return (debatable).

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 10 — Personal Injury Protection Plan

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to rise in this House today and commend this government for implementing the personal injury protection plan — PIPP. At the end of my remarks I will move, seconded by the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley:

That this Assembly affirm its support for the personal injury protection plan, which emphasizes rehabilitation for accident victims.

Mr. Speaker, just for background, the auto fund is a financially self-contained, self-supporting program, administered by SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) on behalf of the government. It does not pay any dividends; it does not receive any subsidies. Mr. Speaker, in other words the auto fund does not borrow money from nor does it pay profits to the provincial government. All its funding comes from premiums, investments, and other miscellaneous income.

In 1994, the auto fund suffered a \$93.8 million loss. Close to 60 per cent of this went towards injury claims. Court awards for pain and suffering were soaring. Insurance rates were rising because of growing damage and liability costs.

Just to give a comparison of some of the interprovincial rates

and what occurred to them from 1993 to 1996. In Alberta, the rates went up 4.8 in 1993; 6.4 in '94; 4.8 in '95; and went up a further 6 per cent this year.

As a result of these increases the Saskatchewan Government Insurance, in consultation with various interest groups and the public — the good old Saskatchewan way — developed the personal injury protection plan commonly referred to as PIPP, or no-fault insurance.

Mr. Speaker, under the old system, SGI was paying most of its settlement dollars anywhere from 60 to 70 per cent for pain and suffering, followed by loss of income, and last, rehabilitation.

PIPP is a more caring system and places rehabilitation as the primary focus. The guarantee's benefits are among the best in Canada. More emphasis is placed on rehabilitation, income replacement, and death benefits, than under the previous system.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to spend a few moments on the benefits which are available under PIPP and compare them to the benefits under the old plan. With regards to rehabilitation, PIPP will pay a \$500,000 maximum for medical and rehabilitation expenses. Compare this to the old program where the maximum was \$10,000. Under PIPP, it also includes \$550 per week maximum for personal home care expenses. This was not covered in the old program.

Under the income replacement there are various categories. Under PIPP, 90 per cent of the net income derived from gross yearly employment income to a maximum of \$50,000. In other words, a member making \$50,000, hurt in an accident, would have income replacement of \$45,000.

Home-makers with dependants receive a child care allowance of up to \$400 a week. Compare this to the old system where it was a maximum of \$150 a week for two years for home-makers. That's all.

Students receive a maximum of 13,000 for each school year missed. If the disability continues past completion of school then income replacement commences. In the old scheme there was a maximum of \$75 per week for 52 weeks if confined to bed, hospital, or wheelchair. This also includes the full-time, self-employed, part-time, temporary workers, seniors, unemployed, students, and home-makers.

With the death benefits under PIPP, 50 per cent of the income replacement benefit the deceased victim would have been entitled to will be paid to the spouse until her or his death, plus 5 per cent to each dependent child until age 21. Lump sum payments are also an option. Compare this to the old program where the maximum was \$10,000, and there was \$1,500 for a dependent child. There was also \$10,000 paid to the estate of victims with no spouse or dependants. In the old scheme it was \$2,500.

A \$30,000 allowance for education and training to home-making spouses. This is a great plan in that it allows the home-making spouses time to retrain, get their education, and become contributing members of society. There was nothing

like this under the old program.

And there's a \$5,000 funeral allowance, which of course was not covered at all under the old program also.

Permanent injury, depending on the extent of the injury and so forth, there is a maximum of 125,000 under PIPP. In the old program the maximum was 10,000.

All of these benefits under PIPP are indexed to the consumer price index, the CPI, and the benefits in the old program were not indexed.

And here comes the controversial one, as we read in the paper at times. Under this new program victims not responsible for the accident can sue for economic loss in excess of the personal injury benefits. In other words, if a member is making \$70,000 then he is allowed to sue for the amount above the \$50,000. However he cannot sue for pain and suffering. In the old scheme they could sue for economic loss and pain and suffering in excess of the above benefits which they had. In both cases there is a \$200,000 liability coverage paid under the plate insurance.

As all schemes are not exactly perfect, an appeal procedure has been put in place. First of all there is the internal appeal. Mr. Speaker, if you were to be in an accident then you would discuss this with your adjuster. If you could not come to an agreement then you could discuss it with the manager; he would give you a written decision. If you were not satisfied with that written decision, then you could apply for mediation. An outside mediator, which would be chosen with mutual consent, would be chosen to hear the case. A \$35 fee is charged. And why the \$35 fee is charged, of course, is to keep complaints or mediation requests from ones which should not be. The mediator is paid by the Saskatchewan Government Insurance. Again his decision is not binding.

Then if you wanted to go a little further, then of course you could go to the Court of Queen's Bench. If you are successful in going to the Queen's Bench, then the legal fees will be paid. If not successful, then of course the plaintiff would be liable for the fees.

Just to give you a next idea of how well this plan is working, there were 6,654 injury claims last year. Of these, there were 48 internal reviews. There were no mediations. There were no, of course, Court of Queen's Bench. And so this is . . . the scheme is working very, very well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — The auto fund has also introduced some other initiatives which will make life a little easier for us. One is the daily vehicle expiry. I know some people wonder about this, but it was in response to the agents who are being flooded at the end of the month period. And so we now have a daily vehicle expiry which you place on your licence plate.

Short-term registrations will be introduced in '97. This of course should be of great benefit to farmers who only use their farm trucks perhaps three months, perhaps six months, of the

year. Then they will only need to register them for that amount of time.

Mr. Speaker, it will also be of great benefit to RV (recreation vehicle) owners who only will have to register their vehicles for three months, six months, whatever period of time that they use. So this will be introduced in '97.

In '97 it will also be possible for you to make monthly payments. Instead of paying out all of the money for your vehicles and so forth in one payment, you will be able to have monthly payments set up.

Drinking and driving, of course, has a devastating effect on the families and friends of those who are injured or killed in alcohol-related crashes. It also increases the cost to society in terms of insurance, health care, and other government services.

As a result of this, an all-party committee on drinking safety of eight MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) toured the province consulting with people on proposed legislation. Their recommendations were as follows. They recommended a reduction in the roadside suspension blood-alcohol content level for all drivers from .06 per cent to .04 per cent. They also recommended that driving without impairment, DWI program, be mandatory for new drivers losing their licence the first time with a BAC (blood alcohol concentration) of .04 per cent. In the case of experienced drivers, a DWI course would be required after a second suspension.

A mandatory rehabilitation program was also recommended for convicted impaired drivers and new drivers with two .04 per cent suspensions and other drivers with three .04 per cent suspensions. As a result of these findings and so forth, legislation has been introduced at this time and will be going into effect.

As a spin-off of all of this . . . one of the spin-offs, Mr. Speaker, has been that new emphasis that resulted in savings for the people of Saskatchewan. There has been no increase in car premiums since 1994, whereas if we compare it to Alberta, remember that they had a 6.4 per cent increase in '94, a 4.8 per cent increase in '95, and a further 6 per cent increase this year in good old, tax-free Alberta.

Injury claims alone dropped to 117 million from 225 million in 1994, a huge financial turnaround from a loss of 93.8 million in 1994 to a profit of 3.5 million — once again this government has placed Saskatchewan on the leading edge, not on the edge of bankruptcy that the former Conservative government led us to, not to the edge of social justice chaos which the Liberals had advocated — these same Liberals who would like us to believe that they have a monopoly on care and compassion, while in truth the only monopoly they have is their misplaced, stifling devotion to the policies of the federal Liberals.

The same Liberals who — without any compassion, concern, or care — slashed the funding to health, education, and social programs by more than \$100 million and whose dismantling of other social programs, such as the emasculation of the unemployment insurance at a time of many job losses, drastic proposed changes to the Canada Pension Plan, and economic

policies which led to the demise of the Crow benefit, deregulation of railroads, the abandonment of municipal airports, and in short the abandonment of rural Canada . . . And how can they justify spending \$1 billion to cover up harmonization of the GST (goods and services tax) in Atlantic Canada while reducing the payments for education, health, and social programs? Mr. Speaker, we do realize where their priorities are.

(1445)

Mr. Speaker, this government has put Saskatchewan on the leading edge of social reform as we confidently enter the 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I would move, seconded by the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley:

That this Assembly affirm its support for the personal injury protection plan which places increasing emphasis on rehabilitation services for accident victims.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to add my support to the motion put forward by my friend and colleague, the member from Swift Current. Much of what I will say has been said by my hon. friend, but I believe so strongly in this motion that I think it bears repeating.

I'd like to begin with a little bit of background. SGI is the main corporation, the main Crown. It has two operations underneath it: the auto fund and SGI CANADA. The auto fund handles basic, compulsory vehicle insurance and SGI handles general insurance. If there is a deficit in the auto fund, which operates on a break-even basis, it cannot look to profits from SGI to help it out. They are separate entities.

The auto fund does not borrow from the government nor does it receive subsidies from the government. It does not pay profits or dividends to the government. Premiums are paid by vehicle owners and drivers and then the corporation uses those premiums to pay for injury and vehicle damage claims.

As a result of large losses in '93 and '94, the auto fund has an accumulated deficit of \$108 million. Most of that money, nearly 60 per cent of it, went towards injury claims. Court awards for pain and suffering were increasing at a prodigious rate. Injury claims for people injured in vehicle collisions have increased an average of 12 per cent during the last 10 years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, something had to be done to restore the financial health of the auto fund. After all, it had an accumulated deficit of \$108.9 million.

Something had to be done to avoid increasing vehicle insurance rates for Saskatchewan motorists. After all, Saskatchewan drivers enjoy some of the lowest rates in Canada. And with no changes, rates would likely increase by 8 per cent a year. And something had to be done — and this is most important — to improve benefits.

And so, Mr. Speaker, on January 1, 1995, the personal injury protection plan was implemented. And in keeping with our government's commitment to involve the people of Saskatchewan, SGI consulted widely with various interest groups to develop this made-in-Saskatchewan solution.

The personal injury protection plan provides improved benefits to every Saskatchewan resident injured in an automobile accident regardless of fault. All Saskatchewan residents injured in automobile accidents, whether in Canada or the United States, are covered.

Under the old tort system, SGI was paying most of its settlement dollars for pain and suffering, followed by loss of income, and lastly, rehabilitation. With this personal injury protection plan, rehabilitation is the prime focus.

This plan is a more caring system, with guaranteed benefits among the best in Canada. This plan does not allow the victim the right to sue the other party for pain and suffering. However this plan does preserve the right of innocent victims to sue for economic losses not covered by personal injury benefits. It was only by removing the right to sue for pain and suffering that SGI was able to redistribute claims payments to improved benefits, implement new rehabilitative programs, and freeze vehicle rates for '94, '95, and 1996.

When the personal injury protection plan was introduced, there were no changes to vehicle damage coverage. The person at fault in the accident continues to pay the \$500 deductible for vehicle damage and continues to receive an insurance premium surcharge on his or her licence.

Now my good friend, the colleague from Swift Current, has talked at length about some of the benefits of the personal injury protection plan, and I would just like to highlight a few of them again.

Rehabilitation and medical expenses are paid to a maximum of \$500,000 including personal home care expenses up to \$550 a week.

Income replacement benefits are paid to injured people who are unable to continue with employment, home-making duties, and education as a result of their injuries. And there are various plans underneath that income replacement benefits for people who are working, seniors, farmers, home-makers with dependants, students, and people unemployed but able to work. All these benefits are indexed to keep pace with inflation.

The personal injury protection plan's emphasis is on rehabilitation and making people well. Under the old system, 70 per cent of costs were incurred for pain and suffering. With the new system, costs have been redirected — 35 per cent for medical and rehabilitation services and 32 per cent for income replacement. This move towards a less adversarial and more compassionate approach focuses on wellness and the rehabilitation of injured individuals which is benefiting SGI clients.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, I'd just like to say a few more words about rehabilitation. SGI has committed \$25 million over

three years towards new rehabilitation programs. This would not have been possible without the introduction of this plan. Health care provider associations, for instance the Saskatchewan Medical Association, the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations, chiropractors, and physiotherapy groups, have indicated they are pleased with the direction and efforts of SGI in this regard.

In accordance with our increased emphasis on rehabilitation, SGI is now working with several health care organizations to improve services and support increased research. As part of the development and implementation of the personal injury protection plan, SGI organized a rehabilitation advisory board. This board is composed of representatives of Saskatchewan Health, district health boards, health care associations, and injury-related consumer groups which have worked closely with the auto fund to determine the province's most pressing needs.

As a result, SGI is now working with many different organizations. The World Health Organization based at the world famous Karolinski Institute in Stockholm, Sweden entered into a partnership agreement with SGI and the University of Saskatchewan in 1995 for a three-year study of neurotrauma, whiplash, brain, and spinal cord injuries. SGI is providing funding of \$300,000 for the project.

Late in 1995, SGI signed an agreement with the Regina and Saskatoon district health boards to provide another \$1.5 million to each district annually to establish specialized treatment centres for new rehabilitative services. An additional 2.8 million will be provided to the Saskatoon Health District to renovate and equip City Hospital for this new program.

Under a three-year partnership with the Saskatchewan Department of Health, SGI will provide \$9.3 million to enhance community rehabilitation services for people who suffer brain injuries. Motor vehicle accidents are a leading cause of brain injuries in this province.

SGI continues its work with the University of Saskatchewan on a five-year \$1 million research project into the assessment and treatment of soft tissue injuries, which was initiated in 1993. Through these projects, the auto fund is investing in rehabilitation and restoration of health. This direction is in keeping with the province's wellness program as we work closely with Saskatchewan Health to improve the province's injury rehabilitation resources.

Mr. Speaker, the personal injury protection plan is not perfect, but it is a substantially better system than the one we had before 1995.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — SGI's staff have met the challenge to make the transition from an adversarial system to a more compassionate one, and they deserve our congratulations. Program delivery will improve as adjusters become more familiar with it. Benefits have improved, and there have been no rate increases in 1994, 1995, or 1996. The financial health of the auto fund has been restored, and in 1995 SGI received only 48 appeals from a total of nearly 7,000 claims. That's less than 1 per cent,

and that indicates a high level of satisfaction.

The personal injury protection plan is in keeping with the vision of the auto fund: to provide quality, compulsory auto insurance and supporting services to Saskatchewan people; to be the leading insurer in the province; and to develop other markets by providing profitable, competitive insurance products in a manner which is responsive to and valued by its stakeholders, is affordable, and contributes to the growth, diversification, and economic well-being of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm proud to support the motion:

That this Assembly affirm its support for the personal injury protection plan which places increasing emphasis on rehabilitation services for accident victims.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm very pleased to enter this debate on the issue that can have drastic impact on Saskatchewan families.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a minute to address the wording of the motion put forward by the member from Swift Current. The motion reads:

That this Assembly affirm its support for the personal injury protection plan which places increasing emphasis on rehabilitation services for accident victims.

I agree that rehabilitation must be considered as a priority for accident victims. We must concentrate on getting an accident victim back to their pre-accident state of health. The personal injury protection plan does cover a lot of expenses which are not covered under the Saskatchewan health care plan. The plan will provide up to \$500,000 for reasonable rehabilitation and medical expenses such as prescription drugs, physiotherapy travel expenses, dental costs, chiropractic care, mobility aids, ambulance costs, and home and personal care. And obviously this is a positive aspect of the plan.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are some very critical concerns that need to be addressed. There are cases that have been brought to our attention which are, without a doubt, slipping through the cracks. It is these cases that the minister responsible for SGI has to take a very close look at.

Mr. Speaker, the first flaw in the personal injury protection plan deals with accident victims who suffer multiple injuries. These are people who are being let down by this plan.

In one particular case, a family was travelling east on Highway No. 1 heading towards Moosomin when they were involved in a very severe accident with an ambulance. This accident has thrown this family's lives into turmoil. Their daughter was killed and the father seriously injured. Since the day of that accident, this family has run into obstacle after obstacle due to no fault of their own.

The extent of the injuries to the father of this family will prevent him from returning to his job as a fire-fighter in the same pre-accident capacity. He has been able to return to work, but working behind a desk due to his physical limitations. As a result of this accident and the personal injury protection plan, this individual's career will undoubtedly suffer. His future career advancement will be impeded strictly because of the injuries he suffered through no fault of his own.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that the personal injury protection plan does not provide for any compensation in cases such as this. Nowhere does the plan address the issue of pain and suffering for victims suffering multiple injuries.

Mr. Speaker, this is a family that has been forced to suffer socially, economically, physically, and emotionally. These cases may be rare, but the minister must place them at the top of his list of priorities. Even one family made to suffer the shortfalls of this plan is one too many.

Mr. Speaker, another problem with the personal injury protection plan deals with the death benefits. Death benefits are paid to the surviving spouse of a victim killed in an automobile accident. The surviving spouse receives an income replacement benefit until he or she dies. The benefit is 50 per cent of the net income the victim was earning. The spouse could choose to receive a lump sum instead of biweekly payments.

Mr. Speaker, I have to ask the minister, how is the amount of the lump sum determined? If it was based solely on the individual's net income, then I would hope the minister can see the problem this could cause. Take the case of a farmer who is involved in a farm accident and loses his or her life. I don't believe that a benefit of 50 per cent of the victim's net income is appropriate.

(1500)

What if the farmer has money tied up in capital assets. This will obviously affect the net income and ultimately the amount of the income replacement benefit. When dealing with cases like this it is not acceptable to have a simplistic formula in place to determine the amount of an income replacement benefit.

Mr. Speaker, the family that is affected by such a tragic accident must be consulted and have input into the amount of the benefit. The needs of the affected families cannot be overlooked, rather they must be looked at very closely.

Mr. Speaker, rates paid by SGI customers have not increased, but this at the expense of a small group of victims who have been made to suffer through no fault of their own. There are some very significant cracks in the personal protection injury plan that need to be addressed before anyone else is made a victim.

The minister has implied that there will be review of the plan after five years in order to determine where the plan has been successful and where the plan has failed. Mr. Speaker, five years is far too long a time frame. There are problems and weaknesses in the system that need to be addressed immediately. We cannot wait five years and hope that no one

else is forced to suffer like some individuals already have.

The personal injury protection plan must be reviewed on a continual basis and the plan must be changed when problems, flaws, and weaknesses are discovered. It is not good enough to sit back and document all of these problems and then attempt to fix them after five years.

Mr. Speaker, action must be taken now. This motion calls on this Assembly to affirm its support for the personal injury protection plan which places increasing emphasis on rehabilitation services for accident victims.

In that, Mr. Speaker, I along with my colleagues in the official opposition, do support this motion. As I stated earlier, rehabilitation must be a priority for accident victims, with the hope that they can return to their pre-accident physical and mental state of health.

Mr. Speaker, although I do support the motion as it reads, I also strongly urge the minister responsible for SGI and his colleagues to take a close look at the problems that I have raised today. Don't wait five years. Don't let anyone else suffer due to the shortfalls of the personal injury protection plan. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise in support of the motion put forward by the member from Swift Current regarding PIPP, or personal injury protection plan.

Mr. Speaker, the auto fund was designed to be a self-sustaining program. I mean by this that premiums and other earnings of the fund were to cover the costs of any losses incurred by the users of this program.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, due to rising liability claims, the fund in 1993 and 1994 found itself in a deficit situation. This government, instead of raising premiums like our neighbours to the east and to the west of us, Mr. Speaker, this government looked for a made-in-Saskatchewan solution.

So SGI, in consultation with interest groups and the public, developed the personal injury protection plan. What PIPP does, Mr. Speaker, is provide improved benefits to every Saskatchewan resident injured in an automobile accident regardless of who is at fault.

Under the old system SGI was paying most of its settlement dollars for pain and suffering followed by loss of income and costly rehabilitation. With PIPP, rehabilitation is the prime focus.

Mr. Speaker, PIPP is a more caring system with guaranteed benefits among the best in Canada. These new benefits include 500,000 maximum for medical and rehabilitation expenses; a maximum of \$550 a week for personal and home care expenses; 90 per cent of net income derived from gross yearly employment income to a maximum of \$50,000; home-makers with dependants receive a child care allowance of up to \$400 per week; students receive a maximum of 13,000 for each school year missed. If the disability continues past completion

of school, income replacement commences.

PIPP includes full-time, self-employed, part-time, temporary workers, seniors, the unemployed, students, and the home-makers. PIPP provides 50 per cent of the income replacement benefit to which a deceased victim would have been entitled; will be paid to the spouse until his or her death plus 5 per cent to each dependent child until age 21.

Lump sum payments are also an option: \$10,000 paid to the estate of victims with no spouse or dependants; \$30,000 allowance for education and training to home-making spouses; and \$5,000 for funeral allowances, Mr. Speaker; permanent injury maximum of \$125,000.

Under PIPP, benefits are indexed to consumer price index. Victims not responsible for the accident can sue for economic loss in excess of the personal injury benefits. And this protects the victims, Mr. Speaker, because they will be able to take the law into the courts and have a civil suit if they want one.

But what PIPP does not allow is the victim the right to sue the other party for pain and suffering. However PIPP does preserve the right of innocent victims to sue for economic losses not covered by personal injury benefits.

Mr. Speaker, it was only by removing the right to sue for pain and suffering that SGI was able to redistribute claim payments to improve benefits, implement new rehabilitative programs, and freeze vehicle rates for '94, '95, and '96.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I think we know that with implementing a new program it will take some time for the public and the department to adjust to the new guidelines. But, Mr. Speaker, being a government of change and showing leadership in this area, I'm sure other parts of the country will soon follow our lead in providing good government and protection to their constituents, at a reasonable cost. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's important that one take a moment just to address the motion that's before us and bring to light some of the problems that people across this province are facing.

And first of all I'd like to read into *Hansard*, a letter that we received — and I'm sure maybe all members in this Assembly received this letter — regarding SGI no-fault insurance. This letter is dated December 18, 1995. And this is what it says, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

I did not know how bad "no fault" SGI insurance was until close friends of mine were involved in a very serious car accident that has changed their lives forever. They were involved in a collision (no fault of theirs) in which a precious daughter was killed, plus serious injuries to the driver. Not only is this a life changing situation, but "no fault" insurance compounds their pain. My friends do not wish to profit from this accident, but just maintain the

standard of living they had before this tragedy. SGI "no fault" insurance is cruel and does not think of the innocent victim.

When I hear Premier Romanow talk about being a caring, compassionate government, this obviously does not apply to SGI "no fault" insurance. VICTIMS should not be treated this way.

Please find attached a commentary about how SGI's "NO FAULT" insurance has affected the Markwart Family. This is just a small portion of what they have endured. Feel free to contact the Markwarts if you have any questions or comments.

It's interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I look at the letter and the information surrounding the circumstances of this . . . the reasons for this letter. It talks about the fact that . . . and the individual's saying here:

I finally wrote a letter to Premier Romanow on August 30, 1995. We have yet to meet with him or one member of the Legislative Assembly regarding this new Act since the letter was sent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this letter has been written by an individual from Regina living on Paynter Crescent; an individual very close to a family who were travelling out to Moosomin a little over a year ago to watch their son play in the Saskatchewan junior boys curling play-downs.

Unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they didn't make the play-downs. About 6 miles west of Moosomin their car came in contact . . . or vehicle came in contact with an ambulance. And as a result, you've heard through the letter, they lost their daughter, and the husband and father is in very serious condition. He's trying to get his life back in order, trying to work, but is facing some very difficult times due to the injuries that he received in that accident.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is one of many incidents across this province where this so-called, no-fault insurance program has become a major burden to people in the province of Saskatchewan, to individuals who have been hurt through no fault of their own, and as was the case here.

The only problem in this situation was that this family happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. It wasn't an accident that occurred because of a problem or the way they were driving down the road or their driving habits, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It had nothing to do with their driving habits. They were following the conditions of the road at the time. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they've got to live with this new no-fault insurance program.

And while I suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while I stand here and bring out these concerns, and the concerns of many other individuals who have contacted our caucus office, I raise them because of the fact that people are being hurt through this no-fault insurance program.

And I understand in some ways where the government was

coming from. There is no doubt we have seen outlandish lawsuits across our country; certainly it was appearing in this province. We've seen them in the United States, the U.S. of A (United States of America). It doesn't matter where you look, where lawsuits like this get into the courts, it seems that we've just had outrageous court settlements.

Now as this letter said, this individual said her friends are not looking to make a lot of money; they are looking for fair and reasonable compensation. And I would suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's where the no-fault insurance program fails people. It fails people because it sets a limit.

I suppose, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you were in your late 60s or late 50s, 125,000 invested might give you something reasonable enough to live on. But when you're a wage earner or when you're a young person in your late teens, early 20's, or 30's, you're the breadwinner and you're just in the prime of your life, and due to an accident you had no fault in, and you're held to \$125,000 to live for the rest of your life, I'd like to ask the members in this Assembly if they'd been willing to live for it. The member from Lloydminster, maybe the \$4,300 that she's taken in extra pay she could give towards the Markwarts to help them in a situation. She still has the ability to make an honest, good day's living. And she's going to make more than \$125,000 in the next four years.

What about, what about these individuals who have been hurt and because of a government policy are being penalized for something they had no control over. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find it very inconsiderate, and I don't believe that government members or the Premier can even talk about compassion when we have people such as the Markwarts here facing what they're facing today — trying to get their lives back to order, having lost a daughter. The individual who wrote this letter, having lost a very close friend, and having to settle for \$125,000 to try and get their lives in order, in order to live and to provide for themselves on into the future.

Not just to provide . . . if it was Mr. Markwart himself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, maybe \$125,000 might work. But he's got a family to look after; he's got young children — children who will be going to university down the road no doubt. And \$125,000, how far does that go?

(1515)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would seem to me that it would have been a lot fairer and a lot more logical, rather than just totally changing and bringing forward the SGI insurance program and bringing in this no-fault insurance coverage, it would have been appropriate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to maybe have set some limits and some guidelines so that the courts couldn't just give out outlandish and outrageous settlements in the millions of dollars, which as we see here, most people aren't really looking for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it would have been appropriate and I think that still can be done. I think if this government really had the will they could reach the need of the Markwart family and many families across this province who have run into similar circumstances. And they could meet that need, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by striking out that \$125,000 maximum and

setting what would be a reasonable limit based on years of working experience or the lifetime that a person may have to rely on insurance for their livelihood up to a maximum. And who knows whether that's a million dollars or whatever, but it's a far cry from the 20 or the 24 million that we've been seeing handed out.

And that's why I believe the government brought it in. Unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they didn't realize that the amount they set is penalizing individuals for circumstances that they had no control over.

Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find it appropriate to move an amendment to this motion. And I would like to move, seconded by the member from Cannington:

That all the words following Assembly be deleted and the following substituted therefor:

strongly urge the government to reverse its decision to take away the rights and freedoms of individuals through the personal injury protection plan, and further recognize the hardship this policy has caused to many Saskatchewan families and seniors, and urge the government to take immediate steps to address this problem while keeping increased rehabilitation services for those in need.

I so move.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is one of those situations where an "I told you so" is appropriate. We informed the minister responsible for SGI, at the time the member from Athabasca . . . or Cumberland, the member from Cumberland, that all of the problems that my colleague talked about would come forward if this particular piece of legislation was implemented. It was implemented, and now we see the problems arising from that piece of legislation.

The minister for SGI talked in Crown Corporations about a saving of 70-plus million dollars that was realized by the SGI auto fund because of the implementation of the no-fault insurance Act. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, indeed there has been a significant profit generated for SGI based on this particular no-fault insurance.

But when you look at where the funds come from, Mr. Speaker, there's only one place where that money was derived from, and that is out of the pockets, out of the bank accounts, out of the livelihoods of those that have been victims of accidents, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is the only place where these savings that SGI claims to have made has come from. It has come from the backs of the victims, the innocent victims of motor vehicle accidents, Mr. Speaker, because they have limited very, very severely, the amount of compensation that is available to SGI accident insurance claimants.

The minister for SGI says, well in the main this has been because of whiplash. It was victims of whiplash that were demanding these insurance claims and were receiving the compensations. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, SGI has a large number of medical doctors on staff that determine whether or not an individual has been injured and if so, what their claim

should be. When SGI medical staff and the insurance claimant's medical advisers disagree, that's when we go to the court system, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In the court system, a judge or a group of peers decides whether or not there is any validity to the claim, whether or not the claim for whiplash or any other injury is valid. If it's valid, then an award is made based on the insurance, based on the life expectancy and the income expectancies of that particular individual.

Under no-fault insurance, all of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has been erased, is no longer available. The claimants against SGI no longer have a right to go before a judge and ask for arbitration or mediation on their behalf under the legal system. They no longer have a right to ask their peers to judge whether or not their claim is indeed valid. That has been totally negated by the government opposite and its members.

The head injury association, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was in favour of changes to the SGI insurance Act. They wanted more compensation payable to victims who suffered soft tissue head injuries, who were, in some cases, totally incapacitated because of these injuries and received very little, in some cases, in way of compensation from SGI.

Now I agreed that when the driver was the victim, they bore in some cases some responsibility for the accident. In those cases at times they received very little compensation. That needed to be increased — their protections, their support needed to be increased. But even the head injury association, Mr. Speaker, believed that it was wrong to deny the claimants for SGI their right to appear in the court system before a judge to make a claim. They agreed that every claimant against SGI should have the opportunity to go before the court, before a judge for a fair and equitable hearing. And that has been denied them under this particular piece of legislation.

Ken Noble, a Regina lawyer who dealt with a large number of these cases, forecast that when these changes were made, any savings realized by SGI would be from the victims of motor vehicle accidents. And that is indeed the case as we see from the Markwart situation, as we see from a number of other circumstances across this province.

There are a number of areas where there are improvements, Mr. Speaker, and we support those areas of improvement. But at the end of the day, we as citizens of Saskatchewan, we as citizens of Canada, ultimately have a right to appeal to a higher authority, to the courts for a determination as to whether or not any institution, any company, any individual is treating us in the proper and fair manner as outlined under the law.

Unfortunately this government, as in a number of other cases, has chosen to erase the law in their favour. It goes back to similar matters where they deem to have performed acts before a date when the law said they had to do it. They didn't write up the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) . . . or change the GRIP contracts on March 18, Mr. Speaker. They deemed to have done it on March 15, which was indeed not the case because the contract date closed on March 15.

It's been the record and the history of this government to change the law to suit their purposes.

Another example with the judges situation. The Minister of Justice put forward a tribunal, a committee to set judges' wages by arbitration, by mutual agreement between the government and the judges for binding results. When the committee came down with their results, the Minister of Justice didn't agree with it, so he broke the law and then he changed it to put forward what he wanted in the first place.

And again, Mr. Speaker, this is another example in this particular circumstance where the government rewrites the laws, negates the rights of Saskatchewan citizens to serve their own purposes, Mr. Speaker. And I believe that's wrong.

And that's why, Mr. Speaker, I support the motion by my colleague from Moosomin to return those rights and those freedoms which Canadians have traditionally enjoyed, which they should continue to enjoy, Mr. Speaker, and therefore I will be supporting this motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't really intending on getting into this debate, but after hearing the amendment from the member from Moosomin, I believe it's misleading and I just have to get into it.

For one thing, the one thing that . . . The member seems to have clouded the issue of income. Income, if you . . . people working at the time of the accident receive up to 90 per cent of their annual net income on a maximum gross pay of \$50,000. This protects the vast majority of Saskatchewan wage-earners.

And the thing is, that under the law that we have passed, you may sue for over 50 per cent. So you are allowed to . . . If someone feels that their income is more than 50 per cent, you are allowed to sue for that. People who earn more than 50,000 a year and are not responsible for the accident may make a claim against the responsible driver for economic loss over 50 per cent of yearly gross pay. Higher wage-earners therefore are protected by their ability to sue.

For seniors, income replacement benefits continue for life without reduction at retirement. So there you are.

Also, the member from Moosomin did not mention death benefits for instance. Death benefits are paid to the surviving spouse of a victim killed in an automobile accident. The surviving spouse receives an income replacement benefit until he or she dies. The benefit is 50 per cent of the net income the victim was earning. The spouse could choose to receive a lump sum payment instead of the biweekly payments. I don't think I know of a plan anywhere in North America that is fairer than that.

How about students, students that may have a potential for earning but aren't working? Students receive a maximum of 13,000 for each school year not completed. If the disability continues past completion of school, the income replacement benefits commence. Where do you, in North America, know of

a plan like that?

I'd like to see the members opposite give me an example of a plan that covers seniors; it covers the spouse, in death; it covers people not working, like seniors, for instance.

How about farmers and other self-employed people? Farmers and other self-employed people receive an income replacement benefit based on the higher of their income or the cost of replacement labour. So I don't think that you could be much fairer than this. And I certainly do not support the amendment that was proposed by the member from Moosomin. I just cannot understand why anybody would be against this plan.

We studied every angle of it in our committee, in our employment on the economy committee. The one thing that sort of did upset me at first was when you thought of people earning over 50,000 and not being able to sue. But we amended that and made that provision so that people earning over 50,000 could sue.

And also, for instance, the thing that got me was the rehabilitation. The rehabilitation just goes on and on in this plan. Rehabilitation and medical expenses are paid to a maximum of \$500,000, a million dollars, including a personal home care expenses to a maximum of \$550 per week. What other plan in North America does that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I love, Mr. Speaker, being in between — like a sandwich — being in between two hecklers, one on my side and one on their side. Anyway, the thing is that I don't believe in this amendment. It's misleading.

Here are some of the hard facts. Why don't the Tories listen up to some of the hard facts? More than 80 per cent of the PIPP claims were for soft-tissue injuries, the most common of these being whiplash. That was one of the problems. In recent years court awards for pain and suffering have sky-rocketed.

(1530)

So you have a few people receiving a great deal of money but what about the rest of the people . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . that's right. And a lot of money going to legal fees. SGI needed a plan to curb these costs without raising vehicle insurance rates. PIPP, with its focus on directing money towards rehabilitation, provided the solution.

And look at what we are doing with brain injury and with soft-tissue injury in this province. The opposition members should be proud of the work that's being done in that area instead of making amendments that are misleading and don't have all of the facts in them.

So I will be voting against this amendment. Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I support the motion made by the member from Moosomin and would like to bring out some information from a particular family that's involved in this situation. And I think most of us are fortunate

enough not having been involved in serious accidents and so sometimes it's easy for us to go ahead and speak about what's happened. But I think we need to hear specifically from some of the individuals that have had to suffer, and here is a situation:

. . . Friday, January 13, 1995, we were hit by an ambulance. The accident killed our daughter at the scene and seriously injured my husband. The driver of the ambulance is to stand trial for this accident. No Fault Insurance came into effect . . . January 1, 1995. For the past 11 months we have tried to understand the effects of this new insurance and what we (have tried to) understand is that we are paying out of our pockets for expenses caused by this ambulance driver, through no fault of our own. I finally wrote a letter to Premier Romanow on August 30, 1995, we have yet to meet with him or one member of the legislative assembly regarding this new Act since the letter was sent. My husband has been employed as a firefighter for 17 years. He has built up sick leave of 109 days during that time. My husband was off work for 7½ months and only went back to work because he had only nine days of sick leave left. He wants to buy back his sick time from the City of Regina, the cost to buy back his sick time and the 5 weeks (from the City of Regina) vacation time he . . . used to recover is \$29,649, SGI paid him \$18,000 which is 90% of his gross income after income tax . . . (is) deducted. SGI's attitude is "why do you think you deserve this" when we asked them to cover the difference. We don't think we deserve it we think we are entitled to it. This accident was not our fault. My husband is now to go to therapy 4 days a week plus work all of his shifts while physically trying to recover from this accident. Work alone wears him out, let alone the therapy. The consequence is he has to put his recovery in slow motion, by cutting down his therapy, so that we can live. . . . (Why should this happen) What should happen if he . . . (gets) seriously ill next week, he has only 9 days sick leave left. Was this accident our fault — no. Liability insurance from the ambulance company should cover this but this new act took this away. . . . (This) new No Fault act does not cover any of the jobs my husband performed around the house. They do cover home care and housekeeping. The adjuster told us that I could be paid to look after my husband, I declined. Now because I wrote to the Premier they feel obligated to pay us for the time I looked after him. People of Saskatchewan we are paying a high price for this insurance. We are not getting what we paid for. We must stand up for our constitutional rights and good business policies. When you purchase house insurance you get coverage to suit your budget and needs. We are forced to purchase auto insurance from SGI . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order. The members will be aware that the rules of the House prohibit reading of speeches and that traditionally that has been provided a great deal of latitude. However, reading direct quotes has been much different.

And I have been listening very carefully. The member is engaged in a very extensive quote from a letter, I believe, and I would ask him to simply . . . if he needs two or three more sentences that he wants to quote directly . . . but then to get on

to other items and to move off his direct quote. It's been very extensive, and I'll ask the member for Rosthern to move on.

Mr. Heppner: — Okay, rather than a direct quote, I consider this reading into the record this particular letter that deals with this issue.

The following is an outline of the inadequacies we have encountered from this new SGI auto plan:

— 7 day waiting period to qualify for benefits. During this time my husband was in hospital in excruciating pain, and we had to make funeral arrangements from the hospital. I only wish my daughter had another 7 days.

Second concern:

— no compensation for pain and suffering . . . (that's all right) but . . . no compensation for sick leave, (however no compensation for) vacation time, pension benefit lost through no fault of our own.

Third:

— no compensation for the duties my husband performed around the house: the car is sitting without a motor, yard work, sinks need to be fixed, carpentry work, electrical work . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now I have asked the . . . I've provided for the hon. member some latitude to take another two or three sentences to finish what he feels is necessary, and you've gone beyond that. So I'll ask the member to move beyond the direct reading of the document he has. Certainly welcome to make reference to it, but not direct quote.

Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Toth: — A point of order.

Mr. Speaker, it would seem to me that, while my colleague the member from Rosthern is reading this letter, the motion brought forward by the government was a motion commending them for what no-fault insurance is doing. We have brought an amendment to this motion, indicating that there are people in this province being hurt.

The letter here is relating some very specific circumstances. And what it's doing, Mr. Speaker, it's bringing out circumstances that really indicate the personal suffering of individuals as a result of this piece of legislation.

And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be appropriate that . . . and it certainly can really enter into the debate of the motion, of what the motion reads. It answers all those questions. And I feel it would be appropriate, Mr. Speaker, to allow that to be brought into the debate today.

The Speaker: — I've listened to the hon. member's point of order, and I will accept it not as a challenge to the ruling of the Chair but as a point of order.

It is the practice of this House to be lenient in the reading of speeches but to be much more stringent in the direct quoting of documents. I point out to all members that that in no way prohibits members from making frequent reference to that, but it clearly does prohibit the extensive, direct quoting from a document of any sort.

I have . . . Order, order. And I have listened to the point of order. I find that the point of order is not well taken in this circumstance.

Mr. Heppner: — Okay. Concluding in the gist of this particular letter, it goes on to discuss the shortfalls that have taken place, the concerns and the hardships that the family are facing, and the very serious concerns that they have, that when that is all taken in consideration, they are left without the ability to sue for the amount that they feel is justified in this particular situation. And having gone through that, this family understands better than any of the rest of us what the effects of this no-fault insurance is.

And I think when we look at the letter and the information that I was allowed to read, it indicates that the suffering and the shortfall that they have had as a family is much greater than anything that this particular insurance policy allowed them to do. And for that reason I support the motion from the member of Moosomin. Thank you.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to let you know at the outset that I support the motion. I do not support the amendment.

The amendment before us is simply . . . if the amendment were adopted and if the government were to act on the amendment, we would go back to the days that we had prior to the introduction of the personal injury protection plan and — in my view and I think in the view of most people in Saskatchewan — would get us back to a system that is much inferior to the system we have now for the great majority of Saskatchewan people and would have a system in which the cost would sky-rocket.

That by itself, that the cost would sky-rocket and therefore you had greater charges for Saskatchewan people, is not something that would be of great concern to the Conservatives, given their sort of record of financial management in Saskatchewan. But that is something that does concern us and is something that concerns SGI.

And one of the reasons that the personal injury protection plan was introduced and also, I might add, is one of the reasons that I think the province of Manitoba — I stand to be corrected? — the province of Manitoba is one of the jurisdictions that has also introduced a plan of this nature . . . now the reason that the plan was introduced, because we were faced with sky-rocketing costs in the insurance sector. And if I can quote, Mr. Speaker, from a newsletter about SGI's personal injury protection plan dated March 1996, and I quote:

For the past few years court awards for pain and suffering for people injured in vehicle collisions have sky-rocketed (sky-rocketed). Injury claims have increased an average of

12 per cent per year during the past decade.

Now I don't know if accidents themselves, if accidents themselves increased by 12 per cent a year. I rather doubt that. But it's interesting to note that court awards for pain and suffering for people injured in vehicle collisions have sky-rocketed. And those costs, injury claims, have gone up.

And I don't think, Mr. Speaker, you have to go very far outside of this Assembly to find someone who favoured the old system because it was kind of like the lottery system; boy, if you struck it, you could really strike it rich. You know there's a lucky few that benefit from that system. But that was one of the reasons that the system had to be changed. The majority of people were being obligated to pay ever-increasing insurance cost, ever-increasing insurance cost for a system that was, in the view of many, an inferior system.

Now if the Progressive Conservatives are saying by their amendment, and if the Liberals are saying by what is rather an unclear statement in this regard, a very unclear statement, that they want to see a return to sky-rocketing costs and to a system that is much more expensive for Saskatchewan drivers . . . that's how I read the amendment before us. That's how I read it.

Now the other reason that the Saskatchewan Government Insurance went to the personal injury protection plan system and why it was approved by the Legislative Assembly was that the system we have provides far superior benefits, far superior benefits for most of the people or virtually all of those — not everyone, not everyone — but virtually all of those that are injured and need to apply to SGI for insurance protection.

Now I heard the member for Rosthern say, well I have an individual here. And I heard the member from Moosomin say, I have an individual here. And these individuals weren't helped the way we would like to see them helped by the system. The old system might have helped them more.

So because we have these concerns about these few individuals, we should change the whole system that we have — a system that again reduces sky-rocketing costs for motorists and those that need to be insured in Saskatchewan. No small issue, I might say these days, to do something that contains costs for the vast majority but also provides far superior benefits for those that are injured.

Mr. Speaker, the previous speakers have talked about how the plan provides improved benefits in the way of income replacement for the vast majority. And there is an opportunity for those that don't feel that income replacement is sufficient to be able to go to the courts to seek further redress that way. But certainly there's an agreement that the rehabilitation services are much, much improved under this system than they were under the old system.

Now you might say, and the Conservatives would say, well we should have the old system and pour money into it. So that it's not enough to have sky-rocketing costs, if I understand their amendment, you should have those costs sky-rocket even further. Because again, being Conservatives, money is not something that they're particularly concerned about. I don't

know what it is, it's like their second nature that if it's money, let's not worry about it. I don't know, I guess I'll never understand the Conservative mind, that you can be in charge of public administration and not concern yourself about money. But that's the Conservative approach.

Mr. Speaker, for me, when I look at the two systems, I have to ask myself which system is the most comprehensive — most comprehensive. And there is no doubt, there is no doubt that the most comprehensive system . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now the Speaker's having a little difficulty hearing the hon. member for Regina Victoria who isn't seated all that far away.

Order, order! And I've noticed a bit of a phenomenon here where members speak and then can feel compelled to continue to speak after they've taken their seats.

I'll ask all members of the House, on both sides of the House, I'll ask all members to cooperate with the rules of the House and allow the hon. member for . . . order . . . and allow the hon. member for Regina Victoria to make his remarks.

(1545)

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look first of all at comprehensiveness. And the Tories are proceeding with their motion and in their statements in its regard now and as they did originally when this matter was before the House, on some silly notion, silly notion that if you didn't like what SGI was going to get you, why you could just go off to court and get what was coming to you. You could get your proper due.

Well this is the silliest thing I've ever heard and certainly isn't borne out by the practice. The majority of people didn't end up going to court. They had no notion how to take an insurance company to go to court . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, it's your idea that everybody should be able to go to court. This wasn't the practice . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. I'll ask the hon. members on both sides of the House to come to order. There will be plenty of opportunity to enter into debate and to put your remarks on the record. Order.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — No, the very idea that everybody in Saskatchewan who didn't like what they were getting from SGI would then just simply go off to court and to sue, and to sue to get what they thought they were entitled to, might be the kind of notion that drives the Tories. After all, these are the people that always talk about rights and freedoms in a most ethereal way, if never in a practical way.

But you know when you look at it, the system that we have is far more comprehensive because everybody — everybody — is entitled, if they've been injured, to income replacement. They're entitled to effective rehabilitation services and other benefits, so it's far more comprehensive than the courts could ever be. Not everybody went to court. Not everyone is in a position to go to court. It's just not practical.

But then again, there's that word, practical. That's not something that . . . I don't know. There seems to be as wide divergence between the Tories and the word practical, as there is between Tories and the words, financial responsibility.

Finally I have to look at what's most effective. Now when you look at the benefits that are provided under the present program, and having listened to some of the previous speakers I think most people would agree, that you have a far superior program when it comes to income replacement. You have a far superior program when it comes to rehabilitation services. And you have a far more effective program when it comes to a number of other benefits.

But the courts, the courts, the courts were only there . . . who could successfully prove, successfully prove that they had pain and suffering related to some injury — all very unclear in many cases — but nevertheless were able to convince the courts. Now it seems to me that this program that we have is far more effective than the courts have ever been, in terms of ensuring that the money was getting to those people that needed it to be able to deal with the questions of income replacement and to ensure that there were effective rehabilitation services.

The courts didn't concern themselves with those issues very greatly. The courts concerned themselves with other issues. And I might say, in a way that cannot be supported by the public of Saskatchewan, because it's seen to be that it resulted in increasing costs — sky-rocketing costs are the words that have been used.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Tories, and I think their major problem in this is that this is a program, the personal injury protection plan, that has been organized by a public agency for the public. These people are basically opposed to any public involvement in anything. These are the people that if you ask them they would say, well we're opposed to public auto insurance. We oppose the idea that the public, or that government, can somehow be involved in providing the service to the people of Saskatchewan.

They would take the position that no, we're in favour of private auto insurance. You ought to be able to get just whatever you can get out there from whatever company is available. Doesn't matter if it's higher, but those . . . or higher costs. That's what you get when you have the freedom and a choice.

But that's the same thing that's happened in terms of injury protection in Saskatchewan. Again you had the freedom and you had the choice, but many people weren't being helped by that. Some were being helped by that and costs to the majority were increasing rapidly. But I think, in the main, these people opposed this because they see it as public involvement in an area that they think that the government and the public ought not to be involved in. It's strictly a private matter.

And this is a very, very clear divide on ideological grounds between them and between us. We stand for government being used in an effective way to help the majority of people, in this case with lower cost automobile insurance and an effective program for personal injury protection. They say no, it should be left up to the individual. And you sink and swim on that

basis.

Well that is the difference between us. In this case, I think the facts are on our side. We provide a vastly superior program. It's done in a way that's able to contain and to reduce the costs for SGI. They say we ought to go the other way. Well I stand four-square behind the original motion. I think the amendment makes no sense, but I'm not surprised, seeing where it's coming from.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The division bells rang from 3:53 p.m. until 4:03 p.m.

Amendment negated on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 4

Boyd	D'Autremont	Toth
Heppner		

Nays — 29

Van Mulligen	MacKinnon	Lingenfelter
Johnson	Upshall	Kowalsky
Pringle	Koenker	Trew
Bradley	Teichrob	Cline
Serby	Stanger	Hamilton
Murray	Langford	Wall
Kasperski	Ward	Sonntag
Flavel	Murrell	Thomson
Aldridge	Belanger	Bjornerud
Julé	Gantefoer	

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak a bit on the motion in reference to the no-fault insurance. The portions of the Act is very confusing to the average citizen out there, and we really want to look at the Act in terms of its compassion. And multiple injuries is one of the big problems that we have with the Act, and that doesn't address that in terms of the specifics of this particular Bill.

As Liberals, we feel that we have to be certainly responsible to the citizens of Saskatchewan. And the whole process we're talking about here really has to do with responsible government. We don't want to see a government that's in debt on every corner that we turn. We don't want to see a government that is sacrificing the future of this province and its residents and its people for the next 10, 15, 20 years.

So part of the thing about being a responsible government, Mr. Speaker, in reference to this particular Bill, is we have to ensure that many of our Crowns and many of our government-owned institutions, if they're government owned and continue to remain government owned, must be viable in this free market economy. So therefore, being a responsible government, we have to ensure that we run certain organizations and certain departments on an even-keel basis.

When you talk about the Act itself, the Liberals believe that responsibility lies with every single member of this particular

House and certainly with every member of the Saskatchewan community.

So responsible government is not running up debt after debt after debt in every Crown corporation that we have. We have to make sure that these Crowns and these agencies remain viable and certainly vibrant because it is our responsibility to insure people that are working within these organizations are employed on a regular basis. So when we talk about responsible government, Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on and on about the number of portions of this Act that fits the financial guidelines that we should have as government. And we know that we can't continue throwing things out the window in terms of trying to be all and do all for every single person in the province. We all have our horror story when it comes to different ways that people haven't been insured properly, and there's 10 to 10,000 different examples of that.

However, when the Liberals believe that we have to be a responsible government, and we have to ensure that many of these organizations do remain viable and competitive, we also must have compassionate policies, Mr. Speaker. We're not in this business of governing for the simple sake of creating dollars. By the same token, we're not in this business of governing for giving away dollars.

We have to understand that certain families — and we talked about a family today — really have a justifiable case in which the government has to be compassionate. And the whole process we speak about again goes back to the simple philosophy that the Liberal Party has in reference to this particular Bill: we have to be a responsible government with compassionate policies.

Now these policies won't be compassionate if we don't take into consideration many of the horror stories we hear from the various members of the third party and certainly some of the problems that many of the other members opposite may have heard throughout their terms as elected officials. Again we look at the whole process of governance and the whole process of compassionate policies, we can't forget the people that we serve, Mr. Speaker. These people that are out there, when they come to the insurance company, they get insurance. They realize what they're getting, and they pay properly and duly for that insurance. Then they should be covered by that insurance.

When there's a grey area, we all have to go back and re-examine that grey area to ensure that this thing does not basically compromise the two positions I spoke about, which again is responsible government and compassionate policies.

If we want to clear the debt of this province and if you want to make sure we have enough money for education, for SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and for SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and for northern Saskatchewan, what I speak about, then we have to make sure that we have at least viable enterprises and certainly Crown corporations that are making . . . if not making money then at least remaining competitive and viable. Not only do we do that for the rest of the areas we speak about, but we certainly do that so we can reduce the debt overall.

So again I cannot stress to you the degree of emphasis that we're certainly placing and I'm certainly placing on being a responsible government. Irresponsible governments cannot continue to operate, not in Saskatchewan, not anywhere in the world. We have to watch every bloody penny that we certainly get.

So I ask the members today, is this being responsible government? And I would say to a certain extent that we really do think that this is part of the solution to being a responsible government. I guess in reference to that, you're talking about the compassionate policies. We really have to examine every single aspect of this particular Act, and the multiple injury portion of this Act really does have some concerns.

Okay, and in closing, Mr. Speaker, we sincerely see that there is some value in being a responsible government. We sincerely see that there is value in having compassionate policies because we can't forget about the Markwarts. And we can't forget about our responsibility to the taxpayers, and we certainly can't forget the mistakes made of irresponsible government, so we continue making these mistakes over and over again. So in reference to that, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Motion agreed to on division.

Motion No. 11 — Unfair Crown Construction Tendering Policy

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased once again to discuss the government's unfair Crown construction tendering policy or their so-called fair wage policy brought in by the members opposite, the government.

It's no surprise, Mr. Speaker; the NDP forced through the unnecessary labour legislation over the past few years since they have to gain back some political support of the unions of this province. It doesn't matter that the legislation wasn't needed or that it would kill jobs or that it didn't make sense. The NDP simply didn't care about that. All they cared about was scoring a few political points with the unions of this province.

The same is true for the leaked memo prepared by the Department of Economic Development, the department that we pay experts for advice on very important economic policies and ideas. And what do the NDP government do with the memo prepared by their own government professionals? Well they took one look at it, and they decided against what was right for Saskatchewan people, against what would create jobs in this province, against the advice of their own department, and did what was good for them politically, Mr. Speaker. That's the problem with this, Mr. Speaker.

It's pretty sad that a leaked memo has to surface several months later proving that we were right all along, that our concerns our caucus and the business community brought up were the same concerns the Economic Development officials had in the minister's own department.

(1615)

From the beginning, PC (Progressive Conservative) caucus, along with the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Saskatchewan Construction Association, and other organizations were against the NDP's union-preference Crown tendering policy. We took this position for a number of reasons, Mr. Speaker. The policy is unfair to non-union contractors and non-union construction employees. It significantly increases the cost to taxpayers, in some cases by up to 30 per cent. And it forces non-union contractors to subsidize union contractors through additional fees and the like.

The union tendering policy, Mr. Speaker, brought in by this government, is a policy that requires the government . . . or pardon me, that requires contractors bidding on Crown tenders must be prepared to hire 75 per cent unionized members if they get the contract, even if it means laying off existing employees. The other 25 per cent of employees can be non-union, but they must get union wages and benefits, and they must pay union dues.

And it was interesting, Mr. Speaker. We had a conversation not long ago with a contractor; I believe it was in the Yorkton area. And this gentleman was a very relatively small contractor; it was himself and four other employees. Those four employees happened to be his sons, however, Mr. Speaker. And under this policy, he would have to lay off — what would it be? — three out of five of his . . . or pardon me, four out of five of his sons in order to qualify for a project under this policy. And on top of that, Mr. Speaker, the remaining members of his family would have to pay union dues even though they don't belong to a union, or a union under this policy.

So we think that, Mr. Speaker, this is a ridiculous situation when you have contractors in this province forced to hire union employees even when they are a non-union company. Our objections are, because it's discriminatory. Only 20 per cent of Saskatchewan construction employees are unionized in Saskatchewan currently, and yet they are guaranteed 75 per cent of the jobs under this policy. Non-union employees are prohibited from applying for these non-union designated jobs.

We have challenged, Mr. Speaker, we have challenged this policy under the Human Rights Code. If the government prohibited, as an example, Mr. Speaker, if the government prohibited certain people from applying for jobs based on sex or race or religion, that would clearly be an illegal discrimination. Yet they are discriminating against those who don't belong to a union. I don't see the difference, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think the contractors of this province see the difference either.

We believe it's also unfair to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan because they're being forced to pay union wages and benefits that will force labour costs up. That will result in much higher costs for Crown construction projects. And we've seen evidence of that, Mr. Speaker, coming forward on a fairly regular basis now. And the minister responds by saying it's only \$9 million or 10 or 15, whatever it is, of contracts that have been let out, and so what if it's only 15 to 30 per cent higher on that number. Still the fact remains, Mr. Speaker, it's a higher cost for the taxpayers of Saskatchewan.

In British Columbia, independent studies have shown that a similar policy has driven construction costs up by that exact 30 per cent, or in Saskatchewan's case the potential for a hundred million dollars of additional costs. This will result in higher taxes, higher utility costs for the people of Saskatchewan, the taxpayers of this province. It's top down union organizing, Mr. Speaker.

If a non-union contractor is forced to hire 75 per cent unionized employees, a certification vote is almost sure to follow, Mr. Speaker. This leaves contractors in an unacceptable position of being forced to choose between bidding on government contracts and being forced to unionize, or not bidding and forgoing a lot of potential income from the project that they are considering.

It also results, Mr. Speaker, in something that we think is very wrong as well, and that's a union slush fund. And I don't think you can term it as anything else because every employee . . . or employer, pardon me, every employer must pay 21 cents an hour into a union slush fund whose stated purpose is for more union organizing. This fund will give the firms the benefit of an unfair competitive advantage over non-union firms in this province.

We think it's also unfair to rural areas in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. The union hiring halls and most of the unionized employers are from Saskatoon and Regina. So local non-unionized workers will lose jobs to unionized workers from Saskatoon and Regina. Clearly this was a political pay-off to non-union . . . to buy union support just before an election, Mr. Speaker. And we think that it is very, very wrong for a government to come in with a policy like that.

Mr. Speaker, our position with respect to government tendering is really quite simple. All government tenders should go to the lowest qualified bidder, union or non-union, with no hiring quotas. This is the only fair policy for employers, employees, and, most importantly, for the taxpayers of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Now we've taken this particular position for a number of reasons. The policy is unfair to non-union contractors and non-union construction employees. It significantly increases costs and forces non-union employers to subsidize union contractors through additional fees and the like.

But, Mr. Speaker, what did the NDP say when we brought these concerns forward? They say their union-preference tendering policy, otherwise known as the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement, was not a pro-union policy, that it was a means to a fair tendering policy and there'd be no increased costs to the taxpayers of this province.

Well last week we all found out that that simply is not the case, Mr. Speaker. Last week we found out that the NDP was misleading the public on this issue from the very start, and that we were right. A leaked memo from the Department of Economic Development to the minister, dated November 19, 1994, revealed the department recommended against implementing this policy. Their own minister . . . his

department recommended against implementing this policy.

In fact the memo described the CCTA as a union preference policy instead of the fair-wage policy that the government tried to promote, and that union contractors would receive 15 to 20 per cent more work than before. It further states that the CCTA could increase Crown tenders by 30 per cent, the cost.

So I guess, Mr. Speaker, the PC caucus and the business community can say to the government, I told you so.

In addition to the information that the government has been putting forward in order to sell the union unfair policy, the memo also states that the bureaucrats were instructed to prepare an article for the NDP's party magazine, *The Commonwealth*.

You can only wonder, Mr. Speaker, what would be . . .

An Hon. Member: — Who said that?

Mr. Boyd: — It said it in the memo.

An Hon. Member: — Who?

Mr. Boyd: — It said it . . . the Department of Economic Development. The memo that was leaked, the memo that came from Treasury Board. The memo that came from Treasury Board. Your own Treasury Board is pretty . . . it's leaky and you don't even realize it.

The memo also called for a letter-to-the-editor campaign and approaching a few employers to contract specific business and political reporters for pre-announcement positive stories on similar union preference agreements.

As one editorialist put it:

Getting business to manipulate reporters, writing phoney letters to the editor, civil servants writing to *The Commonwealth* — our hard-earned taxpayers' dollars at work. It makes the last 14 per cent SaskPower hike seem all that much more worthwhile.

This issue, I don't think is over, Mr. Speaker. Currently a so-called internal review of the policy is taking place. In other words, the public will hear about as many facts about the CCTA as we did about the memo sent to the minister two years ago — nothing.

We have called on the NDP to scrap this policy all together. We have also called the NDP to conduct an independent review of this policy. It's the very least, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP can do. Unfortunately I doubt the taxpayers will get even that consideration, Mr. Speaker.

And that's why, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to move this motion, seconded by the member from Cannington. And the motion reads as follows:

That this Assembly condemn the government for its Crown Construction Tendering Agreement, CCTA, which demonstrates unfair preference for unionized contractors

and which moves government away from the principle of contracting with the lowest qualified bidder, hence driving up the costs of government borne by taxpayers; and further demand the government immediately cancel this agreement and instead implement a policy in which all government construction tendering projects are awarded to the lowest qualified contractor, whether union or non-union.

So moved, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I support the motion as presented by my leader and my colleague from Kindersley.

I believe the CCTA is nothing more than a political policy, Mr. Speaker, not a financial policy. It's simply a means by which this government is using to transfer taxpayers' dollars into the union coffers, which in turn will transfer those dollars from the union funds back into the NDP party. It's just a circular motion, Mr. Speaker, for the NDP and the government to gain more access to the taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, if that's what the object of this is — and it certainly seems to be what it is — I'm not sure why the governments just don't directly transfer the funds they want to the unions so that they can turn around and give them back to the political party. Why do they have to funnel it through a corporation, a construction company? Because the construction company has to pay 21 cents an hour for every employee they have employed on the construction site to the unions. They're going to pass that money on, claim it from the government at the construction site, turn around, funnel it through their accounts to the union.

Why doesn't the government just simply pay the union 21 cents an hour directly for every union job in the Crown corporations? It would certainly be a lot simpler and a lot less bookwork. But, Mr. Speaker, it would also be clearly evident then exactly what is happening, and that the government — this particular government — is directly funding the union operations with that 21 cents. And they want to try and confuse the issue a little bit, cover it up, dirty the tracks. It's like walking across sand, Mr. Speaker, and the Premier is behind there with the little bush, brushing out the tracks, trying to cover up what he's doing. Well, Mr. Speaker, every sidewinder leaves a track, and that track is there to be seen by the public, and they have seen it, Mr. Speaker.

It's a question of priorities, Mr. Speaker, as to what happens with the taxpayers' dollars in this particular province. This government wants to provide assistance to their union membership to gain the vote from them. They would rather pay out roughly 30 per cent extra on those construction jobs, instead of providing it . . . the member from Swift Current brings a motion to this House today, when a nursing home in his own constituency is closing down.

Money that the government is spending on the Crown tendering policy could be used to keep that open, Mr. Speaker, to provide homes, shelter, support, and medical care for those 70 people. But what do they want to do with the money, Mr. Speaker? They want to spend it on their union buddies, who will in turn

pay back some of that to party coffers, to simply allow them to be re-elected again at some future point.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, there is a stench to this whole Crown tendering Act. And that stench can be again clearly seen in the fact that in the Minister of Economic Development's own analysis, his department's analysis, it requests that a piece of propaganda — a piece of propaganda — be written specifically for *The Commonwealth*, the NDP's party organ. (1630)

The particular piece of propaganda was not to be distributed to the *Leader-Post* or the *Star-Phoenix* or the *Oxbow Herald* or the P.A. (Prince Albert) *Herald* or any other newspaper or media outlet in the province. It was simply for the NDP's party mouthpiece, *The Commonwealth*. And I believe that is an absolute disgrace, Mr. Speaker, and an absolute waste of taxpayers' dollars.

What does the CCTA call for? It calls for all construction companies who tender on Crown projects of more than \$50,000 to fire the majority of their employees and hire union members. Now if there's a Crown construction project in my own constituency, Mr. Speaker, there are very few union members there. There are a number of construction companies. So what happens? If they win a tender, they have to fire their own local employees and hire someone to come in from outside whom they have never worked with. They have to pay them for accommodations in one of our communities where the people who were already living there wouldn't have to be paid anything extra for accommodations — simply the wages.

But that's not good enough because the unions don't get the jobs, and the government doesn't get the political benefit. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, local contractors are not bidding on these construction projects because they do not wish to be unionized. They are not union. They don't wish to be abused by the unions. They don't get the jobs, Mr. Speaker, even when they tender on them.

I was asking the minister responsible for SaskPower the other day, the member from P.A. Northcote, about the construction tendering proposals under his jurisdiction. And there were 20 projects, Mr. Speaker. Of those 20 projects in the last year, one — one — went to a non-union contractor for \$44,000. The other 19 went to union contractors. Well okay, maybe they were the low tenders. That wasn't the case, Mr. Speaker; they were not the low tenders. And the fact is in some cases . . . there was one union contractor tendered on a project and 27 non-union contractors, and the one union contractor got the job because he fell within the qualifications as outlined by this government — that you have to have 75 per cent union membership.

Contractors in Swift Current and Yorkton, Mr. Speaker, are refusing to tender on Crown projects because they disagree with this Act, because they disagree with what will be done to their corporations, what will be done to their employees. So they're simply not tendering, Mr. Speaker.

So what happens? Companies from outside of the province tender on these projects. They bring in the management, then they hire local union contractors who pay salaries . . . pay the

salaries in Saskatchewan, pay the taxes. But as soon as that job is over and done with, they move back to wherever they came from: Manitoba or Alberta, B.C. (British Columbia) or Ontario. And they only pay their taxes while they're here in Saskatchewan; the rest of their tax money is paid in their home province. And our own contractors go without work, Mr. Speaker, because of this idiotic policy.

In British Columbia it's been proven that Crown tendering costs 30 per cent more — 30 per cent more, Mr. Speaker. And the Minister for Economic Development, his own department agrees with that number — that it will cost up to 30 per cent more to have this policy in place rather than allowing simply an open tendering process where the lowest tender wins the bid.

One of the arguments that's being put forward by the members opposite is that you have to have this in place so that Saskatchewan people will have jobs. Well again, that's a very laudable comment. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it's not true.

Members opposite were using the example of the Shand project as an example of how people from out of province were coming in and taking Saskatchewan employees' jobs. Again I ask the member from P.A. Northcote, who is the minister for SaskPower, what evidence do you have that people from outside of this province had the jobs at Shand? Because that was an open site; there was union and non-union people there.

His statement was that the majority of people on SaskPower sites are, and were, Saskatchewan people and employees. So again the minister's own words refutes the arguments being presented by the members opposite.

When I asked him, well how do you know if you're . . . under the current policy, the CCTA — that the employees being hired for these construction projects are Saskatchewan people? He says, well I don't know; we're not tracking them. So one of the major planks and the reason to have the CCTA is to hire Saskatchewan people, and yet they're not even tracking whether or not they're hiring Saskatchewan people.

So another proof, Mr. Speaker, that what they're bringing forward are not the real reasons, are not the truth for this policy, but the truths are to provide funds to the unions who in turn can provide those funds back to the NDP party.

Mr. Speaker, this is clearly a failed policy which cost the taxpayers of Saskatchewan an unreasonable amount of money. It shows the lack of priorities that this government has, that they would prefer to pay their union buddies an excessive amount rather than provide funding for nursing homes such as the one in Swift Current, rather than provide funding to maintain our highways which provide for the industrial use of our province, to bring tourists into our province.

But I guess, Mr. Speaker, I guess, Mr. Speaker, one should not expect too much from people who believe that a \$4,300 raise in one year is actually a cut in pay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome this opportunity to enter into the debate, particularly following the, well I guess I'll say typical, comments from our Conservative friends across the aisle. To listen to any sort of a lecture from

the Conservative members of this House about fair and open tendering is simply an affront to the memory of the people in this House who watched what happened when the Tories were in power many years ago, because what was happening then was anything but fair and open tendering.

What we saw happen was, we saw an approach to tendering that took it to the lowest, basest levels that we expect to see from the Tories in Nova Scotia and their pork barrel. It was an offensive approach. It was not fair. It had the business community up in arms. That's what we were talking about.

Mr. Speaker, the agreement that is before us today and the motion concerning the CCTA is in fact a very straightforward piece of public policy. What it deals with is a serious . . . and I think maybe what we should do here is just review the facts here for a second.

Now the members opposite say that this is going to inflate the costs hundreds of millions of dollars. The fact is, only \$15 million in the 1995 year was covered by the agreement. If you take a look at the fiscal year, it's only \$30 million — \$30 million worth of agreements covered, and yet this is going to jack up the price a hundred and eighteen. That's the same kind of math that got us back into this deficit. It's the same kind of Tory math that almost bankrupted the province. That's where the problem is. The problem is with the facts, Mr. Speaker.

They talk about this escalating the cost by 20, 30 . . . I'm just waiting for them to up the bid again to 40 per cent. What we know happens is that even before the CCTA, even before that, we would see the costs fluctuate by as much as 20 per cent. Now I think when we take a look at this — and of course the policy's under review now — when the review is done, I think you will see that the costs have been much less than 10 per cent off.

This is an issue which really comes down to one simple principle, and that's fairness. Mr. Speaker, the CCTA is an agreement which covers a small part of the government's tendering. It attempts to level the playing-field between union and non-union contractors. And it's important to level that playing-field because I think we need to remember what the situation was in the 1980s — a situation that the members opposite, particularly the Tory members, would have us revisit.

We saw a government during those 1980s where they passed the infamous Bill 104 — I think it was 104 — Bill 104, which was one of the most regressive pieces of labour legislation this province has ever seen. Now they're not prepared to simply go back to Bill 104 if they ever came back into power. They want to go further than that because they want to completely eradicate the unions.

Let's not mince words here. The member for, I believe it's Cypress Hills, has a Bill that he's continually putting off in this House which would require union certification, decertification, and strike action by secret ballot. Well what's that aimed at? What's that aimed at? Sounds to me to be an anti-union piece of legislation. We have a Bill affecting the accountability of the Workers' Compensation Board.

What we have here is an attempt, with some flowery wording, to essentially dismantle these pieces. We've seen them with the right-to-work legislation. We've seen them with regressive labour standards legislation.

The Tory Party is an anti-union party — is now, was before, always will be. Their opposition to this piece of fair, public policy is simple; it's based on ideology.

Mr. Speaker, to listen to the members opposite you'd think that the sky was falling. The fact is it's not. What we are doing is we are re-establishing a fair policy. Business, I don't think, particularly understood it. I think that there were some communications difficulties. There's obviously some concern, and this government's agreed to take a look at that. Let's let the review progress. Let's leave the ideology behind, and let's start to move forward.

Now I appreciate that the members opposite, the Tory members opposite, have some interesting ideas on labour policy. In fact you might say that they're also preparing for the new century. The problem is they're some of the greatest 19th century minds ever elected to this Assembly. While we're preparing for the 21st century, they're getting ready for the 20th.

Mr. Speaker, I just think this issue is not even worth debating further, and as such I'll move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Motion No. 12 — Taxation System Reform

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the conclusion of my remarks, which I hope I'll have a chance to do today, would be the moving of the following motion, seconded by the member from Regina Victoria:

That this Assembly affirm its support of the work done by SUMA, SARM, SSTA, and SAMA in updating and reforming the taxation system to reflect a fair and equitable base for local government taxation.

In trying to do this, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to hit three essential points, and the first would be the history and background to the work done by our partners, SUMA, SARM, and the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association). The second would be to provide an overview of the assessment issue that these organizations have worked on for so long, and some tax facts. And the third would be to outline to you what bearing the legislation before the Assembly has on the '97 property tax year.

So first, and very quickly, a brief background of the work done by SUMA, SARM and the SSTA. The story has its beginnings back in 1985 at a time when I was the first . . . a new member of an elected council who was appointed to the SUMA board.

Our first report that was handed to us was a report called the Local Government Finance Commission Report. It contained a number of recommendations to the government of that day to begin a process of updating the assessment system for Saskatchewan. The diagnosis of the commission was that

Saskatchewan assessment system needed an overhaul. And why? It needed an overhaul because it was outdated. The outdated time frame that we were working on and the base for the assessment was causing shifts, and who was paying, who could afford to pay, and whether or not it was a fair reflection of the market value of their property and the home that they lived in.

(1645)

There were a number of cases before the courts, and some serious cases that were contemplating that the fairness of the system has now a great impact on properties such as malls within the city of Regina, smaller homes within inner-city neighbourhoods, and residential homes in the suburbs, and the new developments and the new buildings that were being put into place in communities.

There were also calls for SUMA and SARM and SSTA at their conventions to go ahead and urge the government to go ahead in the assessment system. So subsequently we had the birth of SAMA, the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency, which came into force by an Act of the Assembly in 1987.

In 1987, the make-up of SAMA was a coming together of representatives from SUMA, SARM, and the SSTA, and having some members who would be supportive in the administrative capacity to this group. The city of Regina was allowed one member by SUMA, who would be in rotation with a member from Saskatoon, to represent the interests of the largest cities on a rotating basis.

The new partnership began. SAMA was established and was given the mandate to develop sound assessment policies and procedures and supervise the valuation of properties. The legislative framework for property assessment exists in the assessment provisions of the municipal Acts, and I'll speak to that at the closing of my remarks.

So we've come to the point where on January 1, 1997 all property in Saskatchewan will be reassessed. And the reassessment will be driven by SAMA, which has grown from the first board that was contemplated in the legislation in 1987, to an expanded idea of SAMA and how people are going to be able to get the message out to their communities and the involvement of communities. And that's through a SAMA convention.

So again we see the strong relationship of people who now come to a SAMA convention, who represent our partners of SUMA — the local municipalities who represent the interests of the school boards with the SSTA; who represent the interests of the smaller communities through representation from SARM, and come together in a convention once a year to look at the assessment base and what would be contemplated under the base of assessment to be a fair, market-driven value for deliberating on what the local communities would use as a base for their taxation.

So what is property assessment? It's a way to determine the value of your property, your land and buildings, for tax purposes. A fair and equitable assessment will ensure that the

owner of a high value property be assessed more than the owner of a lesser value property. A modern property assessment system must reflect the accepted principles and practices in widespread use.

So those adopted by SAMA are: accurate and up-to-date assessment base; that they be based on professional standards; that they be defensible in the system that the municipalities have in place for assessment appeals, but also in the courts; that the system be understandable, it be universal, it be cost-effective and easily administered, equitable and fair for all property owners.

So people say, well what does this assessment then have to do with property taxes? Property taxes are the levies used by government to raise the revenue needed to run municipal programs and services. Deciding how much each property owner should pay is a three-part process.

First, property values are assessed. The Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency sets assessment policy and ensures that assessments are carried out fairly and equitably throughout the province.

Next, that taxable assessment is calculated by applying the tax policy decisions made by provincial and local governments. In our case, it would be the percentage of value that we would allocate to each category of property and land. And in the case of local governments, it will be the mill rates that they set on top of the areas where they're able to also do some adjustment on the categories of property and/or land within their communities.

And finally, the taxable assessment is multiplied by the local mill rate to calculate the taxes a property owner will have to pay.

So when we looked at that we said, how are we going to be going through this? How can we give local governments a new system of taxation, the new assessment base that can be accepted by all of them at their convention and passed, which was done last November by the vast majority of our partners — the local governments, the SSTAs, the SUMA and SARM, the SAMA members.

And we decided that we needed to have widespread consultation that took us over a number of years and will end at the end of the system in place, about the end of May, 1997 when the new system will be in place.

January to May, SAMA and the province were going to finish the legislation, and it's before the House. The province passes its tax legislation and regulations. The city analyses their tax policy choices.

From June until September, the city can finish the new assessments based on this information, and they'll gather their public views on tax policies that each individual have to put in place to respond to their communities concerns. Councils will then make tax policy decisions. They do that in their open council chambers and with discussion with their community.

And by October, the city will be able to provide each owner with a projected 1997 assessment and tax change. You can see in January '97 that the city will be sending out assessment notices, and by May the city will send out the tax bills based on the new assessment system.

It's been a long and arduous process, and it's not without its political pitfalls for all levels of political involvement because of course people will see that there are shifts, once you update a system that's now 30 years out of date.

But there are opportunities each step along the way to use the tax levers, the tax policy available to us through the percentages of value set on each property, to the local governments on their tax policy tools, and how they're able to mitigate the effects of the changes in shifts to be able to phase in over a three-year period of time, and to be able to have in place a system that follows, indeed, the principles that have been outlined but can be defensible in the courts.

The Act before the legislature has also an appeal process that will be set up in two levels that will help to have local municipalities be involved in the changes and to be able to have those changes in an appeal process where all of the local board revisions will be made in writing, time for business and property owners to file appeals, written materials to be filed. The appellant may request a taping and transcripts of the hearing, and an appellant cannot further appeal to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board unless their agent is present . . . they themselves or their agent is present at the time of the local board of revision hearing, although deferrals may be requested.

So we now have a system in place that has gone through a long calendar of events with all of our partners in place. They have very often been giving information and advice to us, have been asking for the changes in every step along the way through resolutions to their bodies, through the SAMA conventions to say, let's get on with updating the assessment system. Give us the tools and the flexibility to be able to adjust to this over a three-year time period that we can have our communities understanding what is happening along the way. We can get information out in our public meetings and through the open council chambers and through the debates that have occurred at the local governance levels. And let's have a system in place that everyone in Saskatchewan can feel is fair and defensible.

To that end, there's been a long calendar of events that have taken place to look at some of the changes that we've put forward in the Act. In April 1995, SAMA held their first annual meeting, a general meeting. The preliminary discussions were held individually with SARM, SUMA, the SSTA on tax policy review process and background papers.

In May '95 discussions were held with SARM board and a few of the stakeholders, and there was a presentation to government finance officer's association at that time.

In June '95 there was discussion of tax policy by SARM and SUMA at their district and regional meetings across the province. Department meetings were held with stakeholders and with other provincial departments, and local government associations and stakeholders advised consensus building

sessions that were organized for August, including the topics and the dates that would be discussed.

In July '95 there was presentation on tax policy issues to the west-central municipal government association that was held in Rosetown, presentation on tax policy issues to the north-central rural municipality association in Prince Albert in August '95, a meeting August 4 with three local government associations to review plans for the consensus building sessions, and the department tabled a summary of the submissions that had happened to date or had occurred to date.

There were consensus building sessions facilitated by the department throughout August on such issues as taxation of machinery and equipment for mines, pipelines, oil and gas wells, on the implications for urban municipalities and rural municipalities, on the cities, the managing of the tax . . . (inaudible) . . . and the business tax issue in August of that year, '95 and the business tax issue again on August 30 of that year. And there was a presentation of a draft background paper on rural tax exemptions prepared by the department to the SARM board and discussion of this issue.

In September there were again consensus-building sessions summaries that were distributed, meetings with other departments to discuss the tax policy proposals, and SAMA held an annual meeting that concluded September 29. The list goes on and on of the meetings.

Most recently, in March '96, tax policy and reassessment amendments were now introduced in the legislature. Provincial communications activities to accompany introduction of the amendments occurred. Municipal councils are now going to have to decide what tools they'll use once SAMA releases the assessment figures for properties. And department will continue to work on tax policy and regulations.

Completion of provincial work on percentages of value, property classes, and other supporting regulations should happen by June of this year. And from June into the fall, there'll be advisory work to prepare councils and administrators for the 1997 reassessment. In the fall, SAMA will release the property-by-property figures, and by January '97, the reassessment proceeds.

So much work has been done . . . So little recognition given to the players and our partners who will now be in a position to go forward with a tax system that is fair and equitable, that can be defensible to the public.

So it is my pleasure, and I'm very proud today to be able to stand and support the motion and move the motion:

That this Assembly affirm its support to the work done by SUMA, SARM, SSTA, and SAMA in updating and reforming the taxation system to reflect a fair and equitable base for local government taxation.

Seconded by the member from Prince Albert Carlton. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to second this motion which essentially congratulates the people who are working in the four organizations — SAMA, SARM, SUMA, and the SSTA — on the work that they have done over the past — I think for nearly a decade, Mr. Speaker, as long as they've been working on it — and that they've at this stage come to a consensus on what they believe and are convinced will be a fair property taxation system for the people of Saskatchewan.

And in that vein, they have asked also the Government of Saskatchewan to pass some legislation which is being done this session. And through this legislation, the people in these four organizations will be provided with the tools and the flexibility that they will need to give us a fair and a modern taxation system.

The time being close to 5 o'clock, Mr. Speaker, I will stop at this time and adjourn debate on this motion.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:59 p.m.