

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Plains Health Centre.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who have some concerns about the closure of the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads:

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

The signatures on the petition are from Pilot Butte, from Lumsden, from Regina, from Vibank, from Foam Lake, Saskatchewan; and from Indian Head, Cupar. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to present petitions of names throughout Saskatchewan regarding the closure of the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads:

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

The communities of the people that have signed the petition are from Langenburg, Churchbridge, Marchwell, and Gerald, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to present petitions of names of people from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre closure. 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 Wilcox, Pilot Butte, Indian Head, and Regina. I so present.

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

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

The people that have signed this petition are from Weyburn, Lemburg, Pense, and the majority are from Regina.

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:

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

Signatures on this petition are mostly from the city of Regina, but I notice also Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, and other centres in Saskatchewan.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I again rise today to present petition of names from people throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

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

The people that have signed this petition are from Wadena, Foam Lake, Fishing Lake, Sheho, and Wadena, and other concerned citizens.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by many concerned citizens from the constituency of Arm River in the communities of Aylesbury, Holdfast, Craik, and I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions of names of Saskatchewan people regarding the Plains Health Centre, and 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.

And those who have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from a number of communities in Saskatchewan including communities such as Weyburn, Estevan, Swift Current, Yorkton, Grand Coulee, Lipton, Indian Head, as well as Regina and Moose Jaw.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again we rise to protect health care and 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 petition, Mr. Speaker, they're from Regina here. They're also from Nokomis and from Siltton and Kannata Valley and from all throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING, SELECT, AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Communication

Deputy Clerk: — Mr. Speaker, as Chair of the Standing Committee on Communication, presents the first report of the said committee which is as follows:

Your committee has considered the recommendations of the Public Documents Committee, under The Archives Act, contained in retention and disposal schedules comprising sessional paper no. 167 including schedule no. 329, departments of the Government of Saskatchewan, commissions, boards, bureaux, and other branches of the public service of Saskatchewan; schedule no. 330, Saskatchewan Government Insurance; schedule no. 331, Environment and Resource Management; schedule no. 332, Department of Justice, sheriff's office; schedule no. 333, Department of Agriculture and Food, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation; schedule no. 334, Department of Finance, Public Employees Benefits Agency, tabled this first session of the twenty-third legislature and referred to the committee by the Assembly on May 23, 1996.

Your committee recommends to the Assembly that the recommendations of the Public Documents Committee on schedules 329 through to 334 be accepted.

Your committee also reviewed the report of the Legislative Library for the period ending March 31, 1992.

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Canora-Pelly:

That the first report of the Standing Committee on Communication be now concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 65 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Finance, with regards to revenue generated by the northern mining sector: (1) what has been the total revenue generated to the province as a result of the mining activity in Saskatchewan in 1995; (2) what are the anticipated revenues for the province for 1996 in light of new mines that are being proposed; (3) what portion of these revenues will go to support infrastructure needs to support the mining sector in the North, i.e., road and airport construction; (4) what concessions have been made

to attract mining companies into northern Saskatchewan; and (5) what amount of revenues do you anticipate for 1996 with regards to natural gas exploration and activity in the North?

Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and to my colleagues here in the Assembly, some very nice people that are visiting the province of Saskatchewan from Calgary. They're here with a group of people on a tour. And I wanted to reaffirm the warm, friendly hospitality that not only our province but us in this legislature show to all our guests to our province.

Please welcome Doug and Frances Ferguson, and Gerald and Sally Longeways, from Calgary; and the people that they're travelling with are with them as well.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, through you and to the other members of the Legislative Assembly, it gives me great pleasure today to introduce 34 grade 5 students seated in the west gallery, from the Wesley M. School at Lestock, Saskatchewan; their teachers, Ms. Wolfe, Mr. Squirrel; and their chaperons, Mr. Windigo, and Mr. Wolfe.

I want to ask all members to make them welcome here today, and hope they enjoy the proceedings and their tour of the legislative buildings after and their day off of school. So I would ask the rest of the members to help me welcome them here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly, grade 3 and 4 classes from Imperial School at Imperial, who are as well playing hooky today. However, they did bring some teachers with them, in that of Mrs. Barb Tittlemore — I'll maybe have you ladies stand when I call your names, so we can see who it is — Mrs. Barb Tittlemore is a teacher; as well as Mrs. Lois Lewis, a teacher. As well as some chaperons with them; we have Mrs. Janet Klenk. We also have Mrs. Shirley Crittenden. We also have Mrs. Loretta Lamont; as well as Mrs. Carol Baade, who is a chaperon today but is also a teacher at times at the school.

I'm looking forward to having a short visit with them later on, Mr. Speaker. And I'd ask all members of the Assembly to give them a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House, 65 grade 8 students who have come today from Westmount School in Moose Jaw. They're here to watch the proceedings in the House and I look forward to meeting them after question period.

We're going to gather for a photo.

With them today, Mr. Speaker, are their teachers, Kerry Kirkpatrick, Shameem Razvi, and Mike Warms, and I would want all members to welcome this large group of students from Westmount School in Moose Jaw.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and very proud to have a group of students from my constituency in the gallery this afternoon, seated in the east gallery in fact. I'd like to introduce 16 grade 8 students from the Lake Lenore School.

They're accompanied by their teacher, Wade Weseen; — if you would stand, please — teacher associates, Trina Buttinger, and also just behind the bar, teacher associate Dawn Buckle; and a chaperon with them, Tommy Forster.

I would like all members to join me in welcoming the students to the legislature today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Business Enters Partnership with JobStart/Future Skills

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy gave a member's statement about a couple in Lang, in my constituency. Dean Smith and Kimberley Besler are turning good old Saskatchewan rocks into new and innovative building products, and in the process, helping to make their small Saskatchewan town a viable economic centre.

The building products business is called Written in Stone. They have another related business connected to Dean's academic training in geology. Geo-Ark Petrographic Ltd. collects rock core samples and puts them on microscopic slides for analysis. Mr. Speaker, this service is in demand all over North America.

And just as Written in Stone has the potential of providing up to 50 new jobs in the next three years, Geo-Ark has entered into a partnership with JobStart/Future Skills to take four trainees and train them on the job. The four will receive credit from SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) as well as employment.

As a result of its expanding market, Geo-Ark is looking to hire two more trainees. Mr. Speaker, this is another example of Saskatchewan people expressing confidence in Saskatchewan people by training and hiring them to work in Saskatchewan. As the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy said in March, I too am happy to live just a stone's throw away from Dean Smith and Kimberly Besler, and I congratulate them on their success. Thank you.

Cumberland House Accomplishments

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to

recognize the positive developments that have been accomplished recently by the people of Cumberland House.

Of course everyone that has worked ... everyone in the community has worked extremely hard to get a new bridge at Cumberland House. The \$6 million bridge was funded in equal parts by the Cumberland House people, the province, and the federal government.

Mayor Leonard Morin lobbied particularly hard for this project. As part of his campaign he walked from Cumberland House to Regina, and through many years his association with SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), also lobbied that particular group.

Mayor Morin and past mayors and councillor members also tirelessly pursued the SaskPower settlement. Many felt the offer by government, and accepted by the community, was a very generous settlement because they knew the money was desperately needed to stimulate economic activity in the area. They used some of the money to build a sportsplex and to operate the community farm. It was also used to start other social and economic development projects.

Cumberland House continues to aim for other ambitious projects, all the while considering the diverse interests of the Indian bands, the community, and the special interest groups of the hunters and trappers.

I support the initiatives shown by the people of Cumberland House and the construction of the bridge. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Government House Old-fashioned Picnic

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it was my pleasure to bring greetings on Sunday from the Government of Saskatchewan at an old-fashioned family picnic at Government House sponsored by the Government House Historical Society.

With the change in weather Sunday, Mr. Speaker, many hundreds of people and their families came out to enjoy the day. Sunday's old-fashioned family picnic was an example of heritage programing that re-created both the traditional experiences of our past and the spirit of community that made Saskatchewan.

The old-fashioned family picnic is a re-creation of the Sunday school picnics that were held on the grounds of Government House over a hundred years ago. At the time the property extended over 53 acres and its colourful gardens and lush lawns made it one of the best parks in all of western Canada.

Sunday's event is just one of many activities sponsored by the Government House Historical Society. This society is committed to ensuring that the heritage of the province remains vibrant and accessible to all.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the members of the Legislative Assembly, I wish to congratulate the Government House

Historical Society and all its volunteers for a successful sixth annual picnic, and hope that you'll all join me in thanking them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Access Awareness Week Innovation Award

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my congratulations to the entire teaching staff at the Pre-Cam Elementary School in La Ronge. They are being honoured by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation with this year's presentation of the National Access Awareness Week Innovation Award.

Ten years ago the school's 25 teachers, with support from parents and the rest of the community, launched a program to better suit the educational needs of special needs children.

In 1986, the Pre-Cam teachers worked to fully integrate a young boy with spastic quadriplegia and total blindness into a kindergarten class. Through a teamwork approach, the child was viewed as a student first, and as a student with special needs second. That youngster is now doing well with his peers in a grade 7 class at Pre-Cam. The inclusive program now accommodates more students with multiple disabilities.

Remarking on their accomplishments, STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) president, Dwain Drew, said this great initiative in La Ronge shows how teachers, with cooperation and support, can provide a first-class education to all students.

I ask all member of this Assembly to join me in congratulating the Pre-Cam staff for demonstrating such tremendous creativity and the willingness to improve the educational environment for students in La Ronge.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, as it was mentioned yesterday, this week is Access Awareness Week.

I am pleased to report today that the staff of a school in my constituency is being honoured for an initiative that began 10 years ago. This initiative was to develop an inclusive program that fully integrates students with disabilities into the regular school classes.

The Pre-Cam Elementary School in La Ronge will receive the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation 1996 Access Awareness Week Innovation Award. In 1986 the school's 25 teachers launched a comprehensive effort to change the previous system where special needs children were either placed in an institution or were only partly integrated into school classes. They did this with the support of tutors, consultants, administration, parents, the school board, and other agencies.

Mr. Speaker, when this program was implemented, the Pre-Cam teachers worked to fully integrate a boy with spastic quadriplegia and total blindness into a kindergarten class. Staff report that the program and the philosophy succeeded; and the youngster is now doing well with his peers in a grade 7 class in Pre-Cam.

This inclusive program at the school has now carried on to accommodate more students with multiple disabilities. This is an excellent example of how the integration of Saskatchewan special needs students can and should be done.

I would like to extend congratulations to the teachers and staff at Pre-Cam School for their hard work in this program; and the parents, administration, school board, and everyone who supported this initiative that is benefiting many students.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Brad Hornung Receives Award of Merit

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to commend a young Regina man's pursuit of education despite some extraordinary circumstances. During Campion College's convocation ceremony last week, 27-year-old Brad Hornung was presented with the college's Award of Merit.

Brad was tragically injured as a centre of the Regina Pats in 1987. The accident left him a paraplegic but it did not quash his ambition. During the award ceremony, Campion College officials explained that Brad was being honoured for his extraordinary accomplishments. They said his determination, spiritual courage, and endurance, helped propel him to success. Campion chaplain, Marcia McGovern, said, and I quote:

Hornung has provided those around him with a model of what the human spirit can achieve when the spirit is willing.

I would ask all the members of this Assembly to join me in extending much deserved congratulations to the courageous Brad Hornung.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Last Mountain Times Wins Award

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the member from Watrous, and for myself, I want to congratulate the *Last Mountain Times* in Nokomis. Nokomis was in the constituency of Last Mountain-Touchwood before redistribution, and is now in Watrous. But its far-flung readership extends into both constituencies and beyond, so I'm happy to make the first dual private members' statement in this Assembly.

The *Last Mountain Times* recently received the prestigious Royal Canadian Legion National Media Award. The award was presented to the editors, Lyle and Shirley Emmons, by representatives from the Nokomis, Govan, and Semans branches of the Royal Canadian Legion — the three branches that nominated the *Times* for the award.

The commendation accompanying the award is worth reading:

The Legion Media Award is presented to newspapers, radio, and television stations that have performed valuable service to the Royal Canadian Legion branches in support

of their work in the community.

In short, Mr. Speaker, this is an award of appreciation for community work and community involvement, presented, I should add, to a paper published and operated by community members. With recent events concerning our province's daily papers in mind, I think an award such as this deserves wider recognition and general support.

My congratulations to the Emmonses. The member from Watrous and I wish them many more years of community service. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Battleford Royal Canadian Legion Memorial Dedication

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Freedom and democracy are things we should never take for granted. The courage of our veterans paved the way for the peaceful communities, provinces, in Canada that we enjoy today. Each and every year the Saskatchewan legislature pays tribute to all of the people who have served in the military and are currently involved.

Last year on May 8, as part of the 50th anniversary of the VE (Victory in Europe) Day, there was a sod turning ceremony held for a First World War memorial which graces the grounds of the legislature building — a long overdue tribute to the Saskatchewan men and women who lost their lives in the 1914 to 1918 war.

On Sunday May 26, 1996, branch no. 9, Battleford Royal Canadian Legion, and the ladies auxiliary, held a memorial dedication and unveiling of a plaque in memory of the gallant men of Battleford and district who gave their lives in two world wars.

I wish to extend my congratulations to branch no. 9 for such an important contribution to the community and its history, and to the many people and organizations for their generous donations of time and money. This beautiful plaque will be a reminder to all. We will remember them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Long-term Care

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With each passing day this government demonstrates its lack of compassion and commitments to the seniors of this province, and nowhere is this more evident than in the number of long-term care facilities that have been closed or drastically cut by the NDP (New Democratic Party).

In Swift Current this government has forced the closure of a 70-bed care centre. Irene Hunter is one of 31 residents who does not know where she will be relocated when the doors are shut on this facility.

Yesterday I received a letter from her daughter, Noreen Klassen, who indicates her mother cannot survive a move, adding, and I quote, Mr. Speaker:

My sister and I had better get ready for a funeral because this will kill her. If you think I'm being melodramatic, I'm not. This will be a fact.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Health explain why his government is prepared to put seniors through such life-threatening turmoil?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I certainly recognize, as I think any reasonable person would, that for elderly people the prospect of moving into another facility is stressful. There's no question about that.

But I'm confident, Mr. Speaker, that the long-term care needs of residents of the Swift Current care home will be met continuously and properly by the Swift Current Health District. And I'm confident that no senior in that care facility will be left without good and decent housing. And in fact I go further, Mr. Speaker, and I'd say that no senior in this province living in a nursing home is going to be left without good, decent, and adequate housing, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, there are serious concerns about the closures of long-term beds — 70 in Swift Current; 10 in Rose Valley; 22 eliminated in Regina; 20 slashed in Estevan; and 30 more beds cuts in Melfort.

The letter from Noreen Klassen states that the Minister of Health and the Premier have never had to go through what her family is going through; otherwise they would have fought to keep this and other nursing homes open. She goes on to say, and I quote again:

What are we becoming? What is happening to this province when something else is taking precedence over taking care of our own?

Mr. Speaker, the Premier is someone who has stated that Saskatchewan's health care system is the envy of the world. How then can he sit by and allow economics to take precedence over the care of our elderly? Will the Premier put himself in the shoes of Noreen Klassen? Can he honestly tell this House that if it was his mother who was being kicked out of a care home, he would sit idly by and allow this to happen without a fight?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, there are two competing visions here. One vision says that you never change the system to make it sustainable; you simply pour more money into it. That is the vision of the Liberal Party which is saying we should spend more, notwithstanding the fact that they're taking \$50 million out of our health care system.

The other vision, Mr. Speaker, is one that says we should spend smarter within our means, and that's what we're trying to do, Mr. Speaker. Our vision is to spend smarter within our means,

to have a sustainable system. It is not, as the Liberals propose, to impose large premiums on families in Saskatchewan, to put money into the health care system and not to try to modernize it.

And I don't often quote from the member for Saskatoon Greystone, but when she was leader of the Liberal Party, she said . . . And I'm quoting from the *Star-Phoenix* of September 26, 1991, Mr. Speaker. It says:

But Haverstock said seniors have their dignity preserved when they remain in their own homes and are treated under the home care system.

We need both, Mr. Speaker — good nursing home care and good community care in the home as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Service Districts Act

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister in charge of Municipal Government was questioned in this House yesterday about the fact that they are breaking yet another promise.

The minister indicated to rural administrators on May 13 that The Service Districts Act would be put on the back burner until proper consultation took place. Now she says her government intends to push this legislation through but, and I quote, "not proclaim it at this particular time until the need for it becomes apparent."

Mr. Speaker, SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and SUMA have lost any faith and trust that they had in this government because of its hypocritical actions. The minister had been using common sense before she was apparently overruled by the Premier or cabinet.

Will the minister explain who really is calling the shots, and if it is not her, is she prepared to tender her resignation as the Minister of Municipal Government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I'll answer the question on behalf of the government and say to the hon. member opposite much along the lines of some of the answer given by the Minister of Health to the previous question.

This government, in consultation with the people of the province of Saskatchewan, is preparing the province of Saskatchewan for the 21st century. The infrastructure of rural Saskatchewan was built at a time, 75, 80 years ago, which while having served the province very, very well, has undergone and is undergoing extreme change and stress from change. One example is the abandonment of the Crow rate by the federal Liberal government in Ottawa.

Our intention is, and we're convinced it's the intention of SARM and SUMA as well, is to build the most efficient, most responsive, most modern, up-to-date infrastructure system for urban and rural municipal governments that we can afford in the province of Saskatchewan as part of preparing for the 21st

century.

All that The Service Districts Bill does is provide a voluntary mechanism and an additional tool for local governments to be partners with us in that venture.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. You just proved my point — these decisions are being made from someone other than from rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the minister stated in this House yesterday, and again I quote, "Participating in The Service Districts Act is voluntary." She has stated that there is no top-down plan and yet she has threatened to tighten the purse-strings on local governments who do not wish to amalgamate. And now she is moving to push The Service Districts Act.

It is little wonder that municipal governments feel that this government is preparing to use legislation and funding as a means of forcing them to amalgamate.

Mr. Speaker, this minister is grasping so much, she indicated to the media that this Act may be needed to establish a provincial-wide 911 system. This is ridiculous. Current legislation would not hinder this issue one bit and the new legislation would not help it one bit.

If the minister is truly in control of her portfolio and there's no plans to force amalgamation, will she make a commitment today to honour her previous commitment, and will she drop The Service Districts Act and give local governments a chance to show there is no need for this legislation, and for once, stand behind her word?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, again, answering on behalf of the government with respect to this question, may I say that the hon. member's interpretation of the legislation I disagree with and I don't think that he's read it carefully enough.

But let me repeat again that the purpose of the legislation is to provide a voluntary mechanism — a voluntary mechanism — for rural municipal governments, urban municipal governments, if they wish, to form into a new association in order to eliminate overlap and duplication and to provide infrastructure service more efficiently. That's all. That is to say if the Bill is even proclaimed. We have undertaken a policy of consultation and communication with SARM and SUMA.

We don't have all the answers, that's for sure. I'm sure they don't either. But jointly we can work toward preparing the province of Saskatchewan for the 21st century.

And with all due respect to the hon. member, I think I'll take the words of SARM and SUMA than I will his words about the preparedness of the local governments to work with us.

They are, and we're going to find our way through to a proper

and satisfactory solution which will make Saskatchewan and rural Saskatchewan stronger than ever before.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rental Property Damage Deposits

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there is a Saskatchewan housing crisis on the horizon. Saskatchewan landlords have been asking this government to review its damage deposit policy for months.

They met with government officials months ago to present their case but they are still waiting for action on this issue. They are extremely frustrated by being stonewalled by the government on the damage deposit issue.

Now Saskatchewan landlords are threatening to hike rental prices drastically to recover costs. Mr. Speaker, does the minister have any intent to deal with the landlords' dispute or is it his intention to push the issue off until the end of session when it can no longer be debated in this House?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, once again I wish to answer this question on behalf of the government, if I may, in order to make it absolutely clear. The position of the landlords is under active consideration by the Minister of Justice and the appropriate ministries that are involved, because the issue is not as simple and one-sided as the Liberal Party would represent speaking on behalf of the landlords, as they purportedly do.

There is another very important sector of the population which has an interest in this and that is the tenants — tenants who are very often at the very lowest end of the social ladder, economic-scale ladder. And the landlords' position has been a position which advocates their interests, and you are advocating their interests, and you're ignoring the interests of the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people who are dependent upon accommodation and have another side of the equation.

It's not an easy circle to square, if I may say so bluntly. And if it takes us more time to come up with the right and fair and equitable solution, we intend to take the time rather than rushing to one side of this debate only, as the Liberal Party prepares to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just mention to the Premier that they will take the time. Well now is the time. This is the time. At least talk to these people.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice had promised some type of resolution to the damage deposit issue by April 1. It's now May 28. Saskatchewan landlords believe this is just another in a long line of broken promises by this government. The minister knows full well and so does the Premier what the consequences of his inaction will be. The Saskatchewan Landlords Association say, if the government does not review the damage deposit issue, they will simply hike their rental prices.

Now many of the people living in rental properties are on social assistance, and so I want to know if the minister is prepared to tell the taxpayers of this province that if the landlords increase their rental rates, the taxpayers will ultimately be responsible to pay more, every month of every year, instead of a one-time security deposit increase.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, again I rise because I took the first question on behalf of the government; I may as well follow up on the second one. I can only repeat what I said in response to the first question.

All aspects of this very important issue are being considered. In fact, as I am told, there is a consideration taken by the tenants association which involves an insurance scheme, an alternative scheme, or perhaps a more accurate word to use would be a complementary scheme, as part of solving this particular situation.

We're going to take the time to consider it. But this requires more than simply a question of the damage deposit, as the landlords would want and as the Liberals are advocating. I think one of the other solutions is what is being demanded by the Women's March On Poverty. I have here in front of me, as one of my colleagues has passed to me, part of their literature which demands that the federal government create 14,000 units of social housing a year.

Now would the hon. member of the Liberal Party get up and tell me that she will say publicly, urge publicly, that her colleagues in Ottawa should get on with the task of building 14,000 social housing units because that is going to help those at the lower end of the spectrum a heck of a lot more, a heck of lot more, than the question of damage deposits as she is advocating, solely and exclusively, only on behalf of the landlords, which is what the Liberal Party stands for.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Method of Payment for Doctors

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, Saskatchewan Medical Association president, Dr. Allan Miller, is very concerned about your plan to change the method of payment for doctors. He says that many Saskatchewan doctors are afraid that you plan to impose a new method of payment on doctors without the SMA's (Saskatchewan Medical Association) consent, and he says if that happens, many doctors will leave this province.

Mr. Minister, our health care system is already in crisis, thanks to your government. The last thing we need is more doctors bailing out of the province. Mr. Minister, will you give the commitment today that you will not impose a new fee schedule on doctors without the consent of the SMA?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I don't agree with the member when he says the health care system is in crisis. I think if one looked at Conservative Alberta where health care

spending has been cut by 15 per cent, and per capita health care spending is \$200 less per person per year than in Saskatchewan, that might be a crisis, Mr. Speaker. If you look at Manitoba where health care spending was cut \$37 million this year because they're not back-filling for the Liberals, that might be a crisis.

But I want to say to the member that what we will do, as all governments in Canada are doing as part of a national round table process, is consult with the physicians, with the public, with stakeholders. And, Mr. Speaker, we will consider whether there should be some changes in the health care system and we will do that in due course.

Is there a plan at the present time to impose some new system? No, there is not, Mr. Speaker. And if there is a new system, it will be arrived at in consultation with the physicians and all other interested people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Agreement with Intercontinental Packers

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Economic Development. Mr. Minister, it looks like your shell game over at Intercontinental Packers with regards to jobs is continuing.

In April you were talking about all the new jobs that had been created and were going to be created at Intercon as a result of your \$5 million pre-election hand-out. Now Intercon has announced the closure of its beef packing department in Saskatoon which will mean a loss of 65 to 70 jobs.

Mr. Minister, where were all the new jobs that Intercontinental Packers was going to create? Where are they and when are they going to come? And why are there jobs being lost at Intercontinental Packers in Saskatoon when your government promised exactly the opposite?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting. We've got lots of rain out there and the sun's shining and farmers are out seeding and good news all over the place. And Intercontinental Packers, Western Canadian Beef, is expanding their beef operation in Moose Jaw, and Intercontinental Packers is expanding their hog operation in Saskatoon, and all the members opposite can do is whine and groan and pretend the sky is falling.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite need to pay a little more attention to the facts and acknowledge that the plan is proceeding as it was intended to proceed — that the construction of this facility is moving on target with the plans and that we're well positioned to take advantage of the international market for our beef and pork products by this expansion of this operation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Service Districts Act

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this

afternoon is for the Premier. It's good to see that he's been getting involved in the discussion today and taking some responsibility.

Mr. Premier, in the last couple of days we've seen your Minister of Municipal Government being totally unwilling to listen to municipalities, what they are telling her in regards to service districts Acts. Municipalities do not want this legislation, and it's time for you to show some leadership.

Mr. Premier, I understand that you will be meeting with the presidents of SUMA and SARM later today to discuss this legislation. What position will you be taking at that meeting, and are you willing to pull this legislation if that's what these municipal leaders ask you to do as they move into the 21st century?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, again I can only say what I have said before. This province is on the bridge, on the cusp, of getting ready for a very exciting and very prosperous and a quality of life which is unparalleled in Canada for the 21st century.

I believe that economically and fiscally our house is getting into order, and all aspects of change affect all people in the province of Saskatchewan including local governments, the urbans and the rural municipalities.

I repeat again, the legislation which is before the House is voluntary and voluntary only. Nobody can deny that — nobody can deny that. That is the actual black and white of the words.

We're asking the local governments to join us. We're asking the Conservative Party, we're asking the Liberal Party — although I've given up on both of them — to look forward to the 21st century and making sure that we provide the best possible infrastructure, the best possible infrastructure that the people of Saskatchewan can afford.

That's how we built this great province. We have adjusted and we have looked forward and we've been positive, and I'm sure that the municipal and rural leaders understand the necessity of doing that as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

First Nations Taxation

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Finance.

Madam Minister, it's been several months now since you first announced that you were negotiating the issue of native taxation. Those negotiations appear to be going nowhere. In fact the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) recently threatened to take you to court to get out of collecting the PST (provincial sales tax) on reserve.

Madam Minister, what is the current status of these negotiations and when do you intend to start charging the PST to status Indians on purchases made off reserve?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to the member

opposite, I welcome that question. Our commitment is to a tax system that is fair — fair to first nations or Indian people but also fair to all Saskatchewan taxpayers.

And we have said consistently that any change in the tax system has to meet that criteria.

As far as the discussions with the FSIN go, I do not want to go into greater detail because, as you would know from the press, there's a possibility of a court case. All that we have said is that a court case is not our first choice as a way to resolve this issue, but if a court case does proceed, we obviously reserve the right to take to the courts the whole Indian taxation regime. But we will ensure that the people of this province end up with a fair tax system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, our caucus believes in seeing the first nations people become full partners in the economy. But with equal rights comes equal responsibilities, and that includes paying taxes. Status Indians use the education system, the health care system, the highways — all of the systems of government, all of which face huge funding shortfalls. So it's only fair to expect the status Indians to pay their fair share.

Madam Minister, right after question period the Conservative House Leader will be introducing a private member's Bill requiring status Indians to pay the PST off reserve. Will you support this legislation?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, and to the member opposite, I would say to the member opposite that I don't think he's being exactly fair to the Saskatchewan taxpayers in what he's saying. He's leading the people of this province to believe that they can have it both ways.

We have said to the first nations people that if they want to move to a different system such as exists in Manitoba, that's a possibility, because first nations people off reserve in Manitoba do pay the E&H (education and health) tax. But what the member opposite isn't pointing out is that in Manitoba there also are exemptions available to first nations people that don't exist here.

So please, Mr. Member, stop playing politics with this. We will resolve this, first of all, by trying to negotiate; secondly, by other means, if necessary.

But I would challenge the members here who are being silent. You have at least stated your position. Where do the Liberals stand on this issue?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crown Corporations Review

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government recently announced the date and location of . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I'll ask for the cooperation from

members on both sides of the House to allow the hon. member for Thunder Creek to put his question.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, this government recently announced the date and location of a number of public meetings as part of its review of Saskatchewan's family of Crown corporations. An ad appeared in the province's major daily newspapers last weekend, indicating that this extensive review will include SaskTel, SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), SaskPower, SaskEnergy, and STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company).

Mr. Speaker, most people would agree that these Crowns should be reviewed but so too should a number of Crown investments, some of which have been a drain on Saskatchewan taxpayers.

Will the minister tell this House if investments into projects such as the Bi-Provincial upgrader will be included under the Crown review process. And if so, why is this aspect of the Crown review not addressed in the newspaper ads?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, for the information of the members opposite, I've not seen the advertisements, but it's part of the Crown review that the investment portfolio is also under review.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower Customer Relations Personnel

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, in the past year, SaskPower has closed district offices in rural communities, eliminated the RUD (rural underground distribution) program, and increased our power bills by as much as 14 per cent to make the Crown corporation more efficient; all the while we have heard how administrative and management positions have been reduced.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of this House a pair of organizational charts which appear in the October '95 and December '95 editions of the *HiLines*, SaskPower's monthly newsletter, and I'd like to send copies of these over to the government members.

Mr. Speaker, these charts show that the number of community services and community relations personnel more than doubled. Does the minister have an explanation? Is it because you need more people to address complaints? Or is it because you have to justify raises to Jack Messer and Carole Bryant?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me say to the member opposite that he is right. The corporation has gone through a major, internal restructuring with respect to the management to try and gain management efficiencies and operational efficiencies. And that is a process that I think is only a responsible approach in the new, emerging market-place where deregulation is taking place.

I want to say to the member opposite that the number of management people has been considerably down-sized. I want to also say to him with respect to customer relations, we will put in place the appropriate people to be able to communicate with over 430,000 customers in this province. And I want to say to the member opposite as well that I think that this government has taken a very responsible approach in positioning SaskPower to compete in this deregulated market-place. And I want say on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan that the management team over at SaskPower should be commended for their vision and for their foresight and their decision to act on what could be a very serious situation if nothing was done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Saskatchewan's Credit Rating

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, today all Saskatchewan people can take pride in an achievement built upon their hard work, dedication, and unfailing optimism. Earlier today, Standard and Poor's, one of the oldest, largest, and most influential credit rating agencies in the world, upgraded Saskatchewan's credit rating from BBB plus to A minus.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — This is the first time in 20 years — two entire decades — that the province's credit rating has improved so dramatically.

Moving up a bracket in the credit rating system is an unusual and significant event. It is international recognition from an independent agency of what Saskatchewan people have accomplished together. Standard and Poor's has confirmed why Saskatchewan people are feeling more hope and more optimism. It is because they see how far we've come and they know how far we can still go.

It wasn't that long ago that Saskatchewan faced a fiscal crisis, a crisis that cast a dark shadow on our economy, our social programs, and our province. When I became Finance minister in 1993, our fiscal situation was so bleak that it was practically impossible to borrow money in Canada.

The turnaround led by the people of Saskatchewan has been remarkable. Today, Standard and Poor spoke about, and I quote, "the impressive performance of the Saskatchewan economy, the sharp decline in tax supported debt, and the government's commitment to maintain fiscal balance."

Today our fiscal outlook is dramatically different and better. Investors from all over the world now view Saskatchewan as a good place to invest. That means our interest bill will go down. In the short term, savings on interest costs will amount to \$1.75 million this year alone. But in the longer term it will mean that Saskatchewan people will reap the rewards of their past challenges and choices.

We can look forward to a future of lower public debt, lower

interest payments, and all the possibilities that financial freedom brings. We can feel more secure about the future of our health, education, and social programs. We can feel more confident about our commitment to improve the quality of life for all of our citizens and leave a better world for our children and our grandchildren. Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker, can embrace the future with a sense of confidence and security.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives us a great deal of pleasure to view the members opposite and their reaction to the performance that the people of this province have put in over the past five years in achieving what is a milestone here this afternoon in the announcement of the credit upgrade.

Some might say it has been a long time coming. Perhaps some might say that S&P (Standard and Poor) was in fact a little bit too harsh with this province in terms of its credit grade. I know that the members opposite too, although they seem somewhat surprised by it this afternoon, when we were in interim supply debate not that long ago, it was mentioned by the minister that we were going to be looking forward to some good news from Standard and Poor.

So we are very appreciative of the efforts made by the people of this province in this regard. And the minister suggests that we have something like \$1.7 million in immediate interest savings this year in the province as a result of this. And I would suggest and I would mention it to the Minister of Health again, that this is something that perhaps you could talk to your Minister of Finance about, because again that would be enough money to operate a unit such as the geriatric assessment and rehabilitation unit in the city of Moose Jaw.

So as I say, on behalf of the official opposition, we do congratulate the people of this province for a remarkable achievement. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is indeed good news for the people of Saskatchewan, the province of Saskatchewan. Congratulations are certainly in order — congratulations to the hard-pressed taxpayers of this province for all that they've had to contribute in the last few years.

We see that Standard and Poor said it is due to the performance of the economy. And certainly that is the case, Mr. Speaker. Grain prices are up. Interest rates are down. Oil and gas is certainly moving along. Those areas of the economy are firing on all cylinders, Mr. Speaker. We are finally back to the levels of credit of the spring of 1991, and it's good to see a return.

Mr. Speaker, but the question that I'm sure all the taxpayers of this province is wondering, now that we are seeing a rebound in the economy of this province, when will we see some tax relief in this province to go along with it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 116 — An Act to amend The Education and Health Tax Act respecting the taxation of Saskatchewan Indians off-reserve

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to amend The Education and Health Tax Act respecting the taxation of Saskatchewan Indians off-reserve.

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

ROYAL ASSENT

At 2:29 p.m. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the Chamber, took his seat upon the throne, and gave Royal Assent to the following Bills:

- Bill No. 51 — An Act to amend The Film and Video Classification Act
- Bill No. 57 — An Act to repeal The Police Pension (Saskatoon) Funding Act
- Bill No. 24 — An Act respecting The Prescription of Pharmaceutical Agents and Contact Lenses
- Bill No. 49 — An Act to amend The Natural Resources Act
- Bill No. 36 — An Act to amend or repeal Miscellaneous Statutes concerning Municipal Government
- Bill No. 01 — An Act Respecting St. Paul's Hospital (Grey Nuns) of Saskatoon, being An Act to Amend and Consolidate An Act to incorporate St. Paul's Hospital (Grey Nuns) of Saskatoon
- Bill No. 02 — An Act Respecting Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns) of Saskatchewan, being An Act to Amend and Consolidate An Act to incorporate the Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns) of Saskatchewan
- Bill No. 03 — An Act to Amend The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities Act
- Bill No. 04 — An Act to Amend An Act incorporating Luther College, Regina
- Bill No. 53 — An Act to amend The Snowmobile Act
- Bill No. 8 — An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation Act
- Bill No. 73 — An Act to amend The Planning and Development Act, 1983
- Bill No. 74 — An Act to amend The Government Organization Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts
- Bill No. 89 — An Act to amend The Dependants' Relief Act
- Bill No. 3 — An Act respecting The Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology
- Bill No. 48 — An Act to amend The Animal Identification Act
- Bill No. 60 — An Act to amend The Crop Insurance Act
- Bill No. 90 — An Act to amend The Provincial Mediation Board Act
- Bill No. 83 — An Act to amend The Limitation of Actions Act
- Bill No. 93 — An Act respecting the Public Disclosure of Information related to Individuals who Pose a

Significant Risk of Serious Harm to Other Persons

Bill No. 58 — An Act to amend The Land Titles Act and to make a consequential amendment

Bill No. 17 — An Act to amend certain Acts respecting Highways and Vehicles

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

His Honour retired from the Chamber at 2:33 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I'm pleased to provide the answer to question 108.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 108 is provided.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Support for Small Business

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, today I want to focus on the fantastic initiative, ambition, and flexibility of Saskatchewan's vibrant small-business sector. At the conclusion of my remarks, I will be moving the following motion:

That this Assembly support the important work being done by small business in the province to create jobs and improve the economy, particularly such as tourism, value added processing, and manufacturing.

Mr. Speaker, a recent article by the sometimes thoughtful columnist, Dale Eisler, compared Saskatchewan and Alberta. He made the point that a great many people flock to Alberta from our province. He seemed to imply that there is something inherently wrong with our traditions of governance, rather than fully focusing on the Alberta advantage of oil resources developed at a time of world shortages and demand. Totally ignoring the jest of fate we've been handed by choosing to settle and survive on the sparse Great Plains of North America, he extolled the virtues of no sales tax, ignored the oil royalty income of Alberta, and made it seem as if Saskatchewan people have no ambition other than to move westwards.

Well, Mr. Speaker, today I want to challenge those notions and to indicate to this Assembly the great advances our Saskatchewan people are making, taking advantage of our proud heritage of social democratic cooperation and collective building of a strong social safety net; our history of appropriate and constantly evolving state interventionism in the form of Crown corporations that give us home office presence and clout while simultaneously providing services and job opportunities; and our tradition, Mr. Speaker, of just getting on with it and getting the job done.

It's a cute saying, but it's true, Mr. Speaker — in Saskatchewan when you buy a plaid shirt, it comes with the sleeves already rolled up. All over the world, wherever Saskatchewanians have

migrated, we have the reputation for hard work, initiative, flexibility, and drive. Now we can at last apply those qualities to our own home-grown economy.

It hasn't been easy carving out a province in the hole of the doughnut of this continent, Mr. Speaker. The plains Cree knew that this place wasn't 100 per cent compatible for human habitation. They kept moving around but always coming back to the lure of the Prairies. The Scottish, English, and Ukrainian immigrants who answered the siren call of misleading advertisements for land knew this wasn't an easy place to live. Yet they all persevered, stuck with it, stayed together, and built strong institutions and services that serve now as the humane infrastructure to allow Saskatchewan people to finally pull ahead and prosper.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — The last 50 years may have been great for Alberta, but the next 50 or 100 will be Saskatchewan's time. We built a sustainable sense of self-reliance and mutual interdependency that will permit us to create jobs and improve the economy and make Saskatchewan number one in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Now I'm probably going to say some pretty unfashionable things here this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, but they are things that need to be said.

First, while I know that everyone on this side of the House joins me in lamenting the loss of the Crow benefit, I have to say that we will survive. It isn't the end of the world.

Secondly, while I share the concerns the members opposite have about the changes they see in rural Saskatchewan, I have to say that the unique agrarian lifestyle we built up here over the years will not be saved by governments throwing money at the problem. That approach was tried in the '80s and simply resulted in a horrendous debt and taxpayer fatigue.

The jobs that rural Saskatchewan needs are not government-funded health care jobs. The health care infrastructure all over Saskatchewan is changing, in some cases because of under-utilization, in some cases because of the advances in medical technology, in some cases because of changes necessary and appropriate to health care delivery. Regardless of the reasons, it is changing. Jobs in rural Saskatchewan will come from local people and will be built from the ground up. They will not come from government tinkering and centralist funding.

Finally, as a social democrat who believes very strongly in the important role of government for collective services, I also want to emphasize that for governments of all stripes, but particularly for ours, given the fiscal, economic, and demographic factors we face, the role of government is not to create jobs. Our government can help shape attitudes and opportunities, but it is local people, local communities, local entrepreneurs, that are creating the jobs that will drive us forward, strong and proud, into the next century.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — In a recent television program, I heard the comment: there are two kinds of people — those who wait for the bus and those who walk to town.

Well in Saskatchewan we work together collectively to smooth out the bumps in the road to town, and now Saskatchewan people are demonstrating that they're the sort of folk who will not sit back passively. They're taking their own destiny in their hands. Metaphorically speaking, they're walking to town instead of waiting for the bus. And they're getting results.

Saskatchewan's small and medium-sized businesses are taking off and prospering. The initiative, ingenuity, and tradition of caring for each other and building on our strengths, is yielding results. We've stopped waiting for the bus.

Indeed, the pivotal moment we stopped was likely the massive farm rally in Saskatoon a few years ago where thousands and thousands of farmers gathered to demand the status quo, and left with the growing realization that they could take their own destiny into their own hands. They could stop worshipping King Wheat and they could add value themselves to their own produce. That rally — one of the key, defining moments in this province — was a watershed in attitudinal change.

Local communities are now raising their own investment capital and developing their own equity for jobs and opportunities in their own communities. They are no longer waiting for the big, sexy megaprojects to come from afar, use Saskatchewan resources, and then leave town. There is significant value added economic activity occurring these days in Saskatchewan, and it will only get better.

Let me move beyond the easy rhetoric now, Mr. Speaker, and give you a few examples from all across the province. Out in the constituency of Rosetown-Biggan, three small towns are taking off and proving they can improve their local economy. Beechy, Birsay, and Lucky Lake don't seem to be natural candidates for economic expansion but they're proving the pundits wrong.

They planted 800 acres of Idaho seed potatoes and they've produced almost 23,000 10-pound sacks of potatoes. The arena, which wasn't getting much use anyway, has been taken over for a potato packing plant and 88 people have jobs. That's one job for each 10 acres of planting compared with the traditional, conventional agriculture approach of one job for each 3,000 acres.

Not only have they created jobs, Mr. Speaker, they created economic and investment opportunities for themselves and others. They're growing beans, raising pork, and farming fish. The local economy is truly fish and chips, pork and beans.

The local airstrip is active. And wonder of wonders, the community has just opened up a new motel, so those air travellers will stay awhile, sample Saskatchewan tourism sights, and spend some money locally. That motel is community owned. The local people raised their own equity, and they are proving that value added, community economic development

really does create jobs and economic activity. They've moved from a situation where they were featured on national television on a *W5* program as communities that were dying — and were desperately trying to keep their local hospital open as a job source — to strong, vibrant, and booming towns.

There are other examples. Around Outlook, there's a farmer who diversified in a very creative way. Tired of waiting for the price of wheat to bounce up or for governments to invent yet another support program, he seeded mint. Now he's harvesting mint oil for peppermints all around the world.

(1445)

In Aberdeen, a couple of local farmers with a great idea went to Cargill and convinced them to take a minority equity position in a seed-handling plant. In Canora, they got tired of burning the flax straw, so now they've developed a local community venture that may one day result in linen dresses. Around Tisdale, the German tourists are paying four times the cabin rental rate that anyone in the province would, all for the privilege of enjoying the fantastic ecotourism opportunities Saskatchewan has.

And in Saskatoon, we have Wanuskewin Park, an aboriginal economic development and tourism venture that has exceeded anyone's wildest dreams. That's on the north-east side of the city. Over on the west side, the traffic is very heavy along Valley Road. Ventures such as Dr. Dolittle's Petting Farm, Coronation Garden, Floral Acres, Robertson Valley Farms, the Strawberry Ranch and the Berry Barn, are proving that farmers can roll with the times and change their psychology and their output. I dare say that the number of visitors there rivals even Wanuskewin. These people have taken agriculture and turned it into tourism. The Berry Barn employs 80 people working 40 acres. That's a job every half acre. And the freight rate problem is minuscule, since people drive away the product themselves.

One more quick example, Mr. Speaker, of how the psychology in this province has changed and how the small-business sector is expanding and prospering. I commented recently during the private members' statements about the SABEX (Saskatoon Achievement in Business Excellence) awards for local ventures. One of those I mentioned was a Saskatoon-based company called Bioriginal Food and Science Corporation. This is a prime example of Saskatchewan people working together, finding unique and cooperative business relationships that build on our strengths and our traditions, and then carrying them one or two steps further.

Bioriginal is a joint venture of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool — Saskatchewan's largest corporate entity; Nuvotech, the commercialization arm of the POS Plant; Crown Investments Corporation, which of course is the commercialization arm of the Government of Saskatchewan; Organico, a company owned by organic farmers; and finally PGE Canada, the leading gamma linolenic acid producer in the world.

Bioriginal took a non-conventional approach to economic partnerships, took non-conventional Saskatchewan products, used the strength and conviction of organic farmers, and pulled together all our Saskatchewan economic horsepower to create

products that are being marketed around the world.

Bioriginal is a global player, and they are from here and they're staying here, because that's where their strength and success is. Their products, — health and nutrition, cosmetic and skin care, pet and vet, as well as pharmaceuticals and mass-market foods — are a great example of the economic and job activity that Saskatchewan can and will create.

Alberta may have oil, but we have people who are creative, full of ingenuity, willing to cooperate in unique ways, and able to build upon our social democratic strengths.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Regina Sherwood:

That this Assembly support the important work being done by small business in the province to create jobs and improve the economy, particularly such as tourism, value added processing, and manufacturing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and second the motion by my colleague, the hon. member for Saskatoon Southeast. Mr. Speaker, the importance of small business to the Saskatchewan economy cannot be over-emphasized and I would like to begin my remarks this afternoon by pointing out a few facts in support of this statement.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about small business in Saskatchewan, we generally talk about businesses that employ less than 50 employees and have sales less than 5 million. And the impact of small business in Saskatchewan is considerable. In the last year for which complete statistics were available, that is 1993, the following information came out about our small-business sector.

In total, Mr. Speaker, there are 28,042 employer firms with less than 50 employees, excluding firms in the primary industrial sector of the economy; 92.2 per cent of all firms were small, with 66 per cent of them having less than five employees.

Small firms generated 121,500 full years of employment — that is 40 per cent of the province's total employment, Mr. Speaker. Small firms also had a payroll of two and a third billion dollars — one-third of the provincial payroll, including the private sector, in our economy.

Small firms, in addition, created 6,300 or 72 per cent of all new jobs in employing businesses; 94 per cent of all new businesses created were small businesses. The service sector, Mr. Speaker, was the largest sector within the small-business community, comprising 41 per cent of all firms, 35 per cent of payroll, and 43 per cent of the small-business employment; 72 per cent of the province's manufacturing firms were also small concerns, comprising 27 per cent of that sector of our economy, Mr. Speaker.

From this information it's apparent that the role of small businesses within Saskatchewan's manufacturing sector is very

important. And it is increasingly so. Between 1979 and 1993 the total number of small manufacturing firms rose from 64.3 to 72.4 per cent and accounted for larger shares of the total employment and payroll in our small-business sector.

Mr. Speaker, our *Partnership For Growth* strategy, recently announced by the provincial government earlier this year, also takes into account the importance of our small-business sector. It was clear in the consultations during *Partnership For Growth* that the people of Saskatchewan want the private and cooperative sectors to cooperate and to work together to promote economic activity and create jobs. They want their government to lay the groundwork for economic development.

They advise that the government could best do that by sticking to three key goals — these being to cultivate a positive environment for economic growth . . . Government policies should therefore encourage rather than hinder people who wish to take risks and invest their time and resources in the future of the province and in small-business activity.

Secondly, the action plan of the *Partnership For Growth* recommends building upon the existing strengths to realize our growth opportunities. Government must nurture the six key economic sectors that have been our best opportunities for growth, these being agri-value, forestry, mining, energy, tourism and culture, and information technology. Finally, the *Partnership for Growth* outlines an action plan to develop partnerships and programs to seek full employment.

Mr. Speaker, in my next remarks I'd like to concentrate on the tourism sector of our small-business sector. Next week as being Tourism Awareness Week in Saskatchewan, I think it only appropriate that we focus in and perhaps discuss, take a little time to talk about, the importance of tourism, the tourism sector of our small-business economy.

And I'd like to put out to you a number of facts about our tourism sector that came about here in 1995. Mr. Speaker, visitors to and within Saskatchewan spend \$1.1 billion annually. This money is spent across the province and in a variety of businesses.

For example, 130 million is spent in the east-central part of the province, that is, east of Saskatoon from Prince Albert National Park south to Fort Qu'Appelle, in the following sectors: 41 million in transportation, including gasoline; 36 million on retail items and other miscellaneous expenditures; 20 million in restaurants and bars; 15 million in accommodations; 8 million in recreation activities and entertainment; and 7 million in food and beverages from stores; and finally, 3 million in prepaid packages.

Tourism, Mr. Speaker, is Saskatchewan's fourth largest export industry with 273.3 million in receipts from out-of-province visitors. Tourism provided an estimated 40,500 tourism-related, full- and part-time jobs in Saskatchewan in 1994, employing one in every twelve of Saskatchewan people. Almost half of the jobs are in the food and beverage business, 20 per cent in commercial accommodations, 4 per cent in adventure and outdoor recreation, and sixteen and a half per cent in transportation; and finally 8.1 per cent in tourism attractions.

These jobs, Mr. Speaker, are expected to grow an average of 3 per cent per year, three times the rate of employment growth in other industries, to more than 56,000 jobs by the year 2005. Approximately 900 individuals are currently involved in the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council, or as we call it here, STEC; 900 people are involved in STEC's certification process in 18 key tourism occupations, a level of participation second only to Alberta among Canadian provinces and territories.

Overall, more than 10 million trips are made in Saskatchewan every year. In 1995, 104,000 U.S. (United States) residents entered Saskatchewan directly to spend one or more nights, Mr. Speaker, the highest number in the last five years and an increase of 6.8 per cent over 1994. Our total U.S. visitors number about 270,000, and they spend a total of 640,000 tourism nights in the province. According to Price Waterhouse's survey of hotel vacancy rates, Regina and Saskatoon reached 69 per cent occupancy in 1995 — one of the highest rates among major Canadian cities and well above the national average, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Inquiries to Tourism Saskatchewan from potential tourists reached a record 203,060 last year — a 1 per cent increase over 1994, and a 93.9 increase since 1991. U.S. residents account for 68.2 per cent of all inquiries.

In 1995, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's provincial parks recorded 2.3 million visits — their best season in over five years. Based on attendance, Saskatchewan's top 10, 1995 events were Mosaic in Regina, which starts again this weekend, Saskatoon Folkfest, Buffalo Days, the Saskatoon exhibition, Canadian Western Agribition, the Saskatchewan Air Show, the Great Northern River War Championship Series, the Saskatchewan Jazz Festival, the Prince Albert exhibition, and the Western Canada Farm Progress Show.

Saskatchewan's top 10 attractions, based on 1995 attendance levels, were the Saskatchewan Science Centre, the Western Development Museums, the Mendel Art Gallery, the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, Manitou Springs Resort, the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Wanuskewin Park, the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) Museum, the Allen Sapp Gallery, and the Ukrainian Museum of Canada, Mr. Speaker. And, I'm told, Twenty Fifth Street Theatre of Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, those facts certainly demonstrate the importance of tourism in our sector, in the small-business sector of our economy. I'd like to, in concluding my remarks this afternoon, I'd like to point out that there has been some important developments in the tourism sector.

This spring the major players in Saskatchewan tourism have all amalgamated under the authority of the Saskatchewan Tourism Authority. This spring the tourism ministry association, that is TISASK (Tourism Industry Association of Saskatchewan), joined in or merged with the Tourism Authority on May 1.

The Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council, which I talked about a little earlier, STEC, merged on May 1, and the tourism

development branch of Saskatchewan Economic Development — all merged into the Saskatchewan Economic Development Authority.

And from a recent newsletter — sorry — of the Saskatchewan tourism agency, I'd like to quote Mr. Randy Williams, who's the CEO and general manager of the Tourism Authority, on this merger, who had to say that: "All this re-organization is exhilarating . . ." and of great potential and promise for tourism in the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, next week is Tourism Awareness Week. I think we can take this opportunity to congratulate them on that and with that I'd like to conclude my remarks by seconding the motion that . . .

The Speaker: — The member's time has expired to be able to continue. Debate will continue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1500)

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a small-business owner, I am just delighted to join in on the debate moved by the member from Saskatoon Southeast. The motion put forward is one of extreme importance, and I must say I am very glad and a little shocked to see that the members opposite finally realize just how much importance and significance the small-business sector in Saskatchewan truly has. It has taken them a long time to realize this but it is encouraging to see that the light has finally started to come on.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that I support the motion, but I sincerely believe that there is a great deal more that needs to be said. I want to say to the members opposite that it is no where near good enough to simply put forward a motion and stand up and give a speech saying how great things are in the small-business sector. This NDP government is famous for paying lip-service to the critical components that make our economy in Saskatchewan what it is.

Our business people are amongst the best in the world. They are hard working, innovative, and dedicated. They want to see their businesses and ultimately our province grow and get stronger as we move into the next century.

The businessmen and women of our province never cease to amaze me. Many of their businesses have continued to play a key role in our economy in spite of the environment created by this government.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite repeatedly claim that all I ever do is preach doom and gloom. Well I want to say to them it is not preaching doom and gloom, it is telling the cold, hard truth that they've chose to ignore.

Our business sector is faced with so many obstacles that it's no wonder I receive phone calls every day from business communities concerned about what this NDP government has done to the business environment in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, these people are taxed to death. Their utility rates have sky-rocketed. They are burdened with restrictive labour legislation and over-regulation. Yet our business people have restructured and streamlined their own operations in order to survive. I commend them for that, but I can't help but wonder where they would be if it weren't for the roadblocks that were set up by this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, I honestly believe that the men and women who make up our business community would be leaps and bounds ahead of where they are right now if this government would allow it. I cannot for the life of me figure out why the government is so determined to derail Saskatchewan's business sector. It seems like they have made a promise to make it as difficult as possible for businesses to survive in this province. Mr. Speaker, I hope this follows suit with all the other broken promises of this government.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of examples of businesses that feel they do not have much of a future if this government continues on its current path. McCutcheon Pharmacies in Foam Lake says, and I quote:

The provincial economy is being smothered in high taxes, high utility rates, and consumer pessimism. I don't believe this community has a viable future beyond 10-15 years if deterioration continues at the current rate. Government can't help but (we) must do all it can to get out of the way.

I think this statement holds true for many small-business owners in this province. There is so much that these people can take . . . only so much they can take, and this NDP government is pushing them to the brink of destruction. The members opposite can call it doom and gloom but unfortunately it's reality.

Mr. Speaker, the owner of the two Lorne drug stores in Regina says, and I quote:

I am concerned with the provincial government's stand on reimbursement for pharmacy services. The government does not want to look at any increases while pharmacists are looking at ways that will increase pharmacy services and decrease the overall cost of administrating and paying for the Saskatchewan Drug Plan.

Mr. Speaker, it seems that small-business owners all over Saskatchewan are feeling the effects of this government's arrogance. Businesses both big and small are facing many difficult challenges. The business development director from DCLS told me, and again I quote:

It goes without saying that our clients expect quality products and services. Only now they want them twice as fast and at half the cost.

Mr. Speaker, if business is doing all it can to adapt and compete in an ever-changing market-place, this government has done nothing but knock them down every time they take a step forward, whether it be workmen compensation rate increases, utility rate hikes, new occupational health and safety regulations, and the list goes on. As a small-business owner in

Saskatchewan, I fully understand the frustration that the business community is feeling.

Mr. Speaker, all we need to do is take a look at the number of businesses that have gone bankrupt in the last few years. In 1993 there were 400 business bankruptcies in Saskatchewan, and in Manitoba there were 266. In 1994 Saskatchewan saw 411 business bankruptcies and Manitoba saw 260. In 1995 Saskatchewan had 365 business bankruptcies and Manitoba had 210. When you add this all up, Saskatchewan experienced 1,176 business bankruptcies in the past three years compared to 701 in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't look like 1996 is going to be any better. In the first two months of this year, 73 businesses have already gone bankrupt compared to 48 in Manitoba. The number of employees in 1995 in Saskatchewan declined by 1.8 per cent — the largest decline in five years. I think these numbers speak for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I think the members opposite need to realize that everyone suffers when the economy suffers and everyone benefits when the economy grows. It seems like such a simple concept to understand, but apparently they just don't get it. If they did, they would understand that they would be the one that would take action rather than paying lip-service.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at what is hindering economic growth in Saskatchewan, it comes to five major problems. There are tax burdens, labour laws, limited growth opportunity, debt and instability of taxes, and a lack of financing.

All of these problems are due in large part to this NDP government. They are the ones who increased nearly every tax possible. Saskatchewan citizens have hit the tax wall. They have imposed restrictive labour laws and have impeded businesses from growing. When it comes to the provincial debt, the finger must be pointed at the previous Tory administration, and now the third party in Saskatchewan. A lack of financing is only a problem for those businesses that the Minister of Economic Development decides not to help.

Mr. Speaker, the result of these problems or issues is devastating. According to CFIB (Canadian Federation of Independent Business), 16 per cent of businesses surveyed are considering leaving Saskatchewan; 12 per cent are planning to move; and 6 per cent may move some of their operations out of the province; 18 per cent of the small businesses are competing with government in Saskatchewan.

I can't say enough to the members opposite. Everyone will be made to suffer if they continue on their current path. Mr. Speaker, in closing, I am asking the members opposite to please take a good, hard look at what is really happening in the business community. It's one thing for the member from Saskatoon Southeast to put forward a motion and then attempt to tell this Assembly how wonderful everything is, but that's nothing more than lip-service.

You are in the position to go to your cabinet colleagues, go to the Minister of Economic Development, go to the Premier, and don't be afraid to tell him about your concerns. It is your job to

represent your constituents. I know that you receive the same sort of phone calls and letters that I do from people worried about how their business is going to survive if action isn't taken.

There are some very serious business concerns in the community and they need to be addressed. Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that I support the work being done by small businesses in this province. Small business is a very significant employer. I know full well the importance of every small business in the province.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to put forward an amendment to the motion by the member from Saskatoon Southeast:

That this Assembly support the important work being done by small businesses in this province to create jobs and improve the economy by all small businesses.

And further, that this Assembly encourage the government to remove the roadblocks facing small businesses in Saskatchewan, such as stifling taxation; restrictive labour legislation; over-regulation; and unfair tendering policy, such as CCTA (Crown Construction Tendering Agreement), which are hindering the business growth and economic development of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — This motion is seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale.

The Speaker: — I've not had advance notice of the amendment. I'd just like to take a moment to reflect on whether it's in order.

I will recognize the hon. member for Kelvington-Wadena who may wish to rephrase her amendment.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make an amendment saying:

That this Assembly support the important work done by small businesses in the province creating jobs and improving the economy

and deleting the rest of the sentence, and adding in the following:

by all small businesses; and further, that this Assembly encourage the government to remove the roadblocks facing small businesses in Saskatchewan, such as stifling taxation; restrictive labour legislation; over-regulation; and unfair tendering policies, such as CCTA, which are hindering business growth and economic development in the province.

Seconded by the member from Melfort Tisdale.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to be able to join in the debate this afternoon because it is a very important question in front the people of

this province and of this legislature.

I also have to say that I was very pleased to listen to the comments made by the member from Saskatoon Southeast in their initial remarks in moving the motion. And I have to say that in almost in its entirety I'm in agreement with the statements that were made by the member.

I also have to say that the member from Regina Sherwood and I are also very much in agreement in terms of pointing out all the very unique and creative features of this province's mosaic that are important to our economic development.

And I think that it is really important that I acknowledge the fact that I'm very much in agreement, and it doesn't mean so much that I have changed, but I have to acknowledge how much the members opposite have changed. Because when I trace back the history and I look back at where we've come from in the history of this province, it's a very different type of party that's sitting opposite today than what there was 25 years ago when the catchword was to nationalize and socialize and come out with government and the family of Crown corporations, and all the wonderful slogans that this party and the government that they represent used to think was what was needed in this province.

And unfortunately, the opportunities that we now have before us in this province are not something that are just new to the 1990s. These opportunities were always here, and unfortunately the people that embraced the opportunities of the importance of small business in this country were generally living to the west of us, and to some extent to the east of us, and in Ontario, and you saw the benefits from Saskatchewan of what a province and a government of a province that embraced the principles of small business . . . how much they could move ahead into the future when they had realized that fundamental fact.

(1515)

And so I'm very pleased to hear the kind of comments that the two members opposite made in this debate. Because it would seem to me at least, with a great deal of hope, that you're beginning to understand that the real engines of growth and development, of job creation and prosperity, of self-satisfaction and pride and self-worth, are not government activities but are the activities generated by individual people in small businesses, in farms, in the way they approach their individual jobs . . . are all the fundamentals that I'm very pleased to see you suddenly, maybe gradually but certainly, have come to realize.

Unfortunately, you still carry a little bit of baggage around, because I also see when I look at the atmosphere of Saskatchewan, that there are things that certainly are still impediments and are hold-backs to your past lives before you've sort of seen the new light.

And they are the kinds of things that have been raised by my colleague from Kelvington-Wadena in her amendment which says that although there has been a great deal done and that a great deal of progress has happened in regard to the atmosphere about small business, there is still much to be done and much

that this government has to recognize that is standing in the way of small-business development.

You know, very often we've come with the mentality in our baggage that first of all, the only business that does business is large business, and that we have to gear all the labour legislation and all these kinds of things towards large business — the atmosphere that happened perhaps out of the Industrial Revolution where there were these large corporations that took advantage of their workers.

In Saskatchewan and in small business, I don't think we realize often enough how close the relationship is between employer and employee, how much that that relationship is built on mutual trust and respect, on caring for each other and our families. Because I think in Saskatchewan in small business, both employer and employees realize in almost all instances that they're in it together. They both have interests in making that business succeed and that it isn't an atmosphere of confrontation and conflict, but one of mutual respect and working together to see to their interests.

And quite often what we've done when we've put together labour legislation and some of these practices . . . are still throw-backs to the days when the unions saw themselves as the adversaries and the sole protectors of the individual worker against the large and evil business person. And that's just simply no longer true in most instances and I think that we have to recognize that fact.

And so we end up with situations that are throw-backs to that kind of an attitude. And I point in particular to things that we've raised over time that are still impediments to the progress of small business into this province. I can point to things like the CCTA, that has been documented as a policy and legislation that has indeed increased cost to the taxpayers in Saskatchewan for those projects that fall underneath its mantle by 30 per cent. That's a fact. It's been acknowledged as such.

We can sit and argue about what that amounts to in terms of total numbers. We can take the Minister of Economic Development's figures of \$30 million; we can take the \$15 million that was tabled; we can take the \$630 million of capital project in the Finance minister's budget. That's not the point.

The point is that we have a policy that favours union preference over the non-union contractors and businesses in this province. And that, Mr. Speaker, is an impediment to the small-business environment. There's no other way of explaining it.

We can say, and the argument has been made, that it was necessary to make labour peace. Well it's real easy to make peace when you give one segment everything they ask for. I guess you've got peace. They've got everything they want. And that's not the way you make peace. You make peace by recognizing what's the real engine of your economy — it's small business.

We can look at the changes in labour legislation and some of the other factors there that have created unfair impediments, again based on the past belief that somehow employers were out to exploit workers. And that's simply not true.

We've put changes into place and now we look at regulations and we have to have studies done as the impact of regulations to things like occupational health and safety. And no one in this province . . . there is no one, employer or employee, that wants to have any kind of an unsafe workplace.

As a small-business person myself, the worst thing that I can have happen is that an employee is injured. It affects my business, it affects the workplace, it affects their family, it affects my needs in terms of training other people. It is absolutely, if for nothing else, motivated by business self-interest to make sure the workplace is absolutely as safe as humanly possible. That is a truth in every aspect of business.

And we know that accidents will happen. And we just simply cannot legislate for every conceivable eventuality, because we're just absolutely going to stifle any initiatives that are being done. So we have to take a new atmosphere in this regard.

You know, we have other areas that create an un-level playing-field that is very, very difficult. The government said that they wanted to take some real major efforts in order to reduce and remove a lot of the red tape that's in government. And that's particularly important for small businesses.

Small businesses are not those kinds of businesses that have large staffs, that have accountants and financial experts and controllers, and all kinds of people available to do all the paperwork, to meet all the requirements for filing and entering kinds of data for government statistics and information. They're the ma and pa operations that spend most of their time hands-on, dealing with what the business is all about. And most of them find that doing all of this extra paperwork for regulational requirements is really something that does not contribute a lot to their desire to do business in this province.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I really believe that it is important that we recognize that the real engines of growth in this province are not the megaprojects. I think that's an important thing to state and important to recognize.

They're the kind of businesses that are in every community, urban and rural, that believe in what they're doing as a service to their neighbours and potential customers, who use the innovation of this province. And it maybe is the kind of thing that was born out of the difficulties of climate or whatever over the years that has made a breed of people that are really special, that can succeed if we give them the opportunity. And I really encourage this government to do everything that it can to use the common sense approach that realizes that business and employers are not adversaries — they're partners in the economic development of this province — and that small business is the heart and soul of what's going to bring this province to prosperity.

And so I strongly encourage you to vote in favour of the amendment. And I also support the general thrust of the motion.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm particularly pleased to follow the two Liberal members who have recently spoken on this motion because I think it's important that we put

this issue back in perspective.

And I hate to bring the facts into any argument because they tend to cloud what the Liberals attempt to draw into the debate, but I think we need to go back to some of the basic premisses that the members opposite have presented because they're factually incorrect. Now this isn't unusual for our Liberal friends.

But what we need to look at is not a case of the glass being half empty. Rather this glass is half full in this province. It has been refilled because of the good work of this NDP administration. And it's about time that the members opposite recognized that.

Now they say that . . . I take a look, and they say, well the jobs that are being created have nothing to do with the government. And yet it's interesting because they stand up constantly in this House and talk about what the government is doing on job creation. Take a look at the April job stats. And it's interesting to note that one in every eight jobs created in this country — one in every eight jobs created in this country — was created here in Saskatchewan, here in Saskatchewan under an NDP administration.

I find it interesting that the member for Kelvington says business bankruptcies are up; business bankruptcies are causing us problems. And yet Dale Botting doesn't agree with her. In fact according to Dale Botting, that we are one of only two provinces to continue to experience a decline in bankruptcies this year. Bankruptcies are down, Madam Member. Bankruptcies have dropped every year we have been in office since 1991. I don't understand why they refuse to recognize the facts.

We've got the member from Melfort talking ad nauseam again about the CCTA. Now we debated this last week, and last week we called them on their facts again. Now the member is slowing drifting his number down from \$110 million in inflated cost; I'm not sure where it's drifted down to yet. If this session lasts maybe another 100 days, we'll get close to where the facts are. It has not increased the costs. This is not a pro-union policy. This is about labour fairness. The only reason we've had to rebalance the scales, I say to the members opposite, is because of the right-wing rhetoric that their party continues to perpetuate throughout this province.

What we need is a balance, and that's what this government has been establishing. It hasn't been a pro-union government. It hasn't necessarily been a pro-business government. It has been a government that has been balanced in everything, from its budgets to its priorities. And it's time the members opposite recognized that, absolutely time they recognized that.

Mr. Speaker, the one point that we do all agree on is that small business is extremely important to the growth and prosperity of Saskatchewan's economy. There's no doubt about that. In fact we have seen remarkable growth over the past five years, by and largely, what has happened in the small-business sector.

It was only — hard to believe — it was only 1991, a mere five years ago, that we saw retail sales actually slump. We saw negative growth in retail sales. I'd remind the members

opposite that one of the reasons for that was the oppressive tax policy of the Conservative Party when they were in office. You might remember that being the harmonized PST-GST (goods and services tax) regime that they had introduced. That caused a 7 per cent slump in retail sales.

The first act of this government in 1991 was to repeal the harmonization — was to repeal the harmonization — and the results continue to pour in. We have seen three consecutive years of substantial growth in retail sales, and in fact this is the fifth consecutive year of growth in excess of inflation in the province of Saskatchewan's retail sales. And yet is there a single word from the members opposite about the importance of that? No.

And I would venture to say that if anything, they are defenders of the federal Liberal policy that will turn back the clock, that will harmonize those two taxes again. What does that do to the business climate? What does that do to the small-business people? What does that do to the people whose jobs depend on it? I'll tell you what it does. It threatens them.

So while it's fine to listen to the right-wing rhetoric from the members opposite, I think that it's time that they started to take a look at what's really happening here. We have a government which is listening to business. We have a government that is dealing with the taxes by putting them back into a sensible regime that is fair.

We are also dealing with things in terms of the construction industry, and I want to relay a very brief story. I had the pleasure recently of representing the Premier at the Saskatchewan architects' association annual meeting here in Regina and saying a few words to them. It was interesting touring through the trade show and talking to various people as they were telling us about how their businesses had come back over the last several years, and how much more confident they were about Saskatchewan's prospects and Saskatchewan's economy.

And it reminds me of talking to a couple of employees from a small firm that builds playground equipment. It was interesting that they were speaking in quite glowing terms about the positive things that the Government of Saskatchewan have been done. Now I know that the member from Kelvington-Wadena is well aware of the importance of this because in fact it was her firm that was talking about the benefits of this government's regime in terms of promoting a positive, stable business environment.

Now it's interesting that she talks one way when she sits here in the House, and yet when she goes home and profits from the benefits of the improved business climate, she doesn't complain. I mean this is just another example of the duplicity of the members' opposite, playing petty, cheap politics. And I think it's time that they come clean in this Assembly and it's time that they come clean with the Saskatchewan people and recognize that government, business, labour, are working in partnership.

That's what this is about. We are not putting in roadblocks. We are not creating impediments. We are removing them. And the sooner the members opposite recognize it the better.

Mr. Speaker, we've seen many positive things happen in this province since this government took office, and particularly in the second term. It's interesting to note that we have had the third highest annual provincial growth in our GDP (gross domestic product), the third highest in the country. I think that's something to be quite proud of.

I think it's interesting that even when we start to look at it at the local level — I mean apart from the fact that we know provincially bankruptcies are down, we know that employment is up, we know that the business environment is better, we know the tax regime is stabilized — we're still working with businesses at the local level to help them achieve what their objectives are.

(1530)

And that's really what the *Partnership for Growth* is all about. We're doing it through the tourism sector, we're meeting with the hoteliers' association, we're dealing with the retail food and beverage sector. Mr. Speaker, there's not a part of this business community we're not dealing with.

And it marks a very different approach from what the Liberal members opposite are . . . When business asks the members opposite to meet, they decline. They run; they hide. The member for Thunder Creek is notorious for it. He is the only member of this Assembly to have been openly criticized for driving away business in this province. I think that's something that the Liberal members should hang their head in shame about.

They talk about how we're too caught up on the Crown corporations, yet it's interesting that three of the most successful companies in this province originally started as Crown corporations. You hear no mention of the fact that Cameco used to be a Crown corporation; no mention of the fact Wascana Energy was once a Crown corporation. No mention of the fact, of course, that Crown Life has been enabled largely because of its investments from the province.

And the members opposite continue to neglect these facts because they are ideologically hidebound. Ideology is a dangerous, dangerous thing, and the members opposite practice it in such a . . . I'm not even sure what the word is, Mr. Speaker; it is just such a negative approach to the business environment rather than recognizing that we can build partnerships, which is what this government has done from 1991 on. We have worked with business. I would encourage the members opposite — vote against your amendment. Drop the amendment and recognize that government and business and labour are working together to create jobs in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be voting against the amendment. I encourage all members to vote against the amendment and go back to supporting the original motion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm just noticing the motion. I was following the . . . I've been

following the debate and I've been following it with some interest. And I find it interesting that the member from Saskatoon would be bringing forward such a motion. But I think it's an indication that there are some members on that side of the Assembly who do recognize the role that the small-business community plays in this province and the fact that they happen to be one of the major economic engine generators in this province.

But listening to the member from Regina South, one would really have to wonder if businesses could survive without an NDP government. The way the member was talking, the way the member was bringing . . . his comments were coming forward, Mr. Speaker, you'd think that the only reason small business survived in this province was due to the government.

Well I would like to remind the member that the growth in this province is not due to the policies of this government. Growth has happened in spite of the negative policies of this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — I remember reading an article by the noted columnist in this province, Mr. Eisler — I think it's about a month ago, Mr. Speaker — talking about the economy. And I'm not sure if the member from Regina South goes downtown Regina, whether he goes down Scarth Street or whether he goes down Hamilton Street or whether he just takes Saskatchewan Drive direct to the casino. Because if you go down Hamilton Street or Scarth Street, it's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, the number of empty businesses sitting in downtown Regina or even around the city of Regina. And it's not just Regina, Mr. Speaker; it's all across this province.

So while we talk about small businesses being the economic generator, what has happened in the last few years, despite a bit of a turnaround in the economy of this province, small businesses are facing the difficulties, facing some very difficult times. And while retail sales have increased in certain venues or certain businesses, for many small businesses they haven't increased substantially to offset the costs of operating a small business — and in many cases the costs that have been implemented and imposed on small businesses by this government.

So I say, despite these policies, there are businesses that are surviving and doing well, and we're certainly grateful in the province for these businesses. Mr. Speaker, when I talk about small businesses, I talk about businesses in the communities of the Moosomin constituency. And I certainly run into people every day in communities like the Whitewoods and the Moosomin and the Grenfells and the Kiplings of this world. And certainly, Mr. Speaker, when you go around this province, you find that there are communities that seem to be very vibrant and their small-business sector is doing very well. There are other communities where that small-business sector is doing very poorly, and businessmen and women will tell you that they become very discouraged.

The member from Regina South in particular talked about the harmonization and talked about what the federal Liberals are

doing to harmonization today. Well I kid you not, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in many cases harmonization would simplify the tax process. And if the member says it wouldn't have done anything for the small-business community, what the GST has done, the small-business communities across this province, across this country, do get a credit for the expenses incurred in operating that business. And if the tax was harmonized, they would get it as well on the provincial side not just the federal side.

So, Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's fair to just totally criticize harmonization because harmonization would have done, as I said, two things: it would have simplified tax collection; it would have also given the business community the ability to create, generate, and get that return of the provincial sales tax on the expense side — the expense side which has grown, such as their telephone rates, power, and energy rates; they would have had that benefit. They don't have it today.

But, Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting. What I really like to think about as when I think of small businesses in our province, is the fact that they have, many if not all, have built their businesses based on a firm desire on their part to establish a business, provide a service, and work hard. And through their hard work ethic and through their long hours and the way they have provided a service to the community, many small businesses have done very well. And they certainly have been a real strength in our constituencies and certainly in this province.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, as I've talked to many of the small businesses, and certainly I look at the different routes that go through this province and many outside of the major highways, No. 1 and the Yellowhead Route, a number of businesses in different areas such as the Red Coat Trail that runs from Redvers through Carlyle, through Weyburn and Assiniboia, many of these businesses along those small communities, as the motion talks about, talks about tourism . . . businesses have got together to promote their aspect and their areas of the province and suggest that people should look at when they come to the province of Saskatchewan, don't just get on No. 1 and drive through or don't just get on the Yellowhead and drive through, but come and see what we have in other areas of the province.

I think of the Qu'Appelle Valley just to the north of us. And I think of what the communities along . . . in the constituency that I represent, what they are doing to even get people as they're driving through on the No. 1 to take a swing, swing north and drive through the scenic Qu'Appelle Valley and just see what Saskatchewan has to offer.

And certainly, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to entrepreneurship in business, we have it. When it comes to tourism, we have it. We certainly have opportunities and we certainly have a lot more for people to see.

However, there is one sad note in all of this, Mr. Speaker, and that's just a week or so ago where the tourism association said that they will put in place a 1-800 number so that prospective tourists can call the 1-800 number and find out which highways are passable and which highways they should maybe make . . . follow to reach their destination. And I think that's very unfortunate, Mr. Speaker. Because if there's anything going to discourage tourism in this province, it's the type . . . and the

road conditions that this province has to offer today.

And I feel for the Minister of Highways. I'm sure that the Minister of Highways, coming from a rural area, certainly wants to promote his area. But he has seen . . . for one thing, Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Health hasn't reduced spending, the Minister of Highways has had to take almost a two-thirds of a cut in his department. And no wonder it's very difficult to provide the services and to maintain the road infrastructure in this province so that we can promote the small-business communities and help our small businesses, help tourism and encourage tourism in this province.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that while I can support the motion in general, I would trust that the members and the government and even the Premier pay a little more attention to what the motion says, and that the Premier and this government pay more of an attention to what's happening to the small-business community and work with and encourage our small-business community to continue to develop the business . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The first 65 minutes of the seventy-five minute debate has expired and we will now move to questions and comments.

Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member from Kelvington-Wadena a question.

I have before me — and I'll send her a copy of this — this is . . . the source is StatsCanada and it's entitled, "Provincial Growth: Annual percentage change in provincial GDP, 1986 dollars." It looks at the years 1993, 1994, and 1995 and the total growth of the provinces over those three years, assuming that the trajectory is sort of a pretty good indication of how the economy is growing.

And Saskatchewan is at 9.6, which is the third highest of any province in Canada. For example, New Brunswick, a Liberal province, is 3 per cent lower; Manitoba, a Tory province, is four points lower. And I'd like to ask the member a question, and that is this.

If we are doing so poorly as a government by creating the environment that you say is not conducive to small business expanding, how come over the last three years the Saskatchewan growth is the third highest, only behind B.C. (British Columbia), which is first, New Democratic . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The member has been very lengthy in his preamble and I'll ask the hon. member for Kelvington-Wadena to respond if she wishes. Order.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I think that the information that we received lately said that we really still are . . . we're third lowest in the number of job creations, we're third lowest in the number of the growth of the province, and I guess I'm not understanding where you're from coming when you think that the businesses are doing so great.

We still have the highest . . . we have high bankruptcies. We

have businesses that are moving out all the time. The number of bankruptcies is declining, but it doesn't mean it's low. We still have too many bankruptcies in this province and they're problems that are created by this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Now I want to remind all members again, as is sometimes the case in private members' debate, to direct debate through the Chair.

Mr. Belanger: — I just have a question for the member from Saskatoon Southeast, speaking about small business and small-business development. Some of the problems of course in Saskatchewan . . . When you look at the land mass, Saskatchewan is a fairly impressive province. Certain regions of course do have their challenges. And I was going to ask you: how are you going to address these challenges, particularly northern Saskatchewan, the high cost of doing business in northern Saskatchewan, particularly some of the areas along the Alberta border where taxation is really hurting small business?

So you talk about small business in general; what concessions have you got to deal with some of these issues?

The Speaker: — Now again, before I recognize the hon. member for Saskatoon Southeast, I want to remind all members that both the questions and the responses, I would ask they be directed through the Speaker.

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was very difficult to hear the member, probably because he was addressing the question to me not from his proper chair.

As I heard it though, he was asking what kinds of concessions would this government give to promote various regions in this province. I would have to say that those days of giving grants, giving concessions, are long gone. What we have to do is ensure that everyone, regardless where they live in this province, uses their own initiative, builds on the strengths of the good infrastructure that we have in this province, rolls up their own sleeves, and gets on with it and does it on their own. Thank you.

Mr. Thomson: — I was pleased to see the member from Kelvington stand on her feet, and I certainly have a question for her. My question to her is: what is her position? Does she support the federal Liberal proposal to harmonize the GST and PST at 15 per cent?

Ms. Draude: — I'm really glad to hear that you want my advice on some of these very important aspects and I should maybe ask your advice on some of these things as well. You've been telling me about being an employer. I'd like to ask you a question. I'd like to ask you how many employees you've actually had. I've heard you spout for days now about how employers are supposed to do such a thing. And you've only ever been an employee your whole life, so what have you done about employers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now once again the Speaker appreciates the enthusiasm of the debate, but I do want to remind all members to direct it through the Chair. Next question or comment.

(1545)

Mr. Thomson: — Well my question is still to the member for Kelvington-Wadena who is busily skirting the issue. The question is this. Does she support the federal Liberal's proposal to harmonize the GST and PST?

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, that's a very interesting question he asked me, and I'd be delighted to answer him as soon as he answers my question. Through you, I would like to address to that member, how many jobs has he actually created and what does he know about being an employer?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Johnson: — Mr. Speaker, one of the items . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order! Now I will ask all members to come to order, including the hon. member for Shellbrook-Spiritwood's own colleagues. I'm having difficulty being able to hear him.

Mr. Johnson: — Mr. Speaker, one of the issues of the debate referred to the level of taxation and direct taxation in sales. And the question that I would like to put to the member for Kelvington-Wadena is quite straightforward and simple. Would she be supporting a single tax in the province of Saskatchewan under the GST, which would of course then mean that restaurants and a whole number of services in the province of Saskatchewan which are basically small business would be having to collect a tax. Would she be supporting a 15 or a 16 or a 17 per cent . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I'm going to rule the question out of order. That question has been asked . . . Order! That question has twice already been asked and it is becoming redundant, and I will go to the next question or comment.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask a question to the member from Saskatoon Southeast. I've heard her state that their government is not in favour of hand-outs, that they think they shouldn't be helping the big businesses. And yet I've been listening for the last couple of years and seeing the government handing money to Intercon and to Cargill and to CIBC (Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce), and for job creation. I think this is an interesting story from you. And at the same time, I see that you say that there's 3,500 jobs created.

Do you think these about a thousand jobs that your government has bought, do you think that you should have to take them off the 3,500 jobs that you say you've created?

The Speaker: — Order. Once again now, I'm going to remind members, in directing questions and comments in private members' debate — I want to be firm — is asking members to

direct them through the Chair.

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you. And through the Chair, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that obviously what we have to do as a government is create a positive climate for economic development.

I believe that we have created that climate through very solid measures, such as cutting the corporate income tax rate by 20 per cent; such as cutting the taxes for manufacturing and processing companies, so that the total tax they now pay is the lowest in all of Canada; such as cutting the aviation fuel tax; such as we will be doing next January — changing the tax regime for truckers so that they can become more competitive in this province; and such as taking the E&H tax off 1-800 numbers.

Those kinds of solid tax measures, combined with our approach to strengthen local community economic development through regional economic development authorities, are the way that Saskatchewan will thrive and prosper in the 21st century.

Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to address my question to the member from Melfort. Mr. Speaker, I've had the pleasure of being elected now for eight years. And every spring I do a business survey, a small-business survey, and I would be quite happy to share the results with the hon. members. I do that every year.

And the biggest issue that comes up every single time is the issue of the GST. And I would like to know — and I don't think they should laugh this off — I would like to know from the hon. member, who is a small-business person, if that party supports, the Liberal official opposition supports, the harmonization of the GST. Yes or no?

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, I think I was asked this same question the last time we did the seventy-five minute debate. And I said that I would be particularly pleased to stand up for the federal government when I'm elected a Member of Parliament or the prime minister.

But in the meantime, I think what I am is a small business who did collect PST on restaurant items, up until 1992, at the same time that I was collecting GST on behalf of the federal government. And I'll tell you, I did. And then in 1992, I believe it was, the provincial government repealed the PST on restaurant things. So I did. I was a tax collector for awhile. I am a tax collector. I don't know of any small business that really appreciates being a tax collector; all of us would like to work for ourselves, rather than the provincial or federal government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The seventy-five minute debate has expired. Before proceeding, I would like to make a comment about procedure to hon. members. I would ask that members would take their seats when the Speaker is on his feet, please. I do want to recognize that in the debate here I've risen several times to ask members to direct their debate through the Chair. And I appreciate that on occasion, in the previous 10 minutes, that members have found that somewhat frustrating. But I do want

to remind members of rule no. 28 of our rules of debate which reads:

Every Member desiring to speak is to rise in his place, uncovered, and address himself to the Speaker.

And that is not intended to be a source of frustration to members but to acknowledge that when all members come here, they come with the authority of having been elected in their own constituencies, and when we address one another in this Assembly, we address one another not as individuals but as representatives of our constituencies. And therefore even though it may be tempting in private members' debate to begin to address one another personally, respecting the democratic process and the authority by which all members come to this Assembly, it's appropriate to refer to one another in the third person and therefore to direct the debate through the Chair.

And I simply want to remind all members of the rule which I think exists for good reason and is intended to promote that debate, although it can be very vigorous and very passionate, should always be done respectfully and respecting the democratic process that allowed every one of us to come to these chambers, and I'll ask for all members' cooperation to continue to honour that.

Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The Speaker: — The member may put his point of order.

Mr. Thomson: — As you indicated, rule 28 of our debate says:

Every member desiring to speak is to rise in his place . . . and address himself to the Speaker.

I believe that the member for Athabasca was not in fact duly in his place and was recognized and allowed to participate in the debate, and I would ask for your ruling on that.

The Speaker: — The rules of the Assembly do provide or do require that all members when entering into debate, other than in committee, must make their address to the Chair from their assigned seat.

I've listened to the member for Regina South's point of order and I do recognize that the Chair made an error in recognizing the hon. member for Athabasca. The Chair should ought not to have done that. However the Chair did, and when it came to the Chair's attention, the event had already occurred, and therefore I did not intervene.

I consider the hon. member for Regina South's point of order to be well taken.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 13 — Health Portfolio Redundancy

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will try to exemplify your ruling.

Certainly I'm pleased to stand in this Assembly today, Mr. Speaker, and to discuss a very frustrating matter and a matter that means a lot to people across this province. A matter that is becoming something of a major concern to many people from the south-west part of the province, or the south-east, up to the central, and certainly even into the North.

For the past several years, Mr. Speaker, the NDP have been attempting to implement what they call health reform, or the wellness model for health care in Saskatchewan. Translated, Mr. Speaker, NDP health reform means the closure of 52 rural hospitals, longer waiting-lists for surgeries, the closures of hundreds of beds in hospitals and seniors' homes across Saskatchewan, the loss of hundreds of nurses and support staff, and more. And, Mr. Speaker, that's only the beginning.

Because according to the Provincial Auditor, health district boards are experiencing deficits of over 27 million, and this means there are many more announcements of slashes to health programs — closures of homes, elimination of beds, to be made in the very near future.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people are suffering from this government's wellness program. And we've certainly seen it as we've seen public meetings beginning to take place across this province. And I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, once the district health boards come out with how they're going to address their shortfalls, there are more and more people going to get on the bandwagon and begin ask what's going on here. Especially, Mr. Speaker, when we hear the Premier talking about how they've had to make these cuts to address deficits.

And, Mr. Speaker, we've talked to the Minister of Health. And one would say, well then we were on the right track if indeed there was a significant reduction in health care spending, which there isn't. We still spend that same amount if not more today, than we did in 1991.

Whereas the Minister of Highways can certainly stand up in this Assembly, and some of the other ministers, and apologize for the conditions of some of the responsibilities they have, such as roads, and they can point directly to the elimination of monies out of their budgets. But the Minister of Health does not have that ability. He continues to spend, and yet we've seen so much less. And that's why people are beginning to ask questions and stand up. Communities bring their concerns forward to their local boards, and are told by board members that the government calls the shots — which they do.

The opposition brings many health care concerns forward in this legislature, and what does the minister do? The minister continually tells us to go to the district boards. We've asked the Health minister why the NDP cut funding to 52 rural hospitals; why they de-insured things like oxygen and insulin; why they increased the prescription drug plan deductible from \$125 a year to 1,750; why they are forcing health district boards to cut essential health services to Saskatchewan families; why are they cutting badly needed senior beds in rural areas when many seniors have nowhere to go, and seniors would love to stay at home and live in the communities that they worked so hard to build. Why the NDP aren't allowing local people, local boards

to make the decisions that are right for local communities is another question, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, what has the response been from the minister? Well let's see. He has three or so usual answers. Most of the time he says it's the fault of the big, bad federal government. I wonder, Mr. Speaker, how long the minister can continue to lay the blame at the feet of the Liberal government. When will he begin to take responsibility for his actions?

Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, he even goes back and blames the former provincial administration. One would have to wonder, Mr. Speaker, again, when will the Premier and this minister and this government take responsibility for their actions? They were taking responsibility for finally being moved up from a BBB credit rating today back up to the A-minus that they had when they took over government in 1991, and all of a sudden things are going great again. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not what people are saying throughout Saskatchewan.

But, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to responses and criticism and who the minister blames, the favourite response of the Health minister is to say something like, if the member opposite has a question, he should direct it to the local health district board because they are the ones who are making these decisions.

And once in a while, Mr. Speaker, he throws in something like, this really isn't the place to be debating specific health cases — even though we all remember Louise Simard marching case after case before this Assembly. And I think even Mr. Speaker is quite well aware of some of those claims that were brought forward — claiming people wouldn't be able to buy groceries because the drug plan deductible had been raised to \$125 a year.

(1600)

It was interesting last night in the restaurant, Mr. Speaker, we ran into a couple who recognized us and began to talk to us. And the gentleman had me raise the concern about the drug plan. His wife had suffered a heart attack about three years ago. Mr. Speaker, five years ago, they would have had a maximum 125 plus — I forget; what was it? — 25 per cent thereafter? Mr. Speaker, what they're facing today, his wife has a \$500 a month drug bill because of this health problem, because of this heart attack. Mr. Speaker, and when do they get help?

They have to get the first \$1,700. As the couple said to us, they're fortunate. He has a pretty good job. He's a teacher, and he's making a pretty good dollar. But what about the individuals who are on a very low income? Mr. Speaker, it makes one wonder how people are getting by since the NDP raised the deductible by over a thousand per cent. And this is something I hear about on a daily basis.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure all of the members here remember the specific cases that were debated in great detail in the past. But it's the present that we are all concerned about. Mr. Speaker, as the elected MLAs from areas across Saskatchewan, we bring forward questions and concerns about health care that we have heard from constituents, from public meetings we have attended, from health care providers, and

others. It's simply not good enough for the minister to stand and use district health boards as a scapegoat for his government's actions.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that the Minister of Health has final say on any important decision. We all know that the Health minister has been orchestrating rural hospital closures and senior home closures for years. And, Mr. Speaker, we all know that the minister is trying to deflect criticism from himself and his colleagues by blaming local health care boards for the decisions being made.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that the Health minister refuses to acknowledge the truth. He refuses to accept responsibility for his actions and those of his predecessors and his government's colleagues.

It's like watching, for example, Mr. Speaker, my children a few years back, when they were quite young. If I discovered a broken vase, I would ask my eldest son what happened. And guess what — he would promptly suggest that I ask my youngest son. Well when I go to talk to my youngest son, Mr. Speaker, he would say, well go and talk to my daughter; it was my sister that did it. Of course, Mr. Speaker, when I got to talking to my daughter, she had nothing to do with it. It was the dog, because she had no one else to blame. She didn't have any other sisters or younger brothers.

It's obvious here, Mr. Speaker, that the dog didn't break the vase, but it's hard to get the person responsible to own up to it. Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, my children have grown and have learned valuable lessons about taking responsibility for their own actions and always being truthful and upfront.

I wish the same were true, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about this government. It would be refreshing for the Health minister to stand up and accept responsibility for once in this Assembly. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would be refreshing, but given the performances we have seen over the past several years, it's quite unlikely.

In the meantime, we have seniors all across Saskatchewan fearing for their futures. We have families not receiving the health services and attention they deserve, especially in rural areas. We have health professionals concerned about the state of health care in this province. Mr. Deputy Speaker, one has to begin to ask themselves what the sense is in having a Health minister if, according to him, he doesn't make any of the health care decisions. What's the point?

We don't need to spend over \$80,000 a year — well this year you can add an extra \$4,400 MLA bonus — for a minister who claims he should not be held accountable for health care decisions in Saskatchewan. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm sure there are health facilities in every corner in this province who would jump at the opportunity to have an extra 90,000 or so to spend on health services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think there is a bottom line here. There is a good reason for this motion to be moved today, and that is to make a point. Local decision making, although talked about a great deal by the Health minister and his colleagues, doesn't exist within health districts. We've seen it when the government

forced communities into health care districts and then hand-picked each and every health district board member to carry out the NDP's dirty work.

We've seen it when health board members resign in frustration because they say the NDP government is dictating what can and cannot be done. We've experienced it when the NDP took all the contingency money that local hospitals and communities had fund-raised over the years and placed it all in trust accounts, refusing to allow local facilities to spend it on things like acute care funding. Mr. Deputy Speaker, instead local areas were told they could spend the money on wellness promotion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP aren't fooling anyone any more. That's not local autonomy. That's not allowing local people to make local health care decisions. Instead what we have here is a heavy-handed NDP government dictating direction from the top down, pure and simple. We all know where the health care orders are coming from. It's time the NDP stopped insulting the intelligence of Saskatchewan people and admitted it themselves. Then just maybe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we would be getting somewhere.

Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move the following motion, seconded by my colleague, the member from Rosthern:

That this Assembly acknowledge the statements made by the Minister of Health regarding his taking no responsibility for health decisions in the province of Saskatchewan and instead abdicating this responsibility to local district health boards; and, whereas the Minister of Finance could directly fund the district health boards and the Minister of Justice could directly oversee the Canada Health Act thus making the Health portfolio redundant, urge the government to eliminate the Minister of Health position.

I so move.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am pleased to second this motion. Nothing displays the hypocrisy of the current government like its approach to the Department of Health; it's singularly the one that does it the best.

When they sat on this side of the House, they harangued the Minister of Health over every issue, great and small. Every issue they brought up was indicative, they said, of the attack on health care supposedly being done by the Conservative government. However no action or inaction by any previous government has done more harm to health care than the actions of this government. What other government in Canada can take credit for 52 closed hospitals in one fell swoop?

If you ask the average health consumer whether he thinks health care is better or worse now than in the '80s, I'm sure the universal response, if they're still alive, would be that it is far worse. The NDP put all their spin doctors to work on quaint phrases like wellness, but the public is not buying it. They know that they are suffering, and all the propaganda in the world is not going to convince them they are not. When they can't get health care, when they have to have waiting lists that are six, eight, nine, ten, and twelve months long, they know there is no

health care here. There is no wellness here.

Clearly the NDP's long held claim of being the defenders of health care has been shown to be false by the actions of this government, and they have done it very quickly. As bad as the sloppy, insensitive cuts by this government have been, what is more appalling is the neat way they have tried to sidestep the responsibility for their actions.

Week in and week out in this Assembly — and as a rookie person I've noticed this probably more than anyone else — we have tried to bring the minister's attention to the horror stories that the NDP attack on health care have created. And he still has to answer one of them. And week in and week out we hear the same response — don't blame me; it's the health districts board's fault. If the lights went out, as they did a little earlier on, he would actually expect to see a halo over his head, I'm sure. There's no word for this attitude except pathetic.

There was a time in this Assembly when ministers felt their traditional parliamentary responsibilities for areas, covered it by their portfolios, and at least attempt to answer the question as specifically as it was asked.

The fact that the Minister of Health has created arm's length agencies to administer some responsibilities does not detract from his duties as minister. They are his agencies and he must take the final responsibility for it.

If we are to buy into the arguments of the Minister of Health, we should stop the Economic Development minister about the economy. After all, he doesn't control the economy; it must be somebody else out there that's buying a hamburger. Or perhaps we should stop asking the SaskPower minister questions since he doesn't directly control that corporation; we should ask all the people who flick on the power switches because they control it, obviously.

Our system of government depends on the ministers assuming responsibility for their portfolios. Clearly the Minister of Health refuses to do this. I suppose the easy approach to this problem would be to ask for the minister's resignation. But the problem as we see it is a whole lot deeper than that.

If this government wants to persist in its efforts to offload duties and financial burdens to other agencies, then it must also accept that those agencies deserve the power and authority to make their own decisions. But this government won't take responsibility and won't give the rights to make the decisions.

In the succinct words of the Minister of Health, either you believe in local decision making or you do not. It's too bad he couldn't hear himself. Fine. If this government believes in local decision making, then we do not need provincial decision making in those same areas.

All the taxpayer is getting out of the existence of the Department of Health is a minister's salary, offices, and staff. Since he is not doing anything but passing the buck, that's a rather poor investment. And I think the humour that the public gets from listening to his answer, even though humour does play a part in the wellness program, I'm sure doesn't do

anywhere near enough to cover the shortfalls.

If all he does, and this is all he says he does, is sign the cheques for the funds the district health boards get, then let Finance do this job. I'm sure the Minister of Finance could find time to sign those cheques. If all he does is enforce federal regulations, let the Justice department or the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs handle it. He would probably say, I'm glad; thank you for the question and the opportunity. Either we need a hands-on minister who's willing to deal with the real problems of Saskatchewan people or we do not need a minister at all.

As extreme as this motion may sound, it comes out of the truth and the reality of the situation. That is the basic idea that we are trying to get across, and that is the message I would encourage members to send to the minister by supporting this Bill. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, listening to the mover and the seconder of this motion, it sounded like we're fighting the 1995 election all over again — an election which in many ways was fought on health care reform as an important issue. And I might say that that member was reduced from official opposition to third party status. So, Mr. Speaker . . . and the government of Saskatchewan was returned with the second largest majority in the history of the province on the second term. So I think the Saskatchewan people have spoken on just how they view the various parties with regard to health care reform and other issues. Why did they land up as third-party status? It's because of goofy motions like this, because they deserve it. They devastated the province. They've had their head in the sand in the 1980s with regard to positive change and especially in the area of health care, Mr. Speaker.

And he outlines some of the tough decisions we've made since 1991, Mr. Speaker, and he wonders why we've made these decisions. Well that's . . . Some of these decisions are obvious to everybody else in Saskatchewan but the members opposite and the third party. He says, well why are you still blaming us after five years? Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hole that the previous administration put this province into is a 50-year . . . it's going to take 50 years to get out of it, like they did the last time they were in power, at least.

And so he says, how is the past related to the present? Well the past is very much related to the present, Mr. Speaker. And I would say that if there's ever a ministry that should have resigned, it should have been the Finance ministers of that party in the 1980s. We'd be a lot better off today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1615)

Mr. Pringle: — If there was ever a case for a ministry to resign, it was their Finance ministers in the 1980s.

Mr. Speaker, this is my ninth year here. I have never seen a goofy motion like this in my nine years. And I'm sure that the Liberals aren't even going to support this motion because it doesn't make any sense. The motion alleges that the Minister of

Health is taking on no responsibility for health care decisions. The motion alleges that the Minister of Health is abdicating his responsibility to district health boards. I'll speak to these allegations in a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But then the member says that we should eliminate the ministry of Health portfolio.

Now this would have been possible under their administration because the only time that they were concerned about health care was every election. They would put a new hospital or nursing home in the ridings that they held. You didn't need a ministry of Health under the way that they operated, Mr. Speaker. And also they didn't need a ministry of Health because they don't believe in a publicly funded health care system that is accessible, that is with universal health care. They don't believe in that kind of system.

So under the way they think and the way they interfered in the health care decisions — I might say in decisions in every portfolio — they didn't allow the officials to do the jobs or the local people to make decisions. And had they paid more attention to their officials and some of the advice they were getting, they wouldn't have got us into some of the deals that created incredible financial chaos in this province.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health and the Minister of Health are vital in working with the district health boards in Saskatchewan communities in terms of the health care renewal.

So I go back for a moment to the first part of the motion, that is, the allegation that the Minister of Health is taking on no responsibility for health care decisions and that he is abdicating his responsibilities. Mr. Speaker, are they suggesting that every time a local government, whether it's a school board or municipal government, makes a decision that they don't happen to agree with, that the minister responsible should resign? It doesn't make any sense.

Mr. Speaker, what that member can't relate to, with all due respect, in terms of the whole health care renewal process is the issue of local determination of their health care priorities. He can't relate to that because in 10 years they didn't practice that way. He can't relate to local planning and goal setting. He can't relate to the fact that you should have confidence in the decision making of local people, because that's not how they ran their government for 10 years. And that member can't relate to the fact that you don't interfere every time there's a decision that you don't agree with. The idea is that local people are best positioned to make local decisions. So the record of his government is interfering from Regina. That's not the way that we've been operating, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, that government undermined local decision making on a number of fronts, including in health care. And it's a phoney motion because not only does it reflect on the ministry of Health. I would say that this motion is a slap in the face to district health boards. This motion is a slap in the face to local communities because it assumes that they have not made good, sound decisions, and that is not the case. They have made many, many good, sound decisions, Mr. Speaker, and there's been much progress.

I would invite the member from Rosthern who is — I listened while he made his comments — I would invite him to listen for a moment and then to read the Provincial Auditor's report which we had the pleasure of discussing this morning in Public Accounts, because he's chirping from his seat that no progress is being made. And I think that's a slap in the face to district health boards and the dedication and commitment that local people have put into their needs assessments, their plans, their goal setting. And those are now in place, as acknowledged in the Provincial Auditor's reports.

So a lot of good work has been done. A lot of good decisions have been made. A lot of creativity and innovation has been shown. And he's suggesting, by the motion, that in fact good decisions haven't been made. So I think this is unfair to the district health boards and, if I might say, is somewhat offensive to the citizens who've put their names forward and spent many hours working on behalf of their communities and on behalf of trying to move health care to a new paradigm as we prepare for the next century. Mr. Speaker, the member from Moosomin should be commending the ministry of Health, the Department of Health, the health care professionals, and the district health boards for the good work that they've done.

Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite look at the Provincial Auditor's report — and I invite them to do that — there are some 30 or 40 pages devoted to the accounting and the practice and the decision making with regard to the local district health boards.

Mr. Speaker, any objective person . . . well in fact the Provincial Auditor has been saying this himself this morning, and his office said it two weeks ago at Public Accounts, that the development and the evolution of health care renewal is in fact a story of progress. Health care renewal — if the member looks at the report — he says that health care renewal has made health care more accountable than at any time in the past. Now that's a very important statement, that health renewal has made the health care system more accountable than at any time in the past. That's not me saying that; that's what the Provincial Auditor is saying.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, the Provincial Auditor goes on to talk about the complexity, the large undertaking of health care renewal, the mammoth task of moving that system from 400 health care boards to 30, trying to integrate all of those and mesh all of those systems and the complex issues related to that, and to organize elections and to make difficult decisions, and just the challenges of integrating the systems — let alone the challenges which are very difficult — of providing service delivery in a holistic and integrated fashion.

But the Provincial Auditor outlines the context, and even at that he's very impressed, if I could say that. He's very impressed about the progress that's being made by the district health boards. And he relates that as well to the important work in cooperation with the ministry of . . . and the need for accountability in the ministry of Health and of course the Department of Health.

And he outlines in the report — and has been outlined by the deputy minister of Health — with I think the concurrence of the

members, that the service agreements are now in place in terms of not only the accounting of the health care dollars, but also the plans and goals and the objectives regarding service delivery and the enhancing of that delivery.

He also talks about the fact that the annual reports, most of it annual reports, and where he's pleased with many aspects of the annual report. There's some positive suggestions that can be made, and I think the Public Accounts Committee agrees with him. The Minister of Health agrees that there are some improvements that could be made to move us to a newer, higher level of standard in terms of the performance of the . . . and the accounting, not only of the dollars but also of the health care delivery which at the end of the day is what matters, Mr. Speaker. He also has been supportive of the financial management review process that has been put in place . . . again compliments the health boards and the Department of Health.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that this motion is . . . the only word I can think of is goofy, but I hate to say that word. But I think it just is so nonsensical in the face of the overwhelming evidence by the auditor across Saskatchewan and by others who view what we're doing in terms of health care renewal as a model, not only just to those in Canada, but internationally are coming to see what we're doing.

That isn't to say that there can't be some improvements. But the ministry of Health has been front and centre and fundamental in terms of the kind of leadership provided to that health care renewal in the past and continues to be, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And to somehow suggest that the Minister of Health is not accessible when he's meeting non-stop, day in and day out with real people including consumers of health care services across the province and certainly health care workers across the province and the district health boards . . . So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that the motion . . . I can't rule it out of order, but it doesn't make any sense.

But, Mr. Speaker, I would commend the health boards. I would commend all the citizens of Saskatchewan. I would commend the Department of Health, and I would certainly commend the Minister of Health for the way in which all of those partners are working in partnership to try and improve the health care for Saskatchewan people in a cooperative way which reflects the Saskatchewan spirit.

And I might add that the \$860 million annual interest payment by that previous administration makes the job much more challenging, to put it mildly, where they've left future generations with incredible decisions that they're going to have to try and make. And also, Mr. Speaker, I'm very sad that the official opposition somehow dismisses the \$50 million that the federal government has taken out of health care as not relevant to what happens in district by district by district.

And I noticed it interesting that yesterday when the women's groups were here on the poverty tour — and they have front and centre as one of their platforms the importance of our health in terms of maintaining a national health program and not the dismantling as we see, and the importance of maintaining the Canada Assistance Plan in terms of the health and the housing for families and children — that there were no questions and no

ability by the official opposition to somehow even join us and express some concern that the federal government continues to pull out of these national programs which makes it more challenging to try and build a system.

But in spite of the federal government and their dismantling of the safety net and their weakening of their support to health care in Canada and certainly Saskatchewan, in spite of the interest payment which is two-thirds of the entire health budget, thanks to the previous administration, we're going to continue to make progress in the province with all the stakeholders and the people of Saskatchewan. And I would say that the hon. member from Moosomin would be better to put his mind to how to deal with those challenges than to come forth with motions like this that just don't make any sense. I cannot support it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Although we find the private member's motion put forward by the Tories a desperate attempt for media attention, I believe we must address this issue of health care in this province any chance we get. And I believe it's shameful when the member from Saskatoon Eastview blames again the federal government's cut of \$50 million when in fact this government takes in \$100 million of additional revenue from the hard-working taxpayers through its VLTs (video lottery terminal) but never acknowledges that. I think that's shameful.

I would like to speak to this motion today, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How many times can this government stand up in this House and pretend that health care here is alive and well? How many times can the Minister of Health slap on a phoney smile and extol the virtues of medicare in this province? How many times can the members opposite support his ridiculous claims that the provincial government is helpless in the face of the federal cuts, leftover Tory policies, and indiscriminate health boards? The fact is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government's commitment to quality health care is non-existent.

Somewhere, somehow, sometime, the NDP members went from being the indignant opposition to being the arrogant government. Who would have thought that their promises in 1989 were nothing more than just hollow words? Mr. Deputy Speaker, do any of the members opposite remember when Louise Simard said in 1989:

The opposition NDP is going to fight these health care cut-backs and these changes to medicare. It's going to fight the erosion of the principles of medicare. I feel rather certain we'll be having a change of government next time around, and then the public isn't going to have to worry about these problems.

Now isn't that ironic. Just seven years after an NDP member made that comment, the public is in an uproar because the principles of medicare have eroded down to nothing. What did she mean — the public won't have to worry about these problems? Did she mean that the people in communities throughout this province, who are watching hospital doors shut, shouldn't have to worry? Did she honestly believe that even as the NDP government was shutting down 52 hospitals and

slashing programs across the province that people wouldn't care? Did she truly mean to say that people are not concerned about the quality of care for themselves, for their parents, and for their children?

Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if that is what she meant and if this is what the members opposite sincerely believe, they are kidding themselves.

(1630)

How many days have we, as the official opposition, brought in heartbreaking examples of seniors who have been shipped off to communities miles from their homes? How many sad stories have we brought to this government's attention about people who cannot receive the care they need because the cuts have eliminated programs and resources? How many tales of job losses have we pointed out — job loss — because this government has no commitment to either health or job security?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we don't make these stories up. And the member from Regina South who campaigned on keeping the Plains Health Centre open is now sitting there chirping away that it's all the federal government's fault.

These are actual situations that are happening to people in our province. Every time we speak out and ask the Health minister to have some compassion, we are speaking out on behalf of someone who has no other way to reach this government. And instead of addressing these concerns with sensitivity and genuine concern, the Health minister immediately begins pointing fingers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to this extent we agree with the Tories' motion. The Health minister has the deflection tactics down to an art. When someone brings forward a very serious issue, he turns a deaf ear and passes off responsibility, first to the federal government and then to the district health boards. What he doesn't do is provide any valid solution. What he doesn't do is offer hope to the people who have been hurt by his government's cuts.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is exactly what he should be doing. He should be listening. He should be looking for answers, and he most certainly should take the necessary steps to help restore an acceptable level of health care in this great province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a lot of long-term, highly polished politicians sitting on that side of the House, and they have political rhetoric down to an art, but that's not good enough. Sooner or later Saskatchewan people are going to want to see this government back up their words with action.

The Premier himself, when he was Leader of the Opposition in 1988, said New Democrats would continue to fight to restore social programs such as medicare, the dental and drug plans to their former place of leadership for Saskatchewan. Is this how this government fights, Mr. Deputy Speaker? If so, I'm not sure I'd want them on my side in the war. When I was fighting for the principle that they profess to follow, they would be tucking their tail between their legs and heading for home. And, Mr.

Deputy Speaker, I'm sure that's how the people of Saskatchewan must be feeling right now about this government. For years the NDP politicians were busy trying to convince Saskatchewan people that they cared about health care, but with their actions since coming into government, how can people be expected to believe them? Even in their election platform called "The Saskatchewan Way," it's working, they said. Hospitals will always be there when they're needed. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're needed, but they're not there. As a matter of fact, we're at minus 52 hospitals, and of course I just remind the member from Regina South, the Plains is still scheduled to be shut down in 1997 despite thousands of signatures protesting this government's unilateral decisions.

Now I know the Premier and his party are not overly concerned about keeping promises. We made that clear one day as we listed broken promise after broken promise in this House. What I want to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I really want to know is how this government can live with their decisions knowing that their cuts are destroying the fabric of rural Saskatchewan? How can they applaud day after day every time the Health minister provides an arrogant answer to very serious questions?

Where is their conscience? Don't tell me they don't see what's happening. In the back-benches at least, they have some rural members, and these rural members must have had some constituents bringing their concerns to them about this health care policy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I encourage them to speak out. I encourage them to take a stance on behalf of the people in their communities who are suffering under the severe blows to health care because if enough people get together to speak out, the government will have to stop ignoring the issue. And they will have to start working towards long-term solutions that are good for all the people in this province.

Our population is getting older, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now I could get into the reasons why — that this government is driving our younger people and our working people out of our province with its oppressive policies — but that can be saved for another day. The fact is, our population is getting older and the need for health care is increasing.

Now a responsible, compassionate government would find ways to maintain the quality of care. But the NDP government is neither responsible or compassionate. So instead, they take the cowardly route and create district health boards to be their scapegoats, and even this they carefully manipulated.

Yes, they gave the appearance that these health boards would be elected and free to act out the will of the public. But the government was scared, so they made sure that they still had representatives on the boards who would make sure the government agenda continued to be followed and was silently executed. Meanwhile people who have a real valid commitment to saving our health care system were forced under government rule — so much for being independent.

But the best part for the government is that these district health boards have to sit there, patiently waiting for the government to blame them every time the people speak out against cuts. Very, very clever, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have discovered a way to

possess ultimate control while completely washing themselves, their hands, of blame. By letting the health boards become the bad guys, the NDP government gets to be the good guys. And they blame the federal government for a \$50 million cut and yet forget to acknowledge that they take \$100 million in ill-found money through their VLT programs. But they never acknowledge that or care to admit that. But at some point, this government will be toppled off their high horse.

People are not stupid, even if this government insists on treating them that way. People know where the cuts are coming from and they know that this government is far from innocent. They just can't keep washing it away. At some point they are going to have to stand up and admit they are causing much of the pain in our health care system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, unlike the Tories, we do not believe the portfolio of Health minister should be eliminated. Yes, there are a lot of portfolios that could be eliminated to cut down costs, and most of those portfolios would not be missed, but health care is not one of those. It is too important for the hundreds of thousands of people in this province. We believe that no matter who occupies that seat, he or she must take the problems of this province seriously, and we are not sure that this is happening.

Instead of eliminating the position, we would instead encourage the government to re-evaluate its priorities and to look back at some of the promises they made when they were in opposition. Think back to Louise Simard, who asked the Tory administration of the time: why should the sick and the elderly carry the burden for your incompetence? Why indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Why have the members opposite not asked themselves this question as they watch their leader systematically destroy the health care system? Where is their commitment to the people in their constituencies? Where is their initiatives to take the first steps to finding positive answers?

Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan's health care is in a state of disrepair, and if the government continues on the path of destruction, it may suffer damage too extensive to repair. But if the government revamps its priorities and commits the necessary funds to health, it can be saved.

The people of this province are proud of what they have accomplished. They have built a province on compassion and trust, but right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are scared. They are scared because everything they once believed in is now sitting on shaky ground. We owe these people more. We owe them security, safety, and a sense of well-being. And as their elected officials, we have the ability to do this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, although we don't fully support the private member's motion introduced by the member from Moosomin, we cannot support the path the government has taken in health care. Therefore, because we feel so strongly about providing Saskatchewan people with quality health care solutions, the official opposition will abstain from voting on this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do wish to enter this debate in opposition to this motion.

First, I am disappointed in the quality, or should I say the lack of quality, by the opposition in presenting a motion such as this. First, the Minister of Health has never abdicated his responsibility on health care. But if the opposition is suggesting that we should not be supportive of local district health boards in their decision making, the local decision making is not appropriate in partnership with the provincial government, then the opposition is out of touch with the people of Saskatchewan.

Who I'd like to suggest has abdicated their role in health care, is the federal Liberals in the kinds of cuts that they're making to our health care system right across Canada. They're dismantling not only health care but dismantling a country.

The member from Melville talks about rhetoric. I heard more rhetoric than any truth or facts in his description here today. The premiss of this motion and debate would say that all third-party funding should not be in partnership with the provincial government. And so that we don't believe that local boards, whether they're education boards, local governments, health boards, can make decisions. And yes, sometimes those decisions are difficult decisions.

But what is the real problem identified by this motion is that the opposition Liberals and Tories do not believe in community-based decision making. They do not believe in partnership; they do not believe in cooperation. The right-wing agenda of the opposition, the Tories, we experienced all too well in this province for 10 years — an agenda of overspending, of deficit budgets, and give-aways to their friends so that each and every one of us in Saskatchewan can pay with interest on their irresponsible governing.

Saskatchewan people rejected the Tory way and are participating in community development in partnership with the provincial government to put the pieces back together. Now the minister from Moosomin says he talks about a vase being broken by his family members, and the question on who broke the vase. I would like to tell the member from Moosomin that everyone in this province — everyone in this province — knows who broke the province.

We pay over \$2 million a day on interest on a debt. This year in our provincial budget we have \$50 million less from the federal government. We have 100 million from VLTs, as we did the last year. What is missing from our budget is not the VLT revenue. What is missing is the \$50 million from the federal Liberal government. That's more than a million dollars for every health care district in this province. I wonder what the members of those health boards would say if you had an extra million dollars to work through some of their decision making on every one of those health boards.

Mr. Speaker, the concept of community, of cooperation and compassion, may be foreign to the opposition, but they are core values which are part of our health renewal in this province.

This motion today is also very offensive. I agree with the other member that spoke against this motion, is that it's offensive to our health boards in their decision making. They are working very hard in partnership with the government on health renewal and they do believe in it. And they believe in community-based

decision making.

(1645)

Saskatchewan has secured the future of medicare and is providing new services that will keep people healthy longer. And I am pleased and I am proud to be part of these changes, because I do believe that over the course of history the changes that we are now making will be seen to be just as significant as the changes that were made when medicare was first introduced in 1962.

And as I recall, they opposed that at that time also.

An Hon. Member: — Kicked down the door.

Ms. Bradley: — Kicked down the door. That's right.

They oppose change; they oppose renewal. This is the second phase of health care renewal; the second phase of medicare; the revamping of health care delivery. It's based on prevention, on wellness, as well as looking after those that are sick. It is working together with communities. And we've made these changes the Saskatchewan way, as they have suggested, the opposition.

And you know, it's not the same as the Liberal way, as we saw in the Maritimes where they imposed districts on communities. No, we went to our communities and we worked with them to form the districts.

It's not the Conservative way as in Alberta where there's massive cuts, privatization of health care whereby you move to the front of the line for treatment if you have enough money in your pocket.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bradley: — No, we did it the Saskatchewan way. We didn't reduce funding to health care; we have redistributed it. It's based on community; it's based on need; it's based on partnership. The process of health renewal started in 1992 and has made our health system more accountable, more accessible and sustainable for us today and into the future for our children.

We have gone beyond the traditional view of physicians and hospitals. The new system is based on the needs of people. We're offering residents more options to receive services in their home or close to their home, whether they're recovering from injury, illness, or coping with the effects of ageing or a disability.

Now where were we before we started this health care reform? We were governed by more than 400 separate boards which operated a number of our services throughout the province. We had more hospitals than the province of Ontario. The cost of our system was growing at an alarming rate and it threatened the future of medicare. Provincial funding was based on the way things were always done, not on the real needs.

Health services were often poorly coordinated, making it difficult for people with multiple health needs. What were the

alternatives? To preserve, protect medicare our way, or allow it to deteriorate, leave it unchanged; go to an Americanization, two-tiered system — privatization of the health care system.

Instead we went to the communities. We established 30 health districts, working through a community-based model. This means decisions on health services are made closer to home to meet the needs of local people. And we introduced elections, making it the first health board elections right across Canada were in this province, to make it more democratic, to make it so that people that had interests to serve their communities could — on our health care boards.

We redirected funding from acute care to community-based services. We did not take money out of our health care budget.

As of April 1, 1995 more than 1,400 Saskatchewan health staff and services, such as mental health, public health, drug and alcohol services, were transferred to the districts. Health services in communities such as home care, respite care, home intravenous programs, physiotherapy, have been expanded. Health districts carry out needs assessments to find out what health services their residents need.

And the funding system has been changed to reflect people's needs. When we did our budget this year, Mr. Speaker, we listened to the people of Saskatchewan. The people of Saskatchewan said that health care is a priority. The province reduced spending in other areas to make up the full amount of the federal cuts to health transfer payments. Saskatchewan has not cut health spending like other provinces. We are spending the same amount per person in '96-97 as we did in '90-91. Saskatchewan actually spends \$1,536 per person on health services. In Alberta, spending has dropped over 15 per cent; they spend \$1,335 per person.

It's interesting to note that what a million dollars can do in health care services. It can support six acute care beds. It can support 30 long-term care residents, or it could support 427 home care clients. These are the kinds of things that we have to look at in how we are providing health care services to the people of Saskatchewan — the services that can often be provided at home or in the community at a much lower cost than in an institution.

For instance, one family in the Gabriel Springs district was delighted to have home intravenous therapy for their infant daughter. The home services saved hours of driving to the hospital to visit so the family could keep up with their normal, everyday life. These are the kinds of changes that health care reform is all about.

Also, in looking at just how are we doing with health care services, there's a lot of doom and gloom and scare tactics mentioned by the opposition parties. When we look at how our acute care services are being provided in this province, the number of surgeries have been relatively stable. Actually we have cataract surgeries, are 25 per cent increase; hip and knee replacements, 12 per cent increase; coronary bypass, 9 per cent increase. The number of some procedures, shown through utilization research to be used at a higher rate in Saskatchewan than elsewhere, declined during the same period. Caesarean

sections have reduced; tonsillectomies are reduced.

Home care services have been increased by 38 per cent. Funding for home and community services has increased by 47 million. While funding to acute care has been reduced, we have done some of these shifts, these changes. That's in order to ensure that we have quality health care services when we need it.

Changing technology and medical practices have improved effectiveness. Day surgery, same-day admission for surgery, and diagnostics and more out-patient services result in shorter lengths of hospital stay. New procedures and techniques are less invasive with less risk and discomfort — faster recovery. There is more and more examples of what I can say on how these changes are being brought about in Saskatchewan, but they are effective, and they are working.

What I want to refer back to in this debate is the responsibility of the district health boards. District health boards do have a responsibility to their communities. They deliver a broad range of health services. They are holding accountability meetings that I have never seen in this province before that I have attended, where the people of their health district can ask them questions and they can give their answers back on how they're providing those services to those communities. Certainly there have been mistakes made, as there is in any new initiative, but you learn from those, adjust to those, and you go on to meet those needs in better ways in the future.

District health boards are a form of local government. They're responsible both to their residents and to the Minister of Health. Saskatchewan is the only place where people can take part in province-wide, democratic health board elections. And through health district boards, local people can help make decisions leading to services that meet the unique needs of their communities.

And I'd like to commend the people in this province who are sitting on the health district boards. Certainly they face many challenges in assessing the real health needs of their communities and being able to implement a delivery program to serve their needs. These changes are not often easy and have been contentious, but I know that they will succeed.

We cannot be afraid of mistakes because those can be expected, but change would never occur if we were afraid of mistakes. We would never move ahead; we would never advance, and if we hadn't changed we would've lost medicare. In the process, as we have set it up with partnerships in cooperation in health care, we will adjust, we will learn, and we will succeed.

And while this is becoming a reality in our communities . . . and I just very briefly want to summarize that it's there, as we see a breast cancer screening van going around to our rural communities. It's there when I see the communities of Pangman and Ogema working together to put a health centre and a personal care home together to meet their needs.

It's there when I talk to people in their homes that are receiving home care-based services and said they couldn't live in their home without those things. It's there when somebody says, thank goodness we still have a drug plan in this province —

which most of the provinces do not have in this country — which the federal Liberals, through their legislation, have tried to destroy. When it costs \$25,000 for his chemotherapy per visit, he says, thank goodness we have a drug plan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bradley: — We have across our province initiatives that are helping health care reform work from the community base in cooperation with the province, and it is successful.

Our Minister of Health is moving around this province meeting with boards, meeting with districts, meeting with the people of this province, and he has not abdicated his responsibility.

In conclusion, as I started my speech today, remarks today, on the premiss of the motion, is what you might expect from the Tories — a motion would suggest that community, cooperation, compassion, partnership, is not part of a responsible health care system. The people of Saskatchewan differ with this approach. The people of Saskatchewan see health care as a responsibility of government at all levels, even a responsibility of the federal Liberals, who are trying to abdicate from it.

They believe . . . the people of Saskatchewan believe in partnerships, they believe in medicare; they believe health care is a responsibility of all citizens. They will never, ever want to turn that responsibility over to the right-wing Liberal-Tory agenda of Americanization, privatized health care. They believe in the Saskatchewan way, they believe in accessible, affordable health care for all, they believe in medicare, they believe it should be protected, as it will be.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

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

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — To ask for leave to go to government business.

Leave not granted.

Motion No. 14 — Support for the Canadian Wheat Board

Mr. Johnson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I'm going to, at the end of my remarks, move the motion:

That this Assembly register its opposition to the recent Alberta proposal to circumvent the Canadian Wheat Board, and thereby undermine the single-desk marketing of Canadian grain to the world.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one of the things about the Canadian Wheat Board that I feel should be understood, is that most of the discussion and argument really relates to two simple items, and that is, what a definition of a market really is, and the second one is, where this market really occurs.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in the Canadian Wheat Board a market is not when you haul it to the elevator or it's not when it's shipped by train to the coast. A market really is when the grain is destroyed and removed from the system. And that's when it's marketed.

So what takes place in the situation for wheat and barley and other grains, is that you have to find a place where somebody consumes this particular grain. They consume it in a number of different ways. They may consume it as a flat bread or raisin bread — such as we do — or noodles or actually even as whole grain and in meal, etc.

And that is the market. And that market consumes a product differently each time. And one of the things that the Canadian Wheat Board does in its sale of grain, working for the farmer in the province of Saskatchewan, is that it accesses and does the studies necessary in order to bring about the right grain being shipped to these individual markets to meet the needs and the wants of the people at that particular end.

And, Mr. Speaker, some of the studies that have been done indicate that that analysing of what the real market is, and the consumption, Mr. Speaker, indicates that the Canadian Wheat Board, on average, probably brings to the farmer in the province of Saskatchewan and western Canada approximately 13 to \$15 more a metric ton, year in and year out.

Mr. Speaker, when you think of that amount of money in comparison to the actual cost — and if any of the members opposite would like to have done, they could have read in the annual report — at an actual cost, a marketing cost, the handling cost by the Canadian Wheat Board, of 5 cents per bushel or less, that return is a substantial return to the economy of the province of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.