

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

**General Revenue Fund
Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training
Vote 37**

The Chair: — We'll begin by having the minister introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seated beside me is Dan Perrins who is the deputy minister. Behind Dan is Lily Stonehouse, assistant deputy minister. Behind me is Mae Boa, the executive director of finance and operations. In the back row on the left is Merran Proctor who is the president and CEO (chief executive officer) of New Careers. Beside Merran is Margaret Ball, assistant director of facilities planning. To my right and behind me is Brady Salloum who is the director of the student financial assistance. And that is the officials that I have here this morning, Mr. Chair.

Item 1

The Chair: — I recognize the hon. member for Melfort-Tisdale . . . no, for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — I haven't moved yet, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Minister, and to your assistants and staff. I look forward to a very productive morning. I know that we have discussed many issues in the past at the previous times that Post-Secondary Education has been up before estimates, and there are some things that I think we can move on to.

Because post-secondary covers such a wide range of issues, from universities to technical institutes to the regional colleges to New Careers, I'm going to sort of split it into blocks and try to stay focused on each of the blocks.

And I'd like to begin, Mr. Minister, with universities, if I might. Since 1991, if I take a look at the operating grants for universities, '92-93 to the current year, '96-97, I see that the operating grants to universities have decreased by about \$10 million — a significant amount of money when you look at the total amount allocated to the two universities in this province. Mr. Minister, what has this kind of a reduction . . . what effect has this had on the programs that are now being delivered at the two universities?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, and to the member, that's a very important question. There's no doubt that the universities have had to cope with difficult financial situations, probably over the past dozen years or so and certainly in recent years as the member has indicated.

They have coped with those budgetary pressures by pressing on their entire range of programs, by cutting staff positions, by eliminating vacant positions, by limiting various kinds of expenses, by trimming here and there, and have managed to resolve their problems that way. The mental image that I have with respect to this problem is the universities pressing hard on the whole of the system to squeeze out of the whole system the savings that are necessary to cope with their financial situation.

This has a number of effects on the programming or the product that is delivered in the universities. It results in larger classes. It results in more of the temporary kind of sessional lecturers and that sort of thing, rather than permanent, full-time professors. And it has a number of effects like that.

It has not resulted in any dramatic deletions of entire program areas, but rather, I repeat, the image that I have and I think is the appropriate one, is of the universities squeezing the entire system and realizing their savings from that squeeze.

Mr. Krawetz: — As the universities, I think as you've indicated, become more efficient and look at ways of squeezing and providing still a very adequate program, I think you reach the point where you can't squeeze any more because there just isn't any more drops of, you know, orange juice in the orange. When I take a look at your budget, the government's budget, for the next two years and I see that for both universities and federated colleges, because it's lumped together, we see that there will be a \$5 million further cut in funding for '97-98 and a second \$5 million cut in '98-99, well those two 5 millions add up to again another 10 million.

Now as you've indicated, you've indicated what has happened over the last four years, five years, in terms of how universities have coped with the first \$10 million cut spread out over a longer period of time. Now we're going to be looking at a further \$10 million cut over the next two years. How do you see the universities handling that if there just isn't any more to squeeze?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — They are, in my view, going to have to do two things. First of all, they are going to have to meet together and realize what savings and efficiencies they can realize from working more closely together. This will be achieved in my view in two ways: first of all administrative efficiencies by doing together some of the things they're now doing separately and thereby do them more cheaply. And I think there's . . . my understanding is there's quite a long list of mostly administrative matters where that kind of cooperation can achieve some result. The second thing they can do together is some rationalization of their programs to try and ensure that they're not needlessly duplicating each other's programs and wasting resources as a result of that duplication.

I don't know what that will result in. There are factors to be considered in that debate that are just beyond the knowledge of government or ministers or this Assembly. That's a matter for the . . . more for the people who are involved in the programs — the professors, the faculties, and the university administrations — to sort out how that kind of duplication can be reduced or avoided. That's the first point. That's the

cooperation between the two universities on those two fronts.

The second is internal to each university. And I believe that what will have to happen will be inevitable; will be some rethinking of the programs that they offer to the students — some cuts, some changes, some new programs. But I believe in the end there will be program cuts. It even may be the elimination of colleges. I don't know.

This is very much an internal matter within the universities, very much a matter for their own internal decision making. And we have to respect that process, although as the member will know, we are involved in the process through the presence of Mr. MacKay who is attempting to represent the public interest in the internal work of the universities.

But I believe that at the end of the day there will be some rather significant changes to university programming as a result of the pressures that the member mentions.

I just might add one thing. Tuition fees have been creeping up over the years. I ought to have included that in my first answer. And I believe that there will be some further increase like we saw at the University of Regina this year. That's a complicated issue but it can't be ignored.

(1015)

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You must have been reading my mind, because that's exactly the next point that I wanted to raise. I've met with University of Regina Students Union and of course the University of Saskatchewan Students Union. And in each meeting I've heard from students that since 1991-92, there have been significant increases in tuition at a time when universities were handling or were coping with the money that was granted to them, not the great, serious declines as we said — there was \$10 million over the course of four or five years.

You've indicated that tuitions are probably going to rise. But if we're going to look at another \$10 million cut over two years, if the universities aren't going to really take a good, hard look at the program and achieve savings, if they've achieved all they can achieve in terms of the saving cuts, do you think that this is going to be passed on to the students in terms of a tuition fee increase that's going to be substantial?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I believe there will be some tuition fee increase, but I don't think it will be substantial. And I'll tell you why I have arrived at that conclusion. They have to keep their tuition fee structure more or less in line with the universities in the prairie basin, maybe beyond that; but certainly within the prairie region they have to have an eye to the situation in other universities in Alberta and Manitoba. And they're right up there now; they don't have a lot of room to spare.

So that's why I arrive at the conclusion that they won't be substantial. Although it is normal and natural that they would creep upwards, and I would expect that to happen.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. That's the point that the students are making: like it's a vicious circle that goes

around and round if we indeed increase tuition fee beyond what is sort of a western Canadian average. And we now have students then that decide to select the universities in Alberta, the universities in Manitoba — not necessarily even just the universities but other programs — because they feel that the tuition of a university training in Saskatchewan is so high.

Then they leave, and as a result, the class sizes are a little smaller and in the end there's less money for the university to work. And the fact that the grant isn't going to increase, then they increase it.

That's just a comment, that I'm glad that you're recognizing that. And I think we have to pay very careful attention to what the universities decide to do with their tuition program.

You mentioned the fact that currently your department has a special representative dealing with both universities in terms of trying to get a handle on revitalization, I think, was one of the key words that you used in the terms of reference.

Looking at the terms of reference for the job that Mr. MacKay is doing, I notice that of course he's to act as a catalyst and a facilitator. And then I also note that it says the universities will be invited to develop conceptual proposals. And you indicated in this House not too long ago of course, that the report that Mr. MacKay will eventually have before you, which will be sometime during the summer months, July or August probably, that this indeed will be made public and will be shared with the people involved.

It also indicates in the terms of reference that he will work with the universities and offer advice and suggestions. And it says that he will . . . with a view to establishing the most desirable process to achieve university revitalization.

When we take a look, and again we're looking ahead through the crystal ball, when we take a look at that report and what it might contain — and I'm sure that you have had the discussions with Mr. MacKay and I think you have an idea of the ideas that the report will contain — what is your plan regarding how you will use the report, how it will plan the next X number of years for post-secondary training at the two universities? What is the game plan that you will put in place as far as using the report and its recommendations that it will contain?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — My view of how this will develop is that it will be a long-term process rather than a short-term series of events; that when Harold MacKay reports to us, he will report on how the situation is developing, what the universities are working on, what sorts of changes they have in mind, what some of the options are, what he has contributed to that work in terms of the points of public interest that he has injected into the debate. He's not deciding anything, but he is, in effect, our contact, our main contact, with this process in the universities, helping them to shape the process.

I want to tell the member that I had a good glimpse of that process just last week when I had dinner with the two university presidents and some of their senior people, and Harold MacKay. I watched, and to some extent participated in the discussion, and MacKay as a facilitator and as an inspirer, a

catalyst for the conversation, was really something to see.

He was directing their attention and encouraging their discussion with respect to a lot of very difficult issues. And that was a dinner midway between . . . in the middle of a two-day session that he had with those same people. And I think he's playing his role exactly as it had been contemplated.

Now that's not going to result in any recommendations being made to us or any decisions being made of any substance, but rather more concerned with process and to ensure that this project is off to a good start and is on the right track from the point of view of the public interest. And I think then that his involvement won't be necessary any longer and we can just leave it to the two universities to work it out.

Now that's not responsive to the member's question in a full way, but I just can't see the future clearly enough. It's enough for me to know that the process is under way, that the universities in this province will be able to deliver a quality product at a cost that our taxpayers can afford. That's the crucial thing.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I realize that of course you can't look ahead to what might be in terms of how the universities handle this.

The fear that I had, Mr. Minister, of course is at the very beginning when the representative was selected, is that the universities seemed to withdraw within themselves for a brief period of time and there was strong criticism about, what are you looking for? We did our cuts. I think the president of the University of Saskatchewan said, we'd handled our cuts and I think we've cut \$13 million from our budget over the last number of years. Are you saying that we didn't do a good job as a university?

And there was that fear, of course, that Mr. MacKay was going to come down I think with a heavy hand and say no, you didn't do this right, you didn't do this right, etc. I think . . . I mean the skills and abilities of Mr. MacKay are known and I think he'll provide that.

My fear of course, is that when the budget says that there must also be . . . at all post-secondary institutions there is a need to reduce for next year, there is a need to reduce duplication, there is a need to cut administration, there is a need to share more services — that is a directive that is already within the budget.

And when the presidents of the universities, when Mr. MacKay look at this, and you're saying that they're not going to make recommendations, yet I wonder how they're going to deal with this whole, global picture if they know that the funding is decreasing, if they know, on the other side, that there is a need to stay competitive.

I'm hearing from the university professors, for instance, who are saying, we want to ensure that the quality of education provided by the two universities, which is renowned, remains that way — that we can attract the researchers, that we can attract the money that comes with research, that we can still be the competitive universities that we are without totally

destroying programs and totally having an increase so large to tuitions that we drive away students, and then we become nothing. Then amalgamations . . . an amalgamation will have to take place or we'll be closing one university totally and then moving to something like that. We can't look ahead to that; I understand that.

But my fear is that your department does this in such a fashion that we are able to control all parts of this post-secondary program, that we are able to look ahead and say okay, let's not just deal with one very small part of it, and that's maybe sharing of services at the universities, when the whole roof comes tumbling down. We're going to worry about the foundation; in the meantime everything else is collapsing.

I appreciate your comments as far as how we're going to look at that and I look forward to the report in terms of being able to also contribute to that. Do you have any comments on that at the moment then?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I'd like to address one part of the member's intervention, Mr. Chair. There was a sense of unease and withdrawal, particularly at the University of Saskatchewan, when they saw Harold's terms of reference. And the immediate fear of some of them was that this was a pretty massive interference with the autonomy of universities with respect to academic matters.

The way that we dealt with that is that MacKay and I appeared before the faculty in effect, the council that represents all faculty members. And we did that about two weeks ago at a meeting where there were probably 200 professors. And I said a few words and we answered questions. And you could feel the comfort level in the room rising, I think, as they understood that we understood the importance of the tradition of autonomy and independence at the universities, and that we were prepared to work within that reality, and that our participation was based upon the public interest in what is offered at the universities, and not upon any desire to control their programs or the kinds of offerings that they made to the student public.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you. One final question on the universities. I note on page 105 of the *Estimates* book, under post-secondary, capital, if I compare the two years that you have listed in the two columns, the reduction in post-secondary capital is almost \$5 million. It's almost half the budget.

How will the universities cope with this now that there is \$5 million missing from a capital budget that they've been accustomed to. What do you see in terms of things that may be put on hold, or do you see that there will be decisions made by the universities that will involve projects not going ahead at all?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, and to the member, in effect what we have asked them to do is just put their major capital programs on hold for a year. They will have to do some prioritizing with respect to . . . as they do anyway — but they'll have to sort out their priorities to see what work they can do in this fiscal year. But we've asked them to put their capital programs on hold for this year in light of our budgetary problems that we had for this year.

But we didn't take the money off the operating grants, and I think that was the right decision.

Mr. Krawetz: — If we're on hold for one year at 5 million, do you foresee that you're back into a \$10 million budget for next year and the year after?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Our plan is that normal funding for capital will resume in the next fiscal year. You know, but that's the strongest base on which I can put it. That's our plan. That's our intention. And as I stand here, that's how it is going to be, subject to how the process works.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you for that intention. Could we move to the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Arts and Sciences, SIAST.

Over the last three or four months, even prior to your budget, Mr. Minister, there was a lot of confusion, I think, and a lot of concern at the campuses, specially on the management side, regarding what the budget might contain, what the provincial budget might contain, what the federal budget might contain. We saw the lobby by students, in terms of program.

(1030)

And of course in meeting with Dr. Knight, as president of SIAST, he indicated to me before there was a decision made as far as funding, as far as . . . before the budget did come down, that there would be many lay-offs in terms of restructuring and program cuts.

We've heard in the House many times ministers of your government indicate that all the federal funding has been back-filled. And yet I hear from the SIAST program that there might be as many as 70 jobs that will be cut this year. If the provincial government has back-filled and the grants to the SIAST programs are exactly the same as the year before, what is causing all this concern at SIAST in terms of lay-off and in terms of restructuring and fear for jobs?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — It is correct, as the member observed, that we back-filled behind the federal funding decisions, and that of course has been mentioned more than once in this House. More than once by me, as a matter of fact, in this House. And when SIAST began its planning it did not know that that was how it would come out. So they were planning for the worst.

And I recall in the early days of this session the member from Rosthern had a document that Art Knight and his people . . . had been used for preliminary discussions on this, which was a pretty shocking document in terms of the changes that would have to take place.

I think that that was what he had to do. I mean I think Art Knight is an excellent president and approached this in a very mature, very professional way. When it was announced and made known to him that the grant from the provincial government would remain constant, then he was able to change his planning and change his approach to what had to be done and when it had to be done.

That wasn't the end of the problem for him, as the member has observed. There was still a number of lay-offs that took place. And the reason for that is that the federal government, after the Prime Minister's announcement last fall, just simply stopped a lot of their purchases of seats — and the member will know what that means; purchasing seats in SIAST — as well as their purchases with respect to a number of projects. An example of that, an example of that, is the bridging program for women that was being offered at various places. That just vanished and adjustments had to be made in light of that.

In addition there were cost pressures as a result of the provisions in the collective agreements and in the normal course of events for cost inflation — let me use that term — cost inflation that is . . . just normally happens. Things keep costing more. So he had to cope with that also and that resulted in the lay-offs that the member mentioned.

Mr. Krawetz: — Will your department be involved with the SIAST administration in terms of how they will plan the restructuring and the delivery of programs? As you mentioned, the working document indicated that there would be complete elimination of programs from some campuses and centralized within another campus. There was talk of transferring of staff. Will your department be involved with Mr. Knight in terms of the long-term plan as to where we're going to be delivering the proper courses that are required?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, and to the member, the decisions that are going to have to be made at SIAST will be subject to a number of influences. The chief influence will be the developing Saskatchewan training strategy that I kicked off the other day with the document. Consultations with the people involved in the system have already begun, and we're going to move that along as quickly as we can. But that ought to result in the articulation of a training strategy in the province that will be available for SIAST management to make a lot of the decisions it has to make about programing and the prioritization of programing. So that's one element of the piece.

We have agreed with Dr. Knight and his people that they will proceed with the broadest possible consultation internally — by that, I mean with the faculty and the students — and externally with the groups that are directly affected by the training, either the employers or labour organizations or what have you. So that's the second element of it.

The third element is that the management of SIAST proposes the changes to the board of governors, the board of governors at SIAST. And they are responsible for the approval of the budget and of the changes, the plan; use whatever term you like. But I think we have a common understanding of what that will be, at least the kind of document that will be approved.

It will have within it the changes and the resulting programing and any transfers and movements that take place and the budget that will go along with that. So call that package what you like; it is subject to consideration and approval by the board of governors, and then it comes to the minister for final consideration and approval. And as I understand the Act, I have a significant say in how that will finally play out. All of those things are part of this whole piece.

What I would like to see, and I'll conclude my response on this note, what I would like to see is a plan by SIAST and an approach by SIAST that is tailored to and responsive to the reality of the Saskatchewan labour market — the needs of our economy, the needs of the employers in the economy, and the needs of our people. And that's what the training strategy is all about and that's how SIAST programing should be designed.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I've heard you indicate in this House and I think you've done this publicly, regarding the approach that Saskatchewan must undertake. We know that the changes are occurring in terms of how training is going to be funded. Whether the funding is coming from the federal government or whether the funding is coming from the provincial government, that will change.

And I've had a chance to take a look at your document regarding the choices for a Saskatchewan strategy. And I think the basis is there for, I think developing a new approach as to how the strategy will be planned for all of Saskatchewan for the year 2000 and beyond.

I note that you've paid a lot of attention to the fact that training and employment in the end must be together, hand to hand. Because if they're not, what's the point of training people if there isn't a job market? And I think we have to look at that.

And I know in terms of the discussions with SIAST people, is some of the programs of course they're very concerned about. There's 100 per cent employment from a particular program class that's offered and yet there seems to be . . . in the draft stages there was a proposal that that program would be reduced in terms of the number of graduates that would actually come out of that program. And people found that very hard to comprehend, the fact that you would have a hundred per cent employment and you'd be cutting back.

We know of businesses . . . many of my colleagues on this side of the House have businesses within their constituencies that have indicated that they don't have adequately trained, skilled people in the areas that they need as we're moving into . . . highly skilled machinists that are required in many of the shops.

So the document is a starting point. And I wonder, what is the plan that you see in terms of how you will use the document? What will you do with the input that you receive in terms of planning the strategy for the next millennium?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, the member has raised some very important questions, and indeed those questions are the reason for the approach that we're taking. That approach involves the development through consultation of a Saskatchewan training strategy which we will have for the first time.

As I mentioned in the budget debate, our approach to training heretofore for the last probably 35 years has been to take advantage of any federal training program, and take full advantage of it by implementing it here and then supplementing around the federal program. And we did that apparently without any regard to the Saskatchewan priorities, the labour market

here, the demand for that kind of skill.

Well we want to change all that. In the meantime we're very conscious that there are situations, such as the member mentions, where you'd wonder whether anybody's looking at the labour market to see what is the relevance of the training program being offered. And even worse is the situation where the member mentions, where everybody that graduates is being employed, and yet there are rumours of that program being cut back.

The idea of the strategy and the point that's coming up again and again in the consultations is that the institutions have to be very sensitive to what is the labour market. And if there is, as the member says, 100 per cent employment from a particular skill that's being taught, a particular class or particular program, then don't mess with that. Think in terms of improving it or increasing it, expanding it rather than contracting it.

The idea of the strategy is to help the institutes direct their minds to those questions and to make an assessment based upon the needs of the Saskatchewan labour market and Saskatchewan citizens.

(1045)

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, recently there was an announcement, of course, of the additional \$50 million of federal money coming towards the federated colleges, the Indian federated colleges. I understand that about 2,600 students receive training through those two institutions.

With this extra money that has arrived on the scene, will there be some changes in terms of some of the programs that can now be offered there, whereby maybe students had been involved previously through other campuses within the SIAST system? Do you see this . . . how do you see the program developing to accommodate this additional \$50 million?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The federal announcement of last Friday was not an announcement of new money, new training money, but was a commitment to continue the funding that had been previously there under the pathways program. And that commitment now is extended for the next three years.

The pathways program is quite complex. Some of the training that they arrange is delivered through aboriginal institutions like the technical colleges for the Indians, SIIT (Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies) and the Metis technical institute. And then some of the training is delivered outside of those institutes, arranged by the tribal councils. It's quite a flexible, wide-ranging program. But it is just a continuation of the existing pathways expenditures, and the commitment is over the next three years.

Mr. Krawetz: — By that comment, I take it that it doesn't enter into plans of this budget at all. Okay.

Mr. Minister, if I could just move to sort of one other area that's involved in post-secondary, and that's the regional colleges. And we don't hear a lot about those particular programs and the

colleges themselves in the news. They don't make a lot of waves, and they don't make a lot of news, yet they do a lot of great things out there.

We note of course that over the last number of years there has been a decrease in the funding to regional colleges, and regional colleges are coping like any other institution with those funding decreases.

My question I guess would be, is, what effect has the cuts that have been made thus far, what effect has there been on program delivery out there in rural Saskatchewan? Regional colleges, programs that are offered are needed throughout Saskatchewan, and I've had a chance to meet with some of the board of directors of the various different colleges. And there is a lot of concern out there that they just may not be able to offer the quality of program that they have been offering.

What are your comments there?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, I'm glad that the question has been raised because I want to say something about it. In my view, the position of the regional colleges in the delivery system of training in the province is a very, very important role. I believe that the more training we can deliver in the regions the better. I think that in the modern world, with the technology that's available to us, that a very high product can be delivered through the regional colleges. And my vision of this includes regional colleges playing an increasingly larger role in the delivery of training.

The member is correct that budgetary pressures have affected the regional colleges' ability to function, and they've done a number of things. They've reduced some of their locations, thereby reduced some of their expenditures. They're very flexible, as the member will know. They're not bound by bricks and mortar and the necessity to maintain buildings and all the expenditures that go with that. If it becomes necessary for them to make a move, they can make it quickly. They can mount a program in a couple of weeks and deliver it in the back of an old, abandoned store if they have to. They are quite remarkable.

They're also remarkable because they're out there looking for alternative ways of making their colleges work. Even in a tough funding situation, they're around looking for partners and looking for opportunities to provide training to the people in their region that is relevant to their region. And an example which was just given to me by one of my officials, that the Estevan Energy Institute is an excellent example where the industry has committed to a training program in cooperation with the regional colleges.

They are very concerned at the moment about the impact of the unemployment insurance changes to some of their core programs — best example is the adult basic education program, which depended upon the Unemployment Insurance Commission funding for a lot of the costs of that program. And they are very concerned about how the changes that are going to take place over the next three years will impact on them.

Their involvement in skills training is similarly going to be affected. And at the same time you have what I think is a consensus that there ought to be more and more training

delivered at the regional level. So we have to square the circles, and that is a major subject in the training strategy. That's a major problem to be confronted and resolved, namely the delivery of training and especially the delivery of training to the regions.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you for those comments, Mr. Minister. As I've indicated to you before in discussions that you and I have had, I think we have to look at this globally. We can't just isolate the universities, we can't isolate SIAST, and we can't isolate the regional colleges. What we have in Saskatchewan, we have a million people and we have to provide training in all parts of the province to different people.

Not everyone's going to attend university; not everyone's going to be at SIAST, but yet a post-secondary education is so vital to today's society. And I think, let's make sure that all parts are within. If you look at it as a wheel and they're the spokes that feed the highly trained, highly skilled person in the middle, we have to make sure that all the parts are working together. And I appreciate your comments about the regional system.

But I might just turn to another point, around the student aid fund. I know you have your assistants here to provide some answers within that area. Within the budget I note that you have reduced assistance in the Saskatchewan student aid fund by about \$6.5 million, and in March you announced a program with the Royal Bank.

First of all, 6.5 million, a lot of money. Where did it come from in terms of . . . or where did it go in terms of the fact that you were able to reduce that much money from a budget, since you seem to indicate in your report that the amount of student loan that will be available is still going to be the same?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The \$6.5 million that the member mentions is consequential to the arrangements with the Royal Bank. In years past we've had to set up a budgetary reserve against uncollectible loans. And as the Royal Bank enters the fray here . . . not the fray but the process of loaning money, they're taking the risk and we're relieved from the risk, and the savings for this fiscal year will be 6.5 million.

Mr. Krawetz: — The first look at it by students of course, has caused quite a bit of concern out there. And I note that in the changes that you summarize in terms of your document back in March, when we talk about the loan negotiation, you've indicated of course, that the old program was that the student negotiated the loan with the province and you received approval from the province based on the guidelines. The guidelines have changed slightly but nothing significant in terms of whether or not a student will be eligible, and now the student will negotiate the provincial loan with the Royal Bank. And people have looked at that and saying now, that the need is to establish a credit rating with the Royal Bank. Is that true?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I know that there's some confusion about that and I'm glad we have the opportunity to discuss it on the public record here. The student applications will still come to us, the department, and we will approve them according to the criteria, and we will issue a certificate that we've approved them and the Royal Bank then must make the loan. And there is

no question, so far as the bank is concerned, about credit rating and they just simply make the loan and there is no discretion about that.

Mr. Krawetz: — I appreciate your comment when you said, must make the loan. When I look at the interest rate though, there is a flexibility there within each bank, as I see it, with each individual student, when it says that the rate will float and it will be prime plus a maximum of 2.5 per cent.

Now if I'm a student who, maybe not first year out of school but maybe three or four years down the road, and as a 16-year-old I did borrow that \$1,000 for an old beater and the beater quit and as a result there is a delinquency in terms of payments with Royal Bank, now I'm still maintaining that loan but of course there isn't a good relationship any more between the bank manager and this individual student.

Am I now going to be at the 2.5 per cent because there is that little bit of risk that the bank manager sees? Or am I going to have a better interest rate as determined? Like the flexibility seems to be now in the control of the manager, rather than government saying no, it's this much or it's that much. Your comments, please.

(1100)

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I think that's been handled in a satisfactory way. I just note in passing that we had a lot of student involvement in the shaping up of this program, and they participated in the announcement and told the press, I think, that they were very positive about it.

The interest rate situation is as follows. If you're a student that has been accessing the loans and they've been done through the Royal Bank under this agreement, at the end of your training you have a choice. You can choose either to go with a fixed rate of interest, or you can choose a variable rate of interest. If you choose the fixed rate of interest, then the rate will be prime at the time of selection plus 5 per cent. If you choose a variable rate, then your interest rate will be prime plus two and a half per cent, and the amount of that will vary as does the prime rate.

Also there is this option available to you as a student; you can change from one to the other during the life of the repayment, so you have that flexibility too — not bad.

Mr. Krawetz: — The flexibilities that you describe, Mr. Minister, are great. However the word still in there is maximum of 2.5 per cent, maximum of 5 per cent. Now does that mean that it's zero to 5 per cent because the interpretation by students is that maximum says that he can't charge me more than 5 per cent and prime.

The other point that I would want to make, Mr. Minister, is at this moment in Canada and of course in the province of Saskatchewan, our prime rates are relatively low. I mean we're of course very fearful of what may happen in the future as to what happened previously when we jumped to the 16 and the 18 per cent prime rates. If we have 16 or 17 per cent prime rate and we have an additional 5 per cent added on to that as a handling charge by the interest rate, we're now talking 20 per

cent interest rates. That's going to cause major problems for students. And I wonder if you've taken a look at that.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I've just sort of reviewed the landscape here with my officials, and I want to offer this answer. The student under this program is in at least as good a position and, I think in all fairness, in a better position than under the old program.

Under the old programs on the interest rate toboggan ride that the member referred to which took place back in the late '70s, early '80s, the rates charged from the fund would vary with that toboggan ride too, and when the interest rates went to 16 per cent, the rates in the student fund would go up also. So the student was always having to cope with these difficulties or these changes, these volatile changes, to the interest rate at a time when the interest rates were volatile. Hopefully we don't have that any more. But we think that the students here will be in the no worse position and probably in a better position than they were before.

I want to address one other question that the member has touched on. These are maximum rates, the ones I put forward. A student has the ability go into the Royal Bank and negotiate a lower rate if the student can meet the bank's criteria. And what we're doing here is providing that this will be the rate that applies to everybody. Nobody will have to pay more than this. But if you're able to make a better deal with the bank, just go for it.

Mr. Krawetz: — So my analogy of a few minutes ago, if I have poor working relationship with my bank manager, I'm on the hook for the 5 per cent. I guess the criteria . . . the students would have to understand what the criteria is first.

I have a number of questions, Mr. Minister, and I think in the . . . with the clock as it is, I would appreciate if your official could provide to me an explanation about whether or not the interest, program in terms of the subsidy that the government provides to the interest monies, whether they're the responsibilities of the student. Have there been any changes in that area? If I could have a package of information about the student loan program because, the calls that I'm receiving, I want to provide accurate information.

And the moment, I'm working off the very simplified sheets, and my interpretation of maximum of 5 per cent I see now was correct, but I would like to have those kinds of responses. The information, all information regarding the interest rates, how much of it is subsidized, when the student loan kicks into force, all those things — if I could have them in a package provided to me sometime in the short future, I'd appreciate that. And if you could assure me that that would take place then, I would stop my questioning the regarding the student assistance.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Yes, Mr. Chair, we'll be glad to provide that.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much. Mr. Minister, could we change now to New Careers please. I note that New Careers Corporation within the budget has had a significant increase in funding. I see that the budget has indicated that the New

Careers Corporation monies will rise from 9.5 million to 12.3 million, a substantial increase when we look at percentage and the changes. I'm wondering, the fact that this additional money is now within the corporation, what changes have taken place within the corporation to provide additional programs, additional seats? What has developed regarding this new monies?

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

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Requesting leave, to introduce guests.

The Chair: — Does the member have leave to introduce guests?

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much. I thank the member opposite for the opportunity to provide leave so that I might introduce guests this afternoon . . . or this morning. Seated in the east gallery, Mr. Chairman, are 35 grade 4 students who are here from my constituency of Yorkton from Columbia School. They're accompanied by their teachers, Miss Lorna Exner and Miss Luba Lubenko. And also their chaperons today are Donna Domres and Tammy Austman.

So I want to take a moment here today to ask all members of the Legislative Assembly to join with me in welcoming the 35 students from the Columbia School to the Assembly. They're going to be here also visiting and touring other facilities here in the community. So I want to ask all members to join with me in welcoming all the students that are here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Vote 37

Item 1

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, the member has a sharp eye, and I want to sharpen his view on this question. It's necessary to have the budget estimates to follow the answer. But on page 105, which is the page that the member is on, it would appear that there is a \$3 million increase in funding to New Careers.

But that's not so because you then have to go to page 122 in the Social Services budget, and you will see that the amount of money paid to the New Careers Corporation for the training and employment of social assistance recipients has been reduced from 9 million to 6 million. I speak in round numbers. The total then that New Careers has at its disposal through these two budgetary items is the same this year as it was last year.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, I guess the question that needs to be asked, of course, is why did this occur? Have there been a reallocation in terms of priorities from Social Services over to

New Careers?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The reallocation of the funding follows an extensive period of discussion between officials from the two departments in trying to line these things up in a way that more accurately reflects what happens, and where the money should be located for what happens. What part of it is more properly reflected in the budget of the Post-Secondary Education department as a service delivery from that department? And what part of it represents a payment on behalf of the social assistance system that is not included in the idea of the training that's being delivered from the Post-Secondary department?

Now I'm not certain that I understand fully what I've just said. I have to be frank about that because this is a matter for technical experts, and they're trying make better sense of these numbers so that the information is presented in a more sensible way. And my understanding is that the process is not complete. The development of these approaches is still ongoing and dynamic, and I think we will likely see further changes in the future . . . but certainly reflects more emphasis upon training and employment then upon simply support for the individual.

Mr. Krawetz: — I'm not sure I understand it either, Mr. Minister, so therefore when I look at the training — okay? — if Social Services was providing funding for training and now New Careers has the money within their line, will there be a continuation of the training? And in fact will now New Careers . . . if I look at the number of people that were involved in training programs . . . because now you have that additional \$3 million from Social Services, will in fact there be more people trained through the New Careers?

(1115)

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I'll try and respond to the member's question as best that I can in a developing situation.

In this fiscal year the amount of training is likely to be about the same. The dollar allocation will more closely reflect the reality of what's happening. But there won't be any dramatic increase in the training that is delivered here. The member will know that the bulk of New Career activity concerns work experience training — training by work experience and training by some other kinds of programs and seat purchases that New Careers participates in.

But the short answer to the member's question is that the amount of training involved here is likely to be the same.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, I've heard from people involved in New Careers of course that there is a way . . . that they're looking at ways of delivering the programs better. Policies are being developed. And I guess the question that begs itself of course is, has there been a look at New Careers in terms of expanding it, in terms of eliminating it, in terms of moving it over to another area? When we see the funding change of Social Services money moving into New Careers, we look ahead . . . my colleague has indicated that, you know, the Social Services department is looking at a new way of delivering program, and they're talking about training.

What is the plan for New Careers, I guess is the simple question.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The questions that the member refers to are being considered in the government as we speak. I mean they're just going on all the time. We've got, as the member has observed, a major concept in the social service programing to move people off dependency into the workforce, and obviously that involves training, upgrading skills. And obviously that involves programs like New Careers. So if we're going to expand that programing, then we're going to have to expand the New Careers programing. But at the same time, is that the most effective way of making this happen?

Those questions have been debated within government and I believe continue to be debated at the officials' level to find the most effective way of moving people from dependency to independence so that those consultations are going on. Those discussions are going on within government all the time these days, have been for some time, will for some time.

In addition we've raised these questions in the strategy paper, in the consultation paper for public discussion, and a lot of that will take place in the next while. So as I mentioned earlier, what we have here is a very dynamic situation, a situation that is in transition from something to something with the idea of arriving at the most effective way in which we can to assist social assistance recipients and getting them into the workforce.

Mr. Krawetz: — The most effective way though . . . you're not sure whether that involves the maintaining of a New Careers Corporation or whether it involves amalgamating it within another department or whether it involves completely removing it. As you're saying, I guess that those discussions are ongoing.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Yes, I think all those questions are open. We, each of us, may have our views as to which is the most likely, but those questions are all open and are being discussed.

Mr. Krawetz: — Two shorter-type questions requiring I think shorter-type answers. Who is the CEO of New Careers Corporation, and what is the relationship between yourself and that person? And secondly, one of the programs that you have is called CEP, I think it's called community employment program. Could you tell me a little bit about what CEP is?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, the chief executive officer of the New Careers Corporation and the president is Merran Proctor, who is seated on my right as we speak. The chair of the board of the New Careers Corporation is my deputy minister, Dan Perrins, who is seated on my left.

In the ordinary course of operations, Ms. Proctor reports to Mr. Perrins as the chair of the board. And as you would expect, he reports to me in all his capacities. And on any issues that involve the New Careers Corporation, they would both normally be present at meetings with me in order to discuss those issues.

The community employment program, as the member knows

this is a grant program that is available for NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and for businesses. The idea behind the grant is to fund training programs of 20 weeks . . . I think is the period of the program. And the target for the program is to service approximately 1,300 clients.

The success rate in that program is, I think, quite good. The people who have gone through it are successful in getting employment, either with that employer or someone else, at the rate of between 55 and 60 per cent, which is not bad.

Mr. Krawetz: — A couple of questions then about CEP. The clients that you talk about, are the majority of them coming from a welfare roll? First question.

Secondly, if they're completing the 20-week training program, what happens to those — I guess it would be about 40 or 45 per cent — that didn't obtain employment with that employer? Do they go back to the welfare roll? What happens to them?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The clients under the community employment program are all welfare recipients. Mr. Chair, I want to be sure that the member hears that the program applies to all welfare recipients. For those that, as the member says, don't get jobs — the 40 to 45 per cent that don't get jobs immediately — they go different routes. We do try to keep them from falling back onto the welfare rolls, recognizing the initiative that they've taken in becoming involved in the program in the first place.

Some of them are able, through their unemployment insurance eligibility, to enter training programs of different sorts using their experience as the background. Some of them come back to New Careers for other opportunities and are moved into other situations that are part of the New Careers programing. Others are sponsored for further education. But we do try not to let them simply drop back into the welfare rolls.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I want to raise a couple more issues on New Careers, and this is an issue that I've discussed with you, and I want to have it on public record.

I brought to your attention whereby a manager of a cooperative at Leslie Beach, Miss Jacquie Klebeck, as one of my constituents, has brought to my attention a problem as she sees with New Careers. And this involves the fact that last year, through New Careers, there was a person that was hired at the resort, at the beach, to be on a program whereby she spent a lot of time training the person, ensuring that the person's not only job skills but people skills improved. And of course by the end of the program, she was very pleased with the individual that she had.

When they looked at the program again this year, the same person was eligible through New Careers to be placed, but when she found out that the person who had . . . because the person had worked for her last year at that particular job, he was no longer eligible to be an employee.

She felt that another year of training for this program in that job would have enabled him to go out there — because not just the

physical skills required but because of the people skills — that this person would have been able to then stand a great chance in being employed out there, outside of the New Careers program.

And you've indicated to me that there's been a regulation change that now has put this in place. The employer then who is looking at this, I think, is undergoing a lot of extra costs because she spends a lot of time with a first-time employee, helping them, making sure that they're supervised. And it's a long process until you can remove total supervision from a new person.

She's back into that very scenario again. Now it's a new person that is being trained whereas this other person was still available. Now of course if the person is moved on to a job, that's great. That's what New Careers is for. But I'm wondering whether or not your department is looking at considering removing that restriction on an employer year to year.

(1130)

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, and to the member, I recall this point being raised a couple of times in conversation with the member, and I thought and I do think that the member has raised a very significant point. Personally I agree with it.

I've directed that the department and the corporation make whatever changes are necessary in order to eliminate this limitation in the program and make it more flexible. And my understanding is that that change is in the works and that it will be eliminated, and it won't be a problem in future years.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, and again I think my constituents will be very happy to hear that.

One final comment, Mr. Minister. As I've indicated in the other departments, I have a number of concerns around New Careers in terms of some of the problems that have been raised. But rather than deal with them here, I would appreciate if I could have the cooperation of your officials some day, with the fact that I would supply first of all a written request regarding some questions and comments. And if I could have that meeting sometime in the future whereby I could deal with some of these concerns, I would stop my questioning and proceed in that fashion.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Yes, we will provide that written material, and we'd be glad to . . . the officials will be glad to sit down with the member and discuss this whole area of programing and indeed any of the programs of the department.

Mr. Krawetz: — With that, Mr. Minister, I know the third party may have some questions. And I would like to thank all the officials that have been here. I tried to involve all of you, but maybe I missed out on a couple, and I'm sorry. So next year I'll make sure that I involve all of you. Thank you for your comments, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, and welcome to the minister and to his officials on this particular topic, subject area.

With the changes that have happened in education and the

dividing of the departments into two ministries, my first question sort of follows through on that, and that is what particular programs and services does your department control?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — We are responsible for the programs involving the universities, SIAST, the regional colleges, New Careers, as we've just been discussing with the previous member, the training program, the training strategy, training questions, private vocational schools, apprenticeship, labour market planning, student loans. Those are the ones that occur to me and are being whispered to me as I stand here.

I've just been . . . Another added to the list is VRDP (vocational rehabilitation for disabled persons program), the disabled persons. And finally SCN, the Saskatchewan Communications Network.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Under that listing that you gave, I wonder if you could give a little bit of an elaboration on the term that you used — private vocational schools. What sorts of schools would be in that particular category?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — There are 31 such institutions that have been approved. These are privately owned training institutions that deliver training programs that have been approved by the department . . . cover a broad range of matters. That's the answer.

Mr. Heppner: — Following through a bit more on those private vocational schools, what types of controls does your department have over them? I think you mentioned something about curriculum. Is that the only part that is covered in that? Anything to do with staffing or quality of staff?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The degree of the involvement with the private vocational schools is really quite extensive following the passing of the Act in 1995. There was a consultative process that took place after that that went on for some time and was very detailed. And out of that process came regulations which do provide a range of matters that are considered by the department on their way to the registration of a private vocational school.

That includes a business plan, promotional material, a graduation certificate, student contract, instructor approval; curriculum — as the member had suggested — the schedule of fees for instructions and supplies, and the registration fees, and matters like that. So there's a good deal of department involvement in the programs being offered. And as I said earlier, 31 have been approved to this point.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. What boards and agencies does your department have the power to appoint? And I guess the other two questions that follow through with that one is what is the process for the appointments and the length of time or term for those appointments?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Sorry, Mr. Chair, and to the member, that it took some time to get all the details that the member asked for. The boards that are in place are the boards of the two universities — the board of governors there — the board at SIAST, the boards at the regional colleges, the Provincial

Apprenticeship Board, and 40 trade advisory boards with respect to the apprenticeship program. My understanding is, that in the case of all of these boards, the appointments are made for three-year terms.

Now some words about the process. Let me start with the Apprenticeship Board and the trade advisory boards. The process there is that there is consultation by the department with industry. And when I use the term industry as the apprenticeship people use it, I'm including both the employers and the employees. And that consultation is directed at finding credible representatives to serve either on the Provincial Apprenticeship Board or on the trade advisory boards, and in reality is pressing competent people to devote their time and energy to the work of such a board.

And then as a result of that consultative process, nominations are made by the industry to the government, and the appointment is by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Now with respect to the universities, there is no formal process. The appointments are made on the recommendation of the minister by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The board structure is set out in the Act, and various of the board members are appointed by organizations outside the government like the university senate and the students and that sort of thing. They put their own members on the board. We appointment them pursuant to those nominations.

(1145)

In addition we appoint a number of members. In doing that we try to do a number of things. We try to reflect a good balance as far as gender is concerned. We try to ensure some aboriginal representation. We try to take geography into account. And we try to ensure that there is a mix of skills on the board so that you may have one person who is good at balance sheet and accounting problems, and another has a legal background perhaps or a farming background or an active business background or that sort of thing. You try and get a good mix of perspectives. And it's very difficult to do that, but that's what we have in mind as we're going about selecting board members.

The same thing applies to SIAST, except the SIAST board is entirely appointed, on the recommendation by the minister, by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. And on the SIAST board we pay a lot of attention to regional representation and a lot of attention to the bringing together of different perspectives. So that at a board meeting they will be able to discuss a broad range of issues intelligently because there'll be somebody on the board that knows a fair bit about the subject.

With respect to the regional colleges, the emphasis on the regional colleges is to ensure that different parts of the region are represented. I don't think I could add anything to that. The emphasis there is on geographical representation within the region. The emphasis is also upon people who are interested in what a regional college does. And we try to ensure that there is energy and enthusiasm within the board by appointing to the board people who have got a fire in their belly with respect to the question of delivering training at the regional level.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. What agencies outside of your department does your department influence and fund? And I guess universities and technical schools would be obvious examples. Are there any others you could list that your department either influences or funds?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, we provide funds to the SCN. Of course New Careers is funded. We fund the Wascana Centre Authority and we provide some funds to the Meewasin Valley Authority. I think that's the full list in response to the question raised by the minister. . . or by the member.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Question: how many officials does your department employ, and how many of those were seconded from the Department of Education?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — This is not simple. We have 213 full-time equivalents; 40 per cent of those . . . pardon me, stop. Let me start over again. We have 213 full-time equivalents; 70 of those are shared with the Department of Education; 40 per cent of those 70 are included in our 213. So when I say we have 213 full-time equivalents, that includes our share of the shared-services people — our share of the 70 people who are working in the shared-services area. The total is 213.

We have none seconded from the Department of Education. I think that was the member's question.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I notice that your accommodation and central services budget will be going from 1.39 million this year to 1.427 million the next year. Is this difference only because your department has not been operating a full year? Or are you going to be spending more money on those particular services from that section?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The period we're talking about is the full 12-month period, and the difference is because of the SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) change in rental rates.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Moving into the JobStart and Future Skills areas. If you could update the House on the progress of JobStart and the Future Skills programs, and looking particularly at outlining each of these programs, provisions and goals that are allotted to each program, and the funding.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The JobStart and Future Skills programs were remarkably successful on a number of counts and were immensely popular with the employer and employee communities. They have been combined this year into a combined program, which is logical because they both had the same goals. It was a question of one was directed towards youth and the other to the broader population. So they're pulled together.

I have numbers showing the situation as of May 27, which is two weeks ago. Over 2,775 training positions were approved during that period, and that includes over 2,000 Future Skills positions and about 600 JobStart positions. The 43 per cent of that total involved young people between the ages of 17 and 25. About 16 per cent were of aboriginal ancestry and about 10 per

cent were on social assistance.

The funding is complex because it derives from different sources. There is the grant that appears in the budget material. There is also the agreement that we made with the federal government earlier this year, the so-called strategic initiatives, which provides a variety of programming that is directed at the Future Skill-JobStart objectives. So we're in full blast again, or still, with respect to that initiative.

We've learned a great deal from this program about the relationship between this kind of training and its work-based nature and the involvement of the employer community in the dynamics of the program. It's been a very, very valuable experience and taught us a lot that is relevant for the future.

(1200)

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, for a comprehensive answer on a rather complex question. And I think as we look at that whole area the two kinds of things that come into focus on that is obviously the number of dollars that go into it, and we've talked about that to some extent. We have discussed the purpose of it, and I guess the next question is the results. And I guess the question then is: how many jobs have been created as a direct result of those programs?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, and to the member, the intent of the program is not to create jobs but to train people for jobs that are there. And that's why you have so much employer involvement in this program. So when I say 2,775, as I did a few moments ago, those are the number of actual working positions in respect to which training is a major component. And we are involved through the Future Skills-JobStart program in providing that training. So that's the answer to that part of the member's question. We're not creating jobs so much as training for real jobs that are there.

And we're quite satisfied about this because about 80 per cent of the people who have been trained pursuant to this program are still there, working at those jobs for which they've been trained.

I had the experience just a couple of weeks ago of giving some profile to this program with an announcement at Freightliner in Regina. And they took me on a tour of the operation afterwards, and the tour involved employees who were in the program actually learning how to apply the very latest technology to the repair and maintenance of big truck units, tractor units. And it was most impressive. Those kids are really getting a very high level of training program, and it's an example of which I think we can all be quite proud of, quite satisfied with. It's injected a lot of energy into the employer community and into the employees that come in contact with it. And it's really gratifying to see some of these situations in action.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I agree. It's gratifying to see that when there's a program in place, that people are . . . actually find work and filling jobs for which those programs are put in place.

And as we just finished talking a minute ago about the purpose

of the program and the funding that goes into the program, you answered the question on how successful it was. I guess we need to take one step further back and look at one other component to see how well and how carefully these dollars are all spent. And it may be a fairly difficult question to answer, but I think it's very critical if we're going to look at the best use of those particular dollars. And that is: how many people receive training they would not have otherwise received? I know it's a tough one to come up with, but I think it's very critical to know whether the dollars are spent exactly where they're necessary.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, the member properly characterizes his question as being difficult to answer. But having said that, let me take a crack at it.

What this program has done is provide the opportunity to have entry positions at different plants available to people who are not employed and, if it weren't for this program, likely wouldn't get those jobs.

Take, for example, the Freightliner experience of a couple of weeks ago. They are servicing big, expensive units for themselves and for other companies. And the people who are doing this service work require a high level of skill and a lot of training. The company, Freightliner, would normally be looking for people who could come to work and do the job. They are skilled. If they couldn't find them here, they would go to Alberta or Manitoba or somewhere and try and bring them in. They may even have to reach farther afield than that.

This program gave them the incentive, made it worth their while, to hire locally people who are not employed, who didn't have the skill but who the employer judged had the aptitude to be able to master the skills. And those ideas all married, and they hired people locally. These are kids from Moose Jaw and Saskatoon and Regina, and in the rural areas surrounding Regina.

Seventy per cent of the people who are on the program, of that 2,700 number that I mentioned earlier, have grade 12 or less. And they are not in or were not in the training system. They were looking for a job, but they were looking for it without any specific training. And that's a pretty tough market to break into.

This program has created a situation where they're getting hired. And even though they don't have the skills, the employer judges that they would be appropriate and would be able to learn the skills. And the program provides the incentive to hire them and provide the training and give them a job.

That, I think, is a useful program. I am pleased with it. I can't take any credit for initiating it but I am very pleased that it's there, and I like it and I encourage it. I think that's as responsive to the member's question as I can be at the moment.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. And I think I'd underline the support for — especially one part that you mention — that quite a number of the people finding employment are grade 12 or less. And I think that's always a critical area, to find good job opportunities for these individuals, and I think that's to be recommended.

Sort of a follow-up question in that similar direction, and that deals with the ability for some of these individuals to possibly find or fund those particular costs of education on their own. And the question then is, what systems do you have to ensure that people are not using these grants to underwrite education costs they might be able to manage on their own? Is there some sort of means testing — if you want to use that term — in place, or is the family looked at as well as a possible source of support for that educational funding?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, the program is aimed at smaller employers. We're not interested in participating in the training plans of the really big operations. They've got enough resources to be able to fund their own training and look after their own training needs.

There is no means test for the entrance, the employee entrance. I just repeat that 70 per cent of them have grade 12 or less, which doesn't speak directly to the point but speaks indirectly to it. The other thing is, the employers are paying half the program, half the cost of the program; it's a cost-shared approach.

I want finally to mention that one of the changes to the program that we have recently made is that tuition fees will be paid by those people in the program who take institutional-based training as part of their regime, and that's needs tested as the member will know. And finally they can become eligible for student aid or the student loan program.

But those are the elements that I can offer in answer to the member's question.

Just to repeat: there is no means testing or any testing of the ability of the family to support the effort, apart from the tuition fee matter that I mentioned earlier.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. In some of the questioning that went on earlier a comment was made that some categories seem to have very high success rates. In fact there seems to be an . . . almost a need for more opportunities in some of those areas.

And I'm wondering if your department has a list of general categories of training that's undertaken through the program — not every specific one, but general categories — and what the most common types of courses would be that are being taken.

(1215)

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — In response to the member, Mr. Chair, I'll mention some of the main categories. Truck driver training, welding, fibreglass fabrication; various agricultural-related occupations such as bee-keeping, high-clearance spraying, horticulture, pork production; films and videos. The list goes on, but that's a good sample.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Moving to a different category, and that category is aboriginal and northern education funding, and I'm wondering if you could give some details on aboriginal and northern education funding.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I've got two pieces of paper in my hand and there's a lot of information on it. The first deals with funding for post-secondary aboriginal programs, which is the precise question the member had, and covers the last two years plus this year. The second piece of paper is funding for educational programming in the North, a large portion of which involves aboriginal people.

Let me go to some totals and then I'll make a proposal. The total funding for post-secondary aboriginal programs, which will overlap a lot of the second document, is 13.207 million. The second document deals with funding for educational programming in the North, and that amounts to over \$8 million. And as I say, some of these numbers are included in the general numbers.

What I propose is just simply to send these papers across to the member and save the time of the committee.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. A follow-up question on funding and that is, from the funding that is there, the total potful, how much of that went to institutions and how much of that went to individuals?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, would it be satisfactory to the member if we provided a written response to that question? The information is there but it's just a little complex and we'll figure it out and write to you.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I asked a question a couple of minutes ago about the common types of training but that was in general to the whole program. Dealing with aboriginal and northern situations, and the question then is, what are the most common types of training received under those categories? And I guess what we're looking at is long-term opportunities and are they there from the training that's being received?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — With specific reference to Future Skills and JobStart, the major categories are the forestry industry and tourism. Speaking more generally with respect to training in the North, the multi-party training plan is the most prominent of the programs. It trains people for actual jobs in the mines. And it's judged to be a very successful program.

In addition, there's the NORTEP (northern teacher education program) for the training of teachers, and there's a lot of SIAST and university programs that are being delivered in the North, either by instructors or by technology — television and the like.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly recessed until 1:30 p.m.

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of concerned citizens of the province of Saskatchewan with respect to 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 numerous signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from Kipling, from Grenfell, Whitewood, Kindersley, and all small towns across southern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The petitioners' signatures are all from the city of Regina, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to present petitions of names 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 this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Wolseley, Lemberg, Fort Qu'Appelle, Shaunavon, and places throughout the province. I so present.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise to present petitions of names from residents 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, Mr. Speaker, are from Balcarres, Indian Head, Bengough, Ogema, and a number from Regina.

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

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon.

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

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are all from the city of Regina.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise again today to present a petition on behalf of the concerned citizens of southern Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

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

And the petition has been signed by many concerned citizens from the community of Tuxford, which of course is in the constituency of Arm River, as well as there is a few names from the city of Moose Jaw.

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

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

And those who have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Moose Jaw, Estevan, Langenburg, Preeceville, Bienfait, as well as the city of Regina.

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

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

And the people that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, they're from Regina here. There also is one here from Edmonton, Alberta; from Lebre; from Fort Qu'Appelle; and they're from all throughout Saskatchewan. And I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with my colleagues and the people of Saskatchewan once again on day 71, the 71st day that we've stood in this House presenting petitions and all the efforts that Saskatchewan people have had in saving 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 people that have signed the petition are from the Craven and Lumsden area. I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order petitions respecting the closure of the Plains Health Centre have been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 76 ask the government the following question:

Regarding the Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation: (1) was the minister aware of any donations made by York Medical to any secret trusts of the New Democratic Party before he made the decision to invest taxpayers' money in this corporation; (2) was the minister aware of the amounts of those donations?

I also give notice that on day 76 I will ask the government the following question:

Regarding the Crown Investments Corporation: (1) was the minister aware of any donations made by the shareholders of HARO Financial Corporation to any secret trust funds of the New Democratic Party before CIC extended its involvement in the corporation; (2) was the minister aware of the amounts of those donations?

I also give notice that on day 76 I will ask the government the following question:

Regarding the Department of Energy and Mines: (1) was the minister aware of any donations made by Husky Oil Limited to any secret trust funds of the New Democratic Party before deciding to maintain multimillion dollar tax breaks to that company; and (2) was the minister aware of the amounts of those donations?

And I also give notice on day 76 I will ask the government the following question:

Regarding the Crown Investments Corporation: (1) was the minister aware of any donations made by Goldman Sachs to any secret trust funds of the New Democratic Party before employing the services of this company to sell Cameco shares in 1996; (2) was the minister aware of the amounts of those donations?

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 76 ask the government the following question:

Regarding SaskTel: (1) was the minister aware of any donations made by Symmetrix to any secret trust funds of the New Democratic Party before the decision was made to award this company a re-engineering contract at SaskTel; and (2) was the minister aware of the amounts of those donations?

I also, Mr. Speaker, will give notice that I shall on day 76 ask the government the following question:

Regarding SaskTel: (1) was the minister aware of any donations made by Mr. Don Ching to any secret trust fund of the New Democratic Party before making the decision to appoint him as president and CEO (chief executive officer) of SaskTel; and (2) was the minister aware of the amounts of these donations?

I also will give notice, Mr. Speaker, that I shall on day no. 76 ask the government the following question:

Regarding SaskPower: (1) was the minister aware of any donations made by Mr. Jack Messer to secret trust funds of the New Democratic Party before appointing him of president and chief executive officer of the company; and (2) was the minister aware of the amounts of those donations?

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 76 ask the government the following question:

Regarding the Department of Economic Development: (1) was the minister aware of any donations made by Intercontinental Packers or any of its principals to any secret trust funds of the New Democratic Party before committing additional tax dollars to assist that company; and (2) was the minister aware of the amounts of those donations?

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 76 ask the government the following question:

Regarding the Crown Investments Corporation: (1) was the minister aware of any donations made by union contracting firms involved in the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement to secret trust funds of the New Democratic Party before signing this agreement on behalf of the taxpayers of Saskatchewan; and (2) was the minister aware of the amounts of these donations?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through to members of the Assembly, 33 grade 7, 8, and 12 students from Fillmore in my constituency. They are accompanied by teachers Murray Bruce, Andrew Kidd, and chaperon Elaine Driver. Also bus driver Deb Larose is with the group as well.

I look forward to meeting with them afterwards for a photo, refreshments, and a visit. And I would ask all members to join in welcoming them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the House a group of students I was really glad to see this afternoon when I walked into the House. They're from Beardy's Okemasis. I used to teach in Duck Lake and these students were in grade 1 when I was there.

And also their teacher, Mr. Harry Salahub, who was also in school and we learned a bit from each other. Mr. Salahub's going to enjoy the sparring in the House; he's good at that. And if you students want to verify that, ask him about some bus seats; he'll tell you

about it.

So would you welcome these students to the House. They'll enjoy meeting with their MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) later on for drinks and hamburgers.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Johnson: — Mr. Speaker, since the students have already been introduced from the Duck . . . Beardy's School, from Duck Lake . . . There are 14 in number. Their teacher, as has already been indicated, in attendance with them is Harry Salahub. But there are four chaperons — Ivie Cameron, Leona Eyahpaise, Greg Cameron, and Walter Littlepine.

And I will be meeting with them afterwards for refreshments, and not drinks as the other . . . as the member across the way has suggested. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce a delegation from China, the Hebei province. This group is sponsored by Canpotex Ltd..

The delegation has met with me and the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs for lunch. They will also be meeting with the Department of Economic Development, Energy and Mines officials, to establish more trade linkages in the mining and cooperative sectors between China and Saskatchewan.

Tomorrow the delegation will visit a potash mine and will also be meeting with the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask all members to welcome, if they would, Vice-Minister Gu, the vice-president of All China Federation of Marketing and Supply Cooperatives. And I'll ask Mr. Gu to stand.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I have quite a long list, Mr. Speaker, so if members would want to hold their applause until we're done. Also with them is Mr. Xiao, deputy director of China National Academy of Cooperative Economy; Madam Ren, executive vice-president of CNAMPGC (China National Agricultural Means of Production Group Corporation); Mr. Wang, division chief of All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives; Mr. Luo, who is the general manager of import and export department of CNAMPGC; Mr. Li, who is the business manager for import and export department of the same company; Mr. Steven Dechka, president of Canpotex Ltd. of Saskatoon; Mr. Howard Cummer, managing director of Canpotex Ltd. in Hong Kong; and Mr. Tommie Sutanu, managing director of Odyssey International Group of Hong Kong.

Mr. Speaker, I will ask all members to give a very warm

welcome to these very important people that provide so much economic benefit to our economy. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to add the voice on behalf of Her Majesty's Official Opposition with a very warm welcome to the Chinese delegation. Thank you for coming to visit us and enjoy your visit here to our great province of Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to welcome our Chinese visitors here. I hope you find your visit here both prosperous and enjoyable and we welcome you to Saskatchewan. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that all my colleagues will also want to help me welcome a grade 5 class from the great community of Neudorf who are here in the east gallery. They are here to visit the Legislative Building and to take a tour.

They're accompanied by their teacher, Sandy Jost; Maureen Pfeifer, as a chaperon, Carole Smulan and Lorraine Geres. We really appreciate you coming to visit with us and enjoy your visit here this afternoon. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murrell: — Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to the Assembly today, 34 students from Cut Knife Elementary School. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery. They're from grade 6, and they're accompanied by their teachers, Len Dupuis, Michelle Ramsay, Pat Smith-Putland; and chaperons Glen Blackstock, Cody Denton, and Grant Wasmuth.

And I will be meeting with them for MLA pictures and drinks to follow. Please welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly some visitors in your gallery today, Mr. Speaker — Mr. Brian Johnson, Lisa Simmermon, and their son, Hans. The Regina family are hoping that their visit to the legislature today will be a very productive one, as I do also hope that they have a productive visit.

I'd like all members to join with me in welcoming them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to the other members of the Assembly, and to you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce 51 grade 7 students from the Stewart Hawke School in Hudson Bay.

Many of you will know that Hudson Bay is the moose capital of

the world, Mr. Speaker. If there are hunters in this room, they certainly would be aware of that. It's a very active community as well, Mr. Speaker. The SaskFor-MacMillan plywood mill is located in Hudson Bay, and of course the chipboard mill as well.

So I want to wish them a very enjoyable visit, a very safe trip home. And I will not be able to meet with you at 2 o'clock as the opposition will likely have some questions for the Minister of Highways and Transportation, but the MLA from Regina South will be happy to meet with you this afternoon.

Please help me welcome the students, the teachers, and the chaperons from the great community of Hudson Bay.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Best Wishes to the Minister of Labour

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleagues I would like to extend best wishes and congratulations to the Minister of Labour on today's announcement. I understand that after 21 years in public service, the decision to leave government was a tough one. But I'm also beginning to understand the pressures and stress that occur in politics can place . . . on one's personal life.

I would like to thank the minister for his work on behalf of the Saskatchewan people, and I wish him and his family well as they head out of province to explore new opportunities, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Alternate High School Program

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I was invited to attend a celebration of the first successful year of the Southeast Regional College alternate high school program. The local community partners who have supported this project, teachers, and students were at the event.

This program is designed for students who have dropped out of high school but have since realized they do need further education. The alternate high school allows these young people to get their basic academic training in a setting that is removed from the traditional school system. The students themselves said they appreciated the second chance to start fresh.

Operating out of the Southeast Regional College, young people have opportunity to learn with a more adult environment. The normal peer pressure of high school is gone. Students can focus on learning because they're doing it for themselves this time.

With one successful year behind them, the Southeast alternate high school is making plans to expand and improve upon the program. They want to integrate workplace training into the academics and put greater emphasis on life skills and

preparing for transition to work.

I encourage others to look at our alternate school as a model on how to help kids that, for whatever reasons, fall through the cracks in a traditional classroom setting. All children need a good education, but not all children can learn in the same manner. This program is an excellent example of a community partnership in action. A cross-section of health, education, social service, and business organizations have joined forces to meet a very important need for the young people of the Weyburn area.

Congratulations to all. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Best Wishes to the Minister of Labour

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the Liberal labour critic in saying a few words today about the announcement made earlier today by the Minister of Labour. First of all, Mr. Minister, I hope it wasn't something that I said last night.

Mr. Speaker, the minister and I have had the opportunity to have many heated debates in this legislature with many disagreements in this House. And I have enjoyed these exchanges. After all, what fun is it to talk to someone if you agree with them all the time? And there certainly was no danger of that in this case. But at the end of the day, I have always respected the minister and the work that he has done, even if we didn't always agree on a lot of the issues.

However, even the minister will have to admit that today's announcement seems to have proven one of my points. The labour laws in this province are so bad that even the Labour minister has announced that he is going to move to another province to find work. And we sincerely hope that the minister will do us another favour and take his union-preference tendering policy with him.

Mr. Minister, on behalf of the PC (Progressive Conservative) caucus, in seriousness, I congratulate you on a successful career in politics here in Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, just to let you know that in question period later today, we will be picking the next minister to go. So, Mr. Minister, for you though, I do want to wish you and your family the very best in your home where ever it might be.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Regina International Children's Festival

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is festival season in Regina, and a special one starts today: the 10th annual Regina International Children's Festival.

This year's festival is a four-day birthday party for Regina's young at art. Three hundred thousand people have visited the festival over the past 10 years and have enjoyed hundreds of acts from around the world.

This year's theme is shake, rattle and rhyme — a chance to shake a leg with Fred Penner, rattle with the Echo City Musicians, and

rhyme with the Armagh Rhymers from Northern Ireland. You'll also shake with laughter at the antics of Checkerboard Guy, Flyin' Bob, Paradox and Paradie, and the Queen of Art and her Wacky Friends. The acts this year come from as near as Winnipeg, Vancouver, Saskatoon, Quebec City, and as far away as Britain, North Ireland, the Czech Republic, and the United States.

Other activities include a mad hatter's tent, a story teller's tent, an enviro tent. The Queen of Art will be on hand with her face-painter friends, Vincent Van Glow, Purple Picasso, Willie Shakespeare, and the Knights of the Rectangular Table.

I urge people to take a little drive down College Avenue and have a look at it. It's quite an exciting bunch of tents, and all kinds of action going on. But it is again community support that makes the festival tick — the patrons and donors and the hundreds of volunteers so that school groups . . . I hope that some who are here today will be by there; their children and parents can enjoy the excellent program.

So happy birthday, Children's Festival, and thanks to everyone involved.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ile-a-la-Crosse Homecoming Celebration

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to commend all the people in my hometown of Ile-a-la-Crosse who are working very hard to organize a large homecoming gathering for people from the community.

The 150th anniversary celebration of the Roman Catholic Church's arrival in Ile-a-la-Crosse will take place the last week of this month. The community is also celebrating its 220th year of existence. The homecoming celebration will also coincide with the 90th anniversary celebration of the signing of Treaty No. 10 in 1906.

It will feature a variety of activities for all those in attendance. Organizers are working hard to contact all the people who have lived or worked in Ile-a-la-Crosse in the past 50 years — that includes the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) officers, nuns, doctors, priests, etc.

Ile-a-la-Crosse has a rich and diverse historical past that'll be showcased during the celebrations. Hopefully all those making the trip to take part in the festivities in Ile-a-la-Crosse will be blessed with beautiful weather. I look forward to seeing everyone there and I invite other members of the Assembly to join us as well. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Company Develops Arts Education CD-ROM

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among the growing list of innovative software and high-tech companies in Saskatchewan is a production company called Pebble Beach Interactive. Pebble Beach Interactive is located in my

riding and has recently developed and released an interactive CD-ROM (compact disc read-only memory) for high school arts education.

Entitled "Ideas and Inspiration," this CD-ROM enables students to tour through a series of virtual reality galleries featuring contemporary art work. In doing so, it makes the learning and research process more interesting and inviting to students.

As a teaching tool, it includes the works of 100 Canadian artists, covering the fields of architecture, fine arts, crafts, fashion, and graphic design. It also gives students the opportunity to view artists' studios and to hear the artists discuss their works.

This initiative demonstrates that Saskatchewan is on the cutting edge of arts education and that we are setting new standards in interactive educational technology. Assistance for this project came from Sask Education, the Western Economic Partnership Agreement, SaskFilm, and the JobStart-Future Skills program.

I'd like to congratulate Pebble Beach Interactive and all the organizations involved in this project for taking the education of our high school students one step further into the information age. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Barbara Wasylciw's 100th Birthday

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize a constituent of mine, Mrs. Barbara Wasylciw. Mrs. Wasylciw will celebrate her 100th birthday on Saturday, June 15, a milestone few people ever achieve.

Mrs. Wasylciw was born in the Ukraine in 1896 and came to Canada with her parents at the age of four. She settled in the Fish Creek district. In 1913 she married Peter Wasylciw and together they raised a family of eight children.

The Wasylciws farmed in the Aberdeen and Redberry districts, and moved to Saskatoon in 1941. Mrs. Wasylciw is a very sociable person. Her home is always open to other people for short and long stays. She has strong faith and a strong work ethic. Even with failing eyesight, at the age of 100 she cannot sit idle, and braids rugs and place-mats at her residence in the Cudworth nursing home. She is very alert and enjoys singing to the nurses and the guests at the nursing home.

Her daughter, speaking with pride and admiration, says that her mother is one in a million. What an inspiration. Happy birthday, Mrs. Wasylciw.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Duck Lake Interpretive Centre Historical Exhibit

Mr. Johnson: — Mr. Speaker, as I make this member's statement, I know I'm being watched by students from the Beardy School. The town of Duck Lake in my constituency is the site of a historical significance in western Canada. In recent years the community has taken a number of steps to explain the region's history to visitors.

The first battle of the Riel rebellion is part of that history. This summer the region's interpretive centre in Duck Lake will showcase a new exhibit, Duck Lake — Frontier of Indian, Metis, and Pioneer Society, 1870-1905.

Visitors can view this exhibit and take in one or more events that commemorate that history. From August 16 to 18 the largest outdoor powwow in Saskatchewan will be hosted by the Beardy's First Nation. On July 15 and 16 there will be a pilgrimage to the St. Laurent Shrine. On any other day a visitor may see nearby Fort Carlton which housed the North-West Mounted Police during the Battle of Duck Lake, or simply tour the town to enjoy the history art — murals painted on downtown businesses.

I invite everyone to visit Duck Lake and the surrounding area this summer, and ask the members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating the community spirit that has made such a celebration of history possible. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Political Donations

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker I brought to the attention of this House yesterday the fact that more than \$1.4 million passed through New Democratic constituency associations in the past six years.

I also pointed out that during that same period of time NDP (New Democratic Party) returns filed with the Chief Electoral Officer do not disclose even one contribution from an individual or corporation.

I called on the Premier to explain where the NDP hides such donations. Unfortunately he failed to provide an answer. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to give him another chance. Will the Premier explain where the New Democratic Party hides such donations, and will he assure this House that neither he or any member of his cabinet or caucus or their constituency associations or secret trust funds on their behalf have received a political donation from corporations doing business in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Here we go again. Read my lips. Mr. Speaker, I invite the Leader of the Opposition to listen carefully and read my lips. The New Democratic Party has been in full compliance with The Election Act expense provisions since they were enacted. Now I trust that's clear enough.

I wonder where the Liberal Party is on this. The best I understood yesterday's media reports and the basis of what their lawyer was saying, the Liberal Party is simultaneously in violation of the law and not in violation of the law. And the reason why apparently it's not in violation of the law is that it hasn't been successful in raising any money.

But what kind of hypocrisy is that, to come in here and accuse us when your own lawyer admits that you're in violation of the law? We don't think we are. If you are, you do what you like. But we're not.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — We believe there have been serious violations of the law, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of businesses that have a specified . . . a special relationship with this government and have benefited as a result. As examples I can name Phoenix Advertising, HARO, Harvard Developments, the law firms of Ron Gates and Company, Woloshyn Mattison, and Olive Waller. And of course there are the trade unions.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain if these firms contributed to the New Democratic election, the New Democrat election machine; and if so, where would we find such donations properly disclosed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I repeat, we are in full compliance with the law.

We have invited you over the last several days to toughen up the law. We're interested in doing that — toughening up the law. We notice you're not in favour of toughening up the law. We are, and we will introduce those amendments into this House.

I wonder if the problem isn't, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite and their advisers simply don't understand the law with respect to election financing. I run into that problem with respect to my understanding of computers. And I go down to the computer store and I see all kinds of publications there, *DOS for Dummies*, *Word for Dummies*. Maybe what we need here is a new publication called "Election Finances for Dummies."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Well, Mr. Speaker, when print is black and white and sections of The Election Act read straightforward, there is no question the matter of interpretation is a problem on the other side of this House.

The media reports that the Conservatives are now demanding that all parties, all parties, turn their financial books over to the Chief Electoral Officer. This is merely another attempt by them to obscure the situation. Mr. Kusiak already has the right at any time to see the books. Only a full-scale inquiry will determine the true level of corruption surrounding this issue, Mr. Speaker.

The Election Act clearly identifies the rules relating to disclosure of political contributions. If disclosure is not made, that donation is deemed to be anonymous. Sections 207 and 226 indicate that any person who knowingly is party to, acquiesces in, or assents to a scheme to make donations contrary to the requirements, would also be guilty of or party to this offence.

Given that fact, will the Premier explain if, when his party received cheques from supporters and their identity is not disclosed, whether he is informing them that what they are doing

contravenes The Election Act and is in fact illegal? Is this his interpretation of the Act?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, it does not contravene the Act. Our lawyers are better than your lawyers, and our lawyers say we're complying with the law. Our auditors are better than your auditors, and our auditors say we are complying with the law.

But work with us . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, order. I'm going to ask all members of the House to — I was having — to come to order — I was having difficulty hearing the question being put, and I am finding it extremely difficult to hear the answer being provided right now. Order. And I will ask for all members of the House to allow both the question to be put and the answer to be provided in a way that all members can hear.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — In part, Mr. Minister, it's my own fault. When the member shouts at me, I can't resist the impulse to shout back at him . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the hon. minister knows that it's not appropriate to be commenting — order, order — the hon. minister knows it is not appropriate to be commenting on the Speaker's ruling. I'll ask him to proceed directly to his answer.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, our lawyers are better than their lawyers; our lawyers say we're in complete compliance with the law. Our auditors are better than their auditors; our auditors say we are in full compliance with the law. Our accountants are better than their accountants; our accountants say we are in full compliance with the law. We are.

Let us work together, though, now that we have this opportunity, with the issue having the public profile it has, and the Act being in front of us in this House, to improve the law to ensure that there could be no question as to its proper interpretation, and we can go on with life.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, let's deal with the violations that have occurred over the past couple of decades first, and then we'll change the laws. But in the meantime, let's take care of the violations that occurred. They're saying that their lawyers are better than our lawyers, and I'm not going to dispute either way. But if that's . . . we feel our lawyers are better, so then we let a judge decide who is right and who is wrong.

When the NDP came to power, they promised to be much better than the previous Conservative government, but time has demonstrated they're clearly not. In fact as time goes on we can draw similarities. In recent days we have learned both parties have slush funds. Both channelled their money

through constituency associations in contravention of The Election Act, and both are now feeling the heat as a result, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously one of the reasons the NDP government is refusing to order a judicial inquiry into this issue is because of the fact that their political existence hinges on keeping the Conservatives afloat so as to ensure the right-wing vote is split.

Will the Premier explain if it is for this reason or because he knows his party has contravened The Election Act, that he is so steadfast in refusing to order a judicial inquiry into this important issue?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, this is really getting weird. This gets weirder and weirder. Let's hope this session ends pretty soon before these people spin right off into space on this issue.

Let me say once again to the member, we will not call a judicial inquiry to determine what is a question of the interpretation of the existing Act. No one has ever done that in the history of the world. It would be irresponsible government, and it's irresponsible for the opposition to keep pressing such a ludicrous proposition. Maybe the answer here, talking about the soundness of the legal advice, was captured by the legal adviser to the opposition. And I'll quote from the *Star-Phoenix* of today:

Party lawyer Garrett Wilson told the news conference the Liberals weren't in violation of the act because the dollars involved are substantially smaller. The Liberals received \$32,312 from their ridings over the past six years.

Maybe that's why they're getting the kind of legal advice they're getting.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — We're prepared to be checked out the same as the other two parties, Mr. Speaker. We welcome, we demand, it.

A column by Murray Mandryk in today's edition of the *Leader-Post* poses some very legitimate questions, Mr. Speaker. He indicates, and rightly so, that at issue here are anonymous donations in the thousands and tens of thousands of dollars from big businesses and perhaps big unions.

The people of Saskatchewan deserve to know whether undisclosed contributors benefited from or influenced government decisions. Providing one such example, and I quote Mr. Mandryk:

Were any of the seven companies that most benefited from SaskPower's rate "restructuring" last year . . . contributors to Tommy Douglas House Inc.? Were any of the donors insurance companies that have received guaranteed . . . loans? Hog Processors? Oil companies now being allowed more foreign ownerships?

And, Mr. Speaker, this is the point. The people of Saskatchewan don't know the answers to these questions. Mr. Premier, the buck stops with you. This is serious. Will you call for a judicial inquiry?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, the present . . . if they will

pipe down across the aisle, they'll hear my answer. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now once again the Speaker is having difficulty being able to hear the answer being provided by the hon. minister, and I will ask for the members of the opposition to allow him to be heard in providing his answer.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, the present laws respecting election financing were passed by this legislature in, I believe, 1974. The Liberal opposition of the day voted against those provisions of the Act, arguing to the effect that they would in effect destroy democracy as we know it. They were opposed to it. We passed the law anyway. And the law has served us very well over the years. We have complied with it, and we continue to comply with it.

Now if Murray Mandryk and if you agree that some improvement to that law, some tightening of that law, is now appropriate, we stand prepared to do it. And we have supplied you with a proposed House amendment that will put beyond doubt the requirement of political parties to report contributions.

In the meantime, read my lips again; we have complied with The Elections Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Underground Fuel Tanks

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Environment minister. Mr. Minister, you recently received a letter from service station owners, Linda and Rick Becker of Kindersley. Their business has been devastated by your unreasonable underground fuel tank policies. The Beckers estimate that these regulations have cost them a quarter of a million dollars between the replacement costs and the 84 days their business was forced to close the doors to remove the tanks.

The Beckers write:

As small-business owners in Saskatchewan, we are employers, and we contribute significantly to the economy. But you are creating a burden which we alone must bear, and it is driving us out of business.

Mr. Minister, have you responded to this letter yet? What do you say to people like the Beckers who are being driven out of business by your unfair fuel tank policies?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. Certainly the issue of underground fuel tanks which are old and leaking and becoming a problem in the environment is an issue.

I have not specifically responded to the case raised by the hon. member, but I can assure you that the department and this government is working cooperatively with the service station owners, rural communities, and other areas where there are problems with underground fuel tanks. We are

keeping the expenses involved as low as possible and using monitoring where we can.

But when there's a serious problem affecting a community, which there are many communities in the province affected by leaking underground tanks, we do have to take action and we are working cooperatively as we can to resolve these problems.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, service station owners are only asking to be treated fairly. They say both levels of government got a lot of revenue through the gas tax, but only the service station owner is being stuck with the bill for gas tank removals. And in some cases, like the Beckers, the bill can run as high as a quarter of a million dollars. And you simply can't absorb that kind of a hit in a small town gas station, Mr. Minister.

I understand you are meeting next week with the Environmental Fairness Association. I understand that they've been asking you for some type of cost-sharing compensation package to pay for the removal of these underground storage tanks.

What will you be saying to them next week, Mr. Minister? And will you consider cooperating and providing compensation for service station owners?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I wish to inform the member, and he'll be happy to know, that we do have a liability committee looking at who should pay for cleaning up of orphan sites, leaking underground tanks, and other contaminated sites.

We have industry, we have the small service station owners, we have Environmental Fairness Association, lending institutions, oil companies, SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), Federation of Independent Business. We have this stakeholder group dealing with this very complex problem.

It is not always fair for the last person owning a site to pick up the bill, and we are trying to resolve that. And we will, within the next few months, have a solution and a formula to deal with these problems.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Highway Maintenance

Mr. Goohsen: — And now for the rest of the story, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Highways.

Mr. Minister, our MLAs have been receiving numerous letters complaining about the terrible conditions of Saskatchewan highways, and I'm sure you have received many of these similar letters. The other day I got one such letter from a 10-year-old boy, Gavett Stokke, of Consul, Saskatchewan. He writes, and I quote:

I ride the school bus 125 kilometres a day. I travel on Highway 21 and 13. The highway is so rough and bumpy, I sure wish they could be fixed. Could you please come and take a look at them?

Mr. Minister, I have personally promised Garret that I will come out and look at these highways with him in the next couple of weeks, as soon as we're finished in the Assembly. Would you care to join me, Mr. Minister? Will you come out and look at the terrible highways that Garret and all of the students of Saskatchewan are having to ride on in their school buses throughout this terrible time of our highway deterioration? Will you come along?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I want to thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. As he will be aware, the crews are out now and they're doing an excellent job in repairing the damage to the highways this spring. The crews were delayed a bit, Mr. Speaker, because, as you know, we had some wet weather this spring — not unlike the farmers couldn't get to their fields, we couldn't get to our roads.

But I want to say to the member, when he talks to that young fellow, that 10-year-old young fellow in his community, I'm wondering if he is going to tell the young fellow that they spent and spent and spent during the 1980s, creating a huge debt for the province of Saskatchewan on the shoulders of every one of us, and that if we would in fact have the \$850 million that we spend in interest, we certainly could do a better job on roads and a faster job on repairing roads, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crown Prosecutor Investigation

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, last October Crown prosecutor Randy Kirkham was suspended with pay over allegations of jury tampering in the Robert Latimer case. That investigation, Mr. Minister, is still under way.

Mr. Minister, we have now learned that Mr. Kirkham has already collected nearly \$50,000 in pay while suspended. Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why is this investigation taking so long?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question. This matter is undergoing internal review within the department, and as it is such a case, I won't comment any further. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Autism Therapy

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of this House an issue involving six-year-old Hans Johnson of Regina who is autistic. This young boy's parents were recently made aware of the fact that specialized therapy for his condition is not offered — not offered — in this province, but is offered in

Manitoba.

They contacted Saskatchewan Health to determine if it will cover the costs of this therapy, given the fact that this is beyond their financial means. Mr. Speaker, this therapy program is scheduled to begin tomorrow, but the Department of Health has yet to reply to this financial request.

Will the Minister of Health stand in this House today and clear the way for young Hans Johnson to receive proper treatment for his disability?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, any time someone wants to get some kind of medical treatment out of province, that treatment has to be reviewed by a committee to see if the treatment would be viable and effective. That process is presently going on in the Department of Health.

There is an out-of-province mental health treatment review committee which will have completed its review and communicate its recommendations to the department either today or tomorrow. And the department or the referring practitioner will contact the family before the end of this week to indicate whether this is a program that should properly and appropriately be covered by Saskatchewan Health.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, obviously the minister isn't hearing the problem. It has to be dealt with today. No sense shuffling it off for another day, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Speaker, when Brian Johnson and Lisa Simmermon, the parents of Hans, made their application for assistance from Saskatchewan Health, they were told to first provide scientific proof that such therapy would benefit their son, something they have done.

However it is absurd that parents who merely want proper medical therapy for their son are subjected to providing scientific proof and must justify treatment for a family member.

Mr. Speaker, this six-year-old boy does not deserve more than others. He merely wants the same as others — the opportunity to attend school, to grow up in the care of his parents, not in the province. Mr. Minister . . . or will the minister explain why he is standing in the way of the therapy for Hans, therapy that may allow this six-year-old boy a greater chance at a better life. But you must act today, Mr. Minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as I attempted to explain to the member in my last answer, if someone wishes to get out-of-province treatment we have a duty and responsibility to the taxpayers and to the person who would be sent for that treatment to examine whether the person can be effectively treated in the province or whether there is effective treatment and viable treatment with respect to which someone is making a request.

That process is under way. I've said to the member that the family will be notified by the end of the week. That is the appropriate process, Mr. Speaker, and the appropriate process will be adhered to.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gaming Addictions

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, studies from across the country show that gambling addictions are growing at an alarming rate. This is especially true when it comes to VLTs (video lottery terminal), the crack cocaine of gambling. And this is affecting our society.

In fact a study in Monday's *Toronto Star* show that Manitobans lost more on gambling last year than they spent on grocery staples. Mr. Speaker, we know that this government has embraced gaming and VLTs as a miraculous cash cow. Will the Gaming minister please tell me what this government is doing to ensure that Saskatchewan people do not become a society that spends more on gambling than on food?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the member for the question. I want to first say to the member opposite that in Saskatchewan we have developed, through our gaming regulations, some of the most stringent gaming regulations across the country, and have, in your reference to the VLT programs, specifically have capped two years ago the number of VLTs that we have in this province. At the same time have implemented through the Department of Health, a variety of different programs that are there to assist communities and individuals to the tune of about \$1.5 million.

And if you were to compare that amount that we provide in Saskatchewan compared to any other community or province across the country, you'll find that that figure far exceeds any other. So when you look at the fashion in which we've dealt with gaming in this province you'll see that we have, as I've indicated to you, some of the best regulations and provided some of the best treatment programs anywhere in the country.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is ample evidence that this problem is growing at an alarming rate here, as I've stated before. This government continues to pat itself on the back because it has introduced gaming into provincial revenues. On budget day the Finance minister told us that her government estimates that \$118.4 million will come in from VLTs alone this year. This is well above the 75 million that they had estimated in the 1994-95 budget.

Madam Minister, or Mr. Minister, with gambling revenues sky-rocketing, are you prepared to channel more funding into addiction counselling and prevention, or are you going to wait until children are going hungry because their parents have a serious gambling problem?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I want to first indicate to the member that when we developed VLTs in this province, we were asked to do that by the hospitality industry in a major way. The hospitality industry in Saskatchewan came to the government and said we have a serious problem with the hoteliers across Saskatchewan, particularly in rural Saskatchewan, which members opposite have been standing up and indicating that this government hasn't been providing enough service to.

The development of VLTs in Saskatchewan is specifically around the issue of ensuring that we have a strong hospitality industry in rural Saskatchewan, and a large part of that funding that we receive goes directly into rural Saskatchewan.

The member standing up in the House a couple of days ago talked about bus tours coming into Saskatchewan — requirements for further bus tours to be coming into Saskatchewan — for gaming. I don't think you can have it both ways. You can't be asking for more activity in Saskatchewan for gaming and then make the case that we shouldn't have gaming activity in this province.

And I say to the member opposite that we have in this province the strongest, best regulated gaming regulations anywhere in Canada. And yes we have, as you've indicated, as I indicated earlier, some of the strongest health care services for people with addictions anywhere in the country, and continue to provide those services in the future if those needs become greater.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Agricultural Biotechnology International Conference

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, "A Quick Dip in the Gene Pool", molecular markers, DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) fingerprinting, Global Ag Biotech Association luncheon, reviewing regulatory regime seminars — are all a warm up to an amazing conference in Saskatoon this week. I rise in the House, Mr. Speaker, today to bring members' attention to the ABIC conference in Saskatoon.

ABIC is the agricultural biotechnology international conference. This is truly an international event which is twice as large as predicted, with 600 delegates and presenters from over 30 countries around the world. Sask Ag and Food is a proud partner in sponsoring this conference. It is fitting that this conference is being held in Saskatchewan, and particularly in Saskatoon, because Saskatoon is recognized as one of the six centres of excellence for ag biotech in the world. This conference is one of the many reasons I proclaimed June as Agricultural Science Month.

Agricultural sciences such as biotechnology are vital to Saskatchewan's economic development and growth. In Saskatchewan, biotech product sales are estimated at \$35 million in 1995, and it is estimated by the year 2000 we'll be over 300 million.

During the conference yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I released a report

called Agriculture and Food, *Agriculture Biotechnology Report*. This report is the product of several months of information gathering, and surveying over 70 industry and public sector leaders in ag biotech.

Today I would like to thank the department people who put their work into this report. I would like to thank the people who provided their wisdom, the 70 people who they interviewed. And this exercise is very much focused on four ag biotech disciplines. They are micropropagation and tissue culturing, animal health and vaccines, microbials or soil nutrient systems, molecular genetics or plant breeding. Specific recommendations are presented in the report for each topic.

The survey results suggest that Sask Ag and Food should increase its level of involvement in some aspects of the biotech industry. The actions or roles of the industry as identified are the increase of biotech expertise and industry interaction within Sask Ag and Food, the provision of long-term basic research funding, the provision of a business environment conducive to industrial development, the continuation of support and funding for Ag-West Biotech, and the development and implementation of a strategic plan or vision for the agriculture biotechnology industry in Saskatchewan.

These recommendations will be considered as the future role of Sask Ag and Food as the ag biotech industry is developed. Over the next four years the department hopes to invest 19 million in support of the ag and food innovation fund. We continue to see the industry with a bright and productive future here in Saskatchewan and look forward to being part of the next phase of the industry's development. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, biotechnology, particularly in agriculture, is extremely important in Saskatchewan, not only because of the dollars and the jobs it creates within Saskatchewan but also because of the research results that result from that activity within Saskatchewan.

I think particularly of the herbicide-resistant canolas that have now come out in the market, because the gene manipulation that has taken place will provide an excellent opportunity for prosperity for the canola producers of this province. It would allow us to enhance our export activities around the world, particularly now that the Japanese are giving serious consideration to allowing it into their food supply.

I think we can commend the government for encouraging this particular type of research within the province of Saskatchewan. But I think part of that commendation also has to go to those entrepreneurs and those scientists who do the research, who have the ideas, and wish to pursue those dreams and those goals, Mr. Speaker.

So I believe that both sides, the Government of Saskatchewan and the industry itself, deserve the praise that

they receive for their innovation. And I would hope that the government would not put any roadblocks into the road of this type of technology in Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day, I'd like permission to make a brief personal statement to the legislature.

Leave granted.

(1430)

STATEMENT BY A MEMBER

Resignation of MLA for North Battleford

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm taking my life back, from the political arena that is. Earlier today, I tendered my resignation as Minister of Labour and as the member of the legislature for North Battleford. Both resignations will take effect on July 1.

I come to this decision only after much discussions and soul searching with my family, and we have decided collectively to leave the political arena. I announce this decision with mixed emotion because, while I look forward to new opportunities, I know I'll miss the colleagues in the legislature, and my staff in Regina and also in North Battleford, the people of Saskatchewan, and in particular the people of the Battlefords.

Today I have some heartfelt thank-you's that I wish to pass on. I first off thank my constituents in the Battlefords, whom I've had the pleasure of representing for 14 or more of the last 16 years. Their trust and encouragement have sustained me through what is relatively a long career in public service.

I say thank you to the Saskatchewan New Democratic Party. They've been a wonderful extended family.

And I thank the public employees of Saskatchewan who serve this province with distinction and dedication, and I ask their forgiveness, I guess, in times that I have challenged them.

I thank my colleagues in the legislature on all sides of the Assembly. Public service is an honour that we all share and a responsibility I know we strive to live up to, as difficult as it may be sometimes.

I'd like to say thank you to my staff in Regina and North Battleford for their loyalty and their dedication.

I also want to thank my family for the hardships that they face which only really a politician's family can ever really understand.

And I want to thank the oil and gas industry and the mining industry for their support while I was a member of cabinet, and the labour community for working with me, and truly working with me, during my time as Minister of Labour.

And a special thanks to you, Premier, for giving me the privilege to serve as a minister of the Crown. It was certainly a remarkable

experience that I'll never forget. I hope that you all have that experience some time but not too soon, Premier.

I believe that in Saskatchewan we are far ahead of most other jurisdictions in Canada in preparing Saskatchewan citizens to meet the challenges of the new century with a good deal of confidence and optimism as we go into these very challenging times. I'd like to thank the comments from the member from Melfort and the member from Cypress Hills this afternoon. I've enjoyed the debate with all of you over the years.

I would want to say, before I sit down, how much I've appreciated the Legislative Assembly and the respect that I have for the role of the legislature in our province in terms of our British parliamentary system and the changes that have come about in it over the years.

I've always viewed the Assembly as being something very basic. It's a place where we deal with budgets. It's a place where we deal with laws, and finally it's a place that preserves democracy, and the latter likely being the most important of all. And I think we all need to strive continually to upgrade the respect for this institution and the politicians who serve within it.

Although in the public eye, politicians may be at their lowest that I've experienced since I entered politics, but I've always been proud to be a politician. I think we should all be proud to be politicians and continue to serve the people of Saskatchewan.

So as I ride off into the sunset of my political career, I have no regrets, and I wish my colleagues well. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 77

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 77 — An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act** be now read a second time.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to finally have a chance to rise on Bill 77 which amends The Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act.

Mr. Speaker, as the government opposite has come to learn in the last year or so, there's no more tender subject of discussion in our province than that having to do with the medical care of our citizens. As this government has learned, the single issue in Saskatchewan that stirs the most emotion, the most anger, the most fear, among our people is any issue having to do with health care.

On the face of it, Mr. Speaker, Bill 77 doesn't appear to have much to do with the actual care the people of the province receive from their doctors. On the face of it, all this Bill seems to do is extend the power to deduct Saskatchewan Medical Association fees from payments to doctors operating outside of the fee-for-service system. Why would the average person on the street care?

Well, Mr. Minister, while the person on the street may not notice a difference in their care with this Bill itself, I believe Bill 77 is another step in the recognition that the method in which we pay our doctors is going to come under increasing scrutiny over the next while. I don't think there's any question at all that the government opposite intends at some point to make this their next big issue when it comes to health care. And perhaps, Mr. Speaker, it's an issue that should be looked at, just as the government must look at all areas to make savings in our health care system in order to provide the services people need most.

Up to this point the government has had it all wrong, Mr. Speaker. They've closed dozens of rural hospitals. They've curtailed services at those that remain open. Beds are being closed at provincially funded nursing homes throughout the province. Yet with all the heartache and with all the fear that's been created in rural areas, what's been the result?

Well, Mr. Speaker, other than gutting health care throughout rural Saskatchewan, really not much, because certainly the government has not saved any money through these cuts. We're spending as much as we ever were, even in the days when all people throughout the province had access to adequate health care.

Mr. Speaker, obviously when you're dealing with something as large and as important as our health care system, reforms are going to be necessary from time to time. As this government likes to say, you've got to look to the future to decide what kind of health care system you're going to need to suit our province years down the road. At least that's what the members over there like to say. How they act is totally opposite, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government has tackled a very difficult, very difficult issue of health care in a very ham-handed and clumsy way. Despite their pompous, arrogant talk, they had no plan heading into this much-vaulted health reform package back in 1992. And, Mr. Speaker, four years later I'm quite confident saying they still have no plan.

At least no plan beyond their own political fortunes. And that seems to be the name of the game for the last couple of years; how best to take the political heat off the Premier, the Minister of Health, and all the members opposite.

This government's health reform package has not been about fixing the problems that may exist in our current system. Instead it's been about blaming those problems on others. If we are to believe their rhetoric, the problems in the health care system can't be blamed on the government, Mr. Speaker, or so they would have us believe. The problem is the federal government, which has cut us back all of one and a half per cent; or the problem is the Tories who got us into debt in the first place; or the problem is with the district health boards who have supposedly been given all this

power to make decisions.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, this last point is a complete farce, since health districts are still under the control of this government and this minister. Everyone sees it; everyone knows it. Another farce, Mr. Speaker, has been this government's commitment to a complete and full consultation with the people of Saskatchewan.

Not only over issues concerning health care, but almost any issue we've seen come up in this legislature, every time we see this government patting itself on the back for consulting affected parties. We soon hear that those affected parties who complain, that they haven't been consulted at all. Instead we've been told what the government plans to do. End of story. End of discussion.

I think this tendency to talk at the people, instead of with the people, says a lot about what's gone wrong with health care. Somewhere along the line the government stopped listening, if indeed they were ever listening to begin with.

In studying Bill 77, I caution the government that this has got to stop. While Bill 77 does not overtly say the government plans to change the way it pays physicians in Saskatchewan, I believe the underlying intention is there. In the government's own explanatory notes the government states that one of the main reasons for this Bill is continuing movement away from paying doctors on a fee-for-service basis. It recognizes the growing movement towards a new method of payment, be it salaries or capitation — sometimes known as rostering.

Mr. Speaker, before the government makes any formal decision to adopt any of these methods for our province, I urge the Minister of Health and all members on that side of the House to consult fully with both the citizens of our province and with the physicians who practise here. I think it would be arrogant in the extreme for any of us to dismiss any of these methods out of hand, just as it would be arrogant and unwise to fully endorse these various methods of payment without a full study into the matter, and again, a full round of consultation with the stakeholders — both those who receive the service and those who provide it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not a doctor. I don't know what physicians in Saskatchewan or physicians anywhere for that matter think about a movement away from payment for service whereby they receive a fee each and every time a patient visits their office. But I think they want to have some input in any discussion regarding these issues.

Because these are very important questions that must be answered before we adopt a new policy. Is it wise to continue with the current method of payment? Are there better ways to pay our doctors? I don't know, and I don't think the members opposite know either. Because like I say, none of us can form a firm, educated opinion on this matter until we speak to affected parties.

And before we make any giant leap towards capitation, I believe we have to think about what such a move would do

in helping or hindering Saskatchewan to attract doctors here. I think there's prime concern, because coming from rural Saskatchewan I know there is a problem in many of our small communities to attract qualified physicians.

And before we change our method of payment completely, I would like to see some studies done to see how such a change would affect our smaller communities in this regard. Because if it comes to a point where these communities cannot get doctors to come to their towns because doctors won't come to Saskatchewan at all, then we'll all be in worse trouble than we are now.

Still, Mr. Speaker, I believe we must study all options in this area and see what their benefits and their drawbacks would be.

I read with interest in November two articles in *The Globe and Mail* that dealt with the specific issue of capitation. As well, a comprehensive study on the issue was recently conducted by the American Medical Association. Both the articles and the study seem to come to the conclusion that yes, there is a potential for savings under a capitation system.

In fact some say that a capitation system whereby physicians are paid a fixed monthly fee per patient, regardless of the number of times they see that patient in the month, could save up to 60 per cent over the current system and provide equivalent service. At least in the United States, where the study was conducted, that seems to be true.

(1445)

Obviously our system is much different than that south of the border, so we must do our own studies to see what the savings, if any, would be here. Before we jump head first into such a change, I maintain we must weigh all the benefits and all the drawbacks. Because, Mr. Speaker, if it's all about cost savings, we are putting a significant proportion of our population at risk for fiscal matters only.

Our focus must always be to continue to be providing the best possible care for our residents. If economics begin to dictate all our decisions, we are failing the people who need us most — the sick and the elderly. But I think it's a discussion worth having, Mr. Speaker, because right now we're living in the worst of both worlds.

Decisions being made about our health care throughout our province more often than not these days are being made only with economics in mind. Health districts have seen their funding squeezed dry by this government; therefore they've had to make decisions based on what they can afford, not on what their people need. At the same time that these decisions are being made due to economics instead of care, what's happened? Well, Mr. Speaker, like I said previously, the government hasn't saved a plug nickel, not a dime, not a penny.

The question on many people's minds is this. Where is the money going? Because it certainly isn't going to provide our people with the best quality of health care, the health care they deserve.

That leads them to conclude that too much is being spent on administration; too much is falling into the sinkhole of

government waste, which unfortunately is still a gaping chasm — as gaping under the NDP as it was under the Tories. The government must begin at long last to look at its own house before any other controversial changes are undertaken.

The people have been through enough, Mr. Speaker. I don't think they can stand any more. The government must look to reducing costs other than those to direct medical services. So yes, by all means study the methods in which we pay our doctors. Study, consult, whatever. If there is a better way, it is your duty to bring the alternatives to the floor of this Assembly to be fully and thoughtfully debated.

But before you begin fingering another part of our medical system as the main culprit in the waste in the system, you must look at your own operation to ensure that the money that is supposed to be used to keep our citizens well, to heal their wounds and soothe their pains, in fact is going in that direction.

There's no more room to blame others, Mr. Speaker. Health care is too important to be used as a political football. This government blames all others for its woes, but has yet to look into the mirror even once. And, Mr. Speaker, when they finally look in that mirror, I don't believe they're going to like what they see. They're going to see what residents throughout the province have been seeing for some time now. They're going to see a group of politicians who put their own political welfare above the welfare of those who elected them.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think they know that's where the real reforms are going to have to take place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise and just make a few comments regarding The Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act, Bill No. 77.

I think, Mr. Speaker, as we've been hearing, this Bill certainly has some serious connotations that we must take into consideration. And just recently, in the last two weeks, we raised the question with the minister on behalf of the SMA (Saskatchewan Medical Association) about the fact that the government, before they pursue any new changes in how doctors are billed or paid for services, that they take the time to talk with the profession.

And, Mr. Speaker, as I was coming in yesterday I happened to note there was a survey taken in the province of Manitoba — a survey which indicated that there were, I believe, something like 110 more doctors in the cities of Brandon and Winnipeg than were necessary. And one would wonder why a government or why the public would be concerned.

It would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that if there are more doctors — if more people choose to perform medicine or to set up a practice in a large community — than what you would say would be the normal or the ability of the community to support that number of physicians, it would just be a detriment to the physicians themselves as there

would be more to share the number of dollars that were available.

And I would think that when it comes to the consumer, they would look upon that as a good thing. And it surprises me that a report would be given that would even cause a government to consider the fact of laying down some guidelines as to where physicians practise.

We heard in B.C. (British Columbia) what happened when the province of B.C. tried to regulate where doctors practise. And I think what we're going to find here in this province, Mr. Speaker, and the concern that really arises out of this, if we start coming up with some new ways of financing or new ways of paying doctors for their services or bringing in new fees or whatever, Mr. Speaker . . . There are many communities who are struggling today to attract physicians to their communities. And a change without consulting with the Saskatchewan Medical Association and working with them and through them might be to the detriment of health care in this province.

And so I find, Mr. Speaker, that before this Bill is passed, it would seem to me that maybe the government should give more thought to this piece of legislation. They should maybe take the time to sit down with the SMA and discuss it more fully. They should maybe take the time to talk with other stakeholders and, Mr. Speaker, come up with a solution.

I can understand where the government is coming from and I can understand where the public are coming from when they look at the cost of providing health care and providing health services and the feeling that we need to set a limit, if you will, or draw the line.

But so far, Mr. Speaker, when I look at what has been done over the past five years and the arguments as to why we've cut 52 hospitals or why we've cut so many care homes or care home beds or acute care beds, taken them out of service in this province, or why we've cut down service to level 1 and 2 and restricted it to level 3 and 4 — and even more so now to the level 4 area — why communities like Swift Current are losing their seniors' care home and the city of Regina is looking at closure of the Plains Health Centre when we see a centre that has provided a very effective service to the people of Saskatchewan . . .

And many of these questions are being asked and one has to ask, with all the reductions in services, why we haven't seen a significant cut in the expenditures in health care. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we are spending more today than we did in 1991 before all the cuts came in. And I guess I'm concerned that we would all of a sudden now blame the federal government or we blame the former Devine government or we're blaming the health district boards for decisions that are being made. Now we're looking at doctors as scapegoats, or patients.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, I believe the government should take some time to review this piece of legislation, and rather than rushing ahead with it, Mr. Speaker, they should indeed take the time to debate it and to sit down with all the stakeholders so that when a final decision has arrived, everyone is agreeable with it; and it is a decision that will have a real effect, have a real benefit, will continue with just the top-notch health care system and services that we've bragged about in this province, and that all the stakeholders will be more

than pleased with what they have done through cooperation, working together, rather than the heavy hand of government coming down through a piece of legislation.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I feel that in that respect it would be important, and it's important, that we allow the debate to take place, and I believe that we should adjourn debate and allow that process to continue. Thank you. I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 114

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 114 — An Act respecting the Establishment of a Crown Foundation for District Health Boards and their Affiliates** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one would hope when we have these debates in this House we could concentrate on what's in the Bill, what it does, and how it affects the Saskatchewan public. In this forum of democracy we would like to concentrate on these Bills to see what's in them and what should be changed, if any.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the farther we get into the session the more one thing strikes me about many of these Bills that come before us. There is nothing in them. And yes, there are lots of words and terms and definitions, but the real intent of these Bills to a great extent are simply not there. And therefore they cannot be debated fully and properly.

Too often, Mr. Speaker, we come up against something in these Bills called regulations. Regulations are being used to a greater and greater extent to run this government and this province. And I think the people of Saskatchewan are being cheated by this government's growing reliance on regulations.

Because, Mr. Speaker, it comes to the point where many of these Bills we debate in this supposedly democratic forum are simply meaningless because of the wide-ranging subjects that are left to be determined in the regulations. In other words, determined by cabinet, away from this House, away from the media, and away from the public. I don't think there are any clearer example of this growing problem than it is in Bill 114.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we do get an idea of what the government wants to do with this legislation. As my colleagues have stated, we do have many problems with the Bill itself or what there is of it. We have major difficulty with this government's turning towards charity to fund health care when the government knows full well it's really their responsibility.

However, as my colleagues and the official opposition have and will continue to speak on this, I want to speak for a few minutes today on what is not in the Bill, on what will be determined behind closed doors in regulations. Basically,

Mr. Speaker, almost anything that tells how this government-appointed Crown foundation will work or how it will operate, will be determined in these regulations.

I think it's just unacceptable to ask this House to vote on a Bill like this when we have no indication how this foundation will operate. Simply unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. Let's start with the powers of this new level of bureaucracy called Crown foundations.

Mr. Speaker, in most legislation, the power of such bodies are spelled out or at least in some detail. Not so here. The only hint of what powers this government-appointed body will have comes in clause 6, which gives the Crown foundation all of the capacity, rights, powers, and privileges of a natural person. Not clear enough for you. Okay, then it goes just a little further.

It says the Lieutenant Governor in Council, or the cabinet to you and me, can make regulations restricting and regulating the powers of the foundation. Mr. Speaker, this means that the Crown foundation can virtually do anything it wants, subject only to its powers being cut down or regulated by the cabinet.

My question is, why this is being done? Maybe I'm overly suspicious of a tricky bunch opposite. But I want some answers as to why this government didn't follow the normal course of action and list the powers this body will have. What's the need for giving it such wide-ranging powers? Why can't it be given specific powers, and why can't these powers be spelled out now for the people of Saskatchewan?

It appears the government wants to either hide something or wants to have virtual control over this body, just as it has virtual control over everything else having to do with health care in our province, despite what it says about local representation on district health boards. I mean isn't that precisely what health care was supposed to do? Weren't decisions regarding our health supposed to be moved closer to the communities? Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps that's what we were told by this government at that time.

But as we've come to learn, this is a government that chooses not to live up to its commitments time after time after time. This is a government that has a hidden agenda behind every move it makes. Health reform wasn't about making the health care system more responsive to local concerns; it was about deflecting the blame from the politics we see across from us; it was about giving them a convenient way of passing off blame and on to others. That's what health reform was all about, Mr. Speaker.

And as it turns out, the government wants even more power now. This Bill and others we're debating this session is proof enough of that. This isn't a government that wants to be more democratic, and this is a government that wants all of the power concentrated in the minister's office. And leaving so much up to regulations is a perfect way to do just that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there is little reason to wonder why the Health minister and the government opposite want to hide from their own responsibility, their decisions and their choices.

It's little wonder, Mr. Speaker, why the members opposite want all the power to regulate and control health care in our province, and yet at the same time, shield themselves from all the blame.

For a few moments, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell this House of the things that are facing health care in my constituency — problems this government is responsible for. Like many constituencies in Saskatchewan, mine has a high senior population. And also like most areas, there has been a lack of planning by the government to meet the growing needs of our seniors; 45 per cent of the population in my riding is over the age of 40. Making the problem worse is the loss of funding of level 1 and 2 care homes in my riding.

This in turn has brought about an increased need for private care homes which this government has heartily endorsed. These homes are often too costly for many seniors in need of long-term care. Therefore they have nowhere to turn or they must move miles away from their own communities to seek the care they need and the government does nothing but blame others and at the same time cuts funding.

(1500)

Furthermore, the closure of existing long-term facilities can be devastating to seniors, Mr. Speaker. Many of these people have been unable to leave these facilities for years. Forcing them out to move somewhere else can be traumatic and it can be life threatening.

Yet the government does nothing but blame others. Mr. Speaker, at the hospital in Kamsack there are only two RNs (registered nurse) on each shift who are responsible for 18 acute care patients, emergency patients, and who must oversee long-term care patients. Obviously this decreases the quality of care they can provide, and further cuts are predicted. Yet the government does nothing but blame others.

Mr. Speaker, one positive thing that has happened in my constituency is the new health centre in Langenburg. This facility was funded by local taxation over a period of time as well as from monies from the hospital that was closed by this government in 1992. It was the people of Langenburg who built this facility, Mr. Speaker. The government deserves and will get no credit from the people who live there. The only thing this government deserves credit for is the absolute abandonment of health care in our province.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial government's lack of commitment to health care in rural Saskatchewan is truly scary, especially for the people who live there. And try as they might to pass on that responsibility for the mess they have created . . . is not going to work. Yes, Mr. Speaker, this government tries to blame all their troubles in the world on federal offloading, that whopping 1.5 per cent cut of our provincial budget received. That amount of course, has been more than made up for in gambling revenue. But we never hear the government talk about that. We only hear them passing responsibility off to others because, Mr. Speaker, that has been their game plan. As if we need any lessons from this government on the evils of offloading, Mr. Speaker — this is a government that's turned offloading into an art form.

As a former reeve, I've seen the devastation this

government's budget cuts have had firsthand, and they're not through yet, Mr. Speaker. Next year, municipalities will receive a 25 per cent cut in their funding — 25 per cent, Mr. Speaker. There's no telling what other vital services will have to be cut in rural areas to make up for this tremendous hit on top of the ones we've already received since 1991.

So, Mr. Speaker, forgive me if I don't cry out for this bunch across from us who have only had to absorb one and a half per cent, and forgive the people for not shedding any tears over the tales of woes spun by this government. The people know the government are still in complete control.

They know that they control the purse-strings, the lifeblood of our health care system. And now the people can see the government is still asserting control with this ludicrous power that is left to the regulations in which the cabinet controls behind closed doors.

Mr. Speaker, the Crown foundation Bill acknowledges the generous nature of all Saskatchewan residents. Many of the facilities in Saskatchewan today are in place through the giving of local residents. Mr. Speaker, the Plains hospital to a great degree is an example of this.

But, Mr. Speaker, this Bill leaves the power of the Crown foundation wide open. There's not even a guarantee in the Bill telling donors they can direct their contributions to specific areas or to specific projects. All the Bill states is that the Crown foundation must only consider direction of the donors.

Well isn't that nice, Mr. Speaker? They will consider the requests of those donating their money. But of course they're not bound to follow these directions. In other words, once again, the people really have no say.

And if these donors don't like how the Crown foundation has spent their money, what can they do? Well of course, nothing, Mr. Speaker. The government has made sure of this by restricting the right of the public to sue the Crown foundation or the minister who appoints and controls. It is the money the people have so generously donated is misused or squandered by this government . . . appointed government board.

Mr. Speaker, I think the members opposite forgot sometimes that we do live in a democracy. They do not control everything in this province. Well at least not yet, Mr. Speaker. This is not Communist Russia, Mr. Speaker, and this government works for the people, not the other way around.

The NDP continue to government with unprecedented arrogance and contempt for the public. Mr. Speaker, this has got to stop — and it will stop, Mr. Speaker. It'll stop in 1999 when the people of Saskatchewan tell the crew opposite they are tired of not being listened to and not being heard. They're soon going to tell them that they've heard enough of political trickery and their deceitful way of running this province.

The people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, deserve better. And they will get better, Mr. Speaker, but only once we rid ourselves of the government opposite.

Mr. Speaker, our province should not be governed through

regulation or government decree. It should be governed honestly and openly in this House. That's the way our democratic system . . . whether the NDP likes it or not. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to stand in this Assembly as well and raise some concerns that we have regarding the Bill before us, Bill No. 114, the Crown foundations Act.

Mr. Speaker, our caucus has a number of serious concerns about this Bill. Mr. Speaker, we feel that this Bill is a typical example of Trojan Horse legislation. On the surface, it seems harmless. But on closer examination, it is quite dangerous.

We all know of the challenges that face health care in the province today. Likewise we all know that the province had to show some fiscal restraint in this field, as in all others. Of course, Mr. Speaker, our caucus has maintained in the past and shall continue to maintain that this government has badly mishandled their responsibility regarding health care in this province over the past five years.

The cuts, Mr. Speaker, that have been made have been sloppy, we feel, and we feel they've been cruel. We feel especially that they've left our rural areas with a truly second-class health care system, which the minister says is not second class but is still a top-notch health care system.

The Premier, Mr. Speaker, loves to talk about how we should avoid a two-tier health system, but he has already created one. Ask anyone in this province, especially outside of the two major centres — a system for urban areas and another for rural people that is vastly inferior.

In spite of these many assaults by this government, the people of rural Saskatchewan have rallied behind their local health care services. And, Mr. Speaker, I've had the privilege of attending meetings over the past month where people have gathered together with some major concerns about health care and about the services in their communities.

And what I have found interesting, Mr. Speaker, is while the individuals have gathered and have concerns, they haven't specifically just complained all the time but they've offered alternatives and they have asked — whether it's the district board or whether it happens to be a representative from the Department of Health — they've asked, if we did this, would that be possible and would it be a means with which we can continue to provide a level of service that would meet the needs of our community? So I think Saskatchewan residents certainly have shown and will continue to show they have ideas and they have ways, innovative ways, of meeting the need out there.

It is indeed inspiring to see the number of people who made significant donations and bequests in their wills to their local health services. This is the kind of community spirit for which this province is justly famous. And I think, Mr. Speaker, we're all well aware of that. We look at Telemiracle and we look at the funds that have been raised for people, needy people, across this province, and how people have

been helped, whether young or old. And in many cases it's because of physical ailments or problems or health care needs.

However, regarding this Bill, in this instance, as always, the NDP are clearly afraid of anything that resembles local independence. It is truly ironic to hear the Health minister say, either you believe in local decision making or you do not.

This government has never shown any belief in the decision-making powers of local people. Only grudgingly did they hold elections for the district health boards. And, Mr. Speaker, we raised that question day after day in this Assembly back in the '92-93 period about electing boards rather than continually appointing them.

And while we give credit for opening up election to eight board members, we still feel, Mr. Speaker, that it's time the government opened up total elections of district boards and allowed them and gave them the autonomy that they have been requiring and asking for, in view of the fact that they seem to get blamed for everything. Even then, they made sufficient provisions for appointed board members to ensure that the provincial government will maintain strict control over their decisions. This, Mr. Speaker, is the NDP way: big, central government, Big Brother constantly hanging over the shoulders of the taxpayers telling them what is and isn't good for them.

And we see this once again in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, a board entirely appointed by the provincial government, centralizing all charitable donations to health districts and distributing this money as they see fit.

It is obvious what the NDP is afraid of. If the Health minister decides to close a hospital, who are the local people to say that they want to keep it open even if they can put up the money? The government clearly does not want local people challenging their authority or their decisions. As I said earlier, this Bill is a Trojan Horse. On the surface, it closely resembles the foundations that serve universities. One, Mr. Speaker, cannot argue with the reasoning that people who donate to health services should be entitled to tax credits for that donation. And this Bill will help them do that. We recognize that, Mr. Speaker.

However there is a significant difference between this Bill and the university foundation Bills. Each of the universities has their own foundation. If people give to the University of Saskatchewan, they can feel confident that their money will go towards projects at that institution and will not be diverted to pay down the debt of the University of Regina.

This Bill gives no such assurance to people who donate to health services however. All their money goes into one big pot. And only the Big Brother, provincial government, can say where it will go.

I find it truly offensive, Mr. Speaker, that this Bill would presume to take away the rights of individuals to donate money to and only to the health institution of their choice. Instead the Bill states that the new board, appointed by the minister, will take into consideration the wishes of the donor but will not be bound by them. I find this, Mr. Speaker, to be completely unacceptable.

I know the excuse given by the minister is that sometimes people

may donate money to something that doesn't make sense, such as an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) clinic in Arcola, and certainly there is none there. However in such cases, if it is money that is willed by an individual, the executor of the will or one of the family members should be able to decide what the secondary choice would be. After all, Mr. Speaker, I believe that person knows the deceased more than anyone else.

If the donator is not deceased, don't you think that that person should be able to decide where their own money is to go? And I've just received a couple of letters from individuals asking about the funds that they've donated to hospitals, and is it really used in the hospitals they donate to? Well under this piece of legislation, it really will not allow it to be. While the minister says it may be, it can be, this appointed board will have the choice and the ability to determine whether it is. It certainly shouldn't be decided by a group of strangers who are getting paid from the interest made on donations.

And this is another thing that offends me, and I think will offend a lot of people, which is another point of contention.

The minister was happy to tell reporters that the new level of bureaucracy he is creating won't cost the government money because board members will be paid out of interest gained on donations. Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, I don't think that's much to be proud of. I'm not sure that every individual who donates or would donate to this foundation would be pleased to know that the interest their money is generating all of a sudden is going not to the services that they're providing the funding for, but is going to pay for another appointed board member.

That's why, as I said it earlier in the Assembly at question period, I think, Mr. Speaker, we do have boards across this province duly elected, some appointed, who can handle and manage that money and have a better idea of how that money should be used in their own community or in their own district. When people donate money to their local hospital, that means all of the money, including interest, should go straight to the facility. It shouldn't be wasted on paying unneeded and unnecessary bureaucrats.

Mr. Minister, I would have no problem with this Bill if it set up separate district foundations or required the provincial foundation to respect the wishes of donators. As it stands, I repeat that I find this Bill offensive, a money grab by the province, and an insult to the rights of charitable people.

I urge the government to give the people what they want and need; I urge the government to enhance tax credit for those who are donating but to get rid of the new board this Bill creates and get rid of not listening to where people want their money to go.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I find, in view of the fact that many people have concerns that . . . ongoing concerns with the issues that are being raised out there, I find it imperative that at this time we adjourn debate on this Bill. I move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

(1515)

Bill No. 76

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 76 — An Act to amend The Health Districts Act, to repeal The Union Hospital Act and The Lloydminster Hospital Act, 1948 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as my colleague, the hon. member from Cypress Hills, pointed out the other day, this Health minister has made a great show out of being the defender of local autonomy of district health boards. He was even so bold as to challenge opposition members the other day by saying that either you believe in local decision making or you do not.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, shows just how hollow those words are. Time and again through this session, whenever our caucus has tried to hold the minister accountable for the cruel consequences of his government's health policies, he has tried to turn the focus on to the district health boards.

Mr. Speaker, when we brought to the public's attention that the government's health cut-backs were going to throw seniors out into the street in Swift Current, he said, don't look at me. It was the district health board that made that decision. When we sought his intervention into the closure of the hospitals and acute care beds in Pangman, Estevan, and other communities, the minister threw up his hands and said, it's not my responsibility, go ask the district health boards.

When we charged him with breaking his commitment to sustain services at the Radville Marian hospital he said, sorry, all I can say is that district health boards have to live with their own budgets.

From the beginning, Mr. Speaker, of the government's reform of the health care system, our caucus has realized that the district health boards were being set up to do nothing but act as scapegoats for the NDP's destruction of the province's health care system.

This Bill serves as a further proof that while the Health minister is more than happy to leave the districts with the blame, he is not prepared to give them any authority.

I find it quite curious that the government should bring in this legislation at this time. Through the past three years they have not found it necessary to bring in the changes they are proposing today. Why should they bring them in today? Of course for most of the past three years they had the luxury of appointing the boards of the health districts. There was scarcely any need to have rigid control over local decisions if you could keep control over the local decision makers by appointing them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, after years of delaying the election of these boards, the government is finally faced with district health boards which are at least partially elected and responsive to the needs of

local people. Well we can't have that now, can we, Mr. Speaker? We can't have local people making their own decisions. After all, in the minds of the members opposite, the NDP always know what is best for the people, so we can't either have a situation where the people might overrule the decisions of the Big Brother government in Regina.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill makes three distinct attacks on the autonomy of district health boards. First it restricts still further the ability of boards to acquire or dispose of property without first seeking the approval of the minister.

Secondly, it requires that all health districts adopt a particular philosophy and a particular approach to service delivery which has already been predetermined for them by the Department of Health. To make sure that the boards toe the line on these policies, the minister is giving himself the ability to overrule any by-laws passed by the districts.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this Bill extends, to a still more ridiculous degree, the power of the minister to impose public administrators on districts and their affiliates for any reason he sees fit.

In summary, the power to control its expenditures, the power to set policies, the power to impose direct authority on boards and affiliates — for a man who continually says that he has no desire to influence local health decisions — the minister, Mr. Speaker, sure seems to be asking for a lot of power over them.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill strikes at the very heart of the issue of local autonomy. Those of us both in and out of this Assembly who are concerned about the delivery of health care have fought too long and hard to ensure that local views are respected. We cannot allow this legislation to pass unchallenged. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to join with our caucus in defeating this Bill. Thank you.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, every day I rise in this Assembly, along with my colleagues, to present petitions on behalf of concerned citizens with respect to the closure of the Plains Health Centre. By the end of this session, we will have presented petitions totalling over 70,000 names. What this government must remember is that there's probably a family represented by each name on that petition. That means thousands and thousands of people were so upset with the announcement that the Plains Health Centre was closing that they were actually moved to do something about it. They decided to voice their protest at rallies and by signing these precious petitions.

The key thing this government must remember is that these petitions are vital to the democratic process. Their sheer amount is a powerful sign that the government should re-examine its decision to direct the closure of the Plains Health Centre.

And make no mistake. I know the government is behind the decision to close this valuable health facility. It was pushing for the closure of the Plains under the guise of the old health board. But its threats have become even more blatant with

the mandate it has outlined for the new health board. It maintains its control of this supposedly independent body by maintaining a high percentage of appointees. Even though the Health minister stands in this Assembly day after day spouting the same rhetoric — that his government is not responsible for spreading misery across Saskatchewan with the closure of over 52 hospitals and millions and millions of dollars in health service cuts — I know he is ultimately responsible.

Unfortunately Bill No. 76, The Health Districts Amendment Act, will give the government even more control over the decision making of the health boards. What is even more disturbing about provisions within Bill No. 76 is that it will provide mechanisms that will allow the government to emasculate the current health boards and any meagre input municipalities may have by withholding funding, in order to protest board decisions. It's astonishing to discover that Bill No. 76 will actually provide the government with more tools to stifle the democratic process when it is already accomplishing that goal under the current health care structure.

The Save the Plains Committee published a letter outlining its concerns in Regina's *Leader-Post*. Health board member, Darlene Sterling, revealed the methods the government was using to force the new board into upholding the plans to close the Plains. These strong-arm tactics included a letter from the government stating, and I quote:

The Saskatchewan Health department informed the Regina District Health Board that if they deviated from the course already established, they would have to repay the \$5 million advanced last year to meet their deficit. The health board would not then get help with the deficit that is surely going to be incurred this year as well. With a gun like that to its head, what choice was left.

How can the minister honestly say the decision-making power is in the hands of the board when board members are virtually being blackmailed with the threat of funding cuts. The people of Saskatchewan know that the government ultimately controls the purse-strings for district health boards.

The Minister of Health is not fooling anyone when he tries to deflect responsibility for the massive health care cuts that are stripping away services and health care jobs across Saskatchewan.

I know this government has not allowed the Regina District Health Board careful consideration of the decision to close the Plains Health Centre. The closure is not based on any sound economic analysis. The sad fact is that there has never been an independent benefit/cost study done.

Thousands of the names on the petitions that I help present to this House every day are from rural Saskatchewan. In fact about 70 per cent of people who are treated at the Plains Health Centre are from rural communities. The Plains has always been fairly accessible to them because of its location on the outskirts of Regina.

Plans to close the centre and to disperse those services to the Pasqua and the General will make it harder on rural patients. Many people will have to travel through downtown Regina to get to the Pasqua and the General. They could waste valuable time that in cases of emergency may mean the difference between life and

death.

The plan to close the Plains is moving forward even though there are still serious questions about whether or not the two remaining hospitals will be able to handle the volume of patients who need emergency care. The General Hospital is already overcrowded and there is barely any room for expansion at the Pasqua. That means more long lines in the waiting room for non-emergency service and even longer waiting-lists for non-emergency surgery.

There is already an extensive waiting-list for people waiting for open heart surgery. I have to wonder if the Health minister has considered the possibility that many more people needing such surgery may seek it outside of Saskatchewan because they can't endure a long waiting-list for that serious of an operation. Of course the Plains not only treats rural patients, but many emergency patients from within Regina are currently rushed to the Plains.

Accessibility from within the city is also a concern if the Plains is closed. It's estimated that an ambulance trip from north Regina to the General in rush hour traffic could take at least a half an hour. In most of those emergency cases, the first 20 minutes after a serious accident usually determines if a victim will survive or die.

Many people I have spoken to are not just concerned about the accessibility to health care services after the Plains closes, but they are gravely concerned about the quality of health care services that will be provided.

Regina and Saskatoon have approximately the same health care load. But Regina is already having difficulty attracting specialists. In fact Regina already has 100 less specialists than Saskatoon. People across Saskatchewan are wondering if closing Regina's only trauma centre will discourage even more specialists from choosing Regina as their workplace.

The number of health care professionals currently employed at the Plains Health Centre are also worried that their jobs are in jeopardy. They are not assured by the Health minister's statements that he does not anticipate a lot of job loss at the Plains as a result of the closure. I am sure the minister knows that there will in fact be a significant number of job losses.

As recently as last week, the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses revealed that the future amalgamation of union bargaining units could result in widespread job bumping within the two remaining hospitals. SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses) says dozens of people are already losing their jobs, so that by the time the Plains is slated for closure in 1998, there probably won't be any jobs left to cut.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees is quoted in the June 7 edition of the *Leader-Post* as saying:

Since the announced closure of the Plains in 1993, the health district has eliminated 285 jobs at the city's three hospitals; 130 of those job cuts were at the Plains.

Keeping along the same line of thought, it logically follows that if there are hundreds less health care professionals employed by the Regina health care district, the quality of care for the same patient load will be negatively affected. The target number of closures of acute care beds, as outlined in the Towards 2000 report proposed by the Regina health board, is to have just 734 acute care beds to accommodate the acute care patient load in Regina and area.

According to the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, the current number of acute care beds in Regina is only 735. Can the Health minister tell me if that means that there will only be one more acute care bed closure between now and 1998? I don't believe he can, Mr. Speaker.

(1530)

The prospect of a further number of acute care bed closures becomes even more frightening when you consider the sheer population numbers just in Regina, which now tops 180,000 people. Studies show that in the near future, Regina's population will jump by at least 50,000.

A veteran economist with the University of Regina outlined his concern in a letter to the editor in the August 29 edition of the *Leader-Post*. John Boan pointed out that there can be no value placed on having more than two hospitals in the event of a natural disaster such as a tornado. He writes:

If one hospital got knocked out, there would be two left to cope with the multiple injuries from such a disaster. It's a small point. But insurance is not taken out because one knows there's going to be an accident, but in case there is one.

He goes on to point out that the Regina District Health Board claims that closing the Plains Health Centre will save about \$10 million a year, yet plans to upgrade the Pasqua and General hospitals will cost at least \$90 million plus interest. Mr. Boan correctly points out that it will be the Saskatchewan taxpayers who will be footing the bill for the interest on the construction bill.

It will be the Saskatchewan taxpayers who will foot the bill for any future renovations to the Plains Health Centre building to make it more marketable. I cannot believe that a multimillion dollar decision that will affect the future health care of thousands of Saskatchewan people will be left untouched by this government.

I would like the Minister of Health to explain how, exactly, his wonderful health care reform remains to be a democratic process when he and his government continue to turn a blind eye to the thousands of names on the petitions we have presented concerning the closure of the Plains.

I would like him to explain why this government continues to ignore the dozens and dozens of questions by economists and other health care experts about the feasibility of the plan to shut down the Plains. I would like to know how the minister and this government can ignore the dozens of letters to Saskatchewan papers about the Plains impending closure.

I would like to know how the minister can ignore the thousands of people who are turning out for rallies and meetings across the province to show their disgust and concern about massive health

care cuts.

I would also like to know why the minister feels the government needs additional authority and power that will be provided within The Health Districts Amendment Act, when day after day the minister stands in this House and claims he and the government are ultimately not responsible for health care cuts that are sweeping across Saskatchewan.

Bill No. 76 will place further limits on health boards. And it will also take away municipalities' right to legally challenge decisions made by the district health boards. This legislation will provide several mechanisms for the government to stifle any protests Saskatchewan people may have about district health board decisions.

The undisputable facts, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are many health board members in Regina and across Saskatchewan are appointed by this government. Secondly, this government directs how much funding the district health board gets. And the current Regina Health Board members were already threatened with even more drastic funding cuts if they did not uphold the plan to close the Plains. And thirdly, the government continues to exercise control over district health boards across Saskatchewan, including the Regina board.

The provincial government was elected by and must answer to the people. It's time this government and the health board minister change their ways and actually start living up to that responsibility.

I want to know why the government feels that it needs all the extra authority that it will attain with the passage of Bill No. 76. Why does it need more unchecked power when it is already managing to force its overall plan for massive health cuts down the throats of district board members and the people of Saskatchewan?

If this NDP government truly aims to uphold the basic principles of democracy, it would start listening to all the thousands of people who are attending the health care meetings and rallies; it would take note of the 70,000 people who have signed petitions about the closure of the Plains.

If this government truly believed in exercising democracy, it would put future health care cuts on hold, including re-examining the closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Finally, if this government truly believes in the principles of democracy, it would not try to ram through Bill No. 76. The Saskatchewan people will not forget the callous disregard the government and the Health minister has shown them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and join in the debate on Bill 76, an Act to amend The Health Districts Act and other Acts. Mr. Speaker, or . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a pleasure to join this debate not because I support the legislation but because I take a great pride in speaking up for my constituents. I take great pride in speaking up for the many other people in this province who

have been deprived of a voice because their representative is muzzled on health care by the NDP caucus.

Mr. Speaker, I look over at the members opposite and it saddens me to think of the many thousands of people who don't have a voice in this House because their MLA doesn't have the courage to speak out.

I think of the thousands in Regina South who are upset about the cuts in the Regina Health District and the closure of the Plains Health Centre. If not for the opposition, their voices would be silent because the member from Regina South puts politics ahead of the public service.

We have a controversial Bill before us today and yet I know the voice of the member from Swift Current will also be silent. No one will hear him tell how this Bill will affect his many constituents who will be without health care jobs. No one will hear him speak out about his constituents who must move at an advanced age in what should otherwise have been their happy golden years.

Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am proud to join this debate only so I can help give a voice to the many people who are deeply concerned about this government's misdirected approach to health care. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think of the other members who will not so much as whisper a word to represent their constituents on important Bills in issues dealing with health care.

The member from Weyburn-Big Muddy will also undoubtedly be silent. I guess dreams of summer holidays and caucus discipline come before the need to fight for a valued service that forms the very fabric of what it means to be a resident of this province and what makes us all proud to be Canadians.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while protests and lay-offs continue impacting upon health care in the Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency, much the same will be happening with the member from Estevan. The health facilities in his district will also continue to feel the pinch of health cuts. The very community he represents will be left with no voice as he'll not find the courage within himself to speak his mind and stand up on this important issue for the people who elected him.

The member from Estevan's silence will not surprise me, however, as he's told his own local paper that his caucus colleagues will expend every effort to rid themselves of dissenting views. Last summer for instance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member from Estevan was quoted saying that he once had an opinion on the Plains Hospital but he had had it brainwashed out of him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that was a tongue-in-cheek remark but the member's statement and his behaviour with key issues like the Bill before us today, speak volumes about how this government deals with health care. There's no tolerance over on the government benches for any dissenters, even if they just want to speak up for their own constituents. There's no tolerance whatsoever allowed on this issue.

I'm sure many of those members go home on the weekend and are given such a hard time about their silence on the health care issue and on the Bills that impact on it, like this one, that many wonder

whether being an MLA is worth it after all. I'm sure a number of these members I've mentioned sit back and say to themselves, is it worth it? Why don't I just cross the floor and join the opposition where I could have a chance to speak up?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when Bills like this one come to the floor of this House I'm sure some members have thoughts like that, but then they look at how the Premier keeps calling the member from Wood River a turncoat, and they think to themselves, could I put up with that kind of constant attack on my character?

They toy with these thoughts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They weigh the benefits of keeping silent against those of keeping promises to themselves and their constituents to speak up and try and be good public servants and representatives.

So far, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Premier is winning this battle with his catcalls of turncoat, and the result is silence. I take great pleasure in speaking for the many thousands of constituents whose voices have been drowned out by this sort of politicking by certain members opposite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to this Bill today, not only do I take great pleasure in speaking for the constituents of Swift Current, Regina South, Weyburn-Big Muddy, and Estevan, but I also take pleasure in speaking for the constituents of the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

That member, Mr. Speaker, was a respected man in his community, and I would say considered by most to be a nice, personable gentlemen. But his own constituents are wondering why he's so silent while the health system in his community crumbles. They wondered in the past how he could be so strongly opposed to casinos in his own city but sit as a member of a government that's forcing five casinos on the province while saddling his own community with dozens of VLTs — the crack cocaine of gambling.

An important Bill like the one before us today will impose some controversial changes on our health system, but yet no word will be heard from the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow. Health care in his seat is in the midst of a crisis that is not likely to go away and yet a member who was elected to deal with matters like these refuses to uphold the interests of the people that placed their trust in him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for months now I've attempted to give people a voice. Health care and the changes occurring to the health system through Bills like the one before us are issues of paramount importance to the people of this province.

We sit in this House and often wonder why people become so cynical about the legislative process and about their politicians. I say wonder no more; the evidence of why people are so cynical is all around us. We have cabinet ministers getting convicted; we have secret trusts; we have political parties that steal public money and then avoid paying it back.

Worst of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people send members

they believe they can trust, to this House to represent their interests. They invest much of their time and tax dollars and above all, faith in these individuals. For their reward, the public that continues to go to the polls receives elected officials who have no interest in representing the concerns of the average person. They have no interest in speaking up on Bills like the one before this House today. They have no interest in fighting for their constituents on issues like health care unless they can see some place to score safe political points.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is what politics has brought us to. For many communities this sort of behaviour threatens to rob them of necessary medical facilities. And that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is shameful.

To the members I've mentioned, the member from Swift Current, the member from Estevan, the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy, the member from Regina South, and lastly, the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow, I would like to offer some advice. This is an important Bill and health issues are important to your communities. So I suggest you speak to them, and when doing so, speak up for your constituents. I realize, however, that given these members are on the government side, they fear speaking up on these issues and they fear being punished for doing so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for some of these members I hold some hope, while others, like the member from Regina South who seems totally immersed in the life of politics — he has no interest in the lives of his constituents — one has to remain sceptical.

(1545)

To these members I say that when you go home on the weekends and face ridicule from your constituents for not speaking out, remember these events are just trials in your life like any other. They're trials and difficulties like others you face. The objective isn't to avoid every trial in life; the objective is to gain from them. Every trial and difficulty we face as human beings should give us strength. And strength can give you the courage to speak out for what the members know is right. Courage, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we all know, produces hope, and hope never disappoints.

So I say to the members opposite, Mr. Deputy Speaker, gain from the ridicule you now suffer for your silence on these important issues like the legislation before us. Use these experiences to find the courage within yourselves to stand up to your colleagues and speak out on the disastrous situation facing health care in this province. Stand up and speak out. By doing so, you'll give your constituents hope that their health system will not be destroyed by a government that's strayed from its support for quality care in Saskatchewan.

The voices of these members could not only give their constituents hope, but it will not disappoint these members either. They will learn that they can fight for what's good and right and they will be able to handle whatever scorn or punishment that caucus over there chooses to place on them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, until those members and others like them choose to speak up, as I said before, I will be pleased to ensure that the concerns of their constituents continue to be heard.

The Bill before us is controversial. It's just one more in another long line of controversial measures this government imposed on our health system. The basic problem with the Bill, and with the original legislation it attempts to amend, is a simple one, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When The Health Districts Act was introduced, this government told everyone that it wanted to empower communities, that it wanted to reform the health system so that it would be both community and wellness oriented. The members opposite told everyone that they'd have a better health system in the end.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, four years have almost passed now and we know what this is all about. Today we look at our health system and we find that it isn't really community oriented; it isn't really wellness oriented either. All people really see when they view the health system is the hand of government slashing services and ensuring that there really is just less health care to go around.

That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is simply what's wrong with this Bill. While the government might wish to tell everyone this Bill will clarify housekeeping matters and further empower districts and affiliate agencies, the end result will be anything but. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is sad, but that's been the way this government's handled health care reform since it began the process back in 1992.

Back then people might have toyed with the argument and the public relations fluff that health reform was about wellness and empowering communities. But today, people see it for what it really is. Health reform is simply about Bills like this that rob control from our communities, and it's simply about leaving Saskatchewan residents with less and less health care. The more this government imposes its cuts on the health system, the more readily people in this province realize that this government is simply feeding them a line about community and about wellness.

The more cuts this government makes to the health system, the more tainted and distant are the memories of CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) icons who, unlike the members opposite, were admittedly committed to quality health care. While the members opposite try and pass legislation like this, they continue to remind themselves and everyone else of people like Woodrow Lloyd and T.C. Douglas.

The Minister of Health loves to pull up a picture of a former Liberal leader kicking the door of this very Chamber to protest the introduction of medicare. That being said, the Liberal Party has steadfastly supported medicare for years and will continue to do so. Liberals extended medicare beyond this province to the country as a whole, and that is the proud achievement of Lester Pearson.

It's such an important achievement that many Canadians now identify medicare as an integral part of our Canadian identity. Since that time Liberals such as Monique Bégin worked to defend the state of our health system from innumerable pressures, Despite burgeoning debts left by the previous Mulroney administration, medicare remains a cornerstone of public policy across this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while the members opposite pull out their icons in debate such as this, they do so in order to forget what they're really doing to our medicare system. They do it to try and forget that maybe the changes they impose, like those requested in this Bill, are sometimes not a good idea. They also do it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to wipe from their memories the faces of the many people who have fallen between the cracks in this health care system.

A month or so ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I gave the Minister of Health a picture, seeing as he's so fond of looking at photographs. While he dwells on his icons and pictures of Liberal leaders protesting health changes, he forgot the face of one such man who fell between the cracks.

The photograph I showed the minister was one of Mr. Jack Nicholson who fell off his toilet while in the care of home care workers. After that, he was not admitted to the hospital for three days. On the day he was finally admitted, his family had to go right to the CEO (chief executive officer) of the district to beg that he be given a bed. Two weeks later, this gentleman died of his fall. His daughter remains deeply disappointed that no proper investigation was ever done. She would sue, but she has no money to do so. Her aims in doing so would not be to get money but to ensure that this sort of thing never happens again, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mention this sad and regrettable story because it shows what this government's real intents are behind legislation like that before us. Since health care reform was imposed on us by this government, the Minister of Health and his colleagues have had one common goal. That goal is to ensure that they avoid taking responsibility for the mess they continue to make of our health system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the incident dealing with Mr. Nicholson is just one such example. What we see here is a government that's refusing to act when it knows it should. The members of the cabinet are always happy to hire an impartial investigator to help clear a fellow cabinet minister of wrongdoing, but when an 84-year-old man dies while in the care of health workers the minister is happy to leave the investigation of the matter with self-interested parties.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister is happy to leave the matter in the hands of SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) and the district health board because he wants to distance his government from what one of his senior staff in his department so callously term as fallen sparrows.

This Bill is no different, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The government wants to make amendments which will alter The Health Districts Act so it's easier for the government to pass responsibility to other agencies. Whether it's a matter of people falling through cracks or people suffering because of health care cuts, the government's game plan doesn't change. The members opposite just keep the course and continue to do anything necessary to avoid taking responsibility for their actions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Bill before us is another attempt by this government to distance itself from responsibility for its decisions

with respect to health care. It's an example of how government is taking powers away from communities for health care while claiming to be promoting community involvement and local control.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while there are a few house-cleaning amendments in this Bill, for the most part it's simply just another clever disguise from the private school kids opposite who think they know better than the rest of us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I begin explaining how this government is wrenching control away from communities, I would like to comment on the principles of community involvement and accountability.

Since my election to office I've spoken to a wide variety of people about health care. Many of these people are the constituents of the seemingly mute members I referred to earlier. Some of the individuals that I spoke to lamented the loss of representation afforded under our previous system of health boards. Mr. Deputy Speaker, under that old system everything was clear and understandable. Everyone knew there were lots of health boards in the province and everyone knew that members of those boards worked for free. In addition, and most importantly, everyone knew that the provincial government was responsible for health care funding to the numerous boards around the province.

The other thing which people lament is the loss of a more natural form of representation in favour of a more contrived one, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When we used to have union hospital boards in this province, they generally were made up of representatives from each municipality, while participating urban communities were often given more representatives than their less populated rural counterparts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government took a system where people had over 400 boards that were voluntary in nature and reduced them to 30 boards. That's a huge change, and when this was done, the people of Saskatchewan lost a natural form of representation.

When you have many small boards that are voluntary in nature, the issues which they deal with tended to be more manageable. Today we have boards that deal with budgets in excess of \$50 million, and in the case of Regina and Saskatoon, in excess of \$250 million.

With some 8 to 12 members many board members find it difficult to get as involved in the issues facing their health districts as their predecessors once did on boards for individual facilities.

What results is a situation where management provides the reports at meetings and government officials and administrators wield greater influence against the health board members in districts across the province.

There are other things which people lament beyond the loss of small local boards where board members had ample time to deal with every issue.

People regret that they often no longer know who their board members are. In the past, one likely knew who sat on the board for local facilities because they were so numerous they often were our friends or our neighbours.

Today we may only have eight members on a board. They are supposed to represent people just like the old volunteer boards, but there are so few of them often covering wide areas that people have little if any idea who their board members is, let alone how to get a hold of him or them.

What's been accomplished by all of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Well the government says they've reduced administration but I know many people disagree. Getting rid of 400 volunteer health boards in favour of 30 paid boards is no cost saving. While the boards of separate institutions were removed, the administrators at individual facilities that used to once have their own boards often remained.

This prompts many residents of this province to lament that the removal of hundreds of unpaid boards in favour of health districts simply serve to rob people of their say rather than save anyone any money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, community involvement has always been a part of our health system, and despite what the members opposite say, it played a greater role before they decided to allegedly fix our health care system than it does today. Not only was community involvement more important then but the people who made key decisions could be more readily held accountable.

People knew that small boards were responsible for some matters, and if they had a problem with their decisions, they knew where to find them. More importantly, they knew that the province was responsible for funding the facilities. If there were cuts or major program changes, everyone knew it was the province who was responsible.

Today we see the government returning to The Health Districts Act and trying to amend that piece of legislation, among others. They're trying to change the very piece of legislation that did so much harm to community involvement, and even more to damage accountability.

The members opposite want to amend this legislation, but as I said earlier, the game plan remains the same. There will be no change to the plan that continues to see them try and pin blame for their cuts on local people. There'll be no change in their plan to take away the key controls that make community involvement both real and possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill further damages the key principles of community involvement and control, and it harms accountability in a number of ways.

Instead of further damaging this, the government should take steps to improve The Health Districts Act. The members opposite, who are so mute all of the time on important or controversial issues, between their dark thoughts about bailing out on their NDP colleagues, are probably asking themselves what I mean.

(1600)

Mr. Speaker, instead of passing this piece of legislation and wasting so much effort, this government could have at least made some improvements to the way our district health boards are set up.

The greatest problem with the district boards continues to be the fact that only some of them are elected. And that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is offensive. If this government wants to show it has any commitment to community involvement, then that is the first thing that they should be doing. Get rid of the appointees to the districts and turn yourselves over to the judgement of the voters.

What we see in this Bill is the government making some clarifications as to how board members are appointed. They now must gather 10 signatures from people in the district in order to be eligible for an appointment. That's hardly a significant requirement. In some areas of the province, elected board members gathered thousands of votes, while others won seats on the health boards with the approval of just a few hundred people. Regardless of the number, these people put themselves and their name on the line for their peers to judge and they gained the approval they were looking for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the Canadian way. It's the belief that democracy is always right. The people are always right. And no one, not even the private school kids over there, should be afraid to face the court of public opinion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we shouldn't be surprised that the members are failing to make any changes to The Health Districts Act that would end the system where we have appointments that, while paid less, are still appointments, just like all those Senators that the NDP so vehemently abhor.

I say we shouldn't be surprised, because in the last year the members opposite in the government have done everything they could do to avoid accountability. They've done everything they could to take control of the local health system without, at the same time, accepting any blame. I'll admit they're masters at this, but the game is up. People will no longer tolerate this sort of politicking which is killing our health system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, after the last election, the members opposite cleverly avoided a sitting of this House. They didn't want to sit because they didn't want to be in the legislature while they were forcing the Regina Health District to close the Plains hospital. They didn't want to be sitting when they finally informed the people of Moose Jaw/Thunder Creek that they were breaking their promise of separate funding for the geriatric unit. They didn't want to be sitting when dozens of people deeply opposed to their handling of health care were elected to health boards all across the province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we shouldn't be surprised that this Bill offers little, if any, means for improving community involvement in health care, and little if any improvement in the way this government is held accountable. If one needs any further examples to prove my point, all you have to do is

look at the report which laid out the election rules for health boards in the province — the report done by Garf Stevenson, who, although an intelligent person, is an NDP partisan.

It's not surprising that the report avoided having the elections when the municipal elections were held. Not only did this cost us more money but it also allowed the provincial government to call an election and get re-elected before health board votes elected many individuals strongly opposed to this government's health reforms.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, amending the election process would do much to improve community involvement, but the system of 30 health boards will still leave the government pretty free to try and avoid accountability.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the worst things that happened to the health system since reform is this government's callous and thoughtless attempts to pit different communities and different groups against one another. When boards represented just one facility and their funding came from the provincial government, there was no possibility that local people could be pitted against one another. If funds were not available, it was clear the province was to blame.

Today boards represent a great number of facilities and several if not dozens of communities. This government cuts funding to a board, and then the minister lowers himself and says that each and every one of his funding problems is simply a dispute between a board and an affiliate board. If it's not that, well then it's a dispute between communities and the local health board, or between medical staff and the local health board. At the end of the day, the minister will never admit that he's to blame or that his funding cuts are at the source of the problem.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm deeply disappointed at the minister's lack of courage. That lack of courage is evident in this Bill, and it's been evident all session long. I say the minister lacks courage because instead of taking responsibility for his decisions, he wants to pit people in a community against one another simply to avoid taking the blame for decisions that he's made and that he is responsible for making.

That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, isn't political leadership. In fact I would say it's the most shameful and lowest version of politics that I've ever witnessed. Not only does the minister insist on swinging in the dirt and pitting community against community with his divide and conquer mentality, but he has a double standard when it comes to federal funding for health care.

See, the minister never wants to take responsibility for his cuts, but he insists to no end that the federal government takes the blame for funding reductions. We all recognize that the federal government reduced funding for education, health care, and social services. But the amounts that the minister claims they reduced them by are grossly inflated from the truth. The minister claims that these expenditures were reduced by 114 million. But if one looks at the revenue page in the budget address, they'll soon discover that the real figure is only 41 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he not only can't get his figures straight, but he insists upon continuing his course of blaming. It's always someone else's fault.

If the minister wants to continue taking this shameful approach to his job, he should be warned that claiming that something else is always . . . that something is always someone else's fault won't help solve any of the problems he and his government are creating.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we can see exactly how we've come to this point where the government is trying to pass legislation like this Bill before us. Everything wrong with health care is always someone else's fault. The members opposite want this Bill before us passed so they can continue to dodge blame but retain control of the health system.

They want to continue to direct it in such a way that their damaging needs-based funding system removes precious rural monies to urban areas. They want to continue to their chosen course of taking away health services. But most importantly, they want to be able to blame someone else for everything they've done.

Instead of amending this legislation, this government could and should have been devoting time to issues like needs-based funding. When the members were elected back in 1991, they knew what base of support they wanted to cultivate. What they wanted was to keep seats that were urban and they could care less about those constituencies in rural areas.

As a consequence, we shouldn't be surprised that they devised a funding system that would be set up to permanently inflict cuts on rural health districts in this province. The money reaped from those cuts would be moved to the cities. Not only is this system unfair, unfair to people in rural areas, but its presence does the most to rob these health districts of a real sense of community involvement.

At the same time this government uses this funding formula to shield itself from blame. Instead of devoting itself to improving the system, we find the government here just rejigging the rules a little more in this Bill before us today to further harm community involvement and to avoid blame. As I said before, their shameful game plan remains the same.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are five health districts whose borders cover part of the Thunder Creek constituency. All but the Regina Health District lost money, thanks to the government's needs-based funding formula.

While the Regina district didn't lose money, it continues to be saddled with a large deficit which recently forced the closure of another long-term care home and more staff lay-offs. While government reaps windfall revenues from VLTs and resources and uses them to keep its balance sheet okay, district health boards are left carrying debt loads that they cannot manage.

Needs-based funding and this Bill share a common problem, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That problem is that they both allow government to wrench true decision-making powers away from boards. By quietly and indirectly taking away local

involvement in funding decisions to boards, the government also attempts to avoid taking the blame for unpopular decisions. The needs-based funding formula is probably this government's most sinister creation when it comes to finding ways to avoid taking blame.

Under this funding formula, if a district loses patients to a larger, say urban district, then in subsequent years it will continue to lose money to that other district. This forces many less populated rural districts to lay off staff and cut services.

Because they cut services in one year, more people find they have to travel to larger districts to get the services they need. The result is that in the following year the same rural district has to make more cuts. If that wasn't enough, because these districts must make cuts, and often significant ones at that, they begin finding it increasingly difficult to attract doctors.

The Moose Jaw/Thunder Creek District, for example, experienced a major turnover in doctors and it continues to have considerable difficulty retaining them. Thanks to a needs-based funding, this district will be facing even more difficulty attracting doctors. With problems like this the vicious cycle just continues, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Without doctors, people just continue to hop in the car and travel to the larger urban centres to get care. When doctors rapidly turn over in a community, some people feel reluctant to commit to seeing a doctor who will be heading off to British Columbia or the U.S. (United States) in search of greener pastures in a year or two. You can hardly blame the doctors in this situation, nor the patients. It's, as usual, the provincial government who should accept responsibility for this situation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, instead of making positive improvements in this Bill, this government is just attempting to perpetuate the system. All they want to do is just keep the system in place. This government should be changing the needs-based funding formula but it would rather just make amendments like those in this Bill. So their plan to evade responsibility and rob communities of a role in their health system continues.

As far as this government's concerned, the needs-based funding system is just perfect. It's ideal for them because it's a permanent system that annually imposes cuts on rural areas. Because it's automatic, the minister can more readily try and avoid taking responsibility. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is shameful, and for that reason alone this Bill, if not the government's entire health policy, is deserving of no one's support.

Instead of making improvements to our health system, this government is doing everything it can to avoid responsibility while wrenching more control from local communities.

Another disturbing aspect of this Bill involves the disqualification of members from district boards. It appears that the government can disqualify members from boards if they are no longer a resident within the district. What concerns me about this change to the Act is the fact that it does not apply to the appointed members but only to the elected members.

I know that Saskatoon and Regina's district board may always

have to have a member from outside of those districts who might be appointed, but this aspect of health boards doesn't require that a double standard between elected and appointed members be written into the Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, why should elected members of district health boards have to face a rule which appointed board members don't have to face? That's certainly unfair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it's par for the course from the members opposite. From reading this aspect of the Bill, I think a more suitable alternative would have been to apply this section to all members, then specifically exclude the couple of members on the Regina and Saskatoon boards who are not residents of their districts.

To specifically write into the law that these two members or so were excluded from the residency requirement would allow one to avoid a double standard. By doing so, one could still ensure that rural communities that use the base hospitals in these districts are represented on those boards.

(1615)

Well I think that that would be a more sensible approach. After reading this Bill, I thought I would think in a less sensible and more partisan NDP fashion, like the members opposite. After doing so, I fear the motivation behind this specific measure and wording in the Bill is to rid this government of some annoying opposition.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a former member of this House, Dr. Lewis Draper, has always been an ardent defender of rural health care. Not only has he been an ardent defender of rural health, but he's also a colossal thorn in the side of the members opposite. He was a nightmare come true for both the Premier and Deputy Premier.

I would hope the member from Regina South pays particular attention to this aspect of my speech, because if he wants to have a hope of becoming an effective representative, he should pay good attention to the example set by Dr. Draper. I should also note that the member from Regina South should pay good attention to the example set by Dr. Draper and not to the example which his party tried to make of an independent thinker like Dr. Draper. There's a significant difference there between the two. I think, however, that the member knows the difference between someone who has courage and someone who goes to sleep at night fearing how he'll get disciplined by the Minister of Finance for his latest gaffe on the Public Accounts Committee.

I fear that this aspect of the proposed legislation may be in the Bill simply to remove Dr. Draper from the political landscape on the health issue. We all know, or at least I'm sure the members opposite are aware, that Dr. Draper now resides in Moose Jaw at the Midtown motel where he and his wife operate the facility, and he has a practice. It's my understanding that he still owns a house in Gravelbourg, but does not normally reside there. I'd like to know whether it's the aim of this government to have Dr. Draper disqualified from serving on the South Country Health District.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to ask myself, why the members would have a double standard? Is it because they want to get rid of a gentleman like Dr. Draper, who isn't afraid to speak his mind and speak up for rural people, unlike so many of the members opposite?

I'd like to take a moment and read a few quotes of some of the things which Dr. Draper said in the past which undoubtedly infuriated the members opposite. Dr. Draper is one of those people who was quite critical of this government's first responder program. And as a professional, I'm sure his opinion is that much more feared by this government. In this one letter to the editor, Dr. Draper says, and I quote:

I have no problem with volunteers being trained under the first responder program. I recommend that everyone be taught CPR and the Heimlich manoeuvre. My point is that first responders should be an addition to our fine professional staff and not instead of them.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government wants to preserve its party reputation as a protector of medicare, and they want to do it while destroying medicare. That task is difficult enough, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's taken some pretty careful planning and coercion on this part of the government to try and do it. Well we all know this plan is destined for failure. Such a plan doesn't allow room for a gentleman critic like Dr. Draper. Not only is he a credible critic, but with his elected seat on the South Country Health District, he also has a platform from which to criticize this government. And I know the Minister of Health is pretty uneasy about that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if that weren't reason enough to put a clause in this Bill to get rid of Dr. Draper, I'd like to read another of his comments which I believe, although true, is of no annoyance to the members opposite. It's unfortunate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the members opposite so greatly feared Dr. Draper's honest and candid nature on the health issue. Dr. Draper says in this same letter that:

The minister considered it only fair that Department of Health staff be guaranteed their jobs, but not those of hospital staff. How about some justice for hospital staff?

The former member from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg then goes on to commend 98 nurses and hospital staff who lost their jobs in Moose Jaw two years ago, along with others in North Battleford and Kincaid. He also commends all of them for their years of service and their commitment to making their rural communities better places in which to live. I'm sure Dr. Draper would likely extend his thanks to the many people who this year are losing their jobs thanks to the minister's cuts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's plausible to believe that the members opposite would put a clause in this Bill to rob Dr. Draper of a platform just so they can silence him and stop him from pinning the blame for health care's problems on the provincial government. Dr. Draper knew where the blame for the ills of health care rightfully belonged and he knew this was the truth and he wasn't afraid to say it.

The members over there on the government's benches, including

the apparently mute members that I spoke of before, know exactly what Dr. Draper is speaking of. The only difference between them and Dr. Draper is they don't have the courage and would toe any line put in front of them.

Maybe the only other difference, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that these members that always wind up mute on health issues have that blame-everything-on-the-federal-government line memorized better than Dr. Draper did. As a consequence, the members opposite drove Dr. Draper out of their caucus. And it wouldn't surprise me if they're not using this Bill to disqualify him from the South Country Health District.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm sure Dr. Draper's remarks about the double standard between the Department of Health staff and the hospital staff is a point that the members also are concerned about. They're concerned about it because they fear the truth. Earlier this session, myself and the member from Wood River raised the matter of health care consultants, including the 17 consultants that this government has to spy on our health districts.

This government wastes about 1.2 million on people who serve no real purpose in the health system. They don't deliver care. All they do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is take notes and write briefs for the minister. I believe these members of the district support branch are also known to be able messengers for the minister when the odd threat or ultimatum has to be sent to a district health board thinking of expressing some significant opposition to the minister or his government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a shameful situation. Here we have districts forced to cut acute care services in Canora, Central Butte, Fort Qu'Appelle, Weyburn, and Moose Jaw. Long-term care homes are being cut in Swift Current and Regina and wellness-oriented programs like geriatric rehabilitation in Moose Jaw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, many people in this province kind of wonder why the government slashes hospitals, and even program delivery people in the Department of Health, but yet these political hacks kept their jobs and many of them got substantial raises. When Dr. Draper alluded to issues like this, I'm sure it greatly concerned the members opposite.

The district support branch and all these health care consultants are not only an important issue with respect to the way that the government caucus treats Dr. Draper and our health care workers, but it shows how this government is not interested in community involvement.

I've said before, this Bill isn't about providing for more community control. It's about wrenching more control from our communities. Until the health consultants in the district support branch are removed, it's impossible to say that this government has any interest in providing community control.

I find it amusing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this past week in Moose Jaw, the Providence Place board and the district board met with each other and the consultant from the district support branch. These consultants only appear to

serve in a useful function, or to get involved in a district, when there's some sort of a political problem that the minister wants to see dealt with. They cajole the districts, and they do whatever the minister wants them to do. Above all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they help the minister get what he wants while still allowing him to keep his distance.

In Regina we see that one such consultant, Deb Jordan, delivered the bad-news ultimatum that told the district that they had to close the Plains or else the government wouldn't provide the operational funding they needed to manage their deficit that year.

I say to the members opposite, where is the community involvement there? How is that consultant's job worth keeping when so many nurses in this province somehow are less important enough to keep them?

I'd love to hear the members opposite explain themselves on these issues. But in the case of the member from Regina South, it's pretty hard to explain yourself when you remain silent on these issues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when it comes to the Providence Place geriatric unit, the district support branch is there not to solve the people's problems, but to solve them for the minister and for his colleague, the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow. If the minister was sincere about solving those problems, he'd keep his funding promise and let the community solve its own affairs. But because he's created a political problem, well the district support branch has to come in blazing and help the minister try and pit people in this community against one another.

That's shameful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I don't think people in Moose Jaw are buying it. In fact they're so turned off by it, one of the members of the health board recently said publicly she believes the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow is "done for politically."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I move on to other aspects of the Bill, which are also of great concern, I would like to make a note of one portion which deals with defective appointments. The Bill before us basically states that the decisions made by boards remain in place and are of full force regardless of whether an appointment of a member wasn't made according to the proper procedure.

What brought my attention to this clause is that it's obvious from reading it and by the fact that this particular one is retroactive, that this government obviously goofed on at least one appointment. I look forward to Committee of the Whole when I'm sure the minister would be delighted to answer some more questions on that very issue.

The general flaw in this legislation is that it will allow the government to try and wrench more control from districts while also trying to saddle this same organization with more blame for the government's own actions.

While I say that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must also say that the section of this Bill which concerns me the most deals with affiliate boards. Mr. Speaker, in my constituency there are two major affiliate boards that have a religious affiliation and this proposed legislation is certainly worrisome. Some people suggest this government wants nothing to do with affiliate agencies. While

some would argue that this government would love to see these agencies gone, I would argue that at times the Minister of Health finds them politically convenient.

Take Moose Jaw, for example, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The minister repeatedly gets up in this House and says that problems in that district simply are a dispute between two boards, when he knows his words are not believed in the community and in fact are about as low and ill intended as any comments could be.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government wants affiliate agencies, at least, because I believe they find them convenient for their divide-and-conquer strategy. While they might find them politically convenient to keep around, the members opposite still hold little respect for them. That lack of respect is evident in this Bill.

If one looks the Bill over and spends any time reading the new section 39.1, they will be just as concerned as I. In particular, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the greatest concern in this regard is clause 17 which will create a new section 39.1. If one looks down to 39.1(1)(d), you'll notice that the government will be able to appoint an administrator to oversee the affairs and control the assets of an affiliate for virtually any reason. Well it's pretty common to have a catch-all phrase when drafting legislation. This one place where such a phrase is, is hardly necessary.

(1630)

The Bill gives the cabinet the right to appoint an administrator for several defined reasons. Those include a situation where the safety of patients is jeopardized. It also includes a situation where the affiliate board has resigned, and a new one is not in place. Lastly, it allows a cabinet to appoint an administrator where the affiliate facility is not carrying out its responsibilities. Mr. Deputy Speaker, those reasons were enough, in that they covered every imaginable circumstance where the government could justify appointing an administrator to oversee an affiliate agency.

Apparently the Minister of Health felt this didn't give him enough power, so he had to add a catch-all subsection in the Bill that would allow the cabinet to appoint an administrator for any reason whatsoever that they feel is in the public interest. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that clause is wholly unnecessary, and it should be a matter of significant concern to all affiliate agencies in this province.

Not only is that section disconcerting, but it also flies in the face of traditions developed in our health system. In this province, we've been fortunate to enjoy the service of religious orders like the Grey Nuns and the Sisters of Providence who constructed various facilities. While they constructed these facilities to serve the public, it should be remembered that they and other groups from other denominations continue to own these assets. Why therefore should the government even consider seizing these assets and appointing an administrator?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's rather amusing that the members

opposite are concerned about property rights when it concerns gun control, but they're not concerned when it comes to health facilities that were built by charitable and religious groups. While every party in this House is concerned about gun control, this government should make sure that its position on property rights on that issue extends to others, like seizing land for SaskPower high voltage lines, and affiliate health agencies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill also addresses the need for affiliate agencies to have agreements with their respective district boards. While that's fine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and probably necessary for the sake of efficiency, there's a flaw of considerable concern in those provisions of the Bill. The flaw in this portion of the Bill deals with the eventuality where the district health board and the affiliate fail to come to some agreement. Before this occurs, a mediator is appointed, and if this individual fails, the mediator writes a report and the whole matter is turned over to the minister. The minister is then left with power to make a decision and impose an agreement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this aspect of this legislation concerns me because in the case of the Moose Jaw/Thunder Creek district and the geriatric unit, this would provide the government with but one more tool to help deflect blame. Once this Bill is passed, the government could say that the problem with the unit is that there is no operating agreement between this GARU (geriatric assessment rehabilitation unit) and the district. This would force the two sides into a situation of negotiation when both agree that the government's underfunding is basically the problem.

As a consequence, the minister could force both sides into negotiating and allow the government to make it appear that the whole problem is a problem between two boards rather than one of government funding. If the two sides fail to agree and the matter was forced into the hands of a mediator, this impression would simply be raised to new heights by this clever, if not underhanded, aspect of this particular legislation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe that this is wrong. Why should we allow this government any more loopholes? Isn't it enough for the members to have some 30 district boards to blame their problems on without having a need for this additional tool? The other problem with this particular clause, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that it not only allows the government to escape responsibility, but it allows the minister to be the final arbiter of disputes between affiliates and district boards.

Not only can the minister use this aspect to create the appearance of disputes, where the only disputes that exist are between local boards and the minister, but he can also use it to wrench more control from local boards. The minister should not be settling disputes between boards and their affiliates. Instead the minister and this government should either put their faith in negotiation, or they should allow for binding arbitration by an impartial third party. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the wise thing to do.

That being said, however, we shouldn't be surprised that the minister wants more power to meddle into the affairs of district boards. This aspect of the Bill shows that this government has no interest in fostering and furthering community involvement, except in so far as it allows them to pass the blame for their unpopular decisions to someone else.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are other matters that should concern affiliate agencies in this Bill. I've taken the time to get some input from the Catholic health association and they make some very valid points. One point that they make with respect to this Bill concerns the ability of the health district board to appeal to the minister to appoint a mediator. We all recognize that in the event of a dispute, what everyone wants is to see any matters outstanding resolve quickly, as quickly as possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before getting to my point, I have to say however that if there were as many disputes in this province's health system between affiliate agencies and boards as the minister claims there is, I would really have a serious doubt about that. There will be a lot of overworked mediators once this Bill is passed.

Every time the minister's underfunding problems cause cuts and problems in any community in this province, the minister's first reaction is to say it's a local dispute between boards. If it's not that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, then the minister likely believes the problem is somehow the federal government's fault. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is an abdication of responsibility, and people in this province expect and deserve better treatment from their politicians.

That being said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a significant problem with the provisions in this Bill which allow for a mediator. The basic problem with them is that the Bill only allows the district boards the right to request a mediator. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, creates an imbalance between the affiliates and the district boards. These boards should be equals or at least partners in health care in their respective communities.

Given that, it only seems fair that they be given the same sort of rights and privileges in the event of a dispute. In these circumstances, the government should allow the affiliate equal opportunity to request that the minister appoint a mediator. Without this right, the boards could delay and delay and possibly dig in their heels to get what they want to the detriment of affiliates and the health consumers they are trying to serve. That's only a possibility, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but nonetheless these boards should be treated as equals in the event that a dispute occurs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while we all realize that disputes between affiliates and district health boards are much more rare than the minister says they are, there are other problems with respect to the way affiliates are treated within this Bill.

For example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Catholic health association makes a point that, with regard to the appointment of a public administrator, there is a lack of equality between the affiliates and the district health boards. If an affiliate for example breaks an agreement with a district health board, according to the proposed legislation, it leaves itself open to having its board removed and a public administrator appointed in its place. At the same time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the district health boards do not face this same punishment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, according to the way this Bill is drafted, a district health board could break an agreement with an affiliate, and they won't risk facing the same consequences. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if affiliate agencies are partners, they should be treated as partners and as equals. They shouldn't face any greater or any less punishment for breaking an agreement as do their partners in district boards. I'm sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this government has no desire to face punishment for breaking its own agreements, so I have no idea why it wants to see affiliate agencies singled out for severe punishment if they break part of an agreement.

As an example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the Moose Jaw/Thunder Creek District, this government broke a contract with both a district board and an affiliate board to provide separate funding for the geriatric assessment and rehabilitation unit. The minister over on the government benches had a signed agreement that he broke at will, but yet he faces no punishment for doing so. He didn't even have to give any warning for breaking this promise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But yet he feels, as shown in the Bill before us, that affiliate agencies should be punished severely, when he and his department get off scot-free for the very same sort of actions. Over the years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has shown itself quite adept at breaking agreements with different groups. Whenever it does so, its first interest is to avoid blame, avoid blame and avoid responsibility.

Anyone who behaves in that fashion should hardly think it's fair to single out one party for extra punishment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while others get off for committing the very same crime. Among the many agreements this government's broken are contracts with farmers and more recently a promise not to claw back the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) overpayments.

On the health care front, they're broken agreements with affiliates in the district health board over the geriatric unit in Moose Jaw as I mentioned. More recently, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had a number of concerned residents from across the province come to this legislature and protest this government's decision to break an agreement that it had with the Rural Health Coalition.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite signed an agreement to maintain levels of service in the 52 communities that lost their acute care hospitals in 1993. It should come as no surprise to anyone that this government broke its word on this agreement as well. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government has some pretty stern rules for affiliates in this proposed legislation that it would not ever dream of imposing on itself.

In addition to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a couple of problems or inequities in this Bill with respect to the provincial government's power to appoint a public administrator. I mentioned earlier that I disagree with the way in which these provisions are drafted. It allows the minister too much breadth to appoint a public administrator and remove the board of an affiliate. I also mentioned that I believe it isn't an appropriate way of recognizing that affiliate agencies are privately owned, often by religious groups and religious orders.

Two other aspects of the provisions dealing with public administrators also are of concern to me. Both of these concerns

were raised to the minister by the Catholic health association.

The first of these is that this proposed legislation forces the affiliate agency to pay for a public administrator out of its own funds. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister knows full well that health care budgets are very lean. In districts that lost money, thanks to this government's unfair needs-based funding system, matters are just that much more difficult. At the beginning of a budgetary year, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure affiliate agencies do not plan for the added cost of having a public administrator. If they had to pay for such a person, it's likely that they will either run a deficit, or worse yet they'll have to lay off more staff. Money spent on an administrator will be money that's not spent on patient care.

Thanks to this government's needs-based funding system, if these agencies are spending less money on patients and delivering fewer services, they won't receive as much money in the following year. Because they didn't deliver as many services, Mr. Speaker, the theory among the members opposite entails that the district doesn't deserve as much money as it had the year before. One can also imagine that if the board had to be removed in favour of a public administrator, it's also likely that one or more members of the affiliate agency's senior staff would likely also be laid off.

(1645)

I say this, Mr. Speaker, because senior staff play a large role in the focus of such an agency. In addition, this Bill makes it perfectly clear that the administrator would also have the same powers as an executive director of an affiliate agency in so far as such an administrator would gain control of the daily operations of an affiliate or a program operated by an affiliate.

Mr. Speaker, if an affiliate agency has to lay off senior staff, there again is money that will not be directed towards patient care. Thanks to needs-based funding, that very agency will face more cuts in future because it spent money on administration that it would rather have spent on patient care.

Mr. Speaker, the solution to this problem is to have the government pay for the administrator. There's no room in the district board budget or in an affiliate agency's budget for this surprise expense. As a consequence, it's the government that should provide the money for this unforeseen expense. It would also be useful to add to that comment by noting that if the government feels it's in the public interest to appoint such an administrator, it must likewise be in the public interest for them to pay for any administrators they feel that they must appoint.

With respect to provisions regarding a public administrator, a second problem was raised with the minister by the Catholic health association. While the minister feels it is imperative that we have this power to appoint a public administrator in extraordinary circumstances, he neglected to create a means to handle concerns in the event that this power is used.

Mr. Speaker, affiliate agencies I think would feel more

comfortable if this Bill contained provisions which guaranteed them an opportunity to express their views to the minister in the event that the powers is ever used. It's only fair, Mr. Speaker, that in the event that a public administrator is appointed to oversee an affiliate that the owners of the facility and the board be given a chance to make a presentation to the minister before such an appointment is made. Likewise, Mr. Speaker, in the event that the appointment of an administrator is about to end, the same party should have an opportunity to make a presentation to the minister with regard to the orderly return to their control of the affiliate. Those concerns seem reasonable and, Mr. Speaker, they would provide a balance to the heavy hand of the minister in the event that a public administrator was ever appointed.

Mr. Speaker, before I move on to some other details of concern in this Bill, it would be appropriate to put the Bill in a larger context. Mr. Speaker, in this session the government made some decisions that had a decidedly negative impact on health in this province. Each of these decisions was made in such a way as to avoid responsibility as well as continue the process of wrenching control over health from local people.

This Bill is but one part of this government's design for health care. Needs-based funding comprises much of the rest of their plan to seriously downgrade health services, especially those in rural Saskatchewan.

Earlier this session, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite introduced a Bill regarding health facilities. One can't look at this Bill without at least making some mention of the Bill dealing with health facilities. I say that because while the members opposite are trying to wrench control from local people with this Bill and further evade their responsibilities, they put the health facilities Bill before this House because they believe that this government needed to make some positive news on the health front. Their hopes for positive news rested on the health facilities Bill. While that Bill was designed to make the government look good, this Bill to amend The Health Districts Act is strictly . . . help the members opposite to achieve their purpose of more control and less accountability.

Mr. Speaker, it tells you something about Bills like this and this government's overall handling of the health care when they have to introduce and pass a Bill on health facilities just to make themselves look good.

Mr. Speaker, that Bill is designed to force any private health facilities that might spring up in the province to acquire a government licence. It also prevents these people from extra billing and therefore virtually eliminates the possibility that private facilities will come to this province.

I said earlier, while this Bill is designed to wrench control from districts, that Bill was supposed to make the government look good by drawing a line in the sand. It was supposed to show the members opposite, we're opposed to extra billing and in favour of medicare.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we all support publicly funded medicare and we all support the community involvement that health districts were supposed to provide to Saskatchewan people. That, Mr. Speaker, brings me precisely to my point with respect to how these

Bills all fit into the greater picture.

Mr. Speaker, I've shown today that this government talks a lot about community involvement but its actions more often than not run to the contrary. When we see pieces of legislation like the one before us, we should be suspicious of the rhetoric that this government is feeding us. The members opposite introduce a Bill to draw their line in the sand to show they are committed to medicare and to a publicly funded system, but at the same time are underfunding some 19 districts in this province, thanks to their cuts. Other districts are facing tough times or are saddled with deficits that are forcing them to make other service cuts.

Mr. Speaker, basically we have a government that passes a Bill to show its support for publicly funded medicare when they're responsible for underfunding the very system they claim to protect. That is a matter of not living up to one's own rhetoric.

The larger picture, Mr. Speaker, that I'm trying to get across to the members opposite is that they must realize that no matter how often they repeat their rhetoric on health care, it won't for one moment change the harmful impact of their actions. An example of just how pointless their rhetoric is can be seen with regards to the health facilities Bill, Mr. Speaker.

The members opposite, Mr. Speaker, put forward a Bill in this House to ban private facilities that extra bill for medical services. Just the fact they introduce the Bill is an indication of just how much trouble they are in with regard to health care in this province.

Health in this province is tax supported and people don't pay directly for services they use. If a system is set up where people don't pay on a service basis, one has to wonder why the government would worry about private health facilities at all. This government is worried about them, Mr. Speaker, and is legislating against them because the members opposite over there know that their underfunding of the health system is forcing people to consider paying privately to get the care that they want.

If the members over there were really committed to a publicly funded universal system like they say they are, there would be no need to legislate against private health facilities. If we had adequately funded health care, we wouldn't have the waiting-lists and the gaps in service that are driving people to the desperate measure of wanting to privately pay for health care outside of our publicly funded system.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite should start making good on their rhetoric. Quit giving us a line, and start throwing a lifeline to our health care system that is now starting to slip under the waves. With respect to this Bill to amend The Health Districts Act, it's time this government start making sure its actions were similar to its rhetoric. If the members opposite want community involvement, then I would say quit trying to pass legislation that takes away from local control.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I still have a couple more

detailed concerns about this Bill. I understand this Bill will provide more regulatory power to the government. The additional powers will allow the government to set standards for districts. I would like to see these additional regulations or at least hear in Committee of the Whole why the minister feels that these additional powers are necessary. At a time when the Premier is frequently gathering with his provincial colleagues and discussing ways to destroy national standards for all sorts of federal powers, it's ironic to see the Minister of Health moving in the direction of more centralized control.

I'm also curious about the regulatory power this Bill provides to the government with respect to summary offences. I would like to know what circumstances there could be under The Health Districts Act to punish anyone for a summary offence. Why is this necessary especially when most professional bodies already discipline their members? And there are already other laws in place, such as the Criminal Code, to deal with all variety of wrongdoing without giving more powers to government to make additional matters an offence.

Mr. Speaker, last but not least is the matter of the Lloydminster Health District. This Bill will help set up a district but it still remains quite unclear as to when that district will at least enter the semi-democratic age now experienced by other boards. While this mutated form of democracy is less than sufficient, it's better than none. That being said, I look forward to posing some of these questions to the minister in Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, before I would adjourn this debate, I find this government continues to waste its time and energies on the wrong things. If it spent as much time trying to make health care boards more autonomous and itself more accountable as it does trying to wrench powers from local people and hide its political dealings, our health system would face much fewer problems.

Mr. Speaker, no matter how many times the minister or the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow get up and blame their mistakes on other levels of government and local groups, it will not ease them of one ounce of responsibility. That burden will remain on their shoulders where it rightfully belongs. This opposition will continue to fight for the interests of average people in this province who are concerned about the health care system they built and paid for. We will continue to ensure, despite any measure taken by the members opposite, that this government remains accountable for what it's done to our health system.

No icons, no clever plans, and no group of political consultants put forward by this government will stop us, Mr. Speaker. We will remain dauntless in our efforts to ensure that our health system isn't destroyed by this government. I ask the members opposite to consider the points I've made with regard to this Bill. More importantly, I ask them to reconsider their silence and their fear of speaking out against this government's health care policies.

While I hold no hope for some of these members I still believe some of them are committed to representing their constituents. To them I say, you have faced tough times for your silence in recent months and you will face many more. Make something of those experiences by using them to find the courage within yourself to speak up and give your constituencies hope that politicians really do care.

More particularly I say to the members opposite, show them you really care about our health system. Show them you can think for yourselves and stand up for them rather than just remember the line about who's to blame on everything.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the members opposite to look into themselves. I ask them to take a second look at this proposed legislation. This legislation continues us on the path toward an unresponsive health system that's driven by financial and political demands rather than basic human need.

That, Mr. Speaker, is not what this country was built on. This country was built on common goals among all peoples be they rich or poor, rural or urban. Health care has become a part of our Canadian fabric and for that very reason it's up to every Canadian to use it wisely. It's up to all of us to protect it for our well-being and for the well-being of generations to come and that we'll call Canada and this province our home.

And for those very reasons I would ask at this time that we be able to adjourn this debate because we'll have more . . . So I would at this point move adjournment of this debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.