

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

I so present.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of many people in the southern part of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

I'm pleased to present on their behalf, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present a petition to the Assembly regarding the closure of the Plains Health Centre, and I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And this petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by the good folk from the community of Radville.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

And as is in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The communities involved, Mr. Speaker, are Carievale and Gainsborough. I so present.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions signed by people across Saskatchewan, and I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of Saskatchewan people concerned about the impending closure of the Plains hospital. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Radville and Gladmar. I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

Everyone that has signed this petition is from Radville.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan people dealing with the issue of the closure of the Plains hospital and a moratorium that they wish to see placed on that closure.

The people signing this petition come from the southern part of Saskatchewan — Radville in particular — and I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present a petition on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

Mr. Speaker, this petition has signatures on it from the communities of Weyburn, Moose Jaw, and John Nilson's third cousin . . . oh, I mean Moose Jaw. I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition, and the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And, Mr. Speaker, the people who have signed this petition are from Ituna and Hubbard and all throughout the land. And I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to present petitions on behalf of citizens of the province alarmed by the catastrophic deterioration of health care services under the NDP (New Democratic Party) and about the impending closure of yet more hospitals by the NDP. I so present.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions from citizens of the city of Melville. The petition calls upon the Legislative Assembly to take action to reform the system so that the interests of children such as Steven and Kimberly Walchuk are put first. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may take the required action to allow the children named to remain in the custody of the maternal grandparents and that appropriate amendments be made to the justice system.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, there are close to 300 signatures obtained in a very short period of time from the citizens of Melville. I so present.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair will want to remind the Leader of the Third Party of course, that in presenting the petition he's only provided the opportunity to present the prayer itself. And I know that if presenting future petitions he'll want to guide himself accordingly. Continued presentation of petitions.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of citizens who are seeking justice for men and women who have lost their spouses in work-related accidents.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to have The Workers' Compensation Board Act amended for the disenfranchised widows, widowers of Saskatchewan whereby their pensions are reinstated and the revoked pensions reimbursed to them retroactively and with interest, as requested by the statement of entitlement presented to the Workers' Compensation Board on October 27, 1997.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The signatories today, Mr. Speaker, are all from Saskatoon.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy today to present a continuing stream of petitions from the people across Saskatchewan whose prayer for relief basically is continuing to ask for the double-laning of Highway No. 1.

I'm happy to present on behalf of the people from Swift Current and the village of Cabri today.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been

reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly on the following matters: to twin the Trans-Canada Highway; to save the Plains Health Centre; to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre; and to have Workers' Compensation Board reinstate pensions for disenfranchised widows and widowers.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members an especially interested and keen group of people who are seated in the west gallery. It's a group of 55 introduction to political science students from the University of Regina. I think they will be especially interested to see what is happening here in this institution. They're accompanied by their instructor, Patricia Paton. I would ask all members to welcome these people in the usual cordial and warm way. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whitmore: — Mr. Speaker, through you and to you, to members of the Assembly, I would like to introduce someone behind the bar, a former MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) in this Chamber, Mr. Elwood Cowley.

Mr. Cowley served as MLA for the constituency of Biggar from 1971 to 1982, served in many senior capacities as cabinet minister in the Allan . . . Premier Allan Blakeney government. Mr. Cowley and I also have the opportunity of saying that we also represented the same constituency of Biggar for many years.

And I could also say that Elwood and I are also related also, so there are many commonalities that we share. And I again would like to welcome Elwood here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, in your gallery we have 15 students from Shoal Lake School from Pakwaw Lake, Saskatchewan, and these are in grade 6. They're accompanied by their teacher, Ms. Ivy McKee. There's chaperons Darlene and Marcel Head, and Christopher Head and Eldon Whitecap.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words in Cree as well.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Cree.)

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with my colleague from Cumberland and welcome our guests from Shoal Lake. I'm sure you'll find the proceedings of the Assembly informative, and certainly challenging and exciting as well.

And as an aboriginal member of the Assembly, I'm encouraged to see that you are bringing many native kids and children to the Assembly and it's good to see that you are here.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Cree.)

Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join with my colleagues in introducing our visitors from Shoal Lake. As most of you will know, Shoal Lake is in the constituency of Carrot River Valley. It's the most beautiful part of our province. It is a beautiful community and their graduation, Mr. Speaker, is on June 4 and so I know that they will enjoy that time and hopefully I will be able to visit them then. So enjoy your visit to Regina, have a safe trip home. Thanks for coming.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — If other members have completed introductions, the Chair would like to introduce some visiting guests from my own constituency. In the Speaker's gallery are seated 21 grade 7 students from Ross School in Moose Jaw. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Ramona Stillar and Yasmina Shugaifi; as well as chaperons Steve and Sandy Myers, David Moore, and Carla Usher; and also Bobbie Reeves and Art Erickson.

Following their leaving the Speaker's gallery at 2 o'clock for a tour of the building, I look forward to meeting with them briefly for photos and refreshments and a visit, with the assistance of the hon. member for Shellbrook-Spiritwood, to enable me to be free from the House to do that. And . . . order, order.

The hon. members remind the Speaker to bring the hat for the photo. So I'll be sure to do that. And I would ask all hon. members to join with me in extending a warm welcome to these students from Ross School in Moose Jaw.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Free Vote to Save the Plains Health Centre

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one look at the order paper makes it clear that this afternoon all members of the Legislative Assembly will have the opportunity to debate the future of the Plains hospital. But it is less clear whether the Premier will allow a vote on the motion to save the Plains, and if so whether NDP members will be allowed to vote with their constituents rather than with the Premier and his Health minister.

That is what the people in the real world call a free vote, Mr. Speaker. I mention this as a point of clarification because I am not sure the NDP know what a free vote really is. In response to our demands to allow a free vote the Premier and his House Leader tell us all votes in the NDP caucus are free. Well that's not what former NDP MLA, Dr. Lewis Draper, has to say about the process and procedures in the NDP caucus.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Draper comments that the only time NDP MLAs were asked for their input on health issues, including the closure of 52 rural hospitals, was to suggest the propaganda that

would sell to the public the decisions that had already been made. I'm glad to see democracy is alive and well in the NDP caucus.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are calling on the Premier to allow a free vote on the future of the Plains. Will that vote take place today? And will the Premier remove the shackles from the MLAs and allow a free vote to take place today? Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Government Urges Amendment to the Canada Transportation Act

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Later on today I will be introducing a motion urging the federal government to amend the Canada Transportation Act in order to make it more producer friendly. I call on all opposition MLAs to support this very significant motion.

Saskatchewan producers have been hit hard with rail-line abandonment and the rising costs of shipping their products.

An unanimous vote by all members of the Assembly will send a strong message to the federal Liberals in Ottawa that changes to the CTA (Canada Transportation Act) must be made.

This motion supports the NDP government's current policy direction of making it easier for producers to transport their products. Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food and Highways and Transportation have been working with Saskatchewan producers and other western provinces pressuring the federal government into making changes to the CTA.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Saskatchewan MLAs to support this motion today and add their voices to this important issue. Perhaps today is the day, Mr. Speaker, that the Saskatchewan Party and Liberal Party will stand up in a free vote and join with us to support the farmers of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Care Funding

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we told this House that the Southwest Health District is preparing to dig its heels in to prevent any further cuts to its local health care system. The board says health care services have been cut too far already and will not cross that line.

Last night the people of Carrot River expressed the same feelings in spades. Mr. Speaker, about 300 people attended a public meeting to discuss the possible closure of their local hospital.

Residents of the community sent a clear message to this government which was sent very loud and clear. They will not sit by and allow the NDP to close their hospital. They will not allow their local services to be slashed any further. They will not allow this government to continue its "we know best" attitude when it translates into poor health care services at the local level.

Health board members say they were shocked at the response. We hope some of that shock rubs off on this government — that they sit down with this and other boards and find a solution to the funding crisis which continues to gut our health care system. Thank you.

Saskatchewan's Jobless Rate Falls

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan's jobless rate continues to fall. On May 8 the *Leader-Post* reported, and I quote:

Saskatchewan's job market kept racing along again in April, adding 5,400 new jobs compared to the same month last year. The province's job figures have climbed year over year for the past 15 months.

The article went on to say that Saskatchewan's unemployment rate was 6.6 per cent for the month of April, while the national average was 8.6.

In addition, the unemployment rates for 20 major Canadian cities were reported. Regina had the lowest of all Canadian cities at 4.3 per cent, as compared to 4.7 per cent in Calgary, 6.3 per cent in Edmonton, and 5.8 per cent in Winnipeg.

That's good economic news for Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations Citizen of the Year

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to stand and congratulate the former . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now the Chair is having difficulty being able to hear the member provide his members' statement. And I — order — and I would ask for the cooperation of all members of the House to allow members' statements to be presented in an uninterrupted manner, as is the usual case.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to stand and congratulate a former constituent of mine on being awarded the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) Citizen of the Year. Mr. Donald Deranger was a former resident of the far North — Fond-du-Lac to be exact — and was recognized for his work at the FSIN's spring Legislative Assembly in Saskatoon.

Don is the Athabasca training and employment coordinator under the Prince Albert Grand Council and is a definite asset to the North and the Dene people. Don has been doing an excellent job working with the far northern communities in areas such as increasing northern employment for the Dene bands with the mining sector; was the first Dene journeyman millwright; he single-handedly organized the certification of 100 athletic coaches from the far North as well. He also organized training, travel, and accommodation of over 500 northern athletes for the Indian Summer and Winter Games — an incredible task.

Above all else, he treats people with care, compassion, and respect, Mr. Speaker. I share with the entire Assembly, an article in the *Prince Albert Herald* that covered the commitment of Don Deranger to his people. I know Don very well and as the MLA for Athabasca, I thank him for his service and contribution to his people and congratulate him once again. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Palliative Care Week

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we begin the observance of Palliative Care Week here in Saskatchewan, I'd like to pay particular tribute to one individual, Dr. Zachariah Thomas, the former president of the Saskatchewan Palliative Care Association, who died suddenly last August.

Dr. Thomas was a driving force and an inspiration for palliative care in our province. Palliative care of course refers to interdisciplinary services that provide active, compassionate care to the terminally ill, whether they are at home or in hospitals or other institutions.

The purpose of palliative care is to improve the quality of remaining life of people for whom cure or prolongation of life is no longer an appropriate objective. It emphasizes quality of life, maintenance of human dignity, comfort, and concern for the terminally ill as well as their families.

And palliative care is more than medical care. It addresses the whole person physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually. And so I know I speak for all members of this Assembly when I thank the countless volunteers across the province who provide palliative care to the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon Eastview By-Election

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to welcome to the Saskatoon Eastview by-election race, Judy Junor. I want to say that I have some affection for the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and her work with that organization because they certainly had a key role to play in my election in North Battleford. They were most effective in pointing out in North Battleford that NDP claims that health care was not in crisis were hogwash, and they contradicted what the NDP were saying, and saying that health care was in crisis. And the North Battleford people believed the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses.

I just have one note of caution however, for Ms. Junor. In the unlikely event she is elected, she will unfortunately have to make do with considerably less than the 100,000 a year the Minister of Health says she and other nurses are presently earning. However if she is able to get by on about half what the Minister of Health says nurses in this province earn, she will find it an exciting and rewarding life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Kinsmen Club Sponsorships

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize the efforts of two Kinsmen clubs in my constituency. The Wilkie Kinsmen recently made three generous donations to their community. The Wilkie Golf Club was presented with a cheque for \$5,500 to help with renovations for the course clubhouse. The Wilkie Regional Park received \$10,000 for the completion of a new ball diamond. And still another cheque for \$2,400, which will be used to purchase a large screen television, which went to the seniors at the Poplar Court Special Care Home.

Obviously the Wilkie Kinsmen Club have been very busy and their fund-raising events have been well supported by their community.

I would also like to congratulate the Macklin Kinsmen Club for recently sponsoring the first Macklin Kinsmen LRA (Lakeland Rodeo Association) indoor rodeo. The club very successfully organized this major event, which was well attended and appreciated by the community, and which will hopefully become an annual event.

I would like to thank both the Macklin and Wilkie Kinsmen members for their volunteer efforts and for the many benefits they have given back to the citizens of their community. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Carrot River Hospital Closure

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Health.

Mr. Minister, the people of Carrot River are about to lose their hospital and they are extremely angry about it. Last night over 300 Carrot River residents got together to let the health board and the government know that they are not prepared or willing to accept the loss of their hospital.

The question is, did you get the message? Did you get the message that health care is in crisis thanks to the mismanagement of the NDP Party?

Mr. Minister, if NDP health reform is working, if you are providing adequate funding for health care, why are you still closing hospitals? When is the NDP destruction of the health system going to stop and will you start today by ensuring that the Carrot River hospital remains open?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say to the member opposite . . . and he has some appreciation and understanding of this because just recently I was in his constituency of which he was also a partner at the podium, and together we talked about and shared the opening of the new Wawota facility.

The decision around the new Wawota facility was made by the district health board, which was a conversion, conversion of a hospital to a community health centre. And the people who stood up at that event spoke highly about the wonderful services that they had in Wawota today.

And that decision, Mr. Speaker, was made by, that decision was made by the district health board — not unlike the decision that's currently being made in Carrot River where the district health board is going to the community, having a discussion with the community about what their needs are, and will be making some determinations in the near future about what level of care or services they require for Carrot River; not unlike, not unlike the same decision that his constituents made and their district health board made in Wawota, Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes I was at that meeting and yes the minister will also realize that the people of Wawota got what they asked for. They asked for and they received the acute care beds that they wanted and they didn't have them all closed down.

But the people of Carrot River won't have that to talk about. In fact, Mr. Minister, you keep telling us that your health care system is working, but it's falling apart. It's falling apart, yes, thanks to the fact that the federal Liberals cut \$7 billion out of the health budget without so much as a peep out of their provincial puppet party.

Then the NDP claims to have replaced that funding but for some reason despite the replaced funding, beds keep closing, hospitals keep closing, Saskatchewan people continue to suffer. People in Carrot River are not prepared to accept your decision. In fact, where is the member from Carrot . . . the member responsible, the member from Carrot River? Is he supporting his community?

Mr. Minister, what are you doing to address this crisis? Will you start today by telling the people of Carrot River that their hospital will remain open, or is Carrot River going to be another casualty in the NDP attack on health care?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to reiterate to the member opposite that when he talks about there being a crisis in Saskatchewan in the health care system, I have travelled around the province and have had a chance to be in many of the health care districts.

And I want to say to the member opposite that he should visit the town of Neilburg, who have a health centre. And that health centre today has more specialized services in it today, community-based services, than it ever had when it had a hospital, Mr. Speaker.

He should visit, he should visit the Shellbrook . . . he should visit the community of Shellbrook, who converted their health care centre . . . converted their hospital to a health care centre and today have more people receiving a broad range of community-based services than they ever had.

And I want to say to the member opposite, when he talks about

mismanagement of a system, the member should just reflect a bit into the 1980s when he sat as a Tory in the Tory government and gutted this province to the tune of \$15 billion. And today we pay \$750,000 in interest payments of which you, my friend, have been a part of accumulating to Saskatchewan people. You talk about mismanagement. You're the owner of mismanagement in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — A further question to the minister. Mr. Minister, that response does nothing for the people of Carrot River. You haven't even addressed the question.

Mr. Minister, your proposal is to cut back to two hospital beds in Carrot River. Sharon Newstead is a nurse's aide at Carrot River hospital. She said that yesterday there were 14 patients in the Carrot River hospital and she wanted to know who was going to decide which patients get to stay and which will be sent home. That I think, is a very good question.

Where are these other patients going to go, Mr. Minister? And who is going to make that decision — you or the NDP member from Carrot River Valley? How can you justify cutting back to 2 acute care beds when just yesterday 14 beds in Carrot River were being utilized?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that in this year's budget allocation, we provided to the health district of North-East almost \$200,000 of additional funding in their 1998-99 allocation.

And I say to the member opposite that the district board will examine what the needs are in their community and will examine what the needs are for all of the individuals who live in that part of the district and will ensure that people, at the end of the day, will receive the kinds of quality health care services of which they've been charged to provide.

And I say to the member opposite that you need to pay more attention to what's happening in other parts of Saskatchewan as well. When you need to look at what's happened, look at what's happening today in the communities of St. Walburg where similar kinds of decisions were made and today the community is richer for its health care services. And I say to you that that is the case across the province and you should visit some of these communities to see the kinds of outcomes that exist, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Railway Successor Rights

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the member for Carrot River Valley refuses to stand up for his own constituents and help save their hospital, but I see he's moving a motion calling on the federal government to assist in the establishment of short rail line operations.

That's a joke, Mr. Speaker, when you consider it's the NDP government that is standing in the way of short rail line

operations by refusing to remove successor rights. Yes, the federal government — federal Liberal government — must make changes to the Canadian transportation Act to make it producer friendly, but the NDP should get its own house in order before it calls on Ottawa.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Minister, will you immediately take action to help Saskatchewan farmers by removing your successor rights legislation and making it easier for short rail line operations to set up in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am glad to have the opportunity to answer this question. Successor rights are not an issue to the short-line railways that are trying to operate in this province.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the Chair had no difficulty being able to hear the question being put and I'll ask for the cooperation of the House — order — to allow the answer to be heard.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, it's not successor rights that are the obstacle for short-line rail development in this province. We've got Omni Trax that is operating in this province, we have Southern Rails that's operating in this province, and we certainly heard from other short-lines that want to be operating in this province.

What the obstacles are in this province is the changes that happened to the Canadian transportation Act that do not allow for competition, for true competition, which was the work of both the Tory and the Liberal governments, in which they do not have an opportunity. We want to talk today, as part of those solutions . . . is to have true competition, to have joint running rights, to have things that are the real obstacle . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Now the Chair — order — the Chair asks for cooperation of both sides of the House to allow the hon. minister to complete her response in a way that is able to be heard by all who are here and care to hear the answer.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've been out across this province and talking to the producers in this province, what is the obstacle to short-line development is the Canadian transportation Act that needs changes, which we need to have competition in this, we need to have joint running rights, we need to have the pieces changed that will allow true short-line development in this province, in which the federal government — both Conservative and Liberals — have been obstacles to.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP is really showing its true colours today. If there's ever a choice between helping farmers or helping their union leader friends, the NDP will side with their union leader friends every single time. Removing successor rights would be better for everyone. It'd be better for the short rail line companies; it'd be better for railway workers; and it would be better for farmers in this province.

The only people who are opposed to the removal of successor rights are the NDP and the NDP's union leader friends. And guess who wins out. Your lack of action on this is inexcusable, Madam Minister, and it's the farmers who'll pay the price.

Immediately after question period I'll be introducing a private members' Bill to remove successor rights for short rail line operations. Will you stand up for the farmers of Saskatchewan, Madam Minister, and support that legislation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Well you know it is really interesting, in talking to all of the groups in this province that are wanting to form to save their branch lines, in order to talk to the short lines, it's not successor rights that come up even once.

The issue there is definitely the changes that need to happen to the Canadian transportation Act. But it seems again that we're in favour of the big railways across the way, that CN (Canadian National) and CP (Canadian Pacific) should have all of the say in this. That's the problem. We need division . . . They know what the problems are; we need division of revenues. We need to be able to have . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the question period would be facilitated immensely if it wasn't for the constant commentary, and I'll ask for the cooperation of the House to allow the minister to be heard.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — The short-line railways that have been in contact with us also . . . it's not successor rights. They say they can work around that and they know that. And we've had very . . . we've got examples of success with that. But what we need is the changes to the federal legislation that will allow for true competition, which will allow for the development of short-line railways in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Potential Drought Conditions

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is for the Premier. Mr. Premier, yesterday Saskatchewan farmers were looking to you to see if you had a plan to deal with the increasing threat of drought in Saskatchewan. And the answer they got was pretty disturbing. There is no contingency plan in place at all. You haven't even contacted the federal government. And all we got was you, Mr. Premier, predicting that it was going to rain.

Well, Mr. Premier, why don't you leave the weather forecasting to the experts. Just do your job instead. Pick up the phone, call the federal Minister of Agriculture and start putting together a plan for dealing with this very large potential crisis. What are you waiting for, Mr. Premier? The farmers of Saskatchewan are wondering what your plans are.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really glad that

the opposition woke up after the member from south-west raised the issue. Now here's the concise answer. There is a big concern about grazing, about the grass starting. We have programs in place for water pumping. We have programs in place to affect the . . . if you have to sell your cattle. We have all kinds of programs that have been in place and will be in place today and in the future. We monitor the situation . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Now once again the Chair is having difficulty being able to hear the answer provided because of the constant commentary from the official opposition. I would ask for the cooperation of the House.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe they don't want to hear the answer. Maybe it's just straight politics. The answer is that we are monitoring the situation. We don't want to, we don't want to pull the pin too early here and create a crisis that isn't there. We know there's urgency; we know there's urgency in the livestock side. We have programs in place to deal with that.

We have talked to the federal government. It's not true what the member says. I don't know where he gets his information from. We have talked many times about this. Why, my deputy's down east right now talking about defining these disaster programs, talking about what we need for disaster relief if necessary. But let's not pull the string right now and sort of put the country in an uproar. I know these people like to cry wolf like Chicken Little but let's just be calm and rational and handle this as it should be handled.

Plains Health Centre Closure

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Liberals staged a Save the Plains meeting last night in Swift Current, and it appears what we have been saying is finally beginning to sink in with the NDP members. The Premier says we're fearmongering when we raise concerns about accessing the General Hospital, but the member from Swift Current last night, and I quote, said: "Everybody agrees access is a problem."

The member from Regina Centre, when commenting about which hospital serves the people of rural Saskatchewan best explained, and I quote again: "I agree with you. The Plains would have been the better choice."

Mr. Premier, your own MLAs are finally coming to realize that we are raising legitimate concerns. The question is, are we getting through to you yet?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I repeat again to the House that when the renovation of the Regina hospital system is such that we have the finest in Regina and the finest in southern Saskatchewan of modern technology that medicine can provide, as we will have, the people of this province and this country — I'll say this province in any event — can be very proud of what we are achieving. We are well on the way now to turning that corner in the next few months.

The member talks about Swift Current. I tell you what the message I got out of Swift Current.

Several of your Liberal and Conservative supporters talked

about the need of health care premiums in the extent of 8 to \$900 a year. I think Mr. Hermanson, the leader of the so-called Saskatchewan Party, raised it and the Liberals supported it, including you. Is that the true message of Swift Current — you support, as you have, two-tier medicine and 800, \$900 health care premium a year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Premier, do you support premiums? You have a \$1,500 deductible drug plan. That's a premium, Mr. Premier. You must support that; you brought it in. But the question is access, Mr. Speaker, and it is a concern because a computer-generated video has been produced by the Regina District Board which attempts to guide rural people to the General Hospital.

This cartoon provides an aerial view of a car taking a 10-step process before arriving at the General. But it fails to show any other vehicles on the route. It doesn't explain problems associated with rush hour traffic. It fails to mention that motorists must drive through two school zones. There is no mention of parking problems and it certainly doesn't warn the people about hookers and drug dealers in this area.

Mr. Premier, do you know how much time and money was spent developing this cartoon?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I do not know. The Regina District Health Board can give that answer, the Minister of Health can find out that answer. But the member opposite talks about access. He's dead right, the issue is access and accessibility. The issue is whether or not the Liberals and the Conservative policy on health care, which now involves health care premiums . . . notice how he did not respond to that because he knows what I said is the truth.

Last night the Liberals and the Conservatives together advocated \$900 a year health care premium. You're right, the issue is accessibility; those who've got the money, they get in. Those that don't have the money, tough luck for them. That is the destruction of medicare. That's the way you Liberals and you Conservatives have always been.

And it's demonstrated by the fact that you took away — they took away — \$7 billion of health care in Canada, the Liberals did, and now stand up in defence of medicare. Nobody believes you. Nobody believes the Liberals or the Conservatives as defenders of medicare.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this province, those that have \$1,500 can get their drugs, those that don't have to do without. And it's happening every day right across this province, Mr. Premier. What about that? What about your two-tier process? What about you? You brought in the drug plan.

Mr. Premier, for weeks you have said that the Liberal opposition is nothing but fearmongering. Now we find that we're spending God knows how much on a cartoon, a 10-step process that no one will remember, especially in an emergency

situation.

Mr. Premier, if this is your solution to major concerns about accessing the General Hospital in an emergency, we're in serious trouble. Why don't you provide the ultimate solution to concerns about access to this hospital and keep it open?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, these are the same old Liberals with the same old solutions. In 1961, 1962, one Liberal leader came to the door of this legislature at the time of medicare when Woodrow Lloyd, the father of medicare in this province and this country, was introducing and fighting it, came to this door, the late Premier Ross Thatcher, and he kicked at the door.

Today in 1998 the new Liberal leader, he goes around to every one of these Liberal-sponsored so-called rallies and he promises not to kick at the door. He promises that he's going to chain himself to the machinery at Plains hospital in opposition to this.

What happened to Ross Thatcher was the people of Saskatchewan knew that what he really was fighting was the implementation of medicare. And what the current leader, the good doctor in Eastview knows, is that he is fighting the reforms of this government designed to make medicare in this country and in this province the very best that we can afford — once again the next step forward to health care reform.

Nothing ever changes. They're like the Bourbons. They remember nothing and they forget nothing. They just slash \$7 billion worth and are in favour of health care premiums of \$900 a year. Shame on you, Liberals. Shame on you, Conservatives.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Inquiry into Channel Lake

Mr. Hillson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier can talk the talk but can he walk the walk? He gave us a little history lesson a minute ago. Well I'll give him a history lesson.

The last time we had a legislative inquiry in this province similar to the Channel Lake inquiry was 1953 when Tommy Douglas's minister of Finance was under investigation. What did Tommy do then? He went before the Crown Corporations Committee to answer the allegations; to testify as to what he knew.

My question for the Premier: does he the same moral fortitude, the same courage that Tommy had, or does he just talk about Tommy? Is he prepared to follow in Tommy's footsteps and go before the Crown Corporations Committee to answer what he knows, or is he going to continue to duck and hide behind his NDP puppets on the committee?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, this member from Battlefords talking about moral fortitude — moral fortitude. This was the same member I think I recall a couple of days ago,

together with his colleague, the member from Melville, who were saying that today's — Melfort — who were saying about today's witness, allegations of the highest order of wrongdoing; bring in the police.

Did you have the moral fortitude to ask one question about that today when Mr. Portugal was before the committee? Nothing. Did you have one moral fortitude to ask one question about that?

You talk to me about moral fortitude. You don't know it if it hits you in the face.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — There are lots more questions that have to be answered and asked, Mr. Speaker. But the one question we did get to today was what was the significance of March 31. What we were told: this was not a business deadline. This was political deadline for one reason and one reason alone — so we could bury Channel Lake and not have to report what was going on to the legislature of this province and to the people of this province because of the embarrassment if the people of this province and this House found out what was going on.

April 10, a statement was made in this House as to the sale and the profits from Channel Lake. That statement turned out to be wrong. Did SaskPower or the government, or the NDP caucus who had issued that statement, think it necessary to come up with a clarification or a retraction or a correction? Not a peep.

My question for the Premier: why was there no correction when you found out in June that was wrong — there had been no \$5 million profit? Why did you let that false information stand on the record? That's the question.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I say to the member opposite, who claims today to have established some startling revelation about the March 31 deadline, on page 14 of the Deloitte Touche report, which we tabled in this House two months ago, I want to quote; it says, and I quote:

However, it is clear that significant attention was focused by SaskPower officials on how the 1996 Channel Lake financial results would be detailed and made public, and it was believed in some quarters that settlement by March 31 would allow the corporation to tie the losses and sales together in one "package" and thereby simplifying the process surrounding public disclosure of the Channel Lake situation.

And following up that, my comment in my report from CIC (Crown Investments Corporation), I said:

The goal of concluding the sale by March 31 in less than 90 days led to serious shortcomings in the sales process.

I reported that to you two months ago. And so you found that out today; you found that out today and reported to the House this startling document. I say your credibility, sir, on that kind of logic and that kind of inquiry is seriously questioned — I would say it's zero.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Potential Wheat Trade War

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is either to the Premier or the Minister of Agriculture. For the past week, Mr. Speaker, we've been hearing warning signals coming out of the international communities about a potential of a trade war in wheat. And we first heard about it last week of course, when the Prime Minister's nephew, the ambassador to the United States, came to Regina to discuss this and other matters with the Premier.

I would like to ask very simply of the Premier or the Minister of Agriculture: what plans do you have to protect farmers in Saskatchewan from a trade war with the Americans; what advice did you have for the ambassador last week; and what do you have to say to the people who are ringing those alarm bells today from the federal Department of Agriculture, namely the Minister of Agriculture at the federal level?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, this question is a very important question because it speaks to something which threatens the — how should I describe it? — the normal way in trade of a very important aspect of our economy, agriculture.

The position that I have taken as Premier consistently — by the way, even before the meeting with the American . . . Canadian ambassador to America here in Regina when I was in Washington three weeks ago with officials in the United States, everywhere — is that we oppose what's going on with the potential of subsidizations — with the EU (European Union); the program, the EEP (export enhancement program) program in the United States — with the United States government officials.

And the Canadian government is also on this same track. We believe that the Canadian government, through its minister thus far, and certainly exemplified by Mr. Raymond Chrétien as the Canadian ambassador to the United States, opposes the idea that fair trading should be disrupted in this way.

Now you ask what happens if this process should proceed and escalate. That we'll have to await, because right now these are in an important stage of diplomatic and other talks and other communications, and it involves huge, huge dollars. And if Canada gets into this by way of support for our programs, what we do of course, is compound the very problem which we have raised with respect to the federal government and the authorities with the embassy in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a supplemental to the minister and to the Premier. Mr. Premier, as you will know, historians are writing the records of the past and they refer to the 1980s as the "dirty" '80s. Part of the reason for that of course, was the economic position taken by Europe. And at that time, we were told that we should blame the Europeans for our problems.

But at the same time we had the export enhancement program that the Americans had put into place. I don't know who we're

going to blame this time, but the truth of the matter is that the export enhancement program is the very one that the Americans are talking about bringing back into effect. That devastated agriculture in Saskatchewan in the 1980s and totally destroyed the economic foundation of this province and can largely be attributed to the terrible economic problems that this province is in in its fiscal areas.

Mr. Premier, knowing all of that, do you have any plans to send a delegation to the Americans and tell them about the possibilities of destroying the province of Saskatchewan's economic base?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the member asks, do we have any plans? And my answer to the member is that we've begun to execute the plans by meeting, as I have, in Washington with our Canadian ambassador and with American officials, not only on this issue; other issues as well, but on this issue.

And it's a question, you're right, of whether or not EEP really gets up and going the way it was in the mid-80s, complemented by the EU subsidies. Whoever began that war, it doesn't matter; the negative impact of it we all know historically is the case.

It is the responsibility of the federal Government of Canada under the constitution and the conventions of this country to be involved in international trading and treaty relationships. The hon. member will know that.

It's the responsibility to the External Affairs minister, it's the responsibility of the Prime Minister, it's the responsibility of Ottawa, to fight on behalf of the Canadian farmers. We're doing it provincially, as you're doing it in this House. And I thank you for raising the question because it gives me an opportunity, as it gives you an opportunity, to raise this matter.

Now if this thing escalates to such a point that the situation fiscally is even further harmed — although I'm not that pessimistic yet; I'm much more optimistic both in terms of weather, both in terms of the trading arrangements and negotiations — but if it escalates, it is the primary responsibility of the federal government to come through to the aid and the benefit of farmers in western Canada, because food is not a Saskatchewan matter. Food is a Canadian matter involving all Canadians, in fact many people of the world, and that is the national responsibility first and foremost.

And thus in the discussions that the Minister of Agriculture reported to the House on other questions, we are putting these and other propositions for the federal minister to consider, and I think the federal government is considering them. Let's see what happens in the weeks and months ahead.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 220 — The Trade Union Amendment Act (Repealing Successor Rights)

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill No. 220, The Trade Union Amendment Act (Repealing Successor Rights).

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

ROYAL ASSENT

At 2:27 p.m. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the Chamber, took his seat upon the throne, and gave Royal Assent to the following Bills:

- Bill No. 14 - The Adoption Amendment Act, 1998
- Bill No. 5 - The Animal Products Amendment Act, 1998
- Bill No. 6 - The Cattle Marketing Deductions Act, 1998
- Bill No. 8 - The Stray Animals Amendment Act, 1998
- Bill No. 13 - The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act, 1998
- Bill No. 17 - The Certified Management Consultants Act
- Bill No. 16 - The Certified General Accountants Amendment Act, 1998
- Bill No. 30 - The Tobacco Tax Act, 1998
- Bill No. 3 - The Public Utilities Easements Amendment Act, 1998
- Bill No. 23 - The Statute Law Amendment Act, 1998
- Bill No. 19 - The Physical Therapists Act, 1998
- Bill No. 20 - The Election Amendment Act, 1998

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

His Honour retired from the Chamber at 2:30 p.m.

(1430)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Grain Transportation

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the end of my statement today, Mr. Speaker, I will move a motion, a very significant motion, and I would urge and expect all members of the Assembly to support that motion.

Why do we need a motion on transportation, Mr. Speaker? Why do we need a motion dealing with the Canadian transportation Act. Well I'm going to try and demonstrate to you and to the Legislative Assembly why we again have to bring this matter to the attention of the federal government and to the public of Saskatchewan.

I want to read into *Hansard* a speech given by the Minister of Highways at a recent meeting that demonstrates why we need to have a motion, a significant motion, that it will be recognized by the federal government. And this is what the speech says:

We all know (that) what agriculture means to us — we know it in our bones. We see it (in) . . . the faces of our rural friends and neighbours.

We are here today because of the importance of a critical link in our agricultural economy — grain handling and transportation.

Right now I'll give you just one very important statistic that is worthy of remembering — Grain handling and

transportation costs make up 25 per cent of a Saskatchewan farmer's input costs.

That's a bigger cost, Mr. Speaker — and many of us will not realize — a bigger cost than fuel costs to the farmer. It is a bigger cost than the fertilizer costs to the farmer, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-five per cent of all the input costs is freight costs.

All of us here today (the minister goes on to say) understands that either regulation or competition are essential in an efficient grain handling and transportation system to ensure producers pay affordable, reasonable, rates and have accountability in the system.

And I'll go on, Mr. Speaker, to mention that this problem is not just for Saskatchewan farmers but it in fact affects farmers in Alberta and in Manitoba as well.

In regards to competition, one of the things that we have been mentioning for a long time is joint running rights or common road beds — something that will promote competition. And now we see that the CN and CP are doing it on their own, looking at sharing each other's track. But you know, Mr. Speaker, that might be like putting the chicken in . . . or the fox in charge of the chicken coop. And you've got to be very careful of that. There are . . . Joint running rights is a very good principle. Common road bed is a very good principle. But we must be quite concerned as to who is in control of that system.

I want to read you an article from *The Western Producer*, Mr. Speaker, that illustrates to you and to the Assembly the importance of this matter to the producer, to the individual producer. And this is by Barry Wilson of *The Western Producer* and it's dated April 9, 1998 and it says this, Mr. Speaker:

Like every prairie farmer, Robert Anderson of Shaunavon, Saskatchewan, paid attention three years ago when the federal government announced the end of the Crow Benefit grain transportation subsidy

And like many others, it is just now that the full implication of that announcement is hitting home.

More than two years after the end of the Crow, falling grain prices finally are exposing the on-farm implications of freight rates that have tripled in just a few years.

"It wasn't such a shock when the announcement was made because we kind of knew it was coming," Anderson said. "It is a shock now to see the freight bills when there aren't the grain prices to cover it."

You know that the federal government disguised the end of the Crow rate because they gave just a little bit to get people's minds off of the subsidy. Also when we look at grain prices at that time, they were quite reasonable. And of course it was natural for farmers to not to worry about the cost so much as what they were getting for their product.

But in the end result, Mr. Speaker, today with the low grain prices, high input costs, and as I mentioned earlier, freight being 25 per cent of the input costs to farmers, certainly they are starting to realize it.

An interesting note in this article, and I will quote again, Mr. Speaker, and this is what it says:

Federal officials are brimming with confidence that higher freight rates and lower prices for export grain will be good for prairie agriculture . . .

That's the federal officials that are saying that. That's the fellows that work for the federal Liberal government in Ottawa. That's what they're saying. They're saying that in fact they're:

. . . brimming with confidence that higher freight rates and lower prices for export grain will be good for prairie agriculture, forcing farmers to quit exporting raw product and the jobs that go abroad.

Well isn't that interesting, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we need to value add to our production here, our production of raw materials. And we will do that, Mr. Speaker. But that doesn't happen overnight. We still are a producer of raw product and we always will be. And we have to ship that grain to market, to our great friends in Japan and China and the U.S.S.R. (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and everywhere else in the world.

But, Mr. Speaker, that takes time. To value add, it takes time. We will always be producers of raw products and we will always have those freight costs that go with them. So for the federal officials to brim with confidence because freight rates are increasing and grain prices are falling, is beyond me, Mr. Speaker. It's beyond me.

I read with interest as well, Mr. Speaker, and it's another reason why we have to make this motion today, as the reaction to the report from the CNCP on their earnings of the first quarter of this year, and I think the earnings . . . it says here, CN reported earnings of \$104 million, up 46 per cent from the \$7.1 million the same period last year.

Well that's interesting. They seem to be doing all right while the farmer in my area and Arborfield and Carrot River and in the Tisdale area, I don't think they can say that their income is growing by very much. And do we hear the Saskatchewan Party say a word? Uh uh, nothing. Do you know why? Because they're more interested in maybe defeating this government. They're not really interested in the farmers of Saskatchewan or anybody else for that matter. They would just like to be the king in power. That's what they would like.

And it's interesting to note also, Mr. Speaker, that CP reported 142 per cent increase in operating profit to \$150 million. So that's another interesting statistic, Mr. Speaker, and that's the reason why we have to bring a motion to this House today.

Another interesting point to look at is how our transportation has improved over the many years that we've had to ship our grain to market from the centre of Canada, from the prairie provinces.

And this is another newspaper article from the *Moose Jaw Times*, dated April 16, 1998, and this is what it says:

The turnaround for a rail car to port and back in 1910 (in 1910, Mr. Deputy Speaker) was 20 days.

Do you now what it is today in 1998? It is 20 days. So isn't that interesting. Efficiencies that the railways have provided to the farmers of the Prairies, 20 days turnaround time, grain cars to port in 1910; today the same turnaround time. Isn't that interesting, Mr. Speaker.

My motion today, Mr. Speaker, will call on extending the period of time allowed for interested parties to consider purchasing rail lines put up for abandonment. The reason that's in the motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is this. And I'll give you a personal experience.

In my constituency in Carrot River Valley we have two lines, the Chelan subdivision and Arborfield subdivision that are going to be abandoned. Well with this brand-new Bill C-101 that the federal government passed in 1996, gives us so very little time to find anybody with some interest to open a short-line, that in fact most of the time a short-line will not develop.

Now the Saskatchewan Party will go on and say it's successor rights that are stopping short-line development. Well that is completely false. This is the time, in the Bill C-101, the time to be able to purchase rail lines that the CN or CP doesn't want. It's just not sufficient. It doesn't allow short-lines to develop.

They allow the private sector 60 days. Now can you imagine trying to determine if a short-line is feasible — after the CN says it's not — to be able to purchase that line to, in fact, save the roads and save the farmers some money; 60 days they allow a group of farmers to look at purchasing it. It's a wonderful thing. I think the federal government allowing the railways to abandon at will is what it really means.

And then if the private sector can't come to some kind of conclusion in the 60 days, well then they dump it onto the province. And you know how much time they give the province to decide whether they can help a group of producers look at purchasing a line, whether it's financially viable, whether the farmers will use that line. You know how much time they give to the farmers? They give 30 days. Well whoopee ding — 30 days to decide to buy a rail line. Well that is just wonderful.

But the Saskatchewan Party stands there and says, oh, it's successor rights that is the hold-up here, that's what stopping short-line development.

Well it isn't, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's the railways and the federal government that is stopping short-line development in this province, I'll tell you right now.

And then if the province can't come to a determination within 30 days, you know who gets it then? Well the municipality gets a chance to purchase the railway. And do you know how many days they get? They get a whooping 30 days to decide whether they should be able to buy the railway.

So you know, most bankers can't decide whether to give me a loan in that length of time, let alone trying to come up with some kind of a proposal, finding out whether the rail line is financially viable, to find out whether the producers will in fact use the line if a short-line is developed, what kind of loading facility there will be on that line.

Right now in Arborfield, the Department of Highways are working with a group from Arborfield and Chelan. They're doing a track study to see what kind of shape the track is in. That all takes time, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So certainly we have to change the CTA and make that time more viable so that people can in fact take a serious look, groups can take a serious look at operating a short-line, if in fact it is of benefit to the producers and to the community.

The other thing that we're going to do in the motion is ask for an inclusion of provisions allowing for the encouragement and establishment of independent, competitive short-line railroad operations.

Right now the short-lines you see can't really develop because CN may strip away a little chunk in between two destinations. So perhaps the whole section would have been viable but because only a portion of it is abandoned by the railway, which isn't really interesting to anybody, it destroys the economics of the whole line. Well this can't continue, Mr. Speaker, to allow the Liberal opposition over there and the Saskatchewan Party opposition to stand at their desk and say successor rights are the problem here, when we know full well the railways and the federal government are at fault.

The other thing we're going to be asking, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that establishing by law the principle of joint running rights. And I know that the CN and CP are quite a bit against it, if in fact it's done by the producers and the provincial governments. But if it's done by them it's okay because they still . . . You see they have a duopoly. The CN has control of the north part of the province; the CP has control of the south part of the province, and you see they control therefore, the whole province. And we the producers, are captive to the railways.

If we're going to haul a bulk commodity like grain, the only way we can haul it is in fact by rail. So if there is a monopoly, or what I call duopoly because you have two of them sort of in charge and deciding what to charge and controlling the whole system and wanting to control even more of the system, to have them control joint running rights doesn't make much sense.

But if it was a neutral body perhaps, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or perhaps a group of producers controlling the running rights on railways or some kind of a system that could involve the railways as a partner but certainly not on . . .

(1445)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Johnson): — The member has used up his time. Would he now move the motion?

Mr. Renaud: — I would be more than happy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to move my motion, and it will be seconded by the member from Saskatchewan Rivers. And the motion reads:

That the Government of Saskatchewan urge the federal government to amend the Canada Transportation Act, 1996 to make it more producer friendly by extending the period of time allowed for interested parties to consider purchasing rail lines put up for abandonment; by including provisions allowing for and encouraging the establishment

of independent, competitive short-line railroad operations; by establishing in law the principle of joint running rights; and by making other specific changes that level the playing-field between the railway companies, short-line railways, shippers in general, and prairie grain producers in particular.

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am proud to stand up and second a motion put forward by the member from Carrot River.

Mr. Speaker, short-lines are needed. With short-lines we need joint running rights; on main lines as well. Rail lines are selling and some are being abandoned. If we had competition on rail lines, Mr. Speaker, we would not have to worry about purchasing or abandoning rail lines. Competition would determine what lines would remain open.

I'd like to look at a couple of lines that have been closed and where I think joint running rights would have probably had a . . . played a factor in. And one was the line between Shellbrook and Prince Albert. And at one time that area, we used to have pulp come in from the Big River area, as well as chips, logs, and also grain. That line had been taken out and so the trucks had moved onto our main highways and roads, and it created a lot of problems there too.

Competition would determine which lines would be open, and as I stated also in the line right now between Meath Park and Choiceland . . . is up for closure or abandonment. And I believe if you had joint running rights and allowed competition on those lines, those lines would probably stand a chance of staying open.

Another one is between PA (Prince Albert) and Birch Hills, which would really cause a lot of problems if that line had closed, and we look at especially going towards Hudson Bay and to the Churchill and one of the closest ways to port. So that would really remain a problem if that was closed. But I think joint running rights would probably not . . . would play a big factor in keeping that line open.

Also I just listened to the member again from Kindersley stating about successor rights. Mr. Speaker, I just keep thinking to myself, why does he keep going back to this successor rights. And we see that Omni Trax not only purchased the line from P.A. to Warman, they've also took a lot of the workers from CN, so . . . and you don't hear them complain about it. And I just want to say it's too bad we have to keep . . . or hear him keep picking on the workers. I think these workers are great people and probably hired by Omni Trax because of their capability of doing their job. So I sure think that we need these people.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is potash. This Bill allows for potash companies to negotiate prices, and if we look, it says here it is somewhat ironic that rail line competition for other commodities such as potash has been encouraged under the Canada Transportation Act. For example, competitive tendering

for potash shipments has reduced freight rates by about 30 per cent since 1992 to negotiations of confidential contracts between shippers and railroad carriers. So that shows you, Mr. Speaker, that there is some benefits to keeping or having this . . . or having other producers being allowed to compete.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to discuss the competition regarding chemical companies. Why I bring chemical companies in, it's the same as having competition on the rail lines. And I look at chemical companies that didn't allow for competition in the market-place. I can remember working with Focus on Inputs, and we went around to communities doing research — which was a great benefit to the producers, had been being able to get on to the competition. But the federal government extended the patent protection and of course Focus on Inputs was not able to proceed. They are given the protection there. So I see the same thing happening here under this protection Act here that is called the Bill 101.

Mr. Speaker, the profits that the railroad companies are able to make, especially in the last year, has not been actually given to the producers. It's the railroad companies that were the ones that benefited. So I just want to say that I was glad to enter into this debate, Mr. Speaker, and I'll be looking forward to some questions from the opposition later.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm pleased to enter the debate this afternoon and I find it somewhat ironic that we find these new free enterprisers opposite here talking about competition. They have never talked about competition in the past. Never been in favour of competition. Always in favour of more regulation, more roadblocks to everything possible.

The fact of the matter is that your roots are in nationalization. You remember that? Every time you turned around you thought, when someone was making any money at something, you should take it away from them. Often without any compensation whatsoever. That's your background over there. Remember the potash companies that . . . the holes in the ground that you took over? Those are . . . that's the kind of legacy that you people have opposite in terms . . .

Now they're talking competition. Now they're saying that we should open up the rail lines and have anybody and anybody across this province that wants to run a locomotive . . . (inaudible) . . . open them up to competition. Well there may be some merit in it but it certainly isn't any merit in it when it comes from you people opposite who's always been in favour of anything but competition.

Every time that there's a problem for Saskatchewan, particularly when it comes to Saskatchewan agriculture, it's cry on the federal government's shoulder. Rather than taking any responsibility and doing something that would truly be meaningful towards the agriculture in Saskatchewan and helpful to the farmers of this province, cry about it to the federal government and what they're doing.

You want some suggestions? You want some suggestions about what you could do to help farmers in Saskatchewan these days? I'll give you a few suggestions. One of them is in terms of

diesel fuel taxes. Some of the highest diesel fuel taxes in all of Canada is right here in Saskatchewan, right here in Saskatchewan.

And who imposes those fees? It's you people opposite. And those costs are capitalized into the cost of moving grain here in Saskatchewan, those costs are capitalized into moving grain here in Saskatchewan, and every farmer every time they deliver a bushel of grain helps pay for that diesel fuel that moves that grain to port and helps pay the taxes that those rail companies have.

So if you want competition, look at that area for competition. Move toward reducing the taxes in that area.

Another . . .

An Hon. Member: — We are.

Mr. Boyd: — You are? The member from Lloyd says they are. You've done nothing in terms of any reduction in taxes in terms of rail lines. Nothing whatsoever. Reassessment is hitting the rail companies again which will be capitalized in the costs of moving grain. High taxes in every area will be capitalized into moving grain in Saskatchewan.

More regulation, that has always been your forte. That has always been what you people stood for — regulate, regulate, regulate. In fact a few years ago, Mr. Speaker, they brought in, in the throne speech — they were going to reduce the regulation here in Saskatchewan. We've seen nothing in that area. You've increased the amount of regulation, not backed off on it.

I'm surprised and shocked to see these new free enterprisers opposite wanting to open up rail lines for competition. Open up competition, all right. If you want to open up competition, open up competition in terms of allowing short rail lines to come into this province.

The members opposite . . . How to do that? I'll tell you how to do that. The members opposite, if they would have attended the short rail line conference here in Regina last winter, would have been told how to do that. The way that you do that, they said, company after company after company stood up and said, the way to do that is to take successor rights out, to allow for competition, to allow for competition.

You people want competition? Truly allow for competition . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I most certainly was there. And the fact of the matter was that company after company after company stood up and said they want to see successor rights dealt with so that they could come in and operate here in Saskatchewan.

And the fact of the matter is that if that happened, you would see short rail lines take place. You would see short rail line companies take root here in Saskatchewan. And the fact that you could point to one company or two companies here in Saskatchewan that say that it isn't an issue is not relevant to the issue.

People here in Saskatchewan believe that there are opportunities. If you look at the road and rail committee, if you

look at the road and rail committee in west central Saskatchewan, there's a view there that a short rail line operation would work, would work. But the fact of the matter is you people, through many, many of your policies, are standing in the way of real transportation reform here in Saskatchewan. And the member opposite wants to chirp from her seat and we'll be asking her to speak to the debate.

The fact of the matter is the farmers of this province want meaningful change here. They don't want the member from Carrot River standing up and saying we're whining about what the federal government is doing. Look in your own back corner, look in your own house, Mr. Speaker. Look in your own backyard before you start crying about everybody else for a change.

(1500)

People here in Saskatchewan believe that there needs to be changes to Saskatchewan law. We'll deal with federal law at some point as well, but Saskatchewan needs changes as well. Certainly the federal Liberals should be doing everything they can to encourage the development of short rail line operations. The federal government's lack of transportation policy or strategy in general is doing harm to the provinces, yes, in Saskatchewan in particular.

Goodale has been very, very unhelpful in this regard since . . .

An Hon. Member: — Who is he?

Mr. Boyd: — Well he's Saskatchewan's only federal cabinet minister. Most of the time when it comes to these issues he's strangely silent though, and the farmers of Saskatchewan are beginning to notice that. The feds are offering to supply facilitators to encourage short rail line development, but that's about all they'll do and we should be calling on them to do more.

But it's hypocritical for the members opposite to sit there and tell the feds what to do when the NDP won't do anything themselves to facilitate short rail line operations other than to pay lip-service or to point fingers at everybody else. Again they do everything to shirk their responsibility in this issue. It is in this province that the meaningful change could take place. If you truly wanted to see changes in this area, why wouldn't you just remove successor rights and let's get on with the job.

The people of this province, and particularly the farmers of this province, don't believe that the NDP have any credibility in putting forward motions when they have this union-only type mentality that precipitates across their party membership. But it doesn't have any credibility in this issue, not with the farmers of this province. The farmers of this province want to see changes in these areas.

And as we see the kind of problems that are beginning to come forward in rural Saskatchewan these days with an impending drought and lower commodity prices, it's only going to be more and more important that we do everything we can to reduce the cost of operations of the farm people across Saskatchewan. And the largest bill, the largest bill that a farmer in Saskatchewan pays today is not his fuel bill, it's not his fertilizer bill, it is the

bill for transporting his product to market.

And that's an area that this government has some responsibility for and could make some changes that would help in that area, as I've outlined, in terms of fuel taxes, in terms of successor rights, in terms of the issue of reassessment, in terms of general taxation here in this province. Those are areas that this government could impact upon if they truly wanted to see any help in this area, Mr. Speaker, and I'll conclude at that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to participate in this debate today. It's very interesting to hear from the opposite side the whole question of regulation and deregulation when it comes to the grain transportation system, Mr. Speaker.

Today within this resolution we talk about a quaint idea that farmers talked about 15 years ago, joint running rights. The only way we can have true competition in the grain handling system is to have joint running rights, because railways running 75 kilometres apart is not competition. And we have the parties across the way and their federal cousins, starting in the 1980s, talking about a system of deregulation. A system of deregulation that's only for the railways, not for the farmers of Saskatchewan. That is shameful, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whitmore: — I have seen changes to the western grain transportation system that have been detrimental to the farmers. I've heard these parties talk about deregulation, deregulation by which the farmers suffer. We see a new Act in terms of the grain transportation system that takes out a chunk of track that makes it absolutely worthless. We see that in a case of the rail line that goes from Eston to Elrose, that the member was speaking about, that takes that chunk out to the Alberta border, that makes the track absolutely worthless to the people of Saskatchewan and to the farmers who want to use it. So you tell me who's speaking on behalf of the farmers.

And then we talk about the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Elwin Hermanson, who talks about an attack on the Canadian Wheat Board, in terms that he wants deregulation — who's the deregulation for? It is not for the farmers. Deregulation has not been for the farmers, Mr. Speaker.

We are talking about true competition when we are talking about joint running rights. Three to four weeks ago the Reform Party in Saskatoon held a meeting talking about grain transportations, everyone from all political spectrums. And do you know what came out as the joint statement that all farmers at that meeting supported? You know what it was from the left and from the right? Joint running rights — joint running rights.

As I've said earlier in another speech, Mr. Speaker, in this House, there is only one place in Saskatchewan by which there is true competition in the railway industry, and that is the main Omni Trax to CNCP (Canadian National and Canadian Pacific) running through Saskatoon, side by side to the Alberta border — the only place farmers have competition with the railway system.

I am tired of hearing farm organizations talk about deregulation when they think the system will get better. Well we got deregulation. But what did it get us? Higher freight costs, poor system to move grain. And you know what the railways say? We don't know if grain is important to us any more.

In 1983 when the Western Grain Transportation Act changed in terms of deregulation, I sat in a room with the former president of CN, and the former president of CP Rail said, grain, now with the changes to the system by which we are being paid, grain is the most important commodity.

We are paying them full price and getting nothing in return. It is time for the kind of competition that we need in the system, Mr. Speaker — true competition. And a member opposite says, oh my God, this is coming from the social democratic party, the NDP, the question of competition.

When things don't work in this province, farmers come together to make it work. Short-line railways is an example of that. But I am tired of this. I am tired of this so-called deregulation that we hear from both parties. From both parties. Because I want to remind the Liberals opposite it was their federal cousins who cut the grain transportation Act as a payment from producers to the railways.

You know what I hear right now from those from the right? They're starting to say that maybe paying the railways was a good idea instead of the producers. At least we had control. At least we had handcuffs on the railways. At least we had a say. Now we have nothing.

It is time to fight for those kind of controls and those kind of competitions that protect the farmers of Saskatchewan. And while we talk about this question of what's going on here, I know where this party stands and I know it is right in terms of what it's fighting for. So I ask the other parties to support this motion and send a message to our federal cousins, because I tell you it will be in your back door next when it comes to a rail line being abandoned. And what will you do to protect the producers of . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order. Order. Now I know the hon. member will be well aware — order! — the hon. member will be well aware of rule 28 which requires that all debate be directed through the Chair and I'm sure that he will want to conduct himself in his debate accordingly.

Mr. Whitmore: — Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I apologize for that and I have completed my portion of the debate. Thank you again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to get in on this debate. My constituency of Battleford-Cut Knife has a large component of agriculture. And having lived in this area for most of my life, I have experienced the changes and the challenges facing our farmers.

When my husband and I started farming 30 years ago, our basic crops were wheat, oats, and barley. At least with these crops, if the price was poor for grain, we could feed our crops to our cattle, our sheep, and our pigs.

Now farmers are diversifying into canola, flax, mustard, peas, dill, specialty livestock. You name it — we're growing it and we're raising it. There are many reasons. There's advanced chemicals and technologies . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. We're having a bit of a disturbing kind of trend here that the ones who are calling out the most are the ones who have already spoken and have put their remarks on the record. Now I ask for the cooperation of all members of the House. Those who have spoken, allow the others to be heard. And those who have not spoken, put your remarks on the record.

Ms. Murrell: — Mr. Speaker, advanced chemicals and technologies, the price, the processing, and the need. And as we are all aware, grain prices fluctuate daily but input costs are consistently high and freight rates since the loss of the Crow are sky-rocketing.

Mr. Speaker, in 1987-88 to move grain from Reford, Saskatchewan via Thunder Bay, the railway freight was \$6.65 per tonne. In 1996-97 that freight rate was \$33.46 per tonne.

Now, Mr. Speaker, farmers are and have always been risk-takers. But how do individual farmers continue to survive with low rainfall, low prices, poor yields, railway rip-offs, or off-the-farm incomes?

First of all, more and more farmers are forming co-ops to have more value added processing in their own area — the hog barns, the cattle feedlots, the malt plants, the pellet plants.

And community leaders are realizing the impact of low farm incomes and have been meeting — such as the west-central municipal government committee who are discussing transportation networks and trying to find solutions. And farm groups are meeting regarding short-lines and other alternatives to move grain more efficiently and more cost-effective.

The western premiers at their May '97 conference urged the federal government to establish a review of the grain handling and transportation to develop long-term system improvements. And what is happening while Mr. Justice Estey is reviewing this? The railways are closing short-lines.

Mr. Speaker, the western provinces recommend that alternatives for enhancing competition should be evaluated and we need to expand the use of running rights and joint . . . or common use of rights of way for provisions, and maintain or enhance too access to producer cars. If the freight charges are 25 per cent of a farmer's input costs, why not encourage competition so that farmers can enjoy the benefit of their labour?

CN reported earnings of 104 million — up 46 per cent from the 71 million in the same period the year before, while revenue rose to 1.6 billion. Record profits while last year prairie grain sat waiting to be shipped.

Well, Mr. Speaker, farmers will be compensated for these losses. CN Rail has agreed to pay the Canadian Wheat Board millions in compensation for poor rail service to farmers in lower freight rates and cash.

So it's time for change and competition. Therefore I support this motion and I encourage the federal government to get on board.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to listen to this debate and I'm pleased to be able to be a part of it. And I'm just wondering if there's any farmers out there — there's the odd one that may have a small TV in his tractor cab or on a breakdown on the way to the repair shop — and I'm sure he's asking, I wonder who in the world is actually sticking up for the farmers because I haven't heard that here today.

And I certainly don't hear it from the members opposite. The question that I would ask is what in the world have they done to help out the producers in this province to get their products to port. What have they actually done? Well the answer is pretty simple, Mr. Speaker. It's nothing. They've actually done nothing, Mr. Speaker, absolutely nothing.

But could they do something? Yes, sure they could. And they do what they do best — they whine about what everybody else should be doing. They continually blame the former Tories, whether it's in Saskatchewan here, whether it's in Ottawa, about the terrible state they put this country in, and this province. They continually blame the federal government in Ottawa. They just keep crying and whining like a lamb lost in the forest, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — What could they do?

Mr. McLane: — What could they do? Maybe a few suggestions we could ask them, Mr. Speaker. And maybe I'll ask a few of these questions at the end.

What have they done in conjunction with the grain companies to stop mass abandonment of their facilities along these rail lines? What have they done? Have they talked to the grain companies? Have they talked to their friends at the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, one of the largest grain handlers in this province? Have they talked to them and said, will you quit bulldozing your elevators over till we get this situation straightened out? Have they talked to them? I ask the question, Mr. Speaker, have they actually talked to those people?

I have my doubts. I have my doubts if they've talked to them about it because they wouldn't want to step on anybody's toes, Mr. Speaker.

And have they actually started thinking about picking up any of these branch lines, Mr. Speaker? Have they actually thought what the provincial government could do in this province to help out the producers and the communities affected by these lines. Have you ever actually thought of going and buying any of these branch lines for net salvage value — which would not be an expenditure, it would be an investment. They would receive equity in doing it. And if the net salvage value of the line today is a million dollars, in 5 years it will likely be a million dollars and in 10 years it will likely be a million dollars. So it can be an investment till you get this thing straightened out.

There's no plan, there's no plan, Mr. Speaker, of transportation in this province. No road, rail plan — nothing at all, Mr. Speaker. So I'm wondering why they're crying. Wonder why they're always crying about everybody else.

And they don't . . . Yes, Mr. Speaker, it does sound a bit like I'm whining, as the member opposite from Saskatoon noted, but I tell you it kind of grows on you in here. And coming over across there it kind of grows on you. It sticks to you, all the whining, whining, whining, and it gets to everybody eventually.

(1515)

There's one thing I would like to mention, Mr. Speaker, and read into the record if I could. It's an article in *The Western Producer* by Barry Wilson, and it talks about . . . I guess the point of this, Mr. Speaker, is who is sticking up for the farmers. And I'd like to quote if I could, just a short paragraph from this article: "Over the strong objections . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, Mr. Member, *The Western Producer* is a Liberal magazine . . .

Mr. Speaker, if I could quote from this article by Barry Wilson:

Over the strong objections of the Reform and Conservative MPs, the House of Commons has approved in principle Canada Labour Code changes that would prevent west coast exports from being tied up by third party work stoppages.

What this does is make the grain handlers an essential service, Mr. Speaker. And it's opposed, it was opposed by the Conservatives, the federal Conservatives and the Reform Party, Mr. Speaker. That should tell you who's sticking up for the farmers in this province.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of this there is a question and answer period; I have a couple of questions I will be putting forward to the members opposite. But I would wish that the provincial government for once in its lifetime — this NDP government since it came to power in 1991 — would take a leadership role for something in this province and stick up for the producers and the families in this province and start doing something proactive with regards to the abandonment of these rail lines. Thank you.

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to enter this debate and to support the motion presented by the member from Carrot River.

One of the reasons is that I think some of the policies that are being put to the people of Canada by the federal government are going to change the face of rural Saskatchewan. In fact they are going to change the face of Saskatchewan, period. And along with the government I agree with the member from Arm River. Yes, the grain companies and yes, other people are working hand in hand — the railways, the grain companies, and the Liberal government — to destroy the kind of province that I've known since I was a young child.

I can tell you that I feel very, very, very emotional about this and I don't apologize for it. Because my grandparents came from Ukraine, and I don't want to see in three generations the

people of Saskatchewan being serfs on their land again. We came to this country three generations ago because there was land here. We could work hard. We could own our own land and we could get ahead.

And I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, the policies that I am seeing by the railways and by the federal governments, subsequent federal governments, are destroying the freedom for our producers to farm and to own their own land. Shippers in the prairie provinces are major users of the Canadian railway system. I'm going to say that again — shippers in the prairie provinces are major users of our railway system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Stanger: — Nearly 800 million tonnes . . . 8 million tonnes . . . 80 — pardon me, Mr. Speaker, I'll get it right yet — 80 million tonnes of products such as grain, coal, potash, and sulphur are shipped every year by rail to market. Prairie traffic forms an important component of all Canadian rail traffic.

I mean the way it looks to me sometimes, it's as if somehow we were the users of this and we did not contribute. Mr. Speaker, we contribute 50 per cent of all the tonnage that is hauled by the CN and the CP. And what do we get in replacement for that, Mr. Speaker?

Not only that, we have given millions of acres in western Canada to the railways — free, millions of acres to the railways. Not only that, we have paid, our taxpayers have paid, for those railways. The cost of rail transportation represents a significant component of the delivered price of prairie products. A modest increase in transportation costs could have a significant implication to profit margins as shippers. And of course when we say shippers, we mean also our farm producers.

For example, potash, the average freight rate per tonne represents over 35 per cent of the delivered value. Similarly for coal, the freight rate exceeds 45 per cent of the delivered price.

Most prairie markets are inherently captive to rail because of their high weight, low value, and long distance to market. Availability of rail competition is a key component to prairie shippers while negotiating freight rates and service requirements with CP and CN.

And let me tell the member from Arm River why the federal government is responsible. We are a land-locked province. We need the railways. That was a condition of Confederation. That's what built this country.

We are not whining. The federal government is responsible to keep this country together by helping the railways, by helping the producers, by giving us good legislation. They are responsible. I'm not a whiner or a crier, but this is a backbone of Confederation.

I mean the salmon industries get subsidies, the cod industry gets subsidy. Look at the eastern provinces. Good luck to them, but it's about time that Saskatchewan got some of this backing that other producers get. It isn't a matter of whining and crying, it's a matter of what the responsibility of the federal government is to this country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put into the record the fact that as taxpayers we have given the railways, as I said before, a million acres of free land. As the taxpayers, we have subsidized the railroads to the tune of millions of dollars, and it's time that the federal government gave us a hand in directing the railways to serve our producers and our shippers in western Canada, Mr. Speaker.

And I just want to say that I feel very strongly that the face of Saskatchewan is going to change in the next five years. And what makes me sad is, I think down in Ottawa there are people that just don't give a care for us here. And I want to speak up for the producers in my area and all of Saskatchewan, and it's about time that somebody got a handle and joint running rights at the very least would help people to really be competitive.

You know what? The funny part of it all is, Mr. Speaker, is people like me and my philosophy, we don't mind competition. What I see, what I see in the philosophy of these great free enterprisers that they so espouse, what competition means to them is this — I'll tell you what competition means to them: competition means monopolies. They love having complete control and not any true competition.

The smaller businessmen, the smaller producers, people like myself, we can compete and we believe in that kind of competition. What we don't believe is in railways and grain companies having all the power, and the producers and people having none of the power. That isn't competition, Mr. Speaker. That's a monopoly and it drives small people completely out of the business. And again you are going to have huge land holdings and you are going to have the same situation that my grandparents tried to escape from just three generations ago. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a few minutes to address this motion, particularly at this time when there is a proposed rail-line abandonment joining my constituency of Prince Albert to Birch Hills. And this line connects all the way up to the Churchill River.

Of course in using that shipping route, our farmers have advised us that there's a saving of approximately up to the vicinity of \$20 per tonne if the grain is shipped through the Churchill River system — through the Churchill Port system, Mr. Speaker — as opposed to the Lakehead or to the west coast. So this rail line is particularly important to people, to farmers, and to all of us who benefit from having farmers shipping their grain to ports to export outside of the country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to address only one portion of the motion, and that is this business . . . the portion of the motion that deals with establishing in law the principle of joint running rights.

I believe if we could make that change alone in federal legislation or regulation, whichever the case may be, that that in itself would go a long way to assisting farmers with their shipping costs.

Right now the way the situation is evolved is that CN and CP, who effectively got monopolies on the rail transportation across

the country, they got the monopolies and in turn they were supposed to supply or to produce some . . . there was some social responsibility that came with that monopoly. Once they were privatized in total they seemed to have forgotten that there's a social responsibility and they've now turned all of their attention strictly to profit. That's the bottom line only. There is no social conscience to the corporation at this stage, to either of those corporations at this stage.

So what they're trying to do is abandon the lines one by one. Take little portions out here, take little portions out here because they're not viable and then . . . because this enables them to maximize their profits. And the way they do . . . the way it maximizes profits is that a lot of the haul is then done by farmers who have to pay truckers to haul longer distances, and of course the people, the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, who are footing the bills for the highways that are being damaged by this kind of a policy.

So if the railways were not given the privileged position of being able to destroy the lines on their own but had to offer that line and give any company that might come up the running rights on that line, then the natural market-place would take care of which lines would stay in place and which wouldn't. And I would maintain, Mr. Speaker, that the line from Birch Hills to Prince Albert would stay.

And when it comes to the principle of joint running rights, you know we used to think that that was such a foreign concept. But when you think of it, when you think of it, Mr. Speaker, the whole idea of running rights has changed a lot in this province and across the continent. We always had joint running rights on our highways — anybody could go, it was paid by the public.

We never used to have joint running rights on our power lines, but the system is evolving so that any company . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . God bless you, Mr. Speaker — so that any company can now put their power into the power grids and the transmitting company has to charge them a fair price for doing it.

So you've got joint running rights on power. The same thing applies to telephones. We've got companies from all over the continent vying for position and trying to attract customers, but it's SaskTel's lines that they're using for the most case, in addition to the satellite and microwave towers they may be establishing.

You've got joint running rights on telephones, on highways, and on power. And you have joint running rights on gas, natural gas. Why can't we have joint running rights on the railways?

The only reason we don't have it is because of the sweetheart deal between CNCP and the federal politicians, and that has to change. And we are asking, in this motion, to take a hard look at it and change that, and be consistent. If you want to have freedom and you want to have competition, then have it. Don't give somebody a monopoly and provide them with the opportunity to have a scorched earth policy, or a scorched rail track policy, Mr. Chair.

So with that, I want to advise that I will be, on behalf of my constituents, voting for this motion and supporting the mover,

the member from Tisdale.

The Speaker: — Is the Assembly ready for the question? If the Assembly is ready for the question then we will proceed to the second part of the seventy-five minute debate for the 10 minutes of exchange of questions or comments, at the conclusion of which then the vote shall be put on the question. The floor is now open for questions or comments by members.

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the member from Arm River. I notice he stands up in this House often and never blames the federal government for the massive cuts in health care funding.

For example, he stands up in this House and he never complains about the lack of funding by the federal government or the lack of interest to the national highways program. He stands up in here and he favours the railways over the farmers.

I guess my question to him is: why is it when an issue is either in the interest of the federal government, or in the interest of the farmers on the other hand, he always sticks up, and his party, for the federal government rather than the producers of the province?

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that the rules apply the same in this question and answer exchange as they do in question period, where we're not allowed to say that the member isn't quite being straightforward with his answers . . . or his questions. And I'd like to use a little stronger language if I could, Mr. Speaker, because I am one of those farmers in this province, and a producer, and I stand up many days in this House, standing up for the principles of the farmers and the communities in which they live.

And for the member opposite to say anything else — the same member who has been dead silent on the issue of the hospital closure in his community — to stand in this House today and say that we're for the . . . everything the federal government does, is absolutely ludicrous, Mr. Speaker.

I wish that member would speak up on behalf of his constituents — the very people, Mr. Speaker, that elected him — now to represent them; he's being very quiet. So I would just say to the member opposite, we will do everything in this Liberal caucus to ensure that the producers rights in this province are upheld and that their products get to port on time.

Mr. Renaud: — A supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I do note that there's many political donations to the Liberal Party by the railways and I'm wondering, is that why the member there sticks up for the railways over the producers of the province of Saskatchewan?

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure who the member is talking about, if he's talking about the federal Liberal Party or the Saskatchewan Liberal Party. As far as I know, the Saskatchewan Liberal Party doesn't receive those types of donations from the huge railroads.

And certainly with the stand that the NDP have on transportation and issues reflected by the railways, I'm surprised that the railways continue to donate money to the

NDP, in which they do federally. So I don't think the member can have his cake and eat it too.

(1530)

The Speaker: — The Chair does want to remind all hon. members that in rule 75, in seventy-five minute debate, for questions and comments, the questions and comments must be pertinent to the debate made by the member in the motion before us, and that no member can be required to be held accountable for actions of their political parties, but must . . . in this Assembly. But the debate must be in the context of the motion before us. Questions and comments will continue.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would too like to ask the members opposite a question. I guess I will direct it to the member from Carrot River Valley since he was the one that moved this motion. In the motion they talk about the extended period of time allowed for interested parties to consider purchasing the rail line put forward. And they didn't want to talk about that issue in their debate, and I'm not surprised why.

To the member, my question is: would he take a proposal back to his caucus and to his cabinet, to his cabinet ministers responsible for transportation in this province, to look at these rail lines that are up for abandonment, Mr. Speaker, that are allowed to be bought for net salvage value, which means what the value of the rail line would be after it's torn up and hauled down to some place in the States where most of these are going to?

His government would make a commitment to these rail lines to buy them now as an investment and hold them at the very least until this situation has been settled — transportation — until his government has a plan in this province. Will the member take that back to his cabinet?

Mr. Renaud: — Mr. Speaker, a very good question. He wants the federal government to be able to dump the railways onto the province and make the province pay. Well isn't that interesting. Well I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that our Premier has asked for a moratorium, a halt on all rail line abandonment until Mr. Estey finishes his review of the grain transportation.

We also have asked in this motion that the 60-day time for the private sector to purchase a short-line . . . or a piece of line from the railways, or 30 days by the province or 30 days from the municipal government, is not enough time. It doesn't give anybody enough chance to find out whether it's financially feasible and/or warranted by the producers. So certainly we're asking all of that on this side of the House.

Ms. Stanger: — I'd like to ask the member from Arm River a simple question. The question is, Mr. Member, do you not think the federal . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now I want to remind the hon. member that all . . . according to rule 28, all members understand that debate and comment in the House must be directed to the Chair.

Ms. Stanger: — Sorry about that, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member from Arm River a simple

question, and the question that I'd like to put to him is: does he think the federal government has any responsibility to the province of Saskatchewan as it is in conjunction to agriculture?

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I would ask that member the same question I asked the previous member from Carrot River who didn't seem to understand the question and I don't think he understands the process.

And maybe this member could go and give me an answer whether she would go back to her cabinet colleagues and present the same opportunity that I asked the minister . . . or the member from Carrot River to do, and that is to make an investment in Saskatchewan, in the farmers in the communities in Saskatchewan, and go and invest in these rail lines now, as they're being abandoned, for the people of Saskatchewan until such a time that you have an actual plan for transportation in this province.

The division bells rang from 3:39 p.m. until 3:40 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 27

Van Mulligen	Mitchell	Tchorzewski
Johnson	Whitmore	Kowalsky
Bradley	Koenker	Renaud
Lorje	Hamilton	Stanger
Wall	Kasperski	Murray
Langford	Murrell	Thomson
Krawetz	Bjornerud	Toth
Boyd	Gantfoer	Heppner
Osika	McLane	Julé

Nays — nil

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave to make a motion regarding the transmission of the previous motion and the debate to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Transport.

Leave granted.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Lloydminster:

That the text of the motion and transcripts of the debate on the motion just passed regarding the need to amend the Canada Transportation Act, 1996 be transmitted to the federal Minister of Transport, the federal minister of the Wheat Board, and the Prime Minister, on behalf of this Assembly, by Mr. Speaker.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 4 — Plains Health Centre Closure

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to enter into the debate this afternoon and discuss a very

important issue that people across Saskatchewan are very interested in. Certainly people across the southern part of the province have taken keen interest in through their attendance at a number of public meetings.

And, Mr. Speaker, we would hope as well that at the end of the debate, we will have the same opportunity to have a vote taken on this question as well, that all members would have the opportunity through free vote to express their opinions and represent their constituents. And that, Mr. Speaker, is in regards to the imminent closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, as we discuss the Plains Health Centre it's interesting to note how on many occasions the government, whether it's the Premier or the Minister of Health, keep telling residents of Saskatchewan, keep telling members of this Legislative Assembly, that everyone has had an opportunity to speak out on the issue.

They had an opportunity certainly in 1995, at least that's what I've heard the Minister of Health say at many of the public meetings, whether they be in Swift Current or Weyburn or Whitewood or Indian Head or wherever the meetings have been — Assiniboia. And the Minister of Health has got up and he has stood in his place and basically said, people of Saskatchewan voted for the Plains closure in 1995 at that provincial general election. And the fact that the NDP was re-elected was a positive vote for the government and the closure of the Plains Health Centre.

(1545)

It's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, however, that as has been pointed out on a number of occasions, that in the vote that was taking place in 1995, members even of the current governing party, member from Regina South, was openly and publicly, and even in campaign brochures, saying elect me; I will stand up and I will make sure that I will speak up on behalf of the Plains and see to it that the Plains is not closed.

I'm sure the member from Cannington . . . or Indian Head-Milestone on many occasions said as well that he would speak out in support of the Plains Health Centre

And, Mr. Speaker, however, before the election writ was even over and the election ballots were counted, we find that these members all of a sudden were on the government side of the Assembly basically saying no, I'm sorry, we cannot stand in the way of progress — that's the way they would put it — the beds, the Plains Health Centre, needs to be closed.

But one has to ask, why do we need to close the Plains Health Centre. Especially when we see headlines such as "Bed shortage delays heart surgery" in the Wednesday, April 8, Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*, or people . . . "Family angered as a result of lack of a bed availability for family member."

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the debate taking place in the province, in Saskatchewan, and you look at what the Plains Health Centre has offered people of Saskatchewan, certainly rural and southern Saskatchewan, the Plains Health Centre as a facility no doubt provides top-notch care.

We've seen that on many occasions where individuals in very traumatic situations were brought into the Plains Health Centre and where they were given the life support that was needed to allow them the opportunity to continue to live a productive life. And while we can argue the fact that in many cases people have been treated very fairly and certainly have received very acute and specific care and emergency care, their needs have been met at the Plains.

And while the government had argued that those needs will not be lost, they will be offered in the Regina General or the Pasqua hospitals, the facts are, Mr. Speaker, on a daily basis we hear of more bed closures across Saskatchewan. We hear of — as a result of bed shortages — we see waiting-lists continue to grow in the province of Saskatchewan for elective surgeries, Mr. Speaker. We even find emergency situations where people are scheduled for emergency operations but basically a more severe emergency arrives, that individual may be bumped for a few hours or even two or three days, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to note that on one hand . . . even we just had a debate in this Assembly talking about rail-line abandonment, and the government, the NDP government, has said that it's . . . and they basically requested the federal government to hold a moratorium on rail-line abandonment until further debate can take place to allow a total review of the problems that may arise or how we look at rail-line service in the province of Saskatchewan.

If indeed, Mr. Speaker, the government really feels that a moratorium is necessary to address the rail-line abandonment in the province, it would certainly be appropriate I think as well, Mr. Speaker, for the government to recognize that maybe a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre would be reasonable as well. And I think that's what people are looking for.

People are looking for this government to begin to listen, and I think a recent poll conducted, phone-in poll conducted by the Regina *Leader-Post*, reflects how people feel about health care. And I believe, Mr. Speaker, the fact that over 5,700 respondents, from people who responded to that phone-in show or phone-in line, and 91 per cent said that health care is in worse shape than it was prior to the wellness model. I believe a lot of that is reflective of the anger that people have, especially with the closure of the Plains health care centre.

Now why are people so angry, Mr. Speaker? Why are people so annoyed at the fact that the government has talked about closing the health care centre? They're annoyed for a couple of reasons. The fact that they haven't had an opportunity to really be involved in the debate. The fact that the Plains health care, the Plains facility sits an ideal location for quick and easy access not only from many areas of the city of Regina, but certainly southern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

As well, Mr. Speaker, people are angered because they see the cut-back in their own local communities of acute care facilities and of acute care beds and they view access to acute care facilities in the large urban centres as something that is their right if you will — if they need the service, that they've got a bed to come to.

Well the government will argue that 675 beds are all that's needed in the province of . . . or in the city of Regina, and the fact that when the Plains closes there will be no further bed closures. The facts are even one of their own studies, the Atkinson report indicates that 900 beds would be the more appropriate or in that neighbourhood of 900 beds, acute care beds would be more appropriate than 675.

And the member from Regina South says no. I guess the member from Regina South wants to . . . says that anyone who has to wait more than a year for elective surgery, that's fine. That's their problem. Basically that's what he's basically saying to them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if indeed this government is listening to the people, if indeed, Mr. Speaker, this government has the concern of the public in mind, if indeed it feels that it is addressing health care appropriately, and if it feels that people have had a chance to have a voice, then I would feel, Mr. Speaker, it would be appropriate for this Legislative Assembly to have an open and free vote on the question.

Why do I say that, Mr. Speaker? Because we're all elected. I say that because of the fact we are elected to represent our constituents. And I'm sure that many of the members on the government's side of the House as well as my colleagues on the opposition side have had many people calling us in regards to the closure of the Plains health care centre.

And I've just got in front of me just a few of the many letters I've received from individuals not only in my constituency but across the province in regards to the question, in regards to the closure of the Plains health care centre. And in one of the letters I quote, Mr. Speaker, says this: "We realize . . ." And this is talking . . . addressed to the Minister of Health:

We realize that your main interests lie with the populations of Regina and Saskatoon, but remember there are a few taxpaying citizens like ourselves left in rural Saskatchewan. We do not think that you are properly addressing our concerns. Rural hospital bed and services have been decimated, yet your government is continually opening new office space. We would like to draw your attention to the fact that office space, personnel, and computers do not replace hospital staff, beds, and medical attention.

Mr. Speaker, that's just one of the letters I've received.

Another letter to the editor, "Time has come to speak out against injustice." And an editorial in the *Star-Phoenix*, April 8, talking about the closure. Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the Minister of Health would like everyone to believe that it was the Regina District Health Board that made that decision. And I'm quoting from editorial, "Lack of say on Plains angers public."

The government tells them the Plains closure was made at the local board level. Oh, was it?

Let's quickly review the record:

"If it is not cost-efficient and it doesn't make sense, the

government will not be providing funding,” said Regina South MLA Andrew Thomson, wearing a “Save the Plains” T-shirt at a rally on July 26, 1995, where he vowed the government would not close the Plains until a proper study was done.

Then as you go further on in the article:

“In terms of an acute-care facility, that issue is closed,” said then health minister Eric Cline on Jan. 16, 1996.

That was just shortly after the 1995 rally that the member from Regina South attended with his Save the Plains T-shirt on, and then he comes to the Legislative Assembly and the Minister of Health at that time says, case closed. — that’s what the Premier’s arguing.

People in Saskatchewan are basically saying, Mr. Speaker, they’re asking whether or not this government has any compassion, whether or not this government is willing to listen and willing to heed the wishes and desires of the people and allow the public to have some say.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, I do have a number of letters that have been addressed to my attention from people all across this province speaking out about the Plains health closure. Not only that, Mr. Speaker, I have had many people who have called me personally by telephone to speak and raise their concerns.

And what I like, Mr. Speaker, about the fact people are writing and people are calling me is they’re not just talking about the personal circumstances they face, Mr. Speaker, but they’re also giving some solid reasons as to why the Plains Health Centre should stay open. Because, Mr. Speaker, it’s easy to get emotional on a question like this. It’s easy to talk about personal care that you’ve received. And granted, Mr. Speaker, many hospital facilities across this province do give excellent care when it comes to acute care.

But, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to talking about the Plains health care centre it’s not just the emotional issue of how different people have found the service and the facility. There’s so many questions about accessibility, about the fact that it’s a trauma centre.

And, Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that we have so many other shortages in other areas in this province, it would seem to me that it certainly would be appropriate for the government to continue to allow the Plains to act as a trauma centre in the southern part of the province of Saskatchewan and allow the General to meet its role and allow the Pasqua to meet its role as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the fact talking about free vote or free expression, what did the former member have to say about the so-called free vote — Mr. Lewis Draper, member for Assiniboia-Gravelbourg?

This is what Mr. Draper says in an article, *Leader-Post* article, Thursday, May 7:

“Nobody informed me we intended to close small hospitals and it was a great embarrassment when I learned about it.”

This is a letter he wrote to fellow NDP MLAs:

“I do not wish to embarrass my rural colleagues, but if the choice is between 52 politicians and 5,200 patients and friends in Lafleche and Gravelbourg, the choice becomes very easy.”

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of being involved in a by-election back in 1989 in that same area, Assiniboia-Gravelbourg area, and the debate at that time was health care as well. In fact a letter by the NDP in that campaign went around saying to individuals that if they had voted for the Conservative candidate of the day that they would lose all their hospitals.

Well the facts are, Mr. Speaker, it wasn’t the Conservative Party that closed hospitals in Assiniboia-Gravelbourg. Since 1991, the NDP closed hospitals in that constituency and continue to close hospitals.

Mr. Draper also in this article says:

“I heard nothing about health care in the lead up to the 1991 campaign until days before (the election was called) when we (candidates) were given a ‘hand-out’ that talked about wellness.”

And he says:

(He) immediately phoned NDP campaign manager Jack Messer to ask what “wellness” meant.

This is what he was told:

“I was told not to worry about it,” Draper said. “‘They (the voters) are not going to ask about health care. They just want to get rid of . . . Tories.’ Of course he was right.”

Mr. Speaker, yes the 1991 campaign was more about getting rid of a government rather than looking at what governments had to offer or the political parties really had to offer. And, Mr. Speaker, I think if you talk to people today, people would really as they would think back to that ’91 campaign, would feel deceived and would be disappointed in what has taken place because they were led to believe that if they voted especially for the NDP, that health care would be provided in a more compassionate way. But, Mr. Speaker, we are not seeing that.

In fact, Mr. Draper said:

. . . there was no talk in the NDP caucus about health care or hospital closures immediately after the 1991 election either . . . “Several months later at a caucus meeting, Louise Simard dropped the bombshell.”

Several months later. Even the NDP members weren’t aware of the fact that the government was already contemplating the closing of 52 hospitals, including the Plains health care centre.

Mr. Speaker, in this article the . . . a further quote from the article says, “Despite this lack of . . .”

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now from both sides of the

House . . . Order! It's not necessary to be having shouting back and forth. All hon. members are able to put their remarks on the record, where they will stand and be heard. And I'll encourage all hon. members to allow the hon. member for Moosomin to be heard when he makes his remarks on the record.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to continue with a couple more comments out of the article that I am quoting from, the *Leader-Post* article, Thursday, May 7, and in regards to Mr. Draper's comments where he said:

There had been no caucus debate on whether this move should be made.

The Speaker: — Order, order. The hon. member is just in close proximity to the Chair and close proximity to the Speaker. I just asked for the House to provide the hon. member for Moosomin to be heard, and within about 10 to 15 seconds we have members shouting across the floor at each other again. I'll ask for the cooperation of the House to allow the hon. member for Moosomin to be heard.

(1600)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, continuing on with a quote from this article. Mr. Draper says:

There had been no caucus debate on whether this move should be made. There was no consultation with their rural MLAs — not even the one who happened to have three decades experience practising medicine in rural Saskatchewan.

What that basically says to me, Mr. Speaker, that what the minister's been saying is untruthful, the fact that he's saying there was an open discussion, or the fact that members had an opportunity to have some say. And the member from . . . his former member from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg was saying he didn't have that say. He didn't have the opportunity to really express his opinion, even as a long-time experiencing practitioner practising medicine in rural Saskatchewan.

Despite this lack of discussion, a vote in caucus was taken on the rural hospital issue.

And what does Mr. Draper say?

(Mr.) Draper said he was the only one of the 55 NDP MLAs who voted against the closures. "Everybody voted for it, including the great defector from Shaunavon (Glen McPherson, who joined the Liberals)" . . .

The former NDP MLA who all of a sudden is now standing up and saying that he is the saviour of the Plains — close the Plains Health Centre. He was one of the ones, if he really felt that strongly at the time, why didn't he stand up at the time when Mr. Draper did and vote against the closure of the Plains health care centre.

The only time the NDP caucus was ever consulted on health-care policy, Draper said, was when they were asked by Premier Roy Romanow "to suggest the propaganda" that would be used to sell to the public their

already-decided-upon policy.

Mr. Speaker, for our government, for the Premier, for the Minister of Health to suggest that the people, by their elected representatives, have had a say or have had a voice or have had an opportunity to express their concerns and opinions or even a vote on the issue, Mr. Speaker, is not really being honest or open with the public because of the fact that we haven't had that free vote in this Assembly. And that's why we're calling for it. That's why we're asking government members to stand up in their place and speak out and represent the wishes of their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, that's why people are getting together, 2 and 300 at a time at a busy time of the year to address the closure of the Plains health care centre. Mr. Speaker, it seems to me very appropriate that if the government is listening, if the Premier is listening, if the NDP are listening as they always like to tell us they are, that they would certainly give the public of this province an opportunity to a free vote in this Assembly.

Or even better still, Mr. Speaker, the Premier could go one step further and say, I think the people of Saskatchewan have a point here. I think the fact that so many people are speaking out on this issue, maybe we should sit back. Maybe we should take the advice of the opposition and put a moratorium on that. Let's discuss it a little further and determine whether or not the Plains Health Centre has a role to play in health care delivery in the province of Saskatchewan.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? I think if the Premier took that lead or even the Minister of Health took that lead or any one of the members, unfortunately they might even make it more difficult for the members of the Saskatchewan Party in the next provincial election. Because I think the people would say, well they were listening.

But I can say, Mr. Speaker, from what I'm hearing, and even at meetings such as the one in Whitewood where the current government has had a long stand of good, solid, hardworking support, as I observed the number of the people at that meeting last week, Mr. Speaker, many of those people, some long-time, hardworking NDP supporters, were not very happy with the announcement of the closure of the Plains health care centre.

And I think members across this province are certainly finding that from many of their members. The fact that even in Carrot River . . . and we talk about hospital closures, Carrot River announcing that they're going to be cutting the services of acute care facilities. And you ask, where's the member from Carrot River Valley? Is he speaking for his constituents? Why doesn't he stand up and represent his constituents.

Or whether it's individuals in the Living Sky area, the community of Lanigan that is losing their acute care facilities, or cut-backs in other communities.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of closing the Plains is much broader than just one facility. The issue of the closure of the Plains health care centre in the city of Regina and southern Saskatchewan basically speaks to how health care in this province is in crisis.

The fact that doctors are becoming discouraged, nurses and individuals working in the health care field are becoming discouraged, becoming overworked. The fact that people are finding themselves, as one call I just recently had talking about being informed a year ago in June that it would be about a wait for elective surgery, and now is just calling me recently and saying that they're now informed that it's not June, that it's probably going to be September, October when that individual may receive that surgery.

Mr. Speaker, we are seeing that people are becoming very discouraged with where we're going in health care today. And the fact that the Plains is an issue at the forefront is just a part of the bigger picture. Actually the Plains is part of the iceberg of health care and the problems that are facing this government.

And I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the government has the opportunity right now to start to turn the rudder to miss the iceberg. If they don't, Mr. Speaker, the government may find themselves in the same situation the Titanic found itself in a number of years ago, Mr. Speaker, when due to carelessness, people's lives were put in jeopardy because of the big, great ship Titanic running into an iceberg.

Well the Plains has become that iceberg that the government is running headlong into on the health care debate in the province of Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, it would seem to me that it would only be appropriate that at this time we ask the government to put that moratorium on on the closure of the Plains health care centre, just as they've called for a moratorium on any further rail-line abandonment in the province of Saskatchewan. I think, Mr. Speaker, that would only be right; that would only be fair.

And in order to allow other members to speak to the issue and in order to give members the opportunity to vote on the question, such as the vote we had earlier this afternoon, I will move this motion, allow for the further debate, and I look forward to the vote at the end of the debate on this motion, seconded by the member from Saltcoats:

That this Assembly urges the provincial government to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until the matter can be decided in the next provincial election.

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to make a few comments today on this issue, an issue that has seen a great deal of publicity. I was tempted to say light; I wouldn't say that light has been the right word. I think it's seen a great deal of heat lately. I think in part it's occasioned by what I think is a gross misunderstanding by the opposition parties about this particular issue. I'd like in the first instance, Mr. Speaker, to offer a few comments about funding or finances.

I have attended meetings that have been organized by the Liberal Party to, in their words, save the Plains. And at these public meetings there have been a great deal of comment made

by people about funding — if there were only more funding for health care we might be able to approve this. If there were only more funding we might be able to keep the Plains open. If there were only more funding we might be able to do this, we might be able to that.

So funding, even though it's not an issue that has been addressed by the member for Moosomin in making his comments, it is something that is on the minds of many people who are concerned not only about the issue of the Plains hospital, but more generally about health care.

Now I'd like to say in the first instance that this government has made a number of decisions over the years with respect to health care, not all of which are directly related to funding, but that many of these decisions have been made in the context of a very difficult financial environment — a very difficult financial environment.

Now why is that the case, Mr. Speaker? Now I know that the opposition parties will shout out, well if you hadn't invested in Guyana you would have had the money for health care. If you hadn't done this on Channel Lake you would have had the money for health care. And I see the member for Melville is nodding his head that if you hadn't made the investment in Guyana, that somehow you would have all the money that you'd ever need for health care.

Well that then begs the question, Mr. Speaker, on our side, whether or not you should be doing any foreign investments. And they say you shouldn't be doing any foreign investment, which soon begs the question, you don't want the profits that come from those foreign investments either, which far outweigh the losses that we see in situations like Guyana. But that's part of the political posturing and debate that takes place in the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Now the member for Melfort-Tisdale who's involved in Channel Lake saying that if we, you know, hadn't made those . . . or officials at SaskPower or whoever was responsible hadn't made those kinds of mistakes with respect to Channel Lake, then we might have more money for health care. Well I would be concerned too if those kinds of mistakes or decisions were being made with great frequency.

But having said that, Mr. Speaker, I'm quite prepared, I am quite prepared, Mr. Speaker, to put our record, our record of public administration, to put our record and to contrast that with the party that that member represents; to contrast that with the Tory Party and the Tory administration of Grant Devine and ask people to choose and to choose on that basis. Do you choose the NDP, do you choose the NDP who when they make a mistake, openly admit it and try to deal with it as contrasted with the discredited, totally incompetent and corrupt administration of Grant Devine.

And that is a question that I'm quite prepared to put the people of Saskatchewan. Or for that matter, with the record not of any Liberal Party or any Liberal government, because we haven't seen very much, but even the record of the Liberal opposition while in opposition, who seemed quite incapable of running their own affairs and seemed quite incapable of maintaining any kind of congruency or harmony within their own party, Mr.

Speaker.

So when it comes to those issues, we're quite prepared to debate them, quite prepared to put those before the public, Mr. Speaker.

But those, those, Mr. Speaker . . . And I hate to say it, I hate to say it, but the dollars that are represented by the Guyanas, the dollars that are represented by the Channel Lakes — and I'm using plural and I shouldn't because essentially they're singular — but the dollars that are represented by those, Mr. Speaker, are small change, small change — and I never thought I'd say that — are small change compared to the real problems of funding for health programs in the province of Saskatchewan, recognizing that health care is the number one priority for government financing, health care is the number one budget expenditure.

So that when you talk about a difficult financial environment, you cannot help but have implication for health care in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Now one of the things that we might have heard from the opposition party, and especially from the previous speaker, is the recognition that this difficult financial environment is in part occasioned because although we're spending \$1.7 billion this year on health care, we are also spending, Mr. Speaker . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — And I'm proud of that, Mr. Speaker.

I might say that we are also — also, Mr. Speaker — spending \$725 million, not quite 1.7 billion but \$725 million this year on interest payments on a public debt, a public debt which was rung up in the 1980s by the Conservative Devine administration. And we would appreciate, we would appreciate, when it comes to discussing these difficult and emotional health care issues, a little honesty from the member from Moosomin, who was part of that administration, about this difficult financial environment would be very welcomed by all concerned, and especially by the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we also would appreciate that when the Liberal Party opposite, Liberal Party opposite enters into debate in this issue that they might recognize that part of the difficult financial environment that the people of Saskatchewan find themselves in is also occasioned by actions of the federal government. Those actions were to cut transfer payments to all of the provinces in Canada as a means of balancing their budget in Ottawa. They cut health care and they cut it massively. That was their priority, that was their priority to cut that.

Whereas the province of Saskatchewan, the province of Saskatchewan has never made a cut overall in health care spending in this province. Why? Because we say it is the number one public priority and it deserves the support of all of the people. Notwithstanding anything else that's happening, anything else, it deserves our support and we must maintain and improve that system unlike — unlike — the federal government which saw fit to cut and cut massively into transfer payments for health care.

(1615)

I say shame. I say shame. What is wrong with these people, Mr. Speaker, that this in Canada, where the people of Canada, the people of Canada, when asked in recent poll what do you hold most dearly, what is it that identifies you as a Canadian no longer point to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), no longer point to the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), Mr. Speaker. No.

What is it they point to? They point to health care. And what is it that you decided to cut as federal Liberals. Shame, shame, shame, Mr. Speaker, cutting health care.

Mr. Speaker, their silence, whenever this issue is raised, their silence on this topic indicates to me and indicates very clearly to everyone in Saskatchewan — their silence on this — that they favour cuts to health care. They support what it is the federal government has done. They like to support any notion that makes it more difficult for provincial administrations to continue to prioritize health care.

Let's make that clear. Not one word of protest, not one word in opposition to the cuts from the federal government. None. None whatsoever. No record, no fax, no telephone message, nothing. Zip. And that is the fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker.

Oh we know all about their approach, Mr. Speaker, all about their approach. They favour cuts to health care, they favour cuts to health care because we see that with their support for the federal government's actions in this case.

They also, incidentally, support an Americanized — and both parties do — an Americanized two-tiered system to health care. They also from time to time make it clear that they kind of favour a premium for health care that's much the same as they have in Alberta, or where they what? Families are expected to come up with 8 or \$900 a year no matter what your financial circumstances are, to come up with 8 or \$900 a year to fund health care, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, again let me just summarize this point. Let me summarize this point. Health care is for us an important public priority. We will continue to ensure that resources are devoted to health care to support improvements to our health care system. But none of this improvement and none of these additional resources have been helped either by a lack of honesty on the part of the Tory Party about events in the '80s that impinge on us now, or are helped by the lack of action from the Liberal Party which supports cuts to health care at the federal level, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to make that clear. I wanted to make it clear because everywhere I go, in all of the meetings that are organized by the Liberal Party the issue of funding comes up, the issue of money comes up. And I want to make it clear that we will continue to support improvements to our health care system and make sure the resources are dedicated towards that, unlike those two parties, Mr. Speaker. And that's one comment I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, here we are in 1998, and now the Saskatchewan Tory Party is saying you should . . .

An Hon. Member: — The reformatories.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — The reformatories. You should stop what it is that you're doing with respect to the Plains hospital. You should put a halt on it. You should put a moratorium on it. As if this is some decision or action which is only been . . . Or that they're asking for a change in a policy or an action which is only been commenced within the last few weeks.

There is, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to take a few minutes, I'd like to take a few minutes to go back to the history on this. And people can judge for themselves where it is that different decisions might have been made and which might have seen a different scenario and might not have seen us arguing this particular question, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know if that's the case but I'll be quite prepared, and I will be prepared to put before the people that are watching this today and for the members of the Assembly, a little history lesson on health care services or hospital services in Regina.

And I go back to 1973 when a Dr. Graham Clarkson presented a report to the provincial government of the day entitled "Health Care Services in Regina: A Study of Health Care Services in Regina" which was conducted by J. Graham Clarkson Consultants Ltd. in February 1973. That became known as the Clarkson report, Mr. Speaker. That particular report was commissioned by the government because at that point in 1973, the Plains hospital was coming onto stream as an acute care facility in Regina.

And although there had been discussions by the other hospitals how to better rationalize services, recognizing that not each hospital was going to have a cancer ward, recognizing that not each hospital was going to have, say, specialities in obstetrics, there had been discussions on the part of the health care system and the people involved in the other two hospitals how to rationalize those services.

Clarkson was called upon by the government to study the situation in Regina and to give his report on what he thought should happen with respect to rationalization of health care services in the city for southern Saskatchewan.

And having said that, Mr. Speaker, I just might point out something, and it's a little aside, you know, that you get at these meetings, and especially in rural Saskatchewan, about the Plains is our hospital in rural Saskatchewan to the exclusion of any other hospitals; the Plains is our hospital even though about half of all the people from rural Saskatchewan that do come to use hospital services in Regina — I think more than half — actually do go to the Regina General, and the Plains now.

For example, if you're a person from rural Saskatchewan and you need to have the obstetric services that are provided by the hospitals, well then you go to the Regina General Hospital. If you have cancer then you go to the Pasqua Hospital where the Allan Blair Memorial Cancer Clinic is located. And that has always been the case.

But it's also interesting to note that the very first words of Dr. Clarkson was that for many years hospital services in Regina have been provided by the Regina Grey Nuns, which is now the

Pasqua Hospital, and the Regina General Hospital.

As medical technology advanced and highways improved, these hospitals developed as referral centres for the southern portion of the province as well as providing comprehensive hospital services for the citizens of Regina and its immediate environs, Mr. Speaker.

So even at that point you have to remember that before there was the Plains, Regina hospitals were the referral service for all of southern Saskatchewan, okay? So it's not as if the Plains is the hospital for rural Saskatchewan as opposed to some other hospital providing the service only for urban Regina, Mr. Speaker. And I just wanted to get that out.

But anyway, Clarkson looked at hospital services in Regina and made a number of recommendations. I might point out that in 1973 Regina had 1,254 hospital beds. And I ask members to just note that number; and for people who are watching, that in 1973 there were 1,254 hospital beds in Regina. And even then Clarkson was saying that the size of waiting-lists has been a source of concern. So even with 1,254 hospital beds, there was still a concern about waiting-lists, Mr. Speaker.

But . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I'll certainly let the member know how it is that I propose to vote on this particular subject, Mr. Speaker, when I get around to it. And I'll make it very clear — very clear — where I stand on this subject. I'll also make it very clear where I was in the 1995 election on this, Mr. Speaker.

But anyway, Mr. Speaker, the assumptions of 1973 and the study by Dr. Clarkson became the blueprint, the blueprint for improvements to hospital facilities in Regina in the 1980s, Mr. Speaker, okay, in the late 70s and the 80s. That then . . . his study became the blueprint, Mr. Speaker, as to how hospital services were to be improved. And as a result, as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, we had a two-phase, two-phase improvement, two-phase improvement for hospital services in Regina.

And the first phase meant that some funds were expended in the late 1970s into improving the Regina General Hospital and in improving the Pasqua Hospital. But in 1982, the phase two which saw the major, major expansion, or the major regeneration of those two facilities and involved about \$85 million, Mr. Speaker, of expenditure, that was supposed to start in 1982.

But in 1982 the election of Grant Devine and his Tory PC (Progressive Conservative) government, they decided to put that on hold, decided to put that on hold, but then came back a year later and say, let's give her snooze. Carry right on to spend \$85 million in the 1980s — a decision, a decision supported by the Devine administration and a decision which is supported by the Saskatchewan Tory Party here today to spend 85 . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member says that there is no Tory Party.

Well I'm confused, Mr. Speaker, if I might digress here for just a minute. Because I'm responding, Mr. Speaker, to the heckling from the seat. He says that there is no Tory Party. Why is it that every time though we talk about the Tory record, they rise in

defence of the Tory record? As the member for Moosomin . . . (inaudible) . . . I don't know what that old saying is, but if you throw a stick in the dark — is that how it goes? What . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . if you throw a stone in the dark, you'll know you hit a dog. And I think that's what happening here, Mr. Speaker, but . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order, order. Order, order. Order, order. Order. Order. Order, order. Order. Now the Chair is much pleased to see the enthusiasm for the debate that the House has, but I would urge all hon. members to direct their enthusiasm to debate on the record, and not debate off the record, and to allow the hon. member who's speaking to be heard in an uninterrupted manner with the respect that is deserving in the House. Having said that, I'll recognize the hon. member for Regina Victoria.

Order. Now the hon. member hasn't even been recognized . . . hasn't even stood and already we're shouting across the House again.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't want to blame the Conservative government for having made the decision, for having made the decision to carry on with the plans which are in a sense the end product of the work that Clarkson did in 1970s in terms of how to rationalize hospital services in Regina. I don't want to blame the Conservative government.

By the same token, Mr. Speaker, I do not appreciate comments from those members about how we should be making different decisions today when they didn't avail themselves of the opportunity to make different decisions when they had the opportunity to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, perhaps they weren't aware as the government of that time of how medical technology was changing. Perhaps they weren't interested in how home care provided much more of an alternative for acute care hospital beds; and that in the future as opposed to requiring 1,254 hospital beds in Regina, we might require something far less than that.

Now I don't want to pin that on them for not having made that decision, Mr. Speaker. But also having said that, I wish they would recognize and be honest in recognizing that there were decisions made in the 1980s that have had a major bearing on what is now taking place in the 1990s, Mr. Speaker.

Because pursuant to this plan and pursuant to an expenditure of about \$85 million in the 1980s to improve the Regina General and to improve the Pasqua Hospital, by 1991 we had the following, here's what another report, which was commissioned in 1991 by the Conservative administration of the day, the Atkinson report, had to say about what it found, what it found in terms of Regina hospitals after this expenditure. After this massive expenditure, which was supported by that administration, here is what a report which was commissioned by a Tory government had to say:

The Regina General Hospital. Built in 1912, the Regina General Hospital currently operates 466 acute care beds, 25 designated long-term care beds. Approximately 70 per

cent of these are new in-patient beds in programed areas.

Seventy per cent. Here's what they had to say about the Pasqua Hospital:

Built in 1918, was initially the Grey Nuns Hospital, it was purchased by the province in 1972. Approximately 80 per cent of its 334 acute care beds and programs are new.

(1630)

Okay. So here in terms of the General Hospital, all this tens of millions of dollars spent in the '80s, at the end of the day, the report that you commissioned as a Tory government, by Atkinson, said 70 per cent of all the Regina General Hospital had been regenerated, modern, brand-new; 80 per cent of the Pasqua, modern, brand-new. And anybody that's been through those facilities in those days will know the truth of those statements, Mr. Speaker, okay . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, those are old facilities but they have been modernized and by the time that your massive expenditures were done in the 1980s this was the situation.

Here's what it had to say about the Plains Health Centre, and when you had the opportunity to make an . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Now I know that the hon. member is a veteran member and well acquainted with rule 28 that he'll want to direct his debate through the Chair as required by the rule. And so as to permit . . . Order! So I permit the hon. member to continue and I'll ask all members to cooperate.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think those members, those members will also be aware, Mr. Speaker, that that particular government didn't spend any money on improving the Plains Health Centre when they had the opportunity to do so in the 1980s. And I might say there was a window of opportunity there to consider a slightly different direction than had been anticipated by Clarkson, which might have seen more than expenditure on the Plains to bring it up to speed, and perhaps not upgrade the General hospital, Mr. Speaker.

There was that window of opportunity and they didn't take it in the 1980s. But by the time the '80s were over, their consultant, Dr. Atkinson, found this about the Plains Health Centre: built in '74, currently operates 267 acute care beds, major structural changes are required if it is to continue its role as an acute care hospital. And he makes mention of an asbestos abatement has been ordered to meet fire code regulations. And something that doesn't get mentioned very often but was also a major part of this, the critical care areas urgently need modification, Mr. Speaker.

Okay. That was the situation, that was the situation after massive expenditures by the Tory government of the 1980s. Okay? Two facilities in the city which had been to a very great extent modernized and improved, and one facility which was built in the 1970s in major . . . requiring, in his words, major structural changes.

It's not my report, Mr. Speaker. This is a report by . . . it's called "More Effective Hospital Care for Regina — A concept

for Rationalization of Acute Care Services.” It was delivered in April 1992, but it was commissioned by the former Tory government and its called the Atkinson report, Mr. Speaker.

And when George McLeod from Meadow Lake was the Minister of Health for the Tory administration, he decided, after spending \$85 million on improving health care, or hospital services in Regina, that maybe they should have one hospital board for the city, and to look at sort of this trend of not requiring as many hospital beds and how better to rationalize these services in Regina. So it was the Tory administration, Mr. Speaker, the Tory administration that spelled the doom of the Plains hospital, Mr. Speaker. They had different choices but chose not to take them. So, Mr. Speaker, that was the change that occurred.

Now there was some other major changes that occurred in the 1980s — major changes. And the major changes occurred in the area of health technology. And you will remember that when I said in 1973 that Dr. Clarkson said at that time they had 1,254 hospital beds, that’s what they needed. That’s what they needed to provide hospital services for Regina and southern Saskatchewan.

But there were major changes that occurred in the 1980s. Major changes which I might say unfortunately passed the Tory government by. They weren’t able to pick up on it. They weren’t able to respond quickly enough, Mr. Speaker. Or perhaps there was nothing that could be done about it and no blame should be attached to the Tory government. But then again, I say if there’s no blame to be attached to them, neither should they be attaching blame in this situation for the expenditures that were made in the 1980s, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh, the member’s asking me how I vote. I vote for improved and better health care for Regina and southern Saskatchewan. That’s what I’m going to be voting for. That’s what I’m going to be speaking in favour of. Mr. Speaker, you won’t see me clinging to the past. You won’t see me clinging to a pile of bricks because bricks offer nothing. You’ll see me vote for better hospital services. You’ll see me vote for better health care services, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the other major change that occurred in the 1980s was the question of technology, okay. Major changes occurred in technology. And I venture to say there may be even members of this Legislative Assembly who are old enough to remember this but maybe not. If not, check with your parents, check with your grandparents, as to what might have happened in the early ’80s if you’d have gone for cataract surgery.

If you’d had to have gone for cataract surgery in the early ’80s, the chances are you would have had to be admitted the night before the surgery for what’s called pre-op. Then you would have had the surgery on the second day and then you would have had to remain in the hospital for a solid week — a solid week, immobilized, as I understand it, in some special contraption so there is no movement of the head and movement of the eyes. Attended to hand and foot, literally, because you couldn’t look after yourself. And that’s how cataract surgery was dealt with in the 1980s.

But there are major changes that took place in technology, in

medical technology, which meant that as opposed to having to be in a hospital for a solid week — for a solid week — nowadays, cataract surgery, Mr. Speaker, you go in in the morning and you check out the same day. And people think it’s wonderful, people think it’s excellent.

I first learned about this on the doorsteps during the last election campaign when I ran across a woman on the doorstep. She was somewhat older than I was and she had a patch on her eye. And I said, what happened to you? She said, well I’ve just had cataract surgery.

I said, were you in the hospital for very long? — being a little bit naïve about these things. She said, oh no, I went in this morning and I came out today. So I just got home from the hospital. And it’s great, she says.

Why? Because I used to be a nurse and I knew how long it took and I knew what, I know what a tremendous improvement this is for people to have these changes in technology.

And it’s just not cataracts. It’s gall bladder. It’s all kinds of laparoscopic surgery. Major changes in medical technology.

Now what do all of these things have in common, Mr. Speaker, what do they in common?

The Speaker: — Order, order, order.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, it’s not just medical technology, it’s also in pharmacology. I know for example, that there have been many new drugs that have come into use by the medical community.

One area that I am particularly familiar with because of some relations with people in that community, is drugs that treat psychiatric illnesses. Where in the past people might have had to be hospitalized far more to deal with psychosis, these days because of the administration of the right kinds of drugs, they are able to be maintained in the community and on the streets.

But all of this means, Mr. Speaker, all of this means that when you no longer need a week-plus in a hospital bed and now can have the surgery done the same day, and out the same day, you don’t quite need the hospital beds you might once have required for the proper care for people in Saskatchewan — or anywhere, Mr. Speaker.

And the future, Mr. Speaker, on that — what was it? A couple of weeks ago that there was a great deal of discussion about some miracle drugs in the area of cancer. These drugs apparently, as I understand it, when they’re introduced those drugs starve the cancers of blood; that the cancers can no longer grow, and because they no longer get the blood supply, then they atrophy and therefore the cancer is cured in that way. Can you just think for a minute, can you think for a minute as to not only the blessing that will be for people that are afflicted by cancer — the blessing that that will be — but also the implications that it will have for our health care system, which still sees far too many people being admitted because they are being cared for for cancer.

And so these technologies are evolving and are improving at all

times and this is a blessing for the people of Saskatchewan. This is a blessing that we receive as the changes in these technologies, Mr. Speaker. But, but it does have an implication as to how many hospital beds you actually require to perform surgeries and to look after people, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, another change that has occurred during the 1980s and is picking up a great deal of steam and I'm seeing . . . I'm glad to see that the Ontario government has now come on board, is understanding its place too, is their home care, okay.

We're beginning to understand far more about home care, how home care might help people to get well in their homes as opposed to having to go to hospitals. And the best example I can think of — I have a constituent, Mr. Speaker, who, I have a constituent who related to me that because of an infection that he had that he required intravenous injection of antibiotics as opposed to taking orally, and so therefore he had to be hooked up to an intravenous bag which contained the solution that contained the antibiotic and he was able to do this at home. He didn't have to go to the hospital.

The nurse came by at 2 in the afternoon. The nurse came by at 8 o'clock at night. The nurse came by at 2 o'clock in the morning, and a nurse came by at 8 o'clock in the morning — every six hours — to change the intravenous bag. But it meant that he was able to get cured while he was at home, whereas in the past he might have required a hospital bed for the four or five days that it took to get better. And this is a tremendous improvement.

This is a tremendous improvement for people. Now those people, those Tories, can take the position that it's better, better, better to have the old cataract surgery where you laid in a hospital bed for seven days. Better to have had the old system that you check into a hospital bed simply because you need an intravenous drip 24 hours a day, that only needs to be changed 4 times a day.

You can take the position, if you want, that it's better health care for that to be done in an acute care hospital as opposed to doing that kind of thing at home, Mr. Speaker. But I take the position that that's a tremendous improvement in health care and again and again . . . Again, Mr. Speaker, it has implication for hospital . . . (inaudible) . . . Now again the members will criticize, you're pushing people out the door too soon, and home care and all that kind of nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

But I tell you, like when you look at readmission rates, people who are readmitted for the same occurrence after 30 days or 70 days, it doesn't bear that out. There's always readmission. There's always about 11 per cent or so, as I understand it, people who are readmitted because the surgery that was done or the solution that was administered in the hospital didn't work so people are readmitted because something didn't go right.

But has there been any major change in this? No, no change. In fact if there is any change it's slightly downward, and that's probably reflective of better surgical techniques than we've had in the past, Mr. Speaker, but there's no change.

But all of that has an impact on hospital beds. Even if the Conservatives opposite, the Tories opposite, don't want to admit it, the people of Saskatchewan know this. That where in

1973 you might have required 1,254 hospital beds, by the time the Atkinson report came out — and that was authored by the Conservative government in the early 1990s — at that point they're talking about 900.

Now the Regina Health District says 675 hospital beds will suffice, and we can quibble, Mr. Speaker, about whether 675 is the exact number; whether it should be 685 or 95, or for that matter whether it should be 665. We can quibble about these things, but the fact of the matter is, the fact of the matter is that starting in the 1980s, there has been a major trend, a major trend of fewer hospital beds required; while at the same time, the same time, because we have an ageing population, we've seen a major increase in the number of surgeries that have been done.

And this destroys all of your old thinking about what we really require in the way of hospital beds; really destroys all the old thinking in terms of what kinds of care you need out there. Even though hospital beds are going like this, the number of surgeries that are able to be done are going like this, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that the 1980s saw major changes in health care and those are major changes that health care systems now have to deal with. It's not just a matter that this is a blessing for individuals, Mr. Speaker, who are able to benefit from fewer days stay in hospitals, it also has implications for those who are charged with the public administration of our health care system. And they have to respond.

(1645)

Again, earlier I talked about difficult financial circumstances. We cannot in the face of difficult financial circumstances take a position that somehow we should be oblivious to these things, that somehow we can continue to spend money like it's going out of style; that money grows on trees and that we can just pluck it from the trees — as the Conservative administration of the 1980s used to believe, Mr. Speaker.

Oh, Mr. Speaker, before I forget, there's one other major change that happened in 1980s which has had a major impact on health care in Regina, okay, and for southern Saskatchewan. And that was the decision by the Conservative government of the day to curtail funding to the College of Medicine in Saskatoon, which caused the College of Medicine to stop using the Plains hospital as a teaching hospital, which has resulted more so than any other thing in a loss of specialties and a loss of specialists for the city of Regina, Mr. Speaker.

And I just want to make it clear, want to make it clear that everyone understands that little major change that occurred in the 1980s because of a decision, a decision made by that Devine administration. And every time you mention it, they continue to support and offer support for that sort of sorry time in our history.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, it was after the 1980s that, after the 1980s that the Atkinson report, which was commissioned in January of 1991 by George McLeod and the Grant Devine administration, the Tory administration . . . his terms of reference was to develop a blueprint to guide the overall planning for programs and services offered by the Regina

hospitals after an \$85 million expenditure had been made on those hospitals.

These recommendations were: number one, the acute hospital care in Regina should be consolidated in the Regina General and in the Pasqua Hospital; number two, the Plains hospital centre should phase out its acute care roles; and number eleven, Saskatchewan Health should consider a single governance structure for Regina hospitals.

Now those members talk about health districts, and we'd like each hospital to have its own board. We kind of like the old system where every home care district had a board, every hospital got a board, anybody that's got any involvement in health care at all has got its own board — contrary to what their own consultants were advising them, Mr. Speaker, and that was that there should be a single governance structure.

Now Atkinson pointed out some of the problems with having three hospitals in Regina, and again this is not a consultant that was commissioned by the NDP. This is a consultant . . . The Liberals would be interested to know this, if they weren't Tories in those days of course. Like I don't know that because we generally find that when the Tories were in power we didn't find any Liberals and they were supporting the Tories; they call themselves Tories. But anyway, the Liberals would be interested to hear that this report which was commissioned by the Tory government in Regina, the Atkinson report, talked about the problems with having three hospitals in Regina.

They talked at that time about problems with having three hospitals in Regina, duplications of positions . . . (inaudible) . . . Expensive equipment for diagnosis and therapy must be purchased for each site, which could mean that in future some new and expensive equipment that cannot be afforded. Where shortages of staff exist from time to time the problem will be exacerbated by spreading them across three sites. The cost of supporting three physical plants is significant.

The number of administrative, maintenance and dietary, and other services required creates additional overhead costs. And that's something the public understand, that if you've got 675 beds, that if you can do it over two buildings there's going to be some savings, because well you only need two cafeterias as opposed to one. You only need a limited number of administrative people for two buildings or fewer than you might require for three. You need fewer maintenance staff for two buildings than you require for three, and so on, Mr. Speaker.

They also mentioned problems with the Plains Health Centre, and this was the Atkinson report that was commissioned by the Tory government. The Plains Health Centre must be upgraded to meet fire code requirements and asbestos must be removed. The Plains Health Centre critical care areas are woefully inadequate — woefully inadequate, Mr. Speaker. Its design, which puts the critical care areas along corridors, is extremely difficult and inefficient for nursing and potentially jeopardizes patient care. This layout must be changed for the Plains Health Centre to be used frequently. And so on and so on, Mr. Speaker.

Also they talked about emergency services — 24-hour emergency services are very costly for any hospital to maintain. Having three emergency services compounds the problem of

physician coverage when specialists are in short number. The number of emergencies in Regina does not support three sites and travel within the city is not difficult, Mr. Speaker.

So this again is the Tory-authored or the Tory-commissioned report, Mr. Speaker, coming to those conclusions. And it was on that basis that the Regina Health District came to some conclusions that . . . and they looked at various scenarios, but the bottom line on those was, Mr. Speaker, that after an \$85 million expenditure in the 1980s to upgrade the Regina General and to upgrade the Plains, it would require very few additional dollars to upgrade the Regina General and the Pasqua — sorry, the Pasqua — to accommodate all of the beds and services that were then being provided at the Plains.

But significant annual savings and operating costs would result. More dollars available for services in progress, fewer dollars for dietary, fewer dollars for maintenance, fewer dollars for management. Fewer dollars being spent on those things but more dollars being made available for important services and programs.

They also found, Mr. Speaker, that to close the Regina General Hospital, which at that point had been 70 per cent done, and add to the Plains, was very expensive because that would require, in the case of Plains, building a new tower. If you're going to have the General then you'd have to add the new tower, which is very expensive. Which would not offset annual savings in operating costs, Mr. Speaker.

In any event, the conclusion they came to, based in large part on the Tory . . . on the report which is authored by the Tory — that three hospitals meant fewer dollars available for services and programs. And that's the decision that has been made and that is the background — the genesis if you like — of the decision that was made in 1993 by the Regina Health District — though the board I guess at that point, before there was a health district.

And again, the concept of having one board for those hospitals is not something that came from the NDP. That was something too that came from the Conservative government, Mr. Speaker. But that is the conclusion they came to. Given so that the expenditures of dollars in the 1980s, they had very little option but to proceed as they now have done, to improve the General, to improve the Pasqua and to move the services and the beds from the Plains to those two new and improved facilities.

Now I want to touch very briefly, Mr. Speaker, with some of the issues that had been raised. The member talks about the impact of the closures of rural hospitals; that somehow this should have a bearing on the need for hospital beds in Regina. Well I remember one rural hospital which was featured on a television show. I think it was in Coronach, and the Coronach hospital, Mr. Speaker. Now I have to ask, what difference will it make to hospital services in Regina?

Having converted the Coronach hospital to a health centre, did it mean that the cardiovascular surgery that otherwise might have been done at the Coronach hospital now has to be done in Regina? Did it mean that the orthopedic surgery that otherwise might have been in the Coronach hospital now has to be done in Regina? Did it mean that the ophthalmological services that were provided by the Coronach hospital now had to be done in

Regina? Did it mean that gynecologists would no longer be able to provide services for people at the Coronach hospital; now had to be done in Regina?

No, Mr. Speaker. It didn't mean any of those things because none of those services were being provided in those hospitals and will have zip — no effect — on hospital services in Regina, Mr. Speaker. None at all, Mr. Speaker.

And even Atkinson, the author of the report commissioned by the Tories, said all this seems to indicate that there is not an untapped patient case-load that will require access to Regina hospitals. He's talking about impact of rural hospitals, Mr. Speaker.

Access has been mentioned as an issue, and I agree. I agree, Mr. Speaker, that access is far easier to the Plains hospital for people from out of town than it is to the Regina General Hospital. But again, you have to remember that about half the people that now come to hospitals come to the Pasqua and to the General and are able to do so. Okay?

Parking has been mentioned, Mr. Speaker. I think that there is a recognition that parking is a problem today. But I can't say that I remember in 1986, when my son was born, that my wife and I went to the Regina General Hospital, two, three, four times daily to visit our son who was in the neo-natal care unit — and received excellent care there — I can't remember parking as having been a big problem there. And I don't think parking is going to be that big a problem that the members like to make it is . . . make it out to be, after the consolidation is done, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I just want to deal very briefly with the question of a free vote. These members say that there should be a free vote. Now in our system of government, Mr. Speaker, parties at election time put forward a platform. They put forward a platform and they say to the public, this is what we want to do. This is what we want to do. And then that party gets elected and they have the power to do what it is that they say they're going to do. And there are no excuses that can be offered by that government for not having done what it is that they say they propose to do. No excuses at all. When they go back to the people they can say, this is our program; this is what we did; there are no excuses, none whatsoever. So it is a clear, clear accountability, Mr. Speaker.

Now when votes involve money, the government is right to ask for support of its members to main integrity of its overall programs. A government loss on a money vote in the Legislative Assembly is generally taken, or is always taken, as a loss of confidence in the government, Mr. Speaker; that when there is money involved, to say members should have a free vote, to spend money in effect — to spend money — which is not provided for, is to argue governments should no longer be accountable for how dollars are spent, Mr. Speaker.

That is to say the government gets elected for their certain programs and say this is what we want to do. Here's our priorities. Here's where we think the money should be spent. Here's where we think the taxes should be cut. And then for the opposition to come along and say, well we want to have a free vote on an issue that has major money implications and

therefore the government should still go back and say yes we had our program — it doesn't work that way, friends; it simply doesn't work that way, Mr. Speaker.

There is a very clear accountability mechanism in our system of government, Mr. Speaker. It's fundamental; it's a fundamental aspect of our system, and government is re-elected on whether or not it accomplishes its program, Mr. Speaker, unlike the American system which is far less accountable, Mr. Speaker.

And these are issues that I would like frankly to have more time to dwell on. I support our system but I think at this point I would like to move that debate on this be adjourned, Mr. Speaker.

The division bells rang from 4:58 p.m. until 4:59 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 20

Van Mulligen	Mitchell	Tchorzewski
Johnson	Whitmore	Kowalsky
Calvert	Teichrob	Bradley
Koenker	Renaud	Lorje
Cline	Hamilton	Stanger
Wall	Kasperski	Murray
Langford	Murrell	

Nays — 8

Krawetz	Bjornerud	Toth
Boyd	Draude	Gantefoer
Heppner	Osika	

Debate adjourned

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Krawetz.....	1081
Toth.....	1081
Bjornerud.....	1081
Heppner.....	1081
Gantefoer.....	1081
Draude.....	1081
Boyd.....	1081
McLane.....	1081
Belanger.....	1081
Hillson.....	1082
Osika.....	1082
Haverstock.....	1082
Goohsen.....	1082

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk.....	1082
------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Van Mulligen.....	1082
Whitmore.....	1082
Goulet.....	1082
Belanger.....	1082
Renaud.....	1083
Hagel.....	1083

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Free Vote to Save the Plains Health Centre	
Krawetz.....	1083
Government Urges Amendment to the Canada Transportation Act	
Renaud.....	1083
Health Care Funding	
McLane.....	1083
Saskatchewan's Jobless Rate Falls	
Hamilton.....	1084
Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations Citizen of the Year	
Belanger.....	1084
Palliative Care Week	
Koenker.....	1084
Saskatoon Eastview By-Election	
Hillson.....	1084
Kinsmen Club Sponsorships	
Murrell.....	1085

ORAL QUESTIONS

Carrot River Hospital Closure	
Toth.....	1085
Serby.....	1085
Railway Successor Rights	
Boyd.....	1086
Bradley.....	1086
Potential Drought Conditions	
Boyd.....	1087
Upshall.....	1087
Plains Health Centre Closure	
McLane.....	1087
Romanow.....	1087
Inquiry into Channel Lake	
Hillson.....	1088
Romanow.....	1088
Lingenfelter.....	1089
Potential Wheat Trade War	
Goohsen.....	1089
Romanow.....	1089

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 220 — The Trade Union Amendment Act (Repealing Successor Rights)	
---	--

Boyd	1090
ROYAL ASSENT	1090
ORDERS OF THE DAY	
SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE	
Grain Transportation	
Renaud	1090, 1099
Langford	1093
Boyd	1093
Whitmore	1095
Murrell	1095
McLane	1096, 1099
Stanger	1097, 1099
Kowalsky	1098, 1100
Recorded division	1100
PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS	
Motion No. 4 — Plains Health Centre Closure	
Toth	1100
Van Mulligen	1104
Recorded division	1111