

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of residents of the community of Arborfield. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitions humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate actions to ensure the survival of the Carrot River Hospital.

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

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — I am also pleased to present petitions today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action to ensure that the required level of service in radiology is maintained in the North Central Health District and the priorities of its board be adjusted accordingly.

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

These petitions come entirely from the Melfort community, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, as well to present petitions in regards to further hospital closures, and reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action to ensure the survival of the Carrot River Hospital.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petitions are signed by individuals from Arborfield and Carrot River. I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action to ensure the survival of the Carrot River Hospital.

As is in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The community of Arborfield, Mr. Speaker, the petitioners are from.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present

a petition signed by people from Carrot River and from Nipawin. And I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate actions to ensure the survival of the Carrot River Hospital.

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

I so present.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens concerned about the provision of radiology services in the north-east. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action to ensure that the required level of service in radiology is maintained in the North Central Health District and the priorities of its board be adjusted accordingly.

The signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Melfort and also of Gronlid in the north-east.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today from people that are concerned about the radiology in the North Central Health District.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action to ensure that the required level of service in radiology is maintained in the North Central Health District and the priorities of its board be adjusted accordingly.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will every pray.

The people who have signed this petition are from Star City, Melfort, Kinistino, and Fairy Glen.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I as well have a petition to present to the Assembly this afternoon — a recent petition renewing the call, however, for Jack Messer to give back the severance payment that he was so generously provided with. The petitioners on this petition come from the Rose Valley area of Saskatchewan and I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise again today on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan to present a petition. 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 from the communities of Assiniboia, Lafleche, and the community of

Mossbank. I so present.

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed the petition are primarily from Yorkton, and I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions on behalf of citizens concerned about the closure of the Plains hospital. 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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Those who have signed these petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Springside; also a number from the city of Yorkton. It looks like it includes some of the . . . a member from Yorkton's constituency campaign . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Now the hon. member will recognize of course that he won't want to engage in debate in the presentation of petitions.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with petitions this afternoon from citizens concerned about the confusing and dangerous highway entrance to the city of North Battleford, and the prayer for relief reads as follows:

Your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to relocate Highway 40 to east of the David Laird Campground in order to alleviate the congestion at the entrance to the city of North Battleford.

Your petitioners this afternoon come from Richard, Battleford, Cochin, and North Battleford.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to present a petition with respect to the interim custody of Steven and Kimberly Walchuk. The prayer of relief 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.

And the signatures on these petitions are all from Outlook and Macrorie. Thank you. I so present.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are asking for fair and just action for the many workers injured permanently through work-related accidents that are not being covered by workmen's compensation. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to acknowledge the concerns of the taxpaying citizens by causing the Government of Saskatchewan to ensure that absolute fairness and equitable treatment be given to those injured and disabled people and their families and be diligent in this most urgent matter.

And the petitioners on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from White City and Regina. I so present.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy today to present the following petition:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to reach the necessary agreements with other levels of government to fund the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan so that work can begin in 1998, and to set out a time frame for the ultimate completion of the project with or without federal assistance.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, these folks come from the community of Maple Creek and Golden Prairie and I'm happy to present them 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 to reconsider the rigid requirements to qualify for Betaseron and Copaxone coverage; to ensure that equitable treatment be given to those insured and disabled through work-related accidents; to fund the twinning of Trans-Canada Highway; to call an independent public inquiry surrounding Channel Lake; to put an immediate halt to all investments in foreign countries by Saskatchewan Crown corporations; to relocate Highway 40 to alleviate congestion at the entrance to North Battleford; and to take action in health, education, jobs, homes, and roads to allow the North to join the rest of Saskatchewan.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 58 ask the government the following question:

Regarding the federal review of the financial services industry now being headed by Regina resident Harold MacKay: (1) has the government made any submission on

behalf of the consumers of Saskatchewan to Mr. MacKay's review regarding the financial services industry; (2) if any submission has been made, why has it not been released to the public or tabled in this House; (3) what steps has the government taken to gather the views of Saskatchewan residents regarding the banks for the purposes of presenting them to the federal review of the financial services industry; and, (4) what steps has the government made to directly convey those views to the federal minister responsible.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House, in the east gallery, 42 students from Valley Manor School, grade 5 students, and that's in Martensville.

They are accompanied by their teachers Jim Golding and Bill Zaretsky, and their chaperons, Tracey, Marla, Marj, Dawn, and Theresa. I look forward to meeting with them afterwards and answering some of the questions that they will have after watching us here in the House.

Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the Assembly, on behalf of the member from Saskatoon Sutherland, 49 students in the west gallery, Mr. Speaker, from Sutherland School, accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Ross and Ms. Amos, and the chaperons Mrs. Salter, and Mr. Anderson.

These students are in grade 7 and 8 of Sutherland School, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask all my colleagues to give them a warm welcome to the legislature today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to my colleagues someone in your gallery, my mother. She's in from Calgary to visit and to see the legislature. A very special person to me.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you're aware, it is the job of the Sergeant-at-Arms to keep us in line. I'm very pleased to tell members today that finally we have some support on our side, as in your gallery is the Sergeant-at-Arms's mother-in-law who I'm sure will help keep him in line today. Accompanying . . .

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — She and her husband Harry Betts, Harry and Anne Betts are here from Penticton, visiting us. And also joining them is the Sergeant-at-Arms's daughter Shannon. So if you would join with me in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so happy to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly, 36 grade 7 students from Lashburn School. It isn't often that we get visitors from the north-west and I'm so happy to have them here today. Accompanying them are Val Shockey and Tracy Doering, two teachers that I taught with in the Battle River School Division, and 12 chaperons.

And I'll be meeting with them later on to discuss some of the proceedings and give them explanations as to what is going on. And I hope all of you behave. And please welcome the students here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Passing of Dr. Hjertaas

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday Saskatchewan lost truly a national hero, one of our leading citizens of this province. Dr. Orville Hjertaas of Prince Albert passed away at the age of 80. And I know that all members will join his widow, Millie, and his family in mourning his passing.

I also know that every Canadian will join me in celebrating his life, his vision, and his contribution to our most profoundly Canadian institution, medicare.

Dr. Hjertaas's medical career was defined by the struggle of Saskatchewan people to achieve a health care system which, in his own words, quote, "Placed the emphasis on the patient's state of well-being, not his or her state of finances."

The successful creation of that system belongs to him and a few other courageous doctors, just as it belongs to T.C. Douglas, Woodrow Lloyd, and a few other courageous parliamentarians.

After finishing medical school he worked with Tommy in creating the province's first two health regions in Swift Current and Weyburn. He was named vice-president of the commission to bring in medicare.

And in response to the doctors' strike of 1962, which he refused to join, he started the first community clinic in Saskatchewan thereby launching another Saskatchewan innovation in health care.

Last February Dr. Hjertaas was named to the Order of Canada in recognition of his life of service to his profession, his community, and his country as well as being named Order of Merit, Saskatchewan, 1993.

Mr. Speaker, I was proud to know Dr. Orville Hjertaas, or Dr. Medicare as we called him, and I'm sure I speak for all of us when I say that what he and others founded, we will preserve and strengthen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to join with the Premier and express on behalf of my colleagues our sympathies to the Dr. Hjertaas family as well.

It's only been a few short weeks since we recognized the accomplishments of Dr. Hjertaas right here in this Assembly, having received the Order of Canada and also, as the Premier has noted, the Saskatchewan Order of Merit many years ago.

For a person of his accomplishments to be involved actively in the profession for 36 years . . . and in fact he also remained active in his retirement, stressing the needs for home care and the needs of the disabled throughout his lifetime . . . he was a man dedicated to this province and to his community, and for that everyone should note the passing of this remarkable person.

On behalf of the official opposition, I want to express our sympathies and kind thoughts to Dr. Hjertaas's family and also to his friends of which I know he had many. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Leads Country in Youth Employment

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this month a Calgary-based consulting firm reported that Saskatchewan had the fastest growing youth employment rate in Canada. It also reported that we lead the country in terms of youth employment in 1997, that we did lead them.

Yesterday myself and the Minister of Post-Secondary Education had the pleasure of attending a luncheon sponsored by the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board that honoured several employers for the work that they were doing in terms of encouraging retraining, new training, and employment — particularly of young people.

And I'd like to recognize some of the good work that they are doing in partnership — business community, labour unions, and the community at large. In particular three Regina companies were recognized yesterday. Minds Eye Pictures, SaskEnergy, and Crown Life were all recognized along with Luther College for the good work that they were doing in terms of promoting employment growth in our province.

Additionally the Sask Abilities Council and Cameco, in the Rabbit Lake operations, were also recognized for the work they're doing in bringing peoples' skills up. Each of the speakers yesterday talked about the important role a government played in working with them to encourage greater employment. And I would be remiss not to mention the programs that they particularly singled out, programs like Future Skills, New Careers, and the tax credits the government had been giving to industry to spur on new growth.

Mr. Speaker, each of these companies has played an important role in terms of providing youth employment. I want to congratulate them.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Carrot River Hospital Closure

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A delegation from the community of Carrot River sent a message to their local health board yesterday. They will not sit by and allow the NDP (New Democratic Party) government to close their hospital.

The source of their biggest frustration is the fact that their MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), the member for Carrot River Valley, chooses to duck the issue. He tries instead to pin this one on the board.

Mr. Speaker, the delegation from Arm River presented a number of reasons why their hospital must not be closed. And you know what? They made sense, and their arguments made sense, Mr. Speaker. We all know how much that is worth with this government.

The people of Carrot River left the board with no option but to take their case to the Minister of Health in the coming days. The minister promised this spring that there would be no more cuts to the health care system, and the people of Carrot River are watching and waiting for the minister to live up to that commitment and prevent their hospital from closing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Aboriginal Employment Opportunities

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One significant way where people in my constituency and in all of Prince Albert lead is in aboriginal employment. Exciting things are happening and jobs — good jobs, Mr. Speaker — are being filled by aboriginal people.

One case in point is the agreement between the Prince Albert Health District and the Department of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs. This agreement is designed to increase aboriginal employment in the health care field.

By this agreement the employer agrees to work in communication with the aboriginal community to identify workplace opportunities for aboriginals, to advertise it amongst their community, and freely compete with others. It also, in the agreement, is to identify spots where training will help qualify aboriginals for job competition and to identify business opportunities where people may apply for contracts for goods and services to the Prince Albert Health District.

The results are, Mr. Speaker, in 1998 there were 35 aboriginal people on staff at the health board. Since the partnership, there have been 53 additional positions added, for a total of 87. As the Minister of Social Services often says, the best social policy is a job, Mr. Speaker, and I am proud that the Prince Albert Health District in my area is actively seeking to create employment which reflects our population.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon Eastview Candidates

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the by-election in Saskatoon Eastview is barely 24-hours-old

and already it appears that the Liberal Party is raising the white flag. In an interview yesterday with the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), the Liberal candidate stated that he thought that a close second-place finish would be good enough for his party. I wonder if the Liberal colleagues agree with him?

Mr. Speaker, this is the earliest concession speech I have ever heard coming a month before the ballots are actually cast. In contrast the Saskatchewan Party candidate, Francis Krieser, is conceding nothing and will knock on every door and talk to every constituent before June 24. And he knows the neighbourhood well, Mr. Speaker, as he ran as the Liberal candidate in 1995 election before the party fell apart under Jim Melenchuk's leadership.

Melenchuk's leadership is clearly on the line with the pretenders from the Battlefords and from Melville rubbing their hands and licking their chops with glee. Francis is also much better acquainted with the constituency than either of the opponents since he actually lives in Saskatoon Eastview. He is not being parachuted in unlike either Mr. Melenchuk or Ms. Junor.

Mr. Speaker, unlike the Liberal candidate, Francis Krieser is in this race to win and we look forward to him joining our caucus within a month. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ohio Residents Envy Canadian Health Care

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Assembly is aware the members from Kindersley, Melville, and myself recently returned from a legislative conference in Ohio. I briefly want to relate a true story that happened one day outside the state legislature in Columbus.

I stepped outside of the House for a break and I happened to be wearing my Canadian legislature name tag which a couple of window washers noticed. The very first thing that they said to me was something to the effect of you come from that country with the wonderful health care, don't you. I said yes I did, and proceeded to have an insightful conversation with them. What the conversation made clear to me is that the universal medicare offered in Saskatchewan is the envy of many.

What made this point even stronger in my mind was an article a staff worker showed me when I got back home. In the May 18 issue of *Maclean's* magazine is a rather interesting story and a letter from a Paul Shinkle of Seven Hills, Ohio. Mr. Shinkle writes, "If we could trade our decent military pay for your decent health-care system, would you all consider adding Ohio as the next province?"

Mr. Speaker, there are 18 hospitals, 4,000 doctors with a population of about 640,000 people in Columbus, Ohio, but those buildings and doctors don't mean much to the many unfortunate people who can't afford them. Health care simply is not just about the number of buildings, beds, and doctors you have — just ask a window washer in the mid-west. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon Eastview Candidates

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I had not planned on rising this afternoon but the outrageous and ill-founded comments of the member for Cannington cannot go unchallenged. I will not participate in debate except to remind the Speaker that we have just celebrated Victoria Day and I wish to leave the members with a quote from the old Queen: "There is no talk of defeat in this household; the possibility does not exist."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Tax Credits for Political Contributions

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Labour, the minister responsible for The Election Act.

Mr. Minister, some provincial parties continue to play fast and loose with political donation laws by laundering their provincial contributions through the federal wings of the party in order to hand out tax credits. I have a copy of Jim Melenchuk's fund-raising letter for the Saskatoon Eastview by-election. It instructs contributors to make their cheques out to the Eastview by-election campaign and they will receive a \$75 tax credit for a hundred-dollar donation.

Mr. Minister, as you know there are no provincial tax credits. The Eastview Liberal association is in no position to legally give out tax credits. This money is being laundered through their federal Liberal Party even though there is no mention of that in the letter.

Mr. Minister, why are federal tax dollars being used to finance Jim Melenchuk's election campaign?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I have a little trouble, Mr. Speaker, with the . . . I have a little trouble, Mr. Speaker, with the term "laundering" considering that we're referring to a system of tax credits that's been in effect all across this country for two or three decades and is well-known and well-acknowledged. I think the term "laundering" is a bit excessive and probably unnecessary.

So I can appreciate that the members are concerned about the fact that they have severed themselves from any kind of national collection and therefore put themselves right outside the laws relating to income tax deductions for political contributions.

And that's a problem that I think they should probably think about and see if they can't re-establish their connections with the federal Conservative Party and probably get back in a position where they can take advantage of the laws that have been in effect in this country for about 20 or 30 years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: we enjoy being independent. But I can understand why the minister isn't doing anything about it. It's because the

NDP are doing exactly the same thing.

There are two parties, the Liberal and NDP, whose by-election campaigns are being funded by the taxpayers. There is one party, the Saskatchewan Party, whose campaign is entirely funded by its members.

While the Liberals and the NDP hand out tax credits by laundering their money through Ottawa, the Saskatchewan Party does not access tax credits because we have no federal party.

Mr. Minister, will you change The Election Act to put all the parties on a level playing-field? Will you close the loophole that allows the NDP and the Liberals to issue federal tax receipts for provincial contributions?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I think I understand where the member's coming from now. They would like to launder their money, and I can appreciate that.

We have no present plan to change the Act. The member will know, the member will know — if they'll permit me to answer, Mr. Speaker — the members will know that we passed a provision in the last amendments to The Election Act and that we did that on the basis that it was our understanding that the federal government was giving some consideration to abandoning the tax credit system — abandoning the federal tax system.

Now as far as I know, they have not abandoned it. As far as I know, it is still in place. And as far as I know, Mr. Speaker, every one of the members of the official opposition took advantage of those same tax credit provisions in the last provincial election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Sale of Crown Life to Canada Life

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for CIC (Crown Investments Corporation). Mr. Minister, Crown Life has now been sold in spite of all your denials over the past few weeks. And now we understand why you didn't really want to talk about it. As many as 400 jobs could be lost over the next couple of years, as Canada Life is only guaranteeing 900 jobs in Regina.

Mr. Minister, as one of the major stakeholders, is the loss of 400 jobs in Regina acceptable to you? What are you doing to ensure that no jobs are lost as a result of this take-over?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question and I want to say to you, Mr. Speaker, and to other members, that in quoting the president of the Regina chamber, Leith McKay, I think his comments probably capture better than anyone else the circumstances, and I quote, and Leith said:

There is going to be a net 700 jobs here rather than a net

none. And from that point of view I think that it is a biggie.

Meaning the announcement today by Canada and Crown Life.

I say to the member opposite and to him and his caucus and to some of the members who were around when this deal was formulated back in the early '90s, I think it's fair to say that the mayor of Regina, who was very positive about the arrangement that has been made by Canada Life and Crown Life . . . that is, to secure the future of the employees here in Regina and in Saskatchewan, in face of huge competition across Canada, mergers going on in the institution era of banks, financial institutions, as well as insurance companies, that this is a win-win situation for the province. And I might say as well that you are the first voice of negative . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to correct the member. The first voice of negativity were you people when you first criticized this very idea in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, CIC has loaned HARO over \$350 million over the years to finance its ownership of Crown Life. CIC is still owed almost \$100 million interest on these loans. Are these loans going to be paid back in full as a result of the deal with Canada Life and will the accrued interest on these loans also be paid back or are Saskatchewan taxpayers ever going to see any of the interest returned on these loans?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite . . . and I want to refer as well to the mayor of Regina who this morning commented on the arrangement that was arrived at by Crown Life and Canada Life, and Mr. Archer said, and I quote:

It will solidify the employment levels here in the city of Regina and I understand there may be some opportunities for expansion, depending on the development of the life insurance business.

I say to the member opposite that I know he's been around in opposition for a long time and it tends to become a very negative way of life and you have a difficult time ever expressing anything positive. But the fact of the matter is that today is an important day about securing jobs for the people here who work now in Canada Life.

I say to the member opposite that we intend to get back all of the dollars — those that were invested by your party, the Conservative Party, in the early '90s. Remember this was a deal done by the Devine government. We intend to get back every dollar that was invested, maintain the building as an operating facility, and 700 jobs here in the city of Regina.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Free Vote on Plains Health Centre Closure

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Premier. Mr. Premier, for four weeks

the Saskatchewan Party has been calling for a free vote on the future of the Plains hospital. And for four weeks the NDP has blocked our efforts. You have prevented the issue from coming to the floor; you have cut off debate. You have done everything in your power to keep your MLAs from voting on this issue.

Mr. Premier, today is private members' day and we are calling for a free vote on the Plains hospital again today. Will you allow this important debate to take place? Will you take the muzzle off your members and allow them to represent their constituents and vote to keep the Plains hospital open?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, over the last several weeks I've had the opportunity to answer this question on a number of occasions and from that member opposite, from Canora.

And what I've said to the member opposite, that this has been a very long debate on the issue of the Plains Health Centre which began not four weeks ago, but really began in 1993 when a decision was made by this administration and district health boards across the province that there in fact would be a consolidation of health care services in this province.

And in this district the Regina District Health Board said in 1993 that they would be consolidating their services from three major health facilities to two, of which the Plains Health Centre would be the one where all of their services would be moved from. And I say to the member opposite that decision was made in 1993.

And in 1995 in this province every person had a vote. Every individual in this province had a vote. They had a free vote in the 1995 election and their choice was to have the New Democratic Party govern Saskatchewan and continue to make sure that we have the best health care services anywhere in the world.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, and Mr. Premier, if that decision was such a sound decision why don't you let your members stand in their place and vote? Let the member for Weyburn vote to close the Plains hospital; let the member for Estevan vote to close the Plains hospital; let the member for Indian Head-Milestone vote to close the Plains hospital and then watch what happens to them in the next election.

That's what you're really afraid of, Mr. Premier. They can't vote to save the Plains because you would never forgive them, and they can't vote to close the Plains because their constituents would never forgive them.

Mr. Premier, if you are so confident of your decision to close the Plains hospital, will you allow a free vote and will you allow that vote to take place today?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to just reiterate one more time that the decision in 1993 was that the Plains Health Centre in this community would close and their services would be consolidated into the other two facilities.

But I'm extremely interested in the sincere interest that the

member opposite has in the democratic process — sincerely interested in it — because the member opposite from Canora as I know it, was elected in 1995 as a Liberal. Was elected as a Liberal and served his constituents on the conscience that they would elect him as a Liberal. That through the democratic process of which he didn't allow to exercise, he decides, Mr. Speaker, that he would change parties, and that he would change parties without the participation of a democratic vote — without the participation.

If you believe in the democratic process you should have left your name and your constituency. You should have resigned, sat as an independent, because that's what democracy is truly about. And if you believe it, that's what you should have done for yourself, Mr. Member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding of Saskatchewan Party from Tory Funds

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Last year because of scandal, charges of fraud, and a legacy of fiscal incompetence, the Tories told the people of Saskatchewan that the party had imposed on itself a ban from participating in provincial politics.

Former Tory executive director, Tom Lukiwski, who coincidentally is now the executive director of the Saskatchewan Party, told the *Leader-Post* that the Tory executive party received a hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars from the secret slush fund. Thirty to forty thousand dollars of that was received after the Tories announced their self-imposed exile from politics.

This fund is hidden from the lights of scrutiny and openness, Mr. Speaker. It reeks of shadowy fund-raising and of a time when cigar-chomping big-business men thought they owned the province.

On behalf of the House, will the Premier ask the Acting Chief Electoral Officer to review the secret Tory slush fund and ask her to demand the Tories report every donation, corporate or individual, that the Regina PC (Progressive Conservative) metro slush fund has received. It's time the Tories were brought into the '90s, even if it is kicking and screaming.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The requirements with respect to filing returns with the Chief Electoral Officer were laid down in this House about a year ago. And this filing that took place just recently, is the first filing under that Act.

The Chief Electoral Officer, as I understand it, is working with the parties to ensure that the intention of the Act is being fully complied with. I think those are ongoing. The matter would appear to be looked after or being looked into by the Acting Chief Electoral Officer, and we're content to let that process play out.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, last month I wrote a letter to Saskatchewan Party leader Mr. Hermanson. I asked him to

assure the people of Saskatchewan that he and his party would not receive any money directly or indirectly, meaning goods or services, from the Tory slush fund. I received a response from Mr. Hermanson and he assured me no money was coming directly from the Tory slush fund.

However he did not reassure the people of Saskatchewan that goods or services were not being received indirectly from the Tory's secret slush fund. If the party is dormant, then in the familiar words of the member from Rosthern, what do they have to hide or what are they afraid of if they have nothing to hide.

Will the Premier request a full and public report on the source and expenditures of the hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars drawn from the secret slush fund. Mr. Premier, what assurances do the people of Saskatchewan have that none of that money will go from the secret Tory slush fund to any other Saskatchewan party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I think that the member will agree that we now have on the books in Saskatchewan about the tightest election expenditure law that exists in the country. As I said in my previous answer, Mr. Speaker, this is the first filing that parties have been required to do under that law. And I think it natural, I think it natural that there would be some difference of opinion as to what is required and what is not required.

As I also said in my previous answer, this matter is in the hands of the Acting Chief Electoral Officer and she will be working with the parties to ensure that the intent of the Act is complied with. Beyond that I simply don't want to make any comment on the matters raised by the hon. member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding of District Health Boards

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A delegation from the community of Carrot River sent a clear message to their local health board yesterday. They told the board in no uncertain terms, they will not sit by and allow this NDP government to close their hospital.

Their biggest source of frustration is their own MLA. And quoting from a gentleman at the meeting, Mr. Speaker, who stood up and said that our MLA tells us that it's only the district board's fault; it's not government's fault.

Mr. Minister, when is your government going to begin accepting responsibility for the continual gutting of our health care system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, first and foremost I want to just allude to the comment that was made a couple of days ago by the Leader of the Third Party, Mr. Melenchuk, who said in his acceptance speech that in this province if he were leader, that he would reduce the number of boards maybe to 10

— maybe to 10.

And what he said when he was first elected in 1996, or first elected as the leader, he said that he would have no boards in Saskatchewan. No boards. He would have populations of 100,000. And today you stand up in the House and you talk about the value of boards in this province or the lack of value of boards in this province.

And I say to you that it's hypocritical for you to stand up and make analysis of how boards are going to provide services in this province because you don't first of all believe in it, nor do you have any respect for them, and nor do you have any respect for the process.

So I say to you, Mr. Member, the representative from Carrot River who sits on this side of the House has always and continues to work very closely with his community and this government. And the people who serve on those district health boards today represent those communities in the fashion in which is . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question, next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member from Carrot River Valley was not in attendance at yesterday's meeting and the people there were wondering, if he's working so closely with them, why he wasn't there.

Mr. Speaker, the delegation from Carrot River presented a number of reasons to demonstrate why their hospital shouldn't close. They all made sense. They want to work with the district board so that they can maintain the health services in their community.

They talked about a health care system that is based on the need, not on finances in which the district boards' hands are tied by this government.

The people of Carrot River left the board with no option but to work with them, and they are coming to Regina, Mr. Minister. The whole works of them are coming down here to see you.

Mr. Minister, the buck stops with you. You promised this spring that there would be no more cuts to health care — there'd be no more bed closures, there'd be no more lay-offs, there'd be no more facilities closed. Will you tell the people of Carrot River that you plan on living up to that commitment, and that their hospital will not be closing and that they will not be losing those services in the community of Carrot River?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I say to the member opposite a couple of things. First and foremost is that I am very much informed of what's happening in the district of North East and with the people who are working on the district health board in respect of their plan. And I've heard that from the member from Nipawin who has raised that with me on a regular basis. I've also heard it . . . and will be meeting with the people from Nipawin on Sunday for the second time.

And I say to the member opposite that the decisions that are being made in that district are made by the district health board, by men and men who have been elected and appointed to serve and represent their constituents in the best fashion that they know how.

And I say to you, yesterday you and your party were in my constituency — not you, I'm sorry, not you. Only one member of your party was there. Everybody else from your party has abandoned the process. So you send the poor member from Melville to a meeting of which only 30 people show up, where the rest of you have now decided, where the rest of you have now decided that this issue you can't continue to sustain.

So what you do is you take your show now, in the Liberal Party, and you move it to Nipawin, Saskatchewan, and try to get some activity and some interest going there because the Liberal . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Next question.

Forest Fire Hazard in Northern Saskatchewan

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only road leading to the northern community of Turnor Lake is now cut off because of forest fires. Cabins around Ile-a-la-Crosse have been evacuated and fires just west of the town are still burning.

My question is to the Minister of Environment. What is being done to ensure the protection of people at Turnor Lake and Ile-a-la-Crosse, and can you assure this House that every available person is given the opportunity to fight these fires?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the very timely question. Unfortunately we've had over 300 fires in northern Saskatchewan this year, compared to an average of 100 fires at this time of the year.

We are very pleased to say that only three fires are burning out of control at this time, and the hon. member did raise a very important concern about the people living in the North.

We will work with the communities, we'll work with Northern Affairs and everyone else to pool our resources and expertise to make sure the supplies get into these communities and that very little if any damage to private property does occur.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Property Tax Reassessment on Farm Land

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, on May 6, 1998, Rev. Marvin Wojda, a constituent of mine, wrote to you for the second time stating his concern regarding the dramatic increases in property taxes that he had faced over the last few years, and particularly excessive increases due to property reassessment.

His situation is of such. Between 1994 and 1999 his property taxes will have escalated from \$2,000 to \$3,641. Now, Mr. Premier, that is a total increase of 82 per cent over five years, an average annual increase of 16.4 per cent. And Mr. Wojda's

income hasn't increased anywhere near 16 per cent annually. He states that he simply cannot cope.

Mr. Premier, do you think his situation and in effect the situation of many farmers in this province, do you think that his 82 per cent increase in property taxes is reasonable, and how do you suggest that he could cope with this exorbitant rise without a commensurate rise in his own income?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for that question. It's difficult to comment on specific cases from this vantage point. But the member will know that the property tax bill is arrived at by the results of two factors — the assessment of the property, with the local mill rate applied.

And so I am not able to comment on what the mill rate and the tax policies of the municipality that the property is located in might be. But if there is a negative comparison when that property assessment and taxes is compared to the similar neighbouring property, then the property owner has the right to appeal. So there are a number of avenues available.

On the other hand, after a 30-year lag, Mr. Speaker, with the reassessment neglected since 1965, there are bound to be shifts. However if a taxpayer sees unfairness, there is recourse.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Premier, in the late 1980s many Saskatchewan farm families underwent foreclosure and bankruptcy as you well know. And sadly the stress of high debt loads, low grain prices, caused many to take their own lives.

Mr. Speaker, numerous farmers are now once again faced with high input costs, lower grain prices, high transportation costs, and they are struggling under the burden of Saskatchewan's excessive taxation — taxation with the highest levels in Canada. And now sky-rocketing property taxes due to government reassessment are threatening to force farm property owners and their families to leave their homes and their land once again.

Mr. Premier, do you realize that in effect your government is contributing to the demise of farm families due to the unbearable tax burdens, much of which has come as a result of property reassessment?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, being a member of a farm family and a rural resident myself, I'm certainly well aware of the pressures on rural residents all over Canada today, and certainly tax changes in the property tax regime might be one of them. But as I have outlined, Mr. Speaker, we did a reassessment to try to make the system more fair.

And I acknowledge that our property tax system is one of the least progressive taxes that exist in that it's based on the *ad valorem* system, pegged to the value, the market value of what an individual owns if it were sold. Of course if their circumstances change and they become sick or unemployed, or other factors change respecting their income, that's not recognized in the property tax system under the *ad valorem* principle.

And if we need to look at something else, then we'd be prepared to look at that. But it's a fundamental principle throughout North America that's recognized today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Sale of Crown Life

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, it was announced earlier today that Canada Life has purchased most of the insurance business of Crown Life and has an option to purchase the common shares of Crown Life at a later date.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to provide members with some information about this transaction as well as the reasons our government believes it is in the best interest of the employees, the policy holders of Crown Life, and the city of Regina and the people of Saskatchewan for this to take place.

Mr. Speaker, members will know that Crown Life was brought to Regina through a commitment of \$272 million in public funds by the Devine government. A further 149.5 million in loans was provided in 1995 to protect the province's substantial investment in Crown Life. CIC Industrial Interests owns 94 per cent of HARO Financial Corporation which owns 64 per cent of the common shares of Crown Life.

Mr. Speaker, the company has provided good job opportunities for Saskatchewan people, improved its financial position since coming to Regina, and proved a good and worthy corporate citizen.

However, Mr. Speaker, like all companies and financial service industries, Crown Life has been forced to consider its size and strength in the market-place and its future viability in the face of rapid consolidation. They have concluded that the best way to secure the future is to join its insurance business with the much larger entity, Canada Life.

Mr. Speaker, by comparison, Canada Life has about \$43 billion in assets under administration compared to 5.4 billion, or nine times difference in assets that will be added from the Crown Life purchase.

Mr. Speaker, the deal that was announced by the two life insurance companies this morning is a complex one which has been explained by Crown and Canada Life in some detail earlier today. However, I do want to give some of the highlights and outline measures the government has taken to safeguard the interests of the majority shareholders which are in fact the people of the province of Saskatchewan.

First, Mr. Speaker, Canada Life purchased the Crown Life building here in Regina and is establishing the western Canada office here with many senior positions and key functions of the company located right here in the capital, Regina. Regina will also continue to be the head office of Crown Life, which will manage the remaining assets not purchased by Canada Life.

Canada Life has guaranteed at least as many jobs in the Regina

office as Crown Life would have had maintained if no sale had taken place. It is important to note that the 700 jobs that the two companies will pledge to maintain is a minimum, not a target, and that many more jobs could be created through Canada Life's plan to expand its business in western Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the third point is that the 149.5 million that was loaned to Crown Life by CIC through HARO in 1995 will be repaid when the deal is closed. This money will be used to further reduce Saskatchewan's debt and annual interest payments.

Mr. Speaker, another point: the balance of the province's investment in Crown Life will be recovered over a period of several years through management of the approximate 1.5 billion in mortgage and real estate assets that Canada Life has indicated it will not be purchasing from Crown Life. The details of how these assets will be managed will be worked out by way of the shareholders of HARO and Crown Life over the next 18 months.

Mr. Speaker, as well, Canada Life will carry on with the community support practised by Crown Life in areas such as charitable donations, education, training support, and purchasing goods and services here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, Crown Life investment corporation has negotiated a memorandum of understanding with Canada Life which sets out these commitments to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, there has been much speculation in recent months about the future of the relatively small insurance companies like Crown Life in the financial service industry where companies are rapidly becoming fewer and much bigger. Most analysts in the industry saw it as inevitable that our Regina-based company would become part of a much larger company. We can be proud that we are making this transition on our terms in a way that will have long-term benefits for Saskatchewan.

There have been many interesting comments made about insurance industries by analysts and the possible sale of Crown Life; and I want to quote one made by David Havens, vice-president of UBS Securities in New York, on CBC radio on May 7. Mr. Havens said, and I quote:

I guess that any eastern Canadian company looking to buy into Crown would probably find it attractive to set up more employees in the province because of its lower cost of doing business. (And that is a very shrewd analysis.) I am sure that Canada Life will very quickly become aware of the lower costs of doing business in Saskatchewan just as Crown Life did when it moved to the province.

Mr. Speaker, as always with a change of this magnitude, there will be those who would rather just leave things the way they are and ignore what is going on in the world around them.

When considering the future of Saskatchewan's operation of Crown Life, I would urge members to recall the hue and cry that was raised by some when Wascana Energy was sold to CanOxy. They claimed the sale . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. The minister's statement has already been extremely lengthy for the time normally allotted in the House, and I'll ask the minister to wrap up his remarks quickly.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I just wanted to say in light of the fact that this is a \$421 million transaction, I would just ask for a couple of minutes to complete my comments. And if I need leave of the Assembly, I would ask for leave to do that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As always with a change of this magnitude, there are always those who would rather just leave things as they are and ignore what is going on in the rest of the industry.

When considering the future of Saskatchewan's operation of Canada Life, I would urge members to recall the hue and cry that was raised by some when Wascana Energy was sold to CanOxy. They claimed the sale meant the end of the office in Regina and loss of jobs in Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that there are now 364 Wascana Energy employees working in Saskatchewan compared to 350 before the sale, and more hiring in the province is planned by Wascana for this year.

Mr. Speaker, I provide that example so that we can illustrate that the last time one of our companies joined forces with a larger company it turned out to be an opportunity for Saskatchewan and young people to work in the province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members in the Assembly to join with Mayor Archer, the mayor of Regina, the Saskatchewan and Regina Chamber of Commerce, the Regina Economic Development Authority, the business people in our province, in welcoming Canada Life to Regina and Saskatchewan.

We look forward to a long and fruitful relationship as one of the top five companies in the industry builds on the Crown Life experience and foundation and uses Regina, our capital city, as a base to expand its western Canadian business.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly comment today on the announcement by the minister in regard to the Crown Life sale. Certainly, certainly there are aspects to the announcement that are very positive.

In a world that is seeing mergers of financial and life insurance companies occurring on an unprecedented rate, I think that it makes good sense that we see a merger of a company that has assets in the magnitude of \$43 billion to join . . . and have the 5.4 approximately billion dollar assets of Crown Life join with that and as a result make a stronger company competing in an ever changing world more effectively. And I think, Mr. Speaker, that that aspect of this announcement is very positive indeed.

However there are some concerns that we have and I would like to certainly point to one, and I hope it is only a Freudian slip

and no other intent, but in the copy of the minister's statement that I received, when he read the statement there was a part that he neglected and I suspect that it was an oversight. But I'd like to read it into the record because I think it is important. It says, and I quote:

The Crown Life-Canada Life transaction will be reported to the Crown Corporations Committee under the significant transaction guidelines.

That was in the text but I do not believe the minister stated it in his statement, so I want to assume at least that that was still the intention, that this be done in that nature. And so I'm pleased to see the minister agreeing that that is indeed important.

The other thing that seems passing strange is that I do vaguely recall when Crown Life was first proposed to come to Saskatchewan, that that same minister stood up very vigorously and said it was a dumb idea and a bad idea. And now this same minister is standing up and somehow saying that the conversion of 1,100 jobs to 700 jobs is another good idea.

I guess it's a good idea for the 700 people that still have jobs, but I'm not too sure that the 400 that are potentially going to lose them are quite as enthusiastic about this announcement as the minister is.

(1430)

Mr. Speaker, I think it's also of interest that Crown Life has indicated that it's going to remain holding the assets that Canada Life particularly did not want in the real estate and mortgage business, some \$1.5 billion of assets. And we sincerely hope that the management of those assets are going to result in a positive outcome because the province is still into this company for some \$271 million. And it's going to require a positive outlook on Crown Life being able to manage those assets in order to have this happen.

The details on how this is all going to arrive at is going to be worked out, I think, over the next 18 months. I hope that that's a long enough period of time for the minister and the officials responsible at CIC to at least read all the contracts so that we don't get ourselves into another typical fiasco that seems to be happening so much lately.

Crown Life has been an excellent corporate citizen in Regina and in Saskatchewan. And many of their philanthropic kind of activities and charitable works, both on local charities and provincial things, are well-known.

And on behalf of the official opposition, we certainly wish them every success and join in welcoming Canada Life to Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, one phrase in the minister's statement jumps out at me and I will read it into the record. And it reads: "The deal that was announced by the two life insurance companies this morning is a complex one."

Mr. Speaker, I greatly fear that this government does not excel in the reading of very complex agreements. And dare we to hope, dare we to hope that this very complex agreement was in fact carefully read. Well that being said, the benefits of joining with a company the size of Canada Life are obvious. And it is our hope that by joining with a company of the size of Canada Life, that the operations in Regina have been strengthened.

We do of course have a number of questions. What about the potential 300 to 400 displaced workers. Will they be fairly treated? What provision is there for them? Will the company remain in Regina? I understand there is a five-year guarantee. What's going to happen after that time?

However if those questions are answered, if the 272 million is repaid with interest, then I say this agreement is good news for the people of Saskatchewan and something for us all to celebrate.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of months ago the Premier said at a news conference that governments should be out of business; government doesn't do well in business. Well we are not quarrelling with that statement. And I think that if that is what we're doing, that we are getting government out of the business, we are recouping our investment and we are going to have a strong business in this province, then it is something for us all to celebrate, and on behalf of the Liberal opposition I too wish to say to the management and staff of Canada Life, welcome to Saskatchewan and we look forward to what we hope will be a long and prosperous business relationship.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 215 — The Saskatchewan Property Rights Act

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move first reading of Bill No. 215, The Saskatchewan Property Rights Act.

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

Bill No. 751 — The Big Game Hunt Farming Regulation Ministerial Responsibility Act

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 751, The Big Game Hunt Farming Regulation Ministerial Responsibility Act be now introduced and read the first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Community Development for Northern Saskatchewan

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on a very interesting challenge that the province faces in

Saskatchewan as a whole and I look forward to some of the other comments of different MLAs across the floor, and certainly to my extreme right, in terms of some of their aspirations, some of their views, and some of their policies when we talk about how we deal with northern Saskatchewan.

And I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the seventy-five minute debate . . . just for clarity's sake, for those that may be watching the television screens back in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Buffalo Narrows, La Loche, and I believe Pinehouse may be on the air as well, as well as other areas in the Cumberland constituency, perhaps La Ronge, and so on and so forth, I think the key point I'm trying to make here, Mr. Speaker, is after the 15 minutes I'm allotted, the other individual MLAs will have the opportunity to speak as well and of course hopefully this whole debate will come to a vote.

And if it doesn't come to a vote obviously members opposite, in particular the member from Cumberland, may not want to show his true stripes and stand to vote aye or nay on the whole resolution I have proposed for today.

But, Mr. Speaker, back in . . . I quote from an article of May 16, 1984, when the former member of Cumberland, the NDP MLA Lawrence Yew . . . I follow in his footsteps, Mr. Speaker, roughly 15 years later talking about a similar resolution, and I quote from the article of May 16:

Yew introduced a resolution to condemn what he saw as government inaction. However the 75 minutes allotted for the debate expired without members having a chance to vote.

And, Mr. Speaker, I hope that doesn't happen today, because as in Mr. Yew's spirit we often speak about the tremendous amount of work that he done when he was a member of opposition facing the then PC (Progressive Conservative) government of Grant Devine. And certainly Mr. Yew spoke eloquently and spoke from the heart and certainly spoke about the knowledge of the issues of people of northern Saskatchewan, the issues that they face over many years.

Mr. Speaker, there's five crucial areas that we need to look at when we talk about the whole basis of my resolution. The first point is I want to thank my Liberal colleagues for highlighting the item and certainly giving us this forum and this opportunity to speak about northern issues above and beyond theirs. I think that certainly shows leadership and certainly shows team cooperation — so certainly I want to thank the Liberal caucus for giving me this opportunity.

They believe that northern Saskatchewan should be part of the province and they certainly want to give some of the challenges and some of the problems that the North has experienced over the years an opportunity to be heard here in the Assembly.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I've indicated throughout the House that in following Mr. Yew's spirit, I certainly know and appreciate the fact that his family is quite aware that we often use his words and often use some of his quotes to continue on the battle that he started back in 1984. And I quote from an article again from May 16:

Residents of the North don't want jobs some day, Yew said. They want jobs now. The economy of the North has virtually ground to a halt (he added).

Mr. Speaker, Lawrence talked about the stuff that I want to speak about today very briefly, approximately 15 years ago. And once again we see that inaction is the end result of the that lack of direction that northern Saskatchewan communities have to look forward to.

And I quote again, Mr. Speaker, from a number of other individuals. And I want to pay particular attention to a quote, again of December 10, 1986. And I quote, Mr. Speaker:

With the record high unemployment rates of 80, 90 per cent in certain communities, there has to be a tremendous amount of perseverance. The other thing that I have learned was the importance of standing up for your rights. You could not back down on your rights, you had to stand up for them.

Mr. Speaker, that quote is December 10, 1986, as I mentioned, and was a quote made famous by the now sitting NDP MLA, the hon. member from Cumberland. And I want to point out that this is exactly what the 75-minute debate is, Mr. Speaker. It is to talk about standing up and fighting for northern Saskatchewan people.

Throughout time, Mr. Speaker, throughout the PC administration of the '80s, the NDP administration of the '70s, and now the NDP of the '90s, we have continued suffering the indignation of poor highways, of poor housing, and generally a lack of direction to deal with the northern Saskatchewan problems.

Mr. Speaker, for years we have talked about what options there were available to government, and for years northern Saskatchewan people have not been heard. At this point in time the entire northern part of Saskatchewan, we account for 3 per cent of the provincial population — not 5, not 10, not 15, but 3 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And if my calculations serve me correct, that's roughly 80 to 90 square kilometres for every man, woman, and child.

And I think if you look at that scenario, the question you would ask is, why would we have these continual economic and social problems with the vast amount of land which has the vast amount of opportunity available to us, why have we continued suffering through some of these problems?

And, Mr. Speaker, the point that I want to make here is that there was never an intention to empower the northern Saskatchewan communities to make a difference in their own lives.

Community development — that's the basis of our argument here, Mr. Speaker. We're talking and asking the government to work hand in hand — not dictate — but to work hand in hand with the northern Saskatchewan people to finally put together a plan and put together some financial commitment so that we may one day see economic and social justice for northern Saskatchewan people.

Throughout my travels, Mr. Speaker, I have been to certain communities that don't have water and sewer in 1998 and that of course is Stony Rapids. And I've been to certain houses that don't have water and sewer, Mr. Speaker.

You know when you walk into a house and see the overcrowded conditions, you begin to wonder whether you're in a third world country or whether you're in northern Saskatchewan. There is no excuse for any of those type of housing to exist in the North at this point and at this day and age primarily because, Mr. Speaker, we have put a tremendous amount of money over the past 20, 30 years back into the provincial coffers.

Now again we've asked time and time again that this whole argument that we have today about social and economic justice, a comprehensive development plan for the North, hand in hand with the leadership, is that we don't want to look at this thing from the political perspective. This is not about politics, Mr. Speaker. This, as I mentioned before, is about how we treat and how we view northern Saskatchewan people. I believe it's very, very important that we get that out into the forefront at this point in time.

And that's my second point is that we, above all else, simply want to be consulted. We want to be part of the economy of northern Saskatchewan and we certainly want to be a contributing partner of this great province.

(1445)

And again I point out to the statement that Mr. Yew made and a quote, it's now a famous quote: "Northerners want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem."

And the other matter I want to raise is that there is a lot of tremendous pride in these communities. Everywhere I go people are proud that they have clean yards, they got communities that are growing, and they do all that they can, Mr. Speaker, with their two hands. And that shows the incredible pride that they have in themselves, and in their families, and their communities, and again it really qualifies what Mr. Yew had said when he says we want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

So I think it's high time that governments, senior and . . . well the provincial and federal governments, to recognize the incredible Saskatchewan spirit that exists in northern Saskatchewan. And people out there are saying we need a three-pronged approach which is my third point.

We need economic development so we can create jobs for people. We need social development so we can also learn to appreciate the social fabric of our community and the social challenges associated with our community. And we also need to develop our infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, there are only 3 per cent of the provincial population living in the North and is it not possible that we can take some revenues in the North to create an economy, a self-sustaining economy that people themselves build, and that people themselves can be proud of. That's the challenge that we have and that's exactly what we want to do.

And the other point that I wish to make, Mr. Speaker, as kind of my fifth and final point is that when you talk about empowerment of people, politics should not be about control and power. Politics should be about empowerment of people, communities, and ideas. And that's exactly what the northern Saskatchewan people would like to see. They'd like to see an opportunity for themselves to start doing things on their own and to start looking at options that they feel are the only way to go in the future development of northern communities.

At this point in time we live under a system of disincentives, Mr. Speaker. Everything from the social services system to the policies of the housing program to the high cost of living in northern Saskatchewan to the lack of infrastructure. All those add to the challenge of developing an economy in northern Saskatchewan, and it's very important that people understand that this is not an issue of trying to pick ourselves up by the bootstraps. This is really an issue — give us some boots in which we can pull ourselves up with. That's the bottom line.

And I think the system of disincentives when you look at the working people, that if you have a social housing program that's designed to house those families that cannot afford to build their own, in a sense that's a good program for those people. However how about if you have a couple that are trying to work, and there's thousands of examples of that, of trying to work breaking away from the social services system, for every dollar that they make their rent increases. And all of a sudden they can't afford to live in this house any more.

So some of the policies that we talk about when we talk about solutions — we identified some of those solutions a couple of days ago. We said where possible all the working people that currently live in government houses try and roll those houses into a mortgage that is reflective of the market rates of northern Saskatchewan, and that is similar to the remote housing program principles.

And I think what you'll see, Mr. Speaker, is you'll see people quite frankly breaking free of the shackles of social services and finally beginning to seek independence of government. And certainly that's a great benefit to all of northern Saskatchewan people.

And you would expect that, Mr. Speaker, from a socialist government, because socialism I believe is all about empowerment. And to me I believe that it's incumbent, it's incumbent upon a government that's suppose to be for the small people to try and make those people as independent as quickly as possible.

So that, heaven forbid, we have an extreme right-wing party that comes along and says, that's it, we're cutting off the North, we're cutting off the aboriginal community. Well they can do all they want but the people will be independent, they'll be strong, and above all else they will have control of their lives, and not government.

And that's the key point they're trying to make. If you're truly, if you are truly committed to empowerment of people and ideas, then this is the first step. It's to get rid of the disincentives, work with these northern communities to address the economic and social development plans, as well as meeting the

infrastructure needs. Poor housing, poor highways, unemployment levels — all these factors add to the challenge of northern communities.

But you wouldn't expect to see that, Mr. Speaker, when you travel to Buffalo Narrows or through Beauval or through Green Lake. You see a lot of optimism. Some of the work they're doing is incredible. But, Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, there is certainly a lot of challenges that they have to overcome and certainly they want to be part of the province; so they're putting effort into it.

And some of the ideas and some of the meetings and some of the trips that these guys take on behalf of their communities is tremendous. Green Lake, you have three or four councillors working very hard to develop their forestry industry. And the whole objectives of northern Saskatchewan is we're trying to get southern Saskatchewan to recognize that we are not a welfare state of the province, that we are a proud, true people that wish to seek independence.

And how we do that, Mr. Speaker, like everywhere else you seek government support. And so far, Mr. Speaker, we have not seen evidence of that particular government support in northern Saskatchewan, in spite of the millions of dollars they dig out in royalties from forestry and mining, in spite of the millions of dollars they dig out from the hydro development and tourism and on and on and on.

Mr. Speaker, we're asking the government, we're suggesting to the government today, that they develop a community development Act in which they direct-finance social development agencies at the local level, they direct-finance community development corporations, and that they direct-finance local infrastructure needs. And that they make this whole process politics free, in which they say, okay we as a province are going to take leadership, we as a province are going to do this, and we are prepared and committed to stand up for northern Saskatchewan people.

And that I think is the gist of my presentation this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is to try and get the government to wake up, to recognize that. Because people in the North have been saying, if you guys have been so great to us, if you have been so good to us, why are we still having these particular challenges, why are we still living under a system of disincentives, why is it there at times seems to be little hope of our young people waking up and taking part and parcel of what the vision of the future of the North . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The hon. member's time has expired and without further comment he must now directly move the motion.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from North Battleford:

That this Assembly urge the government to put in place a comprehensive strategy for community development for northern Saskatchewan, such a strategy to include: (1) in meeting the basic infrastructure needs of northern communities such as adequate housing, roads, recreational facilities, water and sewer installations, and health centres;

(2) providing competitive training and employment opportunities for northern people; (3) providing business opportunities for entrepreneurs in northern communities; (4) putting into place an agenda for the social development of northern communities; (5) providing for the true empowerment of northern people over the major decisions which affect their lives.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now hon. members will have opportunity to put their remarks on the record and I'll encourage them to do that. On the record one at a time. Order. Can I have order please.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all I want to say that not only do I think the North is an incredible asset to our province, I believe that the member for Athabasca has been an incredible asset to our caucus and to this House, and through this House to the larger province, in that he has been a tremendous resource in making us all aware of the challenges and needs of the North and what the North has to offer us as the larger people of Saskatchewan.

I certainly personally consider the North to be one of the most beautiful parts of our province and a rich resource to us all. It is also of course, Mr. Speaker, ironically the oldest part of our province. We find it somewhat strange in view of the fact that it is still in some respects new and opening up and developing, but the oldest community in Saskatchewan is of course Cumberland House. The oldest existing structure in Saskatchewan is Holy Trinity Church at Stanley Mission. And the community of Ile-a-la-Crosse celebrated its 200th anniversary five years ago.

So ... (inaudible interjection) ... yes, I'm sorry. I stand corrected. They celebrated their 200th anniversary the same year as our American friends celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Most of the communities which we come from in the South are now gearing up to celebrate their 100th anniversary, and here the member for Ile-a-la-Crosse comes from a community now well over 200 years old.

Well we also know that projections are that at least 35 per cent of our population will be aboriginal within the next few decades. We are also told that the majority of our school-aged children will be aboriginal by the year 2011.

We have seen these statistics on many occasions. The question is, how do we choose to address them. Do we see these statistics as a problem? Do we see them as a challenge? Or do we see them as an opportunity?

Certainly it has to be said that unless the levels of education, job training, and economic activity are raised from their present, admittedly unsatisfactory levels, then it is a problem.

But if we can empower our northern and aboriginal peoples, if we can provide them with the tools of education and job training that they can fully enter the economy of our province, then these figures are an opportunity and not a problem to our future.

I like what the member for Athabasca says about empowerment and independence. I think we, as the non-aboriginal population, freely concede that for too many years we have tried to "do for our northern and native people." And I think we all acknowledge that our policies of doing things for northern and native peoples have met with very limited success, if not downright failure.

So it is time to turn the reins over to them, to empower them, and I am sure they will surprise us with what they are capable of doing and that they will in the next generation enter fully into the economic life of this province.

I do however have to say that as always, with rights come responsibilities. The issue of taxation will have to be addressed. Hopefully it can be addressed with mutual respect and that we can approach each other in a new sense of partnership and comradeship.

But I think it has to be acknowledged that if the projections we see are correct — that between a third and a half of our population will be aboriginal by the middle of the next century — then it becomes obvious that we as a province simply will not be able to afford the roads, the schools, and the hospitals that we all want and we all need without the taxation issue being addressed.

But I say, let us address it in a sense not of confrontation, not in a sense of attack, not in a sense of trying to foment racial disunity, but let us address these issues in a sense of friendship and common citizenship.

That being said, I am pleased and proud to support my colleague from Athabasca in bringing this resolution before us, in saying the North needs the infrastructure, needs the personal development and empowerment in order to fully take its place as an active, prosperous, growing part of our province.

(1500)

And in conclusion, I would like to quote from the member for Athabasca in his graduation wishes to the people of La Loche, which is one of the few Dene communities in our province, Mr. Speaker. And I wish to quote now:

The measure of our people, of all people, is the manner in which we appreciate our children. We must afford them confidence and peace, for these are the greatest gifts any nation can bestow upon its children. For all of us there is no time for anything but challenging life in every arena it has to offer, whether the challenge be in sports, business, arts, or politics. Our greatest challenge is to develop our children and our nation to become independent, compassionate, and free to dream.

I support this motion, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I'll be moving an amendment on the motion after some comments.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member from

Athabasca for quoting Lawrence Yew. I know that it's very, very difficult to find Liberals to quote from and that indeed when you're looking at quotations it's always very important to look at people who have been involved in the development of northern Saskatchewan at such a great extent as Lawrence Yew and who happened to be a great also NDP'er. And so I thank the member for cutting across party lines, you know, accepting the fact that NDP MLAs were a great asset to this province.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the situation of the North in a very positive fashion. Contrary to some of the more doom and gloom type statements that have been made in the past by the member, I would like to offer a more positive way of life in the North. A more . . . a greater sense of hope and determination that I feel from the people as I travel throughout the North.

The first thing I would like to mention in regards to the motion itself is that it deals with various aspects of economic, social development. I would like to say this, that on May 20 this year we had an historic meeting in La Ronge with the Premier, the Minister of Energy and Mines, the Minister of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management), and also the first nations people from northern Saskatchewan as well as the province, as well as Metis people, and very importantly the northern elected representatives — the municipalities from the North — and in there as well were the top-level civil servants in the federal government.

So here we had a situation where all levels of government were meeting in northern Saskatchewan. And so therefore it was historic in this sense, that we had a unified view of what we needed to do in regards to northern development. We came out of that place, Mr. Speaker, with an historic agreement. It was historic in regards to the vision of the North. It was historic in regards to the goals of economic development, of jobs.

People knew the \$150 million worth of contracts in mining. People knew we had progressed to over 1,000 jobs in mining alone. We have hundreds of jobs in forestry. We're developing an opportunities conference in forestry this year and we're moving forward, Mr. Speaker.

We're also looking at the northern development fund this year from this government. We didn't stop after last year's meeting and not do anything. We moved from 2 million to \$5 million worth in regards to the northern development fund. It was a direct response to people of the North; we were listening to people in northern Saskatchewan.

As well, Mr. Speaker, we have moved in the area of education. There's now over 1,600 people in post-secondary education in northern Saskatchewan. In NORTEP (northern teacher education program) teacher education alone we've had over 200 grads, Mr. Speaker.

So we are moving in the area not only in teacher education, but also in the health sciences. We've got a northern professional access program. We're now talking about moving into the area of engineering, and so on, Mr. Speaker. So we're moving at higher levels of development in education.

Also in the area of infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say this. Historically it's been the NDP mainly who has built

the roads in the North. Whether we look at the '70s, there was a stop of course when the Tories were around, now represented by the Saskatchewan Party. But we now see the development — the Cumberland bridge has gone up, the Grandmother's Bay road, the Athabasca road going.

In his own constituency there was \$5 million worth in the Canoe Narrows area put in, \$5 million worth of road construction in regards to the area in around the Pinehouse, and about 1.2 million in Turnor Lake which he mentioned today.

And I think that, Mr. Speaker, we've done well in regards to the response and listening to the people. The other thing is that we have moved from approximately overall in the road construction . . . we added another 9 million this year, to make it a total of 35 million.

When the member talks about revenue sharing, Mr. Speaker, and he narrows it down to resource revenue sharing, the total amount of revenue we get from uranium is 35 million. It was about 25 million over the past 10 years. It wouldn't even pay for the roads.

We need money shared on the whole provincial Consolidated Fund, Mr. Speaker. We have about 600 million from the oil, potash, and . . . (inaudible) . . . over the years. And the policy of the government is to have a fair share of the revenues on the Consolidated Fund, General Revenue Fund, with the northern benefits in education, health, economic development, and so on.

And that's the strategy of this government, not simply revenue sharing, resource revenue sharing, Mr. Speaker, because that wouldn't be enough. The highest amount of income and revenue we get is from uranium royalties and that's about . . . going to be about 40 million this year. So, Mr. Speaker, it would hardly even pay for the roads.

So when we look at it, Mr. Speaker, we're looking at housing, we've got 8 million on that over three years. We're hoping that the federal government will match those funds. One of the key issues that came out was that we needed some money in the social development areas — health, we put 14 million on the La Ronge facility, another 10 million in Stony Rapids in the member's own constituency, as well as in La Loche.

So, Mr. Speaker, a lot of the things have happened from educational control, municipal control, now health control in the North, with the health boards. So we agree on the northern control angle.

So, Mr. Speaker, overall we agreed at that meeting — that we would address the federal government head on. We would like money from the federal government to cost share the development and economic and social development, to cost share the roads, to cost share the whole development in the North — to be part of the economic strategy of the North.

And as such we had a new agreement over here where we have a northern development board. We agreed on that. We also agreed to oversee development. We also agreed that indeed we have a . . . (inaudible) . . . northern Saskatchewan agreement to do cost sharing on it, and also to have a strategic type of assessment in the North so we knew exactly where we need to

go in areas of economic development. Also, Mr. Speaker, there is the whole aspect of looking after the environment.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move the following amendment. After the words "This Assembly" I would have to replace the following words: "urge the government to put," and I would like to replace that with the following. I would like to:

commend the government for signing the historic memorandum of understanding on May 20, 1998 in La Ronge. This memorandum of understanding puts (Mr. Speaker) in place a comprehensive strategy for community development in northern Saskatchewan . . .

And I include the words "which includes". And as we go to the different one, two, three, four, and five, I'm also adding, Mr. Speaker:

6) sustainable development and protection of the environment.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I put across that amendment.

The Speaker: — If the minister would like to identify the seconder for the motion.

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Seconded by the member from Shellbrook-Spiritwood.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Not having had previous notice of the amendment, the Chair would like to take a moment to reflect on its admissibility.

The amendment is in order and the question before the House is the motion moved by the hon. member for Athabasca, seconded by the hon. member for North Battleford; and at the same time the amendment moved by the Minister for Northern Affairs, seconded by the hon. member for Shellbrook-Spiritwood.

Mr. Johnson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 75-minute-debate, the resolution that's before us and the motion that's before us as it was previously divided into six categories, indicated that the communities of the North were being limited in the amount of development and that which was taking place in it. And I'd like to just comment on a few items to indicate that that's not the case.

In the six years from 1991 through till the end of 1996 there was something in the neighbourhood of \$15 million in expenditures made in sewer and water in the northern communities in the northern administrative district in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, that amounts to something in the neighbourhood of \$200 per capita for people in that particular area which I would find is a larger expenditure than you'd find anywhere else in the province of Saskatchewan.

And following that, in the following year there was an additional 6 million of provincial and Canada/Saskatchewan infrastructure funding was committed to sewer and water

projects for the North in the year just ended March 31, '98.

The federal government . . . this motion, resolution, comes from the member of Athabasca. And I'd like to indicate, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government, Liberal cousin to the Liberal Party here in the province of Saskatchewan, withdrew from providing . . . participating in the construction of homes, new homes in the northern part of the province of Saskatchewan. And the province of Saskatchewan announced at that particular time a three-year program where we would spend \$8 million in the construction of new homes.

Mr. Speaker, the northern part of the province of Saskatchewan under this administration has not been abandoned as the member from Athabasca is indicating in his motion, but rather there have been a large number of expenditures made in that area.

You will find that in looking at highway expenditures in northern Saskatchewan, that there are three major arteries that are being spent on. One of them up the west side of the province, ends up at Cluff Lake. One of them goes almost up the centre of the province that ends at Key Lake. And the third route, which is under construction now with another \$6 million expenditure both federal and provincial funding, that will end at Black Lake and today has reached the points north.

(1515)

And I can tell the members opposite that I've driven on that particular route all the way from Prince Albert right to points north. And although I would not consider it a number one high-class highway, given the nature of the economic activity that's along that particular road and the amount of flow of traffic, it meets the same standards that you'd find in rural Saskatchewan to deliver services out into areas with the same amount of activity or less.

Mr. Speaker, I note that the northern development fund provides \$3 million in loans and grants to support northern entrepreneurs in the year '97-98. And in recognition of success of this program which is overseen by a review board, a northern review board, the budget has been doubled for this coming year to something in the neighbourhood of \$6 million.

So you can look at the five items that were there. Item number one, the infrastructure, the major parts of infrastructure are being expanded in northern Saskatchewan. Roads, water and sewage, and health facilities, infrastructure type of facilities. Two, the training and that which Northerners are receiving are expanding and will provide results for the future in the province of Saskatchewan.

There's a multi-party training plan that's supported both by the federal and provincial governments, and the mining industry, so you have a tripartite approach. And this program will provide \$10 million in training geared specifically to northern employment in the private sector, mainly in mining.

Mr. Speaker, it has contributed more than a thousand Northerners to mine sites. They've gone through this program, 85 per cent of whom are of aboriginal ancestry. A new and expanded multi-party training plan is currently being developed

and I expect that if this comes into place it will have more agreements or more areas that the training will take place.

Mr. Speaker, part of the training strategy of the provincial government is to expand the opportunities for Northerners and allow them to participate in the industries that are already there, as well with other organizations, and to develop some industries that are not already covered.

Mr. Speaker, in the last week or so a number of cabinet ministers have spent some time in La Ronge and have been negotiating changes to different agreements so that this can proceed.

Mr. Speaker, the \$9 million increase in the Highways and Transportation northern expenditures for the year 1988 bring the total expenditures to 35 million. Mr. Speaker, this is in my mind, looking after the requirements of the North in a number of different ways. Because if you look at what took place in the southern half of the province of Saskatchewan, it was the rail lines that came in that expanded the development throughout the southern part of the province. And the three main routes that I've already talked about are some of the things related to expansion of industry in the northern part of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the involvement of northern people in setting priorities for highway and transport planning through their . . . with transportation planning committees have led to the construction of roads — extension of roads like the one from . . . just north of Missinipe into Grandmother Bay, a community that has existed for something in excess of probably 75 years and has not had the opportunity of any transportation route out — is now connected to the highway that goes from points north to La Ronge.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the initiatives that have been carried out just recently, there are now two health districts in the northern part of the province of Saskatchewan. And these two districts, I believe over the next number of years, will be providing very effective health care services to the people in northern Saskatchewan.

And with that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close my remarks in saying that I move . . . support the amendment and voting on that. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make a few comments in regards to the motion presented before us and the amendment. As I look at the amendment, I look at the motion that's being presented, in many ways the motion basically just compliments . . . or the amendment compliments the motion in talking about infrastructure.

I think the member, the Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs, the member from Cumberland talked about a memorandum of understanding. This memorandum of understanding, if I understand the motion that's . . . or the amendment that's been brought forward, talks about meeting infrastructure needs. And I think that's what the member from Athabasca was talking about. It talks about training and it talks about business opportunities.

I think, Mr. Speaker, when we look at northern Saskatchewan, we look at individuals living in northern communities in this province. At the end of the day I have a feeling that a lot of members of northern Saskatchewan are tired as well of just living off government and would like to have an opportunity to really provide for themselves. And it's something that I think we need to talk about a lot more.

We need to sit down with our aboriginal friends and talk about ways in which we can give them the ability then to enhance opportunities for themselves rather than looking to someone else to provide for them.

Because certainly northern Saskatchewan has so much to offer. There are so many opportunities for businesses and job opportunities and certainly industry to build in the province of Saskatchewan and to add to the employment opportunities for Northerners that would give them then the ability to provide for themselves — whether it's adequate housing or whether it's just providing educational opportunities and tools, or providing for the needs of their family members.

And certainly one of the areas that we talk about, when we talk about northern Saskatchewan as well, is the area of health care and providing quality health care and health availability and access to health care in northern Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the availability of health care for northern communities, I think we need to look at it on a basis of the provincial needs and the health care in general in regards to the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I think when we look at the motion presented before us, we're also mindful of the very serious debate that is taking place in the province of Saskatchewan right now. And a debate that I believe is calling upon members to stand up and represent their constituents and certainly speak out on behalf of their constituents. A debate that is calling for a real review of the health care system. A debate that is calling for this government to take a look at what it has done in regards to the Plains hospital and other hospitals across the province of Saskatchewan. A debate that as well is asking members to exercise their responsibility to represent their constituents through a free vote.

And with that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move a motion, seconded by my colleague, the member from Saltcoats:

That the Assembly do now proceed to item 4 under private members' public Bills and orders, adjourned debates, in the orders of the day.

I so move.

The division bells rang from 3:25 p.m. until 3:34 p.m.

Motion negated on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 8

Krawetz	Bjornerud	Toth
Draude	Gantefoer	Heppner
D'Autremont	Julé	

Nays — 29

Flavel	Van Mulligen	Wiens
Ms. MacKinnon	Tchorzewski	Johnson
Whitmore	Goulet	Kowalsky
Trew	Renaud	Ms. Lorje
Scott	Nilson	Ms. Hamilton
Ms. Stanger	Jess	Wall
Kasperski	Ward	Ms. Murray
Langford	Ms. Murrell	Thomson
Osika	Hillson	Aldridge
Belanger	McLane	

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, the attitude just portrayed by the movers of the motion previous, that is the members of the Saskatchewan Party, many of them who used to be the Tories, are reflecting exactly what was happening with respect to the North in 1983. The members opposite from the old Tories here didn't want to deal with any northern issues at the time, and what they've just said is they don't want to deal with it now as well.

Did you remember, Mr. Speaker, the 1983 highways map on which the Tory minister at that time identified in full print that the North is full of beautiful lakes and rivers but no people, Mr. Speaker — no people.

It's not any wonder at all, Mr. Speaker, that when the party opposite, the Saskatchewan Party, called a meeting — had a meeting, a political rally — in La Ronge, that all of four people turned up, Mr. Speaker. After them declaring that there was no people in the North.

Well, Mr. Speaker, fortunately, fortunately when the New Democrats were elected, people came back to northern Saskatchewan. And we know that there's a lot of good activity going on in northern Saskatchewan right now, Mr. Speaker.

And so for that I actually want to thank the member from the Liberal Party for raising this issue. Perhaps a little misguided in the way he raised the issue that there . . . saying that there was a lack of activity and that he wanted . . . but in the spirit in which he raised it — to emphasize that there should be a debate about northern issues in this House.

And secondly, identifying the direction in which we should be moving with respect to employment and other opportunities in the North.

Coming from Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker, I have the opportunity to rub shoulders with northern neighbours — people coming through Prince Albert, people who live in Prince Albert and have lived in the North, or vice versa. And I have had the pleasure of dealing with and talking with northern leaders, both Metis leaders and leaders from first nations.

And as a result of all of the dialogue that's happened between government and amongst leadership from northern Saskatchewan, I have to say that when I look back to 1967 when I first moved to Prince Albert and was in touch with some of the northern communities then, there has been a world of difference of what's happening now compared to what was happening then.

Because really it was . . . access by roads for one thing was very, very poor at the time. And that means . . . it meant that the access to other things, like schools, health facilities, social services were all very hard to come by. And now when you drive into any of these communities, you see that there's a purpose, people are active, their communities are involved in supporting the institutions which they themselves have had a tremendous part in building.

And I guess there's not much else that gives me greater hope than to see the progress, particularly in the last few years, with respect to employment. We've had members . . . and I know a former member from Athabasca often used to rise in this House along with Lawrence Yew and talk about 90 per cent and 95 per cent and in some cases a hundred per cent unemployment in some of the northern communities. A dent has been made in that, Mr. Speaker, and it took years to do it, but a dent has been made in it.

And for example, I have before me a little briefing note here about northern employment figures at northern mining sites. Mr. Speaker, it's heartening to know that the figure which we now use is that there are 1,095 Northerners which are employed in northern Saskatchewan in mining sites as of September 30, 1997. And, Mr. Speaker, that 85 per cent of these people, or 935 of these people, are of aboriginal ancestry.

Now this figure is something that compares with this figure of 1,095 — compares with 1,092 as of just June of the same year before that, and for 1996 it was a 1,017. But if you go back to 1992, the quarterly average was 529 people working in mine sites. Mr. Speaker, these are good jobs. These are jobs on which you can raise a family, you can send a family to school . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The time for the 65-minute debate has now expired and the Assembly will now proceed to a maximum of 10 minutes of questions and comments by members.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Minister of Northern Affairs, the hon. member from Cumberland. The reason why we stress community development in every sense, Mr. Speaker, is because the challenge of northern communities include limited skills of a lot of people; a young population; no migration of people; the isolation factor; the lack of a comprehensive plan; the system of disincentive with housing and health care, etc.; no community development scenario.

My question to the minister is how do people perceive that lack of action besides taking the position that this government is intent on depopulating northern Saskatchewan and seeing the North become practically a ghost town in that sense. Can I ask the minister what his opinion on that particular issue is?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, the member mentions quite a few points. I'll deal with a couple of points.

One is when he says a lack of a comprehensive plan. We just announced with the Premier and three ministers, along with first nations, Metis leaders, also the northern community leaders — and also representatives from the federal government were there — we announced a comprehensive strategy, Mr. Speaker. From the economic level to the social development level, also to the

environmental level. That was done on May 20.

It's probably the first of its kind anywhere in Canada, and it was a unified view by everybody. And one of the major points, the second point that I make, is we needed to have the federal government onside in regard to the partnerships. We need the federal government to provide resources and revenues in the North for development.

(1545)

Mr. Renaud: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the member from Athabasca. I'm wondering if he approves of the partnership between governments and private sector on many of the projects which I am going to list: the Athabasca road, the Cumberland House bridge, Grandmother's Bay road, and the partnership agreement with Cameco, COGEMA, and Cigar Lake Mining to upgrade highways 102 and 905.

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, there's no question, I can certainly support those initiatives. I think the key point I'm trying to make here is that it must have development of the North be sustainable, community based, and the people in charge of that development of that particular economy.

The problem with the partnership that you speak about is these partnerships are limited. There's very little control at the local level. And secondly, they're not sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about a 50-prong approach. Don't just look at a temporary job creation objective. Let's look at a long-term, sustainable plan in which people can develop tourism opportunities, manufacturing opportunities, agricultural opportunities, develop the service sector and develop the service industry for all the people of northern Saskatchewan, and the list goes on.

So yes, I support those initiatives in general. They are a good start, but they're not sustainable and they're not community driven.

Mr. Renaud: — I've listened to the member from Athabasca. I'm sure he's aware that the provincial government is spending something like \$35.325 million on roads in the North in the 1998-99 budget year. And I'm wondering if he could tell me how much his federal brothers in Ottawa are spending in northern Saskatchewan on roads, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to get into detail, the exact details of what the federal government is putting into the roads, but I will share with you one road, the Athabasca road . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order, order, order. Now all members will be well aware of rule 28 which requires that the comments and questions and answers be provided through the Chair. And I'm sure the hon. member for Athabasca will want to guide himself accordingly.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize. I just want to make the point that in one particular road, the Black Lake road, as in the Cumberland House bridge and the Grandmother Bay road that the minister always talks about, a

big chunk of those dollars did come from the federal government. However I am not here to apologize nor am I here to defend the federal government.

What I want to say though is that the majority of those dollars that we speak about here — 35 million, that's the figure that's pulled out of the air — the huge majority of that money is going into roads that take out all the resources of northern Saskatchewan. Highway 155, we talk about it, from Green Lake that serves all the west-side communities, that highway takes \$180,000 a year to . . . per year to maintain, while all the roads that take all the resources, be it forestry and so on, they get the big chunk of that dollar.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a question to the member from Cumberland, to the minister. Mr. Minister, in your . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now we're private member's day, and I know it's a little different format than question period and I'm sure the hon. member will want to direct his questions and comments through the Chair, as per rule 28.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, I thought I recognized the Speaker originally, but, Mr. Speaker, a question to the member from Cumberland. Mr. Speaker . . .

An Hon. Member: — You got that right now.

Mr. Toth: — Okay, we'll get there yet. Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure if the Speaker really wants to respond to the question; but, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member from Cumberland, I want to raise the question of the fact this memorandum of understanding that you have signed with . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order. Now just to be clear, rule 28 requires that comments be directed to the Chair not directly to another member of the House. May refer of course to another member of the House in the third person and we follow that rule strictly in private member's day. And I'll ask the hon. member to conduct himself accordingly.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, to the member from Cumberland. Mr. Speaker, the member from Cumberland has talked about a memorandum of understanding. And the member from Cumberland has also talked, in this memorandum of understanding, talked about doing a number of studies in regards to a number of issues related to northern Saskatchewan, issues that I think are imperative that we certainly look into. The issue of training, the issue of business opportunities, the issue of allowing northern people to really take charge of their affairs and giving them an opportunity to become real participants in job opportunities in the North.

Well I guess the question to the member from Cumberland is such. To the member from Cumberland, the question I have: is this memorandum of understanding going to really mean something positive at the end of the day or is this another study that's just going to become dusty on another shelf?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, the memorandum of understanding is not a study. It is an agreement by the leaders of the North in regards to economic development, social

development, and in relation to the environment.

In regards to the idea of taking charge of the affairs of the North, it has been an NDP government, Mr. Speaker, who've moved in from the area of developing control on education, control on municipalities, and control on health.

We're now moving in the area of control on economic development. We have moved from \$20 million worth of contracts in mining alone to \$150 million this past year, Mr. Speaker. That's the type of control, the partnership of northern people with the rest of the province and internationally. And I think that is the way of the future as we approach the next century, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the member for North Battleford. I know that the member for North Battleford is particularly interested in the North, at least in North Battleford. I'm not sure he has any experience much beyond that. And certainly flying over the North — we've heard about that — and particularly camping and fishing up there.

My question is, what particular programs does the member for North Battleford support in terms of the economic and social development of northern people?

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I had hoped I'd made it clear in my remarks. Perhaps I did not. Of course there are some members who may need it repeated and don't maybe grasp it the first time. I'll be happy to do so.

We have for too long as non-aboriginals embarked on policies in which we decided what was best for our northern and native people. Those days are now over. Northern and native peoples must be empowered to make decisions about their own future.

I think we can assist in the process but we are no longer going to be able to make the decisions as to what is best for them. They will make their own decisions as to how to build their communities, how to train and educate their young people, how to develop the infrastructure and the industries that will give the North the future we all want.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to ask the Minister of Northern Affairs a question. Will he stand up in the House today and admit that the vast majority of those dollars he's talking about is being spent on roads that service the mining sector, that service the forestry sector, and not those roads such as Highway 155 between Green Lake and Beauval and Patuanak that serve people?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, those roads serve the people of northern Saskatchewan. Many of the contracts that have been had in many areas in mining, forestry, and even as we go in is now moving even to northern contractors. And Athabasca Road, we had Dene people in addition with our joint partners be part of a contractual system of getting the contracts on the highways.

So, Mr. Speaker, indeed we're seeing direct benefits to northern people in the many areas including highways.

The Speaker: — The time for the 75-minute debate has expired.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I would request, with leave of the Assembly, that we proceed directly to private members' motions, Mr. Aldridge's motion, in view of the fact that one of the members is not here.

Leave granted.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 6 — Hospital Waiting-lists

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of waiting-lists is one which represents a great concern to many people in this province.

Recently I wrote to my constituents on the whole aspect of health care surrounding the Plains hospital closure as well. And these mail-outs proved so popular that residents of other constituencies, particularly those in Moose Jaw, Souris-Cannington, and a number of Regina seats, through word of mouth, through friends and family, heard of them and came asking for them as well.

To date I've received over 1,500 responses. And of those who responded and offered their comments, it was close to 20 per cent of them, Mr. Speaker, who mentioned waiting-lists as one of their major concerns. So certainly this whole issue is a worrisome one indeed.

Presently in the province there is over 6,000 people — over 6,000 people — waiting for health services. That number is three times higher than what the Blakeney NDP government had considered acceptable, yet it's acceptable for this government, Mr. Speaker.

Back in the '70s Blakeney suggested he'd fire his minister of Health if those waiting-lists were not reduced to below 2,000 people. Well today, Mr. Speaker, I have in my hand a list of all of the individuals who wrote me and said they had concerns about waiting-lists, and this list represents the failures of this government.

This government, Mr. Speaker, often relies upon its past accomplishments to try and see its way through the future. Past accomplishments, while they might sound glorious and they tend to grow over time, they're no consolation for the people who now have to wait for these essential procedures, those some 6,000 or 6,600 or more, that are on waiting-lists. They're no consolation for a person that's waiting for a test, wondering whether or not they have a major illness.

I know I've heard instances from parents in my riding that are in that very predicament. They have to go on working and taking care of their children, and with a considerable amount of agony for months on end, just because they can't get a procedure or an operation on a timely basis or get in for some tests. In the past couple of months I've heard of too many of

these personal horror stories from constituents and from people all over the province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, enough is enough. People should not have to suffer and wait for months to receive the assistance that they require. Mr. Speaker, while the government might sit back . . . or, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while the government might sit back and rest upon its laurels, they're failing to recognize what is the real problem.

And the real problem, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that members in the government benches too often have their priorities all wrong. I'm looking at an article from the *Leader-Post* dated May 23 as an example of that very thing. Headline: "Gov't mailout on health care cost \$600,000."

Now within this article they go on to talk about a 12-page brochure called a *Guide to Health Services in Saskatchewan* which, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be distributed to households across the province. I guess we're to take it to be coincidentally that it starts out distribution in Saskatoon.

Now this particular document, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm told winds up . . . the final three pages of it are actively promoting the health policies contained in the recent NDP's budget, and try to talk about improvements that they've made in the health system since they've assumed office, so it becomes rather a political document for themselves.

In fact I don't know if this was a Freudian slip or not, but one health department spokesperson had said, and I quote:

The cost of printing and mailing the brochure was 185,000. Newspaper advertising promoting the arrival of the brochure, and ad agency fees drove up the total cost of the campaign to 600 . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Why is the member on her feet?

Ms. Murrell: — To introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, and I apologize for interrupting. For the members who have had the opportunity to attend the Midwestern Legislative Conference I'm sure they will all recognize the lady in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. Please welcome to Saskatchewan Miss Ilene Grossman, assistant director of the Midwestern Conference. Ilene is responsible for organizing and does a fine job of it. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1600)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 6 (continued)

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With

respect to the health department spokesperson as I was quoting:

The cost of printing and mailing the brochure was \$185,000. Newspaper advertising promoting the arrival of the brochure, and ad agency fees drove up the total cost of the . . .

And for the member from Regina South who was chirping earlier, this is where the Freudian slip comes in, because the spokesperson says the agency fees and advertising:

. . . drove up the total cost of the campaign to \$600,000. Campbell acknowledged some might argue that the money should be spent to hire more nurses.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some might argue that it should be also used to reduce some waiting-lists in the province, and I guess all of these things go hand in hand. You close the Plains hospital, you don't have enough beds available, you don't have enough nurses available, one aspect of health care depends on the other.

All too often, Mr. Deputy Speaker, health care to this government is a matter of financial, strictly financial statements ahead of human need. We shouldn't be surprised by this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We shouldn't be surprised because the government has placed foreign gambles in the Crowns ahead of health care and also ahead of the highways at home. It's placed tax breaks for billionaires ahead of the real suffering which people are now enduring on these waiting-lists, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This government can evoke Tommy Douglas whenever it likes, but it will do nothing to change the fact that they have their priorities all wrong — nothing to do anything about that at all, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The question we all want to know is when is the government going to once again start caring about the needs of Saskatchewan people?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while far too many people languish on waiting-lists in this province, the provincial government intends to close yet more hospitals and more hospital beds. If the government can remain indifferent to the calls of Saskatchewan people and close the Plains hospital, a valuable chance to ease the bed shortage in this province will in fact be lost, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister of Health and the Premier have repeatedly tried to assure people that there'll be the same number of beds in Regina after the Plains closes. Well even if this is true, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this would do nothing to ease what is currently the shameful number of people having to be on waiting-lists due to bed shortages as they exist right now, and thanks to no one else but this NDP government.

If the hospital closes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and is converted to a SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) campus it'll not be available for use for a hospital again.

And I recall a question that came from the floor at a meeting we conducted in the city of Moose Jaw — not a question I suppose, more properly referred to as a comment — where it was said,

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that converting the Plains hospital to a hospital won't save any . . . or converting it to a SIAST campus won't save any lives, but keeping it as the Plains hospital will. And I think that pretty much sums it up, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Well I know the members opposite are again talking about Darlene Sterling, and they do like to attack Darlene Sterling's character because basically they can't undermine what she's saying. I'd like to raise a point that she repeatedly made at Save the Plains meetings. Darlene stated that we needed a renovated General and renovated Pasqua Hospital. That being the case, she made the point that we also need the Plains hospital too. With bed shortages and waiting-lists we risk facing much greater costs if we close that hospital.

When this government comes to its senses, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and realizes that there are too few beds available in the province already, let's hope it's before the Plains hospital closes and not after. If it's after the government realizes that it needs more beds, then what will they do at that point in time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They'll have to either simply let everyone suffer or it will have to start constructing more buildings at a much higher cost.

Now that's exactly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, exactly what Mike Harris and his Ontario Tories are finding themselves having to do now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's somewhat ironic — well quite ironic I'd say — that a government which so frequently likes to appeal to its glorious past on medicare is more or less following a Tory, right-wing, pro-big-business approach to health care. It's a shameful legacy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's not one I think that the members opposite would like to bequeath to their successors.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, waiting-lists are a major concern in the province. Not only will closing the Plains not help that, but neither will some of the other closures that we're now facing in Saskatchewan. In my own riding the threat still exists that 10 long-term beds could be cut. We have too many people on waiting-lists for these beds already. But yet the government is not providing enough funding to keep all 49 open.

In Swift Current and Carrot River, Living Sky District, we also see problems there. Now my constituents . . .

An Hon. Member: — What's the problem?

Mr. Aldridge: — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the member from Swift Current would give me an opportunity, I'll tell him exactly what the problems are. And I know he seems quite sensitive about what's going on and what's the problem in the constituency of Swift Current. So for his benefit, if he'll just stay calm for a moment, I'll tell him.

Some of my constituents, over what is going on in his constituency of Swift Current, are already . . . they're enduring doctor shortages and they're concerned that 54 beds will be closed in what is their regional hospital in Swift Current, downgrading that particular facility, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so it'll no longer be a regional hospital.

And those are people from my riding . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member from Swift Current does seem to have quite a passion for this particular debate. So maybe what I'll do is I'll just take this opportunity to read a letter that was wrote to the Premier but might as well be written to the member from Swift Current. Perhaps he can knock on this door in fact:

Mr. Premier: Please keep the Plains. It's an easy, quick access for ambulances, saving precious minutes. We cannot lose any more hospital beds. We should not have to recoup from surgery in a hotel when hospital care is needed (Mr. Deputy Speaker).

An Hon. Member: — Relevance.

Mr. Aldridge: — And that was quote . . . And the relevancy here is there are problems in the constituency of Swift Current.

This comes from some constituents in Swift Current. I'll send this across to the member from Swift Current; I hope you'll kindly address these problems. It comes from Nick and Mary Wall of the city of Swift Current. From Nick and Mary Wall of the city of Swift Current. And we'll let the member from Swift Current deal with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Instead of acknowledging the problem, the government's only willing to cave in if placed under tremendous public pressure. Then they rehire some of the 500 or more nurses that they've laid off since health reform. Instead of swallowing their pride, the government is telling everyone that even more beds could be closed and more people could be placed on home care. While home care is valuable and it's needed, it isn't any magic pill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the woes of our health system.

The very fact that they make such a suggestion is an indication that they have their priorities in the wrong place. It's time this government put human need ahead of financial statements. It's time this government got its priorities straight and placed our health system and the problem of waiting-lists ahead of severance packages for political friends and expensive foreign gambles. It's time for this government to get back to what it really should be doing, and that's caring.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would move, seconded by the member from Melville:

That this Assembly call upon the government to take urgently needed measures to reduce the length of waiting-lists for surgeries and other hospital treatments from the present outrageous level of 6,600 patients down to a level in keeping with the fundamental principles of medicare.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter into this debate, particularly to follow my friend and colleague from Thunder Creek.

I want to start by reading to him something which was in the paper yesterday. It's a letter from a Dr. Bartlett. In it, and I'm quoting at this point, he says:

Quite simply, it is unconscionable to manipulate people

into believing something that is untrue.

Unconscionable to manipulate people into believing something that's untrue. Well who do you think he's talking about, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Who do you think that this is directed at? It's directed at the people that are spreading misinformation and fear around this province about our medicare system. It is directed at the Liberals in this particular case. Make absolutely no doubt about it.

We see that in their motion today. We see a lack of understanding of what exactly is happening. We see them move away and abdicate their responsibility as Liberals — as Liberals. That member for Thunder Creek has stood up in this House time and again and professed that he supports the Canada Health Act — absolutely supports the Canada Health Act.

Well what do we know about their support for the Canada Health Act? It's a support that is as deep as a page of paper that it's written on because there's no money behind it to back it up. Where exactly is the money, I say to the member for Thunder Creek. Where is the federal government's support for the Canada Health Act that these Liberals supposedly believe in? It's not there.

Seven billion dollars the federal Liberals take out of medicare — seven billion! That's what they suck out of medicare and they believe, oh it's not going to cause any problems. The federal Liberals say, well it's not going to cause any problems at all.

Well for the first little while now this merry band of malcontents across the way stand up and say, oh no, no, no, this isn't us. That's the federal party; that's not us. That's not the provincial Liberals. And yet when a by-election comes along, who do they call in? The very man that cuts the money — Paul Martin. They call him in to support their leader, Dr. Melenchuk.

And what does Dr. Melenchuk say? Well in essence he says, a Liberal is a Liberal is a Liberal. What do we know that that means? It means cuts, cuts, cuts to medicare. It has meant that since the '60s; it means it today; it'll mean it tomorrow.

And the members know that. That's why this is such a shameful, shameful attempt on their part to cause fear. And I have to say I agree with Dr. Bartlett that it is quite simply unconscionable to manipulate people into believing something that's untrue — because that's what they're trying to do.

Why? Because they plan on saving medicare? No. Is it because they think that there is a real problem in the system? No. It's because they have a political agenda. At least they should admit to that. That's all this is, is more cheap Liberal politics.

We go from them seeing throughout this entire debate — from this entire debate . . . First it's the Save the Plains committee is out there as a citizens' group. Now all of a sudden, yesterday, the member stands up in this House and says, our Liberal rallies — our Liberal rallies.

Well let's just be honest about it. This is Liberal politics. There's not a crisis in health care today. There isn't. There isn't.

The member from Melville yells from his seat and says, tell that to the people from rural Saskatchewan.

You know, it's interesting . . . and I didn't go to Yorkton last night, where there was supposedly a rally. But I understand the member for Melville was there. And what we have seen at these Save the Plains rallies that they're attempting to convert into health care rallies, you know, a.k.a. the KOD (Keep Our Doctors committee), it's a Save the Liberals campaign.

(1615)

But what we see happening here is we see it dropping off. Why? Why? Because people recognize the fact that the Liberals are not the friends of medicare. They have never been the friends of medicare here in Regina. They are certainly not the friends of medicare in Ottawa where they slash \$7 billion, and not a word. Not a word.

Not one of those members over there has ever stood up and said, Mr. Speaker, I have written a letter to complain to the Minister of Health federally, or the Minister of Finance federally. Not one of them. Not one of them has ever said that they oppose that \$7 billion cut. All they say is that's not us; that's the federal Liberals.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we're on to them. Not just the members on this side are on to them. The public is on to them. Listen to them. Listen to them. Here they are and all they're interested in doing is stirring the pot — causing fear, misrepresenting things, spreading misinformation. It is absolutely, in the words of Dr. Bartlett, unconscionable. And I think he knows that. I think he knows that.

I want to take a look at what they're saying elsewhere. What are other people saying about this? I'm looking today at a copy of the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*, not that I regularly read Conrad Black's papers. But this one was put in my hand and it seems to have an interesting comment in it.

David Smith, who as we all know is not a particular fan of this government, but a political scientist at the U of S (University of Saskatchewan), he goes on to say:

There's concern about health care and not just in Saskatchewan. In fact it arises as an issue more frequently outside of Saskatchewan. We read about what's happening in Ontario, which is Tory; Nova Scotia, which is Liberal; even B.C. (British Columbia), which is NDP. You might say it's terrible here, but it's worse elsewhere. You might say that on balance this government has done a better job than most have.

On balance this government has done a better job than most have. A better job of what, Mr. Speaker? A better job of dealing with the \$7 billion that that federal Liberal Party, supported by the provincial Liberal Party, yanked out of health care. That's what we have done a better job of here in Saskatchewan. And I think it's time that those members opposite stop playing politics, stop playing with fear, and admit it.

On the weekend I was watching the parliamentary access channel. It wasn't a very exciting thing to do but it happened to

have a question period on from Manitoba. And the Leader of the Opposition, New Democrat Gary Doer, was standing up and asking the Tory government what were they going to do about waiting-lists.

Do you want to know what their waiting-lists were that they were arguing about? Do you want to know what the waiting-list was they were arguing about? They were arguing about a waiting-list of 8,000 people for the MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). They were talking about a waiting list of 4,500 to get a CAT (computerized axial tomography) scan. That's in Manitoba, a province of exactly the same size as Saskatchewan — 8,000 for the MRI, 4,500 for a CT scan.

And what do these guys across the way have to say? It's terrible that there's a total waiting-list of 6,000 people. In Manitoba we have double that number waiting for MRIs and CT scans. That's what we've got. This is the kind of fear, this is the kind of misinformation, these are the kind of pieces of information that they put out that are simply not true.

Now they say, the member for Thunder Creek stands up and he says, you know, all you guys do is stand up and talk about the good old days. You talk about how Tommy Douglas set up this system. You stand up and you talk about how Orville Hjertaas was one of only two doctors in this province to keep his practice open and to treat people.

I want to tell you that that's right, we do. Why? Because Tommy Douglas and Dr. Orville Hjertaas were CCFers (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) and New Democrats. They're the people that set up medicare. They're the forefathers of this party and they spent every day of their lives fighting with Liberals — Liberals who meant to tear down the system, to kick in the side of medicare like they wanted to kick in the doors of the legislature. That's what we were dealing with.

Well let me tell you I don't need to simply talk about what we used to do. I can tell you that today in NDP Saskatchewan, today there are 10,000 more surgeries occurring than there were when we took office — 10,000. Do we hear a word about that? No, not a word. Are they out there saying it's interesting that despite the fact we have one of the smallest numbers of folks to do hip and knee replacements, we do the highest number in Canada. Did they say that? Oh I guess it's the second highest. No they don't. Not a word.

They talk about the fact that even the good old right-wing Fraser Institute — and we know what friends of this government they are — the right-wing Fraser Institute says that Saskatchewan has the shortest waiting-lists in Canada for heart and brain surgery. Then why don't they talk about that?

You know why? Because, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't suit their political agenda. Their political agenda is very simple. Their political agenda is simply to destabilize medicare. It's to cause fear. It is to allow people to start to think that system's not going to be there to protect them, and as such they should start looking for other vehicles, be it private insurance, be it employer insurance, be it user-pay.

That's what those folks believe in. That's what they want to cause fear in. Then they say the demands are so high, there's

going to be such a huge demand because of the ageing population, what they want to do is they want to put out the seed there that people, younger folks, they're going to be paying the tax bill in the future and won't be able to afford it.

That's the kind of fear they want. And why do they want it? Because they want to destroy universal, single-payer system of medicare. It's a shameful old Liberal trick.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to go on for too much longer tonight because I think we've made the point. But let me just tell you that we've seen this before. And I think it is absolutely shameful that the Liberals, when they want to campaign, because they think the federal Liberals have something of advantage, they campaign with the federal Liberals, with Paul Martin, with the man that yanked \$7 billion out of health care — larger than any other cut.

Do you know they took more . . . the federal government took more money out of health care and education than they took out of absolutely any other sector. What was our response? We could have passed it along. We could have passed along the cuts. Do you know what? We didn't. We didn't because we believe in medicare. We believe in it, not because we founded it; we believe in it because it is exactly what makes us a good place to live. It is what allows us to share our resources. It is what allows us to trade and to share among generations, because we know that people deserve health care.

We believe that. And we don't think it's linked to the ability to pay. So it's interesting. It's interesting.

An Hon. Member: — Get rid of the waiting-lists.

Mr. Thomson: — The member says, get rid of the waiting-lists. We will never get rid of the waiting-lists. At what level of funding does he want us to move to? We've seen this go on and on and on.

And I could go and quote their leader, Dr. Melenchuk, who's campaigning today in a by-election I assume in Saskatoon who says, we're going to shorten the waiting-lists. We're going to put more money into medicare, we're going to slash taxes. You know, he's going to do everything — absolutely everything. And you know what he's going to do actually? Nothing. Because that's all the Liberals have ever done — nothing. The Liberals do not support medicare and I think that people out there know it.

Are things perfect? No. We recognize that. But we're listening; we hear what people are saying. That's why I'm very pleased to see Judy Junor having announced her candidacy and I'm very pleased to read her comments in the newspaper saying that she wants to be a part of the team that can make health reform right.

Is she running for the Liberals? No. Is she running for the Tories? Well no. She's running for us. She's running for us because she believes in health care reform. She's running for us because she knows this is the party, these are the people, that really believe in medicare. Not in a medicare of old, but a medicare of today. A medicare that's affordable, a medicare that has services, a medicare that works.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this debate on health care will go on in the public for some time. And we will be out there making sure people know exactly where the Liberal Party stands. And we'll be making sure they know exactly where we stand. Because there is a huge distance between the two.

I am very, very strong in my belief that we should defeat this motion today outright and be done with it. Because it is simply, simply a Liberal ploy to further spread or further, as Dr. Bartlett says, manipulate people into believing something that is untrue. It's unconscionable and untrue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll be opposing the motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I just, in deference to the naïvety from the member from Regina South, I would just want to make some very clear statements at the outset. And please allow me to read the motion once again to this House and to the people of this province:

That this Assembly call upon the government to take urgently needed measures to reduce the length of waiting-lists for surgery and other hospital treatments from the present outrageous levels of 6,600 patients down to a level in keeping with the fundamental principles of medicare.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he's voting against something that people are very upset and concerned about. I don't know what happens in his constituency but I have people coming to me and are hurting and are in pain, are being treated with codeine and Demerol to subside their pain until they can get into a hospital for much needed surgery.

How can you possibly vote against trying to alleviate those kind of problems for people that are suffering in this province? How can you do that, member from Regina South? But it's obvious you really don't care, because at the outset before your campaign, before you got elected, you campaigned to keep the Plains . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. Order, order. Now I'm sure that the hon. member from Melville has heard the line before that all statements must be addressed through the Chair and not directly across the Assembly at another member. So I would ask him to direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. I apologize for that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I will address it through you and to the people of this province and to the rest of the members of this Assembly, the fact that the member from Regina South, who campaigned and who we have been told . . . and everybody in this province knows and we continue to be reminded, that the decision to close the Plains hospital was made in 1993 or 1994, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So guess what? The member from Regina South, with his arm around the Premier in his campaign, in his brochure, "I will fight to save the Plains hospital." All right? That was his campaign, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now all of a sudden he says, hey I'm all for closing it. I wouldn't support cutting down waiting-lists for people that are suffering, waiting for surgery and treatment in hospital. That's shameful. That's shameful. I would not have believed that it would come to this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm going to quote. The members opposite are great for quoting; let me just quote. And I'm going to quote a couple of things here from a letter by . . . this one from Mr. Lewis Draper. Yes, I know you don't like hearing from Mr. Lewis Draper, a former member of your caucus, and this was on April 9, 1998, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

Dear Sir: What I hate about the provincial budget is the hypocrisy of blaming the federal Liberal government for all the things that are unpalatable, like the health care cuts. The provincial government cannot blame the federal Liberal government for health care cuts. The provincial government announced the closure of 52 small rural hospitals to save money, calling them inefficient, well over a year before the federal election. If the provincial government saved money this way, can they fault the federal government for claiming their share?

They're so quick to forget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's shameful.

I want to quote something else. I guess being new to the Assembly here it never ceases to amaze me how things turn around and how people change their whatever — their thoughts and their views.

(1630)

And I'd like to quote . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the member from Regina South, who is so serious about opposing cutting down waiting-lists for surgeries for people that are suffering . . . I'd be happy to allow him the opportunity to stand up again and repeat that to the people of this province.

In 1991, April 22, in this House, our Premier, who also was into a debate about issues of health care said, and I quote, in his comments in a statement that he was making:

And finally what about the health care system. Much can be said about this and much will be in the days ahead as I bring my remarks to a close.

A health care system that we see today where doctors and nurses and other care-givers are worried about intolerable working conditions and difficulties of stress which manifest themselves today with the nurses coming to this Legislative Building to protest what's happening.

Boy I'll tell you, think about that picture — has anything changed?

What in the world's gone wrong with medicare and health care — 197 beds, 197 people; 113 beds in Saskatoon, about 200 in Moose Jaw, Yorkton, and Regina I think in round terms, closed down. What in the world has gone wrong.

This is the Premier of the day making a statement in this House about the devastating effects that the government of the day's policy was having on . . . what's changed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We're back to . . . nothing's changed, nothing's fixed. So what promises were made in 1991 about fixing all this. Lots of complaints, lots of criticisms, but I don't see anything different; it's gotten worse, it's gotten worse.

I just want to carry on here. It says:

They say that the costs are getting out of control. That's not true. The costs are within the projected costs of Emmett Hall's survey back in 1968 essentially. But they propagate this myth that the costs are way out of control and so the constituency people are saying you got to put deterrent fees on. Oh well, the premium won't hurt anybody, they say. Well we'll cut back on the prescription drug plan.

And it goes on:

I mean, but what in the world has caused all this bed closures and professionals leaving and communities on the edge? I'll tell you what's caused it. What's caused it is a government that has more interest in the well-being of Cargill than in the well-being of Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon or City Hospital in Saskatoon.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, now this government, what are they more concerned about? Guyana, Chile, all their offshore investments where they lose, lose, lose taxpayers' dollars that could go to sustaining our much needed surgical, hospital, or acute care beds.

And the member from Regina South has the audacity to stand up in this House and say he would vote against alleviating the suffering of the people of this province. That's shameful. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want one other thing that I would like to clarify that the member from Regina South has been accusing members on this side of the House, that we did not support medicare.

Let me just refer to the *Leader-Post*, Regina, Monday, November 24, referring to the policies adopted at the Liberal convention, to reaffirm where the Liberals have always stood, and that is to uphold the principles of the Canada Health Act to ensure publicly funded, publicly administered, universal medicare, and to allow all health board members to be democratically elected.

Now what's further from the truth, and I believe the member from Regina South is not prepared to change his mind on his observations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, much has been said in recent times about the efforts of citizens of this province to talk to the people. As a matter of fact at one of the meetings there was a gentlemen that happened to get up and ask the question, whatever happened for government by the people and for the people? This government has refused to listen.

A constant barrage of allegations and accusations that we on this side are fearmongering, that we are going out and

organizing rallies and making up stories. And the member from Swift Current hollers yes, that's true. Well I guess he doesn't believe the people from rural Saskatchewan either who return letters to us with respect to the health care situation in this province — thousands of these letters, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We've had lots of people that have showed up at the rallies that get up to speak. And we don't make up those stories. Those people come and tell their own, their own pathetic experiences with the pathetic health care system that we have today.

This one's long waits for anything serious, shortage of beds, but to close the Plains is the worst decision ever made — it's modern, accessible. Millions of billions spent on other two hospitals is ridiculous. Do we indeed have a health system? Where is Tommy Douglas when we need him? Please start listening to the people who have put you where you are. I have voted NDP in the past, however due to the arrogance shown by your party I will not vote NDP and I'm actively telling people to not vote for your party.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're here — we have lots of these.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the closure of a facility like the Plains, it will not help to reduce the waiting-lists of people that are subjected — subjected to taking drugs like codeine and Demerol to ease the pain, to cease the pain until they're able to get to professional services in any hospital. That's terrible. That's appalling.

The Plains hospital, just as a matter of some interest, is the home of world famous anesthetist Dr. Joy Dobson. Dr. Joy Dobson, the gold medal winner at the University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine. Dr. Dobson, one of the finest anesthetists in Canada.

She helped in the treatment and management and resuscitation of Karlee Kosolofski, the little girl who almost froze to death outside her home near Rouleau. There are miracles that are performed at that hospital. That hospital is much needed in order that we can reduce the waiting-lists for surgery, for people to have much needed attention.

This same lady, this same great lady helped in the treatment, management, and resuscitation of Kenji Chan, the exchange student who was trapped beneath the semi-tractor-trailor west of Regina last year and who almost froze to death.

This hospital, besides being much needed for the beds, for the expertise, for the ability and the opportunity to attract some highly specialized individuals to this centre of excellence from which it was built, a centre of excellence in the field of cardiovascular care, cardiology, internal medicine, neurology, anesthesiology, trauma care, and urology.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are obviously not words that I use daily, not being associated with the medical profession. But these are people that are experts in their individual fields that are desperately needed, that people our citizens rely on and need to get to but can't because of the lengthy waiting-lists for hospital care, for medical care in this province.

And that's sad, it's really sad. It's even sadder when the

government of the day who's in charge, the government of the day that's responsible for its citizens, for the citizens that had put their confidence and their trust in them to care for them, has turned their backs and virtually says who cares, like the member from Regina South who says I will vote against a Bill or a motion rather that calls for reducing waiting-lists. That doesn't make any sense to me — totally without any compassion or feelings.

The same member who campaigned to keep a hospital open because it was desperately needed and now suddenly says no way, changed my mind. Perhaps like one of his colleagues, had an opinion but was brainwashed out of it. That's a sad state of affairs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's certainly not something that the people of this province deserve.

I just want to quote one more time from *Hansard*, April 22, 1991 when the Premier is speaking, and I quote:

I do not understand how this can happen except for a government that either doesn't care much about the sanctity of the health care system or a government which doesn't understand the importance of health care and the tradition of this province.

There's something wrong with this picture. This was said way back then; it's being said again. I mean what's changed? And why hasn't it changed? If it was going to be changed for the better in 1991, then why are we in this debate about the disastrous situation our health care system is in this great province of Saskatchewan?

Continue to quote:

Well I tell you, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe the people of this province have ever, ever trusted Conservatives. I won't say all Conservatives; they will never trust this government with health care.

And again it's funny. I've heard this said in the House before so I'm not the first person that's read it I guess, but it also goes on to say:

Putting this government in charge of the health care system in Saskatchewan is a bit like putting Colonel Sanders in charge of the chicken coop. It's downright dangerous to the health of medicare, Mr. Speaker — downright dangerous.

Well I ask, I guess, what's changed? I don't understand where they're . . . I don't see any improvements from 1991 to this day. After 1991, a whole bunch of hospitals closed down, a lot of nurses lose their jobs, a lot of doctors leave this province. I know my personal physician could hardly wait to get out of this province to go across the line, and a lot of his colleagues.

And that's the sad . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, he's not. He's not coming back. The member from Carrot River Valley whose hospital is being closed down to again extend the waiting-list, Mr. Deputy Speaker, says is he coming back? No, I don't think so.

There are more . . . (inaudible) . . . As a matter of fact the much needed health care in Carrot River Valley will no longer be

there. And that will again, that will again contribute to waiting-lists some place else, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How can you continue to shut down hospitals and hospital beds and talk about having regional facilities when in fact you start shutting down more beds?

Where are people going to go? Why would doctors want to come to communities, to small communities, where there is no hospital or no facilities for them to operate. It just doesn't make sense. This continues to be a revenge on rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It started in 1991 and it continues.

We were promised no more hospital closures by the previous Health minister and by the current Health minister; and we continue to see hospital beds and hospitals closed in rural Saskatchewan. That's shameful. There are commitments being made by this government they're not living up to. They've broken promises before; they don't live up to their commitments. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can't believe that they can continue to sit there and believe that the people that they represent are supportive of their actions as far as the devastation of our health care in this great province of Saskatchewan.

I strongly support this motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I urge all members to support this motion to reduce the waiting-lists and the costs on the health, the pain and suffering of the people of this province that need serious attention. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One of the great joys of being an elected member in this province, and in all provinces in Canada, is that we have the opportunity here to speak on behalf of our constituents and to speak strongly for what we believe in.

Now it's been very interesting listening to my friend, the member from Melville, talk about his views on health care. And I also want to say I was most impressed by the remarks made by my colleague, the member from Regina South on health care and waiting-lists in this province.

(1645)

I just would like to make a few remarks specifically on waiting-lists. But before I do that I want to preface my remarks just by reminding everyone again about the commitment that this government made in this budget to health care.

The financial commitment was such, \$1.7 billion — \$1.7 billion. That's a huge amount of money, Mr. Speaker, the most money that's ever been spent on health care in this province. And it represents \$88 million more than we spent last year. That represents \$1,700 for every man, woman, and child in this province.

Now that's more money than Alberta spends on health care. Alberta, which is supposedly the wealthy province, but Alberta which also has health care premiums; \$1,700 for every man, woman, and child. Now to me that represents a serious commitment to the health and welfare of the people of Saskatchewan.

Health spending has grown since 1991-92, and community and home-based services are receiving a bigger share of the budget.

Now some of the services that are provided to the people of Saskatchewan for this money, some of the statistics are very interesting and I just want to share some of them with you.

Based on the information we have from previous years we know, for instance, that there are 4.66 million visits to family physicians every year. There are 925,000 visits to specialists. There are 1.773 million hours of home care services; 857,500 days of in-patient hospital care; and 650,000 emergency room or clinic visits. That's a lot of health services to provide to the people of this province, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to now just give some background information on waiting time for elective surgery. When booking a patient for surgery, specialists classify cases into one of three groups, and in all cases, it's the specialists that determine whether a case is an emergency, urgent, or whether it's elective.

An emergency surgical procedure means it's a life-saving measure and is always done as soon as possible. Urgent procedures are performed in a few days or weeks depending on the patient's condition, and elective procedures are those where the physician believes there is a low risk and patients are able to wait for their surgery.

Waiting times for procedures are almost exclusively for elective cases. The Saskatoon and Regina medical staffs have each developed and approved guidelines for physicians to use in classifying procedures as emergency, urgent, or elective. The medical staffs have also defined reasonable waits for emergency and urgent surgeries. There are however no agreed upon criteria defining reasonable waits for elective surgery — not in Saskatchewan nor anywhere else in Canada.

Waits for surgery vary by specialty. And as my friend the member from Regina South said when he quoted the Fraser Institute, the Fraser Institute survey says Saskatchewan has comparatively short waits for heart surgery and brain surgery.

Waiting times are a result of many factors including the availability of specialists. Average waiting times are sometimes influenced by specific physicians whose waiting-lists are far longer than others in the same field. Patients can choose specialists with shorter waiting times.

I'd like to say a few words about the number of surgeries. The total number of surgeries performed in Saskatchewan has remained relatively stable throughout the '90s with considerable variation in the types of procedures done. During this time there has been a shift to performing more procedures on a day surgery basis. Day surgery involves less invasive techniques, is less costly, and results in faster recovery for patients.

For instance in 1987-88 there were a total of 77,235 surgeries performed in Saskatchewan — 29 per cent of those were day surgeries. In '96-97, 87,378 surgeries were performed — 52 per cent were day surgeries. The number of procedures performed in some specialties, notably ophthalmology and cardiovascular surgery, has increased while other surgeries, for example tonsillectomies and caesarean sections, have decreased.

Demand for some procedures including cataract surgery and replacement of hips and knees has grown substantially in recent years. The Health Services Utilization and Research Commission found that this province has the second highest rate of cataract surgery and among the highest rates of total joint replacement in Canada. In 1983, Mr. Speaker, there were 1,500 cataract surgeries. In '96-97 there were 10,484. In 1983 there were 820 total knee and total hip replacements, and in '96-97 there were 1,850.

Mr. Speaker, health districts are working on initiatives to improve scheduling services. Work is currently underway with the Saskatoon and Regina health districts to improve prioritization by reaching agreement on how patients are classified to ensure that patients don't wait longer than their condition suggests — by establishing committees of district staff that monitor the use of their operating rooms with the goal of improving efficiency, balancing surgical workload across facilities to reduce waiting times, and allocating resources such as prosthetics more equitably, and streamlining the surgical booking process and consequently the quality of information on waiting times.

Mr. Speaker, waiting times for surgical procedures are not the best measure of health care performance. If you want to determine how well a health care system is performing, it's the rates of surgeries performed in comparison to the population, and Saskatchewan has quite a high rate of surgeries performed compared to other places. Waiting times can easily be manipulated to suit political purposes, Mr. Speaker; and they do not reflect what is actually being done.

Mr. Speaker, before I take my place, may I just reiterate what I think are the important points here. In all cases it is the specialists who determine whether a case is an emergency, urgent, or elective. Waiting times are comprised almost exclusively of people who are waiting for elective surgery, not those classified as emergency or urgent changes. Waiting times for elective surgery in Saskatchewan are very comparable with other provinces.

Many people, Mr. Speaker, voluntarily choose to delay surgery while others will place their names on the waiting list while they are still making a final decision on whether or not they want the surgery. Hospitals and doctors are doing a good job of scheduling surgeries. Our government will continue to work with health boards to ensure waiting time for surgery is reasonable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to say a few words with regards to the health system as we see it in this great province.

The opposition has some criticism with regards to the funding of the health program within Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan's last budget was \$1.72 billion. The most that has ever been slated for health care in the history of this province.

Contrast this with the federal cut of \$7 billion from health care

across this nation of ours . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . and by the Liberals. I'm just wondering if the Liberal members have even bothered to let their concerns be known to their federal cousins.

What is so sad about this cut is that it will give premiers like Klein and Harris an opportunity to say, why bother following the national medicare system. We'll go it on our own. And you know what they will do, they will go for two tiers. But then this is what our Liberals opposite are all in favour of.

And in case they don't believe this, quoting from the daily news of Canada, Wednesday, December 24:

Tom Kent's blistering critique of the Chrétien government's betrayal of medicare has suddenly increased pressure on the Liberals to restore money to the health care system. Physicians and opposition critics welcomed yesterday a new report written by Kent.

Now I wonder who this Kent is. I wonder if the Liberals opposite know who they are, who he is. Well, Mr. Speaker, Kent is long considered the Liberals godfather of social policy.

And so here we have a serious thinking, highly respected, very senior policy guru who was there when medicare started. He's got no vested interest and he's saying the same thing that we are. I think it puts some balance back into the discussion. And so that's what we want to talk about just a little bit with regards to the federal government and their cut back to the health system.

With regards to the Swift Current Health District. The member from Thunder Creek gave us some information which was false and misleading. He stated that the Swift Current hospital would lose its regional status if it cut its beds and that it was going to cut the beds. He forgot to turn the paper. He got this information from the member from Wood River. That's where he got the information from.

What did the CEO (chief executive officer) of the Swift Current District Health Board say? He said that every bit of that information was false. And now he uses this in the House and tries to scare the people — scare the people, fearmongering at its worse. Shame on you people with regards to it. And that is what happened in Swift Current. So the next time, make sure of some of your facts.

I'd like to take a look at the little town of Kyle which is just north of Swift Current about 52 miles. It's a great little place out there. And when the town of Kyle lost its hospital in 1993, Lois Lowe says it was like a death in the family — terrible that this should happen to a town like Kyle. Guess what happened. She worked there for 30 years. Lowe fought the change tooth and nail, but has since changed her mind.

People in Kyle and area are better off now. We're offering a lot more services and helping a lot more people in the community than we ever did before. This health reform is working. It's working for the betterment of the people — so that our health care system is envied throughout all of the world. And these people across attack it — attack it because they have politicized it. And there's no reason for that.

Talking a little bit with regards to these keep the Plains open rallies which have been going on for the last little while. It was interesting that I read five reasons why the Plains should be kept open.

Mr. Speaker, the first one was a bed shortage exists. Well they even admit that there will be no beds cut when the Plains is closed. There are 675 beds in the system now, there will be 675 beds then. Average daily use in Regina is approximately 608. Where is the bed shortage — new mathematics? We're not sure.

Secondly, the Plains is easily accessible. Of course the Plains is easily accessible. It took a long time for people to get used to going to the Plains. In fact the CEO of the Plains, when it was first gone into existence, had trouble convincing people that they should come and use it. The General can be found easily; the Pasqua can be found easily. There is no problem with that at all.

Number three, they state that the Plains is a state-of-the-art building. It at one time was probably . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. It now being at the hour of recess, the House stands recessed until 7:00 o'clock p.m.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.

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