

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the petition I have on behalf of Saskatchewan is as follows. 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.

Mr. Speaker, the signatures to this petition come from the communities of Melfort, Naicam, St. Brieux, Gronlid, Weldon, Birch Hills. I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to work with aboriginal and Metis leaders and wildlife and sportsmen's organizations in the province of Saskatchewan in an immediate effort to end the destructive and dangerous practice of night hunting in the province for everyone, regardless of their heritage.

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the Yorkton, Kelvington, Fosston, Lintlaw, St. Gregor, Wadena, across the north-east corner of the province, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, as well to present petitions. Reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petitions I am presenting today are signed by individuals from the Glen Ewen, Milestone, Riceton, Zenon Park, Arborfield, Regina, Saskatoon, Lampman areas of the province, Mr. Speaker. 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

cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

The communities involved, Mr. Speaker, are Oxbow, Alameda, Storthoaks, Carnduff, and I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of citizens in the north-east concerning the future of the Carrot River Hospital. The prayer reads as follows:

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.

Signatures on these petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Nipawin and Codette. I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today regarding Jack Messer and our call for an independent public inquiry to look into the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

Everyone that has signed this petition are from Gainsborough, Melfort, Tisdale, Hudson Bay, all over Saskatchewan.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have petitions as well to present to the Assembly this afternoon dealing with the issue of foreign investment of Crown corporations in Saskatchewan and the people's view that that is inappropriate.

Mr. Speaker, these petitions come from the Gravelbourg, Lake Alma areas of the province and I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Petitions from the good citizens of Saskatchewan keep pouring in concerned with our health care provisions in this province. Mr. Speaker, I'll read the prayer:

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 the good people of Sinaluta, Weyburn, Benson, Estevan, North Portal, Bienfait, Oxbow, and Torquay would like their voices to be heard through these petitions. I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions concerning the confusing and dangerous situation at the junction of the Yellowhead and Highway 40.

Wherefore 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 come from Battleford, North Battleford, Cochin, and Paradise Hill.

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

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.

Those who've signed these petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Swift Current, Moose Jaw, Pense, Waldeck, Ponteix, Ernfold, also the city of Regina. I so present.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition this afternoon, and the petition's in reference to the high power costs of northern Saskatchewan. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to address the issue of reducing the high costs of power rates in the North.

And the people that have signed these many petitions, Mr. Speaker, some of them are from Canoe Lake, some are from Camsell Portage from Uranium City. I have other people from Uranium City as well, Mr. Speaker. I've got people here from Ile-a-la-Crosse that have signed the petition. I've got others from Ile-a-la-Crosse as well. I've got the great community of Canoe Narrows that have also signed a number of petitions. And finally, Mr. Speaker, the final petition of course, these certainly complement the thousands of other names we have submitted. And I so present on behalf of the people of the North.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join with my colleagues here today in bringing forward petitions. These petitions, Mr. Speaker, are in people's efforts in saving the Plains hospital and in fact health care in general. 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 essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed these pages and pages of petitions and felt that it was the Liberal caucus that had to raise them was from . . .

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

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

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

Today, Mr. Speaker, the people who have signed these petitions are from Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Wartime, Regina, and there are actually some people who have signed from out of province, from the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today your petitioner's prayer for relief reads as follows:

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.

These all come from the community of Morse, Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens humbly praying: for agreements with other levels of government to fund twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway; to save the Plains Health Centre; to enact legislation to completely ban the practice of night hunting; twinning of the remaining portions of the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan; to cancel severance payments to Jack Messer and to call an independent public inquiry surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco; for a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre; to the Worker's Compensation Board Act to be amended to reinstate pensions for the disenfranchised widows and widowers of Saskatchewan; to immediately halt all plans to close the Plains Health Centre; to take action to allow the North to join the rest of Saskatchewan; to ensure the survival of the Carrot River Hospital; to ensure service in radiology is maintained in the North Central Health District; and to allow Saskatchewan citizens to erect a cross on the highway where their loved one was killed.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Murray: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seated in the west gallery are some very fine people and I welcome them all. But I specifically want to welcome a group from MacNeill School in my constituency. They are, as I said, Mr. Speaker,

seated in the gallery. And to you and to my colleagues, I introduce 14 grade 5 students who are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Sue Leech. They are also . . . Present with them are their chaperons Mrs. Smotra-Cook and Mrs. Cochrane.

Now I was — earlier this spring — I was in and around their school when they had their spring carnival. And I can assure you that this is a very energetic group that is here, and I know that they will look forward to the proceedings and I look forward to meeting with them later on today.

So please extend to these students and their teachers a very warm welcome. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take pleasure in introducing to you, seated in your gallery, my cousin, Ken Dowie. And hon. members will recall Michael Dowie, his son, who was one of our pages last year. I'd ask all members to kindly welcome him this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, I'd like to introduce a friend of mine; he used to work with a rural service centre in Watson, and now he's with a pork implementation team here in Regina. Regina's gain is our loss, so welcome Norm Jensen.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased this afternoon to introduce to you and members of the House, seated in your Assembly, 38 students from the Dr. Brass School in Yorkton. They, this morning, visited the Motherwell building. They're going to spend some time of course this afternoon here in the legislature, both observing the session and also touring the building. And then they're going on later to Government House.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that this is one of the classrooms that you visited in Yorkton, and the teachers in this school take a strong interest in the workings of the Legislative Buildings and the legislature. Accompanying the students today is Mrs. Mauri Ingham and Mrs. Glenda Lazaruko, and the bus driver is Burke Bullock. So I'd ask all members of the Assembly could join with me this afternoon and welcome them to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce some former neighbours of mine from Prince Albert, formerly from Prince Albert, who have chosen career opportunities now in Saskatoon — Gale and Eileen Blythe. Along with them today is their son, Mark, who has been one of our sessional staff during this session. Mark is accompanied by his friend, Laura Vangen.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, to Mark's parents, that he did a very fine job for us. And I'm fortunate to say before he leaves to further his studies, to complete his Ph.D. in Edmonton this fall, he'll be joining my staff as a summer student until he

leaves to further his studies. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly, two friends of mine who are also seated in the west gallery. Up in the extreme far corner is Bob Loewen, who is a retired educator, a man who is keenly interested in politics, and has been . . . often visits the legislature and worked here for some time. And I'd like the members to welcome Bob back to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — And kitty-corner in the west gallery is another person who has been interested in politics I think ever since he wore a diaper, Mr. Speaker. And that is Ray Funk, who was the former MP (Member of Parliament) for Prince Albert-Churchill River, and is now running a consulting company known as Spruce River Research. And welcome to Regina, Ray.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to members of the Assembly, a group of 39 young people from Forest Grove School in the constituency of Saskatoon Sutherland. These are grade 8 students and they're accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Fowler-Thomson and Mr. Tranborg.

I'm sure that they'll have many questions based on the proceedings that they witness when I meet with them after question period. And I ask all members to welcome them in the accustomed way.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce some people in your gallery, but I'm going to start by saying I hope this introduction would be seen to include all the people who work in this building, and them really here representing all the fine people that work in this building. And because they're very shy, I'm going to introduce these three very important women in my life who work in my office as Hear No Evil, See No Evil, and Do No Evil.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I also want to join my colleague from Prince Albert in welcoming an old friend, older friend — notice I didn't say old — Mr. Ray Funk, from Prince Albert. Ray was a former MP and I just wanted to take the opportunity on behalf of my caucus to welcome Mr. Funk to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, you'll find this hard to believe but there's still people who haven't been introduced yet. I notice a couple of friends sitting in your gallery. I'd like to introduce to the Assembly, Sara — sorry or actually in the government gallery — Sara McQuarrie who is joining us from

my riding, she lives in my riding, and accompanying her also is Brett Quiring.

I notice both of them here today. I thought they should be canvassing up in the Eastview by-election, but they obviously are so confident about how we're going to do that they decided to take the day off and come here. So if you'd join me in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

National Trailer Parts Expansion

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to announce today another business expansion in Swift Current. National Trailer Parts Ltd. recently completed a 500,000 expansion of their warehouse on Highway No. 1 west, making it the largest distributor of trailer parts in western Canada.

Keith Brown established the company in 1992 because there was a market for utility trailer components. Since then the business has grown very quickly. National Trailer distributes rims, tires, axles, and jacks for stock, horse, and flat deck trailers.

At the grand opening of the new warehouse on Friday, June 5, Keith Brown said Swift Current is an ideal location for his business because of its proximity to the highway and the high quality of the local workforce.

Keith Brown started his company with three employees. In five years his staff grew to 20. Today, the expansion will mean five additional jobs for Swift Current.

He told the crowd at the grand opening that great customer service is the key to his success. He thanked his competent, loyal employees who, he said, have a strong work ethic.

National Trailer Parts serves customers from all across the prairie provinces, British Columbia, and the mid-western United States.

Success stories like this are happening all across Saskatchewan and our strong provincial economy is making it possible for business women and men like Keith Brown to expand, creating jobs and growing the local economy.

Congratulations to the staff of National Trailer Parts in Swift Current. Thank you.

Saskatchewan Party Membership

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, unlike the other two parties in this House, the Saskatchewan Party doesn't feel that it's necessary to take cheap shots at the representatives of the media, in particular those from the newspaper.

However, I must take serious issue with an item, which appeared in this morning's Regina *Leader-Post*. In today's editorial the member from Thunder Creek was referred . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order. Now I'll ask for the cooperation of all of the members on both sides of the House to enable the member who's making the statement to be heard by the Chair and anyone else who is interested and I think that will include a large number of folks . . . Order. And I'll ask for the cooperation of the House to enable the member to be heard.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, this is an important statement and I'm glad they're all interested. In today's editorial the member from Thunder Creek was referred to as a Saskatchewan Party MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly). While we don't think we're going to sue the *Leader-Post* for slandering us in such a horrendous manner, I think I should take this opportunity to set the record straight for the people of Saskatchewan. The member from Thunder Creek is not a member of our caucus, never has been a member of our caucus, and rest assured, never ever will be invited to be a member of this caucus.

Mr. Speaker, the door is barred for this member. While there probably will be a dispersal draft of the Liberal caucus after this session, we may want to have first pick but certainly not last, which is the most likely spot for the member from Thunder Creek to be chosen, except perhaps for his evil twin, the member from Wood River. He was a Liberal problem yesterday; he's a Liberal problem today; he will be a Liberal problem tomorrow. Amen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Canada's Representative for the International Hunter Education Association

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of mine, John Panio, has recently been elected at the Canadian international level to represent Canada for the International Hunter Education Association.

The Speaker: — Order. Now I'm afraid I have to ask the House for order for the second time. I'm just plain unable to hear the hon. member making his statement to the House. And I do ask for the cooperation of all members to enable the member who's making a statement to be heard.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. John Panio lives in Montmartre where he spends his retirement after a distinguished teaching career. However, retirement is not for John. He continues to work in various associations and committees including Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association, Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, cottage owners association, to name a few.

John has spent many years raising social awareness about responsibilities, ethics, and safety. Several years ago Saskatchewan took the initiative to change the atmosphere around hunting and firearms due to the infamous Bill C-68 firearms legislation in Ottawa. Saskatchewan's policies on hunter safety are now a model for Canada and more recently, 38 states want to buy the Saskatchewan program.

John says he took a hunter safety class in 1983 and has since dedicated himself to the education of hunters. Hunting,

trapping, and fishing are important both in terms of employment and recreation in our province. However, a safe environment in which to participate in these activities is also very important.

I would like to congratulate John in his recent election, and I have confidence that he will continue to work to educate young people, hunters, and other outdoor enthusiasts and represent our province and country very ably at the international level.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Top 10 List

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, I received a fax this morning from David Letterman. He was shocked to read this morning's *Leader-Post* and discover I was referred to as a Sask Party MLA. Knowing I'd never do so, he faxed me the top 10 reasons for not joining the Sask Tory Party:

10. I'd rather eliminate the extreme right than human rights.
9. Unlike the member from Turncoat . . . or Saltcoats, I don't want to see our roads return to gravel.
8. I wouldn't want to be sitting in the pick-up when a water bomber drops tonnes of water on the member from Cannington.
7. I could never bring myself to support, oh, what's-his-name? — something Petersen as leader.
6. I'm not nocturnal. I'd not be able to find the Schmidt house for those meetings in the dead of the night.
5. Slush funds are meant for 7 Eleven slurpees not re-election campaigns.
4. It's branding season in Saskatchewan. While I've done some branding in my lifetime I'd never want to be branded myself.
3. I only own one coat.
2. I don't want to share the same phone number and office space as the Conservative Party.

And finally the number one reason I'd never join the Saskatchewan Party:

I don't want to have to go to the correctional centre to have my campaign paper signed.

Walk A Mile in our Moccasins

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, and I along with many others participated in the Walk A Mile in our Moccasins campaign against violence. We joined together in this walk to demonstrate our common view that violence is wrong.

Yesterday we gathered for a prayer and sweet grass ceremony and walked a mile. We walked not to raise the profile of any specific act of violence but we walked to demonstrate against

violence in any form. Many people joined us along the way, Mr. Speaker. The walk ended at Scott Collegiate where a pipe ceremony and a feast was held at a tepee.

One way of thinking about our actions and how they affect others was presented to me in the following interesting way. Think of a circle, drop a pebble into a pond, and the ripples expand outward. That is how it is with our actions both good and bad.

Violence works the same way. Violent acts affect us all and it is up to all of us to ensure that we stand against violence, whatever form it takes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Remembering a Great Saskatchewan Citizen

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, recently a well-known gentleman who was the president of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation passed away. And I would like to just acknowledge the work that Mr. Jack Redman contributed to the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation.

Mr. Redman and his wife ran the Wapella hotel. They were very involved in the Wapella Wildlife Federation. He was president of the Wapella Wildlife Federation, and most recently was president of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation.

Mr. Redman was very dedicated, not only to his family, but to working with others who were interested in Saskatchewan wildlife, and certainly building and promoting the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation.

I would like to acknowledge at this time that on June 20 the Wapella Wildlife Federation in memorium are going to hold a cairn dedication and they're going to place a cairn on a piece of property that they own, in memory of Mr. Jack Redman.

I certainly extend my sympathy to the family and commend the Wapella Wildlife Federation for this honorarium that they . . . and this cairn dedication that they are undertaking to remember a great Saskatchewan citizen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

School Readers' Program

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow and I, together put our reputation and that of every MLA in the Assembly right on the line. We performed without a net; we played without a helmet; and we flew without a parachute. And, Mr. Speaker, fortunately for all of us, we are both here to tell the tale.

We visited St Peter's Elementary School in Unity and learned about a fever sweeping through the school. It's called the accelerated reading virus, the AR virus for short.

Students who contract this virus choose one of many specially marked books in the school library. They then take a multiple

choice test on the computer in the lab. The computer tells them their score in percentages and in reading points. It's very complex, Mr. Speaker. Points range from a half a point to 21 points per book, depending on its difficulty.

The school goal was 4,500 points. As of yesterday, the total was 5,236 points. All students and staff are to be congratulated.

The minister and I walked right into the middle of the virus. We were read a book by one of the school's top readers — I won't tell you how many points our book was worth — then we both took the test. Mr. Speaker, we are proud members of the Legislative Assembly and we did not let you down — we both passed. Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Channel Lake Inquiry

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Mr. Premier, for three months you've been ducking your responsibility, hiding from the Channel Lake hearings, and refusing to explain your role in this whole messed-up affair. Today we're finally going to have some answers to questions in the Committee of Finance. The timing's actually pretty good, because just this morning John Wright directly contradicted your version of events.

From the day of the throne speech and quoted in the March 10 *Leader-Post*, you told reporters that Jack Messer had not been asked to resign. This morning under oath, John Wright said he was directed by the board of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation) to ask for Mr. Messer's resignation directly and inform him that if he did not resign by 6 o'clock on that day, he would be fired.

Mr. Premier, why did you make those false statements about Jack Messer's dismissal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite, obviously this issue has been dealt with in a thousand different ways and a thousand different documents were tabled before the committee starting on March 10 when we delivered to the Assembly a report from Crown Investments Corporation, the Deloitte Touche report, later the Gerrand report — all of these documents have been tabled. Nothing has had a more full airing in this province than the issue of Channel Lake.

Mr. Speaker, what I would urge the member to do, who has been fairly calm the last three weeks about this issue . . . going through the work of the committee which I would say the members opposite have worked diligently on — members of the Liberal, the Conservatives, members of our caucus — I would just urge you to continue that work . . . Not again jump to conclusions which after three weeks of calmness today you come back to the House and want to demand this and that. Complete your work, write the report, and I'm sure that you will find that the process has been satisfactory.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, on behalf of the Premier, are you prepared to clarify the direct contradiction between the statements as quoted in the March 10 *Regina Leader-Post* that clearly says that the Premier clearly said that there were no ministers involved with the firing of Jack Messer. And it's further quoted that he was doing that . . . in uncharacteristic stammering and stuttering.

Mr. Deputy Premier, if this is not a direct contradiction to the testimony this morning of Mr. John Wright, I don't know what is. Who's telling the truth, Mr. Deputy Premier?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the members opposite that they are, I think, treading on difficult ground when they talk about who's misleading, especially that member from Melfort when he promised the Liberal members, when he promised in writing, the Liberal member from Melfort, that he would never, ever, ever leave the Liberal Party to join the Conservatives. And today he's asking his question from the Conservative bench.

So I say to the member opposite, do the work of the committee. The Premier will be here later this afternoon to answer all your questions. And we'll watch with interest how that debate unfolds.

But I say to the member opposite, you've been calm and cool for the last three weeks if you've done your work in the committee. Continue on that basis and I'm sure you'll find the process will work to the benefit of all Saskatchewan people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Upgrading Highways and Transportation Systems

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier or his designate. Mr. Premier, retired Chief Justice Willard Estey has released an interim report on prairie grain handling and transportation system, and Justice Estey's number one comment was that your roads stink, Mr. Premier.

The executive director of the western Canadian wheat growers agree. She said the road system is in desperate need of repair. And SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) president, Sinclair Harrison, said Estey isn't going nearly far enough in describing the damage to our road system. Mr. Premier, Estey says the road system is a big part of our problems and what are you going to do to bring on a solution?

Mr. Premier, last year you promised 250 million in highway funding every year and then immediately reneged on that promise. Then you reneged on a promise again this year.

Mr. Premier, Saskatchewan's road system is in shambles and the best you can do is break your word. Will you at least live up to the highway spending promises you made last year and add 80 million to this year's highway budget?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I again have to, I guess, clarify to the member opposite that we have identified

that roads and transportation are a priority for this provincial government. And that's why we've put in, over 10 years, as I've said . . . \$2.5 billion is what we will be spending.

And what Justice Estey has said in a report to the federal government, which we would agree. One of the issues in the changes in grain transportation is the impact that it does have on highways and roads. And just as Justice Estey said, as many others have identified, that this is a national problem and needs to be identified to the federal Liberal government.

And so we would agree that the infrastructure in this province is certainly something that we see some federal responsibility, and it has been identified in that report.

The second item that we have said that is absolutely important to this is that during this important review . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the Chair is having some difficulty being able to hear the minister provide the response because of the constant commentary coming from the opposition benches. And I would ask for the cooperation of all hon. members to enable the minister to be heard. And I'll give the minister a little more time to wrap up her response.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Just in my last comment, the one thing that we have stressed and which Estey also said is that the branch-line abandonment is the major factor in this, in the factor that's affecting our road system. And during this review, as all western provinces and even the province of Ontario has said, we need to halt the rail-line abandonment during this important review.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister may have identified the problem but she certainly isn't backing up with dollars that she promised last year.

Madam Minister, on Tuesday while the Premier was following the Prime Minister around Regina like a lost puppy looking for its mom, the Saskatchewan Party was here in the legislature standing up for the province of Saskatchewan.

Madam Minister, the Saskatchewan Party attempted to introduce an emergency motion calling on the Prime Minister to immediately establish and fund a national highways program. And what do your NDP (New Democratic Party) members do? They say no.

Saskatchewan NDP was so busy sucking up to the Prime Minister, they . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order! Order. Now we have unparliamentary language being used on both sides of the House, and I'm going to ask first of all the hon. member for Saltcoats to withdraw his unparliamentary remark, and following that I will ask the hon. member for Regina Victoria to withdraw the unparliamentary remark that he shouts from his seat.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw those remarks.

The Speaker: — And I ask the member for Regina Victoria to withdraw his unparliamentary remark from his seat.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — I withdraw the unparliamentary remark I directed at that member, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Premier, at the other day's back-slapping frenzy with Jean Chrétien, did you manage to squeeze in any discussions on one of the major priorities of municipalities and the people of Saskatchewan — a national highway program that would fund the twinning of the Trans-Canada and the Yellowhead Highway.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Speaker, our Premier has certainly made Highways and Transportation an important issue that he has raised at the federal level.

We have made a commitment over 10 years to spend \$2.5 billion in this government with good planning, with the community of Saskatchewan. And I find it a bit hypocritical, over 10 years of a Tory government that ran 10 years of deficits in which we still have . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, order. Order. Order. Now . . . order, order. All hon. members will recognize that question period is not well served by either the hon. member who asked the question shouting while the answer is being provided, or by the minister's colleagues shouting while she's providing it. And I will ask all hon. members again to allow the minister to be heard in an uninterrupted manner.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Yes, as I said, we made our 10-year commitment of more monies to build our infrastructure system, our highway and transportation system, but they ran 10 years of deficit. That was their plan, and they sold off all the highway equipment in 1982. So don't tell me the commitment . . .

The biggest pothole, as I've said, in this province is the debt that was left behind by them that we have to spend \$2 million a day on interest; three months of that interest could double our Highways and Transportation budget.

We've made a commitment to it; we are fixing the transportation system for this . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Disaster Assistance for Ranchers and Farmers

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier or his designate. Yesterday the Saskatchewan Party exposed the latest attack on farmers and ranchers in Saskatchewan. Jacking lease rates up is what the Minister of Agriculture has done to the tune of 25 per cent. Farmers and ranchers all over the province have told us this is very unfair considering the condition of those pastures in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, and Mr. Minister, the legislative session may adjourn in the next few days and it'll be too soon to tell the total extent of crop damage caused by drought and by frost in the

province. However, if conditions don't improve very quickly, we're going to have a real disaster on our hands.

We've had a fall session at one point dealing with the constitution. Agriculture is a very important issue to Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan families. Will you give your assurance today that if the crop conditions continue to deteriorate in Saskatchewan over the next few weeks, that you will recall the legislature to deal with this possible crisis and the need for disaster assistance for the farmers and ranchers in this province?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the Tory Party finally figured out there was a drought out there; the last couple of days had two questions in a row. You're doing real good, so you can just keep it up. I'm sure someone will recognize that sooner or later.

Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, we wouldn't need the fall session legislature to fix the problem because if it's not . . . if you don't have a plan in place by then it might be too late.

So what we have done, we've put out a report to all the agrologists' offices — and that available widely in rural Saskatchewan — about everything that's available for the hay land for pastures and for water pumping. We've called the federal government to enact the tax deferral when you sell your livestock. Those things are being done.

Mr. Speaker, we planned this for many years. We've got a crop insurance program that's available and a NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) program. In fact NISA has about \$1.2 billion in it.

In the 1988 drought payment, Saskatchewan only got paid \$400 million. There is contingency plans available. This fall, if this is a province-wide problem, then we certainly will have to reassess with the federal government, and that's what you should be looking at.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Care in Saskatchewan

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, as this legislative session draws to a close, there are people, our citizens, the people that we serve, who have some words that come to mind in their minds, and that's beaten, battered, bruised, and abandoned. And I'm not referring to the Minister of Health, although this could certainly apply to him.

I'm speaking for those people who rely on our health care system. I'm talking about the more than 6,000 people who occupy waiting-lists. I'm talking about cancer patients who must wait unacceptable periods for treatment.

I'm talking about people, member from Lloydminster, who can't get medical care in Regina because of a bed crises. And I'm talking about our seniors who are booted out of hospital before they're ready because doctors must make room for other patients.

To the minister, why have you allowed cracks in our health care

system to become gaping holes?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite, as I did last evening when we talked in estimates, that the health care system in Saskatchewan over the last several years has not only grown but it has enhanced the number of services across the province, and I say that to the member.

When you take a look at the kinds of expenditures and investment that we've made in health care in this province, it supersedes anything that you'll see in any other province over the history of the last seven years. Because in Saskatchewan, our Premier, and this government has said that the number one priority will always be health and will continue to be health.

When the member opposite talks about beaten, abused, and abandoned, he's got to be talking about his leader — he's got to be talking about his leader — because today here's the man who's getting ready to tie himself to the incinerator at the Plains Health Centre. And I say to you, he'll go up in smoke like everything else comes out of the incinerator goes up.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed that the Health minister would trivialize those serious concerns of cancer patients and people waiting for treatment.

This legislative session is ending exactly the way it started, with the Liberal opposition assuming — assuming — its role as defender of health care and demonstrating how this government over here has abandoned its health care principles.

From the day we raised health care concerns on behalf of people across Saskatchewan we have been rewarded with their confidence and with their support for this very important fight. It is rare that a government and the official opposition both chase the agenda set out by the third party, but that's exactly what's been happening during this session.

My question to the Minister of Health. You sell your party as the saviours of medicare. You suggest that you are carrying on the work of the late Tommy Douglas. Why then — why — do you continue to gut our health care system? Why have you abandoned the principles upon which medicare was built?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that in the adversity of what this province was left with after the Tory administration finished in this province, and the philosophy that the current Saskatchewan Party promotes through its leader in terms of what it would do with health care, and what you and your leader propagate in terms of what you would do to health care in this province . . . We in Saskatchewan have been able to sustain all of those adversities and continue to build.

When you say to me, Mr. Member, and ask a question about what we're doing in Saskatchewan today we point out to you many, many of those objectives that we've reached and are going to continue to ensure.

You talk about cancer patients in this province, Mr. Speaker, and I said many times over — many times over — that in Saskatchewan we enjoy some of the best cancer service programs anywhere in North America. And that's been highlighted, I would say to the member opposite, in the recent report by *Maclean's*. And what do they say, Saskatchewan has fewer cancer deaths — 1.76 per 100,000 — than the national average.

In this province we serve our cancer patients in a far better fashion than anywhere else across the country and you should take heed of that and be speaking in that favour, Mr. Member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Health told this House that the headlines tell the real story about health care. And that's a point that he and I will probably agree on.

So what do the headlines in our major newspaper suggest? Let me read a couple. "Health funds said misdirected." "City short ER beds." "Bed closures questioned." "Saskatoon health crisis." "Man's death blamed on bed shortage." "Pediatric bed shortage severe."

Those are the headlines, Mr. Speaker. And what do these headlines all have in common? They are all as a result of concerns raised by this Liberal opposition.

Yes, Mr. Minister, the facts do speak for themselves. Saskatchewan people are looking to you for the answers. Are you going to take action or are you simply going to point fingers and say that we're spending a lot of money. And it gives me a reminder about somebody saying I gave you all that money; what did you do with it? If you do have all that money and you're spending it, where are you spending it? You're not spending it in the right places.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, when I read the article out of *Maclean's* it says a number of issues. It says first of all, Mr. Speaker, that in the province of Saskatchewan we have 6.91 beds per 100,000 residents — the highest in the country. Number one.

They go on to say that Saskatchewan actually has some of the best health indicators in the country in terms of life expectancy, mortality rates, and these kinds of things. And then they go on, Mr. Speaker, to talk about the average length of stays today in hospital beds, which are reducing in Canada and in Saskatchewan.

And the point I was making yesterday and you raised today, and you're right. In every one of the newspapers or in the newspapers over the last 50 or 60 days, on page number 1 and number 3, you see those stories every day.

And when you get a story of this nature that talks about — a national story — that talks about how in fact Saskatchewan has been able to capture and provide excellent health services in this country, where do they appear? They appear on the eighth page, in a small article. They don't talk about the kind . . . (inaudible) . . . And I say to the member opposite, if you know where there is better health care in Canada or the world, you stand up and

tell this House and the people of Saskatchewan where in fact that is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During this session one thing . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now I ask for cooperation of both sides of the House, including the government side of the House. I'm in difficulty, before he even begins his question, hearing the Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Osika: — Well members in the Assembly who trivialize this really don't give much of a care for our citizens because during this session one thing has been constant, is that the NDP has refused to assume any kind of responsibility for gutting of our health care system. They blame Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, they blame Grant Devine, and when they get tired of pointing their fingers, they launch vicious personal attacks on our nurses and our doctors.

Mr. Minister, the people of Saskatchewan don't buy it anymore. The time for excuses is over. The biggest single problem facing our health care system, particularly in Regina, is a lack of acute care beds. The obvious solution is then to keep the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Minister, are you finally willing to admit that you went too far too fast in eliminating almost 1,000 acute care beds? Will you make a commitment to save the Plains hospital?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in the member's comments, and he makes three. He says back-filled cuts, he talks about gutting the health care system, and blaming Grant Devine.

And I say to the member opposite, in Saskatchewan we have back-filled behind the federal government — back-filled fully every penny that was cut. And Allan Rock a year ago stood up in front of the Canadian Medical Association and said provinces across the country have had to deal with significant cuts of the federal Liberals, and we to some degree apologize for that.

And today for you to stand up in the House and say that health care hasn't been gutted — it has been gutted by the federal government, of which you are a partner I say, Mr. Member. And today to stand up in the House and say that we're blaming Grant Devine, of course we blaming Grant Devine and his administration, \$15 billion . . .

And that signal to me says only one thing, is that you're concerned about your leadership race in Saskatoon and you, like some of your colleagues last year, are preparing to move across to the other side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Now I ask for cooperation of all hon. members, and particularly I ask for the cooperation of government members, to enable the Leader of the Third Party to be heard in putting his question.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, without a doubt the root cause of this health care crisis is finances . . . without a doubt. Health districts continue cutting services because of finances. Rural hospitals continue to close because of finances. Almost 1,000 acute care beds have been eliminated because of finances.

Almost 600 nurses have been turfed because of finances, and waiting-lists are at an unprecedented level because of finances. The present system is dictated by dollars and cents. And this may make NDP bean counters happy but not those who depend on the health care system.

Mr. Minister, you're always quick to add that this government is providing more funding than ever before for health care. Why then, why, is our health care system worse than ever before? And what steps will you be taking in the coming months to address these very serious problems?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite that you've now, and your party have, covered all the ground that you can cover as it comes to health care. You've gone full circle on this issue. You have said that we don't have enough docs, and we don't have enough nurses, and that the systems are breaking down, facilities don't work, and we don't have enough equipment, and finally today, Mr. Member, you come to the issue at heart, which is the finances.

And I say to the member opposite, we in Saskatchewan have back-filled every penny that the federal government has removed across the country. And those are your brothers and sisters, who in fact cut Saskatchewan and Canadian health care to the bone. And that's been endorsed by the federal minister, it's been endorsed by the Prime Minister of this country. And I say to you, in this province, in Saskatchewan, we will always ensure — always ensure — that health will be our number one priority and the Saskatchewan people will be well served in a fashion in which they've become accustomed to under this administration.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Paging Systems for Emergency Responders

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker the emergency communications coordinator for the St. Brieux and district volunteer fire department and first responders has for the past year and a half been pursuing every avenue with SaskTel to improve paging in his coverage area off the SaskTel paging network, or by providing alpha-numeric paging through FleetNet. The only suggestion forthcoming from SaskTel was to put in a paging tower in St. Brieux which costs several thousands of dollars and would impose upon them exorbitant and unaffordable monthly operating costs.

Mr. Minister, as a volunteer organization they cannot possibly afford these costs. Mr. Speaker, reliable emergency communications are a matter of life and death. And my question to the Minister responsible for SaskTel is what is SaskTel doing to assist emergency response coordinators in their efforts to ensure fail-safe communications in rural Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that her continued attack on men and women

who work in our Crowns, as to the poor service that they provide, I think leaves her credibility a little bit open to question.

That fact of the matter is that when it comes to FleetNet 800 services in the province of Saskatchewan and cellular service and communications in general, you will find that SaskTel delivers a premium product as compared to any telecommunication company in any part of Canada.

And I say to the member opposite, rather than complaining about the service being delivered in the rural areas, you as a rural member from the Humboldt area I think should be standing and congratulating the men and women who deliver that service.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Minister, you thoroughly misunderstand the intent of the question. There was no time during that question that I was criticizing SaskTel employees. I was simply asking a question about a more efficient paging system which is needed because, over the last year, the emergency signal in the St. Brieux district has been getting poorer and there are increasing numbers of locations where their pagers do not work adequately.

There is more to this, Mr. Minister, than a local problem. It's a province-wide problem. A good, clear emergency signal is necessary in order that communications coordinators are able to expediently relay messages to all responders so that they can in turn save lives.

And alphanumeric is economical, flexible, and provides more options for pagers. So why have SaskTel not yet provided the affordable solution that is best for emergency response? Please, Mr. Minister, respond to that.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, what I will do for the member is give her a complete briefing on the situation as it relates to 911, FleetNet, all of the paging equipment that we have in rural Saskatchewan. The members in rural Saskatchewan in most areas will realize that we have a much better communications system with our rural members, whether it's with health care or whether it's with school buses, than any other area in rural Canada or United States, and certainly as related to other parts of the world.

But I will take upon myself to give you a complete briefing about the future, the vision they have for the future, as it would relate to this style of communication because obviously, Mr. Speaker, the member is sadly lacking as it would relate to the products that are available to her area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Hon. members, before orders of the day I table, pursuant to section 14 of The Provincial Auditor Act, the auditor's 1998 annual report on operations.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Before orders of the day, by leave

I'd like to make a motion concerning membership of a certain standing committee.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader requests leave to introduce a motion on membership of a committee. I think I'm getting a request from the House regarding which committee before leave is considered.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I could read the motion, that the name of Mr. Ned Shillington be substituted for that of Mr. Ed Tchorzewski on the list of members composing the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Leave granted.

(1430)

MOTIONS

Substitution of Member on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I move:

That Mr. Ned Shillington be substituted for that of Mr. Ed Tchorzewski on a list of members composing the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Seconded by the member from Prince Albert Carlton.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, before I submit the answer to question 81, I would like to bring to your attention what I believe to be a record in this Assembly. That is, Mr. Speaker, that to date, out of the 81 questions, all of them have been dealt with. All but one have been responded to, have been answered.

There have been no amendments, and I think that speaks well for the members opposite that their questions were not ambiguous. The one that was not answered was unable to be answered because of a client-solicitor privilege.

Mr. Speaker, we're committed to make democracy work. We're trying to improve public confidence and confidence in this legislature by making information available in a timely manner; by putting a floodlight on the issues rather than by sweeping them under the rug. And I think this speaks very well for a public service and ministers' offices, and indeed those members who are asking the questions.

And I'm very proud, Mr. Speaker, to submit the answer to question 81.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The answer to question 81 is tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Executive Council Vote 10

The Chair: — I would ask the Premier to introduce his officials, please.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My pleasure to be here with my estimates today. I have with me, seated to my left, the deputy minister to the Executive Council, to myself, and cabinet secretary, Dr. Greg Marchildon. To my right, the chief of staff to myself, Ms. Judy Samuelson.

Directly seated behind me is Mr. Jim Nicol, executive assistant to the deputy minister. And seated behind the deputy minister is the director of administration, Bonita Heidt. That is our little group and we're ready for the questions and the comments the opposition and the government benches may wish to direct to myself as Executive Council.

Subvote (EX01)

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, welcome this afternoon and to all of your officials.

Mr. Premier, I understand the scheduling of this year's estimates precluded you from attending a roast in honour of Frank McKenna down East and I know you're disappointed, Mr. Premier, but I really do think there are some questions that are begging to be asked here at home, so we appreciate you making time for the people of Saskatchewan.

A full year has gone by since we last had a chance to question you and your set of estimates. And obviously by looking behind me, Mr. Premier, a lot has changed in that year. Not only for members on this side of the House but I think for members over there as well.

I'll not go on at length this afternoon, Mr. Premier, as I know all of my colleagues have some very, very specific questions for you on a number of topics of interest to the Saskatchewan public today. Mr. Premier, I hope you take the opportunity to answer those questions. They are the questions the people of this province are asking and they are questions that are deserving of full and complete answers.

Mr. Premier, we've had a very interesting session so far. And if one theme has dominated this session, it's that of openness and accountability, or rather the lack of openness and accountability on the part of your government. This is by no means a new lament. Indeed it's been something I and many of my colleagues have been saying since we were first elected.

But in many ways, Mr. Premier, I believe the chickens have come home to roost this year. This is the year when Saskatchewan public has truly gotten angry about what they perceive as a lack of openness on the part of your government. They have the feeling that this is a government that has become masters at slight-of-hand tricks — a master of smoke and mirrors. Well in many ways, Mr. Premier, I think that mirror

cracked this year.

I know the Premier is an old pro at politics, having been a member of this legislature before I even graduated from high school. So he doesn't need . . . he doesn't need me to tell him that it's usually not policy that brings down a government. It's not the little mistakes that happen along the way or, for that matter, even the big ones. What usually brings down a government at the end of the day is its own arrogance and its lack of willingness to listen to the people who elected it. And with all due respect I believe your government is more arrogant today than ever before, if that is indeed possible.

A new attitude now pervades your ranks that makes it seem as though that cabinet feels that they have the right to do whatever they want, whenever they want, however they want. When people feel their government is listening to them, is indeed concerned with the opinions of voters, then the policies of that government are easier to accept. And even when such a government makes mistakes, I believe people are much more forgiving of those mistakes.

But when the people believe a government has become irredeemably arrogant, that's when they say enough is enough. And, Mr. Premier, again with all due respect I believe you and your government are moving very quickly to becoming irredeemably arrogant.

In the area of taxation, in the area of Crown corporations, in the area of health care and so many others, the people are asking for answers. And all they get from the government is the shrugging of the shoulders and the pointing of fingers. The mark of true leadership I believe is the ability to accept one's own responsibility for mistakes that have occurred, for decisions that have been taken.

The current government has now been in power for seven years and still we see that they are not willing to take responsibility for their own actions. Everything bad that happens in this province is the fault of a previous administration, long since dismissed, or the fault of the federal government. And while this panache you have for blaming all of your troubles on the feds — it's not totally without merit, it does come off as disingenuous at times.

It's no secret that you're probably closer with the Prime Minister than any other member of this House — including the members on my left. And your blame game with the feds came to be all the more phoney this past week. In this House the official opposition moved a motion calling on the federal government to come up with a national highways program — something you and your ministers have also been calling on for many, many years.

And yes, we purposely moved this motion on Monday when Jean Chrétien was in town, to try to make a point with him. But what happened? Shockingly your members refused to support this motion. And I know that my colleague from Saltcoats will have much more to say on this later on.

Here the Prime Minister was in town; this House had the perfect opportunity to send a very strong message to him about a subject that is of vital importance to this province, and you

decided that the needs of the people of this province were less important than your friendship with good old Jean.

I think that's what the people of this province were looking for, Mr. Premier. From now on when you blame our transportation problems, our health care problems, our education problems, our social services problems on the federal government, it's going to come off a little less believable after your failure to support our motion on Monday.

Mr. Premier, there are many issues of concern to Saskatchewan residents. Health care remains a high concern. Many people in many parts of this province simply feel they do not have access to quality health care any longer, and they don't think they're being listened to. That's why they're so angry about the Plains closure. The people feel they weren't consulted that their opinions don't matter. They see their services reduced and reduced again. And for this courtesy they're asked to pay the highest taxes in the entire country.

Last year a great cheer went up throughout this province when the PST (provincial sales tax) was reduced to the same point it was when you came to power in 1991. However, the so-called tax cut turned out to be something of a mirage once people were hit with SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) rates, higher telephone rates, and higher natural gas rates. And thanks largely to your cut-backs to municipal transfers; people were hit with higher property tax rates — in one pocket and out the other.

This is particularly distasteful when one looks at the Crowns. I don't think there's a person in this province who now views rate hikes by the Crowns as anything but tax increases. The story is familiar. The Crown decides it needs a rate increase, and 45 days later it gets that increase. And the people of Saskatchewan are supposed to just take the government's word that it is justified.

Mr. Premier, Saskatchewan remains the only jurisdiction in North America outside of perhaps Cuba that doesn't have an independent utility rate review mechanism. The NDP say we don't want one. They know best when it comes to the utilities, we're told. The people's views are not important. That's the mentality that now pervades the Crowns. And when this arrogance takes hold that's when we see the Guyanas take place, and of course that's when we see the Channel Lakes occur.

For two months we've see the legislative committee looking into Channel Lakes, slogging through the evidence with the government majority defeating nearly every opposition motion. So much for an impartial inquiry.

One of the most important motions your minions defeated, sir, was the one calling you as a witness. It was up to you, sir, as the head of government, to explain your actions around the Channel Lakes mess. It's up to you to explain your role in the departure of Jack Messer and the golden handshake he received. You've refused to appear before the committee to answer these questions. You've left it up to the Deputy Premier to answer the questions in question period. Now I hope it's your turn.

While we will be asking you questions about a number of topics

over the next few hours and days, I am hoping you will finally break your silence when it comes to Channel Lake and Jack Messer. But before my colleagues begin with those questions, Mr. Premier, perhaps you'd like to respond to my comments thus far.

(1445)

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you very much for inviting me to respond, but I don't think I needed your invitation. I am going to respond. I'm going to respond first of all by the scheduling to New Brunswick. I believe that my first duty is to the legislature of the province of Saskatchewan. And based on the discussions which took place amongst the officials, elected and non-elected, the arrangement was such that I was to start my estimates last night at 9 o'clock and go until 11:30 and to go today, so that we would be able to have two days, last night and today, to deal with the estimates of the Premier.

And on that basis I phoned to New Brunswick and I told Frank McKenna and those who advertised and those who had said the responsibility that I should be there as the Premier, one of many, to honour, a great Canadian, not one of my political stripe. On that basis I attended. And then you, typical Tories as you are, broke your word like that. No estimates last night, no estimates last night, and now the estimates are here again. And where did they go, Mr. Speaker? Well we'll see how the evidence comes about.

So none the less we are here, and we are here on the basis that somehow these people gave their word, but typically break their word just like that — just like that.

What I find most interesting, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, about the opening remarks of the hon. member from the Saskatchewan Party, is the notion of accountability and arrogance. He is chastising this government for being arrogant and not accountable.

An Hon. Member: — You bet.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — You bet, he says. And I want to say to the hon. member opposite, that in a democracy there can be nothing more arrogant, nothing more arrogant than being elected as a Liberal — as you were elected, given the trust and the confidence of the voters in your constituency to represent them as a Liberal. And in the dead of night, arrogantly, without the courtesy of going back to consult them by way of vote, you switched parties and allegiances like that, and joined up with the Tory parties.

And tell me about arrogance and accountability! Sir, you and the Saskatchewan Party are the most arrogant and the least accountable political party in Saskatchewan's history, by your dead of the night operations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Arrogant. Arrogant. Arrogant.

An Hon. Member: — People don't believe that.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — People don't believe that, he says.

Arrogant. Where did you hold your founding convention? You held it out there in the back rooms of some telephone booth. And you had the dead of the night meeting in August of 1997. And the four discontented Liberals — I should say three discontented Liberals; there's the member from Saltcoats, or as the member from Thunder Creek identified him, the member from turncoat.

Those three Liberals and the remaining four Tories got together and voilà like magic, voilà without the approval of the people of Saskatchewan, voilà just like that, they say there's a new political party.

And you tell us about arrogance? And you tell us about accountability? If you are so accountable, why don't you resign your seat and go in there and face the electors of Canora constituency. If the member from Kindersley is so strong, resign your seat and get out there in Kindersley in a by-election. If the member from Cannington is not arrogant, get out there and call yourself a by-election.

If your leader, the Reform Party member, is so confident of his support, why doesn't he get out there and run in Saskatoon Eastview? Because you're all a bunch of scared pussycats. All a bunch of scared pussycats who run together and plot together in the middle of the night.

And in the middle of the night, without any accountability to the voters, have this record and this history. This will always be with you.

And, Mr. Chairman, you know what we have here? We have a Saskatchewan Party which is made up of Liberals, some of them may be red; made of Tories, some of them may be blue; they've got a brand new banner called the Saskatchewan Party, they say. I've got news for those people. There has been a Saskatchewan party for 50 years and it's the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) and the NDP, not the Saskatchewan Party over there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — And I've got news also, Mr. Chairman, I've got news also, Mr. Chairman, for these folks opposite there. If you take a hard look at that Saskatchewan Party banner that they're now carrying, if you look hard at it, there's going to be a faded motto in that banner and that faded motto is, "Give 'er snoose, Bruce." That's what these people are. "Give 'er snoose, Bruce," the faded motto which will be there.

Mr. Speaker, they may be red coats, they may be blue coats, but, Mr. Chairman, everyone of them including their leader is a turncoat — a turncoat, everyone of them. Arrogant and unaccountable. A turncoat! Everyone of them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — So much so that they don't even have the courage of their convictions. The leader hiding up there in the gallery — there he is. He won't even face . . . He waves at me. He waves at me from the safety of the Speaker's gallery but he won't wave to the people of Saskatoon Eastview because he

doesn't have the guts to face the people in Saskatoon Eastview. He doesn't have the guts to put his policies before the people of Saskatoon Eastview.

He doesn't have the guts to explain to the people of Saskatoon Eastview how this collection of Tories, who have a record that they have, and these Liberals, who signed an oath of office . . . Remember, Mr. Leader, up there in the gallery, when it comes to your turn to receive that signed oath of office . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Order, order! I will bring it to the attention of the Premier that he's not to bring anyone into the debate from the galleries and that he is bordering on unparliamentary language also. So I will give that warning.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I won't bring anybody in from the gallery if the gallery doesn't bring me in. So please if it's a ruling, it's got to be a two-way ruling from the gallery as well.

I am saying to you, Mr. Chairman, and to this House that the leader of this so-called Saskatchewan Party and the members of this so-called Saskatchewan Party are the epitome, the epitome of unaccountability and arrogance.

And when I used the word the lack of guts, I repeat that. Not one of them has the guts to do the right thing: to resign, put their names before the electorates in their individual constituency; to run in the Saskatoon Eastview by-election; not one of them because they are not accountable, and they are arrogant, and the people of Saskatchewan know exactly what they are. And as I've said before, some may wear Liberal red coats; some may wear Tory blue coats, but each and every one of them are turncoats. Make no mistake about that — turncoats, every one of them.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, moving on to other matters, talks about an independent utilities review commission — an independent utilities review commission which we established, they established, the Tories established back in the 1980s when they were in power. We had an independent so-called utilities review commission for four or five years. The budget was \$3 million, roughly speaking, I could be wrong in the exact number, but in that area.

Every rate application with the Crown corporations advanced — every rate application that they advanced was approved by that independent utilities review commission — every one. Not only was it the cost of running the independent rate review commission; but you had to pay for the consumers who had to appear; you had to pay for the lawyers; you had to pay for all the other interest groups — running this cost . . . year into several millions of dollars. And every rate was approved because it was an unfair contest to be sure, with the accountants of Power or Energy or SGI coming forward and advancing the rate causes.

And you know the one time, the one time that the independent rates review commission of the Tory Party — the one time that it had the guts and the courage to say no to rate increases on SGI — you know, Mr. Chairman, what the Tories did, what those people did there? — They fired each and every one of the

utilities review commission. So much for independent review — right there, from that crowd. And now they stand up and they talk about credibility; they talk about arrogance; they talk about accountability. That's what they did with the independent rate review commission.

I say a 45-day review is not perfect. I understand that, but it's better than no review, and it's one heck of a lot better than the experience that we had of the independent, so-called rate review commission that you and your crowd established and followed and fired when it didn't suit your pleasing in the ways you wanted to do it.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the member says that we're close to the feds. Well we may be and we may not be, but I believe in cooperative federalism. And I believe in working with Conservative premiers, I believe in working with Liberal premiers, and I believe in working with the Liberal government or any federal government going.

I tell you the day that you moved that motion I spoke to the ministers of the municipalities, the FCM (Federation of Canadian Municipalities), and I talked about a national infrastructure program. And I talked about a road structure publicly, and I called on the federal government publicly. And I've written to the Prime Minister and I've spoken to the Prime Minister about it. What did you do? For 63 days of this session, — zero. You didn't even ask a question on road infrastructure, not one question. For 63 days, until the member from Kindersley got up on Monday and all of a sudden realized that this whole session had gone sideways on them because of the Channel Lake stories which didn't materialize, now he gets up — yes, now he gets up — and he says he wants to talk about agriculture. Sixty-three days, what happened? Did the cat catch your tongue?

What happened to your courage? What happened to your strength to stand up and fight for national transportation? Where was your courage about fighting for national transportation and the emergency motion — where was it? Zero, nowhere.

Your courage on national transportation equates the same amount of courage that you have or you don't have, when in the middle of the night you formed this kind of a dead of the night party. Not validated by one voter — not one voter has validated your posture or your position or the position of your voters. That's exactly the level of courage that you have with respect to the feds on the question of national roads and national road policies. So don't tell me about this situation at all.

And, Mr. Speaker, may I just finish off my remarks? And the member says opposite, do I have some opening remarks? I do.

I'll tell you about this session. These people know they got off on the wrong track. They know now they got off on the wrong track. They got off on the wrong track because they thought that Channel Lake would be the . . . that this would be the destruction point of the government — Channel Lake. And now they're realizing three months later, after 1,000 documents, after the three documents we tabled, after the televised hearings, now they're realizing that what the minister in charge of CIC tabled on the second day of the House is essentially, in fact, the truth of what the circumstances are.

We tabled them, we hired the independent reviewers, we hired the lawyers, we hired the CIC report that was tabled, and now they realized that what was said was the truth.

Unlike you and your fiascos, when you had GigaText, when you had Supercart, when you had High R Doors, every fiasco that the Tories had in the 1980s, you hid everything and there was not even one inquiry.

And the hon. member opposite says we've got something to hide. After they went on strike on Public Accounts, they went on strike on Public Accounts — you couldn't get them to meet on this issue. We begged them to meet on this issue; we pleaded with them to meet on this issue.

No way. Out they ran. And that member from Kelvington, out she ran, hiding from her own committee, the chairmanship of her own committee.

And they say that we've had something to hide. Impossible, Mr. Chairman, we have nothing to hide. They had everything to hide and that's why they ran. And that is why I say they've got off on the wrong track.

The people in Saskatchewan have seen in Channel Lake exactly what this opposition's all about. This opposition doesn't know where it's going, it doesn't know where it's come from except Liberals and Conservatives, and it has no future.

This session is a session of success. This is a session where we have the fifth balanced budget in a row. This session is a session of a second year of tax reductions.

This session is a session where we've eliminated your deficit. This session is a session where we continue to reduce your debt of 12, \$14 billion.

This is a session where we have the highest expenditure for health care in the history of Saskatchewan.

This is a session where we have more people working than ever in the history of the province of Saskatchewan.

This is a session where we've dedicated more roads for highways than ever before.

This is a session where we introduced actions for safe communities, more prosecutors, and more police.

This is a session, which says that we're going to build independence and care for the kids in poverty.

This is a session, which builds for the future of the province of Saskatchewan. This was our agenda and this is what we enacted.

And for 63 days you people were asleep at the switch in not speaking to the interests of the people of the province of Saskatchewan . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . You're doggone right you were and you know it now, and that's what you're trying to get by way of a recapture on these estimates.

Mr. Speaker, arrogance, incompetence, unaccountability, dead

of the night — Tories by any other name — no policy, right wing, mean, incompetent, that is the official opposition.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1500)

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. I would ask the government members to, and the opposition . . . Order. The opposition has sat and listened to the Premier's replies, and I would ask the government members to come to order and listen to the questions from the hon. member for Melfort-Tisdale.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to give the Premier a breather. I was a little worried he was going to hurt himself in his comments and certainly at your advancing years that you have to be careful about that overexertion.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that certainly when you get to that grandfatherly age, as I certainly am as well, that a person has to be able to pace himself, and I wouldn't want to see any injury come to the Premier.

Mr. Premier, this afternoon earlier in question period, the deputy, your deputy, said that you'd be pleased to answer the questions that I posed at that time, later on. So to begin I would like to follow up on the questions that I attempted to place to you this afternoon earlier.

Mr. Premier, this morning, Mr. John Wright, who is the CEO (chief executive officer) of CIC, testified under oath that he was instructed by the CIC board, which is made up exclusively of cabinet ministers, to go to Mr. John Messer and demand that he resign by 6 o'clock that same evening or be fired.

On March 9, as quoted in the March 10 edition of the *Regina Leader-Post*, you said that no cabinet minister had been involved in asking for Mr. Messer's resignation, that he had been fired and that indeed that was the end of it. All is that was . . . to this whole issue is that Jack Messer resigned. That clearly is in direct conflict with what Mr. Wright said this morning. Mr. Premier, why the contradiction?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, there is no contradiction. John Wright — although I didn't hear his testimony and I don't have a copy of it in front of me, I think we can get it very shortly — said the decision was the decision of the CIC board, albeit made up of ministers.

I was asked at that press conference, to the best of my recollection, if a minister had asked Mr. Messer for his resignation. If a minister had asked Mr. Messer for his resignation, not whether or not a minister had asked for Mr. Messer's resignation in the deliberations of the Crown Investment Corporations board.

I said at that time that no, no minister had asked Mr. Messer for his resignation. The matter was to be handled when Mr. Wright was president of CIC, and it was, as Mr. Wright testified today, no contradiction.

Mr. Gantefer: — I'm sorry, Mr. Premier, I think that you're playing a little bit fast and loose with the definition of whose responsibility is here. Mr. Wright is immaterial to this exercise; he was merely doing what was told to him to do by the cabinet ministers, who indeed were the CIC board. And to sort of now place it as if this was initiated by Mr. Wright is blatantly unfair and blatantly misrepresenting the statements that you had made.

It was not only one minister that asked for Mr. Messer's resignation, it was the collective wish of your cabinet that Mr. Messer resign. You couldn't be further from the truth on this issue.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, we can go around the block on this as many times as you want, and you're perfectly welcome to do it. I've given you my answer because I've been asked both by the press on this in widely publicized stories — there's nothing new on this — and I give you my answer in the House today.

The way the question was put to me on the opening of the House, the embargoed day of the opening of the House, whether or not the minister . . . any minister had gone to Mr. Messer to ask for his resignation. At least that's the way I interpreted it. Perhaps I misinterpreted it, but that's the way I interpreted it.

I gave the answer, as I've told you: no that was done by Mr. Wright. Mr. Wright gave his testimony to that effect. There is no contradiction. You can either accept it or reject it; that's what I answered in the Q&A (question and answer) of a question period. I think it's perfectly logical and understandable.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, as I recall as an observer of politics, in 1991 from the community of Melfort where I do business, in 1991 you promised to end patronage in Saskatchewan. I recall that you criticized the previous Devine government at great length about the patronage appointments that had occurred.

And the thing that surprised me most, coming from the north-east of the province, is that after that very clear and deliberate promise to the people of Saskatchewan as part of your campaign to be elected, that almost the very first thing you did was hire your old buddy Jack Messer to head SaskPower.

And to add insult to injury, you didn't even go through a direct appointment and said Jack, you've been an awfully good guy and you've directed our successful election campaign, we're going to give you SaskPower in exchange for that.

What really was hurtful to the whole credibility of the process at that time, there was this great sham, this great sham of an executive search. And I can remember people up in the north-east saying, well; here's this great search for a chief executive officer for SaskPower. And lo and behold, out of all the people that potentially could have been hired for this job, we were so surprised that a guy from Tisdale would get the job. Surprised.

But everyone knew that it was a mockery, the beginning of a mockery of the process; the beginning of you breaking your

promises about what you were going to do about patronage appointments and the beginning of the realization that you were there to support Jack Messer, that you had rewarded him as your confidante and friend with a plum position in SaskPower.

And then as time went on, of course you ended up into a situation where these patronage appointments were going to finally come back and bite you.

Jack Messer and the SaskPower people that he had hired under his administration, if you like, ended up getting up getting into the wild affair in Guyana, and we can talk about that later; got into the whole issue of Channel Lake and that's an issue under review, and I certainly want to ask you some questions in that regard since it seems very clear that you won't be coming to the committee. And at the end of the day, you ended up having to finally admit that Jack had to go, that there was no other way that you could continue to protect him; and then at the end of the day, we ended up with him leaving with a \$300,000 golden handshake.

Now I know that in the committee, and we talk about it, there's opinions here and there and everywhere. And I think the Minister of Finance in response to a question somewhere in the session said, you can hire 100 lawyers, you can get 100 opinions. And I that probably pretty accurately states the reality in some of these issues. The bottom line is that you made sure that this was going to happen.

You know, we ended up with a situation where Mr. Nystuen — who ended up with a mess at STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company), another patronage kind of appointment, and forgot to make sure the computers were billing for invoices properly — he ends up moved out of there and is now going to be in charge of the so-called SHIN (Saskatchewan Health Information Network) project, another patronage sort of thing. And I think my colleague will ask some questions about that.

And I know people out in rural Saskatchewan and urban Saskatchewan are extremely concerned about the fact that while all this is going on, there has been rate increase after rate increases across the board in their utilities. And you can defend the 45-day review process all you like and you can make fun of what the PURC (Public Utilities Review Commission) process was. I say to you, Mr. Premier, neither is satisfactory.

But surely if almost every single jurisdiction in North America has a proper and independent review process, surely somewhere in all that mix of structures that are there, we can find something that will truly work and that will have the confidence of the people of Saskatchewan because, I think, even by your own admission, the current one does not.

Mr. Premier, one of the things that was very strange to me in questions that we had asked is that . . . Was there any time prior to this current fiasco that Jack Messer and his mandate came under scrutiny. And you admitted that you had said that there was a time when Mr. Anguish was the minister responsible for SaskPower, that indeed he came to you and said the board wants to get rid of Jack. They're unhappy with the way he's conducting affairs at SaskPower.

And you said in response to that question, Mr. Premier, you said, I told Mr. Anguish, the minister responsible, to go back and fix it. And in doing that you ended up sending out a clear message that Jack Messer was under your protection and untouchable. And from that, he was able to take it as a mandate that he could operate any way he wanted and any direction he wanted to, until things got so bad in Guyana and in Channel Lake that you had no choice.

Mr. Premier, I want to ask you some questions. Mr. Premier, who first advised you about the sale and the problems of the sale with Channel Lake Petroleum?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, the answer to that question is that the advice with respect to the sale of Channel Lake came either a day or so before or during the December 1997 unity week session that we debated about the Calgary Declaration.

If my memory serves me correctly, the Provincial Auditor had already made a comment respecting the sale. And to be honest with you, the question by the member from the Battlefords directed to the minister of CIC was the part that really drew to my attention that there was a situation here, which required further inquiry. That was the first time, and no other indication was raised to my office in this context.

I do want to make a point however about some of the other points you raise. First of all I dismissed PURC for the reasons which I think are legitimate; I won't repeat them again. Maybe there is another way better than 45 days. I'm open to suggestions here. I know that your caucus has talked about a LURC (legislative utilities review committee), a legislative review committee. I've often felt that that had some potential, but also some dangers with high politicization of the question of rates.

But maybe there's another mechanism. I mean this quite genuinely. If the House can come up with a forum to take a look at rates independently, we would be open to that because of the obvious benefits to the government in this context.

Leave that aside. I want to talk about patronage. You need a little history about Jack Messer first of all with respect to patronage. When we assumed office on or about November 1 of 1991 there were no immediate large-scale dismissals of people in the civil service. We didn't come into the civil service with the view that they were a bunch of dead woods and that we had to remove them, or that they would be gone. No, we did not attend that.

There were a couple obviously who were very close to the Premier. Mr. Sojony was one who I think, by the way, in a very professional way even tendered his resignation. With Mr. George Hill, and we know his connections to Mr. Devine and the Conservative Party, there was no intention to immediately dismiss. I will tell you quite frankly, George Hill and I went to law school together. He was much older than I was, and I'm not like you at the grandfatherly age yet, but I knew George on a personal basis.

But what we wanted to do, being a new government, was to have somebody — I described it to the press this morning — sit

sidesaddle, with the key people watching us in this period of transition with other activities. And Messer, being a former member of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation board of directors as chairman and minister responsible in the old way in which we did business with the Crowns, was assigned by me or assigned — yes I guess I take the responsibility — to sit sidesaddle with George Hill.

And everything was going along well and we were in office, in government, when lo and behold what do we find out? We find out that two weeks before the vote on November 1 — it was actually before November 1 — a contract had been entered into between the board of directors of the Power Corporation — as it then was constituted, and George Hill — as it then was constituted, for a million-dollar pay out to Mr. George Hill, in the eventuality that if there was a government change he should lose his job.

(1515)

And it was more than a contract. There was actually a cash transference if my memory serves me correctly — I stand to be corrected here — a cash transfer to a trust account of a law firm in Saskatoon of this large amount of money. And so we called in the lawyers to say, what do we do with this? This was even before we assumed office. What do we do with this?

The argument at that point was we needed to, obviously, have a new president of the Power Corporation. Right away from one moment having a Power Corporation president, there's no Power Corporation president, so Messer was asked to take on the duties because of the experience that he had previously certainly in his ministerial capacities, and he took on the duties.

And unlike what you say, there actually was a hiring of a head-hunting firm to do the job of canvassing who should be the president of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, of which Messer was one of several people as a candidate and who was recommended by the head-hunting firm to be the president of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation. And that's the history. And so he was named and the board confirmed. And it's a fact.

And I want to say one thing, which is a problem, to be very serious about what I think, is a very serious question. Crown corporations in this province have got a major problem, many major problems, but this is one major problem. In order to have a CEO of a Crown corporation, and the stature and size and importance of Power Corporation, to advertise nationally or internationally to get a CEO you're going to have to pay something in the order of \$350,000 a year, maybe upwards to \$450,000 a year, plus all kinds of perks.

And the political imperative for sure in 1991 was we couldn't do that. And to be honest with you, in 1998 it is still the political imperative we can't do that. Because if we did that, you people would be after us, didn't matter who we hired. Automatically the pool of talent is defined by that circumstance.

That's not to diminish Jack Messer's appointment who, I think, fulfilled his job's role quite admirably as the president of the Power Corporation even at the reduced rate of 145, 150, whatever it was, after the various increases that took place.

So that's what happened. And we will always be faced, in this particular situation, unless of course we adopt the attitude, which is what we're trying to do, namely: don't privatization the Crowns, remove the ministers from the boards, make them commercially sound, let them be judged by commercial standards.

But that means that CEOs will not be "people linked to political parties," or they may be, but they're going to be CEOs paid 350,000 or \$450,000 in order to get the very, very best that you can get. Again, not to diminish Jack Messer or anybody else.

That will be a dilemma for us. It'll be dilemma if you should make it to office or if the Liberals should make it to office. Or the other alternative of course, which your party's advocating, privatize them all. Let the shareholders and the board of directors decide that. Well we oppose the privatization route.

May I add one other thing about patronage. It has been the custom of every government to the best of my knowledge in Saskatchewan, and by the way outside of Saskatchewan, as a matter of good governance that the premier, at the end of the day, must say yes or no to the hiring — I'm not now talking about Crown corporation heads — yes or no to the hiring of deputy ministers.

We like to hire deputy ministers who are the most competent, most able, most experienced, can contribute to department. We try to do it without political relevance at all. I give you many examples of that, many examples of that . . .

An Hon. Member: — John Wright.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — John Wright, somebody whispered, is a good example. John Wright was deputy minister of Finance under the Tories and we kept him as deputy minister of Finance and — one of the best decisions we ever made — and now he's over at CIC and doing a good job for CIC as well. Another very good decision of the government.

So it is always the case that the premier will make . . . approve about this. And one can argue this is patronage. We need to limit . . . to eliminate patronage. We need to do this. But let me just make one other last point on the issue of patronage.

No government will at its core have key advisers who fundamentally oppose the direction and the policy of the government. It doesn't work. At the deputy level or at the Crown corporation level. It doesn't work if the Crown corporation, head of Power say, wants to privatize right out, the Power Corporation, and the policy of the government says no, you're not going to do it. Just is not going to work.

So there needs to be an uneasy balance, is the way I describe it, between competence and independence, and not patronage, but at least an ability to have advisers who are on the same page as the government of the day is, as it's been elected as a government of the day to do its thing.

With respect to severance, this I think now has been canvassed ad nauseam by the committee. I haven't been following the process of the committee but I've received enough reports to know — the Bogdasavich reports, the Gerrand reports. The

situation while CIC dealt with it referred to it to Mr. Fair. Mr. Fair referred to it to . . . the lawyer from Saskatoon from MacPherson Leslie & Tyerman; the opinions were made and the decision was made by Mr. Fair based on those legal opinions.

That is the record. I believe Mr. Wright testified to that today. He was party, central, principal actor to that. And that was the only way that we could do it without the allegations that this was somehow a political interference.

The Deputy Premier has many times said, and he's right — politically popularly — perhaps the government should have said, politically popularly, you're not going to get any severance.

Well I'll tell you, at my age, approaching yours, at my stage in life, I've decided — and you can believe it or not believe it — but the best politics very often, most often, is to do what you think is the correct thing and the right thing to do. And the process through CIC, through Fair, through lawyers, was severance. And that is how the severance situation took place and there's nothing else that can be added.

Now 1994 — and I'll take my place; I'm sorry for being long-winded in the answers. I'll try to shorten them up a little bit in the interest of time so we can get more questions out.

I did not say, technically or actually, the words that you used in asking the question that I told Mr. Anguish to go fix it. Mr. Anguish will be testifying before the Crown Corporations Committee.

What I did say, and quite candidly, Doug Anguish told me — and this is no secret — Jack Messer by that time had had problems with Lexus issues and files issues and reorganization issues. I think he was doing a good job in reorganizing the Crown corporation, reducing debt — a number of very many good things that Messer did for the corporation. A lot, to be quite frank with you, in my judgement. And I'll maintain that position.

But none the less Jack Messer's style is a style of — and I say this charitably of the man — aggressive, go for it, do it. And this was irritating the board, and in effect what Messer . . . what Anguish reported to me was that this style of personality and management had raised serious problems within the board. These would be Jack Messer.

He asked me what should I do about it or what I thought about it. These are not the exact words but this is the effect, as I recall. I indicated to the minister that I thought Messer was doing a good job on debt restructuring, reorganizing — although it was difficult with respect to the unions and others. The corporation was in the black, in a profit position and that the minister should go out and try to work out the differences, is what I said, between the board and the CEO in order to make sure the corporation functions and continues to function in that direction — the direction that I alluded to with respect to the question of debt/equity ratios, reorganization and the like.

And the rest is history. Apparently that's what happened and the board in effect kept him and there was some appraisals of work

as Messer testified himself before the Crown Corporations Committee about evaluations, and there we go. That's the situation.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Premier. Premier, through the course of the discussions of the Channel Lake hearings, a recurring theme has come back a number of times surrounding the issue of accountability and authority. And certainly there's two planes of this I guess.

We have first of all where you would say the structural type where if you look at Channel Lake specifically, you start with the Channel Lake management, the Channel Lake board, the SaskPower board, CIC board, the cabinet, and ultimately, as you said, you ultimately are responsible. I think as President Truman said, the buck stops here. And it probably holds the same in our process.

But the other area that is there is sort of ministerial accountability in terms of — and I'm not talking about where the Crown corporations are intending to head into the future by removing ministers from individual Crowns — up until and including this exact point in time, there is a minister appointed to each of the Crown boards who indeed is the chairman of the board and who has that direct linkage, if you like, with the cabinet.

Mr. Premier, how do you see that ministerial accountability to the process. First of all the ministerial accountability and responsibility that goes with that accountability to the cabinet, and then the cabinet through you to the people of Saskatchewan for affairs that are conducted under their auspices.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Chairman, if I may say so again, this is a very fundamentally important question. This is what we aim for; this is what our goal is.

The Crown review has said that we need to be competitive, the Crowns do, in the world. They need to be commercially tested, their standards, profitability, and the like. And they need to be therefore freed by the political constraints, which very often are imposed upon a Crown corporation by virtue of ministers sitting on boards.

We need to, they say — not to diminish any of the boards of director members who have served very loyally over many, many years on the Crowns — elevate the Crown corporation boards of directors with respect to their duties, their obligations, their responsibilities which are very, very high on law these days.

That's what Crown review said. And we bought in that because we think that if we don't do that — our Crowns unchanged — will gradually diminish in their importance because of the limited market that we have in Saskatchewan if they're confined within the boundaries of Saskatchewan. And then we'll lose the Crowns and a valuable asset.

Now we may have an ideological difference here between us and you folks. Privatization solves that problem, I grant you that. Then you're out in the world doing everything that you want. But for our philosophy and our policy, we want the Crowns within the Saskatchewan context — owned by the

people. If we do, then we can't allow them to wither on the vine. We've got to allow them to expand out there and doing it.

So how do we see accountability? We see accountability this way: through the Crown Investments Corporation board of directors composed of ministers and the minister responsible. The answerability for the actions of the Crowns will be in this House through that minister — the CIC minister. That's why the questions have been directed to the Deputy Premier because he's the minister in charge of CIC as opposed to the old style of going to this minister or that minister or this minister and that minister because . . . no more ministers on the boards any more.

Secondly, the minister in charge of Crown Investments Corporation is advised and guided by Mr. John Wright or whoever John Wright's successor may be in the future and the staff who — as John Wright in his statement this morning outlined very briefly . . . the general oversight of the functions of the Crowns.

CIC neither has the capacity nor has it the mandate to micromanage Power or micromanage Tel or micromanage SGI — cannot do that. So this is our attempt to try to square the circle of freeing up publicly-owned Crown corporations to be commercially active out there and commercially tested while at the same time being accountable to you folks and to the people of the province of Saskatchewan in the Legislative Assembly which is the case here.

By the way, before I take my place, parenthetically speaking, the buck in the United States might stop here with President Truman but I would remind the member opposite there that in the United States the form of government is essentially totally different than the form of government here.

In the United States there is the executive arm of which there is constitutional power vested in the President. And then there is the Congress of which there is a different set of constitutional powers vested, and there is the judiciary with a different set of constitutional powers vested. And the fathers of that country and mothers who invented it, wanted the give and take and the uneven balance, and the checks and balances in this regard. And when Truman said, the buck stops here, he said, within my jurisdiction.

This is a British parliamentary form of government. The British parliamentary form of government has a cabinet in which each and every one of us is collectively and individually responsible for the decisions made. We are supported by our colleagues. Our colleagues are all part of the team.

My cabinet, I've said to my colleagues, it is no more, no less than a committee of the caucus, albeit vested with extra-statutory duties. You are the opposition, you test us, you oppose, you propose. It's the give and take. We're collectively responsible.

So every once in a while when a journalist comes up to me and says, you know, Lingenfelter, excuse me, the Minister of CIC says this — what do you have to say about it . . . they say to me. I say he speaks for the government. No, no, what do you have to say about it? So I repeat it all over again — it's cock-eyed. They don't understand the parliamentary system those who put

it that way, and I'm simply saying that the buck stops with all of us in the front benches.

(1530)

And if the buck turns out to be a situation, if I can use that expression, which merits the lack of confidence of this House, then theoretically under a British parliamentary system, a vote of non-confidence will bring down the House and the people of Saskatchewan and the people of Canada will decide.

Anyway that's an aside, my little two-bits worth to get to feel a bit better, but . . . feel a bit better. But that is how we think accountability will work. CIC minister, always in the presence of this House answering questions of policy — not micromanaging, but answering questions of policy on Crown corporations, on details . . . that presidents and the Chairs which will now be professional, non-political, they will be answering for the commercial decisions. That's not to say that you can't ask them here, but on policy terms you come back here and the minister has to respond.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Premier, for that philosophical dissertation as to where you're heading with the Crowns. We're reviewing where you've been. And the structure under which this review has been taking place is not under the new model that's proposed, but under the model where indeed ministers were individually responsible for Crown corporations. All of the events surrounding Channel Lake occurred under the former model, and I believe technically it's still the current model, although I understand the transition is indeed in process.

Mr. Premier, the current minister responsible for Energy and Mines was the SaskPower minister at the time of the Channel Lake sale. He was the individual charged with being the chairman of the SaskPower board.

You've indicated that the chairman of the board in the future is going to be answerable for the actions of that corporation and I understand that into the future. But surely the same principle applies into the way things were before, where the chairman of the board was a member of your cabinet.

The minister responsible for Energy and Mines was the chairman of the board when the sale of Channel Lake occurred. Did he tell you and the cabinet about the problems that had occurred with the sale?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, at the time of the sale, on or about June 20 of 1997, and as I answered to you earlier with respect to me — and I believe this is the case with the cabinet although I'm not going to get into the question of revelation of cabinet discussions in debate — but I will venture breaking my rule to say, I believe it's also safe to say that he did not tell the cabinet either, of the circumstances.

And the reason that that was the case is that if you take a look at the material which was tabled by Deloitte Touche . . . not by Deloitte Touche, but the material we tabled featuring Deloitte Touche and CIC and Gerrand, I'm not going to repeat their conclusions, but they're obvious.

That in effect what the testimony seems to also say before the

Crown Corporations Committee, was that the current, or as he was then, Minister of Energy and Mines, and the board did not have sufficient information about Channel Lake and the activities, the controversies involving Mr. Portigal, Mr. Hurst, and SaskPower and the like.

Now that being the case, it's pretty hard to know how you hold accountable the person who did not know. If the person knew and did not reveal, then there's accountability and responsibility. And finally, the minister will be appearing before the committee and giving testimony, his version of the testimony, and you can ask him the details of it.

But that is what the evidence . . . I remind you again what we did. Gerrand interviewed people; interviewed everybody who consented. Deloitte Touche took every part of that record apart fiscally. CIC reviewed all of those and came to those conclusions. And now you're hearing testimony, and a thousand documents on top of it.

And I would say to you, at some point the committee will have to make the decision whether or not those findings as tabled are accurate or not accurate. But as they stand now, as I see it, the tabling of those reports are accurate and on that basis, pretty hard to know how you hold someone at fault.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Premier, I certainly could go through many aspects of this whole thing, and I think that that would perhaps be valuable. But I think more importantly is that the testimony that we've heard and is pretty well beyond debate in terms of the events surrounding the whole Channel Lake thing — the sale and all the rest of it.

There are certainly significant milestones in there where clearly things were — searching for the parliamentary word — done in a way that left a lot to be desired. Now ultimately, ultimately also in our British parliamentary system, there is ministerial responsibility for the actions of those people that are under the direct supervision and responsibility of the minister.

And I know that you could cite better than I, countless issues in both this province, other provinces, and in the federal scene where ministers who have been found to be responsible at a time, their officials or people in their department have messed up to — the significance is what happened here — hold themselves accountable by tendering their resignation, by saying I was responsible, this happened under my watch.

And certainly clearly, clearly there could be pointed to dates like the June date when there was pretty strong evidence that something still could be done to save the day and that clearly at that time the minister knew that that was the situation.

Clearly there were events . . . that things could have been turned around. And clearly, Mr. Premier, at the very least, the issue of under our parliamentary tradition in history of ministerial responsibility and offering a resignation is the honourable thing to do when things go off the rail in this magnitude. Because, Mr. Premier, by your own admission that as a result of these events, Mr. Messer was given the choice of be fired or resign with severance.

So is he the only person that's going to have the responsibility

for this issue? What about executive responsibility and ministerial responsibility, Mr. Premier, under our British parliamentary system?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Chairman, the committee hearings are not yet complete and those should await completion and see what the evidence is. Let me make one other point before I take my place however.

One has to be careful that in your line of questioning . . . you don't find yourself, if I may say so with respect, in a point of fundamental contradiction. On the one hand if you argue based on the Gerrand report, that Mr. Messer should have been fired, period, and you base your arguments on that, you accept it. If you accept that part of Gerrand, logically you must conclude that the board was not sufficiently apprised with all the facts because that's what Gerrand found. And if that's the case, then how can the minister be asked to resign given that he relied on the advice and information provided by the management of Power and Channel Lake as Gerrand and all the documents indicate. It's one or the other.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. I certainly do support and appreciate the fact that Mr. Messer was the CEO who was responsible for a lack of proper diligence — perhaps by himself and including his vice-presidents — who didn't see fit to read the document, who didn't see fit to place due diligence on the process in an attempt to get the deal rushed through before March 31.

This morning Mr. Wright was at a loss to explain how those officials could come to the conclusion that by getting this deal done as was apparent in this whole issue, by getting the deal done on March 31, that somehow they came to the opinion that they would be able to sort of blend the results of the sale of the shares because they're buying a balance sheet. And because it was a balance sheet they could somehow write off into that balance sheet the losses that were suffered under the unauthorized arbitrage tradings. Mr. Wright was at a loss to explain how they could get that into their head because clearly the Ernst & Young auditor said that that would not be possible, that the reporting mechanisms were such that that couldn't be done.

So it seems to me, Mr. Premier, that you perhaps would even agree that Mr. Messer certainly didn't have control of the process. It's perhaps even true that the senior management didn't have control of the process. Surely under our ministerial accountability and responsibility tradition in the British parliamentary system, if you end up with that much of a lack of confidence in your very senior people that you have under the sole department you're responsible for — when it goes wrong that badly — it's the obligation of the minister responsible to tender his resignation.

And if at the very least this inquiry then exonerated the minister, then you might reinstate him, but there's been nothing there and I don't think it's the duty of a committee to be calling for a minister's resignation. It's your responsibility, Premier. They're the people that you appoint. As Bill Cosby said, I brought you into this world, I'll take you out of this world. It's your responsibility, sir, and you should have called for his resignation as soon as these events came forward. Why didn't

you?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I have had sadly in the time of my tenure as Premier, the occasion to ask for ministers to resign. The rule that I adopt which I think is the fair rule to adopt, is if there is cause to resign . . . what we see thus far . . . well whether it's resign or resignation, I've had cause to do that. What we see here in this case is that the minister here acted reasonably when he relied on the advice and information provided by the management of SaskPower and Channel Lake. That is my conclusion.

And I cite again what I say is the fundamental contradiction that you're finding yourself in. Because if you rely on Gerrand on this issue, which says fire Mr. Messer, why? Because the board did not have sufficient information in management respecting Channel Lake, then you must logically accept the other side of the dimension, namely that the minister and the board was not properly informed. On what basis is their culpability or request for resignation or for dismissal?

Now again I repeat, the minister will be there to explain. Mr. Messer has given his version of what he's says took place. The minister will be there to give his version of what takes place. The committee report will be filed and written. At some point I may have to reassess all of the facts and make some other decisions.

But you're asking me as of this moment? As of this moment, that is where the factual basis remains.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, welcome to yourself and your officials. Something that has struck me as very unusual in this whole session, and throughout the Channel Lake discussions, was your reluctance to testify at the Channel Lake hearings. I could never really understand that given the fact that today we are talking in a pretty open and frank way about what has happened surrounding this whole Channel Lake situation. You've been answering the questions fairly straightforwardly, I think, and arguably so.

People in Saskatchewan I think feel that it is part of your responsibility to answer questions in a straightforward and in a responsible fashion. And I think we got many, many calls from people, and I think if you look back at the editorials, writers' views, many of them felt that you had a responsibility to testify at the hearings.

You've always, and your committee members have always displayed an extreme reluctance to take part in such a discussion in that forum. I don't understand why. I don't really understand why you would want to not move in this direction. After all, you are the Premier of Saskatchewan; you have a responsibility to the taxpayers of this province, as we all do have a responsibility to the taxpayers of this province. You have a responsibility to explain the actions, collectively, of your administration. And I think that that's valid. I think that you have to explain the actions not only of yourself but your ministers. That's part of the responsibility that we're talking about in terms of ministerial responsibility.

That is something that I think is fundamental for a government. And I think that you would agree with me on that point, that

someone has to explain the actions of the administration. And ultimately the Premier's responsibility is to take the top-line type of responsibility for the actions of government. I suppose if you came to the committee and just said, Mr. Premier, I have no knowledge of any of this kind . . . what went on, or some of the answers that you're providing today, it probably would have been a pretty brief stay.

Your reluctance to attend, though, raised a lot of questions in a lot of people's minds about what you did or didn't know about what happened in that whole Channel Lake situation. There's a lot of questions about Jack Messer. There's a lot of questions about your relationship with Mr. Messer — how it was at one point a very open and very good relationship, and how that seems to have deteriorated over a period of time, and how perhaps there's even a little bit of animosity between the two of you at this point.

An Hon. Member: — Not on my part.

(1545)

Mr. Boyd: — Well the Premier says not on his part. And I would respect that view. If the Premier feels that there isn't animosity on his part, certainly I would hope that that is the case. And I would hope that Mr. Messer would feel the same way about it. But there seems to be at least a view by many people in Saskatchewan that there's been a little bit of separation of views, to say the least, on this subject.

Mr. Premier, the people of Saskatchewan I think are owed some explanations with respect to this whole thing. I think they want to see you attend that — those Crown corporation meetings — to discuss the whole issue surrounding this so that there can be some rather pointed questions asked about the situation. Why will you not attend? As I said, I think if you have nothing to share with the committee, it would be a relatively brief stay. A relatively brief opportunity to say to the people of Saskatchewan, the ministers, the member from Rosetown, or the member from P.A. (Prince Albert) — he certainly would be of the view that you should attend, I would think.

I think people in Saskatchewan want you to stand up for the people of Saskatchewan. I think they also want you to take responsibility for your government's actions.

Mr. Premier, I'll take my place at this point, and perhaps you might want to explain why there is a reluctance on your behalf and on behalf of the members of your government that are on the committee to have you attend and explain.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, this is an easy answer for me. First of all, on the question of responsibility from the government, we have . . . the day that we tabled the reports the minister in charge of CIC has said, I repeat again, the reports which we tabled — Deloitte Touche, Gerrand, CIC — point to mistake and error for which we take responsibility. The government takes responsibility. I've said it here; I repeat it again; I haven't denied that.

Secondly I take the view, as I explained in — the member from Melfort said lengthy dissertation, philosophic dissertation — when ministers or officials appear, they speak on behalf of the

government. The notion that a minister speaks differently than a premier or premier differently from a minister belies cabinet solidarity and cabinet decision-making process.

Secondly, I have limited knowledge of this matter, as the documentation reveals and any personal direct knowledge that I have, as has been already directed to me in the last hour or so of questions by the member from Melfort, I'll do my best to answer.

Now in addition to that, we have a list of witnesses coming up of ministers and other officials yet to be heard. Everything, which is relevant, is out there. That is the answer and I think it's a perfectly logical one.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Premier, frankly I think in a lot of people's minds the reports that your government has tabled raised more questions than they answered. I think lots of people would be of that view in Saskatchewan that they simply are not adequate in terms of where the breakdown was in responsibility.

And what we have seen so far is Messer standing up and saying he had no responsibility in it. What we have is officials from SaskPower standing up and say they had no responsibility. We have people that were from DEML (Direct Energy Marketing Limited) standing up and saying they had no responsibility in any of this. They bought the company, and they bought it under what they thought was a straightforward business deal.

You have people just constantly going on and on, and on contradicting each other. I think what's happened in that whole committee structure down there . . . and we'll watch it unfold and the Chair will do her best I'm sure to keep things in line there, but the fact of the matter is, is I think a lot of people that have attended those committee meetings have developed the attitude that they can say whatever they want because it doesn't really make any difference. It doesn't really make any difference in terms of any kind of repercussions.

I don't see at this point anyone, anyone that seems to be of the view that they're going to be in a position where there's going to be a problem here. There's contradictions constantly — Messer says one thing, the minister responsible for CIC stands up in the legislature the very same day and says, well there will always be a difference of views about how things have unfolded in this situation.

There seems to be an absolute and complete breakdown of any responsibility or any accountability in here. Everybody is pointing the finger at everyone else here. No, it's not me, it's them; no, it's not me, it's them. Every single person that's attended so far has always protected their interests to the best of their ability and have pointed their finger in every other direction. Pretty much that is the assumption . . . or that is the view that a lot of people in Saskatchewan have here today, I believe.

They don't see a government standing up and saying yes, we are responsible; yes, we are accountable to the taxpayers. They see everything but that. They see everything but that in every fashion. Ministers like the minister from P.A. saying no, he isn't prepared to answer questions about it from the media. He'll answer his questions when he gets to the committee. Not

prepared to answer any questions of the media at all.

You have ministers responsible at the time who were shuffled away from the responsibilities right around the same time frame when these whole discussions about Crown corporations were taking place. Shuffled away out of harm's way, many people would be of the view.

All through that same time frame, the minister from Rosetown-Biggar, he stood up in the Assembly — there was a Crown Corporation Committee . . . or Crown corporation review taking place much heralded by this government — saying that it would be the definitive voice and definitive view on the direction of Crown corporations into the future. An authoritative look at how we are going to operate Crown corporations now and well into the future. Very, very tight terms of reference, I might add. Nevertheless that's what was happening at that time frame.

June 25, the member from Rosetown-Biggar got up before the people of Saskatchewan and said all is well. Don't worry about a thing in the Crown corporations; we are watching them very carefully; the people of Saskatchewan can go to sleep every night and not worry one little bit about how the corporations are being managed by the government of the day. That was pretty much the assessment, I think, many people had of it. Five days, just five short days after the whole discussions took place surrounding what had happened by the board, what had happened — we lost some money. It happens; we all understand that. Business goes sour every once in awhile. Anyone that's been in business understands that. Sometimes things don't work out.

The member, or the Minister, or pardon me, Jack Messer has said, well if this is a private corporation who would care? Well I'll tell you who would care in a private corporation — the people who own the corporation would care; the shareholders of that corporation would care. And they would be asking some very important questions of the people who own that . . . or who operate and manage that corporation.

It is not my, it is not my view that they shouldn't have that kind of responsibility placed on them. I think everyone is of the view that the responsibility placed on management, whether it is a private corporation or a government Crown corporation, are similar in many fashions. You lose money; you have to answer the questions, the difficult questions. Why did you do it? What broke down? Who's responsible? What kind of responsibility are you prepared to take on this situation?

The member from Rosetown — member from Rosetown and Biggar — what possibly do you think was going on in that department when that member stands before the people of Saskatchewan and just, I think blatantly tells them very, very misleading facts. Says to them everything is fine when he knows full well, just coming off of a meeting a few short days before, that there is a very, very serious problem that the SaskPower . . . SaskPower is engaged in unauthorized trading activities. They just finished botching a huge sale deal. People are responsible.

I can't help but think that somehow or another that that discussion did not carry back to cabinet. I don't think many

people believe the fact that that type of discussion would not have been brought back to the cabinet table. I don't think that that's all that credible. I'm afraid people won't believe that. It's a little too long of a bow, particularly when he goes out on one occasion and says everything's okay, and then just days later is miraculously shuffled off out of harm's way — quite a coincidence. I don't know whether anyone's believing it, but I'm not. And I think a lot of people in Saskatchewan share my view that they don't believe it either. They don't believe it because it's just all too coincidental and convenient that things of that nature would take place in such nice little time frames to ensure that, hopefully anyway, none of this ever comes before the people of Saskatchewan, none of its ever revealed to the people of Saskatchewan.

And had it not been, had it not been for the Provincial Auditor, you would have pulled it off. Had it not been for the Provincial Auditor raising questions, you'd have pulled it off and the people of Saskatchewan would have never known what had happened in this whole situation at all. Channel Lake would have never been heard from.

Channel Lake would have been a topic that no one would ever have known the difference about. Nothing would have ever become before the people of Saskatchewan. We wouldn't have had months of this Channel Lake inquiry going on. We wouldn't have had bell ringing the legislature. We wouldn't have had all of those things taking place had it not been for the Provincial Auditor saying, whoa, there is something wrong with what has happened in this situation.

And I think many people in Saskatchewan view this as just all too convenient, a government that wants to — legitimately wants to — run the province in a proper fashion, but when something goes wrong, instead of standing up like that minister should have done, the one from Rosetown-Biggar, or the member from P.A., what they should have done was stand up and say we've had some problems here. We got into a situation where we ran into some difficulties, just as I think you would see happen in many, many private companies. If you don't, I think you've abdicated your responsibility.

I think you have committed what is ultimately the only thing, generally speaking, that gets you fired as a minister. You've stepped outside of the rules of accountability and responsibility. The moment that you do that, I think you're in grave danger, politically speaking, and you should be.

I think that's where the break down is. It's not in the admission of failure because we all have failures. We all make mistakes. It is in the admission of those failures that I think is the important consideration here that has to be brought before the people of Saskatchewan.

Had they done that . . . and you've seen examples of it in governments all over Canada. We've seen examples of it in Ontario. We've seen examples of it in Alberta. We've seen examples of it in many, many situations where they stand up and say look, we made a mistake.

I think that's what people are looking for in government these days. I think they want an admission that there's been a problem. I think they want an admission from the member from

Rosetown-Biggan that he screwed up. I think they want an admission from the member from P.A. that he may have made mistakes in this whole situation and that the accountability broke down and they are responsible.

Had they done that, I think you could have saved them, Mr. Premier. I think you could have saved them. Rather than shuffling them out of harm's way, what you should have done, I think, is ask them to take responsibility for their actions. Ask them to stand before the people of Saskatchewan, and say yes, I made a mistake. And I suppose in a lot of ways people would say at least they have the intestinal fortitude to stand up and say they made a mistake.

People would have agreed with that, people would have believed that, people would have respected that, people would have appreciated that, and people may even have forgiven that.

But now, we've seen what appears to be a very deliberate attempt to cover this whole thing up. I don't know whether you're hearing from people across Saskatchewan about this, Mr. Premier, but we certainly are hearing from people across Saskatchewan about this. They don't believe all of the stories on this unfortunately. And, Mr. Premier, we will see I guess ultimately when they . . . at the conclusion of these hearings what kind of responsibility is going to be taken in all of this situation.

But, Mr. Premier, I would ask on behalf of, I think, a lot of people in Saskatchewan, that you would take responsibility now for the actions of those ministers as you are ultimately, I think, responsible. Even though you say ministers speak on behalf of the government, I think you have to ultimately be responsible, be the one that takes the action on this, be the minister, be the first minister; be the Premier of Saskatchewan. Take responsibility for the actions of those ministers and dismiss them. I think that's what people feel is appropriate in this situation.

And as my colleague from Melfort has said, dismiss them, and if there is at the end of day, the view that perhaps they didn't have any involvement or that they are not responsible, I don't think anyone would have any problem reinstating them at that point. I don't think people would have response . . . a concern about them being reinstated.

After all, it's happened before with your administration. People have stepped aside. I remember the member from Saskatoon when there was some difficulties surrounding allegations about some improper financing of farming operation, stepped aside, did the honourable thing, and stepped aside.

I remember the Minister of Post-Secondary Education doing something of a similar fashion — stepping aside when there was some concern about what had happened in his department, very similar situations I think today.

Mr. Premier, will you do what I think a lot of people in Saskatchewan want you to do on this situation — take the ultimate responsibility, ask those two members to step aside from their responsibilities until this whole thing can be cleared up?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member made a rather lengthy statement and then tried to close it off with a question. I'll try not to be as long, but I feel duty-bound to make a few points in response if I may.

First of all I do want to tell you he may believe in the conspiracy theory that says that Elvis is still alive and well somewhere, maybe hanging out in the SaskPower buildings, I don't know. But I don't believe in that and I don't believe the conspiracy theories which the hon. member has tried to spin I think rather unconvincingly — not rather unconvincingly — totally unconvincingly.

(1600)

The hon. member talked about the question of my appearance, and I've given the answer already in his previous question. But the hon. member full well knows, as does the press gallery, as does anybody who follows this on television, that every witness who has appeared before the Crown Corporations Committee was asked by members, including the member from Melfort today with Mr. Wright, specifically, what did the Premier tell you; what did the Premier say; what did the Premier ask you to do; what did the Premier write; what did the Premier . . .

Every witness, they've been trying to do that to try to get some direct connection. And in reality, as Mr. Wright has given by his sworn testimony, and Mr. Gerrand in his sworn testimony, the facts are as I've indicated in my estimates here. Anything in my direct knowledge I've answered the hon. member from Melfort. And every one of the testimonies of the people under oath with respect to those kind of questions show that what I have said is true.

We're not pointing in every direction I don't think in this Crown Corporations Committee. I don't know what the judgement call of the Crown Corporations Committee will be at the end of the day. I would hope that there would be as much as possible a unanimous report, which sets out specific aspects of the specific transaction, and if necessary, casts blame.

I think if they find the blame I don't think it will be very much different from the blame which is already been identified in the three reports by Deloitte and by Gerrand and by CIC. But if there's something extra, that should be a part of your report, which obviously will be in the public domain, and the Premier and the government will have to act on.

But I want to remind the member opposite that without prejudging this report, from what I've seen of it, very limitedly, we are ending up at this Crown Corporations Committee hearing exactly where we started off three months ago, namely that Deloitte Touche and CIC and Gerrand are fundamentally correct. There has not been one statement by one opposition person on either party which points to a fundamental contradiction of any statement of fact involving any minister or official that hasn't already been stated by Deloitte Touche and stated by the Crown Corporations Committee review. That's the reality.

There's been confusing testimony about what papers were switched, what papers were read, and all of that. The committee will sort that out just like Gerrand tried to sort it out and

Deloitte Touche. But fundamentally the record is set out there in this document and that's where we're ending up. And that's what the journalists know and that's what the public knows.

And in that regard, I say to the hon. member, when he says do the right thing as Premier — we did the right thing. We ordered Gerrand, we ordered Deloitte & Touche, we ordered CIC, we tabled it, we had the minister in charge of CIC make his full comprehensive statement, we tabled a thousand documents — not pages — but a thousand documents.

All of this we revealed. Nobody forced it on us. We did this. We put this before the House. The member laughs. We put this before the House on Tuesday . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No. We put this document before the House on Tuesday.

Look, chronologically . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Do you want to hear the answer or not? Chronologically, on or about December 9, 1997 during the unity hearing, the member from Battleford asked the question. On or about December 9, according to Mr. Wright's testimony, Mr. Lingenfelter's public testimony, the full inquiry was directed of CIC, and Deloitte Touche and Gerrand were commissioned and the work then took place for the remaining weeks or days of December — it being Christmas — working through January and February and prepared and tabled on the first available day of the opening of the House — we did that.

They didn't ask us and they didn't press us. That's the reality. We tabled a thousand extra documents. When they wouldn't convene the Public Accounts Committee, we went to the Crown Corporations Committee. And I want to pay tribute to all members of the Crown Corporations Committee. There have been some notable exceptions of statements, which I don't like but that doesn't matter. I think they have done a good job and they have brought credit to the committee and to the Legislative Assembly in the fact that they could do this job and get to the fact of the matter and the bottom of the issues.

So there are no three points; there's no blaming people differently. We're ending up exactly where the government, in its independent study, said that that would be the case. And there is no statement by anybody and no evidence by anybody . . . at any fundamental contradiction.

In fact there's a very high standard, Mr. Member from Kindersley. One of the humorous, or sad, aspects of the Channel Lake inquiry involve the Russian connection, the Russian mafia connection. And it so happened that I was reading the report on business of yesterday, June 9, and lo and behold I see a story on the front page about, "YBM probe unveils policy breaches."

What happened was this, and I'll read you the report:

An internal review by directors of YBM Magnex International, Inc. has found no illegal activity by company officials but has noted "significant breaches (seriously, just listen to this, member from Kindersley) significant breaches in corporate policy and common business prudence" by chief operating officer, Igor Fisherman and others.

A summary of the report released yesterday also identified "substantial transactions that required, but did not receive, board of directors' approval."

I'll stop there because it might resonate with what Deloitte Touche and CIC said when we tabled it at the opening of the House.

The company has done what? I'm reading from the report.

The company has "reprimanded the officers involved based on the breaches of policy," the summary said.

Not the chairman of the board of directors of YBM resigning; not the internal audit committee resigning; not firing Mr. Fisherman, at least not thus far, but reprimanding him in this operation by commercial standards.

Now your rebuttal to me will be, but you're not a private company, you're a public company; your standards should be higher. And you're right. And you're right; our standards have been higher. And our standards were higher in the revelation and on the actions that were taken throughout the whole piece.

And finally, I don't want this to degenerate any more than it was in its opening moments of hostility and anger, but I simply want to say, I really . . . every time — you can do it any time you want — but anytime the Saskatchewan Party gets up in this House and tries to tell me about misleading the voters, and standing up and taking responsibility, I am not going to allow that statement to go unchallenged.

I'm going to say you people practised the biggest deception on the voters by switching your loyalty . . . to the people who gave you the trust to be elected as Tories.

And the hon. member from Moosomin who is speaking from his chair, I love this. This is November 19, 1996. I'm reading from the report of the House so it's not naming a member. This is the report. It says: "Toth mixes rumours." "Moosomin MLA Don Toth says there is no truth to rumours he may be considering leaving the Progressive Conservative Party to sit as a Liberal. He considers crossing the floor . . ." Hold it. "He considers . . ." That's right. I'll read you . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . You're right about that. And you know — a little smile on his face that it's true — he didn't sit as a Liberal. But then he says this: "He considers crossing the floor to be political opportunism. He said Friday that he doesn't want to be branded an opportunist."

Bring out the old branding iron, ladies and gentlemen. Bring out the old branding iron for 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and a ninth — and a ninth — member who shall go unnamed because of the rules of this House, but who also crossed the floor.

Now again, I don't want to get into that except I'm not . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, I don't. I don't. I don't because I will not accept, nor will the people of Saskatchewan accept, a lecture from you folks about misleading voters. And if you're going to lecture me on that in the light of what we've done, I am going to lecture you on what you've done, which is the highest form of deception on the voters in your ridings.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Order. Before I recognize the hon. member for Kindersley, I wish to bring to his attention rule 28 of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, which is that comments will be directed through the Chair.

This is further supported in Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms, sixth ed., chapter 168, which in part — it's a long paragraph. I just choose to read part of it:

In debate all speeches are addressed to the Speaker.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We appreciate your advice in this area and we'll endeavour to be helpful in that area.

Mr. Premier, you were first elected in 1967?

An Hon. Member: — October 11 or 18, I'm not sure, of 1967.

Mr. Boyd: — 1967 . . .

An Hon. Member: — I was 17 years of age!

Mr. Boyd: — Well, I was still junior to you by about six years if we would accept the fact that you were 17 when you were elected. We all know that you were considerably older than that at the time — 11 years older at the time.

And you've learned a lot since then and certainly I've learned a lot since then. And I have to admit that I always . . . since I've had the privilege of being elected to the Assembly here in 1991 and re-elected in 1995, I've always had the . . . very much had the pleasure of watching the Premier get up in the Assembly, go into an attack, and then step back and say, but I don't want to do that. It's a sight to behold. It's a sight to behold.

An Hon. Member: — The devil made me do it.

Mr. Boyd: — Yes, exactly, like my colleague said the devil made me do it — didn't want to but I had to. Didn't want to but I had to. And you put on quite a performance; you have to admit that. I mean when the Premier gets up and he gets into those rants that he gets into, there is no one better. No one better in this whole place. I don't know whether there's ever been anyone better in this whole place. You've got to give the guy credit.

Thirty years — you've learned a lot. You've learned a lot about the mastery of the language. The getting up and saying on one hand I'm not going to get into this, perfectly well after you've just went out of your way to get into it, out of your way to get into it, and then step back and say well, we won't get into that kind of thing.

It's a great performance. It's a great way of pumping up the troops over there I am sure, after what many, many people in this Assembly across Saskatchewan would view as an absolutely disastrous session for this administration.

(1615)

The first time that I have seen, since I was elected in 1991, the very first session that I have seen where you and your administration have literally been off the agenda since about day 3 of the session right through until today, right through until today, completely off the agenda.

Here's what's happened in this session to date. We've had the government come forward — they came forward with a report on Channel Lake, couple of days previous to the budget. Why was it done that way? I think it was done that way for very, very obvious reasons.

They thought, dragged kicking and screaming all the way up to that point, kicking and screaming every inch of the way up to that point, every millimetre of the way up to that point, kicking and screaming all the way through this whole thing, they drop this report, they think — the CIC minister and I'm sure the Premier and all the cabinet thought that'll be the end of it; won't have to deal with this any more because what'll happen, Mr. Chair, what'll happen, Mr. Chair, is we'll drop this budget. It's a good news budget, we've tinkered a little bit with a few taxes, and this whole thing will go away. And anybody that opposes us, we'll go into this attack on them — you did this and you did that; and at the same time, we ordered all of these reports and we released them before the people of Saskatchewan. We did this; we did that; we did everything in the best interest of the taxpayers.

And at the same time, everybody knows full well that the only way that any of this was dragged out of you is through the efforts of the people who oppose you — through the people who oppose you. Every step of the way, every step of the way it's like pulling hens' teeth with you and your administration. Every single step of the way, it's been a debate in the legislature, it's been bell-ringing, it's been work in the committee — it's been everything.

And in that committee, what happens all of the time? In the committee what happens all the time. Whenever there's a need to try and diffuse things, in comes another part of a report that was absent in the original documents. The member from Regina sitting over there that's on the committee, knows full well what I'm talking about there. In comes that kind of thing.

Well, Mr. Premier, I don't think people are buying it any longer. I don't think they believe you on some of these things any longer. I don't believe that they think that this was done in an appropriate fashion. I don't think they believe the personal or the attacks on the Saskatchewan Party are living up to scrutiny any longer.

You can call it whatever you want, and I'm sure you're going to. You think that it's going to help you in the long run. But the fact of the matter is the Saskatchewan Party is here. It's here to stay. It's here before the people of Saskatchewan. It will stand the test of time. It will go before the people of Saskatchewan in a general election. It will be there. Our leader will be sitting down here, our leader will be sitting here, and in fact I think he might even be sitting in a chair you occupy today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — I think, Mr. Premier, that we're on, I think we're

on to something very, very important here in Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Party will stand up for the people of Saskatchewan. We will stand up to for the taxpayers of this province. We will stand up to your administration. We will stand up to the scrutiny of people in this province. We will stand up because they want us to. They want us to.

What they are telling us all across Saskatchewan is this administration has got to be held accountable. This administration is not accountable. This administration does not believe in accountability. This administration does not believe in responsibility and all of what's happened here in the last weeks of this session points more and more to that all of the time.

Channel Lake — the reports you put forward raised nothing but more questions rather than answer the questions. These questions are about the potential of fraud. These questions have been about the potential of a breach of trust, conflict of interest. All kinds of allegations have come forward, and have they been answered by your administration? Have they been answered by you or any member of cabinet who you say speaks for cabinet? No. They're not about that at all.

These are very, very serious charges that have been brought forward about your administration. These are about potential criminal charges. These are about concerns that taxpayers have from all across Saskatchewan. And what kind of response do you come forward with? An attack on who is ever in opposition to you. In every occasion whenever things get a little bit rough in this Assembly bring out the attack.

That's always been your style. It's always been the NDP's style. It always has been and I presume it always will be, whenever there's an attack or whenever there's an attack on you, rather than answering the questions in a legitimate fashion, strike back. That's the rallying cry of you and your administration. Strike back; pump up the troops; give them that big speech; give them that big rallying cry — turncoat, redcoat, bluecoat, all of that kind of boloney that you stand up and give the people of Saskatchewan.

The fact of the matter is, is we have the respect and the support of people across this province. We will come before the people of Saskatchewan in the next election campaign when you decide to call it. We will be there. We'll be speaking for the interests of the taxpayers of this province. People want us to stand up and say no. That's exactly what we will do, Mr. Speaker . . . or Mr. Chairman and Mr. Premier.

That's why, that's why we think it's so fundamentally important that you answer the questions. Rather than getting into this, you get up and give those kind of responses; we get up and give the response back. Why don't you just answer? Why don't you just answer the type of questions that people are asking?

You say you didn't have any responsibility. Lots of evidence points in the other direction. You say the ministers didn't inform cabinet. Well if they didn't inform cabinet they sure as heck should have. And if they didn't inform cabinet they have abdicated their responsibility and they have no other, no other responsibility than to stand up before this Assembly and say

they resign. And if they aren't prepared to do it, you have to do what you have always said you would do, and that is to remove them.

Mr. Premier, you said that you've asked ministers to resign. I can't think of one single example of that — I can't think of one single example of that in your administration. Today earlier you said you've asked ministers to resign. Can you give us one example of that? I don't think it's happened.

When the member from — sitting in the back corner over there, when he stepped down he resigned, was what happened there. He said he resigned and you said he resigned. Every occasion that I can think of, with respect to these kinds of things when you look at the different ministers responsible, they've all resigned. They haven't been asked to resign, or at least you have . . . at least you have said you didn't ask them to resign. But that's what's happened.

You can't have it both ways, sir. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Premier, you can't have it both ways. Either you ask them to resign or they resign on their own. But the fact of the matter is, is they didn't. They should've in this case. The member from P.A. and the member from Rosetown should have. I think you know they should have. I think they're toast shortly after this session in a cabinet shuffle, as they should be. And I think very likely both of them are toast in the next general election.

Certainly, certainly, the one from Rosetown will be. The one from Rosetown, the seat occupied by that member will be occupied by the gentleman sitting in the gallery that the Premier was so interested in bringing into the debate a little earlier today. He's having a little problem having him injected into the debate now. It was no problem to do it at that point.

But the fact of the matter is, is that people don't believe your administration on a lot of these things any more, Mr. Premier. The fact of the matter is people want to see some changes, people want to see responsibility, and you've done anything but that. I hope you can answer the questions that'll be before the taxpayers again in this province at some point. Did your administration do the right thing? I think you didn't.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member thinks that he didn't, because nothing, especially the facts, will convince him — notwithstanding the volumes of the report, nothing will do that.

But I just want to close off by saying, if this member's talking about disaster sessions, I'll tell you where the disaster session falls. The Saskatchewan Party was of the view that through Channel Lake somehow they would find some sort of a smoking gun which would bring this government toppling right down. That's what they were thinking of doing.

And instead, what did they find out? They found out that under the auditors' reports and the accountants' reports, that Channel Lake made a profit of \$2 million during the course of its years. It found out that Channel Lake's appraised value is 14 million, and was sold for 14.5 million.

It's true there's a dispute about the 20 million that the board authorized and the actual 14.5. That's what the committee is

doing its work. But arguably what they found out was there was no loss to the taxpayers, given the \$2 million profit and the sale at the appraised value, and they do not know where to go.

And all of a sudden they've realized that the people of Saskatchewan know that this government has tabled every document, and as I've said before, has admitted its errors with respect to this particular operation as I've indicated before. They know that.

And now here's where the disastrous session comes into place, Mr. Chairman. You know what? After 61, 63 days they're saying to themselves, we got off on the wrong issue. Oh yes they are. We got off on the wrong issue.

What we should be doing is getting off on the issue of high taxation, we should be getting off on the issue of agriculture, we should be getting off on the issue of jobs, we should be getting off on the issue of comparing ourselves to Alberta, because that's what people want to do.

And no, instead, what they found was the people of Saskatchewan know that we made total revelation and the Crown Corporations is dealing with the issue. Now that issue is going to be dealt with when the report is finished.

But what the people of Saskatchewan have understood is this, that long after Channel Lake is gone -- and it is going and gone, and I hope we learned the lessons and we never repeat it again -- they know one thing that will be behind as the foundations of this session.

Two per cent reduction in the personal income tax, second reduction in taxes in two years. Five balanced budgets after a disastrous debt load by the Conservatives. The highest spending budget in health care in the history of the province. More people working in the province of Saskatchewan than ever before. The leading program on child poverty, and the question of building independence. Building safe communities. More money for police and prosecutors. And all of a sudden they realize, wow, these people are speaking to what the people of Saskatchewan want. And they've revealed and they've learned from Channel Lake, and now at day 63 they say, how did we get into this mess.

It's a disastrous session, you're doggone right it's a disastrous session. It's a disastrous session for the Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Boyd: — YBM as you point out, Mr. Premier, has got some problems going on down in the States, and I understand that's true. YBM's problems sound a lot like Channel Lake's situation with one big exception, an exception that you don't seem to understand. The situation is in the United States with YBM that they are being investigated by the FBI, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Who's investigating Channel Lake? Who's investigating it?

An Hon. Member: — We are.

Mr. Boyd: — We are? I'm not a criminal investigator. I don't think the member from . . . I don't think the member . . . I don't think the member from Melfort's a criminal investigator. I don't think the member from Saltcoats is a criminal investigator. I

don't think that the member from Rosthern is a criminal investigator.

But the fact of the matter is that things of this nature, and obviously the case in the States is with respect to YBM, they're putting people in place that are criminal investigators to see whether there was anything wrong. You've left no opportunity. You've denied any opportunity to have a criminal investigation here in Saskatchewan. We aren't going to have that. Oh no, because we're going to have our little dog and pony show which we control, run things down here.

Your Crown Corporations Committee is going to investigate this. It would be better that way than having trained criminal investigators look into this. There's all kinds of allegations. Yes, the Premier says there's allegations. You're darn right there's allegations. There's allegations of potential for fraud. There's allegations of a breach of trust. There's allegations of conflict of interest. And there's allegations of criminal charges.

I don't know whether any of them are valid, and that's why there should be an investigation conducted by people who are trained in these areas. People who are trained in the areas of finding out whether or not there is something wrong here. There's tremendous suspicion that there's something wrong here. An independent public inquiry would have been able to ascertain whether there should have been criminal charges or not.

(1630)

What happened when we called for that, Mr. Premier? You and every other member of your government said no, we won't have a public inquiry; we won't have the potential for having someone with criminal expertise look into situations like this. Not going to have that -- oh no, no way. We're going to have an NDP-dominated committee look into this and then say, oh it's the members opposite that are looking into it.

Like as if we're supposed to be running around here like Dick Tracy looking into what's gone on with this situation. Frankly between our responsibilities, responsibilities as MLAs and as opposition, we don't have time to be Dick Tracy, sir. We would wish that there would be a criminal investigation. We said right from the very outset that there should have been a public inquiry into this situation. Well the fact is, is people think there should have been something more done with respect to this, Mr. Premier.

Columnists in Saskatchewan, and I think from all over, would agree with us that there should have been something. Political observers believe that there should have been something more done.

YBM, you cite that example as somehow or another justifying what you have done here in Saskatchewan. And yet down in the United States, what has happened? YBM is under investigation all right, but it's not under investigation in some congressional committee, it's not under investigation by some sort of Senate committee, it's not under investigation by some sort of state committee — it's under investigation by the FBI, just as it probably should.

And I suspect they'll get their comeuppance just as they should get their comeuppance with whatever wrongdoing they did down there . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Me and the member from Battleford, he says somehow we're involved in this mafia, Russian mob thing.

As I recall, our member said, we'll leave those kind of wild-eyed, cockamamie stories and conspiracy theories to that member.

An Hon. Member: — Well you just said they'd get their comeuppance.

Mr. Boyd: — Well they'll get their comeuppance all right. They'll get them all right. The fact of the matter is, is that was their allegation. We play no role in that. The day that that took place . . . the day that took place we were surprised that there wasn't a few boys rolling up in a Russian Lada to have a few words with that member. We take no responsibility for those strange and haphazard remarks by that member.

It's no wonder that that member hasn't risen since that statement in the Assembly. I'm sure you and all members of your party were assigned some good lines to deal with him. We were not a part of that. We take no responsibility for that. That's craziness at its extreme.

YBM is being investigated by the FBI. There should have been an investigation into Channel Lake here, Mr. Premier. There should have been a public inquiry into this to get to the bottom of this. There is allegations about all kinds of responsibility. Who is responsibility . . . who has responsibility? Who is accountable? But we don't see any of that coming from your administration.

Mr. Premier, why have you not committed to a public inquiry? There's the cost issue, yes. There's a cost issue to it — of course there is. Every time we do something in this legislature there's a cost issue associated with things of this nature.

But there is also a cost to democracy. There is also a price that we have to pay if we're going to have responsibility and accountability. There is a price to that, sir. The people of Saskatchewan I think were prepared to pay that price with respect to this situation. I think you deserve them . . . and you deserve to give them an explanation.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I think of all of the arguments that the hon. member has mounted today and previously, this is probably the weakest one of all and the most repetitively boring one of all. If the hon. member gets up and alludes to "potential of fraud" thinking, you know that by those use of the words he's going to avoid any potential legal culpability if he repeats them outside. I can tell him as a lawyer, forget about it.

Look, let's just cut right to the chase. If you or your colleague from Melfort or anybody in the Saskatchewan Party has one example or one piece of evidence which leads to an allegation of criminality, take it to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) and repeat it outside. That's all. That's all. You haven't done it.

No, what you do is flatter everybody and not only that — here's this member from Rosthern piping up — not only that, here you have one of the most prominent lawyers in Saskatchewan with his law partners, Mr. Gerald Gerrand, Gerry Gerrand, testifying at length, testifying at length on his report all kinds of allegations of criminality. And the one thing he told you folks in cold, simple language was forget it, there's no evidence of criminality. He told you that.

It doesn't prohibit you from getting up again and repeating it all over again in the hopes that somebody from the Conrad Black press will pick it up and blow it up all over again. I mean this is ridiculous. You've got Deloitte Touche doing an audit of the books, you got Gerrand doing the interviews and the laws, you've got Crown Investments Corporation and their officials doing all of this business, and he says we're not criminal investigators.

You're doggone right you're not criminal investigators. Why make criminal allegations of wrongdoing if you're not criminal investigators. Why do it in that basis?

You say you're not Dick Tracy. You doggone right you're not Dick Tracy. You're not even as good as Inspector Clouseau.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Premier, if the SaskPower board, or CIC, believes that fraud or a breach of trust was involved in the Channel Lake scandal, they have a responsibility to the taxpayers to apply to the courts to set aside the Channel Lake sale. Do you think that that is a responsibility that they have? Do you think that they have some responsibility in this situation? Why hasn't this been done to this point?

Do you plan on taking any actions . . . does your government plan on taking any actions to recover the Channel Lake assets? Are we just going to get into this "who said what said" kind of thing, or are we going to actually try and get to the bottom of this situation?

The Channel Lake inquiry is going on. We think, and we have held to the fundamental principle right from the very outset, that there should have been a public inquiry, and we'll stand to that. We'll stand the test of time with respect to that.

And yes, we'll continue to bring forward the concerns of Saskatchewan people just as is our responsibility. But don't abdicate your responsibility, sir. And don't ask CIC to do it for you, or SaskPower, or the members on that board for you. Because I think that's what's happened to this point.

You don't want to take responsibility for this because you know you are responsible and it will create a problem for you electorally. I think so, sir. You whiff at that.

An Hon. Member: — Why didn't your boy run in Saskatoon Eastview?

Mr. Boyd: — You whiff at that, you whiff at that. Mr. Hermanson is going to run in the constituency where he lives. Is there anything wrong with that? Is there anything wrong with that?

I know you don't have any problem . . . I know you don't have

any problem with running in a constituency you don't live in, but some of us do, some of us do. He's going to run in a constituency that he lives in.

The Chair: — Order, order. Order. If the committee wants to do it properly and get the remarks on the record, then we have to one speak and the other listen, and then the other speak and the others listen. And I would ask both sides to do that.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Premier, you're always interested in getting into these wild games of chicken. That's about what it amounts to. When you were kids, remember those kinds of things? I dare you to do this, I don't think you got the guts to do this.

I don't think, sir, I don't think — why didn't you run him in this constituency? The fact is that the Saskatchewan Party will make their own determinations about what we do not you or the NDP. We won't be goaded into anything by you. We won't be goaded into anything by the NDP Party of Saskatchewan. We won't be goaded by you to say, oh, you have to run in there, because somehow or another — that will somehow or another — provide the people of Saskatchewan with a window on what the Saskatchewan Party is thinking about. We have a candidate in Saskatoon. We have a very good candidate in Saskatoon. We have a person in that constituency that is the only one that lives in that constituency. We didn't float in some sort of what you thought was going to be a star candidate into that constituency only to find out that it fell flat on its face.

We aren't going to engage in those kinds of childish games of chicken that you always want to throw out — try to bait people into doing what you think would be in their best interests or your best interests. That's the way you govern. That's the way you operate your party.

Well I tell you, sir; we don't operate that way. We don't go into those constituencies and say to the candidates, the heck with what you want, we're taking over the show now. We had a candidate that ran, that is running up there because that candidate wants to run in that constituency.

You may be prepared, and your party may be prepared to just go in there and elbow them out of the way, but that isn't the way the Saskatchewan Party operates, sir. That isn't the way the Saskatchewan Party runs things. We will stand the test in that election campaign. You may be prepared to do that. Jim Melenchuk may be prepared to do that. Jim Melenchuk was going to run anywhere he thought he might have a chance of getting elected.

You know why? Because he thought, he thought that he had some sort of, some sort of — almost like a guarantee of a pass, a pass from the NDP to this Assembly. You guys did an ultimate job in that respect — a tremendous sell job. You sucked that guy in big time. You have to admit you're good; you're really good at that kind of game, really, really good at it.

You talked this guy into running. You talked this poor son of a gun into running; you talk him into running and say to them, we're not going to go too hard on you Jim. We're just going to back off a little bit and we're going to allow you to slip through the cracks and you'll be the Leader of the Liberal Party in all of

its grandeur, sitting in the Assembly.

That's what I think happened here, Mr. Premier. But we're not buying into that game that you like to play all of the time of trying to goad your opponents into doing whatever you think is in your best interests. The Saskatchewan Party will do what we think is in our best interests. We'll continue to do what we think is in the party's best interests and in the interests of the taxpayers of this province. And we won't be taking any advice from you, sir, with respect to that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — The people here of this province still believe, sir, that you're headed in many, many directions. And the Premier says that only at this late date in the debate in this session . . . that we want to bring forward and continue to bring forward other issues. We brought forward Channel Lake — yes. We brought forward Guyana. We brought forward concerns about health care. We brought forward concerns about highways. We brought forward concerns about justice. We brought forward concerns about agriculture. We brought forward concerns about taxes. We brought forward concerns about accountability — just to list a few of the things that this opposition brought to the Assembly.

I think we've done a pretty good job representing the taxpayers of this province. Immodestly I think we've done a pretty good job. Were we perfect in opposition? No. Were you perfect in government? Were you perfect in government? No. Were you perfect in this administration of Channel Lake? No. You take any responsibility for it? No.

Mr. Premier, I'll take my place at this point and allow my colleagues to ask additional questions but I think your record will stand for itself on this question. Your record in this session will be tested by the people of Saskatchewan in the next election.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, it's certainly a pleasure to get up in this Assembly and have the privilege . . . I should say to stand in the Assembly and address issues to, certainly I believe, the individual who should be in charge in the province of Saskatchewan, not only of Executive Council.

But I believe, Mr. Chairman, when it comes right down to it, the buck stops at the Premier's doorstep whether it's a health issue, whether it's an educational issue, whether it's an agricultural issue, whether it has to do with Channel Lake or Guyana. Any issue that this government is involved in, any circumstance that they're dealing with, any situation that they find themselves mired in eventually ends up at the door of the Premier of the province when it comes to debate in this Assembly.

(1645)

And, Mr. Chairman, it certainly is the responsibility of the opposition to not only hold the ministers responsible and accountable in their areas of expertise or the areas of responsibility that they are carrying, but it's also our responsibility to hold the Premier accountable because the

Premier is the one who actually has delegated the authority to each one of the members to hold those positions of responsibility.

And when it comes to health care, Mr. Premier, while it's been unfortunate that the member from Yorkton has had to bear most of the brunt, or if it isn't the member from Yorkton carrying the brunt of the health care questions, the government places the blame . . . where do they place the blame? They place the blame on the district health boards.

If they can't get away with placing the blame on the district health boards then they place the blame on the federal government or per chance, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Premier, they placed the blame on some other government. They placed the blame on governments of the past. For some reason, Mr. Chairman, this government, and this Premier, even as we've seen today, finds it very interesting and challenging to just place the blame some place else.

Always point the finger and unfortunately when they're pointing the finger, they forget about the fact — or the Premier anyway — forgets about the fact that on most occasions he's got three fingers pointing back at him, basically saying he's the one responsible.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier is responsible for the state of health care in the province today. I was hoping the Premier would stand up today and acknowledge that there have been mistakes made. I was hoping that the Premier would stand up today and say; yes health care is not working the way we want it to. In fact, I shouldn't say was . . . I'll have to give the benefit of the doubt because we haven't had the opportunity the Premier responding to health care concerns yet.

But, Mr. Chairman, we will find out in a few moments as to what the responses will be in regards to health care. We will find out whether or not the Premier will accept responsibility.

My guess, Mr. Chairman, the first thing the Premier's going to do is stand up in his place and he is going to talk about all the virtues of health care that the NDP have espoused in the past. He's going to talk about the medicare debate that took place in the early '60s. He's going to talk about what Tommy Douglas has done for health care and the leadership given by the province of Saskatchewan. He is going to forget everything all about the fact, actual facts, taking place today about how people do not believe health care is working for them.

Mr. Chairman, it was interesting yesterday calling an individual who — some of my colleagues and number of people who are currently campaigning in the Saskatoon Eastview by-election have left some calls and asked me to call a few people in regards to health care . . . people that they've met on the doorstep who — has raised some very serious concerns.

And one specific lady in particular, Constance McRobbie, who I called yesterday. And because she had some very major concerns, a situation where her husband was admitted to City Hospital back in September of 1997 and a few weeks later was transferred to Royal University, laid on a gurney in the emergency ward from 10:30 p.m. till 11:30 a.m. and out of her frustration, she finally let out a holler and suggested that if her

husband was somebody else, he would be able to get a bed. The unfortunate part, Mr. Chairman, by the time everything was said and done . . . shortly after, her husband passed away. And then to add insult to injury the hospital then sent a letter in February indicating that her husband now had an appointment to see a specialist.

You know what, Mr. Chairman, you know what the lady, what Mrs. McRobbie said to me. She said she would love to have the opportunity to be able to come down to Regina and speak to the Premier face to face and tell him exactly what she believes of his wellness program, of his wellness model.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, I can just see the Premier standing up in a few short minutes and just espousing the virtues of health care, and telling us how much Tommy Douglas has done for this province, what the NDP have done and their former associates, the CCF, have done in delivering a solid — one of the best and top rate — form of health care in the province.

But, Mr. Chairman, what we're hearing from people is that health care is not meeting what people are expecting of their tax dollars when it comes to health care. Mr. Chairman — and I think the Premier will acknowledge that — Mr. Chairman, \$1.72 billion, I believe, is what the government is putting into health care this year.

And the Premier will say they've increased their spending in health care. The unfortunate part, even with the increase of \$88 million this year, of that \$88 million, very little if any money will end up in the hands of district boards. That would allow them to provide the individuals, whether it's a nursing positions or some of the other positions, needed to provide the direct services to the individuals of this province, the taxpayers of this province who rely on health care to meet their health needs.

And if health care is doing so well, Mr. Chairman, why have we had so many headlines in the papers in recent months telling us, and basically reiterating the fact of what individuals are telling us, that health care is not working. That this wellness model that somebody on the NDP side of the House, whether it was the Premier, or whether it was the former Minister of Health, the Hon. Louise Simard, dreamed up in the dead of night, decided we've got to come out with something different. Or as the former member from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg commented, the fact that he just got a note just prior to the 1991 election that they were coming out with what would be a wellness model. And when he had called NDP campaign office to ask what this meant, he was told, don't worry about it, who really cares, it doesn't really matter, we'll figure it out when the election campaign is over.

Well what has a wellness model done for people? As the headline says here: "Health care has increased discomfort." More and more people are finding themselves in a situation of having to deal with discomfort, having to deal with pain, having to be on long waiting-lists for a procedure that may give them the ability to finally have a quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Chairman, when it comes right down to it, I don't believe in having to be on a waiting-list. As the lady from Leask recently called me indicating that she was informed

almost a year ago now that she would have an operation by this June, June of 1998, and only just recently was informed that it might be in the fall now. Mr. Chairman, that June of 1997 — it's a year ago. Now she's told that it's maybe four or five months more down the road. Mr. Chairman, that is 12, that's 18, 17 to 18 months, could be even longer.

Mr. Chairman, I wonder if that's how the Premier would want to be treated. If the Premier was faced — even if it wasn't a life-threatening situation — I'm wondering if that's how the Premier would like to be treated. Would he like to have to put up with the discomfort? Would he like to have to live with discomfort knowing that the longer that his body is — there's pain in his body from whatever condition he may be facing — that it may create other problems that would be magnified down the road; that by the time an operation was finally achieved, you've got to deal with other medical problems? I don't think so.

I would hope that as the media have indicated that the Premier will show indeed some compassion today. I would hope the Premier would finally, as one of the headlines says, "NDP loses compassion test." I think this afternoon the Premier has the opportunity and has certainly . . . is being given that ability to finally show that he does have some compassion, that he is listening, Mr. Chair — that the Premier is listening to the current concerns that are being raised by individuals across this province.

Mr. Chairman, when it comes to talking about health care, it's not just the Saskatchewan Party official opposition that's been raising this concern. Mr. Chairman, SARM delegates, and I'm sure that — in fact I know — I know for a fact the Premier heard at the recent SARM convention that health care is a major concern, that health care is an issue, that health care is something that SARM delegates are very concerned in. In fact, quoting from one of the articles, the *Leader-Post* on March 12th, "Health cuts hurt rural residents: SARM delegates". "It's the rural people who are going . . .", and I'm quoting, "It's the rural people who are going to lose out when this facility closes, says the RM of Redburn delegate."

And, Mr. Chairman, he's referring to the Plains Health Centre. In interviews earlier this week, several delegates said, while the Plains located on a major thoroughfare is easily accessible in an emergency, the city's two inner-city hospitals are more difficult to reach.

Mr. Chairman, the Premier can agree and can reiterate what the Minister of Health has said, that while they've spent millions of dollars to upgrade the General, while they've spent millions of dollars to upgrade the Pasqua, the facts are, and yes, that is quite possibly true, they have put the money into those two facilities that when they close the doors, officially close the doors on the Plains Health Centre, that they will have all the services available at the other two hospitals.

Mr. Chairman, it's unfortunate that the government didn't take and give a little more thought to how they were addressing health care, how they were going to provide health care. How they were going to guarantee that their health services, our health services were available. The Premier will argue that we've got the highest level of beds in Saskatchewan versus

other provinces.

Now a report yesterday I think in *Maclean's* talked about 6.1, but the Minister of Health indicated last night that we actually in this province have 3,117 I believe acute care beds in the province of Saskatchewan. Acute care beds I believe are the beds that are available to put that individual, that are utilized in order to provide the procedures, that are necessary to meet the needs. Now 3.1 is quite a distance from the 6.9 beds I believe the Premier was talking about earlier.

Mr. Premier, for your government and for you to stand here today and say that health care is working, basically flies against what many people across the province have been saying . . . as the individuals down at Shaunavon said when they had a number of individuals that I met when I was down to the meeting in Shaunavon, or whether it was people in Whitewood, or people in Indian Head. And what I found very interesting, Mr. Premier, certainly the community of Whitewood was an example that really surprised me because to be very honest with you . . . while I do have a lot of support, it tends to have a more majority of support for your party.

I ran into individuals who I didn't dream would ever speak against your government at that meeting in Whitewood. And one individual who is a long-time Pool member, in fact a Pool delegate got up and was thanking the opposition parties for having raised the concern of the Plains Health Centre and hold a public meeting.

Mr. Premier, it's very interesting. And I find it hard to believe that you can stand here and suggest that you are doing everything to provide adequate and supportive health care in the province of Saskatchewan when your own people do not believe you. And we hear them more and more. And while I cannot at the end of the day just jump on the bandwagon and say people are going to vote for the Saskatchewan Party or going to vote for an opposition parties, because somehow or other I know while NDP members become angry, at the end of the day there are so many NDP members who are so tied to the party, that they will vote for you regardless, even if they're angry.

So that's one thing that you can be thankful for, grateful for. The elections over the years have shown that at least 35 per cent of this population, the population of this province, will continually vote for you despite Channel Lake, despite Guyana, despite what's happening in health care.

Mr. Premier, when we look at health care and we talk about what's happening in health care, we talk about delivery of services, the Saskatoon Eastview by-election comes to mind. And it's very interesting, Mr. Premier, it is very interesting that just prior to the announcement, or just after the announcement of the Saskatoon by-election — or just prior to, pardon me — and the announcement of, Mr. Chair, the announcement of Ms. Judy Junor's seeking the NDP nomination in Saskatoon Eastview, there wasn't a hint, wasn't a hint of any more funding for nursing care in the province of Saskatchewan.

And yet I'm sure, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Premier, you've been hearing — your Minister of Health, you as the Premier of this province, your government back-benchers — your ministers

have been hearing time and time again that one of the problems with health care today is the lack of front-line workers. That's what Constance McRobbie mentioned, the lack of front-line workers, the fact that the nurses were running off their feet.

And I've chatted with a number of nurses. I've chatted with many nurses who find themselves just being run off their feet, run ragged, and in fact being asked to put in overtime because of the fact that there aren't enough nurses in the province of Saskatchewan.

So what do we have before, just on the eve of the Saskatoon Eastview by-election, just on the eve of Judy Junor's announcement that she will seek the NDP nomination and carry the NDP banner, if nominated to carry that banner, we find the Minister of Health all of a sudden finds \$9 million — \$9 million and announces 200 new nursing positions.

Mr. Premier, I have to ask you, Mr. Premier, if indeed 200 . . . First of all, how did you know that 200 positions, new nursing positions, is the number? Is it 200 positions, is it more, is it less? Where does the 200 come from?

Mr. Chair, I thought the district boards were in charge. I thought the district boards had the responsibility of hiring. I thought the district boards had the responsibility of making sure there were enough front-line workers. But all of a sudden, while the boards are being basically accused of all the other, and blamed for all the other problems, the Minister of Health finds \$9 million for 200 nursing positions in the province of Saskatchewan.

(1700)

I guess, Mr. Premier, the proof will be in the pudding. We'll see after the June 24 by-election whether or not there are any new nursing positions showing up in the province of Saskatchewan. In fact, I don't think there will be too many showing up before September as we see a cut-back in the number of beds that will be open during the summer months.

So that'll give the government a bit of a reprieve. So we're going to probably have to wait until the month of September to find out whether or not this government is actually keeping their word, whether or not this is just another misleading statement by the Minister of Health and the Premier in regards to health care delivery and health care services in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, our health care system in the minds of many people, many people across this province, is in crisis. And what is your government doing? The government says they're throwing \$88 million more. It ends up in capital construction. It ends up in SHIN. It ends up going to district boards. In fact the amount that's going to district boards is less than the amount the boards are in debt right now. So how much more money is actually going into patient care?

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Premier, if we are spending more on health care today than ever, more than we spend in any other budgetary item — and I fully expect that you will be finding out the fact that eats up almost a third or better than a third of the budget of the province of Saskatchewan — what are you doing

wrong?

Because clearly the money that you are spending in health care today, Mr. Premier, in the minds of many individuals, and some that I've mentioned here today because they have indicated they have no problem in me using their name, have indicated is not meeting the needs of individuals and providing the delivery of service that the people of this province have come to expect.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I say with the greatest of respect and admiration for the hon. member opposite, for whom I do have a great deal of admiration and respect, but I'm really nonplussed to where to start by way of a response to that question or speech. But I should perhaps make my answer short and to the point.

I'll tell you where we will not start. We do not work on the assumption that the health care system is as you portray it. And even if it were, we would not start as your candidate Francis Krieser — I hope I pronounced his name correctly . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Krieser, when he starts.

Here's his pamphlet. Health care. Reviewing the health care system including the appointment of a health ombudsman. I might say that, that's an area where we may start. Improving the accountability and effectiveness of district health boards. We may start.

But here's where we will not start. Note this. Allowing private health services in order to reduce the load on public facilities. I repeat, Mr. Chairman, the Saskatchewan Party is campaigning on this platform allowing private health services in order to reduce the load on public facilities.

Now, Mr. Member, you might just tell the House and the people of Saskatchewan what kinds, number, nature of private health services will you allow if you should be in the government?

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier. I find it interesting, Mr. Premier, when you start talking about private health care system. And most of the time, Mr. Premier, basically the argument you talk about is a two-tier system. You say we don't have a two-tier system. The facts are, Mr. Premier, we do have a two-tier system in this province already. In fact we've got a multi-tier system in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Premier, if we didn't have, as you say, if we only have one level of health care in the province of Saskatchewan, why are Saskatchewan residents going outside of the province to seek services that you say are available in the province of Saskatchewan?

In fact, Mr. Premier, other than the fact . . . I haven't chatted with the individuals so I won't release names, but one individual just very close to us indicated that she was having a major problem with lower back pain. She had basically had hip and knee surgery but had ongoing problems.

And her sister finally said, when she was visiting, why don't you swallow your pride and go across the line, get that MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) that she was scheduled . . . Back in 1997 she had an appointment for an MRI in Saskatoon to determine what needed to be done to address her

condition. May of 1997 to November of 1997.

Guess what, Mr. Premier. She did decide, well maybe she'll try it. She went across to Minot. Yes it did cost her a little bit. But also, Mr. Premier, she had an operation performed in June of 1997. She didn't wait till November for that MRI.

Mr. Premier, if indeed you're saying that the health care system we have in this province is working for all people, why are people already going outside of this province to receive a service that you're telling us is immediately available to individuals? Why should someone have to suffer with an aggravated back that could be addressed through a minor operation that basically you need the services of the MRI. Well I acknowledge the only place at that time was Saskatoon.

And if I'm not mistaken, Mr. Premier, the MRI machine in Saskatoon operates about eight hours a day. Why is it not operating 12 or 16 hours a day, Mr. Premier, to meet the needs that put on the services of that machine? And yes I acknowledge and I will give you credit for the fact that there will be an MRI available in southern Saskatchewan in the near future; we've talked about that for a long time.

But, Mr. Premier, when you went to say that there isn't a two-tier system today is not being truthful with the people of Saskatchewan because so many people are going outside of this province. And because of a result of going outside of the province, they're actually receiving the medical attention that they fully expected to receive in this province yesterday, not 12 months or so down the road, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Premier.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, the hon. member from Moosomin is building his case for private health care very, very effectively as a Saskatchewan Party member, Tory Party member. I repeat again that Francis Krieser has in his new priorities pamphlet in Saskatoon Eastview the following statement: "Allowing private health services in order to reduce the load on public facilities."

And I ask that hon. member to tell us what private health services would be permitted. He didn't give me a direct answer, but he gave me an indirect answer. His indirect answer was an MRI. Translated, his answer said this: you get immediate health care if you've got the money to buy it in Minot or anywhere else. You got the money, you got the health care. Two-tier — yes. Two-tier according to you, based on capacity to pay, not on need or medical assessment.

And your leader is going to have to detail for us very shortly because we will be hounding him and you to tell us what private health services will you allow in order to reduce the load on public facilities.

I bet you I know one of them. You will allow private, for-profit hospitals for those who've got the money to get into those hospitals and diminish the public hospital system. Tell me that that isn't so.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I find it interesting. Mr. Chairman, what we have from the Premier right now, we ask a question. The health care is in shambles; all he's interested in is all of a sudden deflecting. I just told you earlier, Mr. Chair, that

the Premier certainly would deflect. He would deflect all the criticism. He would start pointing the finger again.

Mr. Chairman, the Premier talks about this health care system that is working well for the people of Saskatchewan. He talks about a wellness model that everyone has total access to at any time of the day or night. And yet we find, Mr. Chairman, that people are telling us that they do not have that access to that service.

Then the Premier wants to tell us that there isn't a two-tier system in the province of Saskatchewan, and we keep telling him people are telling us it's a multi-tiered system. Mr. Premier, as I've indicated earlier, people are not going to wait the 18 months or the 12 months or whatever, the 360 days or the 400 days to get surgery to relieve a condition.

Because of your actions, Mr. Premier, individuals — and unfortunately that might be true — individuals who can afford it are seeking services outside of the province so that they don't have to live with a health care condition that makes it difficult for them to enjoy a quality of life.

Mr. Premier, the responsibility is yours to provide that quality health care system that doesn't force people to go outside of this province. Mr. Premier, if you had a health care system that was meeting the needs, you wouldn't have people going elsewhere. Why are you not providing that service today, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well now, so you're telling me this then, that under your government, the Tory government, Saskatchewan Party government, they wouldn't have to go outside of the province of Saskatchewan. Instead they'd have private, public health services — private, public health services in Saskatchewan. That's your argument.

They don't have to go to Minot. They don't have to go to Calgary. But under Mr. Krieser's campaign, you would have a private health service in order to reduce the load on public facilities. Tell me where. Tell me what that includes.

I'll put another proposition to you. You say I'm deflecting. I'm not deflecting. I'm going to give you my answer. I do not believe the health care system in Saskatchewan is in crisis. I think it is the best health care system in this country. And this province leads the reform in this country, and that is measured by independent observers inside and outside this province who know that to be the case. And I believe that the record, the \$1.72 million you talked about . . . you gave me all the answers I had to give. That is my answer; I'm not deflecting.

Who's deflecting? You are deflecting. Get up and tell me where it is that private health services will be allowed. Where? Where will they be?

An Hon. Member: — Dialysis.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Dialysis? Let me give you another quotation to help you answer this question for us. Saskatchewan Party convention, November 17, 1997, constitution policy platform, okay. From the Regina *Leader-Post*, "A plan to invite private health providers to the province to reduce waiting-lists."

I'll stop there from the quotation, Mr. Chairman. To reduce waiting-lists. Where do waiting-lists come? Hospitals. A plan to invite private health providers to the province to reduce waiting-lists was one of the policies that passed without any opposition at your convention. I repeat, is one of your private, public health facilities to reduce waiting-lists mean, as I hereby accuse you that it means, private, for-profit hospitals, as they're talking in Alberta? Tell me, yes or no. And if it doesn't, then tell me what it does include. Don't deflect.

And then I'm reading from this point of view. And here's this:

During a panel discussion Saturday (get this, Mr. Chairman, during a panel discussion Saturday), party organizer Brian Fitzgerald called the five fundamental principles behind medicare (called the five fundamental principles behind medicare) mindless slogans that stand in the way of innovative health care solutions like private clinics.

That's what you said. So I ask you right now — and consult your leader, if you will — come down here and tell us where the private health facilities will be, in what areas, to ease the burden off the public load; where the waiting-lists are going to be eased, with specifics; and tell this House, and tell the people of Saskatchewan whether the five fundamental principles of medicare are mindless slogans preventing private, for-profit clinics, as you and your Tory/Saskatchewan Party have adopted as policy. As you and your leader have adopted as policy.

Tell us where they're going to be; 'fess up that you believe in private, for-profit health care and with it the destruction of medicare. Because the moment that you do it — you've already said it now — you will not, not one of you will be re-elected to this Legislative Assembly, I guarantee you. Not one of you.

(1715)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I find it very interesting . . . Mr. Chairman, what I find very interesting in this whole debate is the . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well let's talk about the truth. Let's talk about the truth.

Which party said in a by-election that they will not close any hospitals? And then shortly after they form government, guess what. The hospitals are all closed. In fact, they didn't just close five in the Shaunavon constituency, Mr. Chairman, they closed 52 hospitals including the hospital, the Plains Health Centre, sitting here in Regina. And the Premier has the audacity to talk about the member from Saskatoon, has the audacity to talk about telling the truth, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, in fact just for the information of the Premier, the Premier likes to wave brochures. One of the most recent brochures that's been put out by Mr. Krieser . . . and I'd just like to read a few comments in regards to this. And it goes along with what the Saskatchewan Party has been addressing in the Legislative Assembly in regards health care, what it's been talking about — one clear choice for health care.

The NDP is spending 1.7 billion on health care, yet hospitals are closing. Doctors are leaving. Nurses and front-line staff are

burning out. NDP health reforms have been a disaster, yet the government refuses to admit there's a problem. Federal Liberals have cut \$7 billion from health funding to the provinces, but Saskatchewan Liberals refuse to lobby Ottawa to restore the funding.

The Saskatchewan Party solution — the Saskatchewan Party will push the federal Liberal government to reinstate that health funding. I believe the Premier's even been calling for that. The Saskatchewan Party will establish fully elected health district boards. That way Saskatoon people, not just Saskatoon people but people across this province will have a real opportunity to decide how their health funding will be allocated.

The Saskatchewan Party will provide adequate block funding to district health boards with no strings attached. The Saskatchewan Party will appoint a health ombudsman. But I'm pleased to hear this afternoon that the Premier even believes that a Saskatchewan health ombudsman might be a good thing.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, to the Premier, the more I think about it, I think I even agree even more wholeheartedly with the Saskatchewan health ombudsman in view of some of the concerns that have been raised with SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) and the problems with SAHO and their own board of inquiry. And a health ombudsman, Mr. Chair, at least would be able to listen to the concerns being raised by individuals when they are continually being turned down or ridiculed by SAHO and their board.

Mr. Chairman, I believe, and the Premier knows, the Saskatchewan Party has laid out a plan regarding health care in the province of Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Party has laid out . . . and if the Premier wants to, he can show some compassion by moving some of the legislation that's currently in the legislature by fully electing boards rather than having his hand-picked individuals continue to manipulate district boards — not just the Regina district board or Saskatoon, but the other 30 district boards across the province.

If the Premier is not afraid of district boards doing their jobs, why doesn't the Premier take the leadership even today, even in this Assembly, and announce that as of tomorrow or June 21 or July 1 there will be no more appointees. All the appointed positions will be eliminated. We now have in place a mechanism whereby the elected positions can continue to function and operate — that would be a saving that would be able to address some of the shortfalls in health spending in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Premier, the choice is yours — it's very clear the choice is yours. You have that opportunity to show some leadership. But unfortunately as we see, openness is it not . . . while it's on the tip of your tongue, while it's rhetoric, the actual fact of openness is certainly far from reality.

In fact I'm just going to go through . . . read from a column, an editorial "No free and open discussion by MLAs" — talking about the Plains health care centre. In fact there was no talk in the NDP caucus. And this was, and this was written by a former colleague of yours. An individual, an individual who ran for you. And then all of a sudden you didn't like what he was saying, that he was standing up for his constituents — and Mr.

Chair, he was standing up for the electorate of this province.

So what did you do? You ran somebody against him to make sure he was not your candidate because he was one individual who was not afraid to stand up in caucus. And I'm sure, Mr. Chair, if the Premier would've been more than willing and open to hold a free vote in this Assembly when he was a member, he would've also stood up with the opposition on issues that he opposed, and the direction that his government was going.

But let me quote from this article:

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

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

Despite this lack of discussion, a vote in caucus was taken on the rural hospital issue. Draper said he was the only one of the 55 NDP MLAs who voted against the closures. "Everybody voted for it, including the great defector from Shaunavon (Glen McPherson, who joined the Liberals)," the former NDP MLA said.

The member from Shaunavon, the great defector who joined the Liberals.

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

That was decided, it was decided by the Premier and his colleagues. In fact . . . and your Cabinet. I don't believe the back-benchers, as Mr. Draper said, had any involvement in it. Certainly the boards did not have involvement. They were just approached when they were asked how do we sell this policy of closing? Just with a swipe or with a flick of the pen — closing 52 hospitals in the province of Saskatchewan. Talk about open and free discussion.

Draper said he knows of no such discussion or vote on the 1993 closure of Plains before he left caucus in 1995. But in an indirect way, the issue did occasionally come up, Draper recalls.

Mr. Chairman, he closes by saying:

"The great thing was to shove it on the backs of the district boards and let them do the dirty work," . . . Evidently, that must be the free and open discussions Serby talked about.

Mr. Chairman, the Premier talks about openness. He talks about accountability. He talks about freedom for members to choose, but we have one of his former colleagues telling us about

openness and accountability and being honest with the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Premier, whether it's someone looking for the services of the Gimbel eye clinic, whether it's chiropractor, dentist, I don't believe . . . I believe dentists fall under health. They all have their own clinics. And you're saying that there's no two-tiered system in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Premier, what you have is a number of services that are available under health care that run their own clinic. Chiropractic, they don't operate out of hospitals. Dentists, they don't operate out of hospitals. People, Mr. Premier, will seek the services that they feel will meet the need. And if they choose to — because you're not providing that service — they will choose to seek those services elsewhere.

Mr. Premier, it's time you accepted responsibility for your actions. Are you going to stand up and say that Mr. Draper doesn't know — the former member from Shaunavon — doesn't know what he's talking about?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I'm still waiting, and I'm still waiting. I want to know where the Saskatchewan Tory Party is going to allow more private health care facilities. I am still waiting.

I've told you about our views of health care reform and how I believe that it is adequate. Could be better, we're working to make it better. I won't repeat that. You know my position.

But I haven't heard your position yet. Allowing private health care facilities, allowing . . . The five principles of medicare are mindless slogans according to you folks over there . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . and there the member from Rosthern supports it. Get up and tell us you support it . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I'll sit down and let him tell me. Go ahead. Tell me they're mindless slogans.

Mr. Chairman, I'll sit down if that member will stand up, show the courage to say publicly on the record what he's been saying from his seated position that they're mindless slogans. The truth . . .

Mr. Heppner: — . . . and I make it right now for everyone in Saskatchewan. I want the Premier to get up and tell the 6,000 people that are waiting for operations what good those slogans do them. The people, who are dying in hospitals, what good slogans do them? Tell all those people that are waiting for health care what good slogans do them. When we have that answer and those people are happy, then I'll be satisfied as well. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, that's not what he was saying. I said that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . no, that's not what he was saying. I said that the convention said they were mindless slogans and you said yes they were mindless slogans. That's exactly what you said. That's exactly what it says in black and white and every one of you believe that the principles of medicare invented in this Legislative Assembly, fought against the KOD (Keep Our Doctors committee) and the Liberals outside there. You say they're mindless slogans. Your leader says they're mindless slogans. You're going to allow

private clinics for profit and private hospitals for profit. Shame on you. Not one of you is going to get re-elected with that position, I guarantee you. Not one of you.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am actually quite pleased to be able to have this time with the Premier and his officials and I think the time has come to restore some modicum of civility to the House as well as reduce the rhetoric all the way around, I hope.

My questions are going to cover three topics this evening, Mr. Premier. The first is regarding the management of Saskatchewan Crowns; the second will be a very short question regarding financial accountability; and the third deals with my questions regarding justice for people who of course have been seeking justice from the Government of Saskatchewan.

Let me begin then with the management of our Crowns. Given that there are many, many people who have spent precious hours over weeks and weeks and weeks in the Crown Corporations Committee, I think it would be useful, Mr. Premier, if you had an opportunity to discuss what lessons have already been learned. And I have three areas of questioning within that.

The first is that I'm interested in helping to ensure that Saskatchewan Crowns actually work together and I want you to comment on the following: since SaskEnergy's expertise is in security of supply and predictability of price for natural gas, why wouldn't SaskPower work more closely with SaskEnergy to utilize this expertise? And there are different areas where it seems quite bewildering to ordinary people why the group that has the accumulated intelligence, if you will, to deal with these issues was left out of the loop: first of all, in utilizing their expertise when deciding to acquire Channel Lake; secondly, when managing the arbitrage; and thirdly, when disposing of Channel Lake; and lastly, when negotiating the 10-year contract for supply. Now I don't know how much of that you actually got to hear, but it's quite specific, and I'm going to articulate once again what the gist of this is.

I indicated that SaskEnergy's expertise is in security of supply, as well as predictability of price for natural gas. And so it would make inherent sense to anyone that SaskPower would utilize the skills involved with the people from SaskEnergy in these different areas — the acquisition, the sale, the arbitrage, as well as the 10-year contract for supply. I'd very much appreciate your comments on that, please.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, with respect to this specific question, the belief of SaskPower was at the time of the establishment of Channel Lake through appropriate studies and the like — and a lot of this has come up in testimony — that they could get more secure supplies at cheaper price of natural gas involving the establishment of Channel Lake. As they had been doing by the way prior to SaskEnergy in the 1980s — and SaskEnergy being established in the 1980s. That was the rationale behind it.

As to the first aspect of the question about what specific lessons, I won't take up the time of the committee, but I can send over to you a copy of Mr. Wright's statements this morning made to the Channel Lake hearing, where he sets out

several, in fact many specific lessons ranging all the way from roles and responsibilities of board members; regular evaluation of board members; balanced score-card performance for management performance; outside directors on subsidiary boards, which Channel Lake was; strong Crown board oversight and on it goes.

Those are the things which are being actually implemented at this stage in the game. I might add not only because of Channel Lake. Channel Lake I think has added more impetus for us to do this. A lot of this was in the works under the Crown review.

(1730)

Ms. Haverstock: — Well I thank you for sending that to me. I'm looking forward to reading it. I guess I go back to my initial questions and that is that Mr. Wright has a particular responsibility and a particular position. And I'm wanting to know what lessons you, as the Premier, have learned.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, as Premier of the province of Saskatchewan I learn lessons every day I hope, about something or other.

Now when you ask in general terms I'm not quite sure how to respond except to say that the best response I can give you is that in the documents we tabled on the opening day of the House, there was a plan of corrective measures which were articulated, and they have been restated in a different way and updated by Mr. Wright in his testimony today.

I take the advice of my officials and I apply my own intelligence and my own knowledge and I learn. And on this basis, with respect to this specific matter, these are among some of the things that this government has adopted and some of the things that I have learned. I'm sure there'll be many more things I'll have to learn as I proceed in my career in public life.

That's the answer I give you on this particular issue.

Ms. Haverstock: — I don't think I was specific enough, to tell you the truth, with that last comment saying what have you learned. I should have been a tad more specific I would say. I guess we could get very specific.

We could talk about Mr. Stengler being put in the position he is, was in. We could talk about the appointment to the person in charge of SHIN. We could talk about the appointment of the individual who is in charge of SaskPower. We could talk about a lot of different things in terms of specifics and lessons learned.

And I'm wondering if in fact there have been lessons learned about the kind of people who have been put in positions of great authority and power, who have had a tremendous, I think, influence on the direction that this province has gone, not only in Crown corporations but in other business enterprises as well.

Now I don't expect for one moment for you to stand in your place and say that these people were not highly competent. But I do think that it's very, very telling when we have had evidence that there are people who have applied for the position with SHIN who had far, far greater expertise and experience than the

individual who subsequently got that position.

And I'm wondering if any lessons have been learned. That in fact, one of the things I most certainly would love to be able to see before this Assembly or a committee or something, is a way of being able to at least determine the credentials of people, of the top three or four people, with their names removed, so that we actually know that the most talented and capable people are put in positions of running some of the most expensive and important entities to the people of Saskatchewan.

And it stands to no reason at all that in this particular case, the corporations that should have been working in conjunction with one another were working in isolation from one another. I'm confused by that. And of course as a result of that, this is potentially contrary to the best interests of all the people in Saskatchewan.

So I know that I have provided some specifics. I do expect some response. I just want you to, please, if you will, tell us if there has been some understanding that has come from all of this in the way in which people are given positions, in the way that corporations ultimately work together. And it's not simply about personalities, I'm sure. I think that it perhaps is even broader than that.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I certainly want to agree with the hon. member on the last statement that it is not personality, that it is something greater than that. Because I want to say that it is only good politics — if we want to put it in political terms, let alone just good common sense — to get the best competent people that you can get to advise government at whatever order or level of government. That only stands to reason, and we try to do that.

I was saying earlier in the afternoon in my little debate with the Tory Party, the Saskatchewan Party here next door, that in Saskatchewan we're partly handicapped, mainly handicapped with respect to some Crown corporations in terms of what the public will accept in terms of payment for CEOs. Three hundred and fifty thousand to \$450,000 for a SaskTel or a SaskPower president by industry standards, I am told, is normal. I think if we did that, we would have a lot of political trouble on our hands, and in the consequence we are conditioned by that. So we have some limitations.

But you mentioned a couple of examples. I can tell you in the case of SHIN, the chief executive officer of SHIN was selected not by the cabinet or the government or by any direct or indirect communication by me, but selected by the board of directors of SHIN, composed of SAHO, nurses, doctors, and the providers from a list of applicants which the committee of SHIN examined and then suggested the choice. I don't know if they gave them three choices or whether there was a one, two, three ranking, but that was their decision. And that's how the decision was made in that context.

Even in the case of Jack Messer — which I said earlier this afternoon — when he took over at Power Corporation on an interim basis after the George Hill dust-up which we had, we hired a head-hunting firm. Head-hunting firm went out on a nation-wide search, series of applicants, and recommended Jack Messer. It happens to be that he was a New Democrat, is a New

Democrat. I think he did a good job. Channel Lake is a problem, but put into perspective as to what he accomplished, and I think there's a pretty impressive record of public service. Perhaps I'm still reflecting a bias, but I'm trying to be as objective as I can.

So I agree with you. The lessons that one would learn is try to be objective. Try to have competent people, but there are limitations, limitations in our salary and there are also some limitations in terms of ideology.

No premier would want to have, no government would want to have, as an example, the head of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, a person who totally and completely believed in say massive privatization of the corporation. That may be a position that somebody adopts. We do not adopt it.

We don't demand monolithic conformity to our position but we do believe that the very top, the civil servant advisers, must be knowledgeable of and in — how should I describe it to be delicate — in general support of the ideology and philosophy that the government of the day, elected by the people to govern, is pursuing.

Now couple that with all kinds of checks and balances pursuant to Mr. Wright and the Deloitte Touche report, we might be able to have the right combination of the various interests that need to be balanced off in this regard.

Ms. Haverstock: — I find your comments interesting. I'm not going to go in that particular direction because it's going to veer away, really digress from what I had started off talking to you about, but I just want to make one comment.

I was present during the Crown Corporations Committee and it in fact is on the public record that Mr. Messer I think is far more leaning toward privatization of a particular Crown than probably most people in this room would care to think . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I think, I know I'm right. All we have to do is haul out the book, but then of course words don't mean much to people any more, written or otherwise.

I'm wondering if it would help if the government were to put on the table its overall plan so that there's a clear indication — and this may be in fact what you're sending over to me . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I'm saying an overall plan for all boards, commissions, Crowns, departments, and agencies so that . . . and looking at how they all fit into and can contribute overall to this plan.

I'm really asking, what's in place now as far as ensuring that a more holistic approach is used?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well with respect, I think this is a very positive suggestion, and I was asking my deputy minister, perhaps we could put together something which is readily understood in this context. I'd try it again and won't repeat, in the interests of time, what I told my friends in the Tory Saskatchewan Party, but the current transition is well under way now.

No more ministers on the boards, different kinds of boards, more commercially oriented, accountability through the CIC

minister and the CIC board, with internal management controls à la Mr. Wright. I think that the notion of a schematic chart plus description of mandate is something which has a lot of merit. We are implementing it because basically the documentation does exist. It's a couple of feet in height based on the Crown review study. But as I understand, your suggestion is we should put this into something which is a discernible 30, 40, 50-page document that can be debated and reviewed.

And I would say to you that I will ask . . . as Dr. Marchildon is taking some note of this, we'll raise this with Mr. Wright and Mr. Lingenfelter to see if it can be done.

The Chair: — Order. I just want to remind the Premier not to use names of sitting members. Yes . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Understood. The Premier recognized it.

Ms. Haverstock: — I thought that was one of the more decent references to members in the House this afternoon, actually calling them by their original name. I thought that was not appropriate by rules of the House, but more civilized than some things I've heard today.

I want to finish off this one section of questioning with a particular question regarding what transpired with Channel Lake, and then I will try to bring to some conclusion my other questions surrounding the Crowns.

In your opinion, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Premier, what was missing that allowed this whole thing to happen? It isn't simply things that were present; it was probably things that weren't. And I'm wondering, in the overall analysis, if your government has been able to come to some conclusion about . . . was there something in particular not in place that needed to be?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well I have to make this general observation. We try very hard, all of us, in our individual lives to not make mistakes, but we do make mistakes. And we make them in private business. We make them in public business. I don't want to minimize it when I use the word mistakes, because there were some pretty serious mistakes made.

I don't know if I can summarize this into one or two conclusion statements, for two reasons. My first reason is that the Crown Corporations Committee is still continuing its examination, and I think we should await their suggested solutions or ideas as to what went wrong and how it could be improved.

And secondly, in slight contradiction of what I've just said, there are a set of suggested recommendations in Deloitte Touche and CIC which point to some of the errors which were made. And those I think need to be further tested by further evidence and witnesses, and we'll await the report and then we might be able to distil the one or two that are there.

But I don't think I should go any further than that because if I do I'll be prejudging what the committee would be reporting.

Ms. Haverstock: — Before I move on, I want to make a specific comment about something that you just did that I don't think enough people do. And I know that there were political reasons why, at least people could claim there are political reasons why the proclamation was made about Channel Lake

and information brought forward and so forth. But it is absolutely imperative that people in leadership roles have the courage to do what you did again today, and that was to admit that something went wrong, that mistakes can be made. And I don't think that's done often enough to say, this happened, it was wrong, we're sorry, and this is what we've done to fix it.

So I want to take this opportunity to be on the public record of saying thank you for doing that, because I think it's woefully lacking in society overall, let alone amongst people who are in leadership roles.

Moving on to public planning of Crowns, I'm wondering why I can't obtain a summary of the corporate plan for each Crown. And why don't Crowns provide the public with a summary corporate plan when every other . . . and in the case of electric utilities across Canada actually do. And perhaps this is something that the deputy minister can make note of as well.

If I may, I'll just let you know what I can access. I can go on the Internet and get New Brunswick's plan; I can go on the Internet and get Quebec Hydro's five-year plan, and so forth. In fact the federal government gives awards and they're given for the best summary plan and they're also given for the best annual report provided to parliament. It's in this very city, not that long ago, that the Farm Credit Corporation based in Regina won the award for the second year in a row.

So why is it that people in other provinces are able to have greater access to information about their Crowns and their overall plan than we are in Saskatchewan?

(1745)

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I think, Mr. Chairman, my response and defence would be that with respect to accounting and financial bookkeeping and financial records, that those have improved in the last several years enormously and substantially as the Provincial Auditor and his office himself has stated.

You're speaking to another dimension of the issue which is forward planning, and here I think that we do have work to do. I'm advised by the Deputy Premier and the Minister in charge of CIC that one of the works in progress at the officials' level of CIC is the notion of annual general meetings of shareholders open to the public, whereby there would be a plan or set of plans as to where individual Crowns are headed, for discussion and for debate. And if that is in fact the case, which makes a lot of sense to me, that would go a long way toward I think meeting the comment and suggestion that you make.

Right now it isn't ready, and I can only say that what we're doing here . . . to be very candid with you about this, this is just myself speaking. I guess I can't do it on a personal basis because as Premier you speak for the government.

But I think we've been caught behind the curve with respect to Crown corporations a little bit. We've been running Crown corporations with ministers as chairs, vice-chairs sometimes, and they've been closely held and kept closely as part of commercial activity and also public policy activity. And there's a good argument to made that a Crown is a commercial entity, but it also has a social dimension to it.

And now we see a world which is competitive, global, interconnected, deregulated as we see through SaskTel for example. And this is where we're behind the curve a bit in terms of governance issues.

Channel Lake is an example, question of forward planning, accountability, yardsticks of measurement and the like. The Crown review started us on the direction of getting ourselves modernized and updated. We've got a lot of work yet to do. Channel Lake has added a little more fire power behind the urgency for doing it, but it is a large task which can't be done over night.

And I guess my answer to you is that if what the Deputy Premier tells me is true — I have no reason to doubt that it isn't true — then with good reporting numbers we should be in a much better position. I can't say when, but a few years or shorter down the road than we are today, although we have made great strides in the meantime anyway.

Ms. Haverstock: — I thank you very much for your response, and I'm hoping that when there's going to be this movement toward looking at more holistic approach with boards and commissions and departments and agencies and Crowns that this might be one thing that will enhance that whole process as well. The best way to know where you're going is to have an articulated plan. And if everybody knows where they're going, on the same journey to the same end and how they fit into that overall plan, I think it makes a substantive difference.

I want you to know that the sorts of things that are available on the Internet are not things that disclose sensitive information, but they most certainly are worthwhile to look at. And I see no reason, with the kind of talent and expertise that we have in Crowns here, that we aren't doing it.

I take it . . . although I don't access to the copy of Mr. Wright's comments yet, I am interested in exploring the role of the board of directors. And I'm assuming that much of what he discusses there or makes reference to and perhaps suggestions for relate to precisely what I'm talking about, so this might be redundant.

I'm wondering what the view of your government is for the responsibility of boards of directors and how this relates to the view of the responsibilities of cabinet, of CIC overall, and of the role of the CEO.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — This, Mr. Chairman, is a very wide-ranging question. I don't mean to be critical of it by saying it. But being wide ranging, I'm not sure that it can be answered in a very succinct and precise way.

But I will endeavour to do so by giving you my interpretation of the lines of communication and authority and responsibility in the future, I'm talking about, as opposed to the past. In the past, as we know, we had a minister in charge of Power, and he answered questions or she answered questions on Power, SaskTel, and so forth.

Now with the new system, what is happening is as follows. Number one, the boards will be more entrepreneurial and more commercially dictated and mandated. The boards will be composed of people with expertise in this area. This is not to be

critical of any of the board members who have served so well in previous years for previous governments, but I think in the competitiveness of the society today, they have to bring a certain expertise.

We hope to have Chairs of the boards of directors who bring expertise and knowledge of the business world involving labour relations and involving human resources and the whole plethora of issues, even as far as environment is concerned.

We are moving closer to the question of director's liability, which is somewhat akin to director's liability in private law, where directors are ultimately responsible to shareholders, although this is a different kind of an animal that we're talking about in terms of a public Crown corporation. But we want to be able to, in the day-to-day management, let's say in the case of Power Corporation, for the board of directors — who by the way will have greater control over the CEO and the officials because it will be less politicized — to be able to do the kind of things economically and managerially and entrepreneurially that should be done in the interest of the corporation.

And that means more freedom. It may mean more risk. It may mean some winners and some losers. It may mean some political difficulty for us in the losses. It rarely benefits us if there's a political win on a good investment, but nonetheless, that is the way to go if we believe in public ownership because they've got to expand in the world of tomorrow.

Now how do we square the circle without simply saying, through privatization, they're free as a bird to do whatever they want to do? And the way to do that is accountability, democratic accountability, and under the current system that will lie with the minister in charge of the Crown Investments Corporation. As Mr. Wright says in his statement, which I have now delivered over to you, this will be a large oversight board, not a micromanagement board. It will not be a day-to-day management board, but an oversight board and it will answer to the House, through the minister, major areas of policy. Note the words I use, major areas of policy, respecting individual Crowns.

If the legislature descends into, and I use that word advisedly, the Minister of CIC under the new arrangement getting into micro answers about micro issues — if I can describe it that way — micromanage the situation, then we're back into the old system. And if we're back into the old system and we're going to get all the political heat for all the decisions we should or should not have done in Guyana, you name it, then we might as well go back to the board members and the politicians there. I don't think that's the way the Crown corporations of tomorrow, publicly owned in Saskatchewan, are going to thrive and survive.

So the squaring of the circle is in the way that I've described it to you and the reporting mechanism to the House will be in the way that I've described it to you. One alternative of course, which is what I know that the Saskatchewan Tory Party believes in, perhaps even the Liberal Party believes in, as it's currently structured in any event, is out and out privatization. That would be a simple answer. It's gone to the TSE (Toronto Stock Exchange) and all the private rules of governance and direction and mandate apply. We don't subscribe to that. Our

Crown review says that it should not be the case and thus, this is the mechanism that we're generally putting into place in order to achieve our objectives.

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Premier . . . Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, there's a decision-making grid provided to boards which outlines when they assumed advisory roles versus when they have decision-making authority. And on the following key issues, I'd like to know which of the four groups, the board . . . I'll start again . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . All right, this isn't that long. In fact you can say A, B, C, D . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Okay.

There's a decision-making grid provided to boards which outlines when they assume an advisory role versus when they have decision-making authority. And on the following key issues, which of the four groups — the board, CIC, the cabinet, or the CEO — has the decision-making authority and responsibility for: (1) utility rate hikes, and (2) the hiring of the CEO?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — With respect to the utility-rate hikes, theoretically — and I don't mean this in any . . . I mean it in its best sense of the word, theoretically — that should be in the hands of the board of directors of the Crown corporation involved, and theoretically it is. The tradition has been, however, over many, many years — Conservative, Liberal, and NDP, and CCF — that the rate-hike increase gets a cabinet oversight.

Now comes the problem of what level of other additional oversights should there be. Some have argued for a public utilities review commission, take it right out of the hands of cabinet, and for that matter out of the hands of the board of directors. Some have argued, put it in the legislative utilities review commission — a LURC.

Some have, because I have felt both of those two alternatives are flawed, 45-day review, which the opposition says is a sham. Ultimately there is, so long as the shareholder is the Government of Saskatchewan . . . Sorry, the shareholders are represented by the elected members of this Legislative Assembly on the behalf of the shareholders, the taxpayers, we have to have a say on this kind of an issue.

Now traditionally CEOs have been, theoretically, approved by the board of directors, evaluated by the board of directors, maintained by the board of directors. But CEOs are in many ways like deputy ministers. I said in response to the Saskatchewan Party earlier this afternoon, every premier I know of — at least I know in the case of premier Blakeney, and I believe this is good public administration — the premier always reserves onto himself or herself the right to consult and to approve or disapprove of the appointment of a deputy minister, as he does or she does with respect to the appointment of a minister. Just the way it works federally and the way it works provincially.

And the purpose of it is that there'd be cohesion, a collectivity, a collegiality, in the decision-making matters which pertain to either the regular business of government or the regular business of Crowns or the individual business of Crowns.

Now that, with respect to deputies, I suspect will remain. With respect to Crown corporations, I think that'll be greatly diminished. Why? Because as I've explained, greater independence, no political interference, no political chairs, commerciality, dictates of commerciality — future CEOs are going to be the choices of the boards more than they will be of cabinet or premiers, as final decision-making operations.

Can we take the break now . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . You have another question?

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Chair, I have one final question in this section and I thought perhaps what you might want to do, if it's at all possible, is simply finish that question. And then we can proceed with the remainder after the break. Is that to your satisfaction?

Mr. Premier, the SaskPower board of directors seems to have been painted with a brush that they were negligent. And in your opinion, can a board of directors of a Saskatchewan Crown ever have the responsibility for all key decisions when in fact they have to be cabinet decisions? And it begs the question, should Crown boards be reconstituted and called advisory boards?

With that I will simply place the last couple of questions that fit with this. Is it not true that as Premier and with your cabinet that the decisions must be final? And should we not be moving to a place where cabinet clearly states this ultimate responsibility, because if not, then there most certainly is an argument for privatization.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well by the way I've just been handed by, again, the minister in charge of CIC, Deputy Premier . . . the CIC '97 annual report on page 34 talks about new initiatives on governance. I can mail that to . . . not mail it but deliver it to the hon. member opposite and it outlines the pre-Crown-review procedure and the new governance model procedure for further and greater elaboration of what I've tried to say. And where I've been in error verbally in my report, take the printed word as the one that applies.

With respect to cabinet, the truth of the matter is that cabinet is very, very, very limitedly involved in major decisions with respect to the Crown corporations. Channel Lake is an example. We get involved in certain purchases over a certain dollar value. We get involved in the appointment of the boards of directors. We have had, as I've explained, the traditional role in the appointment of the CEOs. We do have some influence on rates, or discussion of rates, and that's about it.

The corporation in 99 per cent of their work operates as a corporation, qua corporation, and has its board of agenda meetings dealing with those issues.

So I don't see it as being so intrusive into the integrity and the independence of the board of directors of Crowns by cabinet that we might as well just simply take it over totally or, in the alternative, privatize it.

It is always a tricky balance of making sure that you have the commerciality and proper decision-making processes with accountability to you folks, to the shareholders who own the Crown corporations. It's not an easy circle to square and not an

easy balance.

(1800)

And there have been, if I may say so, not portraying myself as any expert in this area . . . But when I retired from politics momentarily in 1982, with the consent of the majority of the voters in my constituency, I spent some time with the Canadian Institute of Resources Law in Calgary, Alberta, studying governance of Crown corporations and, particularly, studying the case study of the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan. I don't say it's a great piece of written work, but nonetheless there are four or five published pieces about this. And others who preceded me describe the complexity of . . . the TVA is an example — Tennessee Valley Authority down in the United States — another example of the governance roles. There will be these difficulties that always ensue.

All I'm saying is we're moving in a different way for the reasons that we are, and that should eliminate those areas where there's a perceived, how shall I describe it, a perceived conflict.

Could I ask members of the House for a three-minute break?

The Chair: — The Premier has requested leave for a three-to five-minute recess. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

The Assembly recessed for a period of time.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will begin by thanking you for the comments that you've made this evening and I will go over *Hansard* with great interest, Mr. Premier.

I have one question that arose from something that I had submitted as a written question during this session. And I was somewhat perplexed by the response. And I think that you'll have an opinion about it as well, Mr. Premier. I'm going to read the question and I'm going to read the answer. This is the second time I submitted this question to the government for a response and I will tell you that I still don't have a response even though they gave me, supposedly, a response the first time.

To the Government: As of March 31, 1997 the reported accumulated deficit in the Summary Financial Statements was \$9.3 billion. (1) What is the forecasted accumulated deficit of the government as a whole (not just the General Revenue Fund) as of March 31, 1998? (2) What is the forecasted accumulated deficit of the government as a whole for March 31, 1999?

The second response that I received from your government, Mr. Premier, stated as follows:

(1) The information is not known because the Provincial budget is based on the operations of the General Revenue Fund, not the summary financial statement entity. As indicated on page 10 of the Estimates and page 64 of the budget Address, the Provincial budget forecasts an accumulated deficit of \$7.194 billion as of March 31, 1998,

and \$7.088 billion at March 31, 1999.

And, of course, as you know, those numbers are not based on the overall accumulated deficit of the government but rather again a repeat of the General Revenue Fund. The answer to number (2) stated simply, "Same as above."

Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, do you believe that your government should be able to answer what the forecasted accumulated deficit for the government as a whole, is?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chair, I think the answer in general terms is . . . obviously there can be an answer given, an estimate, perhaps in a direct answer, if you combine the GRF (General Revenue Fund) with the Crown corporation debt which is not part of this number. It however works out that as a matter of long-standing practice in the development of the budget, the answer is truthful; we work on the question of the GRF. I know your question is, give us the cumulative total. We've been bandying about — bandying about has been a bad word — but I've been using a cumulative total now for quite a number of years. I think it's at about 12 billion if my memory serves me correctly, counting the Crown corporations.

And I think we can provide that easily enough . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Pardon me . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No that . . . Well he's asking whether it's gross versus net. The answer is we have more assets in the Crown than we have debt in the Crown, so the figure that I'm taking out is the debt on the Crown and adding it to the 9.3 billion figure that you have, which roughly approximates 12 to \$13 billion.

We can do that, and in fact in some ways the rating agencies when they come by to rate our debt capacity, they say there's no difference between the GRF or the CIC cumulative Crown debt. It's just that in the accounting of the circumstances of our budget, we have traditionally and always carried out this way. Not a very good answer. Maybe it's time to put it in some sort of cumulative approach, but that's the way it's worked.

Ms. Haverstock: — Well I'll sum this area up. I don't have a number of questions on this. I just found it somewhat confusing and couldn't understand why it was such a tough question.

I know that there have been a lot of concerns about not having pension liabilities taken into consideration when we're dealing with the overall accumulated deficit for the province.

But one of the things that the government has done since 1991 for which it has received, I think not only deserving credit but has been followed by other governments, is with the summary financial statements. They're tremendously useful. Far more valuable in fact than dealing with simply the numbers that we get from the budget.

And I just hope that in future that one would be able to just simply say, yes, this is how much the people of the province owe. However we can define what our assets are; these are the assets that we have. We're in a better position than we are in a bad position and get on with it. Because that's precisely what each and everyone of us has to do whether we're doing it as part of a small business — it's what corporations have to do, and individuals have to do. So I appreciate that you tried to answer

this question this evening.

I'm going to move now into the third area of questioning that I mentioned earlier. And it probably, Mr. Premier, will not surprise you at all that I'm going to talk with you about the disenfranchised widows and widowers of Saskatchewan.

And I'm going to begin by quoting from a letter that was sent to you three days ago. It was not simply sent to you, it was sent as well to the Minister of Finance, the Leader of the Official Opposition. It was sent to the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Health, and myself. I'm sorry, the bottom is cut off so I don't know if there were other people.

I'm just going to read a few paragraphs from this letter. I don't expect you to have it with you. And it's to the hon., I'll just say, the Minister of Labour.

(1815)

To date you've not committed yourself with a reply to the disenfranchised widows and it appears that this sitting of the legislature is coming to an end soon, thus anticipating an end to a reply to us.

The lives of most widows was so very difficult and in many cases nothing has changed except . . . years later. I was widowed on January 20, 1975, gave birth to my daughter on February 1, 1975, and had to undergo surgery February 23, 1975.

Today my five adult children can openly discuss how much their lives were affected by the death of their dad. To avoid concern, worry and sorrow to me, because of fear of losing another parent, they withheld their emotions until now when we all can talk about it freely.

My eldest daughter, aged 39 years, still refuses to visit her dad's grave site because she was robbed of a dad at the age of 15. Raising five children by myself was a real challenge — emotionally, financially, and spiritually. My only son gave up his dream of dentistry to avoid a financial burden to me.

The children and I had to give up many things in life that a two-parent family enjoys and often takes for granted. We feel robbed.

Today so many special interest groups, and in many cases, some who have contributed little to society, have become totally dependant upon government and society and this appears to be acceptable.

All Canadians are supposed to be equal under Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Why have the Saskatchewan disenfranchised widows been singled out as unworthy of equality?

Now I'm not going to read the rest of this letter. But I want you to know that I know that your Minister of Labour, and perhaps your own office, and numerous other people who are members of this Legislative Assembly, have received letter, upon letter, upon letter like this, where it really does put the human face on

what is a tremendous injustice.

When the Workers' Compensation Board legislation was changed in 1985, the widows and widowers of workers killed on the job and remarried prior to 1985 had their pensions revoked upon remarriage. Those who remarried after 1985 continue to receive their pensions to this very day

The widows who remarried after 1985 were in effect disenfranchised and discriminated against on the basis of a marital status prior to a certain date. The widows have petitioned the Workers' Compensation Board, and by extension the Government of Saskatchewan, for the restoration of benefits for surviving spouses.

And while the restoration of the benefits is a major objective, the primary reason for the petition is the fact that these people — primarily women — believe that their constitutional rights have been denied.

Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, subparagraph (1) calls for "non-discrimination." And given these circumstances, Mr. Premier, I would very much appreciate — as well as all of the people who have worked so hard to bring this issue to the attention of the public and your government — I would like you to state on the public record your government's position in dealing with the disenfranchised widows and widowers of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Chairman, there's no doubt about it that the hon. member from Greystone has certainly brought this to our attention and to the public attention — there can be no doubt about that — as she has done again this evening.

You asked the position of the government. I can give you the position of the government only as of this moment. And it is that the Workers' Compensation Board in assessing the issue of its statutory obligations and rights and powers, in the context of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in the context of what other jurisdictions may or may not be doing . . . completed a report on or about April 24 of 1998 — that's approaching two months from now.

There are, as well, actuarial reports involving Watson and Wyatt, the two people who were doing the actuarial report. And what I'm advised by my officials is that the Department of Labour, Justice — because it's a constitutional and human rights issue — they are now in the process of preparing a recommendation to be moved to cabinet at the earliest possible date as to how to resolve this issue.

And it's a tough one for me to answer because the argument based on principle with respect to equality under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms might make it a black and white consideration — might, I underline that word might. On the other hand, it also carries with it enormous implications to the philosophy and principle of the WCB (Workers' Compensation Board), and with it financial implications which attach thereto.

British Columbia has moved, but under different circumstances — I don't mean to diminish their movement — but they've moved under different circumstances; other provinces are in the

same position that we're in. And all I can say is that because of your concern, because of the issue, it is being moved forward. Not as quickly as you would like or those who have written the letter — I have not seen this letter but I'll read it — it's being moved forward for an early deliberation and decision by cabinet. I can't give you a date but it is a commitment by the Minister of Labour that it'll be on the agenda, our agenda, as soon as he can be ready to prepare a recommendation.

Ms. Haverstock: — Well I think that you should know, Mr. Premier, that your words this evening are probably the only sense of hope that any one of these women has heard to date.

When they approached the Workers' Compensation Board on October 27 of 1997, they were led to believe that there would be not only action taken but that it would come much more promptly than it has. They were under the understanding that specific things were being done according to a specific timeline. And I don't expect that people would have unrealistic expectations when they have waited for some time, if they weren't given unrealistic expectations.

I know what they have told me in terms of what would be done by December. It doesn't mean the monies would come forward, but there most certainly would be action taken. Then they were told February, then they were told March, they were told that the actuary would be done by a particular date and then they were put off again. So the fact that you are indicating that the minister is determined to bring this before the cabinet is something that will have these people feeling a great sense of relief — that there will be some discussion at that level of government about their situation.

Over the last nine months, these people have actually undertaken themselves to search for widows from Saskatchewan who would fit into this category. And their responses to date total 45 women. Now the actuarial report indicates that there is a total number of widows at about the 302 level. This is . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . 304. This is the number I think that the Minister of Labour raised this past week.

Now that total, Mr. Premier, I want you to know, goes back to the year 1930. So if a woman were widowed at the age of 30 in 1930 she would be 98 years old now. It is on the basis of these 304 files that the Workers' Compensation Board has arrived at a figure of \$74 million in compensation. The number of 304 raises a number of questions that the Workers' Compensation Board and I believe the minister responsible have not addressed regardless of my questions.

And these questions are how many widows of that number are still living? How many widows of this number did not remarry and are still in receipt of their pensions? And I mean, one could go on and on given the restrictions that were placed on people whether there were common-law relationships and so forth.

I guess, Mr. Premier, what I'd like to know is, if the Workers' Compensation Board has done an analysis to be able to answer these kinds of questions. I think that it's very, very important that this information be made available to people who are sort of living this night and day and day and night.

And if they haven't done this kind of analysis to know who continues to be in receipt of their pensions, who are people who are no longer with us and so forth, it begs the question if they haven't done it, then why haven't they done it? And I'm hoping that what you will do is to give instruction or some guidance to the Minister of Labour and have him instruct the Workers' Compensation Board to do the analysis and provide these results to the widows.

I know what it is they want. And what I want to do is to share that with you because they believe that they have been very, very diligent in collecting information, collating information, and providing support to one another . . . That is, really made it possible for them to go through all of the times that they've been experiencing lately . . . and to try to help overcome — through a sense of camaraderie and the fact that they have had a common tragic experience — to try to overcome some of what their history has brought to them.

I know that what they want is access to this information. I know that what they want is not only what they believe is deemed morally and legally theirs, but they want to know that there's movement going forward. They want to have access to the information that has been accumulated. And they are going to ask I know, and be willing to negotiate as well because they most certainly aren't people who are thinking, oh gosh, we're going to come into some windfall. Let's just rip off, you know as much money as we can. I haven't heard that from anyone.

What they want is to say, for those of us who are clearly identified and have been ready, willing, and able to move forward now, will you please consider us and settle with us? Not to the exclusion of others who may come about in future but with the 45 people who actually do exist. I'm going to skip through this and . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, please.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I'll undertake to the hon. member that I will ask Dr. Marchildon to contact the WCB officials and to do the analysis that you have described for us in this exchange. I want to put one caveat to this — unless there is some legal prohibition or impediment, we will be in communication with at least you, as the person who has raised this, as quickly as possible, to answer the question of the evaluation of the numbers. And the earlier comment I made respecting the principle and the issues of principle still applies.

(1830)

Ms. Haverstock: — You're making me happier as the night goes on. You're either getting weary and not knowing what you're saying or you're just honing in on what makes me a happy person.

I do want to raise something that is of grave concern to them and get your comments on this. One of the things that all of these individuals have said who were present one day . . . And by the way, I didn't invite them here. I was very pleased that they came on their own fruition and I was delighted that the Minister of Labour got to his feet during introduction of guests and invited them to meet with him. I had no intention of even asking him if he would meet with them. And it seemed to be a very good meeting. I think a lot of things were stated that needed to be. But one of the things they're concerned about is

that delays mean that there is a strategy to simply wear them down and that they're very concerned that they're going to be forced into litigation, as what happened in British Columbia with the government there.

I don't know if you know how that unfolded in B.C., but the government not only forced the disenfranchised widows there into litigation, the government lost their case and then they appealed it and they lost it again in the Supreme Court of B.C. . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, I'm delighted to hear that. That's not the way it's been written up and I'm sure that you're information's correct.

I guess the more important thing is this: that if we could have from you some reassurance to them that there is no intent that people who are already — many of whom are elderly, many have no resources and many are in ill health — that this is something that they will not have to be concerned with, taking their own government to court.

If they could have that reassurance from you this evening, I know that it would make a tremendous, tremendous difference to their level of stress.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — That's a tougher question to answer, Madam Chair, because I need to take advice from legal people. I hate to sound legalistic on an issue which really is an issue of compassion and rights, but I do have to take some advice from them as to what impediments, if any, there may or may not be to this solution that the member advocates.

I'm just going through some briefing notes here which are not very helpful to me. I do know that under our statute there is a Limitation of Actions Act, and that may be an impediment. I don't know whether that requires an amendment.

All that I can tell you is that as a general policy we don't like to be sued. We don't like to have our people sue us. It doesn't make sense. As a general principle, as a lawyer, when I practised law, all long these many years ago, I took the position that, not a perfect settlement was better than a doggone good lawsuit. If you try to work on principles with a little bit of give and take and compromise and on what is the correct and proper thing to do, we can come to a conclusion.

So my answer would be to say what I said to you earlier, namely, we will ask the Minister of Labour to speed up the recommendation to cabinet on the principles of the issue. In the interim, and before that time, we will ask the WCB to give the analysis of the 302 as you've described it, which is a very powerful argument the way you describe it in the computation. I want to see if they've done that.

And with respect to the question about no lawsuits, our hope would be that it would not be a lawsuit.

But I cannot guarantee that, I have to be clear about that. I simply don't have legal advice in this regard. But I want to communicate our intent to see if we can come to some satisfactory resolution of the issue.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would just simply like to say to the Premier that I know that these individuals

would enter into dialogue with you, your government, or any representatives thereof, any time, any place, at anyone else's convenience actually.

And I want to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to you for your candour this evening and your cooperation. And I look forward to future opportunities for discussion.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, coming back to an issue that you were raising earlier on this evening and asking the question about . . . Mr. Minister or Mr. Premier . . . Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, do we have any private clinics operating currently in the province of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Chair, the answer is yes, but . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes a big but. We introduced legislation . . . we introduced legislation which said they had to be publicly administered. You people opposed it.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, I thank the Premier for acknowledging the fact that we do have private clinics in the province because certainly the minister . . . the Premier will know that in the Saskatoon Health District manual on page 129 we do have the Gimbel eye clinic that is currently operating and providing a service in the province of Saskatchewan — a limited service, I might add. If I'm not mistaken, Mr. Chair, or Deputy Chair, I don't believe it provides the full services that the Gimbel Eye Clinic in Calgary provides.

Also, Mr. Chair, in a very recent article, "Straight Talk", on Saturday, June 6, the article talks about a crisis in health care . . . but also brings into the debate about the crisis in health care about services that the Free Trade Medical president Doug Hitchlock claims he can virtually find almost anywhere in North America for Canadian citizens.

He also . . . the article says:

What he and others like him are suggesting is a combination of public and private health care, where brokers would help insurance companies and worker's compensation boards cut their costs through finding medical services in the U.S.

Another wrinkle on that idea might be to establish a private MRI clinic in Saskatchewan, an idea Hitchlock says he's already talked to Saskatchewan health care administrators about.

Mr. Minister, Mr. Premier, are you aware of any discussions that have taken place with the Department of Health in regards to a private MRI clinic in Saskatchewan? Are you aware of any discussion in that regard?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I'm not aware of discussion with respect to a MRI in that regard. I do not deny that it has taken place; I do not agree that it has taken place; I simply do not know.

But the principle of my argument, which I am responding to the member of the Saskatchewan Party is this: all of these so-called private clinics which you are trying to justify as your health policy, by our legislation, need to be publicly administered.

No two-tiering, because one of the five principles of medicare, which your convention calls mindless slogans, apart from universality and comprehensiveness, is public administration. You could not operate the system outside of public administration without it being penalized by the Canada Health Act. The Canada Health Act, being a law of Canada, says if you break the five principles you get penalized. We've had little dust-ups in Alberta in this regard from time to time.

There is where the fundamental difference between us and medicare and health care is, and you are. You argue because these "private clinics" exist, and conveniently ignore, under public administration, that somehow we condone it. We don't. We condone the five principles of the Canada Health Act, one of which is public administration.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, and Mr. Premier, I find it interesting when you talk about public administration and the types of services that are administered or aren't administered, and the reasons for some of the insured procedures that are available, some that aren't insured, because, Mr. Premier, we'll go back to an election . . . two elections ago where almost two-thirds of the province of Saskatchewan suggested that we should be de-insuring abortion funding at that time.

I look in the most recent annual statistics report, Saskatchewan Health '96-97, and it talks about a number of procedures that have been de-insured over time, Mr. Premier. So it seems to me that there . . . while we can argue on one hand that the under the Canada Health Act you cannot, you cannot take services or not insure services, there seems to be a number of services even since you've been in government that have been de-insured in the province of Saskatchewan, which certainly goes against the fact of your argument—even the fact of de-insuring publicly funded abortions. But, Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, in regards to the Gimbel Eye Clinic operating in Calgary, Alberta it seems to me that that clinic is certainly providing a very positive function. I do not know if that is a publicly administered clinic but it certainly provides and meets a need.

And indeed residents of Saskatchewan continue to go to Calgary because of the fact that even the Gimbel Eye Clinic that is available here in Saskatoon does not provide all the services that are provided in Calgary.

I think, Mr. Premier, and whether you agree or not, we can agree to disagree on this. Mr. Premier, I think it's time, as the article says, it's time to stop harping about sacred cows and find solutions that the province either can't or won't look for.

Mr. Premier, I will not dispute the fact that you have stood for a long time and you've argued the principles of medicare. You've argued the principles of an accessible and universal health care program. You've stood in this Assembly and you've argued about any changes at all, that they would be seen as private, that they would not work.

I think the fact that people across this province, just by leaving the province to find the quality of care they're looking for, have shown that some of those services can work or are working to meet that specific need.

And, Mr. Premier, as well if I'm not mistaken, in regards to the

chiropractic service, the province insures a level of care and I believe the patient does pay for some of the services. I'm not exactly sure about the Gimbel Eye Clinic in Saskatoon, whether all of the care that is currently being offered there is insured or whether or not the patient pays for some of those services.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, I had a discussion with your colleague, the Minister of Health, the other day in regard to a number of issues and one of the discussions centred around specific diseases or conditions where you may not have a lot of individuals in Saskatchewan that are suffering with that.

And we talked about the fact of interprovincial agreements where we start working with other provinces. And if provinces have the expertise, have the medical services available, have the specialists who have worked in those fields, that rather than the province of Saskatchewan taking its few resources and starting a similar clinic but really not having enough patients to justify the clinic, that we look at these alternatives, that we work together with other provinces, other jurisdictions, so that we indeed at the end of the day, Mr. Premier, can provide — Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier — can provide that level of health care and health service that the public of Saskatchewan are looking for.

And, Mr. Premier, in our discussions certainly with the Minister of Health, the Minister of Health in his opinion as well had indicated that there might be areas or avenues that we could pursue. I think those are some of the discussions we need to get into. I think that some of the argument about the sacred cow, Mr. Premier, that we talk about, the fact that we're so tied ideologically in this province to a certain form of health care, that we are limiting the ability that Saskatchewan residents have to access quality health care. And rather than tying up the few dollars we have in continuing to provide all the services, let's begin to work with other jurisdictions, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Premier, I think, if you will, you could even give some leadership in that matter. Mr. Premier, you could take the lead in that matter. You could say, we in Saskatchewan have built a health care system that we believe is just probably the best health care system. And certainly that's what you would argue, while many residents say it's going downhill.

Mr. Premier, you could certainly, by looking at some . . . working together with other jurisdictions and looking at reaching out, we could indeed build a health care system that is not just tied to Saskatchewan, but, Mr. Premier, is reaching out, not only providing services for residents of Saskatchewan, not only addressing the waiting-lists, but is giving Saskatchewan people the most optimum quality health care program we can offer. And those are some of the suggestions that the Minister of Health and I had. I just wanted to make certain as well, Mr. Premier, that you were aware of those.

And I think there is some very good, positive methods of health care delivery that we can look at without always saying, the only way we can deliver it . . . and because we don't have the money, we de-insure more services.

Mr. Premier, let's look at building and offering our citizens access to quality health care, whether it's delivered in the city of Regina, whether it's delivered in a hospital in Saskatoon or Humboldt. If that service is . . . and it isn't feasible for us to

start our own research and try to get specialists in, Mr. Premier. Let's not bury our heads in the sand and say we can't look at working with other jurisdictions.

(1845)

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Premier, when you look at, when we talk about health care, we talk about closure of the Plains health care centre, and for the past number of months there's been a major debate taking place in this province in regards to the closure of the Plains health care centre.

Mr. Premier, over the period of time we have been asking you to free your members and to give them an opportunity to vote freely in regards to the closure of the Plains health care centre. Now we see the member from Regina South . . . You have argued on a number of occasions, Mr. Chair, the Premier has argued on a number of occasions that you have had that vote. You've had a free vote in caucus. I've just quoted to you earlier, some of the discussion that a former colleague of yours had, and his views regarding that open vote.

You've said that the people of the province had an opportunity to vote in the 1995 election, but we have examples where even some of your own colleagues currently sitting in this Assembly stood at Plains rallies and said that they would, if elected, they would stand up and they would stand for the . . . to maintain the current position of the Plains health care centre.

Mr. Premier, it seems highly irregular to continue to argue that you provide open government; you provide opportunity for a free voice, but not allowing that free voice to take place. And if there's a place, Mr. Chair, for that free voice to take place, this is the place for it to take place, not behind closed doors.

Whether it's our caucus, your caucus, or the Liberal caucus or any other caucus, that is not . . . Well we could argue that we do have the free votes, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, I think you will also acknowledge, yes. But when you leave the caucus, you generally leave with the consensus that was reached, while it may not have been the view of all the members.

And on many occasions I'm sure, Mr. Premier, if there was the opportunity to have even an ability to speak in this Assembly, it would certainly open up the door for many members, but not necessarily mean that the government is going to lose. In fact I would think that would be one way, Mr. Premier, of again showing to the public of Saskatchewan that you are listening and that you are indeed providing that open and that accessible . . . and showing access to your members and also showing some compassion and listening to what people are saying.

Mr. Premier, so in regards to the debate on the Plains, I acknowledged the fact that your government has probably, in fact I would have to say has made the final decision, the final choice. You've made that final choice and I suppose the next general election there will be a major debate. My guess is that the public will speak at that time.

A lot of people, even though they didn't take the time publicly to come out, Mr. Chair, and support a number of the meetings, have written letters. We've got thousands of letters in our office. People signed petitions. Other members of this

Assembly have had petitions and letters in regards to the Plains health care centre.

And so the proof again will be in the pudding whether or not you have made the right choice. And the public, when the opportunity to vote in the next general election, will certainly voice their opinions. And at that time it maybe a split decision as well for that matter, because I recognize the fact that the debate on the Plains health care centre certainly is more intense in this southern part of the province where the services of the Plains health care centre have been utilized.

Mr. Premier, when we look at health care and we talk about health care, for some reason and for far too long we probably associated health care in the last number of years, when we look at the closures of hospitals and the number of bed closures in the province of Saskatchewan, we've . . . Basically I would suggest, health care delivery has been almost the centre of the debate and focused in the two major centres of Regina and Saskatoon. And that's one of the reasons for the major debate on the Plains health care centre.

You talk to people in my constituency, Mr. Premier, and Mr. Chair, individuals who have lost acute care beds and looking for access to . . . I've chatted, Mr. Premier, with a number of ambulance attendants who have been forced, even as they've been on their way with the patient to the city, have been chased from one hospital to the next because of the lack of beds. And that's one of the reasons, Mr. Premier, it has become such an intense debate in the province of Saskatchewan and certainly in the southern part of the province.

Your minister has said 675 beds is all we need. That may be true; I don't really know. But I know, Mr. Premier, that unless you start addressing waiting-lists, unless you start addressing some of the major concerns the public have, I don't believe the public will buy 675 or the fact that the services are available and will be available in the General and the Pasqua as being good enough, or will they see the health system as really providing the needs and meeting the needs of the public of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Premier, as well I'd like to address an issue in regards to hepatitis C. Now your minister, the Minister of Health in this province, has been the Chair of the federal ministers. There's been an ongoing debate in regards to hepatitis C. And the people, individuals infected with hepatitis C, have been looking not only to the Minister of Health, but when it comes right down to the bottom line, Mr. Premier, they're looking to you. They're looking to the Prime Minister on the national scene. And I agree; the federal government has to accept its share of the responsibility as well.

Mr. Premier, when you look at the number of individuals who, prior to 1986 and since 1990, have been infected with hepatitis C and the fact that they're receiving no compensation, it's basically a slap in their face. What you're saying to them, Mr. Premier, is we really don't care.

Mr. Premier, not everyone has full-fledged hepatitis C, and right now I'm not exactly sure of the percentage that are directly affected and having major complications healthwise with regards to hepatitis C. But for anyone who is, Mr. Premier,

it not only becomes a medical problem they're facing, Mr. Premier, but it also becomes a financial burden, not only to them but to their families.

Mr. Premier, what leadership role are you taking to address the problems that individuals who have been infected with hepatitis C prior to '86 and since 1990, what, as far as what they can look forward to in the future to address the very real concerns that they have.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, the hon. member touched on many matters. I'll be very brief on the key ones as I see them.

I have no problems with interprovincial cooperation. The member may or may not know that the Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon, we basically do all of the cardiac surgery for babies, infants, from Winnipeg, Manitoba. That's how we cooperate; we do that. That's been going for some time. And any way that we can co-operate in this way, I'm all for it.

So there's not a question of being a sacred cow in that regard. Where the sacred cows come in is on the five principles of medicare. We don't think, we don't think that they're mindless slogans. We think public administration and the four other principles of the Canada Health Act are principles — principles at the heart of medicare.

Accessibility, yes accessibility, the fact we have the highest beds of anybody in this country, this province, per capita basis — the highest. And for months, you and the Liberals are going around spreading mistruths about the bed issue, like you do on all other issues.

So I mean you simply don't have any credibility in this regard whatsoever. *Maclean's* magazine tells us about highest bed capacity. The Plains decision's been made. We're moving ahead.

With respect to hepatitis C, we have an agreement which has been made by the federal, provincial, territorial governments which provides for 1986, and right now the deputy ministers are working at this to see if they can be further refined. Let's just let them do their work.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Premier, you talk about the number of beds available and you talk about how good our health care system is. Can you talk about what you're doing for hepatitis C victims. Mr. Premier, what leadership role are you taking on this issue?

Other premiers across the province have already come forward. They are taking a leadership role. Other health ministers are taking a leadership role. Is it true that Saskatchewan is one of the few provinces holding out in this whole debate about compensation for hepatitis C victims?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I mean how ludicrous can this question get — one of the few provinces. Eight out of ten provinces still support the original federal-provincial agreement — 8 out of 10 plus Ottawa. Ontario and Quebec, for their own reasons, have decided that there should be full complete compensation for pre-'86 and post-1990.

What's happening now, based on the Ontario and Quebec decision, is a further re-examination to see what options there are.

What leadership role are we taking? We're participating; we're offering our views and our input in its operation. Eight out of 10 provinces and one federal government and two territorial governments are on side with the deal which was made. We're working at what other options there may or may not be open to us and we'll consider them at the appropriate time.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Premier, as I'm aware, I believe other provinces are certainly looking at it. Well you say they're on side. It seems to me there is some indication that other provinces, if the federal government would make a move, would be more than willing to offer some support, additional support, to hepatitis C victims.

Mr. Premier, are not hepatitis C patients victims of a medical problem that they had no control over? Would it not be appropriate to show some compensation, recognize the problems that they have, especially for those who are dealing with the serious cases of full-blown hepatitis C, and recognize the difficulties that they're facing.

Mr. Premier, you could certainly give some leadership in this area. Why don't you take that opportunity to give leadership. I think, Mr. Chairman, what the Premier's afraid of, he's going to be standing and saying, if I were to do it for one, I'd have to do it for all.

Now I don't know what the total parameters were for the agreement between '86 and 1990, but I think, Mr. Premier, what the public are saying, we need to think of the people infected and not necessarily everyone. I think the program in place should be addressing those who now have to face the full-blown problems as a result of hepatitis C.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I've given my answer, Mr. Speaker. This government is very concerned about the patients and persons affected by hepatitis C. We have an agreement in place; two provinces want it examined and re-examined. The officials are examining it. We're contributing and taking part on it.

For the time being, the agreement stands: eight provincial governments, two territorial governments, and Canada. The two provincial governments which have pulled out of the agreement are coming to the table as the rest of us are. Let's see what those deliberations produce.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Premier, you recently announced with great fanfare the implementation or putting in place a new agency called SHIN or the Saskatchewan Health Information Network, talking about having access to medical information. And as I understand it, that whole process is on hold right now as we try to deal with and address concerns that the medical association is pointing out — the fear that they do not believe that SHIN itself will indeed be able to address the issue of confidentiality.

And in that regard, Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, I certainly commend the minister for having taken the time to at least listen to those concerns and review the whole program.

But first of all, Mr. Premier, in the budget, and in the budget of Health, of the \$88 million, \$20 million was targeted to the SHIN program of which now \$9 million for this year has been directed to 200 nursing positions. And as I indicated earlier, 200 nursing positions, I guess, which will have to wait and see whether or not they actually become a reality.

The question down the road is also once those positions are in place and using \$9 million out of the SHIN program, who is going, or how are you going to pay for the 200 nursing positions next year, Mr. Premier? Are you going to take a further \$9 million until you deplete the budget that's been put aside for the SHIN program?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — The hon. member perhaps doesn't understand the term that I shall use here, flow accounting. When we put a certain amount in there for budgeting for SHIN, this is expended as requirements would call it to be expended for the SHIN project.

For the moment we have, as the member's identified, an issue related to privacy. And in the consequence for the consultation of professionals when this issue has taken place and in the further consequence, the expenditures of SHIN have accordingly been slowed down.

Taking a look at that development, taking a look at the 200 nurses which will be delivered whatever the outcome of the June 24 by-election, we're not like Tories or Saskatchewan Party people; we deliver on our promises. Those nurses will be there. The funding will be looked after with SHIN as needed at the appropriate time.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, the public will believe it when they see it. What was your promise in the North Battleford by-election, Wasn't there a promise for a long-term care facility in that community? What has happened to that long-term care facility, Mr. Premier? Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, those are the types of reasons that people are very reluctant to believe you when you say you're going to do this. They will believe you when, as I've said earlier, when the proof is in the pudding.

(1900)

But coming back to the SHIN board, Mr. Premier. When you announced SHIN, at that time, shortly after the announcement of the SHIN program, you announced that you were looking for a CEO. But before the announcement really came out, we find that it appears one of your closest friends was given the job over 37 other candidates — Gord Nystuen.

Mr. Premier, earlier this afternoon you had indicated that we need professional and competent people to run the Crowns. You'd said that. You said that we have to start looking for . . . and that's what you were looking for when you were looking for leadership for the Crown corporations in the province of Saskatchewan back in 1991.

Well, Mr. Premier, we've been contacted by a couple of the individuals who did respond to the application or the tender for the position of CEO. And I'm not exactly sure about all of the candidates, or the other five short listed, but I've seen the

résumé of one of the individuals who interviewed for the job.

And my question is this, Mr. Premier, who do we want running the health information computer network? The one individual I'm talking about has a master's degree and Ph.D. in medical physics from the University of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Premier, is that what we're looking for, or are we looking for an NDP hack with experience in liquor and gaming. A former director of nuclear medicine at Winnipeg General Hospital, or your NDP bagman. A person who is recognized internationally for his contribution to the application of computers in nuclear medicine, and has extensive experience in the telecommunications and information technology sectors, or an NDP CEO who even with STC, actually shut down the computers because they had not sent out bills and we lost \$750,000.

Mr. Premier, if indeed what you were saying earlier this afternoon is true, if indeed you're looking for the most competent and professional person to run an agency like SHIN, Mr. Premier, why did you appoint Mr. Gord Nystuen to the CEO position versus a number of the applications, and in particular one of the applications we looked at which seems to have a résumé that would indicate he had all the qualifications — even more than the current CEO for SHIN.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, the member must have been out of the House when I answered that question earlier. The government did not appoint Mr. Gord Nystuen. The appointment of the CEO to SHIN was made by the SHIN board, headed by a conglomeration of people in the health care field — from SAHO, nurses, doctors, professional body. Those were all tabled there after due and careful application.

And the fact of the matter is that people have many qualifications, but when you're a CEO one of the key qualifications is to be able to manage — that is what is required. You may not be able to be manager, even though you have an expertise standing with respect to a particular field of academia. That was the decision of the SHIN board.

If somebody complains to you about the fact that they were overlooked, I would suggest that you or the complainant write directly to the SHIN board and ask for a re-review of the circumstances.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, it was very interesting because shortly after the question was raised, one of the individuals that had contacted us actually was in this province to give a presentation to a health forum in this province, which I think is a strong indication of the qualifications of the individual.

Now, Mr. Premier, I did ask the Minister of Health for a list of the board members. I did ask the Minister of Health for the criteria. And we're looking forward to receiving that information shortly so we can review it.

And, Mr. Premier, I find it very interesting that of 37 candidates, Gordon Nystuen would all of a sudden qualify. It seems to me, Mr. Premier, that when you're looking at 37 candidates and some very impressive resumes it's . . . well you

would argue that you had no control over it, that the board did it, made the recommendation and the decision. I don't know if the public buy it. I don't believe the public are buying the fact that Mr. Nystuen, whose long-time association with the NDP, didn't get the job simply because of his affiliation with the New Democratic Party.

Now Mr. Premier, when we talk about health care, we talk about the need for personnel to provide the services. We talked about the need for nursing positions. We just mentioned a moment ago about the 200 positions you plan to . . . you're putting the funding aside for. And there are a number of concerns about the fact as to whether or not we really have 200 individuals in the province of Saskatchewan to even fill the positions that are there. There's concerns by the profession itself. There's concerns by the medical profession. There's concerns by professionals in the health care field that we are losing quality people — we may not have the individuals who can fill all these positions.

Mr. Premier, I think part of that all boils down to the fact that the province of Saskatchewan, while you say, has the best health care system in the world, many people are having a major problem with that.

And when we argue that, Mr. Premier, you talk about . . . you talk about what we have to offer. You neglect to mention the fact that you moved the deductible on the drug plan from \$135 a year to \$1,700 a year and then 35 per cent above that. Many people in the province of Saskatchewan found themselves with major drug bills as a result of your changes. You call this wellness. You call this . . . you call this providing adequate service for the public of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Premier, at the end of the day, as I indicated earlier, the public will certainly judge, and they will determine whether or not you are providing that health care system.

Mr. Premier, what are you doing, what leadership are you providing to make sure that we indeed can attract physicians to this province to provide the services such as most recently the concern raised regarding oncologists and an individual in Saskatoon who required the services of an oncologist and was given such a short period of time to live unless his cancer was addressed immediately? What leadership are you doing to guarantee that we can bring quality physicians in to the province, that we can certainly attract individuals into the nursing profession so that we have individuals . . . so that we have the personnel in this province who will be able to respond to the notices that are going out, respond to the job applications, and indeed fill all these positions.

Mr. Premier, what leadership are you giving in that area?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — This government is providing all the leadership that it can provide, which is considerable.

By the way, before I give any specific answer on the physicians, let me tell the hon. member — he keeps on repeating the public will decide. And I am looking forward to that day — on a health care fight with your party, which has begun now — I am looking forward to that day.

And I was wanting, as I indicated today, and from this day forward, you will be asked repeatedly to tell us where the private health facilities that you're going to be providing will come from and what your resolutions are about.

So don't worry about that. You're going to be talking about health care and you're going to be talking about it, big time, — big time.

I'll give you one other guarantee too: 10 times out of 10, they'll never pick a Tory or a Saskatchewan Party person, or call yourselves whatever you will, and entrust you with health care, given the fact that you find the five principles of the Canada Health Act to be mindless slogans, given the fact that you support the private health care system.

Now what have we announced? We've announced increased support for rural doctors and incentives for rural doctors. The Minister of Health has announced his increase strategies to get specialists required in the province of Saskatchewan, much in competition not only with respect to other provinces but other jurisdictions in North America and the world in that regard. And in this context, we need to do more, but we do have a fairly good complement of doctors, surgeons who can provide what I believe is the finest form of health care in Canada, right here in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, if the Premier thinks we're trying to run from a debate on health care, he's sorely mistaken. And in fact, Mr. Chairman, the Saskatchewan Party is looking forward to that day.

And, Mr. Chairman, as well, the Premier will be surprised at how many people will be supporting the Saskatchewan Party when it comes to the debate on health care, and whether it starts in the rural, or where it starts, people have already started looking and they've already made their choice, and in many cases, Mr. Chairman, to the Premier, they are beginning to say in droves, no, to the Premier's form of wellness.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well that's fine. We'll welcome you on this very much. The debate is enjoyed, don't you be worried about that.

And this is one where again, I should let you have the last word because that's always the way it goes in estimates — you can have it. But believe me on this — believe me, my friend, on this one — and you know it . . . with all of the mistakes we may have made in health care . . .

An Hon. Member: — Oh you finally admitted you're making some.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — No. Yes, we've made mistakes. Not finally, I've said that right from day one. I don't know where you've been, but we've said that. We've made mistakes. For all of those that we have made, I will guarantee you one thing — the people of the province of Saskatchewan will entrust the New Democratic Party with the care and support and maintenance of the health care system ten times out of ten over the Saskatchewan Tory Party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, as you are well aware, Mr. Premier, there are many families in Saskatchewan who are struggling unbelievably due to poverty. In addition to this struggle that these families are going through, there are hundreds and hundreds of poor children and youth who do not have the benefit of caring parents. They are virtually left on their own to fend for themselves, and there are many homeless youth, Mr. Premier, youth who have been driven from their homes for one reason or another by their parents or who have run away from homes because they can no longer endure cruel and dehumanizing treatment.

Mr. Premier, many of these vulnerable young people are coerced into a form of slavery that I've spoken about before in this House. They are being sexually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually exploited through the child prostitution trade. Most of the young people who are subjected to this horrific treatment are in your constituency of Riversdale in Saskatoon and in the Deputy Premier's constituency in Regina Elphinstone.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, these destructive forces have an immediate and long-term devastating impact on our children. They send a message to children that they are worthless and that their body and their sexuality is valued only as a commodity. A sense of their own beauty is lost, Mr. Premier, and their ability to achieve self-fulfilment is forever suppressed because their experiences are so abhorrent.

Mr. Premier, every human being has been given the gift of choice, and it's a wonderful, wonderful gift. And it's up to each of us to use that gift in order to learn and gain wisdom and to appreciate how wonderful it is to be alive. But when a child's choices are limited, or an adult forces a child into a degrading and dehumanizing state, that child's life is forever diminished. And, Mr. Premier, she or he cannot ever come to realize the gloriously beautiful gift of life that they possess. At the end of my comments, Mr. Premier, you will be able to exercise choice.

Mr. Premier, the average life span of those in the prostitution trade is seven years — seven short years. For a child forced into prostitution at the age of 10 that means that by 17 they will die of disease. In many cases their bodies are decimated due to drug and alcohol abuse and they actually starve to death because of malnutrition. For others, Mr. Premier, physical abuse results in death.

It's up to us as adults to protect children, Mr. Premier. And it's the responsibility of governments to protect children from sexual exploitation whenever necessary and wherever possible. According to the United Nations declaration on the rights of the child, it's up to states, which means provinces and countries, to protect children from this heinous crime.

Mr. Premier, you claim to have taken the lead to impress on other provinces and the federal government the need for a national child benefit. Why, why will you not take the lead or at least follow the lead of other provinces in their efforts to eradicate the sexual abuse of children?

The Minister of Social Services stated in this House that proper

process must take place, and he tells me that that will take another year. That statement condemns hundreds of young girls and boys to a life of total misery. I don't understand, Mr. Premier, how anyone who knows that there are children being hurt beyond measure, within arm's reach, would not immediately do everything possible to protect them.

(1915)

Mr. Premier, the need to follow proper process was not considered when your government decided to hire 200 more nurses. Neither the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, nor SAHO, nor district health boards were consulted. That decision disregarded proper process. But as an excuse for inaction to help children on the streets, your government deems it necessary to go through more process.

Mr. Premier, there is still time to pass the legislation that I tabled this session that would immediately afford protection to sexually-abused children and would act as a major deterrent to those exploiting them.

Mr. Premier, don't make them wait. Please don't make them wait. Don't make these children at risk wait until just before the next provincial election to get help. Will you as the Premier show the courage necessary? Prove your commitment to disadvantaged children and pass the Bill entitled The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act immediately, this very day.

When it was deemed that it was necessary to pass the Ipsco Bill in one day, you listened and you did it, Mr. Premier and this is the power and choice of yourself, the Premier of this province. Mr. Premier, will you exercise the same power and choice today on behalf of disadvantaged children?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, we have been around this issue of the member's Bill which — if I may say so, I'm sure is well intentioned — but it is in her mind obviously and by her statements the panacea solution to this very complicated issue.

I've not heard her talk about children's action plan. I've not heard her talk about child poverty. I've not heard her talk about child benefit other than casually and sarcastically about our involvement or otherwise. I've not heard her talk about the question of parenting. I've not heard her talk about the question of cultural and other differences. I've not heard her talk about poverty — any of these issues which are all tied into the question of child poverty.

What I hear her talk about is a Bill. It may help; it may not help. But I'll tell you one thing. This is not the total answer by a long shot. If we are to do what we want to do with respect to these children that you talk about so passionately, and I'd like to think that I talk about passionately too, we need to have in place a variety of programs and knowing how they fit one to the other in order to, if not eliminate, for sure minimize the impact of this thing that you talk about.

And still — I say this with the greatest of respect — the fixation on the Bill which you have, the fixation that you have, is just too narrow. It's not a large enough time horizon. It is an

incomplete picture of the situation. It is misleading and I think quite frankly gives a false sense of hope to people out there on the streets who are struggling with this on a day-to-day basis, on a community basis, a volunteer basis, on an NGO (non-governmental organizations) basis, through children's action, through Department of Social Services, through your efforts, and other efforts.

So this is not a question of process. This is a question of tackling the problem. And this government has done more in the last couple of years in tackling this problem than any government has in the history of the province of Saskatchewan. Is there a long way to go? You're doggone right there's a long way to go. But we're determined to do it and we're going to do it in a way which has concrete results.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Chair, to the Premier. Mr. Premier, I have never, ever, ever indicated to yourself or the Minister of Social Services or anyone in this House that this Bill is a panacea, the be-all and the end-all. It is part of the equation. Every other province that I have mentioned in this House that is doing something concrete about this has recognized that it is a part of the puzzle to have legislation in place that will deter those people, deter them in a manner that is going to really hurt, and deter them to the point that they will think twice about what they're doing. And they know, and they knew in Alberta and they knew in other provinces that it was important to do this, that legislation is part of it, and that the protection of our children on the streets, we know in Saskatchewan can take on another form. And that's also in the Bill I presented.

You have mentioned that health care reform evolved, you know. You did the best you could. It was a model; it needed to be developed. And you took that piece by piece and you're getting a lot of flak for it but you did it anyway because you started where you knew how to start and you believed the rest would happen. I'm asking you to start somewhere here. Yes, there has been money put into people that are helping children on the streets, but that is only part of the equation also. That is only part of the equation. This legislation needs to come to fruition. It needs to, if we in fact care about those children. Other provinces see it. I cannot see how we cannot see it.

Now, Mr. Minister, or Mr. Premier, rather, I expect from your comments that you're not going to take action on this and I find that personally very inexcusable, when something could be done that wouldn't cost your government one red cent, that would just indeed help the children on the streets. There is no doubt about it. I expect that nothing will be done. And I want to tell you, Mr. Premier, that I have talked to some young women that have escaped the streets, and we came up with all kinds of discussion and ideas. And the last word they said to me was, stop those that are looking for the supply. That's what you need to do. You need to get those people off the streets.

So I'm telling you, Mr. Premier, from people who have really gone through the mill with this, that's what they're recommending. They know that has to be happening and they're concerned because, even though they have been able to escape the streets to some extent, they're in fear for their lives. And you know what? They have got brothers and sisters out there on the streets that are younger than they are yet, that they are completely concerned about.

So, Mr. Premier, it's your prerogative. It's your choice to take the time . . . or to take this time to do something about that, about this very serious crime that's happening on our streets; the crime that's destroying people's lives, young children's lives that have no one else to look to them. And so be it, it is your choice. We all have choice and that's your choice.

So you do whatever you feel is necessary for you. But if and when you bring in legislation next year, when your government does that as the Minister of Social Services indicated, I expect it to be at least as strong and as effective as what is tabled this session. And I'll hold you accountable, Mr. Premier, if it's not.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chair, I want to say this with civility, but you're not the only one who's talked to people affected, about child prostitution — far from it. And I say with the greatest respect, I don't need any little lecture from you about what takes place in the inner core of Saskatoon or Regina or Prince Albert, because I have had experiences and discussions with families and the tragedy that has affected, that is afflicted by this, just as well as you have.

And you can have an army of police officers out there — an army — and if anything tells us about history, history will tell us you'll never fully stop this situation the way it takes place. The demand you've got to tackle, but you have to make sure there is no supply too.

And that means that those youngsters who are being exploited, young girls, young women who are being exploited because they don't have the money, they don't have the education, they don't have the parental support, they don't have all of the other things which your children or my children or others may have in society, that's the other side of the equation.

And that is where the other provinces that you point to that we should follow, do not follow us. That's where the children's action plan, at \$50 million a year comes into play. That's where the Child Benefit comes into play. That's where the whole plethora of non-governmental organizations come into play — an army of volunteers and concerned parents and concerned politicians, as much as you. Don't bother about holding me accountable. You're just as accountable. They all take into account all of those social and other considerations.

So when you point to Manitoba, tell me what they've done about a children's action plan, and then you can speak to me with some authority about this legislation. When you say start somewhere, I tell you \$50 million for kids. I tell you \$40 million on the Child Benefit for Saskatchewan, for Saskatchewan alone. I tell you everybody who exploits sexually or otherwise, a child, gets caught, and is convicted in accordance to law, should be punished to the full extent of the law. I say more for police and more for prosecutors not only in this area, but in every area.

But it is a much more complex situation than that and it demands — I'll change the word, demands — it begs of you, of me, of all of us to put aside the politics on this thing and work to the interest of the Saskatchewan kids in a non-political way. That's what it does.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Well, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Premier, I'm not quite sure if there's anything else than can be said to impress on you the necessity of taking every step that needs to be taken.

Mr. Chair, there is no, no excuse for not doing everything possible. That's all I'm asking the Premier to do. The child action plan is certainly taking care of some of the poverty issues but it's not taking care of the issue of children enslaved through the child prostitution trade.

It is as simple as that. The Premier has made his statement, the people of Saskatchewan have listened, and I guess probably they're going to make their own judgement.

I have nothing else that I can say, and I thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Premier, and to your officials. Mr. Premier, this is the third Executive Council estimates that I've been in since I was elected. And it's the first time I've had the opportunity to get up and directly speak to you . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh it is wonderful. And probably you would notice, because I can attribute the fact that I'm standing here tonight because of where I am standing, and that is with the Saskatchewan Party.

And earlier this afternoon you talked about — I won't go into that. So I won't tell you why it is really the first time that I've had a chance to get up and speak. But I look forward to telling you about some of the concerns the people of Kelvington-Wadena have, and most of them are referring to living in rural Saskatchewan and the type of things that are happening out there.

But before I go into that, I'd like to talk to you about another issue, and that is one of them that I had the critic responsibility for, and that is aboriginal and Metis affairs. I've certainly had my eyes opened since I was given that critic's responsibility, and I guess you could probably say it was a rather rude awakening.

I believe that one of the biggest issues facing us in Saskatchewan when we move into the next millennium is issues surrounding native people. It isn't an issue of race, and it isn't an issue of politics. It's an issue of equality. I believe that everyone is equal, and I believe that everyone is special. And so if we're all starting from that same playing-field, I believe that we have some work to do.

I believe that by singling out groups and saying that there are different rules for different groups, we're not only allowing but we are encouraging and ensuring that people feel resentment and frustration and even anger towards other groups. I believe the division that happens then and that this government is allowing to happen, is encouraging and causing racism. The more we make groups different, the more the racism grows. It is increasing because of decisions of governments and of the attitudes of governments.

I'm not raising this issue to make politics in this Assembly or in the aboriginal community, and I'm not raising them to be derogatory or complimentary. I'm raising them because I've been asked to do so by the people of the aboriginal community.

That's what the Saskatchewan Party is all about, Mr. Premier. We listen to and we raise the issues of the grass roots people of Saskatchewan, regardless of their colour or of their skin or of their gender or of their income level. There are a lot of difficult questions out there to be answered. The questions have been avoided for too long because they are politically sensitive or politically incorrect. And you know what happens when we do that? The problems don't go away; they just get worse.

(1930)

I listened to the member from Athabasca this year talk about understanding issues surrounding aboriginal people, and I had the feeling that he believed that it was only he that knew or understood problems dealing with aboriginal people. He stood up in the House for three sessions and talked about them, and I believe he must be failing them because the people are coming to us now. They're coming to the Saskatchewan Party and not to him. And he knows very well that I care deeply about them.

If we're going to move forward as a society, we're going to have to work together to solve some of the very tough social issues facing Saskatchewan and all of Canada. And I look forward to the day when the Assembly equally represents all segments of our society, men and women and aboriginals and non-aboriginals. But until that time, it's important that those who are here speak on behalf of the people who are not just exactly like we are here.

Mr. Premier, my first question is this. When do you plan to work ahead and see what's going on in the aboriginal community and develop a plan to deal with the inequities and the social problems in Saskatchewan that are involving our aboriginal people?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, the question is — how should I describe it? — so disconnected to the preamble that it is impossible to give the answer to the question. But I have to make a comment to the preamble.

This hon. member talks about the principle of equality, something which of course is the foundation of democracy and a cornerstone of how our system and our society should work. But it is an ideal — note the word that I use. It's an ideal.

Let the member stand up in her place and tell us about the equality that the Indian youth age 14 or 15 or 13 has at Pinehouse, Saskatchewan compared to one of her children or her grandchildren with her background. What equality is that? What equality is it to say to this Indian child from the inner core of Regina or Saskatoon, get out there and compete fairly and equally, even though you might just have grade 4 education, with every other child that's got university or grade 12. Some equality.

You know what it is? It reminds me of the argument when I was attorney general. We set up something called the special Indian constable program. Note the word. I hope it doesn't drive the Saskatchewan Party over the wall — special Indian constable program.

You know what we said? We said to the RCMP, will you join with us in partners to bring into the RCMP aboriginal police

officers who will help in policing aboriginal communities, themselves being members of the aboriginal community and knowing the culture and knowing the distinction is there.

Do you know what the first response of the RCMP was? Well everybody has got an equal chance of getting into the RCMP. But you have to have a grade 12 education; you have to be five foot, ten and a half inches; you have to have this qualification and that qualification. And lo and behold, wouldn't you know it, aboriginal RCMP weren't members of the force because we applied the principle of equality.

It's a kind of a comment that the late Tommy Douglas used to describe about Liberals, and now I use it again about you, this argument of equality. We're all equal said the elephant, as he danced amongst the chickens — all equal.

We know that's not the case. We know in Saskatchewan that we have excessive challenges respecting aboriginals in order to get integration, equality of opportunity for them and for all kids — Ukrainian background kids, Canadian-born kids, wherever they come from — but in a lot of areas, to bring out their special talents which require special efforts.

Go to Pinehouse. Fourteen hundred people live in Pinehouse. I say this to the Leader of the Opposition, who is an educator -- 650 approximately of those kids in Pinehouse are in the ages of K to 10. What are they going to do, let alone after they get K to 12 -- finish grade 12 in Pinehouse and area? Are they going to stay there? Are they going to move to the cities? If they move to the cities, what housing requirements do we need to provide for them? What are the equalities that are applicable in that situation?

So when you use the word equality, which is a word nobody can dispute in theoretical and principle terms, you are ignoring the reality that not only in this jurisdiction but in many other jurisdictions in this country, there needs to be recognition of historic, constitutional, cultural, educational differences and programs working in partnership with those people to give them true equality. Not just the word of equality, not the equal right to starve, not the equal right not to have good housing, not the equal right not to have three square meals a day, but the equal right to be educated, to have their place in society, to be fed and clothed and housed with full equality and full opportunity.

And your party doesn't advocate that. Your party says equality, regardless of what treaty rights say, equality regardless of what historic constitutional provisions are, equality regardless of what the economic and social circumstances of the people in this province are.

And in doing so, I say you play a sentiment and a reaction which is destructive of what we ought to be, all of us, regardless of what our political ideology's working for, namely a large, growing centre of community in Saskatchewan where everybody, regardless of colour or background, can be the very best that he or she can be. And that means sometimes giving unequal treatment in order to achieve equality.

That's what it means, and that's what we're doing. We're having programs on aboriginal employment, northern strategy. I'm going up to Wollaston. I'll tell you right now, I'm meeting

on June 18, Wollaston, with the northern leaders — aboriginal — and I'm going to talk about how we can give arrangements with respect to revenue sharing and other economic opportunities for them. That's not equal, but it's going to lead to equality. That's what it's going to do. It's going to lead to a more generous, more kind, more gentle, and more prosperous society for all of us.

And go right down the line on it — whether it's housing, whether it's education, or whatever the issues happen to be. You may win an election on a short-term basis on the argument of equality, but believe me, in the long run you will sow the seeds of destruction of one of the most tolerant, civilized, decent societies and provinces, if not places in the world, in which to live. This one right here, which celebrates differences, compromises, accommodates, makes concessions in order to make sure that the level of standards for people are the very best and the very equal that they can be for all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Premier, I don't think that what I'm saying is so much different that what you're saying. We want the very best for everyone. I have also been to Pinehouse and I have been to Beauval and I have been to Pelican Narrows and I've been to Sandy Bay and I've been to La Loche — I've been to all those places as well. Not only that, I've been to the reserves in my area — that's Kinston and Fishing Lake and Yellowquill. And those people have various concerns too.

And they're living in a community where their children go off the reserve to go to school and then they find out that they have problems trying to work out their life on the reserve, their life off the reserve. And they know that at the end of the day, we all have the same goals. We all want our children to prosper. We all want them to have a better life than supposedly we have. And they're relying on us to help them with that.

I think that racism increases, Mr. Premier, when we say to you, you're different than I am so I'm going to treat you a whole lot differently. You know what happens then? People don't have the same respect for each other. They don't know how to walk across the street and deal with them in the same way.

Mr. Premier, the aboriginal accountability issue is a federal issue for natives on reserves. And I know that you've had delegations, just as we have, that say to you, we are living in third world conditions right now; we have no one to listen to us. Everybody is saying I'm not responsible for you. That responsibility belongs to the provincial government or it belongs to your band council or it belongs to somebody else.

And at the end of the day there are a lot of people who don't have any place to turn, and they're not getting anywhere further in their life because nobody is listening to them. Their MPs (Member of Parliament) are in Ottawa, or some place far away, and they have no one to turn except us that are standing here right now.

When they're living on a reserve, they don't have the same people around them to help them with the concerns that they have. And you know what happens? They leave the reserves

then and they go into the towns and cities, and they, most of the time, end up going onto welfare, and they become a provincial responsibility, and they don't feel like they really have any roots any place, anywhere.

Mr. Premier, when the Prime Minister was in town, I was wondering if you were talking to him about this very important issue. We know that as our native population increases, this is going to be a problem that is growing, not just in Saskatchewan, but right across Canada. I think that we had an opportunity to lead the country when we talked about the unity debate.

We've brought forward issues of other people and special rights, right across Canada. And right now I think you have a huge responsibility because of the number of native people in Saskatchewan, to say look, we've got to develop some kind of a program so that everybody is . . . at the end of the day, we're working towards the same goal so that we all have an opportunity to live a good life.

And what I'm asking you, Mr. Premier, is what are you doing to make sure that the aboriginal people that are living here in Saskatchewan have got the same opportunities that I do, that my children have?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I can find my little list which will probably take about a half an hour to recite, of our various initiatives which the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Aboriginal Affairs has given already to the House. If you want me to repeat them, I can certainly do that, ranging all the way from employment opportunities to housing initiatives and the like. I'm sure that the hon. member does not want me to do that.

She did raise however another issue, and that is a question of accountability of how funds on reserves are spent. Excuse me, Mr. Chairman, I take the position, the government takes the position that public funds need to be accounted for fully and completely and accurately and lawfully. And public funds, which are given by Ottawa to any organization, be it aboriginal or otherwise, have to be spent and accounted for. And if there is a problem with respect to accountability on reserve, then it is the obligation of those who have evidence that warrants the investigation of the proper authorities, to bring it to the attention of the proper authorities.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Premier, that's what I am saying. In lots of cases the people that are trying to say that they are being wrongly done to, don't have the opportunity. They don't have the people to go to that are listening to them, that will listen to them. In lots of cases, the authorities will say, okay, in order to look at that I'm going to have to go to the chief, to the elected people, and that's the very people that are not listening to them. And that's why I'm saying that there has to be some responsibility some place else.

Mr. Premier, we talk about taxation, and that's one issue that I know that there was a big fuss made over when the Saskatchewan Party set forth some of their platforms. And I just wanted to give the people some information about taxation across Canada.

Saskatchewan is the most generous of all provinces when it

comes to charging PST to status Indians off reserve. An exemption is made on all off-reserve purchases if an individual presents an Indian status card. In each of the other provinces, exemptions is made only if there's some proof the goods will be used on the reserve, whether that be delivered or proof that the individual lives on the reserve.

In British Columbia, PST is charged on all off-reserve purchases unless the goods are delivered to the reserve by the seller or by a common carrier to reserve land. In Alberta, of course, there is no sales tax. In Manitoba, PST is charged on all off-reserve purchases unless the goods are delivered to the reserve by the seller. In Ontario, PST exemption is made for all status Indians on off-reserve purchases if they can prove they live on a reserve.

In Quebec, PST exemption is made for status Indians on off-reserve purchases if they can prove they reside on a reserve. In Prince Edward Island, PST exemption is made for status Indians on off-reserve purchases if the goods are delivered to the reserve. If the individual can produce a status card with a reserve address, they can qualify. And in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland, these three provinces are harmonized, so the HST (harmonized sales tax) is charged on all off-reserve purchases unless they deliver to the reserve.

Mr. Premier, we have . . . yesterday in the House, I heard the member from Athabasca talk about asking the natives to pay down the debt with the taxes that we were asking them to pay, which didn't of course didn't make any sense at all. What we're trying to do, Mr. Premier, is to make sure that we can cut back on the racism, that people can grow together. We believe that there is an opportunity here to make sure that our native people are treated equally and that they feel like they are part of the Saskatchewan . . . Saskatchewan citizens.

Does your government have . . . what does your government have in the works at this time dealing with PST for natives in Saskatchewan?

(1945)

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I'm going to read this note, which is succinct. Otherwise I would elaborate and perhaps take up too much time in the committee.

I want to begin by saying that Indian taxation is obviously a complex issue with many facets that are not often readily apparent.

One aspect that is not understood by some people, and perhaps by the member opposite, is that Indian people do pay taxes. The long-standing arrangement that allows status Indian people to not pay the 7 per cent E & H (education and health) also results in the status Indian people paying tobacco and fuel taxes even if these commodities are purchased on reserve. It's a trade-off, a compromise.

In addition, provincial income taxes are generally paid on income earned by Indians off the reserve. Corporations owned by individual Indians or by Indian bands also pay provincial corporation taxes.

Overall, about 50 per cent of the status Indian population in Saskatchewan lives off reserve. As a result, many Indian people pay income taxes on off-reserve employment income. They also pay property taxes to local government, directly when they own their property, and indirectly when they rent property.

Furthermore Metis and non-status Indian people have no special tax exemptions — no special tax exemptions — and as a result are subject to local, provincial, and federal taxes. Now that's the compromise.

This government continues to interpret the current administrative arrangements involving the E&H tax, tobacco, and fuel tax as an overall package, as a part of an arrangement, which has got to be considered if there is going to be any rearrangement of that particular arrangement.

We're involved in a fiscal table with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and the Government of Canada, because status-treaty Indians are the responsibility of the Government of Canada, to seeing where we might resolve any outstanding issues. During these current negotiations, our government continues to meet the challenges of the province's tax system with the appropriate enforcement measures — underline that: with the appropriate enforcement measures — to protect the overall provincial tax base for the good of all Saskatchewan residents.

Now what's wrong with that arrangement and what's wrong with that approach? What don't you like about it?

I know what you don't like about it because you've said it publicly. You want, notwithstanding what the constitutional and other provisions are, to unilaterally impose upon aboriginal people full payment of PST on-reserve, off-reserve, everywhere, under the aegis, under that word, that magic word, "equal treatment".

That's what you want to do — equal treatment — without making my speech over again, to the persons on the reserve, the reserve that you claim you visit — equal treatment for that person with the housing conditions and the water conditions and all the lack of employment or other opportunities. That's what you want to impose — impose — not even discuss, but impose.

Well I think that we should sit down around the fiscal common table and work out a common arrangement for solutions to this thing in order to minimize — you use the word racism, I'll use it — to minimize racism not exacerbate it. Don't use it under code words like equality. Minimize, and let us live in this province harmoniously as we have since 1905 and before 1905. Don't play this card. I urge you — don't play this card.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier. I agree there is negotiations to be done. There is lots of work to be done. And as we have the number of urban reserves growing — we have two of them right now in the city of Saskatoon, we'll be up to 10 of them in the next few years — we have to have an opportunity to make sure that these work within our cities, so that we don't increase the tension and the problems with people living right in the same area, within the same city.

Mr. Premier, I have one other issue to talk to you about today,

and that is the issue of the Secretariat. People of this province have been asking for tax relief and they ask for smaller government. But I believe your government doesn't seem to think that any of the programs are expendable.

And the Saskatchewan Party firmly believes in smaller government. We believe the things the government does, and we're asking ourselves . . . We're always questioning what the government is doing, and we ask ourselves why they are doing this and if they're really achieving any goals?

Quite clearly the Women's Secretariat is a token department to make the Premier feel like he's doing something for women. Most women will tell you they don't want to be singled out. They don't want to be treated differently. And they certainly don't feel this government is committed to women just because they have a Women's Secretariat.

This isn't to say that we have achieved equality in the workforce, because we certainly haven't. It's also not to say there aren't deeper social problems that predominantly deal with women, like domestic violence, because these problems exist and we have to deal with it. But instead how does this government choose to use the Women's Secretariat? We let them hook up to the Internet. Now I think that's a real joke.

Mr. Premier, do you think for a moment this is the right way to spend taxpayers' dollars instead of properly funding women's shelters in this province? My question is this: what do you see as the role of the Women's Secretariat, and do you think you've been accomplishing it through the Secretariat? If it's not being accomplished then we are wasting taxpayers' dollars.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I can assume . . . This has been a wonderful exchange for me on estimates, which I know will continue for the next couple of days or more because some major division lines are now clear for me on health care, and now on this particular issue. Because this member has said in effect, abolish the Women's Secretariat. That's what you've said.

You've also not said, but by your attack under the rubric of equality you've in effect said abolish the intergovernmental affairs, aboriginal side, under the rubric of course of trying to cut down on the size of government. So we know where you stand. And I'm welcoming this very much because this is a clear definition of exactly where you people are coming from.

Now what you've asked me is what do I believe the role of the Women's Secretariat is? Well let me ask you this, and I'll continue to answer my question: do you think that two-thirds of what a man makes — and that's what the average a woman makes — is that fairness in society? She said no. And who does she . . . the Leader of the Opposition says no. Fine, I accept that word.

Who do you think then, members of the Saskatchewan Party, should be advocates for the elimination of that disparity? Who do you think should be the advocates for programs pertaining to women's issues which are more than pay equity; issues related to home and work. Whose responsibility is it? Because I will tell you this one simple fact, everybody's business is nobody's business. You put it to every minister or to any MLAs, and they

continually get shuffled off to the back.

And what the Women's Secretariat does effectively is it highlights and researches these issues, communicates recommendations for implementation, raises the necessary profile for these issues, puts the pressure on the government. And as importantly, has around the Cabinet table a voice for women — specifically designated to speak for women. As we have a voice designated specifically to speak for the interests of aboriginal people, a specific voice.

You don't want that. You're going to do away with it because you want less government. I have news for you. According to the Investment Dealers Association of Canada, this government in Saskatchewan has the leanest per capita government civil service of any provincial government already, already. And do you know what? We've done it still in defence and in support of women's issues, and in defence and in support of the just causes of aboriginal people, unlike you folks, the Saskatchewan Party.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Premier, I doubt very sincerely whether, I doubt sincerely if the chamber of commerce agrees that you have the leanest, meanest government. I know that you have not heard that from them. You've not heard that from the business people in this province who are trying to make a living out here. You haven't heard it from the taxpayers who take home their pay cheques or whatever is left of it at the end of the year. You haven't heard it from a lot of people out there who are trying to make a living in this province.

I'm saying that by having a token secretariat, you are not making a big difference out there. They're making brochures. But we still have only . . . We still have women making 66 or 69 cents for every dollar a man is making. I don't see any big moves on that.

If you really care about it, you're going to have every department caring about it. You're going to have that as something that's brought forward every time you sit at the Cabinet table. You're not going to have one person saying I'm sticking up for the women in this province. You should all be looking at this as an issue that it's something that we should be doing as taxpayers because every woman out here is working very hard to make sure that they can make a living so that they, with the help of their spouse or their partner, can take home a pay cheque at the end of the month that will make it go around so we can raise our families.

It's not helping if we have one little group over there saying I'm responsible for women. We are all responsible for them. And if you don't believe that then you haven't been talking to women.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, you see, Mr. Chairman, this is . . . again, this is a wonderful division line. In the 1990s these people are going to do . . . By the way, are you in favour of doing away with the Human Rights Commission? Or have you changed your position on that? They favour doing away with the Human Rights Commission, Mr. Chairman. They want to do away with the Human Rights Commission. They're going to do away with the Women's Secretariat. They'll do away with aboriginal rights.

And here's their attitude. Here's their attitude toward the civil service. This is what they're going to do. This is the *World Spectator*, Moosomin, Saskatchewan, March 23, 1998, where the candidates stand — Saskatchewan Party leadership hopefuls explain their views. Elwin Hermanson: "Before I agreed to run for the leadership, I asked the MLAs, do you know who the dead wood are?" That's what he says about our civil service. "Do you know who the skunks are? They assured me they know who those people are. Civil servants can be very powerful, Mr. Hermanson said; look what they did to the Devine government."

That's your approach. Women's Secretariat, dead woods and skunks. Human Rights Commission, dead woods and skunks. Aboriginal issues, dead woods and skunks. Stand up and tell us what other dead woods and skunks you're going to do away with.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, women are not dead woods and skunks. Women are not that. Women are working very, very hard, and maybe that's the problem. Maybe that's what you think of them. Maybe that's why we do have the problems in this province.

Mr. Premier, I have been working in this province as a business person for a number of years. I haven't been sitting in this House making rules. I've been out there trying to live under the rules that you make, and I know very well what it's like with a tax burden. And I know that this mean, lean government that you talk about is not here for the people and the business people of this province.

Every day as a business person you look at the workers' compensation rates and fuel tax rates and everything else that we have to deal with, and then at the end of the day we have an increase in utility rates, power and energy and telephone and all the rest of it. And we're supposed to figure out how we're going to pay the bills at the end of the day.

I'm sure that Mr. Hermanson was talking about the fact that there are ways to cut back on government that is still going to make it easier for taxpayers to have some pennies in their pocket so that you aren't the only one that decides how the money is spent. The only thing we have left in our pockets at the end of the day is whatever it takes to just pay the power bill and the phone bill. That's not living; that's survival.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — No, with the greatest respect to the member, that's not what Mr. Hermanson had in mind because the quotation said this from Mr. Hermanson. This is a direct quote from him. He said he asked you, so he must have asked you. He said this, "I asked the MLAs." I'm assuming all the MLAs because your party believes in equality.

An Hon. Member: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Right. The member from Cannington said yes. So maybe he could offer what he told Mr. Hermanson this . . . He said do you know who the dead wood are and do you know who the skunks are. And then he said . . .

An Hon. Member: — Jack Messer.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Go ahead, name them, name them. Continue.

They assured me they know who those people are. Civil servants can be very powerful. Look what they did to the Devine government.

I didn't use those words. Mr. Hermanson used those words. And you told Mr. Hermanson where the dead wood and the skunks are.

And here you are in these estimates and you're saying do away with the Women's Secretariat, do away with the aboriginal secretariat, do away with the Human Rights Commission. Bring in private-for-profit hospitals under health care. Boy, I can hardly wait for that election to take place provincially.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome Mr. Premier tonight and your officials. I'm glad to have the opportunity to get up tonight.

I just want to touch on one thing you said here a minute ago, Mr. Premier, that you run the leanest, meanest ship we've ever seen in this province. Aren't you the same person, the same Premier when you ran in '91 that said anybody can run this province on \$4 billion?

What are we at now, Mr. Premier — 5.4 billion? Whoops, not quite as lean and mean as you really planned on being and that's partly why you got elected.

Mr. Premier, when you started today you made a few comments that I have to respond to. You talked about those of us that formed the Saskatchewan Party, and I must say I'm very proud to be a part of this party. This is without a doubt, in the three years I've been here, the most enjoyable session I have ever had.

Now that's for a couple of reasons. One, because we've done a very credible job as being official opposition; but two, because you've had without a word of a lie the worst session since 1991 — the NDP Party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(2000)

Mr. Bjornerud: — And that's not fibbing, Mr. Premier, that's a fact. Behind closed doors I believe you would admit that.

Mr. Premier, you said we're not accountable to our constituents and I have to respond to that. When I went home after August 8 and we formed the Saskatchewan Party, you're right, I was kind of worried. What would happen when I got home? How would I be received by my people?

An Hon. Member: — You should have been worried.

Mr. Bjornerud: — And the member for Lloydminster said I should be worried, and I was. But I find out for what reason. And I'll tell you why, Madam Member — 95 per cent of my Liberal executive came with me. Now 95 per cent of the Conservative executive come with me.

That's not all. On top of that, Madam Member, I have, I have, Mr. Chairman, the Reform vote behind me in the Saltcoats constituency. And you know what the Reform vote did to you people in the last federal election. But that's not it. It doesn't end there, Mr. Premier. Do you know what happened? I'm finding that I've got a good number of your supporters, die-hard NDP supporters. And do you know why, Mr. Premier? Because this is something new. They couldn't vote for the Liberals, they couldn't vote for the Conservatives, they have voted for the Reform, surprising enough, and they can and say they are going to support the Saskatchewan Party. So, Mr. Premier, it's not all doom and gloom on this side. I would do a little checking behind my back if I was you, though.

Mr. Premier, you also, I believe, took Red Square, as you know — and I'm sure you're well aware of that — very lightly in the '95 election. And as you remember, that's when my good friend from Canora-Pelly was elected, my friend from Melville was elected, and myself in Saltcoats was elected. And what did we leave? We left the Minister of Health sitting in Yorkton all by himself for four years — no more, only four years. We'll have his this time too, Mr. Premier. So, Mr. Premier, I think what I'm saying is you misread Red Square last time, which was a stronghold for your party, and I believe you're misreading the whole province right now.

I don't believe you have any idea what's going on in rural Saskatchewan. I don't believe you know what the Plains hospital closure is doing to the southern MLAs, back-benchers in your government, and, for that matter, cabinet ministers. And I think right offhand, Mr. Premier, the member for Indian Head, the Environment minister, who I believe knows he's gone after the next election. And he's got company. We've got the member for Estevan. We've got your Highways minister. And the list goes on and on and on. And the member for Swift Current. We've had meetings out there, Mr. Premier. We know what we're talking about. I wonder if you do. Thank you, Mr. Premier. I got that off my chest. I just had to respond.

Mr. Premier, I want to get into highways now. I don't know how I got sidetracked. Mr. Premier, we've had a lot of problems and a lot of calls lately and I'm sure the Highways minister has, on problems with our highway system out there. And I guess the first thing that comes up is something that's happened this week. And I would like you to respond, Mr. Premier; just how important you figure a national highways program is to the province of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I'll answer the one serious comment that he makes right off the bat. A national transportation system for Saskatchewan and for Canada is very important, and I've long been an advocate of it as all the premiers, I believe all the premiers, have been in this country in joint communiqués. And I've been such an advocate of it I even made the advocacy as early or as late as Monday noon hour, speaking to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. And we will continue to boost for it.

I have a memorandum dated May 28, 1998, "Saskatchewan renews call for improved national transportation policy." It was done by my colleague, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Our government has a record of this all the way down the piece.

But I just wanted to respond a little bit because it does make it a little bit funny. I enjoy the way the Saskatchewan Party people get up, Mr. Chairman, and they say, you know, I know this member over here, he is a goner; and I know that member over there, she's a goner; and I know that member over there, he's a goner. I know that . . . and she's a goner, but hey, don't ever call me arrogant, don't ever call me arrogant.

And I know, because we've got so many people flocking to the Saskatchewan Party meetings — so many they had at their leadership race, so many they had at their leadership race that it almost makes one annual general meeting of the Saskatchewan NDP Riversdale constituency meeting. That's how many people they have. And they're just flocking to you in droves.

And do you know what makes it so attractive? What makes it so attractive is that this member, the member from Saltcoats . . . When were you the campaign manager for the Conservatives? When were you the campaign manager for — what was his name? who was the member, the long-time PC (Progressive Conservative) you served . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, no. Johnson, Walter Johnson, the late Walter Johnson.

Did you campaign manage for him twice or three times? He would have done it for three times but he wasn't asked. But he's right there in their camp all the way. All the way, and he's never changed his stripes.

And this is why he wants to re-fight 1991 all over again. I'd love to re-fight 1991 again. He says I said in 1991 we could run the government not on 4.1 — I tell you what I said exactly — on \$4.3 billion. And you know something? We can.

What you don't acknowledge is that you add on top of the 4.3 billion, point 800 million interest payments on the public debt that you, as the campaign manager for Walter Johnson, ran up and nearly bankrupted this province. Shame on you.

You sure can run this province on 4.3 billion, but you can't do it when you're paying \$800 million in interest payments and you've got a debt totalling 8 billion on the GRF or 12 to 13 billion totalling on the other issues. You doggone right I made that statement. And I repeat it.

And this comes from an MLA I have here in front of me — and this is going to be a great campaign. There's going to be some great campaign ads on this one, great campaigns. Langenburg *Four-Town Journal*, April 10, 1996, headline says, "MLA committed to riding" by Bob Bjornerud. Nobody reports it — it's by Bob Bjornerud, MLA . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, I'm reading the report, I'm reading the report, Mr. Chairman. He writes it himself. These are his words. No misquote — these are his words.

Many of you undoubtedly read or heard press reports last week indicating that Liberal caucus members are considering defecting to another political party.

Remember writing that? He smiles. Yes, he wrote that.

As ludicrous as these reports are, I want to assure you, (I want to assure you) the people of Saltcoats constituency, that I remain committed to you, the Liberal Party, and my

caucus colleagues.

Do you remember writing that? Do you remember writing that? And then he writes the following, Mr. Chairman, and all he can do is turn I mean beet red and laugh at this. And then he writes this:

As a further sign (as a further sign) of my loyalty, (as a further sign of my loyalty) and that of my caucus colleagues, we have each signed a document in which we unequivocally deny any intention of joining any other party.

Did you sign that document? Did you write this? Yes you wrote this, and this you told to your electorate which had the trust and the faith in you by electing you to this Legislative Assembly. And you know what you did with that statement? You know what you did with that trust? You know what this statement here that you made to the people of Saltcoats constituency, you know what you did with it?

You went like this — ripped up. That's what you did to the people of Saltcoats, that's your word, you ripped them up. And I tell you if you rip it up on this kind of a statement, giving your word, what else is on the agenda?

What else can they believe you or the Saskatchewan Party on any issue that you simply won't take and go like this when it suits your agenda to do it. You've done it once before, you'll do it again. Some of you are red coats, some of you are blue coats, but all of you are turncoats — all of you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank the Premier, Mr. Chair, because I haven't felt this good for a long time. I haven't had this much attention for a long time.

I want to maybe just mention a couple of things to the Premier before we get back into Highways, and I keep getting distracted, but I want to mention, Mr. Premier, that I believe even Tommy Douglas waived a bit on who he voted for, and I think he wandered from the CCF. I call that having a mind, not having a mind-set of being locked into one thing and can't look ahead.

Mr. Premier, I would like to mention, too, tonight that I was going to get up and say: Mr. Premier, you will. But the last time I heard that in here you pretty near popped a vein, and I won't go that way.

Mr. Premier, you say . . . Mr. Chair, the Premier says that he values our highway infrastructure and our highway transportation system very seriously, and I believe him. I do. And I agree with him and I believe the Highway minister does.

I believe where the problem comes in . . . And, Mr. Premier, this week we had put an emergency motion forward to debate that very issue. We asked the Minister of Highways and your members. And why we did that is because the Prime Minister was in town, who's a very good friend of yours, we know. But we felt, Mr. Premier, that when would it be a better time to have an all-party agreement in this House and put pressure on the

Premier.

And, Mr. Chairman, what happened that day, that day when we asked for an emergency debate and took for granted that the members opposite would support us? I would believe that the third party may have had a little problem because probably Ralph might not have agreed with it, but I think even they would have gone along with it because they saw the reason to it.

Mr. Premier, can you tell me why at that point, your government would say no and you would not debate that issue when the Prime Minister was in town?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, you know, this is a rule which I am going to break. I think it's the first time I've done it in my number of years in the legislature, but I'm going to break it. I'm going to break it because I don't believe that negotiations amongst officials, and certainly not negotiations amongst House leaders about the nature of House business, should be the subject of public debate. I've never done it, never done it before. I'm going to do it.

There was an agreement on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday for the agenda of this House, which you could have easily said to our people or to their people, let's negotiate the speciality of the debate. We'd have no problem in debating this if there wasn't . . . That wasn't the case. It was just sprung on us and broke the House leaders' agreement, and thus the argument was no — thus the argument was no.

I'll spare you my little pet grievance, which is very much a small, small grievance. I had an obligation, a national obligation which I think was a good thing for Saskatchewan; it doesn't matter for New Brunswick. Here I am, thanks to you folks. I don't mind this because this is great stuff for the politics for 1999, or perhaps even earlier. Here I am on estimates again, thanks to another broken agreement by you people.

But that doesn't matter, you break your word whether you're Liberals or whether you're Conservatives. And it doesn't matter whether you sign it or whether you don't sign it. It doesn't matter whatsoever. And so that is why it took place.

Now look, why don't you Tories get out of your little snit, why don't you get out of your little snit . . .

An Hon. Member: — We're enjoying this, Mr. Premier, and so is the public.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — And so I am and so is the public. Get out of your little snit, out of your little snit, as somebody who's threatened me ring the bells. Get up! Ring the bells! I challenge you! Get up and start to ring the bells! Do it again. Move adjournment and ring the bells for ever. Get out of your snit, get out of your snit.

We agree with you on a national transportation policy. Let's argue this thing maturely and debate it. We agree with that whatsoever. So please, please, please, understand that those are the rules of the game. And coming back to substance of this, let's talk intelligently about the debates. We agree with '98-99. There needs to be a national transportation program which takes place.

Anyway let's not get out of the House business stuff. Let's debate transportation and the like. That's the reason why we did it. Maybe we were in error in doing it, but we did it. For that reason, we did it. And I'd ask the Leader of the Opposition who also gave his written word and tears it up just like that as well, just please to keep quiet while the Minister of Highways . . . the critic of the Highways Department and myself have a little discussion in this regard.

Don't be so confident that your friend Elwin, if he ever should make it, which I doubt will ever take place, would make you in the cabinet. But anyway, there it is.

(2015)

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you Mr. Chair. Well you may be right, Mr. Premier, I may not be Minister of Highways, because at that point, we're going to have so many capable members on that side of the House, he'll probably have a real dilemma to pick one.

Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Premier, I think we have a problem why in this province our funding for federal highways, and for that matter health, education, a number of things, why the feds keep dumping on us even though now they finally balanced their budget. And I believe it boils back to one thing, Mr. Chairman. The friendship that the Premier and the Prime Minister have, I believe, is costing us money in this province.

You know, Mr. Premier, we go back, and I go back to the Tommy Douglas days, didn't agree . . . I know many people maybe didn't agree with his policies, all of them, but the one thing Mr. Douglas had going for them is he had a lot of respect, because no one in this country didn't know where Saskatchewan was when Mr. Douglas was premier. Everybody knew where it was, and we benefited from that because he hollered for Saskatchewan, for Saskatchewan people, for Saskatchewan taxpayers.

I believe what is happening now, Mr. Premier, is that your friendship and loyalty to Jean Chrétien is causing you not to holler loudly, as it was the other day when he was in town, Mr. Chairman. I believe that you will not go out and holler against your good friend because, naturally, being friends you don't want to do that. Well I don't believe until you do, Mr. Premier, holler on our behalf, all of us from Saskatchewan, that the funding from the federal government ever will come. Why will it?

And Mr. Premier, I want to read you some numbers. And these numbers are federal numbers from the Transport Canada people in Ottawa. And I want to tell you what other provinces are getting for highways: Newfoundland, and this is over about a five-, six-year span, Mr. Premier, Newfoundland, \$671 million; Prince Edward Island, 42 million, doesn't sound like much but, Mr. Premier, I have to throw in Confederation bridge, \$840 million — that's for the little province of P.E.I.; Nova Scotia, 263 million; New Brunswick, 630 million; Quebec, 447 million. Mr. Premier, and I'm sure you saw this, over that same period the federal government is putting a grand total projected 35 million into Saskatchewan.

Now why? What is the reason for that? And, Mr. Premier, I

think it boils down to your friendship with the Prime Minister because we never hear you holler very loud for Saskatchewan, with the federal government, to help support programs like highways, education, and health — the same programs that you keep whining in this House about, you and members.

The Highways minister is constantly doing that when we ask questions, blaming it on the feds. We heard that when we were sitting there. We hear that when we're sitting here. The third party hears it every day. You point the finger at the feds in here but you do it very quietly within these walls. The minute you get outside you forget to talk about it with the Prime Minister.

Mr. Premier, do you feel that there is a problem with you and the Prime Minister being good friends and making it hard to holler? Is it costing us money in this province?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — You know, Mr. Chairman, this really is getting from the sublime to the ridiculous. Is there a problem with my friendship? Let me make a point that . . .

An Hon. Member: — Well there's a problem for us, Mr. Premier.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Oh, there's problems for you, is there? Well let me ask you if there's a problem with you and your Reform friends and their friendship with the Bloc Québécois, PQ (Parti Québécois) separatists? Tell me about that friendship, will you? Go ahead. Let's hear about it. And what about . . . (inaudible) . . . and how you and the separatists are going to get together. What do you want — sovereignty association for Saskatchewan? Let's hear your view on that and then I'll give you my additional views on the Prime Minister.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Mr. Premier, I'm not quite as friendly or knowledgeable with the leader of the Reform or the Bloc or any of them. Actually don't know them by first name at all as you do with the Premier . . . or with the Prime Minister, Mr. Premier. So I guess you aren't going to answer that question it looks like.

An Hon. Member: — Oh yes I am, I am. I'll answer it right now.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Premier, I'm waiting for an answer.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Yes, well I was waiting for your answer. But obviously I'm not going to get it. So we're going to tell the people of Saskatchewan about how you, a few moments ago, got up and said all the Reformers in Saskatchewan, how well they know them, Elwin Hermanson, you know, a former Reformer. They're all coming, flocking to your party. I'm asking you about your friendship with all of these people in the federal Reform Party talking with the BQ (Bloc Québécois) and the PQ. And you refuse to talk about them.

But I'll tell you about my friendship with the Prime Minister. I have been so quiet that I spoke to 1,500 FCM delegates — mayors, councillors, everybody elected from one part of this country to the other part of this country — calling for a national transportation system on highways, the very day of your motion. I've been calling . . . And I'll read you here a

memorandum of May 28, 1998, the following:

At the May 1997 (one year ago) western premiers' conference (western premiers — that's me, I'm one of them) emphasized the importance of working together on transportation issues (for us to work together). That included a joint call to the federal government to develop national highway program proposals, improve the performance of the grain handling and transportation system, and ensure the Canada Transportation Act maintains the competitiveness of producers, shippers, and carriers.

That's how quiet I've been. And I could give you receipts and press releases and statements that have been in that regard . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well fair enough.

Well what about the Conservatives that you praise? They join me. How successful has Ralph Klein been? How successful has Gary Filmon been? What are you singling out . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . A heck of a lot. They've got zero, the same thing as we have. That's how successful they have been.

All of us have been united in this regard so don't tell me about friendship. My responsibility is to the people of the province of Saskatchewan and I am proud to say that for the 30-some-odd years that I have been in this House, friendship is friendship. When it comes down to duty and responsibility to the province of Saskatchewan, I've always tried to exercise that interest first and foremost. And believe me, the Prime Minister knows that as it is his duty to exercise it as he sees it from his national point of view.

Of course he needs it. He needs us to join. We need him to join us in a national transportation program. We've been saying it over and over again. But tell me when you get up on your feet, apart from the BQ connection that you have . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . You don't have any? That's what you say.

Tell me about any hidden connections that you have. You made dead-of-the-night deals in the past in forming the Saskatchewan Party, so how do we know about the dead-of-the-night deals here?

But leave the BQ out of the picture for the moment. Answer me this question. Tell the people on television this question. Why did you wait 63 days of this legislative session — that's how concerned you were about national transportation and highways program — 63 days before you got up for a special motion? Why did you wait?

Check your *Hansard*. Check your *Hansard*. Check your *Hansard*. Why not ask it in question period? Check what has taken place in this House. And you missed the boat. You talk about a disastrous session. It's been disastrous for the Saskatchewan Party and Eastview is going to show it to you.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Premier, for that outburst. I still haven't got my answer.

I want to show you something, Mr. Premier. You said you spoke to 1,500 delegates, and I believe the Prime Minister was there. And what did we come away with? Don't count on any

infrastructure money. I rest my case. You speak on our behalf; we get nothing. I hope the people of Saskatchewan remember, and the old myth is, what have you done for me today? — I would say probably absolutely nothing.

Mr. Premier, part of the problem with that is I believe you've got your priorities all backwards. When the unity issue came and the Calgary accord last year — and it was important, don't get me wrong, it was very important — but you sent every MLA in this province to back to their constituencies, had meetings, spent dollars, and that was fine.

But, Mr. Premier, where I have a problem, or where the problem comes in: I don't remember you doing that when you closed 52 hospitals in this province. One of them was in mine, the Langenburg hospital, and what made it even worse — and you know this, Mr. Premier — they had money raised to build a new hospital and after you got elected you come along and closed that. Did you send people, the MLAs from every constituency of all parties, from all parties funded by you to check to see what our constituents said? No.

Mr. Premier, when you're closing schools out there, are you sending all of us — 58 MLAs, to check with our constituents? No.

Mr. Premier, when you're letting our highway systems crumble and fall apart, do you want to know what our people say? Should we go out there? Do you send us — say hey, go out there like you did with the unity question? Did you send us out? No.

And every other issue that's more important than the unity question to my people in my constituency, did you check with them? No.

And, Mr. Premier, that's one reason I'm here. You didn't check with my people, and I say, in this last three years you aren't checking with anybody else in this province.

Mr. Premier, I'd like to go to your big announcement last year when the member for Tisdale was Highway minister and he had this big hullabalooing announcement that your government was going to put 250 million a year — \$2.5 billion into highways over the next 10 years. And I thought, good, it's what we need in this province. It's a good start.

Well, Mr. Premier, what happened? Just like your '91 election promises, just like your '95 election promises, and I think of the ones like no more health care cuts, no more bed closures — and we saw what happened to that promise.

Well, Mr. Premier, your commitment to 250 million a year, a year ago, was 208 million. How do you justify that? This year you've estimated 219 million. That's a far cry from 250 million. Mr. Premier, that's \$80 million short in the first two years of a 10-year program. When do you plan to catch up?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Here we are Tory math again. What this person does, he gets up, and he says 2.5 million . . . billion over 10 years — 10 into 2.5 — 250 million a year. Just makes sense. Automatic. Doesn't figure out that he can go from . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, no, we said 2.5 billion over 10

years; 218, 225, 235, 245 — 2.5 billion. Give you a break. Doggone right give you a break. Did we consult with your riding and your people in 1991 and '92, '93? You doggone right. We were out at every one of those 52 areas, and we met with them.

Out at Plains hospital rallies, the Minister of Health on our side was there. Were you there? You were missing in action, sir. You weren't even at . . . How many meetings of the Plains were you at?

An Hon. Member: — More than you, Mr. Premier.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Yes that's true. I doubt that you were at three. I doubt that three, so you're three more than me. Don't tell me that you listen to people because you sure don't listen to people either.

You're like the Bourbons you boys or you people over there. You don't remember anything, and you don't learn anything. And you do your math just like Grant Devine does his math. You do your Devine math the same way . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I don't care how long it is. You continue to bankrupt the province.

And you've got a list of commitments in this legislature. I'm going to at some appropriate time give you this. You have a list of commitments already on leaner, meaner government.

And I'll tell you this, education, March 16, the member for Rosthern, Mr. Cool, proposed a 60 per cent provincial funding share for K to 12 operating costs — \$200 million a year. Health, Plains centre . . . what can I say? Hep C, question mark. One could go right down the line on all of your tax cuts. And I tell you; you people simply have no credibility on either the financial side or the integrity side. And the fact that you met in the middle of the night in this disgusting way to form this new party, how dare you try to appropriate onto yourselves the name Saskatchewan Party. That is unbelievable; I can't understand.

And all you do of course is simply laugh at the people of Saskatchewan. Have a good laugh because it isn't going to last for very long in your party.

Mr. Bjornerud: — No, you're right, Mr. Premier. Mr. Chairman, it won't last long because we're going to be governing this province and it's a serious business, and we'll take it that way.

Mr. Premier, I've asked you a number of questions tonight, and you've danced around them. I just asked you one of when are you going to honour your commitment and put the \$80 million that we so badly need into our highway systems, so situations like the Brenda Bods of Estevan that had the 10 pound chunk of asphalt come through her window . . . Do we have to wait for somebody to get killed with an incident like that before you put that 80 million in?

And you can say, Mr. Premier, oh well, a 10-year program, and that doesn't cut it because you know as well as I do you aren't going to be anywhere near here in 10 years. When are you going to honour that commitment, Mr. Premier? It was easy to make. It's not going to be so easy to honour by the looks of it.

When are you going to honour that commitment?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Our commitment, every commitment we've made . . . eliminate the deficit. We did it. Reduce the debt. We did it — your debt and your deficit. Reduce the taxes. We did it — not you people. Increase expenditure for health care. We did it; not you people. Increase expenditure for highways. We made the commitment and we're doing it. And we're doing it as quickly and as efficiently as we will. And the people of Saskatchewan know that the last political party in this province to trust for any word, given our track record of what we say and what we do, the last party to trust is you.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well I still didn't get an answer, Mr. Premier, and I don't think the people of Saskatchewan heard when we're finally going to get the full 250 million. In fact right now you'd probably have to be up to 265, 270 just in the last eight years to even come close to honouring your commitment. I think most people out there that have driven our highways have already given up on your highway program.

Mr. Premier, Mr. Chairman, I would like to go into municipal government which is another, I believe, very integral part of our system in Saskatchewan — and in rural Saskatchewan and urban Saskatchewan, because they're both represented in municipal government.

(2030)

Mr. Premier, you've used municipal government as a whipping boy to balance your books. I know that and you know that. The Minister of Municipal Government; the Minister of Highways knows that. At what point, Mr. Premier, do you plan on stopping the downloading on municipalities? And have you any plans to start back-filling a little of the money that you've taken away on these people out there for their roads and infrastructure? Do you have any plans in the near future?

You've talked about balancing five budgets in a row, and that's great. I commend you for that. But now is the time to stop the hurting within municipal governments, and that passes on to the taxpayers out there. Do you have any plan to start replacing some of the money you took away from these people, in the near future?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — As funding becomes available we intend to expand the monies to important sectors of our community — health, education, highways. Municipal government obviously is on that list.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Premier, I don't know if that's going to be satisfactory for the SARM and SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and those people in the RMs (rural municipalities) and urban councils in there because they're hurting badly. They have nowhere to pass it on and they're stuck with what you do to them, and they've took a lot of punishment in the last seven years.

Mr. Premier, I just wonder . . . I'd like to get your opinion on the state of . . . How does your government right now get along with organizations such as SARM and SUMA? Are you on a real good basis with them? Where are we sitting with these

people? Because the feeling I'm getting is they're very unhappy with what is happening with your government and the treatment you've been giving them. Where do you feel you sit with those people?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — We have a good working relationship with the folks at SARM and folks at SUMA. We don't agree on all issues; we agree on a lot of issues. We have many new initiatives underway. I think the relationship is as good as it's been in quite some time because they, while they represent their local governments, are also citizens of Saskatchewan and they know the challenges we've had to face thanks to the mess that you and your pals in the Conservative Party have created, and they know how far a distance we have come.

They've had to carry their fair share of the burden, maybe more than their fair share of the burden, I understand that. But they know that they're citizens of this province and we're turned the corner and they're prepared to work with us for future solutions. And as we get stronger, fiscally, there will be more which will be distributed to the people of Saskatchewan. But by the way, when that happens, don't come after me at estimates, on the argument that somehow the expenditure for government has increased.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Mr. Premier, another of the problems that the SARM people sure had after their convention was that the value that your government puts on agriculture must be very minimal because the Agriculture minister didn't even bother to attend. And I think it's very crucial that the Minister of Agriculture attends that convention because he should be answering a lot of these questions. These are all farm people. Mr. Premier, are you going to see that that doesn't happen again and that the Agriculture minister will attend those things?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, I mean I ask of the member, give me a break. I know he won't. We are . . . I'm very proud to say, that since 1991 there may be the occasional session where we've not had a 100 per cent ministerial attendance. This was one of them when we didn't because of other commitments the minister simply could not break. Tough to make this kind of a judgement call. I agree with you, he should be there at RMs but he had other obligations on this one occasion. He's attended six or seven of them prior to that as we have as a cabinet on a 100 per cent basis, and you've singled out the one example and the one occasion when he was not there.

My policy is when we bear pit with SARM or SUMA — 100 per cent cabinet policy — ministers have to turn out unless there is a good and valid reason otherwise. So I will assure you that we'll try to get the Ag minister there for sure at the next bear pit this coming spring.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, I'd like to talk just for a minute about SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency) and I know how much of a pain that's been for you and the Minister of Municipal Government and probably for many of the MLAs in here because it's brought many concerns to us and many problems to us.

I guess, and I've heard you say this before, Mr. Premier, that we

were 30 years behind in updating, SAMA had to do a reassessment out there — and I agree with you. But I also think, Mr. Premier, you must agree that there's a number of problems with the way SAMA did it and where we got.

I guess as a farmer sitting out there, Mr. Premier, looking back in hindsight, if something isn't broke, why fix it? And I agree with you, it had to be updated. But what we have now, Mr. Premier, in many cases is far worse.

And I'd like to go from the urban side for a minute, Mr. Premier, and my hometown of Saltcoats is a prime example, I'm sure you're aware of that. But just the other day, I had a resident of Kamsack come to me and I believe he said, he had 19 or 20 neighbours that have joined him where two years ago their taxes were \$2,900, and then last year they've gone up to about 4,000, and this year the proposed taxes on his house will be \$5,200, Mr. Premier. I don't know if you realize what we're doing to the small towns in this province when that happens.

To start with, the gentleman's biggest concern was that should he want to sell his house — who on earth was going to buy a house in rural Saskatchewan in one of our communities when the taxes are \$5,200? And he said it doesn't really matter what the assessment is; it's what the public will bear, what the buyer will bear when he's buying it, and he's definitely going to take into consideration \$5,200 in taxes.

Mr. Premier, that works out to \$450 a month roughly. That's more than we used to pay a few years ago on a house payment. Mr. Premier, what are we going to do with SAMA and how are we going to change the rules so we straighten out this mess and we aren't chasing people out of rural Saskatchewan to the larger cities.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, there is no doubt that when you have a reappraisal which is 30 years late in coming there will be some dramatic adjustments. That is inevitable. It's also inevitable, given the complex nature of reassessments, that it's almost like a Rubik's cube — however if you adjust it to the benefit of one sector somebody else gets hurt by that sector.

I'd simply remind the member that it was former premier, Grant Devine, in 1989, and I agree with this proposal of his, established SAMA in recognition of the fact that there needed to be reassessment. SAMA is a nine-person body: three are nominated by SARM; three are nominated by SUMA; and three are nominated by us. We don't control it; it's controlled by SARM and SUMA. And at convention, SARM and SUMA endorsed it a couple of years ago, and school trustees did as well . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) endorsed it as well. That's true.

And so we went about the task of getting this complex area and trying to work out the best mechanism for assessment. I agree with the member we have to work out some kinks and some inequities which take place. I don't know this particular example that you're talking about.

SAMA and the officials are telling us that they're about the task of doing it and now that we've overcome that 30-year delay and that gap, we're now in a position not to have those kinds of distortions in the future and have a modern, up-to-date, fully

appraised, accurately appraised system of assessment.

By the way, the only principle I think that works is market value and we've got to make sure that it implements itself throughout the entire system. I think it'll be better next time around — by a long shot.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, I certainly hope so because I think there's an awful lot of people out there that are very unhappy with the past reassessment. There's a lot of problems caused by it and I believe there's a lot of hardships coming out of it. And I also believe it's hurt rural Saskatchewan drastically because of the shift in the . . . you add the education tax on and so on.

Mr. Premier, just one quick question and it was a subject that was a hot issue here last year, and I honestly, in the back of my mind, don't believe that you've forgot about it, but you've put it on the back burner. And it's amalgamation. And I know this session, Mr. Premier, that has not come up, and I thank you for that.

But I wonder through funding, and you're cutting the funding for all types of municipalities out there, and if in the back of your mind in your government you aren't deciding that this is the best way to go, enforcing municipalities to join one and another through the funding process. Do you still have amalgamation on the top of your list or have you put that out of your mind completely, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Amalgamation was not ever at the top of my list or the government's lists. Never has been, isn't now, and I don't foresee it in the future. We work in a cooperative fashion with our local governments.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I surely hope I can believe the Premier in this case.

Mr. Premier, I'd like to just touch on a couple of the Crowns because a couple of them are my critic area, and I'd just go through them really quick.

But I guess with STC I'd like to touch on patronage in STC, because I believe they go hand in hand, Mr. Premier. And I believe that's partly why a lot of the problems within our Crowns are happening, and that problem is patronage. What did we do, Mr. Premier, with STC when it was losing all the money it was, and is still for that matter. We put Mr. Glendinning in charge, who I believe was an NDP lawyer, Mr. Premier, had no, from what I can find, no real background in running a company like that.

And what did Mr. Glendinning do? He got a computer system set up and running, except the problem being it didn't send out the bills. And, Mr. Premier, it took what? — 9, 10 months before Mr. Glendinning and company finally realized that they weren't sending out any bills, and we're short of money.

All of a sudden I guess Mr. Glendinning got up one morning and thought to himself, where on earth is all our funds going? We're losing more money than normal. And he found that \$750,000 worth of bills weren't sent out.

So, Mr. Premier, in your wisdom, or your government's wisdom, what did you do? You moved Mr. Glendinning to Liquor and Gaming. What punishment.

Mr. Premier, at what point are we going to quit putting patronage appointments in charge of the Crowns and get them running like we should, like an ordinary business within the private sector?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I have spoken to this I think several times tonight. Maybe the member was out of the House at the time that I did. I can indicate to the member again that we have made, through Crown review, dramatic policy changes respecting ministers on the boards of directors. And with that will flow the question of CEOs and the like.

And this is not an issue of patronage. It's a much more complex matter than that. In every instance, almost every instance, the person so appointed has been appointed to be, because that person was found to be the most qualified by the relevant people that were involved.

Questions about SHIN, I gave the answer in this regard. So we will continue to try to eliminate patronage in the sense that the member opposite tries to advocate it, namely putting in political people strictly because of political reason. We'll put people in there of competence, regardless of the political stripe.

The Deputy Chair: — Why is the Minister of Municipal Affairs on her feet?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chair, with leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you very much to my colleagues in the Assembly. We have in your gallery, Mr. Chairman, five members of the Saskatchewan Water Corporation board that have been in Regina today for a meeting.

Starting on the left is Steve Tokarski, David MacLeod, Donnet Elder, Dan Palsich, and Dennis Zerr. So I'd like to ask members to welcome them here as they take in some of the proceedings tonight.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Executive Council Vote 10

Subvote (EX01)

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Mr. Premier, you tell us or you're trying to convince us that the patronage is not happening under your regime, and I believe it was one of the big things you ran on in '91. You said you were

going to put an end to it.

After the Glendinning episode with STC, and I believe, Mr. Premier, you have touched on an answer with Mr. Nystuen, but what did you do when you replaced Mr. Glendinning? You put Mr. Gord Nystuen in charge. And I'm really worried about this man and his qualifications, Mr. Premier. Because the first thing he did to resurrect the billing situation with STC, after he went in and checked out and tried to find out what was wrong, how did he solve the problem? He shut the computers down, Mr. Premier, and billed by hand.

Now I guess in the old days that might have been fine. But, Mr. Premier, what really worries me is where you've put him now. You've put him in charge of the SHIN program — the most important computer network probably this province has seen and maybe ever will see.

What qualifications, after not knowing how to fix STC's problem with a computer, would Mr. Nystuen have to set it up with the SHIN program? How comfortable should my constituents and the people of Saskatchewan be, Mr. Premier, that their private information will be kept private with this man running the show?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Chairman, we're back at this question again and again, and I can give the answer again and again. The SHIN board engaged Mr. Nystuen — not the government of Saskatchewan, not myself. The SHIN board, made up of representatives of the medical association, the nurses, the practitioners, the wide representative body which is SHIN. They went through the applicants, the list of applicants, and decided, based on the curriculum vitae, based on the questions of experience, based on qualities of management, that Mr. Nystuen should be the SHIN executive director.

If there's a complaint, take it up with the Chair of the SHIN board. If somebody else complains about that, have them direct the complaint to the SHIN board.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Premier. We will do that. As the member from Moosomin had said before, that we have asked for the membership on the SHIN board and have not yet received it, and we'll be waiting for that.

Mr. Premier, I'd also like to touch a little bit on SaskTel. And I think that's one of the big issues here. SaskTel, and I agree, is one of the greatest companies we've got in this province as a Crown. But I have a problem, Mr. Premier, and the problem being that every time something comes up with one of our Crowns we jack the rates up and then decide to supply the service.

And what I'm talking about here is the regional systems that we've been asking for, Mr. Premier. As you know well, we're happy to hear when we're going to get larger telephone districts. But what has happened, Mr. Premier, and it happens every time within the Crowns, we jack the rate up and then we take a look and see what we're going to do out there.

(2045)

And, Mr. Premier, you did it again. Under your leadership we

raised the rates \$4 already. Next February we're told we're going to raise them 2 more. And about 90 per cent of the province — 80 per cent at least, Mr. Premier — have not seen any movement on larger regional telephone areas.

Mr. Premier, I guess the question I would ask you is why don't we put things like this in place and then jack the rates? Because most people — in fact, I believe all people in this province — believe you're only using this as a tax tool.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Chairman, this is an unfortunate example to make the point about using it as a tax tool because . . . and I'll tell you why. SaskTel, of all of the Crown corporations, is now in wide open competition with the world out there — AT&T, MCI, and Sprint.

And one of the arguments against the PURC, by the way, is that the pressures aren't now to increase the rates because of the lack of competition; the pressures are to lower the rates because of the pressures of competition, at every stage of the game. And so the rates you'll find on long-distance calls in order to make sure that SaskTel retains its percentage of the market puts downward pressure on rates.

Now we're all for regionalization. We think it's good servicing and it's a necessary development. I'm assuming you're accepting it as well. The rates are fixed based on the costs pertaining to the region. It is not as you represent it, namely regionalized and then jack up the rates. It's a question of economics, judged by the SaskTel management with respect to the region that's affected.

And I close. As I take my chair, keep in mind the overall principle which is there. The overall principle is that in the case of SaskTel, of any of the Crown corporations, the pressure is downward on rates — downward on rates. That will be the long-term, short-term, and medium-term pressure even on regionalized areas.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Premier. I appreciate that. But I think the problem being out there, and I don't think many people out there probably realize, that we have probably 660,000 private lines in this province. You do your arithmetic on that, Mr. Premier — I'm sure some of them will — that that amounts to about \$40 million a year increase between the \$4 and the \$2 increase.

Then, Mr. Premier, at SARM convention I believe you came along and said we will be jacking up another dollar on your phone rates, on your basic telephone rate for 911, which is a good program.

But, Mr. Premier, you add up the increases that you have just gone through with SaskTel and you're looking at \$50 million a year. And, Mr. Premier, you always say that we're the ones pushing privatization, and yet competition I believe is one of the greatest things we can have.

Look at for an example with SaskTel and long distance. They lowered the rates, and to SaskTel's amazement, guess what happened. People used the phone more and the loss of revenue was not all that great. And, Mr. Premier, the member for Rosetown, as I know, been working on a federal fund to get the

federal government to set up to help subsidize rural rates. And I agree with that.

What scares me, Mr. Premier, at the same time he's running around saying, if we don't get this rural rates, local rates out there are going to have to go up probably \$100 per phone line. I have a problem with that, Mr. Premier. Because as we know with your government, what you're famous for, you come out and tell us something's going to go up, the sky's the limit, and then you jack it up about a fifth of that and say, well aren't we nice guys.

Is this the plan, Mr. Premier, with SaskTel? To scare us with the \$100 a month increase, and come out in about three years with a \$20 a year increase and tell us, look how happy we should be out there?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Chairman, some of my colleagues are talking about competition, which of course is the obvious answer to the member's question. The member of Intergovernmental Affairs advises that on this particular application the Manitoba Conservatives are supporting SaskTel. Saskatchewan Conservatives are opposing this application.

But this doesn't particularly surprise me because I have in front of me a quotation under date of May 2, 1996. And this is written by a very famous journalist in Saskatchewan by the name of Murray Mandryk of the Leader-Star Services. And the headline is, "Government under fire over Sask deal." And I'd like the member from Saltcoats to listen to this:

Romanow was also asked by Liberal opposition critic . . .

You remember those good old days, don't you? . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . That's right, and only once.

Romanow was also asked by Liberal opposition critic Bob Bjornerud, Saltcoats, why Saskatchewan is not following Manitoba's lead by considering SaskTel.

That's what you said. So today you get up and you say you don't support that. You're going to have . . . you're all for selling SaskTel — greatest corporation in the world today. In 1996 you want to privatize it; we should follow Manitoba's lead. Flip-flop, my goodness! This Saskatchewan Party is flip-flop personified, collectively and individually.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Mr. Premier, I don't believe there's a flip-flop there. You have to have . . . Mr. Premier, you would have to have your head in the sand if you don't at least take a look and see what our Crowns are doing for us.

Are they doing what they were designed to do when they originally were set up? They were there to supply everyone in this province with affordable utility rates, whether it's telephone, power, gas. And, Mr. Premier, I would say right now with what we're using them for they're not only doing that. We're using them as a tax tool to help balance your budget, and that's not what they were set up for to start with.

I honestly believe, Mr. Premier, if SaskTel was ever to be looked at and privatized, we should have done it a couple of

years ago, Mr. Premier, before competition come in. I myself believe we waited too long; probably now we've missed the boat at SaskTel. But that's still no reason why we shouldn't take a look at them, make sure they're doing the job we want for the cheapest dollar we can get.

Mr. Premier, I'm pretty well at the end of my questions for you tonight. I just want to say that I have the greatest respect for you, Mr. Premier, and I believe many people in this province do. There has been an aura around you because you are the Premier. You've been politically respected across this province. But I have to say, Mr. Premier, and I know you aren't going to like this, I think your bubble's cracking. I honestly do.

In '95 I believe you come around this province in that little bubble and you ran your whole campaign on yourself, and you got away with it. That isn't going to happen the next time, Mr. Premier, because I think for once you are invincible. You are going to be able to be touched . . . not invincible, Mr. Premier, I'm sorry. You were invincible; I don't believe you are any more, Mr. Premier, and I'm not sure why. I'm not sure if it's because of your age or the arrogance of your government, or you've been in here 30 years and that may be five years too long. I'm not sure of the problem, Mr. Premier.

All I have to say is I have the greatest respect for you and I wish you well, but I think it's time to pass the torch on. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I can just appreciate the great appreciation that the hon. member has for me. And I hope that when I reach your age I exhibit a little more mental agility and youthfulness than you do.

And may I say that I will note, and in this election campaign you will answer to your statement a few moments ago that we missed the boat a couple of years ago in not privatizing SaskTel. That's what you said — we missed the boat a couple of years ago in not privatizing SaskTel. We missed the boat. *Hansard* will say exactly what you said, and I know exactly what you said.

And you might as well also, if you want to come up and follow me, or who follows me next . . . Yorkton Review, March 14, 1998. New style of politics needed, says candidate. This is good old Elwin Hermanson, that bundle of dynamism and youth that the people of Saskatchewan are just waiting for:

Hermanson said the province needs to review all of its Crown corporations. I think after 10 minutes of debate, people of Saskatchewan would be willing to sell (willing to sell) and apply any profits to the debt, Mr. Hermanson said.

That is 1998. In 1996 and 1998, you people will sell off Saskatchewan's heritage, our economic engines, our opportunities, our Crown corporations, our productivity. You call that new age thinking, my friend? You won't be around after the next election.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party, I'd like to welcome the people from the water board here as well. I think on this kind of a year, the name that you have sounds very exciting and people

could be looking forward to all sorts of great and wonderful things from you. And I hope you can produce at least half of what they're hoping for.

Mr. Premier, thank you for this opportunity. And I'm sure after all these hours, it's fairly intense, and anyone that's been looking to follow you into the premiership from your party has probably decided that the kind of job you have tonight may not actually be worth it.

An Hon. Member: — Worth it! I'm enjoying every moment of it.

Mr. Heppner: — Okay. Well we'll keep on having a good time over here. First question, Mr. Premier, and it comes out of a situation here in Regina. And first of all I guess I want to find out what your awareness of it is. Have you been at Mr. Henry Ripplinger's business place called Collections fine arts here in Regina and do you understand that situation?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I do not understand the situation other than what I read in the popular press. And for my money, what I read in the popular press doesn't give me any basis of understanding for most things.

Mr. Heppner: — Understandably so, and you probably missed a good shot at the Conrad Black papers here. But you'll probably get that in a minute or two. I had the opportunity this week, Mr. Premier, to visit his establishment, talk with him, and look around what's happened there. And I think this is one of those situations that might beg for your intervention, might beg for your intervention.

The situation is somewhat like this, Mr. Premier, and I didn't get this from the papers. When Mr. Ripplinger decided to create the business that he has, he went to city hall and said what do I have to do to build the kind of facility that I want to build? City hall gave him all the requirements.

So he built his establishment based, Mr. Premier, on what city hall told him he should do. He met all of those requirements, started his business and, Mr. Premier, I would really strongly urge you to go and visit his place. It's impressive. It's one of those situations that I think every city in Canada would be proud to have there, because it's a real asset to it. He gets a lot of tourists come in and it's a kind of place that I think speaks well for all of Saskatchewan.

Anyway, after he'd been in business for some period of time there was a complaint lodged with the Human Rights Commission that he needed to have a ramp. Well he redesigned the place. He built the ramp just the way it was asked that he build it. All complaints went away. There hasn't been a single complaint since. So at that point, Mr. Premier, we should think that everything was fine and he could continue his business. But that's not the case, Mr. Premier.

What has happened is the Human Rights Commission has chosen to walk in and look around without any concerns being raised, without any complaints being raised, and look around and say well Henry, we think you should do this and this. And so now he's caught in a quandary. He has followed all the regulations of the land created by the people who've been

elected to do those sorts of things. And along comes the Human Rights Commission and tells him that even though they have had no complaints they think for whatever reasons he should make a lot of changes to his building.

First question, Mr. Premier. How fair does that seem to you?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to answer the question because it's a question of how fair does it seem to me. I can make an opinion, a subjective expression of feeling on how something seems or feels to me. But this is a legitimate debate and discussion of major policy issues. It's not a question of my feeling.

The question is if the Human Rights Commission under statute properly exercising its authority? I don't know if it has or hasn't, if it hasn't there's other remedy — if it has made a ruling, then due process of law has been followed.

I think the Ripplinger place from your description and from what I've heard is very impressive and it is an asset. And I understand totally from your explanation and it conforms to what you read in the popular press as well that this causes great inconvenience. One can feel obviously a great deal of sympathy and support for what this person is trying to do, accommodate. And yet the HRC, the Human Rights Commission makes another ruling.

Having said that though, where does that lead this in the public discourse or the public debate. The HRC, Human Rights Commission, having made the decision that it has, what now happens? What am I going to do? Overrule it? I can't in any event even if I'd want to. Are we going to abolish the Human Rights Commission? Are we going to pass some sort of special statute or law? I don't think you're advocating that. At least I'll know in subsequent questions what you're advocating. What can one do about this?

So one can empathize but no other answers are there. Mr. Chairman, may I ask the leave of the committee to have three minutes only to depart for a very important matter, namely . . . the Chairman saying five minutes, but if I may have three minutes. I'll be back as fast as I can because of my need for water.

The Chair: — The request is for recess of five minutes. Is that agreed?

Leave granted.

The Assembly recessed for a period of time.

(2100)

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you again, Mr. Chairperson. Okay, dealing with the answer that you gave, Mr. Premier, and I think therein lies some of the problem, where when you said it would be an opinion that you would have to give. It would seem to me that that's exactly what happens when the Human Rights Commission comes in and overrides the laws that have been created by the elected representatives. That is just an opinion.

Like from where do they decide that he needs to change his

building further when, as I stated earlier on, I think this is the critical part of this, Mr. Premier, when there hasn't been a single complaint. So they're not coming through, and there's a group saying, well, we don't have access, we demand access, we want access, we think we should have access — none of that's happening.

They're going in totally under their own volition and trying to decide what they can look for that he should have to change, when no one's asking it and he's fulfilled all the laws of the land up to that particular point. And as you said, that's just a matter of their opinion.

You stated, Mr. Premier, that it was a situation that you felt you probably shouldn't override, and to some extent that's true. Obviously we wouldn't want the Premier going around and overriding every decision of every group that exists in the province.

However, when you have a group that's there that is acting when there aren't any complaints and they don't have a set of rules or regulations that needs to apply to . . . Mr. Ripplinger in this particular case is suffering because of not a single concern that's being raised by anyone in the public. That is unfair.

And I guess my question is, even though you may not want to override the Human Rights organization, Commission, what are you going to do to ensure that the business people in this country, in this province, don't have to fear the Human Rights Commission is going to come in and make some decision, even though there are no concerns in their communities and they are following all the regulations that exist.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I want to make it clear when I use the word, opinion. The opinion of the Human Rights Commission in that context, I mean, I'm assuming the opinion of the Human Rights Commission at law, in the interpretation of the law by the Human Rights Commission . . . which brings me to the specific question the member asks here. This is not a question of the Human Rights Commission overriding the law. If the Human Rights Commission overrides the law — I'm not speaking about the Ripplinger case but generally — then there are remedies.

One of the remedies is to go to what the lawyers say at a superior court — and say this tribunal exceeded its jurisdiction because it overrode the law and we're quashing that decision. That's the remedy that's available.

So there is no way that they do anything but interpret the law. One can agree or disagree with their interpretation, but that's why we set up the Human Rights Commission or the Labour Relations Board or Minimum Wage Board — you name the various agencies which are around.

So again I repeat: what more can be said about this issue. A decision has been rendered. I have my personal feelings about this. Mr. Ripplinger's got to decide, based on legal advice and other counsel, what his next moves are. I don't know what other options there are for any of us.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Premier, and you're right. Mr. Ripplinger does have to decide that. And I guess after

having been in business numbers of years, he's finding this very frustrating because . . . I think if you would take the time to meet with him and look at what happens . . . there's 20 employees that he has there. It's a very fine situation all the way around. When something else comes down the pipe and creates those kinds of difficulties, we have to very much question what's happening there, and I think what we need is to ensure that the Human Rights Commission knows what its boundaries are.

It's much as if you and I, Mr. Premier, bought a car, went to SGI, said how do I license it? We license the thing and along comes some automobile association and says you're going to have to do this and this to your car before you can drive it. We would be very upset because we would say, well we went to SGI, did everything they told us to do, and along comes this other body and says no but we think something else should happen.

That's what's been happening here. And it's unfair, and I think it's the kind of situation that could happen to any other business in the area. Had he received complaints from people saying that they demanded access or were denied access I think, Mr. Premier, we would all feel somewhat differently about it because we would say that's one of the things we're concerned about.

But that's not what's been happening with Mr. Ripplinger. And I guess in conclusion on that particular matter, I'm just going to ask you to go and talk to him and see what's happening there. When he made his changes to put the ramp in, it's the classiest ramp that you will find in Saskatchewan, I'm sure. It isn't just some little boardwalk stuck off in an alley. It's right up front. It's beautiful. It's architecturally arranged. He's done that to a credit to himself and the credit of the people that work there and that use his facility. So I think it would be good for you to go and talk to him and see what actually is going on there.

Okay. Moving on to a somewhat different area and that's the area of Justice and looking at what we've discussed a lot in this House this session, and that is youth crime.

And admittedly we've had people get up and say well there's only 400 young people incarcerated at this time, and most young people are good young people, and I would agree with both of those. So I think we need to get that out of the way. No one's saying that all the young people in Saskatchewan are bad. We're not saying that most of them are. We're just saying that some of them are . . . and those are the some, Mr. Premier, that we need to deal with.

I guess my question comes out of a little bit of background that you've given to us over the last months and years. We've heard a lot in this House about how good a place Saskatchewan is to live in, Mr. Premier. Well, Mr. Premier, I'm here because I want to be here. I live in Saskatchewan because I want to live in Saskatchewan. I believe all of us do, especially as MLAs. Well there's maybe one or two moving away, but by and large we're here because we wish to be here, and we love this province.

Having said all that and granting you the statement you'll probably make that Saskatchewan, according to various sources, is the best place in the world to live, and in many ways

I wouldn't deny that either, and I would support that because I love this province. However having said all that, if this is such a good place to live and things are so fine out here, how come then, Mr. Premier, do we have two of our cities that rank very near the top — if not the top — as break-in capitals and car theft capitals in Canada? It's a good place to live. How can that happen, Mr. Premier? I think we need an explanation in Saskatchewan for that.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I think the answer really is one which is two-fold. First of all, crime rates fluctuate. They go up, and they go down. And so far as I know, there may be studies as to why this is the case, an explanation for it. I don't think anybody really has a specific answer.

Our answer is however to say that what we've got to do is try to have a budget which makes communities safe as possible. I'll spare you all the details about our increased investments to the RCMP, the police, and the prosecutors. The question of what to do with chronic young offenders, all of that has been publicly announced. It's one of the initiatives taken in this session. This is why this session has been such a productive and forward-looking session from our perspective.

And to answer your question, let's not get into, try to read the entrails of the increases or decreases. Let's try to make sure we've got the kind of social, policing, and other programs in place to deal with crime effectively and purposefully as required.

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Premier, that has to be an exceedingly interesting answer when you say let's not look at the entrails, as you call it, of why crime takes place. You're just going to throw money at it. You're going to hire more police. And you're the one and your people who accuse our party of talking about locking up and throwing away the keys. That's exactly what you're talking about. You're going to throw more money at the police to find more of them. You lock more of them up. But you're not going to look at the entrails. You're not going to look at the real guts of the problem and see why this is happening.

Your party, in one form or another for the last half century, has been in government in this province, and what do we have as a result of that? A break-in capital in Canada and car thief capital of Canada. Mr. Premier, we need an explanation from you.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, the hon. member either did not hear me or, if he did, he misunderstood me. I sure hope he wasn't purposefully misrepresenting me. I would never accuse that of my dear friends in the Tory Saskatchewan Party. However let me just make myself clear again.

(2115)

When I said that the percentage increase in crime, your lead-in question to this, I said you can study the entrails, or perhaps I should clarify it. But there's not much that can be gained by studying the entrails of those, just of that stat, I agree with you that the causes of crime need to be looked at and studied. And in my exchange with the member from Saskatoon Humboldt, I talked about the question of poverty, I talked the question about culture, I talked about the question of regions and

neighbourhoods, education, safe houses — all of those issues are factors which enter into crime rates either going up or going down.

And therefore, what needs to take place is an initiative at a multi-leveled, multi-tiered basis. Some more prosecutors, some more police, some changes to Young Offenders Act, children's action plan, nutrition, inner-core kids, making sure they're off the streets, dealing with the question of child prostitution or child abuse — all of these and more need to be studied and we're doing the studying.

And all I'm saying is that this province, whether it's children's action, Child Benefit, whether it's more police, more prosecutors, urging changes to the Young Offenders Act, is doing as much if not more than any other province in coming to grips with the rise in the percentage of crime that you identify — doing its job in guaranteeing safe communities. That's what I was saying.

Mr. Heppner: — Some of the things that you mention, Mr. Premier, and things that you need to look at, I think are sometimes thrown out and they end up being put out as solutions but because there are . . . or the causes . . . and because there are very few solutions to those, governments like yours can sort of keep walking away and say well we haven't solved it yet. When you talk, Mr. Premier, poverty being one of those. I'm not quite sure of your background but I'm sure that both of us grew up in what would be considered today's terms fairly close to poverty. That didn't turn either one of us into criminals. A lot of that is a matter of choice and I think we need to address some other things than just, as I said already earlier on, throwing some more money at it.

We do have two districts, Mr. Premier, in this province where some of that crime seems to be peculiarly rampant, and one is your own jurisdiction of Riversdale, I believe. And I'm wondering what is happening in Saskatoon in your constituency which is one of the high-rate crime rates in Saskatchewan. What's happening in your constituency? What is this government doing in your constituency to improve that situation?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — My government is doing for Riversdale what it's doing for your constituency and for every other constituency. We are putting forward a series of programs, children's action — I won't repeat them again, but the ones I just gave you in the previous answer — more prosecutors, more police. The demographics change from region to region. In some areas it's a little grave than in other areas. That is the nature of Saskatchewan; it's always been thus.

What are we doing about it? The very program I outlined for you earlier, we'll continue to do that, not only for Riversdale, but we'll continue for Rosthern. We'll continue to do it Sturgis and for Preeceville, and anywhere that it's needed in the province of Saskatchewan in order to guarantee safe communities.

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Premier, I'm not sure that very many people in this province are very convinced that they're going to sleep a whole better because of the programs that you're putting into place.

Over the past number of months I've asked members of Justice . . . questions of the Justice minister, and there's always a very unique interaction that happens because as soon as he gets the question, the minister in charge of Social Services turns around and there's some fast finger pointing. And almost in every case, the Minister of Social Services is the one that's taken the Justice question.

And I suggest to you, Mr. Premier, that because we have those two bodies handling the same situation, we have a lack of continuity. We have people falling in the cracks. We have the kinds of situation develop that we had happen in North Battleford. That was a disastrous situation, Mr. Minister.

And you just a minute or two ago on one of your answers seemed to say that you were doing all kinds of things, and there were some great initiatives that were out there. When that first problem originated in North Battleford . . . and it was a very sad situation. And we contacted your Justice minister if he would be interested in making sure we got to Ottawa in putting some pressure on. He wasn't interested.

And so it was another one of those situations, Mr. Premier, where your government had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into a situation to do something. And now today you stand up and say you're providing some leadership. Well I don't think the leadership was there then, and we still are a little dubious about whether it's there now.

Has that government . . . has your government, Mr. Premier, really changed its position that drastically from not wanting to become involved and going to Ottawa and trying to do something significant with the Young Offenders Act to now, as you say, providing some leadership? I don't think so, Mr. Premier. And I guess I'm going to ask specifically: what major changes to the Young Offenders Act is your government pushing for?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, the hon. member knows full well that back in April of this year the Minister of Justice of our government announced the establishment of the serious and habitual youth offender comprehensive action program, SHOCAP as we call it; \$1.1 million over two years for P.A., Regina, and Saskatoon; dealing with chronic young offenders; maintaining comprehensive files on young offenders; conducting case planning and sharing information with respect to young offenders, and a whole series of other initiatives which were outlined therein. Those are programs which are announced and those are programs which are being implemented now.

With respect to the question of the prosecutions, we believe that our position is a sensible one. Namely that for serious offences, the age should be lowered where the person can be possibly waived, the youngster can be possibly waived from juvenile court or at least out of the adult court . . . into adult court; the serious offences being murder, sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, attempted murder; there may be one other as I recollect it. And we believe that that discretion should be given to the judges to toughen up the proposals and the options which were available to the judicial system to deal with young offenders.

Now that may not conform to your position. I know it does not

conform with some of the Conservative provinces' positions. But we think this is where the moderate balance is between the posture that you say at the beginning but I don't really think you really believe — namely, that 99.9 per cent of our kids are good kids. They study, they do their homework, they honour their parents. About their biggest sin is that they think that we're old-fashioned — and they may be right about it. We're dealing with a small group of people, and we're trying not to overreact one way or the other but to deal with the issue in a sensible way.

Plus in addition to toughening things up, prosecutors and the like having the whole range of social programs, that's why the Minister of Social Services speaks to young offenders, because we're trying to rehabilitate young boys and girls, young people, to still lead a productive life in our community. That's the objective.

And if they can't be rehabilitated or they won't be rehabilitated, then we have into place as best as Saskatchewan or any province can conduct, the proper disciplinary measures to get tough with criminals, and we intend to get tough with criminals in those circumstances.

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Premier, you didn't even come close to answering the specific question I asked, and that is what in the Young Offenders Act is your government working to get changed in Ottawa.

An Hon. Member: — I did.

Mr. Heppner: — No. When you go to Ottawa or you send your minister down there to make some changes, what changes are you telling Ottawa you want to see happen in the Young Offenders Act?

Now you talked to the one about the age, and that's all I heard.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well that's exactly the primary one. That is what the Young Offenders Act is essentially about. The Young Offenders Act is the age; some argue that 18 is too high, it should be lowered to 16. Some argue that the nature of the gravity of the offences require the capacity of the judges to refer to adult court.

We're agreeing in a limited area of offences, the ones that I have identified. That's exactly what the changes to the Young Offenders Act is all about. And that's what our position has been and that's what we've been advocating to Ottawa.

Mr. Heppner: — It seems interesting if you now take the position you've been on a long term, is the impression you're giving, advocating this to Ottawa, why in the middle of winter your Justice minister had his feet just mired in the clay right here in Saskatchewan and wasn't going to work together with other parties to go ahead and put some extra pressure on there. It is very disappointing to the people across Saskatchewan that he happened to be as out of sight on that one as he was. And you earlier on read from a party brochure, so I guess I'll do the same thing and ask for you to comment.

Citizen neighbourhood patrols is one of the things that in this by-election the Saskatchewan Party is dealing with as far as

safe neighbourhoods are concerned — citizen neighbourhood patrols. What is your position, the position of this government, on that?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well I've already given that answer at question period. I repeat it again. It is the obligation, as I see it, of every law-abiding citizen, when he or she sees an offence being committed or the probability of an offence being committed, to take their civic duty and to inform the appropriate law enforcement officials of this particular event that they're actually witnessing and occasioning. On very, very, very rare occasions should citizens assume the job of being police officers since they're not trained to be police officers, since they may be getting themselves into highly dangerous circumstances, and I think that it's a position which is far too extreme. Accordingly, let's be vigilant, let's be community-minded, neighbourhood-minded, make sure the police are our partners. But let's make sure that we leave the job of law enforcement with those who are trained and are best capable of doing it, namely the fine men and women who make up the police forces of Saskatchewan, RCMP and local.

Mr. Heppner: — The concern that you raise about people taking the law totally into their own hands, I think no one would deny that because probably the only ones that we trust with taking the law into our own hands are ourselves and no one else has full faith in that particularly.

Manitoba has begun utilizing citizen patrols to help reduce crime. Has your government looked at that model and are you considering doing something like that, similar to it, or a version of it that you may feel suits our province?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well let me say that any idea which has merit, wherever it comes from and from whatever ideology, we'll take a look at. So if the Manitoba idea has some merit I will certainly instruct the Minister of Justice to take a hard look at it. But I'm told that in Manitoba they're only going to spend \$4,647 on the program — \$4,600 for this particular program. That's not to diminish it. We'll take a look at it, and if it can be made to work here, fair enough. But for the time being the general principle is the one that I articulated to the previous question which you asked me.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. We talked earlier on a bit about rehabilitation. I think we need to go back to that because, in the justice meetings that took place across Saskatchewan, in the time that I was ever allotted I always made that as one of my priorities. Because I think every time we can save a young person from becoming involved in crime, we've saved a life and we've saved ourselves as a province a whole lot of expense and hardship by not having another criminal in our area.

However I think some of the things that Social Services is doing in the area of rehabilitation seem to be relatively counter-productive, and I would guess with your background you should be able to make some comment on this.

When I go to some places in northern Saskatchewan and find out that certain camps have been rented and they bring in a group of young offenders to fish and swim for a week, I can probably underline that, Mr. Premier. I think just because

they're young offenders doesn't mean that they don't need a time to get together, have a good time, and maybe do some bonding and those sorts of things.

Except when I talked with people that were watching they said, well this wasn't particularly happening. It was just told: get out there and swim or fish, and don't bother us. At the end of that week, Mr. Premier, another group of Social Service types came along, picked up this group and went on a fly-in fishing trip.

Mr. Premier, fly-in fishing trips, rehabilitation, your comment on that. I think that's somewhat excessive.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I don't know enough of the details of what the member says, and with the greatest of respect to the member, I do not think that he's telling the full story. I'm not saying he's doing it deliberately; I just don't think he knows the full story. He's representing this as some sort of a holiday for young offenders. If it is, I disagree.

If it's a rehabilitation program, in which case as part of rehabilitation there's a question of recreation, there's a question of discipline, there's a question of corrections and all of this tied into the picture, then I think it's quite acceptable.

If the hon. member is talking about boot camps for kids, for children, if that's what you're talking about, well why don't you just tell us that that's where the Saskatchewan Party stands?

Mr. Heppner: — Well right now we're asking you to tell us where you stand, and I asked for your position on a fly-in fishing trip. And that was not made up and it didn't come out of your Black newspapers. But you seem as if you don't want to answer that. I can get you the information, and I will, and we'll see if you're going to take any steps on that at that particular point. That was in Saskatchewan, it was this last summer.

It's interesting that suddenly at this particular point, seeing as after the North Battleford incident, this government seems to be wanting to get tough on crime. And that's a major, a major switch from what we've seen in the past. We've seen too many examples of young offenders committing crimes in custody and then the North Battleford one is one that shows up time and again.

(2130)

More recently you're quite aware of the Camp Kenosee one, the one that has been . . . (inaudible) . . . as camp walk-away, and that was a disastrous situation. And I'm sure we were told that that was going to get tightened up. But surely, Mr. Premier, your people working in your departments must be able to look ahead of the situation somewhat and be able to be a bit more proactive in waiting till something comes to the House here and have a situation like that nicknamed camp walk-away because of all the things that are happening there. Then it gets tightened up because it comes through the House.

It makes us wonder how many other things like that are going on just because we haven't heard of them and been able to dump them on your doorstep. It's unfortunate that we have to do that to keep things on an even keel.

Mr. Premier, your government has shown absolutely no concern for public safety and that's another component of this. Rehabilitation is one. We may come back to that a little later on, but public safety is another one. And I guess my question is: in view of what's happened . . . Camp Kenosee is one of them and that's a very recent one which you should have been able to correct, that after some of the situations that developed this winter, what can you tell the people of Saskatchewan about their safety concerns?

And they are concerned about those. I attended four of those meetings. And I believe you had ministers at most of those and they can bring that back to you. People out there are concerned for their safety. Each one of us . . . well probably each one of us has had those things happen. Personally I've had my house broken into. I've had my car broken into. I've had farm buildings broken into. And I don't think that my situations are any unusual from anyone else's.

What can you go ahead and say that will give the people of this province some comfort that they don't have to lie awake in the middle of the night wondering if their property is going to be broken into, their cars stolen, or their tires slashed?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well what can you recommend that we should adopt here? And don't give me the business that you know I'm here to answer the questions. I'm here to answer the questions. I asked you about whether or not the Saskatchewan Party supports boot camps for youth. I think you do, just like you do private hospital care. And your refusal to answer tells me that you do support boot camps.

Now if you think that is the answer for making people secure in their homes, get up and tell us right now. I think you're in that camp. I think you're in the boot camp's approach for young people.

Now look, no system that is devised even if you have a boot camp under your system — heaven forbid you should ever be in office to develop such a regiment that is constructed — isn't fail-safe or fail-proof, is always open to some abuse, somebody escaping. You can set up the biggest fourscore, maximum security penitentiary in the world, and somebody finds a way to escape it. They find a way to get out of it. And then you bring it up in the legislature and say, how can people be safe and secure in their homes? Well of course we worry about that, but there is no perfection in the system at all.

And all that we have said, the minister has said, and I repeat again on behalf of the government, if Kenosee is a problem, as it happens to have been a problem, we will do all that we can and take all the measures that we can to make sure that there is no repetition of it.

Will there be a repetition? There may very well be. There is no full-proof system of protection, but there is in Saskatchewan as good a penitentiary, correctional system, other systems of guardianship, of the protection of the people in jeopardy or lacking security in their homes as there is in any other province.

That's our position. We think it's a question of punishing those that need to be punished, and we're going to do that. And we're going to do it firmly as much as the provincial laws can permit

us to do. We're going to rehabilitate them because we think they're young men and women who deserve a chance, a second chance if that's possible, as much as we can within provincial jurisdiction. That's our approach.

Is yours boot camps? Tell us, yes or no.

Mr. Heppner: — Well, sir, as you know, we can go ahead and define boot camps in dozens of different ways. If we think that certain crimes and certain misdemeanours after certain numbers of occurrences have certain kinds of consequences, and you can call them what you wish, so be it.

Your answer is to say that a refusal means agreement. Well, Mr. Premier, if we look at the answers you've been giving us so far throughout this last session and any time you refuse to answer, at any time you refuse to answer that means you're in agreement, we could have a very interesting time of it going through *Hansard* to see what you all had to say and what you all believe because you refused to answer. So there's a whole long list in *Hansard* of those sorts of things, and I would suggest that you probably better not go there.

But as far as the security's concerned, we have a break-in capital in Canada in one of our cities. And what are we doing about that? I haven't heard you go to the Prime Minister and tell him that you want some major changes. You're prepared to come to this House and rant and rave and make all kinds of noise. I think this province would be well served if they once in a while saw you get that enthusiastic with the Prime Minister on a few issues and a number of issues.

He was in town here last week — or this week, earlier on — Mr. Premier. Nobody heard you ranting and raving with the Prime Minister about what's happening with agriculture. And you didn't get anything. And we're not surprised. No one heard you rant and rave with the Prime Minister about highways. And you didn't get anything. And no one's surprised. And we didn't hear you rant and rave about health with the Prime Minister. And we didn't get anything. And we're not surprised. And we didn't hear you rant and rave about justice and the Young Offenders Act. And you didn't get anything. And we're not surprised.

You're not getting anything, Mr. Premier, because the only time that you make a whole lot of noise is when you're in this House. That's the place you ought to be making some noise. You have no problem telling the Liberals here to write their letters, and maybe they should.

But what are you doing? You're the top elected person in this province. What is it that Mr. Chrétien has that he's offering you that keeps you so quiet? The people of this province, Mr. Premier, want you to step up to the batter's box and go ahead and hit a home run for this province for a change and get something on any one of those areas.

Justice should have been the easiest one. But your minister wouldn't even go as far as Ottawa with the rest of the parties to go ahead and try and accomplish something.

When are you going to go ahead and speak up for this province with the Prime Minister, as you had the opportunity when he

was here in Saskatchewan, on your turf and demand something? When are you going to do that, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well I tell you, I'm not going to do it the way you tell me to do it. No, no way. I'll leave the ranting and raving to you folks. I don't deal business with prime ministers or premiers by ranting and raving. I leave that to the Saskatchewan Party. You people are the experts at ranting and raving. And in the end result, zero from Saskatchewan from your approach.

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Premier, that's interesting because you have managed to get absolutely nothing. You've got zero from the feds. You keep coming here and telling us they don't give us anything. We're quite aware of that. And you're not getting anything. I thought you should be doing some of that.

Like, what exactly is the Prime Minister offering you? Mr. Captain Canada or something? Another constitutional thing across the country, when you decide to retire from this job after three or four decades? Surely we deserve to be able to get something. And you're the person that we need to send. You're the person that we look up to to go ahead and do that.

All party politics aside, it's the Premier that's looked to, from everyone in the province, to go to the federal government and get some of that. And when you go there and negotiate, everyone in this province is cheering for you, hoping that you will be able to get something. But as we just went through that litany of things that we need over here, none of it has come back. I guess what we're looking at is, what are you actually doing?

We agree that we must work harder to prevent crime, to keep young offenders out of trouble before they get there. But we think there's some other solutions that may be out there.

For example, for example . . .

An Hon. Member: — Boot camps.

Mr. Heppner: — Now listen, Mr. Premier, here is an example, here is an example. You want boot camps, you build them.

But here is a different example for you to do some work with. In conversations with workers at the Prince Albert Emergency Shelter for Women, I'm told that although they used to receive money for child counselling from Social Services. That funding is no longer there.

Well, Mr. Premier, let's talk about prevention. It's the ultimate solution to crime. We can talk about rehabilitation for the people who have committed a crime not to do it again. We can talk about security with more police, more lock-ups, more fences, and all those sorts of things. We can talk about punishment, the consequences, and those probably all play a part.

But, Mr. Premier, what better way to show youngsters that violence is wrong, to stop the cycle of abuse, than to talk to them in their periods of crisis, when they flee with their mothers for shelter because there has been abuse in their homes? So when we talk about preventing youth crime, there's probably a

good place to start.

However, as I said earlier on in the beginning of my question, they used to receive money for child counselling from Social Services. That funding is no longer there. Mr. Premier, why don't you make a commitment to return that funding so that these children in their early experience with violence can get that counselling, and we may have the example for the best prevention that we can think of, Mr. Premier.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I'll take this up with the Minister of Social Services and report back at some time in the House — Monday or Tuesday of next week.

Mr. Heppner: — There was a question asked, Mr. Premier, earlier on by one of the independents on child prostitution. It's a serious problem. I don't think there's a person . . . well very few people in this province that wouldn't like to see that dealt with totally. And in that discussion that you had, the discussion got fairly heated, Mr. Premier, and I would like to probably give you, at this time in a calmer moment, an opportunity to say what you're planning on doing for making the streets safer for Saskatchewan children, particularly with that component in mind.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I have given this answer, if the hon. member had been in his chair, at length. Now if estimates require me to repeat the answer again because he wasn't in his chair . . . maybe he was watching a movie as he was last night somewhere. I don't know what it is. I'm not going to do it. It's in this transcript of the House, and you know exactly what the answer was.

Mr. Heppner: — Well I don't know what movie you've been watching. We've sent you over a few in the past while that you probably haven't watched. I can verify for you, I wasn't watching any movie, but you've sure been seeing some things. I'm not sure what you've been into to see all those things, but probably wasn't a movie.

Question, Mr. Premier. In Manitoba they have an anti-john legislation, and that's a part that hasn't been discussed here today, with the way they use the concept of confiscating the cars for anyone that's found soliciting a prostitute. So that's something that has not been discussed here today.

And I'm asking you if you have that plan in place or, Mr. Premier, something else that's fairly . . . And I think in this time, Mr. Premier, this province would be ready for you to take some very strong steps on this issue. I don't think anyone would fault you, Mr. Premier, for doing something that has a lot of clout and is very tough in this particular area.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Chairman, here we go again. This has been asked of the Minister of Justice many times, and I'll repeat the position. We're monitoring the Manitoba proposal with interest, as I said earlier. If it works we'll take a look at seeing implementing it here. We want to see particularly whether the proposed legislation will withstand a constitutional challenge. If Manitoba is successful, we'll definitely take a look at the question of seizing cars of perpetrators.

Right now let's examine that case carefully before making a final decision, and that's our point of view.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Well, Mr. Premier, I thought this was a time where we would get your particular perspective on it which as leader of the party should have probably more clout than the other things we've been hearing. And comments such as we're monitoring and we're looking into it, at some point it would have been nice to say we have looked into it. We have monitored it, and here's where we're going.

But so far we're into monitoring, and we're into looking at things, but I'm not sure what the movies over there that people are watching, but they can't be whodunit movies because not much is being done.

It's a well-known fact now, Mr. Premier, that Saskatchewan pays the highest taxes of nearly everyone as far as Saskatchewan is concerned. We pay the highest percentage, Mr. Premier, of our incomes to the taxman of anyone in the country.

In fact we know you've tried to cover this up in different sorts of ways. In your budget documents you state that our taxes are in the middle of the pack. Well that's really rather interesting how you managed to all of a sudden decide that you're in the middle of the pack.

(2145)

I guess you included the cost of rent and mortgage in that as well. Of course, our rents and mortgages are lower here. That's because you've chased everyone in the last 40 years of NDP-CCF rule out of the province. So obviously when there aren't enough people to fill all the houses the rent's going to go down. Anyone can figure that one out and so can you.

Last year we saw a 2 per cent reduction in the PST which, by the way, Mr. Premier, as you're aware, I voted for because we believe in free votes. You maybe don't at this particular point. You saw a 2 per cent reduction in the PST which took the rate back to where it was in 1991 when you assumed power. This year we see a 2 percentage point decrease in the income tax, a saving that amounts to — and you've gone through this — about half a cup of coffee.

Mr. Premier, will you commit tonight to put before the people of this province a detailed plan that's broad-based tax reduction that will help grow our economy and keep our people at home?

If you look around and you talk to the people on your side of the House, and I'm sure it's no different than on this side, you'll find that most people here that have children who have left home, most of those are out of the province.

I'm positive that over 50 per cent of all the kids of the MLAs are out of province. Two-thirds of mine are. They'd probably like to come back. They didn't want to leave but they had to when they found good jobs elsewhere. I would like them at home. I think everyone else would like them at home.

What do you have in mind to set up that broad-based tax and make sure that our economy grows? It hasn't been growing because then our population should be at a million and a

quarter, a million and a half, a million and three-quarters. But it's not there. What are your plans, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I honestly don't know whether the member knows what city we're in or what province we're in when he makes a question and a comment like that.

We . . . having dug out from under a mountain of debt by you Conservatives — a mountain of debt which put this province on the verge of bankruptcy . . . How shameful it was when your party — right there, the ones that you represent — were spending a billion dollars a year more than you were bringing in in revenues. Let the good times roll, your people said. We're not here for a long time, we're here for a good time, is what your people said.

And now we pay \$800 million to interest payments that go all the way to New York and to Hong Kong and to Zurich still, even though we've eliminated the deficit and reduced the debt. Thanks to all of this, you put the people of Saskatchewan behind the biggest eight ball that we've ever had since the Dirty Thirties and the last time the Conservatives were in office.

And finally we're out of this. And now we reduced the PST by 2 points and we have the narrowest base of items which are taxed by the PST in Canada with the exception of Alberta which has no PST. We have an income tax rate which has been reduced by 2 per cent on the income tax — Alberta only did it 1.5 per cent this year, Manitoba did it 2 per cent. We've given all kinds of tax breaks to small businesses and businesses to keep the climate of growth going, whether it's the manufacturing and processing tax, the whole number of other taxes.

Where in the world have you been, man? These have all come from this legislature. They've all been voted on. These are all tax reductions which we make, and they're sustainable, and we're committed to continuing on in that area. And you have the audacity of getting up and saying, what's your game plan?

I'll tell you what the game plan is: with every surplus dollar, one-third continues to pay down the debt, one-third continues to have tax reduction, and one-third of that surplus dollar, roughly speaking, goes to programs for people, whether it's your young offenders' issues, or whether it's health care, or whether it's education. That is our game plan.

And you know why we're going to get re-elected? Because what we've told the people of Saskatchewan we would do, we've done — we've done. Unlike you we didn't bankrupt. We pulled, with their help, the province of Saskatchewan right up into a place where there is hope and opportunity; where there is growth; where there is no more out-migration. We're going to do more. Do we need to do more? Yes, we do need to do more.

But where we took this province from 1991 to 1996, according to *Maclean's* magazine, is a blue ribbon example — not my words, *Maclean's* magazine — a blue-ribbon example for every province. You won't accept that; in a million years you won't accept it because what you want to do is you want to take over the treasury benches, and like the Bourbons, you remember nothing and you learn nothing, and if you ever should gain the treasury benches, let the good times roll again. Let the GigaText

go, let the High R Doors go, let's go with the Supercart spectacles, let's go with every cockamamie scheme of every fly-by-night promoter that ever came around the province and saw a living Tory — that's what you'll do.

Well I'll tell you where we're going. We're going where the people of Saskatchewan want us to go. Continue on debt reduction; continue on tax reduction; continue on program enhancement in the right areas. That's why we were re-elected in 1995. That's our policy, building for the 21st century. And believe me you will not be in politics long enough ever again to have the chance to open up the coffers to every fly-by-night artist that comes by and skins you people as they did between 1982 and 1991, I guarantee it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Talk about fly-by-night artist. Somebody comes up from Guyana and takes a shirt right off your back. Just a bunch of bare backs over there. They come out and they clean you out. You didn't know what you were doing. Along comes some outfit from Alberta and rips you people off.

NST comes along, and you say, well we had to move out of the States because it rained while we were trenching. Well heaven forbid that it rains when we trench. And you talk about knowing what you're doing, talking about calling us Bourbons. I suggest they ought to call you Schultz over there. You see very little, and you know very little. You remember the old series. That's what ought to happen over there.

Talk about debt. You know where it started. You know the numbers you put up. Remember 7-7-7. Thank goodness you weren't around. Thank goodness you weren't in power. You did have four decades in this province. You took over as CCF people when Alberta went in a different direction, and our population hasn't grown since then, and you know it. Four decades of your government and it hasn't gone anywheres.

Everywhere else in Canada has new growth unless you talk about the Maritimes, and that's a different situation altogether. But there's Alberta, moved in a different direction. We had potash. We have uranium. We have the best grain. We have the best universities, turned out the best students. And where has four decades of your government got us? You know where it's got us.

You talked about out-migration in your answer, Mr. Premier. Out-migration still at 1,700 people. When is it going to start to grow? What are you doing about it? What are your plans for? Next time we ask the question you'll be down another 1,700 people and another one. It must be your new program; 7-7-7 didn't work, so you go on down . . . was it going to be 1-7-0-0, drop that many people from this province on a regular basis.

Mr. Premier, you don't have a plan for this province, and if you do I sure hope you don't tell it because it might be a whole lot worse than what you're doing right now.

Last year as I said we saw that out-migration of 1,700 people and talking about out-migration was your idea. This was at a time when the economy was relatively strong. You boasted last year how good this economy was, and people were still leaving.

This year oil prices have dropped. Agriculture is scary. You have a few agricultural people in your area on your side of the House. Talk to the member from Redberry. He'll tell you what it looks like. He'll tell you how tough it is. He puts his thumbs up now. But I'm sure when he gets back home and the people ask him how's farming, I'm sure he doesn't put his thumb up there and say it's going good. He knows it's not going good. It's going tough.

If we lose people when the province is doing that well, Mr. Premier, what's going to happen if the group that was up there can't get us the rain or the oil prices don't go back up? We're already losing people. The economy isn't going to be better than last year. What are you going to do?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I will tell you what I'm not going to do. I'm not going to follow the fiscal policies of the PC (Progressive Conservative) Party, that's for sure. I'm going to read to you what the Investment Dealers of Canada said just a few days ago.

Saskatchewan has the distinction of being one of the first provinces to get its fiscal house in order this decade. A budget surplus last year extended the government's string of black ink to four consecutive years, a record matched only by Alberta.

Continuing:

An important benefit of the government's strengthened financial position is the continuing decline in annual debt (your debt, debt service payments). These fall for the fourth straight year to 725 million (still, thanks to you folks over there). Debt service costs represent nearly 14 per cent of revenues.

Thanks to you PC people over there. And what do the investment dealers say?

The Saskatchewan government is to be commended in its efforts to reduce outstanding debt. Tax-supported debt reached 11.5 billion but was trimmed by 2.3 billion.

We trimmed it, not you people. And what do they say about the economy?

The marked strengthening in Saskatchewan's fiscal finances did not go unnoticed. In 1997 Standard and Poor's raised Saskatchewan's rating for senior, unsecured debt from A minus to A. DBRS upgraded the province to A low from BBB. These upgrades were in recognition of the sharp reduction in government debt, the commitment to reducing the overall debt, the basically sound economic outlook for the province's economy.

That's what the investment dealers say. Not you, sir, but the Investment Dealers of Canada say — Canada-wide if not worldwide.

What are we going to do? We're going to do what we have been doing because the Buddhists have a proverb: when you're on the right track and the right road, you just keep on going. And that's what the people of Saskatchewan know, that we're on the

right track, we're on the right road and going to keep on going, building Saskatchewan for the 21st century, providing hope and opportunity and optimism. And we're never going to go back to the days where you brought this province to its knees — never.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Premier, you're getting your back-benchers fired up but you're not doing much for the rest of Saskatchewan. You speak of the 21st century. You will not be in government in the 21st century. You know what the polls show. You're at 42. We're six points behind you and you know it. And you know it. And the people of Saskatchewan know it. Trot out your figures; trot out your figures. You come to rural Saskatchewan. You come to my constituency and you try and find a red. You try and find an NDP in my constituency. They're running. They're running for the hills and you know it. They don't want to be seen; they don't want to be seen. Last time we had two red signs in the whole constituency. Now they're not around. So don't plan on the 21st century because you won't be there. You won't be there. There's one other thing that . . .

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

Mr. Osika: — To introduce guests, Mr. Chair.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to the members of the legislature. I'd just like to introduce a couple of acquaintances from Moose Jaw that are here in the gallery this evening — this late evening. Mr. John Morris and Heather Wild, both from Moose Jaw, to watch us in operation here today. I'd like you to welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Chair, I was wondering, after six hours, if the loyal Liberal opposition might have a chance . . .

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Executive Council Vote 10

Subvote (EX01)

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Order. What is your point of order?

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Chair, I raise on a point of order the fact that this group have been up for six or seven hours with their blathering on and it seems like we have not the ability . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. Order. Order! The point of order is not well taken.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess if the Liberals weren't in third place, which is last place, they might have an opportunity to say something. If they were here once in a while, they'd have their chances as well. But I guess they show up once in a while and want to say something . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Order. Order. Order! Now the hon. member knows that you are not to refer to the presence or the absence of anyone from the House and I would bring that to the member. Order! Order!

(2200)

Mr. Heppner: — I would like, Mr. Chairman, to read a little part from *Hansard* for you and then we'll have a question for the Premier coming out of that. It's a question that was asked by Mr. D'Autremont and it goes as follows, dealing with the Public Service Commission. It says:

Thank you, Mr. Minister. (Mr. D'Autremont says.) Can you guarantee there is no partisan activity taking place within the Public Service Commission?

And then the hon. Mr. Calvert answers and this is his answer . . .

The Chair: — Order. Order. Now the member knows that he cannot use the proper names of the members sitting in the Legislative Assembly. He must refer to them by their constituents or their ministry.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. The answer then by the Minister of Social Services is as follows. He says:

Yes I can. I want to repeat though that I'm sure that within the Government of Saskatchewan, you will find employed people who support the political party of the current government. You will find people who support the party to which the member belongs, and you will find people who support the Liberal Party, and there may be someone in the province who supports the Green Party.

So basically, Mr. Calvert is making all kinds of comments . . . sorry, Minister of Social Services is making comments about different kinds of political parties and as that answer says, the Public Service Commission is supposed to be non-partisan.

However, at a meeting in late May with PSC and that was for 50 to 60 people, Brian Topp made a presentation stating that the opposition was getting legal advice in return for future services and consideration. And I guess, Mr. Premier, I would like for you to comment on that.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I have no comment to make. I have answers to give to questions which are directed to me.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — That same gentleman, Mr. Premier, went on to say that all we did was run around the province and create trouble. This is supposed to be non-partisan, Mr. Premier, non-partisan. That's not non-partisan. Would you answer that please.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I don't have the faintest clue what the hon. member is talking about, and frankly you don't either.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — It was from management orientation for Public Service Commission. You should know about that because I think he works fairly close to you. Do you consider that acceptable behaviour, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, it must be . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I don't know. Does this man know what he's talking about? What is your concern? State it simply, just get up in a simple English sentence, spit it out, and tell us. Ask me a question; I'll try to give you an answer as best I can. Okay.

Mr. Heppner: — I start off with the response that was given by the Minister of Social Services, so if you want it clear, this comes from your side of the House. And he says:

Yes I can. I want to repeat though that I'm sure within the Government of Saskatchewan you'll find employed people who support the political party of the current government. You will find people who support the party to which the member belongs. You will find people who support the Liberal Party, maybe someone in the province who supports the Green Party.

The question is, the question is . . . and that is an answer to this question. That's an answer to this question:

Thank you, Mr. Minister. Can you guarantee there is no partisan activity taking place within the Public Service Commission?

And the answer was, yes he can; he says he guarantees it.

And here we have, on this meeting in May, at the meeting I just explained to you, the 40 to 50 people — it's an orientation meeting for the PSC, Public Service Commission. He says that all the Saskatchewan Party is doing is running around creating trouble. I thought he was supposed to be non-partisan. Is that non-partisan, Mr. Premier? Now you know the question.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Who says? You say he says. I'm sorry, that's not good enough.

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Premier, I guess we should have filled the galleries with the 40 to 60 people that were there. Would that have been good enough? Do we have to bring in a mob to have to force you to do something? Do we have to bring in a mob to get you to listen?

An Hon. Member: — The blond-haired guy was there . . . (inaudible) . . . was there. Your official was there.

Mr. Heppner: — Ask him. Just lean over and ask him. Right there.

An Hon. Member: — You don't worry about me. I'll ask who I want to ask.

Mr. Heppner: — Everybody in the province worries about you. Everyone in the province worries about you, and I'll ask you what I feel like asking you, and if you want to know how to get the answer, you will go ahead, and you can ask him. He knows, sitting right behind you, Mr. Premier. Turn around; he was at the meeting. You want to know the answer, you turn around and ask the gentleman behind you. If you want to know the answer, go ahead and do it.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, wow! Mr. Chairman, am I glad those people aren't arrogant! But I must say, he's not arrogant, but he is a little bit scary, quite a bit scary.

Mr. Heppner: — I would suggest to you, Mr. Premier, because you seem to know nothing, and I guess that idea of Schultz is kicking in very well. You turn around and ask Mr. Nicol, and he will tell you, and then you can answer this question intelligently.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I don't know, what did you say? Say it again.

Mr. Heppner: — If you turn around and ask Mr. Nicol behind you, he was at the meeting, he will explain this to you, because you wanted to hear it from someone else than me that that occurred. So you check with him. He can tell you; he was there.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — No, no, no, no sir. Doesn't work that way. You have a statement to make or an accusation to make, you give me your source. If it's you, I don't believe anything you say nor are you going to intimidate me. It doesn't work that way. And don't tell me who I have to ask for my information.

You get up and make your accusation. I'll make a response to it. You being a Tory the way you are, you are simply making this by way of intimidation, the way you always do. Just like your leader calls the public service full of deadwood and skunks; do you know where they are and where they're going to be weeded out? That's your line. That's how it works. You get up and make the accusations.

Mr. Heppner: — Well, sir, here's the accusation. You want it. Brian Topp, involved with that meeting that I've told you about three times if you would have cared to listen, was involved in partisan activities after the Minister of Social Services said that he could ensure that didn't happen. Now you wouldn't take it from me the first time, now you asked it from me. You've got it. So now what are you going to do about it?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I repeat again, you say, he says. I'm sorry, it's not good enough for me.

Mr. Heppner: — That's what I tried to solve for you, Mr. Premier. If you want to talk to someone else who was there, if you want to talk to someone else who was there you can turn around and talk to Mr. Nicol sitting right behind you. So either you take my word or, other than that, we have to assume that you want to remain ignorant on the issue. Which is it?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — You know what I hear, Mr. Chairman? I hear that you, the member from Rosthern, when you got together with the Liberals, met with those who are in charge of the \$1.2 billion PC metro fund, or \$2.1 billion metro

fund. Now that's what I hear is the case. And there has been payment from that metro fund to the PC Party as it's now defunct, and also payment to the Saskatchewan Party as it's there. Is that right or wrong? That's what I hear. Is that right or wrong?

The Chair: — Order. Order! Order. Order! I would remind the participants in the debate that they should start addressing their comments through the Chair. The back/forth is not permissible, so your comments from both sides should go through the Chair.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, Mr. Chair, the Premier obviously doesn't want to know what went on there. He doesn't even want to ask his own people that are sitting behind him what went on there. And so I guess the situation that exists will have to be explored by other people, and other people will have to draw the conclusion that the Premier doesn't want to answer to it. As he said earlier on this evening, that a refusal is probably an admission. Those were your words about half an hour ago.

Continuing with the questions that we had on taxation and what's happening in this province, we were dealing, Mr. Premier, with the out-migration and we're going to continue on that for a little longer. For the last year, we've seen your government trotting out job figures as clear vindication of your economic development, and your Minister of Economic Development has done a great job of giving us no end of job figures on that.

In that case however, how can you explain why more than 1,700 people left the province than came in if we've had those fantastic job opportunities that your minister has told us about.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — You see, Mr. Chairman, the answer to that question I can put very, very simply because here's what happened under the Devine administration, the administration you supported and still support and you still defend.

The out-migration in last four years — the out-migration in the last four years of the PC Devine administration was over 60,000 Saskatchewan people . . . 60,000. You know where we're coming back? We're getting those 60,000 back, and we're not quite right there where it's equal off, 60,000 out and 60,000 back. You know what? We're short by your 2,000. Son of a gun, that's a real missing of the target.

Well I'll tell you, we get back 60,000 from people that you drove out of the province. That's a success story. You should be congratulating us, not condemning us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Chairman, this is truly amazing. There stands a Premier, and he gets up, and he wants a compliment because we're losing people. Seventeen hundred people more moved out than came in, and he wants a compliment, Mr. Chairman.

Isn't this truly amazing. I would hate to see what would happen if this Premier thought he was a failure, but then maybe the rest of the people of Saskatchewan would take care of that for us in the next election. Because, as I said earlier on, the next century

will not see this person as Premier, Mr. Chairman. That may be by his own choice, we suspect that very definitely. He's seen those figures I quoted earlier on about how well his party is doing.

So, Mr. Chairman, I suggest very strongly he's going to make his exodus very quickly and hope for Mr. Chrétien, who was here and received such a warm welcome after delivering absolutely nothing, to get a nice position to play some other game out there in the rest of Canada. Maybe he can save us from who knows what. Maybe he can save us from Alexa. There must be things he can save us from. There are no more fire-breathing dragons around, but I'm sure he'll create one.

Well, Mr. Premier, my point here is that in good times we lost people. That was last year. What are you going to do to ensure when the economy changes. And it always does; you said earlier on yourself, Mr. Premier, that things kind of move up and down, and they do that.

What are you going to do to ensure when things get a little on the down side we don't lose droves of people? You're losing them in good times. You say they're good times — and we're losing people.

When times get tough . . . And they look like they're getting that way. Check with your farm community. I gave you a few people on your side of the House that understand farming. What are you going to do then? Or are you going to make sure that what's happened here since the CCF-NDP took on to keep us under a million is going to be there? Is that part of your policy? Are those some of the good points that you talked about earlier on?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Did you say under a hundred million? I'm either mishearing things or the hon. member is misspeaking himself.

But I can tell you this. The policy of this government remains as I described. We have growth. I've given you all the quotations, all the citations from external people. You won't buy it. You're on your policy of rant and rave that you advocate I should adopt. Continue to it; enjoy yourself for as long as you want.

Our policy is clear; the budget is there. I've given this answer 10 times tonight if I've given it once. I don't intend to give it to you one more time. So it's up to you if you want to ask it again.

Mr. Heppner: — Well it's the Premier's estimates, and I guess we have to make an estimate on, Mr. Chairman, on his answers. And we will do that and the people out there who have been watching will probably do the same sort of thing.

Regarding your view of economic development, we've discussed a little bit about job creation and those sorts of things. We've discussed the people that have moved out of the province. And I guess the question is, in your view of economic development, which one do you pick, Mr. Premier? Or you can go part way in between if you wish. The door is yours. Direct government involvement or instead creating an environment where business wants to locate?

Those are two different things. Do you want direct government

involvement or are you in favour of creating an environment where business comes in? Now you're into Crown investments and those sorts of things, which were great in the early days of the CCF, Mr. Premier. Have you changed? Are you still in favour of all Crowns getting involved and doing all sorts of things or are you more in favour of just creating an atmosphere where business can flourish without your involvement?

(2215)

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, does the hon. member mean when he asks me do I favour about the government doing all things, like Mr. Devine did through Fair Share and started to say to the government, you shall get this, you should get that? Does he mean by his example that I should be doing like Mr. Devine advocated we should be doing?

I remember his argument was there's going to be a factory in every town and village in the province of Saskatchewan . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And your candidate, the member from Saltcoats, he was there. A factory in every town . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the answer is no, I don't support that whatsoever, don't support that whatsoever. You support that. You people live way back in the old dinosaur age. That will be your economic policy.

Our economic policy will be the one that has given us upgrades, the one that provides jobs, which has given people coming a hope, a chance to come back to Saskatchewan. We have got an economy and a climate for economic growth which, in the words of *Maclean's*, is a blue ribbon model for all of the people of Saskatchewan. Not your dinosaur days — those days are gone by.

Mr. Heppner: — Well as you say, Mr. Premier, your ideas aren't working. People are moving out of the province and you can know that that happens. So we can wave our arms just as well as you can. And I guess that comes from being the Premier of Saskatchewan who waves good-bye to people of Saskatchewan as they move out of the province.

Dealing on with that same line of questioning, Mr. Premier. So is it your preference for the government to get directly involved in the economy like you did with SPUDCO? Do you want a specific example, Mr. Premier? Like you did with SPUDCO, a Crown corporation dedicated to potatoes. That's an example — you can deal with that one.

Could you not have done more to encourage the private sector to increase this industry instead of competing with them as you're doing?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, I didn't hear what the hon. member said.

Mr. Heppner: — No problem, Mr. Chairman, I've had to repeat many questions today. I know the time's getting on and the Premier's probably getting weary — both of this question period, as he is of being Premier as well.

So specifically, this has a specific component to it, Mr. Premier: is it your preference for the government to get directly involved in the economy — which comes out of the last question, and

here's the example — like you did with SPUDCO, a Crown corporation dedicated to potatoes? And that's an example, or is that just one example?

Could you not have done more to encourage the private sector to increase this industry instead of now becoming a competitor with them?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well now, again, I have to be clear. Is the hon. member asking whether or not I follow the Tory policy of direct intervention in the economy during the Devine administration? You know, \$320 million of your taxpayers in Bi-provincial in Lloydminster. Are you advocating that kind of direct government intervention?

Are you advocating \$250 million plus direct intervention into the economy into the upgrader here in Regina? Is that the kind of Tory thing you're advocating that Mr. Devine did?

Are you advocating that we should pump in another \$300 million plus on top of all of it to the Saferco project at Belle Plaine? That kind of direct investment in the economy?

Do you think I should follow the Devine PC approach of pumping in \$450 million in insurance companies and operating insurance companies? Obviously you believe that government should be in insurance companies. You believe in that.

Do you believe that we should do the same thing with Millar Western, your investments? Is that what you're asking me — do I support your approach to economic development which is the way you practised it during the 1980s? Fingers into everything and everybody around who came around with any kind of an idea on the back of an envelope, you signed up the deal.

You did that. You signed up the deal and you left the province of Saskatchewan \$14 billion in the hole. And you're advocating that today in 1998? Bring on that election. Bring on that election.

Mr. Heppner: — The election will be brought on its own if you've got the courage to be around. Next century you won't be around, Mr. Premier, for one reason or another, and you know it. Because you know how easy it is to get you out of your seat; it's been done before. And the same sort of people are waiting there for you again.

The Chair: — Order. Order. I'd remind the member again that he is directing his comments straight across without going through the Chair. And the comments will be passed through the Chair.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. We will both try to get our comments through you, I hope.

So as we said, those 21st century will not see you anywhere. And I would suggest, Mr. Premier, that in your answers you deal with your government, you seem to have this . . . just like a bicyclist who's got that one little mirror off the side, you keep looking in there. You can't deal with your own government.

Why don't you answer what you're doing? Why don't you answer what you're doing . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Of

which you people left most of it there the last time you were out and you know it, you know it.

Unfunded liability, who started that? That was a CCF-NDP and you know it. Why not take some credit for that. Okay.

Dealing with Channel Lakes, with Channel Lakes. The member over there from Biggar is wondering what the question is about; he should listen. If Channel Lakes has taught us anything it's probably that government is best not involved in business because it didn't turn out that great.

Why not rather encourage private industry in Saskatchewan for a change, and why does the government have its fingers in everything it seems to. I mean, we just mention the SPUDCO and we mentioned a few other things.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — So now you've learned, you say. GigaText, \$3.5 million lost; Supercart International, \$8 million lost; Joytec, 5.2 lost; High R Doors, a million dollars lost; Austrak Machinery Corporation, 700,000 lost; Nardei Fabricators, 600,000 lost.

By the way, did we mention the — what was that big jet airplane they were thinking about? The Squalus — the Squalus from Promavia, 5 million, gone just like that.

This is from you people. You tell us about accounting; you don't even know the first thing about accounting. Please, please tell it to somebody who believes you and in Saskatchewan that's nobody.

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Premier, you seem to have this fixation about history. You don't want to answer about what you're doing; you don't want to answer about your government's doing, you don't want to answer what the plans are.

But here is something that came out of what you've said earlier on today, I believe. You said that you had asked some of your ministers to resign. Well you should be able to handle this one, Mr. Premier. Who did you ask to resign and under what circumstances?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, what I discuss with my ministers is between me and my ministers, fair and simple. I've told the House what I said early in the afternoon, I repeat.

I have been in circumstances . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, it's good government. I don't get up there like the hon. member from Rosetown in these kinds of tones to advocate his case. That's, wherever it is . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, no, Kindersley's all right. I'm talking about the gentleman that was speaking . . . Rosthern, not Rosetown — the member from Rosthern.

Everybody knows the history of this House and what's happened with respect to resignations. That's as far as I'm going to go.

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Premier, that's interesting. We can't seem to be able to question you. You make your own decisions, and that's closed. We knew you were the Premier.

We knew you were the top person elected in the province. We didn't know that you were that high up that you didn't have to answer those sorts of things.

You're the ones that . . . you're the one that said you made those statements. You're the one that said you made . . . you asked people to resign. You're the one that said you had those decisions; they were your decisions to make. You said you had made them.

So, Mr. Premier, was the person that you asked to resign, was that the member from Carrot River?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I've given my answer already.

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I guess we're at the situation where I understand the Premier has got his little area of information that's closed, and the people of the province aren't going to know what it is. We will never find out it seems, Mr. Chairman, which one of his people back there aren't functioning properly, which one he's had to move aside. Maybe you should move them all aside.

Then we've seen what's happened in Guyana, what we seen was happened in Channel Lake, with NST — there should have been a whole long list, and there may have been. But it seems he doesn't want to admit it. He doesn't want to tell it. Maybe he didn't actually ask any people to resign. Maybe he isn't in control of his government. We don't know; he doesn't want to tell us.

Dealing with the economic downturn that we were just talking about and the 1,700 people moving out of the province, we've already seen the effects of the economic downturn. Job growth is slowed. If you check out in the farming, the only activity is some re-seeding that's happening. Crops are terrible. Bugs are out. Drought is there. Frost has killed a lot of crops. Community pastures is sending their cattle home, the ones that took any cattle in the first place. Feed is hardly available.

And when we asked the Minister of Agriculture what he is doing about it, he says, well I have . . . I wrote a two-page document. So a two-page document is supposed to be saving agriculture from the difficulties that are going on. We've seen, as I've said, the effects of this economic downturn. Job growth is slowed, and it will continue to slow, Mr. Premier.

We've had other industries show up in Saskatchewan but with agriculture coming to a halt, there's a lot of other things that are going to slow down.

The machinery business, Mr. Premier, is going to be slowing down. It's going to come to a virtual halt. What about the farm manufacturing things? Some of the things that are the lifeblood of many of our rural communities, communities that have developed their own little industries, adding on to certain kinds of equipment, everything from combine pick-ups to spreaders to cultivation equipment . . . those are laying off people. They're shutting down.

It doesn't look that good out there, Mr. Premier. And at some point, as always happens in Saskatchewan, when agriculture

starts to suffer, the rest of the province starts to suffer. It's just the way it works. Agriculture is still a critical enough part of this province, Mr. Premier, that when it goes down, everything else starts to suffer as well.

It's very easy for government during economic upswings. It's harder on downturns, as you're finding out. And I guess we'd like to know what your plans are during those downturns.

We need in Saskatchewan, Mr. Premier, something that's going to keep things going. How are we going to keep these farm equipment manufacturers going? What ideas do we have for that? A lot of those, such as Flexi coil, have become players on the world market. They've become players on the world market, Mr. Premier. What is happening to their exports? What are you doing to go ahead and enhance that? The other smaller manufacturers, they're suffering as well.

We also need to check into, Mr. Premier, things that we can do about input costs. Now I know we've talked about it; you've talked about some of the things as far as inputs and doing some checking to see what keeps the cost high. And fuel is one of them. But we don't seem to be getting the answer. There's surveys or things going on, but there's no completion to this. As you've said earlier on, you're doing some research. You're looking into it, but never do we have an answer.

Mr. Premier, agriculture is in a dire state. When you found out the other day that all that happened to agriculture is that the Minister of Agriculture had gone to the farmers that had the lease agreements and said we've increased it by 25 per cent — 25 per cent . . . and then he said what good guys we are. It could have been 30 or 33 or 35. So you only sent him an increase of 25 per cent.

And the member from Swift Current looks all upset by that. I'm sure he's got a lot of people that's got lease agreements out there. And for him to shake his head and tell the people of Saskatchewan that he's not concerned that there's been a 25 per cent increase in the lease agreements, I'd suggest that he may not be here for the 21st century either.

So Mr. Premier, we need to look at those sorts of things. And from your government, we haven't heard much. . . . (inaudible) . . . that two page little document.

What are we doing about hauling feed into this country? We looked at the map that was given to us recently about the rainfall in Saskatchewan and the drought areas. And we saw that on that particular map there is virtually no rainfall in Saskatchewan, 6 per cent of what it usually is. Now how can we deal with that sort of thing? When you walk across the field there is no grass. It crunches.

What are your plans? You seem to have no plans. I was home in my constituency last weekend, and a number of farmers came up and asked me very specifically, what's happening? What's the Minister of Agriculture doing?

The Chair: — Order. The clock has been called so this committee will rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:33 p.m.

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