

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

Tantallon and Rhein.

I so present.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of the Saskatchewan's disenfranchised widows group. 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 whereby benefits and pensions are reinstated to disenfranchised widows and whereby all revoked pensions are reimbursed to them retroactively with interest to April 17, 1985.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition come from the communities of Moosomin, Kenosee Lake, Manor, Arcola, Broadview.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions today to present on behalf of Saskatchewan's disenfranchised widows. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to have the Workers' Compensation Board Act amended whereby benefits and pensions are reinstated to disenfranchised widows and whereby all revoked pensions are reimbursed to them retroactively with interest to April 17, 1985.

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the Arcola, Carlyle, Storthoaks, Manor, Saskatoon, Redvers, Carnduff areas, and Carlyle, 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 demand the federal government work with Saskatchewan to put in place a farm aid package that provides real relief to those who need it, and that the provincial government develop a long-term farm safety net program as it promised to do when it cancelled GRIP against the wishes of farmers.

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

The petitioners, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present a petition and reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to have the Workers' Compensation Board Act amended whereby benefits and pensions are reinstated to disenfranchised widows and whereby all revoked pensions are reimbursed to them retroactively with interest to April 17, 1985.

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

Mr. Speaker, the petition I present is signed by individuals from the Manor and Carlyle areas of the province.

I so present.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise with my colleagues to present petitions in support of Saskatchewan's disenfranchised widows. 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 whereby benefits and pensions are reinstated to disenfranchised widows and whereby all revoked pensions are reimbursed to them retroactively with interest to April 17, 1985.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the Weyburn area of the province.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I today present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan's disenfranchised widows. The petition prays:

That your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to have the Workers' Compensation Board Act amended whereby benefits and pensions are reinstated to disenfranchised widows and whereby all revoked pensions are reimbursed to them retroactively with interest to April 17, 1985.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

People that have signed this petition are also from Carlyle and Manor.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition, and I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to have the Workers' Compensation Board Act amended whereby benefits and pensions are reinstated to disenfranchised widows and whereby all revoked pensions are reimbursed to them retroactively with interest to April 17, 1985.

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

And these are signed by people from Fillmore, Regina, Stoughton, and Zehner.

I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on federal and provincial governments to dedicate a greater portion of the fuel tax revenues toward road maintenance and construction so that Saskatchewan residents may have a safe highway system that meets their needs.

Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by the good folks from the communities of Hague, Hepburn, Warman, and several other communities, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions on behalf of citizens that are concerned about the state of our highway system in the province. The prayer reads as follows. Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on federal and provincial governments to dedicate a significantly greater portion of the fuel tax revenues toward road maintenance and construction so Saskatchewan residents may have a safe highway system that meets their needs.

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

Those who signed these petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from a number of communities in the Thunder Creek constituency, as well as from west of there, Fox Valley, Sceptre, Richmond area.

I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present petitions this afternoon from residents of the northwest concerned about the eastern entrance to the city of North Battleford and praying that the junction of Highways 40 and 16 will be removed and corrected in order to give us a safe and less confusing and less congested entrance to the city.

The petitioners this afternoon come from North Battleford, Gallivan, Medstead, and Whitkow.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join my colleagues in presenting a petition on behalf of concerned citizens of Saskatchewan with respect to safety and travel on our highways:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on federal and provincial

governments to dedicate a greater portion of fuel tax revenues toward road maintenance and construction so that Saskatchewan residents may have a safe, reliable, and effective highway system.

And the signatures on this petition are from Bangor, Yorkton, and Melville.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured once again to present petitions on behalf of people who are concerned about some of the most vulnerable in our province. And I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide essential funding and ensure the delivery of scientifically proven, diagnostic assessment and programming for children with learning disabilities in order that they have an access to an education that meets their needs and allows them to reach their full potential.

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

The people who have signed this petition today, Mr. Speaker, are from Birch Hills and Prince Albert. And I'm pleased to present this on their behalf.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the petitions presented at the last sitting have been reviewed and found to be in order. Pursuant to rule 12(7) these petitions are hereby received.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 34 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Justice: how much has been paid by the Department of Justice to Howard Morton, Q.C. in the fiscal year 1996-97, with subsequent questions for the fiscal years '97-98 and '98-99.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you, and of course to my colleagues in the House, a very, very special guest who is seated in your gallery, and that is His Excellency Hang Kyung Kim, the ambassador of Korea to Canada. I'll just ask the ambassador to remain seated for a moment until I finish.

Mr. Speaker, the ambassador has a very long and distinguished career of public service in the Korean government and the diplomatic corps — as director of the Asian affairs bureau of the foreign affairs ministry; as senior protocol secretary to the Prime Minister; as deputy consul general in New York and consul general in Los Angeles; as the ministry's public information office and spokesperson; as director general of the consular and overseas residence affairs bureau; as Korea's ambassador to Myanmar; as deputy minister for planning and management; and as Korea's ambassador to Canada since 1996.

Mr. Speaker, the people and the nation of Korea have long been our friends and our allies. And I'm pleased to say that our relationship with Korea is strong, and getting stronger, and growing. Korea is Canada's seventh most important global trading partner, with bilateral trade worth more than \$5 billion in 1998. Korea is also our third largest trading partner in the very important Asian Pacific Rim. And we have significant investments in each other's nations.

Saskatchewan exports to Korea, Mr. Speaker, a total of \$535 million from 1995 through to 1998. And we're confident that we can build on that solid foundation with Korea, expanding trade further in key sectors like ag-biotechnology, grains, feed products, pre-fab housing, and fertilizers.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Korea have built a prosperous economy, the same way we're trying to build a prosperous and diversified economy here at home, by hard work, innovation, and investing in value-added enterprise.

Mr. Speaker, I think we have much to learn from our Korean friends and partners, and we hope that we might also have many opportunities in the future to share our knowledge with them to the benefit mutually of our people and our nations. We look forward to building an even stronger relationship with Korea as we move forward together to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities of our growing, global marketplace.

Mr. Speaker, Ambassador's Kim's visit to Saskatchewan — his first official visit to our province — will include meetings with his Honour the Lieutenant Governor, with yourself, Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Energy and Mines, our Minister of Agriculture, I believe opposition people as well, officials from the University of Regina, and with officials from STEP (Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership Inc.), the export agency partnership.

And it's also going to be my pleasure and honour to hold a meeting with Ambassador Kim in a very short, few minutes.

I trust that throughout his visit to our province, His Excellency, Mrs. Kim who's with him, Economic Counsellor Mr. Lee, will meet with a friendly welcome and that they will come to know the warmth and the openness of Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, and all colleagues in the House, please join with me in welcoming a distinguished guest and his partner, His Excellency, Mr. Hang Kyung Kim, Korea's ambassador to Canada, and Mrs. Kim. Please stand.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with the Premier on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party official opposition in welcoming Mr. and Mrs. Kim to Saskatchewan and to the legislature. Also to you, Mr. Lee.

I know a number of acquaintances . . . As the Premier has indicated Saskatchewan and Korea share a lot. And I know a number of my acquaintances who are in the teaching profession are currently teaching over in Korea and have returned year after year. And they are thoroughly enjoying their stay in your

country. Welcome to Saskatchewan and I hope that your visit is very, very productive. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure indeed on behalf of the Liberal caucus to extend a welcome to their Honours here to this great province of ours. I hope you enjoy. You have come at the right time of the season when there's a rebirth and a regrowth — better than a month or two ago when everything was covered with a white blanket. So welcome; enjoy your stay.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have the pleasure of introducing today a very distinguished visitor to our province and our legislature namely, Mr. Lassie Chiwayo, who is seated in your gallery, and I'll ask him to stand at the conclusion of my remarks I think, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Chiwayo is the Minister of Finance from the province of Mpumulanga which is a province of South Africa.

And I want to say in reference to Mr. Chiwayo who I had the pleasure along with some of my colleagues here of having dinner with last night along with his deputy minister, that you know we in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, take a lot for granted. And sometimes we think politics is quite rough. But I want to say about Mr. Chiwayo, he was born in 1966 in Witbank's Lynnville Township. And when he was about 20 years old he was arrested for his political involvement with the African National Congress, firstly under the notorious state of emergency of 1986. And he spent an entire year in solitary confinement.

And in 1987 he was charged with 30 other activists from Witbank's with membership in the African National Congress, supposedly, allegedly, terrorism and subversion. And he was sentenced to seven years in prison, where he completed his education at the same time. And today I'm happy to say he's not in solitary confinement and he's not in prison — he's the Minister of Finance from Mpumulanga.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, since 1993, Saskatchewan has been participating in the Canada-South Africa program on governance. We have been twinned with the province of the Free State, which is a different province, since 1984. Mpumulanga is a neighbouring province of the Free State, and is twinned with Alberta.

Mr. Chiwayo and his deputy director general have visited Alberta to examine some of their approaches to democratic governance and are now spending a few days here in Saskatchewan to examine our approaches. They've met with many officials in the Department of Finance, with officials in a variety of other departments and Crown corporations, and with several elected members.

Mr. Chiwayo will be spending part of this afternoon observing our question period and debates, and I would ask all members to welcome Mr. Chiwayo to Saskatchewan and to the legislature. And now I'd ask him to rise. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party official opposition I'd like to join with the minister in welcoming Minister Chiwayo to Saskatchewan. Certainly over the years Canada and Saskatchewan and the Republic of South Africa have had a long-standing relationship and we welcome your visit here Minister. And we look forward to you visiting with us as well because as you know in our history soon there'll be an election and we'll be the government. You'll be talking to us. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity on behalf of myself and my colleagues to welcome to the legislature the members of the Workers' Compensation widows here this afternoon. The Bible tells us the story of the widow who continued to go at the unjust judge until he finally gave her justice. I hope we'll see a re-enactment of that parable here this afternoon.

And while I'm on my feet I also wish to welcome the minister from South Africa. Being married to a South African and having visited that beautiful country a couple of times, I want to say how much we all rejoice in the tremendous developments in that country the last few years.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, I'd like to join with the member opposite in welcoming the remarried widows that are in the gallery today, and just to thank them for their expressions of condolence and their honourable conduct throughout this discussion. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the official opposition I also would like to welcome the disenfranchised widows. You can certainly tell who they are, Mr. Speaker, because they're the ones in the bright pink. And I'd like to welcome them and their families to our Assembly today. And there is a considerable number. They were expecting 43 people to attend today. So I would like to ask members to welcome Rose Polsom and the Saskatchewan disenfranchised widows who are assembled today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly 10 students from Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan who attend the Cumberland Community Regional College. In fact some say that Cumberland Regional College, Mr. Speaker, is probably the best of all regional colleges, and I think they may be right. The students are seated in your gallery.

And I wanted to say a few words about Hudson Bay because Hudson Bay is the moose capital of the world. And on Saturday night the Hudson Bay Wildlife Federation had a supper. And my wife and I had our 28th anniversary, and so I took my wife to the Hudson Bay Wildlife Federation supper and we did enjoy

some of that delicacy.

So please welcome the guests from Hudson Bay.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker to you and through you to all the members in the House, this is an honour and a pleasure that I don't . . . seldom have. With family members spread right across Canada, it's not often that the legislature and the proceedings are visited by a family member.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and to all the members in the House a gentleman seated in the west gallery, an individual from North Battleford, Saskatchewan. A person who's been in North Battleford for I think about 33 years. And if you've had the unfortunate need to go to the lab department and have some blood drawn, you may have had this gentleman poking a needle in your arm.

Mr. Speaker this is my brother Ernie Krawetz from North Battleford.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are indeed a great number of guests present here today. And it does give me a great deal of pleasure to introduce some very special guests later on this afternoon when we give third reading to the private members' Bills, Mr. Speaker. We will have some very distinguished people from the field of the arts to observe us.

These are members of the endowment steering committee set up by the Saskatchewan Arts Board. Members will be aware that the Saskatchewan Arts Board is the oldest board of its kind in North America and this year celebrated its 50th anniversary.

As part of their good works, about a year ago the late Jane Turnbull-Evans, who tragically died in an automobile accident, set up a group, the endowment steering committee, to look at the possibility of establishing a stand-alone Act so that people may give gifts of art work and various things to support the arts in Saskatchewan.

The committee, overseen by Valerie Creighton, a former executive director of the Arts Board, consists of Rupert James as the Chair, Brad Hunter, Patricia Johnston, Darlene Bessey and David Male and Vic Cicansky. Most of the members of the committee are present here today in the gallery.

Darlene Bessey, I would like to single out actually for a very special mention because she is a new mother of a wonderful baby girl, Zoë. And of course all the other members have contributed to the birth of this Saskatchewan Foundation for the Arts Bill in their own various ways.

I would like to ask the members present to stand and be recognized, and I would also note that we have present in the gallery, Joanne Skidmore, the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) arts reporter who will be watching us make history this afternoon with third reading of The Saskatchewan Foundation for the Arts Bill. If the members of the committee

would please stand and be acknowledged.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, the public will be well aware that in addition to a government civil service, the Legislative Assembly also employs officers and other staff. They will be familiar with the Clerk and the Sergeant-at-Arms who are employed here in the legislature.

But with us today is another officer of the Legislative Assembly, and I would ask all the members to join me in extending a warm welcome to the Children's Advocate, Dr. Deborah Parker-Loewen. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to introduce to you and to my colleagues in the House, three very special guests in your gallery. They are here to watch the progress in the House of their Bill, The Group Medical Services Act, 1999, and I would ask them to stand as I introduce them and be recognized, Mr. Speaker.

Shirley Raab is president and CEO (chief executive officer) of Group Medical Services; Dr. Ted Alport is the Vice-Chair of the board of directors; and Shawn Peters is the chief financial officer.

Please join me in extending a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By process of elimination, there's a group of 22 people sitting in the gallery who haven't been introduced yet. I take great pleasure in introducing this group. They're a group of grade 7 students who are joining us from St. Matthew School which is right in the heart of Regina South.

It's always a pleasure to have school groups join us here, particularly from my constituency, and I'd like to welcome them here today. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And further elimination, there are still two people in the west gallery who have not been introduced. And I would like to take this opportunity to introduce these two persons to the Assembly.

We have two persons from the Credit Union Central who are here today to witness the third reading of a Bill to improve the operation of Credit Union Central, The Credit Union Central of Saskatchewan Act, 1999.

My guests today, and I would ask them to rise as I introduce them, is Keith Nixon who is the director of government and public affairs at Credit Union Central; and next to him, Gwen Rupchan, the administrative assistant who does all the work. So I'd like you to welcome them to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — If members have completed introductions, the Chair would like to introduce one guest who has not been introduced yet and who has taken a few minutes out of his workday to come and watch his wife at work. He's seated in the Speaker's gallery and he's here to watch these proceedings this afternoon. And I would ask him to stand and for you to welcome the husband of our Clerk at the Table, Ms. Gwenn Ronyk — her husband Reg Ronyk.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Recognition of Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as you know, in my other life I'm a student and a teacher of Canadian history. Somewhere around the first hour of the first day of my studies, I learned that when the British came to this continent they brought with them their red coats, their love of afternoon tea, and a sense of parliamentary democracy that was already centuries old.

All this, Mr. Speaker, by way of recognizing today a little acknowledged but tremendously important member of our Assembly, Gwenn Joyce Ronyk — our Clerk, our guide, our walking compilation of all that is allowed in this House and all that is not allowed.

Today we are celebrating with Gwenn her 25 years in the legislature — six years as first assistant Clerk, nine as Deputy Clerk, and now 10 as Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan.

She has spent her working life with us, given birth to three children between or during sessions, grown wise with or rather for us and the sometimes arcane but always relevant rules that guide our debates and proceedings.

Her knowledge is astonishing, her objectivity remarkable, and we all hope her tenure with us is just beginning.

Congratulations, Gwenn, it is our privilege to have you as our Clerk. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party official opposition, we too would like to extend our hearty congratulations to Gwenn Ronyk for 25 years of service to this Assembly and the work she's done at the Table.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I have had the privilege of being there on the other side as well, and while at that time I didn't get to know Ms. Ronyk as well at that time, certainly as an opposition member we really appreciate the work that the Clerk's office has done and Ms. Ronyk in particular for opposition members in assisting us and understanding the way the Assembly works and operates and functions.

And I think our Assembly has certainly . . . we've been served well and we appreciate the work and we want to just say

Gwenn, we thank you so much for the time and effort you have given not only to the members of this Assembly but when you think about it, to the people of Saskatchewan which has served this Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I too rise today to recognize the accomplishments and the dedication of Gwenn Ronyk on this, her 25th anniversary with the Clerk's office.

It is exciting to reach such a milestone, Gwenn. I have fond memories of such a sojourn enduring my service with the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police). Though my journey was from constable to corporal to sergeant and finally to staff sergeant and yours from first assistant Clerk to Deputy Clerk to Acting Clerk, and finally Clerk, in a way, I'm sure, Gwenn has been in the line of fire or perhaps even more often than I ever was in this Assembly.

Gwenn has served with distinction in her tenure with the Clerk's office since she started in 1974, and everyone whom she has served and continues to serve is very much appreciative. And as was mentioned by the hon. minister perhaps unnoticed and overlooked from time to time.

Gwenn, on behalf of the Liberal caucus, congratulations. We look forward to working with you for many years to come.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How pleased I am to be a member of this Assembly when we can honour such a worthy person on the occasion of 25 years of exemplary service.

Mr. Speaker, there is an individual whose photograph has graced the walls of this Legislative Building along the side . . . alongside government members past and present. And there is something a tad unfair that the only face that has not changed in 25 years is Gwenn Ronyk's.

There are other things that have remained unchanged, and those are the outstanding qualities that characterize her. I'm among the many who appreciate her air of quiet confidence and her unflappability.

When I arrived here in 1991 without a caucus, without prior experience, she patiently explained all of the complex and, yes, I must say somewhat bizarre rules and procedures of the day. She, Mr. Speaker, was very helpful. She is a diplomat's diplomat. She has a tremendous capacity to smile or not to smile in the face of foolishness. And she has seen her share.

I was going to try my hand at poetry to mark this very special day and by the time I got to, "And all the backbenchers and all the queen's men couldn't get by without our Gwenn," I decided to spare everyone.

So, Mr. Speaker, it gives me great, great pleasure to express my gratitude to the quintessential professional who manages to make it all look so very, very easy that we forget that she does

have an other life with more responsibilities, like being a loving partner and a devoted mother. I thank you so much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Small Business Loans Association Program Creates Jobs in Rural Sector

Mr. Jess: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to recognize the Blaine Lake Economic Development Co-operative and the Marcelin and District Small Business Co-operative for their job creation records through Small Business Loans Association program.

These two organizations each have helped create over 25 jobs. On behalf of the government I was honoured to present job creation certificates to Ed Lozowchuk, chairperson of the Blaine Lake Economic Development Co-operative, and Wayne King, chairperson of the Marcelin and District Small Business Co-operative.

During 1998 small businesses supported by the SBLA (Small Business Loans Association) program created more than 360 jobs and maintained over 565 more, mostly in rural communities. This brought the total number of jobs created and maintained since the program began to almost 12,800. Mr. Speaker, SBLAs are an important part of the province's focus on working with local communities to create opportunities and jobs for the people in their area.

The SBLA funding has initiated significant growth in this province, and this growth is an example of what can be achieved when the government and communities work in partnership. The assistance SBLAs provide plays an important part in building our rural economy creating jobs, keeping our communities healthy and strong. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Porcupine Plain Citizen Inducted into Lions Hall of Fame

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Volunteers are the backbone of Saskatchewan, and today it gives me great pleasure to recognize a volunteer from the Kelvington-Wadena constituency who has been inducted into the Lions Hall of Fame, Ivan Popoff of Porcupine Plain.

Mr. Popoff is a chartered member of the Porcupine Plain's Lions Club which he joined in February of 1957. To date he has held all the club positions with the exception of secretary. He was treasurer of the club from 1966 to 1994 and has 41 years of perfect attendance.

Mr. Popoff has chaired hundreds of Lions' projects, attended many district conventions and many multiple district conventions, as well as chaired the Denver international convention. As well as being an exemplary Lions' member, Mr. Popoff has been named Citizen of the Day and Citizen of the Year in Porcupine. Mr. Popoff has been actively involved in the teaching profession and highly involved in the student extracurricular activities. He has coached drama, hockey, curling, fastball, and baseball.

Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to congratulate Mr. Popoff in his induction into the Lions Hall of Fame, and thank him for his commitment to his community and to the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier Visits Day Care in Weyburn

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words about a day that will be long remembered by a few of my young constituents. Last Wednesday the Premier visited Weyburn and we spent some time visiting Souris Valley Day Care and The Family Place.

The Premier, who has a great love of sports and children, involved himself in a quick game of soccer, played a little foosball, and helped make some puppets with the children.

Watching the Premier interact with these children, it was easy to be reminded that our Premier was instrumental in putting in place the child action plan and indeed the whole “building independence” initiative. These initiatives, the first new social programs in Canada in 30 years, are another first for Saskatchewan and are used as a model for the rest of the country.

Terri Stocker, the director of the Souris Valley Child Care, and Donnita Maas and Linda Rudacek, directors of The Family Place, were very pleased with our visit to the facilities in Weyburn on Wednesday. They know the success of our child action plan. And they certainly should be congratulated for their inspiration and hard work to implement programs that are vital for good parenting for our children and for our youth.

This is another example of a partnership of government working with community to brighten the future for the young people in our province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hudson Bay Community Loans Co-operative

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the pleasure of recognizing the Hudson Bay Community Loans Co-operative for their part in stimulating the economy of Hudson Bay and surrounding area.

The Hudson Bay Community Loans Co-operative had created 27 full-time jobs, five part-time jobs, and maintained 16 jobs to date. They have used the help of Small Business Loans Association to make this possible.

I was very happy to present a job creation certification to the chairperson of the co-operative, Len Elliot, on behalf of our Economic and Co-operative Development minister.

SBLAs and the co-operative such as the one in Hudson Bay are essential components of our focus on creating opportunities at the community level; 12,800 jobs have been created and maintained by the SBLAs thus far, and that number is growing. Some local businesses helped by these loans include bookkeeping services, vehicle repair shops, and retail outlets.

In our recent budget, the SBLAs were given an increase in the revolving line of credit of up to \$100,000. They can also now make loans of up to \$10,000.

I'd like to extend my congratulations to both the Small Business Loans Association and the Hudson Bay Community Loans Co-operative on their job creation effort.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Negotiations with Nurses

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Congratulations, Madam Minister. It took eight years of NDP (New Democratic Party) incompetence, but you have finally managed to bring the health care system to its knees.

Doctors are fleeing the province because of the crippling NDP taxes. Hospitals are closing everywhere. The longest surgical waiting lists in Canada and getting longer every day. And now 8,400 nurses are ready to quit or leave the province because of the intolerable work conditions, thanks to your NDP government.

With all this chaos, all we see from the NDP is a bunch of lawyers threatening nurses in court. Well now, Madam Minister, even the judge is saying your bully tactics are not going to work. The judge is saying you need to settle this dispute through negotiations.

Madam Minister, now that the judge has held up the court decision, what is the government doing to get negotiations with the nurses going again?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the two parties, SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) and the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, have agreed to return to the bargaining table on Monday, May 10, 1999.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's about five weeks after this dispute started.

Madam Minister, all we get from the government is a bunch of hot air about how wonderful your health care system is. Well, Madam Minister, the nurses don't agree with you. They say conditions in hospitals are bordering on the dangerous. They say patient safety is being jeopardized. Doctors and nurses are voting with their feet and leaving.

Madam Minister, thanks to the judge, contract talks between the nurses and SAHO can now start again, barring any further mess-ups by the Premier. But the problem is still there, Madam Minister. Working conditions for nurses are abysmal and nurses are quitting the profession or leaving the province.

Madam Minister, what is the NDP doing to address the serious workplace issues that nurses say are intolerable?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, just for the information of the member, I'm pleased to report that Regina Health District which identified a shortage of nurses at the end of January 1999, they have hired 106 nurses since that time, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'm also pleased to report, Mr. Speaker, that while the dispute was on, that the Regina Health District hired 30 nurses during that time frame. So contrary to what the member has to say, the sky is not falling in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tax Rates in Saskatchewan

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, when asked what the three biggest issues facing business today were, they said, taxes, taxes, taxes.

Mr. Speaker, there's only one party in this province talking about a long-term plan for meaningful tax relief, and that's the Saskatchewan Party. The NDP have given us some of the highest taxes in Canada. The Liberals only seems to say that taxes aren't high enough to pay for our ideas. Mr. Minister, when will you take the initiative and come up with a long-term plan of meaningful tax relief in this province?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well I thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to quote from Jerry from Swift Current who called CBC this morning. He was responding to Mr. Hermanson, the leader of the Tory Party, talking about tax cuts, and he says this, Mr. Speaker:

Good morning, Sheila, this is Jerry from Swift Current calling. I'm just listening to your program and the interview with Mr. Hermanson. And he seems to be suggesting that he can cut 20 per cent on income tax and the provincial tax down to 5 per cent — must mean sales tax — spend money on roads and more on health care and more on other things. I just don't know where he's going to get the money.

It seems to me his mathematics . . . sounds to me like it's all haywire. I don't know what school he went to, but I can't see how you're going to drop your income back and continue to spend and then sit and try to balance the budget. I think it's just not possible. It seems to me that it sounds like a little bit of the old Conservatives who sunk us in the hole, and we're having a heck of a time to get out. And thank you, (says Jerry).

And I think Jerry's right, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister may well have incredible financial qualifications as an expert in this province. And certainly it would seem that you're

listening to people like that instead of people from agencies like WEFA Canada, internationally renowned economic forecasters who work for your own Finance department and who have said that our plan is doable; it's as solid as it can be. Even the Deputy Premier said it's as solid as can be, and WEFA Canada is as legitimate as can be.

Mr. Minister, right now is an appropriate time to talk about these high levels of taxes because it's near the time when people have to submit their income tax returns. And you know what, Mr. Minister? That too shows how much you're failing.

Mr. Minister, when will you address the fact that Saskatchewan has the highest income taxes in almost every category than any other province in this country?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member says we should not listen to Jerry, from Swift Current; he says we should listen to some agencies he's talking about. Well let me tell the member this, Mr. Speaker. We've been listening to what the outside agencies have been saying and you know what they've said? Five credit rating upgrades in the last three years, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — That's what they . . . that's what the agencies have said. And contrast that to the record of those members. And I'll tell the member this, Mr. Speaker, that if we weren't digging out of the \$15 billion hole of debt that they left this province in, and we are digging our way out of it, Mr. Speaker, and if we weren't paying \$750 million a year interest on the debt, we could eliminate the provincial sales tax or we could cut income tax, Mr. Speaker, by about 45 per cent. That's the condition that those members left the province in, Mr. Speaker.

And those members should be honest with the people, Mr. Speaker. They should admit that their tax policies also mean freezing and cutting health care and education. They should admit that instead of trying to talk out of both sides of their mouth, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister talks about credit upgrades, and that's all wonderful. And you know where it came from? It came out of the pockets of Saskatchewan taxpayers. The Provincial Auditor's report says that . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now it does not serve the Assembly well to have members shouting across the floor, and the Chair is having some difficulty being able to hear the question being put.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in an auditor's report it shows that income taxes in 1991 were \$1.988 billion; in 1998, 3.116. Mr. Minister, it's easy to see where you've gotten the money for your upgrade. It's out of Saskatchewan taxpayers' pockets.

And if you do the calculations across this province . . . or across this country, in almost every category of taxpayer, Saskatchewan taxpayers pay more than anywhere else. So thank the people of this province for your credit upgrades, Mr. Minister, because they're the ones who really deserve the credit and not your pocket-picking government.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I have a little bit of news for the member opposite which apparently he doesn't understand. And that is when you borrow money you have to pay it back. Okay? When you borrow money you have to pay it back.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, we have been paying it back and we've been cutting taxes in this province since 1995 which is a far cry from the record of the Conservative Party. And don't listen to what they say; look at what they do.

What did they do in office? Tax on used cars, Mr. Speaker, tax on restaurant meals, tax on children's clothing, tax on reading materials, and harmonization of the GST (goods and services tax) and PST (provincial sales tax).

Their record in office, Mr. Speaker, is deficit, debt, and tax, tax, tax. That's the Tory way, Mr. Speaker, but it's not our way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Call for Election

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, before he was elected in 1991, the Premier promised set election dates every four years. Mr. Premier, your four years are almost up. You are clearly out of new ideas. We need an election now.

Immediately following question period I will be introducing a private members' Bill calling for a set election date every four years. We will also be holding a special 75-minute debate calling for an election in June. Mr. Speaker, that's June of 1999, not June of 2000.

Mr. Premier, we're ready for an election. The voters are ready for an election. Are you ready for an election? Will you support our motion calling for an election this June?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the members of the Saskatchewan Party opposite are putting on a face of false bravado. And I want to say to the . . . and I want . . . I know you can't hear me because I can't hear myself talk either.

Just tell your members to quieten down a bit. Putting on a face of . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . well if anything proves it, it's the yattering from the Saskatchewan Party members there. It's false bravado. And I have another piece of advice for the Leader of the Opposition: be careful about what you are wishing for, you may just get it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — We're hopeful, Mr. Speaker. We're very hopeful that indeed we will get our request, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Saskatchewan Party started running some pre-writ advertising. The Saskatchewan Party is the only party

with an affordable, sustainable plan to cut taxes, redirect money to patient care, and fix the roads now.

The NDP doesn't want to talk about its dismal record. The Liberals don't want to talk about their loopy platform. But we want to talk about our plan, Mr. Premier. That's why we're advertising our platform. That's why we're advertising our party. And that's why we want an election now.

Mr. Premier, we are ready to stack the Saskatchewan Party plan against the NDP's failing record. Are you ready? Will you call an election this June?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter is that the Saskatchewan Party's ads, running as they are now, are not because they are ready for an election. They are running now because they are afraid of an election. They know what's happened to them in the public opinion polling, and that their issues respecting the so-called problem at Highways, the so-called problem with taxes, the so-called other problems, simply don't add up and don't work.

And in the result they continue to fall in support and letting them . . . knowing that they're falling in support, their only hope of recapturing it is to pump this money into its advertising.

Do you know what I want to do? I want to challenge you to keep on putting out those advertising bucks — day after day after day. And I have a little bet, Mr. Speaker, they won't run beyond Saturday of this weekend.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Negotiations with Nurses

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Premier has managed, the Premier has managed to get negotiations postponed until May 10 with the injunction not being heard again until May 27. Mr. Speaker, the delay until the 10th is supposed to allow cooler heads to prevail when negotiations start up again. With the injunction still in place it's hard for cooler heads to prevail, while the nurses still have a gun pointed at their head by the NDP, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that a delay to allow for cooler heads to prevail will work only if there's act of good faith on your part? And that's lift the injunction and repeal Bill 23.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the reason why bargaining is not going to resume until Monday, May 10, is because the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses — beginning this weekend many of their representatives are going to be attending the Canadian Labour Congress convention in Toronto — which is a meeting that happens biennially I understand. In addition this week I understand that Mr. Kelleher, who is the mediator, is only available one day.

And so the SAHO and SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses) decided, independent of government, that they would return to the table on May 10, 1999.

What I can also tell the member, in the memorandum of

understanding signed between the Premier and SAHO and SUN, there are provisions that go beyond Bill 23. And we have indicated in writing to SUN that we will amend Bill 23 once the collective agreement is agreed to by the two parties.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier thinks that by hanging million dollar fines over the heads of the nurses that somehow goodwill will be restored at the bargaining table. He thinks that the threat of jail time and huge fines will make the nurses see the light and agree to whatever the Premier offers. With the Premier, instead of walk softly and carry a big stick, it's barely bargain and threaten everyone with fines.

Mr. Premier, how do you feel nurses will trust you with the million dollar fines you're dangling over their heads when you go back to the table?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I know that the Liberal member would like to escalate this situation, Mr. Speaker. Just once again to say to the member, the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and SAHO are returning to the bargaining table on May 10, 1999.

I understand that SUN this morning acknowledged in writing a position that indicates that they are going to take no job action between now and, I believe it is, May 27, 1999.

Mr. Speaker, I think that Mr. Kelleher was wise to indicate that the parties should take some time to reflect upon their positions. The parties are doing that. The parties have, particularly SUN, have a CLC (Canadian Labour Congress) convention that they wish to attend and they are returning to the bargaining table on May 10, 1999.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Well, Mr. Speaker, while the NDP Premier in Saskatchewan likes to negotiate using the courts and the threats of fines, another province with a Tory Premier seems to be able to get results with good old-fashioned negotiation.

Manitoba Tories were able to get results with their nurses by negotiating fairly. Rather than order them back to work, threaten with fines and jail, and jail them like the NDP would here, the nurses and government were able to come to terms. It's a stark contrast, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Premier, how come a Conservative Premier can negotiate fairly and get results but you could only bully the nurses right into court?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I understand from speaking to Manitoba this morning that in Manitoba . . . I understand that they had over 50 days of bargaining. In addition, they had over 26 days, I think, of mediation.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that all eyes were on Saskatchewan, and we do have a memorandum of understanding that addresses workplace issues, recruitment and retention. And our package for all health care workers amounts

to 13.7 per cent over the next three years. In the case of Manitoba, I understand that their package amounts to a little over 13 per cent.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that while Manitoba has a tentative agreement, I think it's clear that the province and the nurses are watching very carefully what happened here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, I guess that's exactly my point. Unfortunately the Premier doesn't seem to understand how the negotiation process should work.

In other provinces there seems to be this crazy notion that one party offers one thing, the other party offers another. Eventually the two parties meet somewhere in the middle. How unique.

However, our Premier seems to think negotiations mean that one party offers something. Then the NDP says no, refuses to budge, and offers something with the special NDP clause that says take it or leave it.

Mr. Premier, how come other areas can negotiate without threatening their nurses with jail time and million dollar fines, but you can't?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, what the Minister of Health did not say about the Manitoba settlement — and I think this is perhaps out of professional courtesy; I'll say it in any event. In Manitoba, in the past, the government under the health sector rolled back vacation for one week and daily shifts were reduced for a period of time, for the periods of 1997 and 1998 . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, but just listen; that is what happened.

And you're advocating that we follow the Manitoba model. We do not want to follow the Manitoba model. We wish them well. They've got a negotiated settlement. That's fair enough.

We're not for rollbacks. We're for getting fairly bargained negotiated deals, which at 13.7, or roughly that amount that the Minister of Health has indicated, is very comparable to that in Manitoba.

The memorandum of understanding is the basis of a good settlement. I'm looking forward to May 10. I'm looking forward to the parties getting back into collective bargaining and achieving an agreement as soon as possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Land Information Services Corporation

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, today you are introducing legislation to set up a new NDP Crown corporation. The Land Information Services Corporation is supposed to run the province's new computerized land titles system.

Now we support computerizing the land titles system. In fact it should have happened years ago. But why does it require a whole new Crown corporation?

Mr. Minister, why are you setting up this new Crown corporation? Can you confirm that you're creating this new Crown to cover the severe cost overruns in the land titles computer project?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer to that is very simply no. There's no purpose like that at all. What we do know is that as we've looked at this very carefully, this whole area of information as it relates to land is an area that includes many expanded opportunities. And as we looked at how we could do this, we realized that the SaskGeomatics division of the Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation and of the land titles system could work in a much better fashion if we joined them together in a Crown corporation.

(1430)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Minister, in 1997 the total budget for this project was \$20 million. That's according to your associate deputy minister of Justice. In 1998 the project had jumped to 31.5 million. And now we've been told the cost has swelled to \$45.5 half million dollars. Of course none of this shows up in the bottom line of the budget, does it, because you're creating a new Crown corporation to hide these cost overruns.

Mr. Minister, isn't that why you're creating this new Crown corporation, to hide the millions of dollars of cost overruns in your land titles project?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The simple answer is no. We are doing this because we have looked at this whole situation very carefully and we realize that by going and working with a Crown corporation we can provide service over the longer term.

What we want to do is make sure that we have a situation whereby the capital required to develop the system can be arranged in an appropriate way and after very careful review and work we have decided that this is the best way to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Again to the Minister of Justice. If you listened to question period today you heard your Finance minister say, if you borrow it you have to pay it back. Now, you're spending \$45.5 million on this particular project. \$45.5 million! That's more than twice what it was when it started.

Now where is that money all coming from and how do you plan on paying back the debt that's being incurred by this Crown corporation? How are you going to tax and gouge the public on this one?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — This whole project is being designed in a way that will pay for itself and all of those plans are clear. What we have decided, that a Crown corporation is the best way to deal with this as far as setting up a system, and that's why we plan to do it this way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Minister of Justice, two questions. How much debt is this corporation going to be incurring to bring in your new project, and how much are you going to be raising the fees at land titles to cover the debt that you are incurring because, as the Finance minister said, if you borrow it, you've got to pay it back.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well one thing I will say for sure is that we are not going to follow any of the examples that have been provided by the predecessors to our friends across the way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — We know that to provide proper service for the public as it relates to the land titles system and the broad array of geographical information that's very important for the businesses of our province, then we need to make sure that we do it in a way that all of these costs are clearly set out and accountable. And what we don't want to get into is any kind of a situation where once we're involved in this whole process, we have things that are not explainable.

Now practically, what we're going to do as we work on this project is we're going to continue to work with the people who have been helping us design the project. This is going to be a project that's of benefit to all Saskatchewan people, and it's going to be a Crown corporation of which we all can be proud.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 11 — The Labour-sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 11, The Labour-sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Amendment Act, 1999, be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 209 — The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 1999

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice . . . I move first reading of Bill No. 209, The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 1999.

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

Bill No. 210 — The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 1999

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill No. 210, The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 1999.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and ordered to be

read a second time at the next sitting.

Bill No. 212 — The Recall of Members Act, 1999

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill No. 212, The Recall of Members Act, 1999.

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

Bill No. 32 — The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 32, The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 1999 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 33 — The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 33, The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 1999 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 34 — The Education and Health Tax Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 34, The Education and Health Tax Amendment Act, 1999 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 36 — The Animal Protection Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 36, The Animal Protection Act, 1999 be read . . . introduced and read for the very first time.

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

Bill No. 37 — The Snowmobile Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 37, The Snowmobile Amendment Act, 1999 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 38 — The Litter Control Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 38, The Litter Control Amendment Act, 1999 be now introduced and read for the first time.

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

Bill No. 39 — The Wildlife Habitat Protection Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 39, The Wildlife Habitat Protection Amendment Act, 1999 be now introduced and read for the first time.

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

Bill No. 40 — The Income Tax Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 40, The Income Tax Amendment Act, 1999 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Timing of Provincial Election

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise in the Assembly today to begin the debate about the future of the province of Saskatchewan. This is the spring of 1999 and people across this province have been anxiously awaiting spring knowing of course that spring really means rebirth and means that we're going to be taking a new approach to doing what we do in Saskatchewan.

One of the other things that people have been looking forward to, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that spring of 1999 should mean that the province of Saskatchewan will again be engaged in an electoral process and that we will have a provincial election.

As the Premier campaigned, Mr. Speaker, back in 1991 one of the planks of the NDP platform was, at that time, to state that there should be set election dates on a four-year cycle. And the Premier was waiting for that opportunity. I note that back in 1995, the call of the election in 1995 occurred in the month of June, in fact, before the four-year term as the previous election had occurred in the month of October in '91.

Mr. Speaker, what we see happening now of course is that there is . . . June is approaching, and the people of this province are looking forward to the next provincial election. The people of this province want a provincial election for a number of reasons, Mr. Speaker. What they see is a government that is flailing around with no direction and no vision. All they hear on a daily basis is a government which is unwilling and unable to defend its own record. Instead they seem intent on fighting or re-fighting the 1991 election.

Mr. Speaker, we heard evidence of that today in question period from the Premier when he started to indicate that we may get what we wish as an official opposition — and of course that's a provincial election. The people of Saskatchewan know that the

four-year term is up and that indeed there is a time to look at the record, the lack of accomplishments of the government over the last four years, and to analyze where we should move in the future.

(1445)

For the last four years, Mr. Speaker, we've seen a number of things happen in this province. We've seen tremendous upheaval in the area of health care, whereby the previous election, 1991, this NDP government after becoming elected had not mentioned closure of hospitals or in fact a reform of health care at all. And then along came the plan to close 52 hospitals — shocking to the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And ever since then we've seen this health reform model that has . . . that has gripped our province and placed a number of people in serious jeopardy regarding health care.

Tremendous concern across Saskatchewan regarding what is the vision for this province in terms of health care? Are we going to be trying to implement numbers for the number of acute care beds that are not possible in Saskatchewan?

I think what has to be recognized, Mr. Speaker, is that to adopt a standard policy for all of Saskatchewan just doesn't fit. We have tremendous differences in the province from one corner to the other — whether we're talking about northern Saskatchewan or southern Saskatchewan. And to indicate that a particular rule must be in place doesn't, doesn't always fit so nice and neatly when you look at it from the point of view of a piece of paper on a desk. When you actually look at the real situation that's out there, that is not always possible.

What we see happening, Mr. Speaker, is that there is a tremendous difference of how health care is delivered in all parts of the province. We see situations where indeed we do have two-tiered health care right now. People who have the finances, who are able to secure health care outside of their area and can afford it, do so. There isn't . . . that situation doesn't apply to everybody.

Mr. Speaker, the second issue that's before us right now is the fact that the Premier should be calling a June election. And I really think that if he doesn't call a June election, the only reason that he wouldn't do that is because he would be scared to do that.

And I say so because I'm sure that the Premier relies on the polls that he sees on a regular basis, and those polls are showing him that the NDP government's record, that its handling of certain situations right now, is not doing them in good stead. And indeed that support for the New Democratic Party is failing and it is failing fast.

The other situation that we have to look at, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that we now have no longer in this House, 58 members of the Legislative Assembly. We only have 55. And very clearly according to the provisions within the legislation that we have here, the two resignations that occurred, I believe, Mr. Speaker, on January 14 — I'll just say mid-January — those have to be dealt with by mid-July.

And very clearly I'm sure that the Premier is not going to be

interested in calling a July by-election, so we now have three by-elections that are also pending. And I think the people of this province are saying well, Mr. Premier, it's time to put the entire slate before the people of Saskatchewan, and let's look at an election that can be held in June.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a need to have an election to decide I think two very different views of this province. The first is provided by the NDP, and that view is telling the people of Saskatchewan that they should continue paying nearly the highest taxes in the country. That view is that we will be willing to live with the worst job creation record in the country. That view is that the Saskatchewan people's money is better off in the pockets of government than in their own pockets.

Over the last little while, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think what we've seen is that the Liberals are of this view to even a greater extent. At least the NDP offered a pathetic tax cut in the latest budget. The Liberal House Leader is quoted in the newspaper this morning as being totally opposed to any tax cuts whatsoever.

Now as my colleague indicated in the House this afternoon, the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce when asked . . . when polling its members and determining what the real problem in Saskatchewan is, when asked what the top three concerns were, they identified taxes, taxes, and taxes. And here we have the Liberal House Leader say that any tax cuts whatsoever are not possible.

On the other side of that coin, the NDP/Liberal coin, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have the Saskatchewan Party. We have put forward a plan for a responsible and sustainable tax cut. A plan that's been given the thumbs up by WEFA Canada, which the Deputy Premier calls as credible as can be. It's a good plan, and it's a plan that most certainly does not freeze education or health care spending. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's another NDP fantasy.

In fact, last fall when the Deputy Premier of the government responded to the release of the platform of the Saskatchewan Party, he said the numbers can't be argued with. WEFA Canada has analyzed and assessed the entire plan and has put forward their idea that says it's a doable plan. The Deputy Premier said, can't argue with those numbers; they're indeed valid.

And that's the plan that we're putting forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before the people of this province. They need to determine what kind of plan is being put forward. And that's why we're in a process of right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of sharing that plan with anyone.

We have started a series of very small advertisements that indicate to the people of Saskatchewan if they want to know more about the platform of the Saskatchewan Party, that they can indeed call a particular number and ask Elwin Hermanson, the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party, to send that document to them. An open type of situation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The members opposite in the Liberal Party say, we can't afford to cut taxes. Well, as our tax base continues to shrink with more people leaving the province and very few people coming into the province we say, we can't afford not to cut taxes. In order to

raise taxes, you have to have a tax base, and in a few years we're not going to have that.

We've spoken many times, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the eight areas in which Saskatchewan is at the bottom of the ladder — taxes, job creation, health, highways, crime, welfare, retail sales, population growth.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are either the worst, or the worst in every one of those eight categories in the province of . . . in all of Canada. That's where Saskatchewan is. That's not a record that people of this province are proud of. And I dare say that when the Premier calls the next provincial election, the people of Saskatchewan will indicate to him that that's not a record that they want to see happen in this province any longer.

It is time to change this government. It is time to put forward a new plan that will deal with turning this province around, and in fact moving us into the 21st century with a vision, with a hope for the people of Saskatchewan that indeed we will be moving forward and that we will have a situation in Saskatchewan where people who are here right now will be able to stay because there will be job opportunities, and in fact we'll be able to attract businesses and other people to either come back or locate in the province of Saskatchewan for the first time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of this province want an election now. We have put our platform on the line, and we're asking the people of Saskatchewan to consider that. All we require is that the Premier of this province calls an election, and we suggest that he do that in the month of June.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this time I would like to move, seconded by the member for Kelvington-Wadena:

That this Assembly urges the Premier to keep his promise to hold provincial elections every four years and to hold the next provincial election by June 1999.

I so move.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm delighted to second the motion brought forward today from the member of Canora-Pelly. He's asked that the provincial government and that the Premier call an election in June of this year to look at some of . . . let the people of this province actually decide if what is happening in this province is the vision or is the direction that they feel should be . . . that this province should be taking.

I think that I mentioned during the budget speech and during the reply to the Throne Speech that I believe and the people of my constituency believe that this government is operating with no vision, that there is no real plan for the future of the province and no plan for the people. So I went to my constituency office last night and talked to my assistant and I said, what kind of calls are you getting in here, Linda? What are the people of this constituency saying?

So, for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and for the members opposite . . . and I'm sure they do the same thing as I do, talk to their assistants and find out what's happening in the constituency and deal with any problems that they can't deal with while they're

here in Regina. And of course we rely on our assistants for the very great work that they do for all of us. And she said that the calls are increasing, that the number of people that are calling and saying that they need help is increasing every day.

The Minister of Health today said in question period, the sky is not falling. The member opposite, she said that we tend to exaggerate and there is no problem. So just for her information and for the information of the members opposite, I want to tell you what happened in my office yesterday.

The first phone call we had yesterday morning, early yesterday morning, was from a farmer who talked about the farm aid package. He said that he can't qualify, the people he knows can't qualify for it, and that it is doing very little good.

And he remarked that the Minister of Agriculture had said, well fill out the form anyway, and then we can prove to the federal government that this isn't working. And his comment was, we had a project, or a program that was working; it was called GRIP (gross revenue insurance program). And the farmers believed in it and they thought they had a chance with GRIP. And this government took it away. So why should we actually do anything the Minister of Agriculture asks for, because it's not going to be of any use anyway.

A few minutes later there was a phone call from an elderly gentleman. I think she said he was 78 years old. She gave me his name. She said that he had gone into the hospital and they said he was in a large amount of pain. And they told him he'd have to go home because there was no beds for him in the hospital.

And he went home on Friday night, and during the night he actually passed a kidney stone at home, by himself. He of course commented that he was in a tremendous amount of pain, and he didn't think living here in Saskatchewan, in this birthplace of medicare, that he would have to spend a long, lonely pain-ridden night by himself, waiting, because there was no bed for him in this province.

And he asked, is our medical care system, does the government actually believe that it's better now than it was 10 years ago? And he said no.

Not too much later we had a phone call from another elderly gentleman who said he'd gone into the hospital, and he was told that he probably had a blood clot in his leg but he would have to go home because again there was no bed for him. And he was told to go home and rest calmly and they would call him as soon as there was an appropriate space for him in our health system.

And then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had a couple of calls about the highways. One of them was from a school bus driver who said that the parents on his route were getting very upset because the school bus had to travel on the wrong side of the road for just about 3 miles because the road was in such terrible condition. He didn't feel safe with the children in the bus riding . . . driving the way they should be driven. There was holes in the road that were literally dangerous to be driving your vehicle on.

Now I thought, well this is maybe something that I have been bringing up to the Minister of Highways; it's something that they say they are addressing. But it's something that is a concern to families and to parents every day. It's not something we can just put on a list and say well, we'll look at it sometime.

And we also had a call from somebody who had an SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) complaint. They had wrecked the front of their car, wheel alignment, some kind of a problem. They went to court, and the SGI lawyer, the person from SGI representing him there, he said, well if this road is one you'd normally travel on and you know it's in bad shape, why didn't you take another road?

(1500)

Now his question to me was, is this the answer to the road problem in this province, them telling him to take a different road? I think it's an insult to the taxpayers of this province to be told by SGI that if the road isn't good, the one you normally take, well then just take another road.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had a call just before noon from a young mother who wasn't aware that she was expecting and she found out . . . as soon as she found out she purchased Blue Cross. When the baby was to be born in rural Saskatchewan the doctor decided that they should transfer her into Saskatoon, in the ambulance, doctor's order. And when the ambulance bill came for \$800 she sent it in to Blue Cross and then found out that she's not covered, because you have to apply 8 months before the baby is born, and she was 15 days short.

So now in rural Saskatchewan this young mother has a \$800 bill for an ambulance because of a regulation that she knew nothing about and now she's in . . . Like my colleague is saying, we have two-tier health out in rural Saskatchewan. If you don't know the rules and regulations, you're going to pay extra. It's not something that this young mother can afford.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the RM (rural municipality) secretary of our area called and talked about the grants in his area and said that his grants had actually gone down again this year, 17 per cent decrease again this year. And he said that that means there's going to be a mill rate increase for the taxpayers of my constituency. Not just property tax, but also calls from the school division saying because of the decrease in education grants, there's also going to be an increase in the mill rate for education. So again we're going to have the taxpayers in Saskatchewan paying more for education and for the property tax.

The new education Bill that was brought in by the government was discussed last night by one of the taxpayers, and they feel that this Bill is going to be taking away their freedom of choice about where they can be sending their children to school. And they're saying this administration is limiting people's opportunity for their children in lots of areas, education being one of them.

And one of the very last phone calls I got late last night was from an older person who said that he'd been working for 20 years as a labourer and now, at 73 years old, he's retired. He collects the maximum supplement from the Saskatchewan plan;

he collects CPP (Canada Pension Plan); he collects old age pension; and between him and his wife, he has \$1,200 a month to live on.

Now he also talked about the increase in SaskEnergy rates, the increase in SaskPower rates, the increase in telephone, the increase in property taxes, and on and on. And the \$1,200, after you take away the direct living expenses, there's very little left to live on.

What he tells me is now he has a problem with his teeth. He has to have dentures. The cost of dentures if you don't have some kind of a plan, is \$3,400. Now somehow he has to pay for this out of the few dollars that are left after he has his basic living expenses.

So when the members opposite talk about the election and do we have a plan . . . the people of the province, the gentleman that called me last night said, isn't there anything different we can be doing? Is there no hope for this province? I've lived here all my life. I want to live here. I believe that we can have a life here, but every day, every year we live here, we're falling further and further behind.

And I guess the only thing I could say to this constituent is yes, there is an alternative. Yes, we can do something different. The Saskatchewan Party does have a plan. We can reduce the size of government. We can reduce the amount of taxes that are paid. We can let government do the real job of governing, and that is looking after the infrastructure and the basic necessities that government should be involved in, and get out of their life so that people can go forward in this province.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am delighted to second the motion from the member from Canora-Pelly and say that yes, the people of this province not only want, they expect and they deserve an election as soon as possible so they can begin a life in this province.

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak to this motion that's been put forward today. At the end of my conversation today I will be putting forward an amendment to that resolution that I think more deals with the reality that is going on out there in dealing with what the people really want and how they feel about the province of Saskatchewan and how they feel about the Premier of this province.

But you know what has taken me, Mr. Deputy Premier? I heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about the question of fantasy. Well I have just heard two speakers from the opposition party talk about fantasy when they referred to what they want to do for the people of Saskatchewan, and talk about democratic reform.

We want to talk about democratic reform and accountability to the people of Saskatchewan. They need to look at their heritage by which they have come out of in terms of how they've treated the people of Saskatchewan. I want to talk about one of their parents.

I want to talk about the Tory Party of Saskatchewan, which they certainly fit when we call them Sask Tories. That in this

province in the 1980s there were by-elections — not one, not two, not three, not four, but five by-elections where people resigned. Gary Lane resigned, September 5, 1991. Eric Berntson resigned, June 19, 1990. Colin Maxwell resigned, 1990. Graham Taylor resigned, 1990. Bob Andrew resigned, 1989.

And do you know how long those people waited for the opportunity to put a representative in those ridings? Do you know how long? They waited till 1991 — far beyond the six months that is now legislated in the province of Saskatchewan.

And when I hear the opposition parties talk about the question of a legislated four-year mandate in terms of elections, the last time I checked, when I stand for a national anthem in this country, it is not for the Stars and Stripes, it is for *O Canada* under the parliamentary system that has gone a hundred years in this country and throughout the world.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whitmore: — When we talk about what is going on . . . when you scratch the surface of the Saskatchewan Party, we see a system that is truly more Americanizing the politics of Saskatchewan and of Canada. And that is wrong.

But let's talk about the Sask Tories in terms of how they treated themselves when they formed themselves, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Here's a party talks about it, wants an election — they want an election. They've never gone to the people yet on an election. They didn't have the courage to go to the people in terms of an election when they formed a new party, and now they think it's time for that election. It's now time to test the people.

Well it's not the dead of night. It's not the dead of night. We will have that test. We will have that test by which the people of Saskatchewan will guide and determine who they wish to guide this province. And I am confident it will be this party, the New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whitmore: — I'm ready to fight that election any time the Premier calls it. But it bothers me when I see these attacks on the parliamentary system, and they worry me when I see them.

But let's talk about democratic reform and what this government has done in the past eight years to improve the democratic reform in this province in terms of accountability.

I'll refer first to the election of a Speaker that has taken place in this province, done under this government. Beyond that, the opening of Board of Internal Economy for public to attend, which is chaired by the Speaker.

The independent electoral officer in this province, done under this government which is chosen by an all-party committee — part of democratic reform.

Conflict of interest legislation that the public has demanded that we have put forward, and at the same time put forward a Conflict of Interest Commissioner that deals with the openness and accountability of MLAs (Member of the Legislative

Assembly) and Executive Council members in this province. We are opening up to what's going on.

Support of the Provincial Auditor financially at the Board of Internal Economy by which we've allowed him to conduct the kind of things he needs to do in terms of that openness and accountability for the people of Saskatchewan. The McDowell commission, which has led to a great deal of change regarding how MLAs do themselves in terms of the financial aspect and communication aspect that they talk to their constituency.

Open and accountable government again when they're . . . accountability. And one I referred to a little earlier — six months for a by-election. Never in this province again we will see the disrespect of the constituents of this province by instituting the six months.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think one of the most important pieces of legislation that we'll be bringing forward in this session is The Respect for Constituents Act which deals with the question of when people decide that they're moving to another party, they take it to their electorate to see how the electorate feel.

It is important, Mr. Speaker, that we follow the traditions that are set down in this province, set down within the parliamentary system that we have in this province, and as I say in all Commonwealth nations across the world. These important principles by which to follow, and we will continue to follow.

Because if we move off those principles, I see a change that I don't think the public will like. And we have to deal in terms of elections too when we talk about public interest and all that sphere in terms of how we deal with things.

We work as groups. We work together in terms of, as politics is, that of compromise and developing those systems by which best fit the people of Saskatchewan. And these are the things, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that are important to us as a party. It should be important to every member in the House.

I know opposition parties love to get out and say it's time for the election. It's time for the election. But when they talk about every four years, I'm bothered by that. I think it's important that we be very careful of that.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the record that we've put forward in terms of democratic reform. I am proud of those kind of things that we are doing in terms of a government setting forth an agenda that is important for the people of Saskatchewan.

As we have done in every year we have been in government, laying down the foundations of where we want to be dealing with those difficult issues that are out there. That people respect us in those areas in terms of what we're doing, and they have returned us to office every time we've gone back to them. And they will do it again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They will do it again.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to propose an amendment, seconded by the member from Regina South:

That all the words after "Assembly" be deleted and substituted with the following:

commend the Premier for his commitment and dedication to strengthen our Canadian parliamentary system which forms the basis of our prosperity, under which we've earned the United Nations designation as the best country in the world in which to live.

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1515)

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter into this debate today because it, I think, addresses most of the major issues this Assembly needs to talk about. It addresses some fundamental differences between that particular opposition party and the members on this side. It addresses some of the major differences with the Liberal members and the members on this side. And it focuses I think for Saskatchewan people what this coming election debate will be about.

Mr. Speaker, let me start by saying it is amazing, absolutely amazing, that the two members that they have put up so far are the member for Canora-Pelly and the member for Kelvington-Wadena. Two members who were afraid, afraid, to go to their own electorate — refused to go. In the dark of the night they moved over from the Liberal Party that they were elected to represent to go and sit with that dark cloud that hangs over this province, namely Saskatchewan Tory Party.

That is what is so appalling about the motion moved today by those two members. Perhaps if it had been other members it would not have had the same indignation and affront to voters that those two members certainly bring forward.

Who would think, who would think, that only a few months ago these members had turned their backs on their own constituents. These very members that refused to go to the electorate are now today coming forward with the audacity to say gee, it's been almost four years; we should have an election. Isn't that a nice idea. Where were those members when the people in their ridings were calling for an election to pass judgment on what they had done? Where were they?

Mr. Speaker, they were gone. And you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker, soon again they will be gone. This time in a much more permanent way, because it is that attitude — it is that attitude — which shows the difference between these two parties.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is an affront, it is unfortunate, and it's arrogant to watch these members opposite perform. I was particularly bothered today as the member for Melfort stood in this House to introduce a respected foreign visitor, and in his introduction, of all of the pettiness, it was a crass arrogant politics to stand up and say soon we'll be the government. It's one thing for us to play politics in this House, it's one thing for us to fight about politics on the streets, but to be honest about it, there's something called protocol; there's something called decorum; and there's something called a respect. And I'll tell you that was missing today, and that is exactly — exactly — what we are seeing from the members opposite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's unfortunate that the members opposite feel that they should be bringing forward this motion today. The Premier may very well decide that we need an election in June and we should go to the polls. The Premier may have decided last October we should've gone to the polls because it was an appropriate time. He may decide that next month or a month after or this fall is the appropriate time. The fact is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the constitution of this country provides the members of this Assembly with a five-year term — the constitution of this country provides us with a five-year term. It's often the case in most Assemblies that we go to an election between three and a half years and four and a half years.

The only time that I know of where we have seen this actually pressed to the very limit was when . . .

An Hon. Member: — Guess who?

Mr. Thomson: — That's right, guess who was in office. The member opposite, the member from Moosomin, I'm sure will remember this. I can only imagine his advice was to his Premier at that point. I'm sure it was hold on for dear life because we're going down. Don't go at four years, don't go at four and a half years, you know in fact if you could wait a day past five years that'd be the day to go. And lo and behold that's what happened.

So for a party of that nature, for a party with those members, to come forward and in their most arrogant way present this motion that says, we have to go for an election at four years — says to me that really what they say is that their concern is simply cheap, crass, partisan politics.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've listened to the members opposite speak today and explain what they think they should be campaigning on. I watched — I thought it was public access television for a minute last night when I saw their leader on TV; it turned out it was actually just a poorly produced television ad. But nevertheless they are trying to put their agenda forward. Because their agenda has fallen off. It's off the rails.

They've got an agenda which is simply not registering with the public. The public looks at it and says, this is the party that's promising balanced budget? Oh but wait, they never delivered a balanced budget. The member from Moosomin never once stood in this House and voted for a balanced budget — not once. Didn't do it when his party was in office; has never done it while this party's in office. And I think that's unfortunate.

They look at it and they say, this is a party that says we should cut taxes. Well this party has cut taxes. I find it interesting that their leader, Mr. Hermanson, stood up and said that our tax cut this spring was pathetic.

Well now I'm not one to spend much time reading the Tory platform. But wasn't it the Tory platform that was calling for a 1 per cent cut in the PST this year? Oh, isn't that interesting. So the very tax cut that they propose, we implement. And what is it? It's pathetic.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would argue that the thing that was pathetic was their response. It's a fact that they refuse to accept and recognize when there's good government. They refuse to represent their constituents, they hide from their constituents, and I think that's unfortunate.

I've spent a lot of time out on the doorsteps in the last several weeks, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I'll tell you what people are telling me. They're saying that we are headed in the right direction. They are telling me that this government they trust. And they're telling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that not one of those opposition parties would they want to see in this government House. Not one.

Because they don't trust the Conservative members. And they don't know the Liberal members. And at the end of it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the argument or the discussion that we have with the Saskatchewan electorate is one about what this party should do, the approach we should take, the way we should do it.

I understand for the members opposite that's got to be frustrating. And I heard yesterday an arrogant statement from the member for Cannington as he stood in this House and made a rather personal affront I thought to the Premier of this province.

Let me say this about 1982 and April 26. The members on this side of the House learned an important lesson. And I think if you canvassed any one of us, you would hear very personally and very strongly felt feelings about what we learned from that.

We learned that the most important relationship that a government can have is with its electorate. We learned that what you've got to have is an open, honest dialogue with voters — not just at election time but throughout your term. And for eight years we've done that.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm reminded of the fact that our eighth anniversary in office is coming up this October. Our eighth anniversary. It's not until October. So whether it's four years now, three and a half in the first term, four and a half in the second term, that's not a big problem.

Let's also remember the fact that the constitution of this country — which last I looked at the members on this side respected — said that we had a five-year mandate. When we have completed our agenda, the agenda we were elected with in 1995, the Premier should call that election. But it is irresponsible for us simply to go to an election because somehow or another the clock ticks and we hit a magic day.

Once the mandate is finished, we should go. If that mandate had been completed in October, we should have gone back to the people and renewed. That was a mistake the Conservative government made in the 1986 period. They completed their mandate, they had lost the ability to govern, they had lost the respect of the people, and they refused to go to the public for an election.

I would argue that it is much the same situation that we saw with the member for Canora, the member for Kelvington, the member for Saltcoats, the member for Melfort. I think I

mentioned the member for Kelvington but she's got her hand up again so I'll recognize her one more time.

Those members opposite also abandoned their platform. The mandate that they were given by the people was to present a particular sort of view. They weren't views I subscribe to but that was what their constituents said they should represent. They abandoned that.

Rather than going back to their constituents, they simply said oh no, they knew best and that they would simply move across the aisle. And I think that that's most unfortunate.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. The member's time has elapsed. The debate will continue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have to try very hard now to compensate in intellect what I clearly will lack in volume compared to our last two speakers. Fortunately that is not difficult to manage. I'm still of course trying to recover from the concept of the hon. member for Regina South teaching the member for Melfort-Tisdale or for anywhere else about decorum in the Assembly, but I guess we can all stand to learn something in life.

I would like to say though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I agree that one of the strengths of our constitution is its flexibility. And one of the problems that we've at times gotten in to by trying to make our constitution inflexible is that we create a whole new problem. Members opposite have pointed out that the Devine government failed to call by-elections when seats became vacant. This was obviously a defect and an evil in our system which they sought, to their credit, to correct by bringing in the rule about six-month by-elections.

But now it's been shown to us how very, very wrong that was because here we are in a situation where, if by any chance we don't have a June general election, we will be stuck with the expense of three by-elections in order to elect members who in all likelihood will never take their seats in this Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — The same goes for The Respect for Constituents Act. While I have some sympathy for the emotion behind this Act, what it really says is that MLAs are not responsible to their conscience. They are not responsible to their constituents. They are not elected as individuals. They are responsible to the political parties for which they were originally nominated.

I think that while I agree with much of the sentiment behind the Act, I think it is an unconstitutional and an unwarranted attempt to bind the consciences of individual members. And while I may not be in agreement with what my former colleagues in the Saskatchewan Party may have done, it seems to me that they will in due course, like all the rest of us, answer to their electorates for their work in this House and their work as representatives. And we are all facing that great test period and I am content that it should be so.

Well the election is coming up soon. I am also somewhat bewildered that hon. members opposite in the government now seem to be waffling on a long-standing commitment by the NDP to an election this June. And I'm just having a little bit of problem.

I note that the motion before us does not call for automatic constitutional four-year elections. It simply urges the Premier to keep his long-standing commitment to a June election.

And if members opposite and if the Premier is wavering on a June election I have to ask myself: why? You know they tell us, they tell us the polls are just great. Everybody is happy. The province is booming. And these polls — they can't believe them.

Well I can't believe them either, Mr. Speaker. Because if they were so great, then why are the waffling on facing the electorate in June? They have oftentimes told us that's their preference. Well go ahead with your preference.

Mr. Speaker, there are many challenges facing this province which will face whoever is elected as the next Government of Saskatchewan. We all know, we all know that the infrastructure of our province has been let slide by this government.

I congratulate them for balancing the budget. But we know they have balanced the budget at the expense of the infrastructure of this province crumbling. We know that they have balanced the budget by forgetting about the roads, letting literally the roof cave in on our school system, and need I say anything more than our health care system.

The best health care system in the world they tell us. Well I get phone calls at my office each and every day from people who are waiting in pain and agony and health care workers who are stretched to the limit. And they don't believe we have the best health care system in the world.

And indeed to them it sounds like smugness. It sounds as if their problems are being ignored by this government when the government says, oh everything's marvellous; there's nothing to fix; there's nothing to correct; there's nothing to improve.

(1530)

When a man waits in pain for a year and a half for a hip replacement, and he's told, no problem, we've got the best health care in the world. When a lady waits in the darkness for her cataract operation for 12 months and more, again does she get any sympathy from this government? No. She's told we've got a marvellous system. Best place in the whole world.

This sounds like smugness to the people out there. And we know what the people do to governments which become smug and arrogant.

However, we also know that while our infrastructure has been allowed to crumble, we are aware that we have one of the highest tax regimes in the country and we've lived next door to the lowest taxed jurisdiction in Canada. If we want to hold our business and investor class, we are going to have to address that.

I am very unhappy about the number of people who have talked to me in the last few months about moving to Alberta. In many cases, I have to say it's been lifelong supporters of the NDP who are now doing the pencil work of what taxes they would pay if they retired out of the province versus if they retired in Saskatchewan, and they have found this province wanting.

I hope they do decide to stay here, but we know if we want people to remain here, to live here, to invest here, to work here, to pay taxes here, we will have to offer them a tax regime which is fair, giving consideration to our neighbours.

We also know, Mr. Speaker, that we have the highest percentage of senior citizens in the country. We have the second highest percentage of underaged juniors in the country. We know that maintaining a fair tax level, maintaining our infrastructure, is going to be a serious challenge for whatever government is elected.

We also know that our burgeoning Aboriginal population is going to be the major increase and influx into the labour age in the next few years. And I'm distressed that this government doesn't seem to have much of a plan for bringing Aboriginal young people into the economic mainstream and into the workforce, because again this is serious for all of us if this province is to have a future.

Well the government tells us that job creation is doing just marvellous. We may be the last in the country but everything is marvellous. A government, a political party that is proud of the fact we have the lowest job creation in Canada is a government that is coming perilously close to arrogance and smugness.

Well they say we're on top. Well we're on top of, we're on top of social problems. The social indicators, the economic indicators, are not good.

And I think we do have to address some of the issues that the Saskatchewan Party has brought up. But I think we are going to have to be careful about how much tax reduction is possible immediately. It seems to me we are going to have to get economic development and job creation going so that we will be able to afford to maintain our infrastructure and bring our tax level down to a fair level. We know that we can't continue with the highest property taxes in Canada.

But we also know, we also know, that an instantaneous and dramatic drop in the taxes would simply be a return to the deficit budgeting of the Devine years. And the deficit budgeting of the Devine years is not a prescription for prosperity, Mr. Speaker, and we all know that.

So there is a balancing Act which I urge all members to put aside. There's a balancing act which we require. We have to maintain the infrastructure. We have to bring our tax level to somewhere near that of our neighbours, and we need . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. The member's time has elapsed.

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to enter this debate. And I want to thank the members opposite for giving us their advice on how to govern this province. After all,

their record is so good. It's been stated by my fellow colleagues on this side what their record is in by-elections and so on. And they say that we should have an election because our record is so bad.

Well that's odd, Mr. Speaker, because I was looking at some of my campaign literature here from the last election which said I would try to bring balanced budget, lower taxes, and reduce the debt to help bring some stability to the economy. And I think we have been very successful in attaining that objective.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — In the last term we have brought in four balanced budgets, and six altogether. We've reduced income taxes a total of 10 per cent and lowered the PST to 6 per cent, giving our province the lowest provincial sales tax of any province that has a sales tax in Canada.

We also committed to creating 30,000 jobs by the year 2000, and are very close to achieving that goal, Mr. Speaker. I think that what's doubly important is that we have done this by creating a climate for investors and selling the benefits of doing business in Saskatchewan — not only in Canada, but around the world.

I think the diversity of trade and the value-added programs that we have promoted are now showing us the benefits, especially this year when agricultural prices and the oil industry was not strong. Our economy still grew and is projected to increase 2 per cent in '99.

This is not an easy task in light of the free publicity Alberta gets as the greenest grass in the land. But when you make some comparisons or dig into the myths, it's not always what it's cracked up to be.

We hear the charge that Saskatchewan has the second highest tax rate in the country. Supporters of this argument cite Saskatchewan's tax rate for the highest income earners.

But it's a different story when we take a broader look at total taxes and charges. When average taxes are compared, Saskatchewan is very competitive. Saskatchewan's personal income tax for a two-income family of four earning either 50,000 or 75,000 is higher than Alberta's by 1,100 and 2,000 respectively. In Alberta only those better off get better breaks.

Alberta has no sales tax — this is true, Mr. Speaker — but it does charge an annual health premium of \$816 per family, more than the yearly sales tax paid by the average Saskatchewan family.

Automobile insurance rates in Calgary are nearly double those for Regina. Housing costs are significantly lower in Saskatchewan. The average new house in Calgary costs 188,000; in Regina 150,000.

Combined provincial sales taxes, premiums, add in housing, automobile, and utility rates, and for the family of four earning 50,000, the total cost in Saskatoon is \$13,243 and 13,900 in Calgary. For the family earning 75,000, the total in Saskatoon is \$17,010; in Calgary it's 16,449. The only Alberta advantage

goes to the privileged, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, corporate taxes are not out of line. Saskatchewan's corporation income tax rate on manufacturing and processing profits is lower than Alberta's: 10 per cent for Saskatchewan; fourteen and a half in Alberta. The general corporate income tax rate for Saskatchewan is 17 per cent compared to fifteen and a half in Alberta. The income tax rate for small business is 8 per cent here and 6 per cent in Alberta.

The conclusion is that if we base our provincial comparison on sales tax alone, Alberta is the place to be, Mr. Speaker. If we base it on car and health premiums, Saskatchewan wins by a landslide.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — The moral is those who make claims for superiority should base their judgment on all the available evidence, Mr. Speaker, not just on selected and exaggerated bits like the opposition does.

And as I said, we're not a perfect government. And if I had to pick an issue to illustrate that, there's probably not one in this room that wouldn't say it's health care. I guess that if you asked just about any of us, you would be hard pressed to find anyone that would say that if we had to do it over again, would we do it differently.

But there are some things I would like you to remember when the other parties are telling you how bad the system is. Let's remember the health budget in '91 was on a runaway path at about 13 per cent a year growth rate. I believe, as did the government in its first term, that some actions had to be taken to control spending. And to do that, changes had to be made.

Secondly, no one had attempted to do this. So we were breaking new ground. Not only in health reform, but trying to balance a provincial budget, turnaround an economy, and which I'm glad to say, this government was the first in Canada to do.

The third point is that I think that we have a very high usage system. When you know that 35,000 people a day use the health system that means we are serving a million people a month in this province.

And yes, there are some stories on the news, Mr. Speaker, and in the media that are not pleasant and there are some right in my own constituency. It's unfortunate that these situations happen but when you think of the few issues that are raised in comparison to the number of people using the system, the mistakes are very few. Of course we also have a couple of opposition parties who like to highlight these items for their own political gain.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, are we near the end of health reform? I don't know the answer to that. With changing technology and the speed at which it advances, I don't believe we can ever be certain that changes won't have to be made in the future so that we can provide a health system to everyone at the most reasonable cost. And with an aging population, Mr. Speaker, this will be no easy task.

This is one of the areas where the opposition parties make me very nervous. When I hear one of them saying they will freeze spending on health care and education and that the other one is led by a doctor, Mr. Speaker. And I think putting a doctor in charge of health care is sort of like letting the fox guard the chicken coup. And seeing as we're on the opposition, I'll maybe just point out a couple of other things that bother me.

I don't think anybody here is fooled by the old party with a new name. They have the same address in the phone book. They have the same old faces. And looking at their platform it sounds vaguely familiar — more spending, lower taxes. But they do have a new name, Mr. Speaker.

Now the Liberals have turned out to be a little bit interesting, Mr. Speaker, shifting severely to the left to bring back free collective bargaining or third-party arbitration, primarily to attract the labour vote in the province and particularly in my constituency.

But one of the things they forget, Mr. Speaker, is that the public service wage Bill in our province is somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$2 billion. To allow an unelected arbitrator to come in and decide what the people of this province can afford to pay, in my judgment, is not the way to manage a budget. If in his wisdom he decided that 10 per cent is totally acceptable, that starts a me-too campaign and would eventually cost the taxpayers of this province \$200 million.

Or they would have to cut services. And I have not run into anyone who does not think we should have more money for health, more money for education, more money for highways, more money for agriculture, more money for union negotiation, more money for infrastructure — and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker. And these are very real needs for very real people.

And this is the question that will have to go to the voter: who do you want to manage your dollar and at the same time look after your taxes?

I for one do not agree with that concept, simply because . . . oh, I missed a piece. Anyway I don't believe that we can mortgage the future of our children and grandchildren for the wants of a generation that I believe has had it pretty good for the most of the time we've been alive, Mr. Speaker.

And if we're to go on — and we will go on and this government will be re-elected no matter when we call the election, whether it's in June or October or next June — these people will probably not be there, most of them, because they don't have any rights; they don't believe in democracy; they switch in the dark of night.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think that we'll call the election when we want to call it. Thank you very much.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity today to talk about the reasons for having an election every four years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I find . . . I think if the members opposite keep talking about their record, we should take a good look at their record over there.

Probably just the treatment of Saskatchewan people. Examples

— disenfranchised widows that we have in the gallery today. Nurses of Saskatchewan — the treatment that that government has treated our nurses in Saskatchewan; what they've done to our health care system in eight short years. And at the same time they've constantly blamed somebody else for their problems.

(1545)

The member for Saskatoon Northwest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, talked about democratic reform. Well let's see how democracy works under that regime over there. We have a Premier that's probably the biggest dictator we've ever had in the history of Saskatchewan. He does what he wants, and what he wants alone. We saw that in the nurses' negotiations when he threw that off the rail and caused a strike. And it just goes on and on and on.

How does democracy work over there? Let's go back to Channel Lake, a prime example of democracy, where the government under their management had lost what? In excess of \$5 million. Now are they going to be accountable? No, they put it through a Crown Corporations Committee. And what do they do? Before that committee has had time to put out their final report, Brian Topp, the Premier's executive assistant, writes a report.

That's democracy, Mr. Deputy Speaker — democracy at its best on that side. And the member for Saskatoon Northwest has the audacity to say democracy reform. I can't believe it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I'd also like to comment on the member for Regina South who talks about the members from the Saskatchewan Party being hypocritical in their actions, not responding to the constituents. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's the same member that ran his last campaign on working to keep the Plains hospital open. That same member ran on that platform. So where is your integrity and where are you answering to your constituents? Are you going to run on that same platform, Mr. Member?

You know, Mr. Member, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when government comes close to changing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, brown envelopes start to be slid under our door and it's great — we get information. But the best source of information we have is by that member's mouth leaking.

One of the examples was the Channel Lake report. That came out of that member's leak to his constituency. So he's a great help to our party. The more he speaks, the higher we go in the polls.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's so many reasons we need an election every four years, and agriculture is a prime example of why that should be happening. I mean the treatment of farmers, another example of the way this government treats taxpayers in this province.

We had the GRIP program when that government came to power, and what happened? They broke contracts that were signed and sealed, wiped it out, and probably cost every farmer in this province an average of 40 to \$50,000. That 40 to \$50,000 could be keeping some of our farmers afloat. But guess what?

They didn't stop there.

Now we've got an AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) program where we have an Agriculture minister and a Premier — a Premier that forgot to even come to the table. The same Premier said, the Premier in Saskatchewan should be . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. The normal time for debate is concluded and we will now start the 10-minute question and comment session.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to make a comment today, and it is addressed of course to the Tories.

I was looking around the legislature and I realized that I am one of the four longest serving members present here right now as I speak. And I couldn't help but be a little bit surprised at the gall of the new Tory Party calling for an election every four years.

How well I remember that period leading up to 1986 where it took the Tory government four and one-half years to call the first election. Then, Mr. Speaker, five years and a day, five years and a day until there was a subsequent election called, only because the Lieutenant Governor was going to have to stand in.

My question, Mr. Speaker, is for the member for Kelvington-Wadena, and I'm wondering what that member sees when she looks in the mirror in the morning?

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. The question is really to be on the content of the speeches that were in the House, and I don't think that would relate to anything in the content of the speech from the hon. member from Kelvington-Wadena.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, I have a question for the retiring member for Saskatoon Northwest. You mentioned the Tories' delinquency in calling by-elections, and I have to agree completely with you on that. It was scandalous the way they left seats vacant.

But now when you defend the possibility that there won't be a June general election, we then, now, because of this new legislation, will go to the expense of by-elections to elect MLAs who would in all likelihood never take their seats in this Assembly.

And I would like to ask the hon. member how you justify that. Is it not a case that in order to correct one evil, we've simply created another one?

Mr. Whitmore: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm very pleased to answer the question. I am ready for an election. I was ready for an election yesterday; I'm ready for an election today; and I'm ready for an election tomorrow. And I will not be retiring.

I think the member from North Battleford should be prepared for a leadership run in the Liberal Party after the next provincial election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, my question is for the member from Regina South. If that member can convince the Premier to call an election now, this spring — that would be the four years that the Premier actually promised — will he be running on that same criteria they ran last time to keep the Plains hospital open or to reopen the Plains? Will you run on that stand, Mr. Member?

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I never did run on a platform to keep the Plains hospital open. As the members opposite, if they had been in the campaign, which they weren't at 6 per cent, which is what they ended up with in my riding, they would understand the complexity of the debate we were in. They would also know that I was extremely critical of the decision of the health board on the Plains issue. But I welcome the opportunity to debate the Conservative members once we get into an election itself. This time I hope they run a candidate not quite so closely connected to Grant Devine.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. member for Kelvington-Wadena, and it is simply this. In light of the fact that your party's predecessor took four and half years to call the first election, five years and a day to call the second election, how is it possible that you or any members of the Sask-a-Tories could stand up and with a straight face call for a four-year, fixed-term election? It's just like the rest of your Sask-a Tory platform — it just doesn't add up.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all I think we talked about The Respect for Constituents Act. My constituents . . . you're not giving any respect to it at all. They had every opportunity, and on a daily basis they talked to me. And if they would want me to talk about this . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, I would imagine they do, yes. I have not had one of them come to me and say that the election . . . that I should resign. Not one.

And on the second question, you said that my previous party hadn't had an election for four and a half years. Well I don't know what the previous group of people did, but I'm with the Saskatchewan Party. It is a new party which the people of this province want.

Because the old CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) party that joined with the Labour party does not listen to the people of this province any more. They are not in touch with them and they are just like any other old-line party. People are sick and tired of you and they want something new.

So what they want is us — somebody that's quite willing to listen to the electorate and not listen to the garbage that you spout every day. And you have no idea what the people of this province really want. So call the election and I'll be delighted to be there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — This is for the member from Kelvington who's having a drink of water because I would like her to stand and explain to her constituents why she turned her back on them and refused to allow them to vote as they . . . when she decided

to switch parties in the dark of night.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First of all if you would read the paper you would realize that the party was not formed in the dark of the night. The party was formed at 2 o'clock in the afternoon in full sight of everyone, not like you guys who do everything in the dark of the night.

And the second thing, the people in my constituency, every single one of them can call me at any time, day or night, on my cell phone, at home, in my office. And I have never yet had one of them tell me they want me to resign — not one. But they have said they'd like you guys to resign and get a new face in this province so that we actually have a future, and not people that just stand there and spout something they don't know what they're talking about.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would invite the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Canora, to . . . I'm curious as to what he has to say to his constituents about turning his back on them and refusing to allow them to vote on his decision to switch parties.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have the opportunity or the great privilege of having my constituency meet up with the constituency of Canora-Pelly. I spend a lot of time in that area because there's common concerns out in rural Saskatchewan. And the member from Canora-Pelly and I visit with farms and people in different businesses and address their questions and their problems, and take phone calls and answer their questions about the things that this government is and is not doing.

And they are quite . . . they have yet to come to either myself or the member from Canora-Pelly and say, we sure wish you'd get out of there, let more room for these guys over here that are buffaloing, that are absolutely ignoring the needs of the people of this province. These guys over here that have not yet ever come forward and told people what their vision or their plan is because they don't have one. And they're delighted to come . . . to look at the Saskatchewan Party and say, you have a vision that's right there and we're looking at it.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a question to the member from Estevan. As I was listening to the member from Estevan responding to the seventy-five minute debate, he was basically trying to give his reasons why the province should not give consideration to a suggestion the Premier made a number years ago about four-year elections . . . election calls. And I think he ended up by saying, we'll call an election when we feel like calling an election.

Well I think the people of Saskatchewan feel that it's time to have set election dates, and I'm wondering why the member now feels that it's important to forget about a promise to the people of Saskatchewan to set election dates.

Mr. Ward: — Yes, Mr. Speaker. I guess had the member been listening to all of my comments he would've noticed that I started with saying that I wanted to thank them for their advice, but no thank you. They didn't have a very good record when they were in government, and that member from Moosomin was here with Grant Devine. He was responsible for probably \$4 billion of this debt that we're paying 2 million a day on.

He's also, he's also the member that was here for the whole term and now is not taking any responsibility at all. He says, I don't want to be a Tory any more; I'm going to switch my name.

Well what difference does that make? He's still a Tory; they're all still Tories. He doesn't care when the election is; he just wanted to change his name, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite seem to have it quite much in their mind that they want to go to election and go to the polls in June of this year. Mr. Speaker, there will be some type of an election . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. The time for the seventy-five minute debate has elapsed.

PRIVATE BILLS

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 302 — The Group Medical Services Act, 1999

Ms. Murray: — Oh thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. Actually I'm not sure what my role is in this. I thought we were to go through the Bill clause by clause before I ask that the committee report the Bill.

The Deputy Chair: — The member is correct. And I will call clause by — thank you, the chairman is wrong — I will call clause by clause.

Clauses 1 to 17 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

(1600)

Bill No. 303 — The Saskatchewan Foundation for the Arts Act

Clauses 1 to 21 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 304 — The Saskatchewan Medical Association Act

Clauses 1 to 17 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 301 — The Credit Union Central of Saskatchewan Act, 1999

Clauses 1 to 33 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 302 — The Group Medical Services Act, 1999

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 302, The Group Medical Services Act, 1999 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

**Bill No. 303 — The Saskatchewan Foundation
for the Arts Act**

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 303, The Saskatchewan Foundation for the Arts Act, 1999 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

**Bill No. 304 — The Saskatchewan Medical
Association Act**

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 304, The Saskatchewan Medical Association Act, 1999 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

**Bill No. 301 — The Credit Union Central
of Saskatchewan Act, 1999**

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 301, The Credit Union Central of Saskatchewan Act, 1999 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

(1615)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 30 — The Cemeteries Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Cemeteries Act, 1999. A review of the existing Cemeteries Act which is more than 30 years old, has been undertaken by a committee comprised of representatives from consumer, industry, church, and municipal organizations. The committee has recommended that together with legislation dealing with the funeral and cremation services, this Act be replaced with a new one.

Over the years problems have been identified that the existing Act does not adequately address. For example, population shifts have resulted in an increasing number of abandoned and neglected cemeteries. It is not always clear who is responsible for such cemeteries, and ongoing maintenance can be a problem. As well, consumer protection concerns are inadequately dealt with in the existing Act.

The committee reviewing the Act has recommended that for consistency, regulation of cemeteries should remain with the

provincial government. The majority of cemeteries are operated by municipalities. However, others are operated by church groups. Some are operated by commercial operators, while still others are on private property.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, this Bill provides that government will continue to regulate all cemeteries. I would also note that legislation governing cemeteries also applies to mausolea and columbaria.

There are also certain concerns about prepaid cemetery contracts. Some of the consumer protection provisions that currently exist in relation to prepaid funeral contracts are lacking in The Cemeteries Act and in other instances are different than those dealing with prepaid funeral contracts.

For example, under the existing Act the consumer is entitled to cancel a prepaid cemetery contract purchased from a commercial cemetery owner only if the sales person was not licensed as required by the Act. However, in the case of a prepaid funeral contract, consumers have a 10-day time period in which to consider cancelling the contract as well as other contract cancellation rights.

Under this Bill, contract cancellation rights already in place for prepaid funeral contracts are now being applied to prepaid cemetery contracts. Consumers will now have the same rights with respect to all prepaid contracts.

The Bill also provides ... or also prohibits certain sales practices such as making claims about specific goods or services being required by law when in fact they are not. It also provides for regulations to prohibit sales practices that are not in the public interest.

Other consumer protection issues this Bill addresses include: availability of itemized price lists for cemetery plots and services; specifying in contracts whether interment rights in a lot can be sold back to the owner — if they can, the contract must specify the buyback terms; permitting buyers of interment rights in lots to sell those rights; and allowing the installation of a memorial purchased from a source other than the owner of the cemetery if that memorial complies with the bylaws of the cemetery.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, at present a commercial cemetery owner must establish a fund to be used for cemetery care and maintenance. However, because of concerns respecting abandoned cemeteries, the new Act will require that new cemeteries other than those operated by municipalities will be also required to establish care and maintenance funds.

Abandoned and neglected cemeteries have been a concern. Several steps are being taken in this new Act to address these concerns.

First, the Bill distinguishes an abandoned cemetery from one that is merely being neglected by the owner. Regulations will be developed to specify when a cemetery is abandoned as opposed to when it is neglected. This will be done in conjunction with municipal and church representatives.

For instance, Mr. Speaker, if a cemetery is abandoned, the

municipality in which it is situated will be able to assume ownership and responsibility for the cemetery. If a care and maintenance fund has already been established, it will be transferred to the municipality.

If a cemetery is neglected, the municipality will have the ability to require the owner to maintain it. If the owner does not do so, the municipality will be able to undertake basic maintenance, such as dealing with fire hazards, and charge the cost back to the owner.

This Bill also requires owners to maintain cemeteries in a manner that ensures public safety and is in keeping with community standards. If they do not, the Bill provides that any contravention is an offence and attracts serious penalties. Communities, whether they are cities, villages, or rural municipalities, may determine the standard of care.

The Bill continues to require that the registrar approve the establishment of each new cemetery as well as a change to any existing cemetery. It also continues the requirement that commercial cemetery owners and their salespersons be licensed.

These, Mr. Speaker, are some of the important features of this Bill. I believe this new Act deals with any concerns that have been identified by various interest groups. I also appreciate the extensive work undertaken by the consumer, industry, church, and municipal representatives on this committee.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of The Cemeteries Act, 1999.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just a few comments before I move adjournment of Bill No. 30, The Cemeteries Act, 1999.

In listening to the minister's comments, and just having recently received the legislation in front of us, I'd certainly want to take some time to review it a little more closely.

Some of the comments that the minister has made certainly are issues that have been brought to my attention — especially when it comes to abandoned cemeteries or cemeteries that haven't been taken care of very well — and concerns that family members have or even communities because of the way a cemetery may appear and its appearance, especially if it's near a major road, and the unsightly appearance of some. The fact that I think we need to certainly arrive at a common consensus, a common ground, to understand who is responsible to maintain the cemeteries that we have across our province.

I think, Mr. Speaker, though as well we . . . if you take careful note, you will note around the province that it's interesting to note how different areas and different groups and communities do look after cemeteries — places where their loved ones have been laid to rest — and I think we need to commend the private organizations or the communities or the church groups who have looked after the cemeteries they are responsible for.

But certainly there are situations where there are cemeteries that need some care and in some cases private ownership. And I

believe the piece of legislation is attempting to bring some common ground and purpose so that family members and individuals will have a sense of feeling that where their loved one has been buried is going to be looked after and be looking neat and tidy. And I think that's appropriate, and certainly I will be looking at it very closely.

And we compliment the minister and his staff for taking into consideration a number of the concerns that have been raised with his office. And from the comments the minister was making, it's obvious that he's talked to a number of stakeholders. It's not just individuals, it's communities, and it's municipal governments, Mr. Speaker.

As well, the minister made some comments about consumer rights in regards to prepaid funeral contracts and there's some issues we'd just like to take a little closer look at as to what the legislation is specifically doing in those situations, and to make sure we're clear in our mind exactly what the current legislation is attempting to do. And we trust it addresses and attempts to address the concerns that have been raised by consumers.

So with that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 31 — The Funeral and Cremations Services Act

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Funeral and Cremations Services Act. This Bill is the result of extensive work over the past two years to review the legislative framework for funeral and cremation services and cemeteries. This new Act will replace The Saskatchewan Embalmers Act and The Prepaid Funeral Services Act.

The committee, comprised of representatives from consumer groups, churches, industry organizations, and government officials, worked diligently on this review. The committee recommended that legislation be modernized and expanded to improve standards of practice and consumer protection.

All Saskatchewan residents will require funeral services at some time. We have many professionals in this industry who provide high-quality service to their customers. However, as in any profession, there are instances where the family of a deceased person is taken advantage of by an unscrupulous person.

On a person's death the family must make many decisions very quickly at a time when they are also grieving. It is a time when people are especially vulnerable. The fact is funeral homes and crematoria are mostly unregulated, with the exception of the embalmers' professional services and prepaid funeral contracts. This has been of concern to many residents of the province.

Another consideration in amending the existing legislation is that the nature of the funeral industry has changed over the years. There is no longer a clear separation between those companies which operate funeral homes, crematoria and cemeteries, so lines have become blurred.

Also, while some owners are local, independently owned

businesses, multinational corporations now control a large part of this market. The challenge with this legislative reorganization is to provide protection for consumers in an environment that promotes a fair and competitive marketplace while maintaining a balance between the interests of all concerned.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is responsive to the needs of all involved. It provides the flexibility to adapt to future changes facing the industry as new services are developed in order to meet consumer demands.

Mr. Speaker, there will be standards of practice and enforcement of those standards for people working in this industry for whom there are currently only voluntary standards. These include funeral directors and owners of funeral homes, crematoria, and new services such as transfer services.

The committee has recommended that such standards of practice and their enforcement are necessary. A new funeral and cremation services council will be established to be responsible for administering the Act.

This governance model ensures public accountability as four of its ten members will be publicly appointed. Licensees under this Act will elect the other six members. The Bill also limits to one the number of council members that may be affiliated with any one company owner at any one time. The council will be responsible for licensing embalmers, funeral directors, and owners of funeral homes, crematoria, and transfer services.

Licensing standards and standards of practice will be established for all. The council will be responsible for ensuring that standards are met and for taking disciplinary action where standards are not met.

I'm not supposed to get choked up at this part. In addition the council's bylaws and decisions will be reviewable by a Superintendent of Funeral and Cremation Services. This structure ensures that decisions of the council will be in the public interest.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to address some of the other important features of the Bill that will offer greater protection for consumers. Under existing legislation, consumer funds paid to funeral home owners under prepaid contracts are protected through the use of trust accounts and a prepaid contract assurance fund. However problems can occur where a funeral home operator who is not licensed to sell prepaid contracts does so, and subsequently cannot fulfill the contracts.

Under the new Act, owners of all funeral homes, crematoria, and transfer services will be licensed. Therefore all consumers will be protected by having the prepaid contract assurance fund in place. Consumers are naturally frustrated if they are unable to obtain specific information about prices in funeral homes or crematoria. The Bill will now require owners to keep current, itemized price lists, and to make these readily available to the public on request. Specific details as to what prices are to be itemized and as to what other information is to be provided to the public will be expanded upon in the regulations.

The Bill also prohibits misrepresentations such as companies representing that certain goods or services are required by law, when in fact they are not. For example, this applies to a representation that a casket is required for cremation, when this is not the case. The existing protection for consumer funds in prepaid funeral contracts is being continued. These include requirements to place money received under a prepaid contract into trust, a 10-day time period in which to cancel a contract with full refund upon cancellation, and the ability to cancel a prepaid contract at any time before it has been fulfilled with a full refund less a small administrative fee.

Funeral home owners have expressed concerns that they are required to place 100 per cent of the money received under a prepaid contract into trust. They have administrative expenses, including salaries for sales people at the time the contract is sold. Therefore new provisions will permit the owner to place 85 per cent of the funds paid under the contract in the trust. Consumer funds remain fully refundable and protected by the assurance fund.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes there is uncertainty as to which person is the next of kin for the purposes of making decisions about the disposition of human remains after a death. This can be particularly problematic when there are disputes about final disposition of the remains. The Bill clearly sets out a list in order of priority of the authorized decision makers, beginning with the executor of the will.

If the first person is not available, the next person on the list is deemed to be the authorized decision maker. This will clarify matters for the next of kin and for the funeral home or crematorium providing services.

At present, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has no legislation that deals specifically with services provided by crematoria. Increasingly cremation is chosen over burial by residents of this province, as is true in other jurisdictions. There are now 10 crematoria in Saskatchewan.

The Crematorium Association of Saskatchewan fully supports this legislation to govern crematorium operations. Since cremation is an irreversible process, it is therefore very important that there is certainty as to the identity of the deceased person before cremation can take place. The Bill sets out requirements respecting visual identification and alternatives if visual identification of the remains is not possible.

The health and safety of the public and crematorium personnel must be ensured. For this reason, it is necessary that the crematorium operator be certain that the human remains do not contain a pacemaker or other potentially explosive device. The Bill provides for this.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this is a comprehensive Bill that contains provisions to address concerns of both consumers and industry members. This has been achieved through representatives with the various interest groups working together to resolve issues. The commitment and effort made by these representatives is very much appreciated. And, Mr. Speaker, the continued involvement of this committee in developing subsequent regulations to the Act will be essential to

the successful implementation of this legislation.

I beg to inform the Assembly that His Honour, the Lieutenant-Governor, having been informed of the subject matter of the Bill, recommends it to the consideration of the Assembly.

I therefore move second reading of An Act respecting Funeral Services, Cremation Services and Transfer Services be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As with the last piece of legislation that the minister brought forward, Bill No. 31, The Funeral and Cremation Services Act, here again is another situation where, as I understand it, we have just a cleaning-up of some Acts, bringing two Acts under one, and clarifying a number of issues in regards to funeral and cremation services.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about funerals and we talk about crematorial services, it causes each one of us, I believe, just to reflect a little bit about the fact, as the minister indicated, that there isn't an individual who not . . . at some time or the other will not be forced to seek the services of groups and individuals who provide the funeral services in this province.

And I think it's only fair and fitting that we have a regulatory process or a legislative process that certainly gives some direction and guidance. Because there's no doubt when families lose a family member regardless of age, the sadness and the trauma of the situation is difficult all of a sudden to be thrust upon with the responsibility to have to plan for a funeral and being under the duress of loss of a family member.

And certainly we hope and trust that you have the ability to be able to meet and sit with a very diligent funeral director, someone who really is able to show compassion, to help guide you through that process of not only grieving but planning for that funeral service.

And I think it's certainly appropriate that there are some guidelines and regulations. I think if we . . . As an individual who's certainly been thrust into that situation not too . . . or fairly recently, Mr. Speaker, I can say that and I would believe that many of the funeral homes and directors across this province are very compassionate, very understanding, give very clear guidance, and really willing to sit down with family members.

And I think the profession themselves certainly will want to see some guidelines under legislation and regulation. That basically they know that their profession is going to be held with high esteem rather than allowing an individual or group to take advantage of families during these very difficult times and situations.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I think it's appropriate as well to just review the legislation a little more in depth before we move on to further discussion in regards to the legislation, and therefore at this time I move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Saskatchewan Water Corporation Vote 50

Subvote (SW01)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Deputy Chair of committees. I'd like to welcome the minister and his officials here today.

Yesterday we were dealing with SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) when the session ended, and I know there's a number of difficulties occurring there. There is rumours, and perhaps you can confirm what is happening there, Mr. Minister, about the economic viability of the operation with the Lake Diefenbaker Potato Corporation. Can you get to the root of the matter for us please?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Chair, we've been made aware that they are certainly experiencing cash-flow problems and are in discussion right now with their secured creditors.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Is that just the Lake Diefenbaker Potato Corporation or does it involve some of the other corporations that are involved with that operation and involved with Sask Water?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — To our knowledge it is just Lake Diefenbaker Potato Corporation.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Exactly what assets does Sask Water have involvement with, with the Lake Diefenbaker Potato Corporation? Is it the storage sheds only on the quarter section of land that they sit on, or is there other assets that Sask Water is involved with in that operation?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — It's just the buildings that we talked about last night, the Lucky Lake Potato Storage terminal.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Minister, with the debentures and the mortgage that you hold, are the buildings and the land enough security on those debentures and mortgage? You sold the land and the buildings for \$5.81 million. You provided financing of \$5.81 million, so 100 per cent financing on that.

What kind of due diligence did you do in providing that kind of financing? And is it acceptable financial practices to provide 100 per cent security on an asset?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — As part of the . . . I guess I would try to put it in this historic perspective. Late last year we were made aware that they were experiencing some cash flow problems, and in discussions with the Farm Credit Corporation and the Royal Bank, this is the arrangement that we came to, to try to attempt to assist the growers out in the Lake Diefenbaker area.

Mr. D'Autremont: — What kind of due diligence did you do on this particular project?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — We reviewed the business plan . . . In terms of the due diligence we reviewed the business plan and

the financial plan that was put forward. Actually, the Farm Credit Corporation, the Royal Bank and ourselves — all three parties agreed that this is what would be done to again try to assist the growers out there since they were experiencing cash flow problems with the depressed potato prices.

Mr. D'Autremont: — What kind of involvement then does FCC (Farm Credit Corporation) and the Royal Bank have? Do they have some investments in this operation? If so, what are their investments? Or is Saskatchewan and Sask Water the only carrier in this financial situation?

(1645)

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Okay, we're aware that the Royal Bank provides an operating line of credit. The Farm Credit Corporation has provided long-term financing for equipment. But because of the commercial nature of the business, the relationship that you're asking us to disclose is essentially between Lake Diefenbaker Potato Corporation and those two lenders, and we don't have the ability to provide specific information to you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well I recognize that you wouldn't have the information from the Royal Bank or from FCC, but you would have knowledge of who else may have caveats or claims against the property and the supplies, the equipment, the product that may be owned by the Lake Diefenbaker Potato Corporation. I'm just wondering how secure Saskatchewan investment is.

These plants have been in operation now for a short period of time. You have a hundred per cent invested in the security. I think it's a risky operation to have a hundred per cent invested in anything. And yet it is.

Have you been and visited . . . have you visited with these, and had a look at the property that you still have a hundred per cent investment in, to determine what kind of situation they're in now? Are they being used? Are they empty? Are they being maintained properly? And what is the current tax status on that property?

I know that in other operations whenever the situation becomes financially difficult, oftentimes the taxes are not as up to date as they could be. What kind of situation are they in with taxes? Who else might have a claim on that property? Does anybody else have a caveat on it?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — We don't have any information on the taxes at all. To our knowledge there are no caveats that we're aware of on the property. And we do have staff that are in the area working on a continual basis. And they certainly do drive-by inspections, and we're informed that everything is well maintained.

And I think the last question you asked was with respect to whether or not there were still potatoes in the facility. And yes, they are still . . . some of the bins still have potatoes in them. It's not completely full but there still is potatoes in the facilities.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. SPUDCO — what other investments would SPUDCO, have or

involvements does it have? Is it strictly with the Lake Diefenbaker Potato Corporation, or does SPUDCO have other investments and other involvements?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — We own five other potato storage terminals, plus potato handling equipment that we lease to other area growers.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Could you please give us an indication of the names of these other storage units? Are they all entitled SPUDCO, or do they have some other name that they're being used, and what their locations are. Also any corporate names that you may be using for the equipment that you have financial interests in.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — The five buildings are owned by Sask Water and operated by the SPUDCO division. They are located, one in Tullis . . . the Tullis Potato Storage building is in, of course, in Tullis. There's one in Riverhurst, and there are three in Broderick.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Tullis potato corporation, who is the Tullis potato corporation? Is it a wholly owned subsidiary of Sask Water or are there other principals involved in it?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — You're correct. It's a wholly owned subsidiary of the Sask Water Corporation.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Back to the Lake Diefenbaker Potato Corporation, I wonder if you can tell us who the principals are of that corporation and where they're located at.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Just had a quick discussion here as to whether or not this was public information we could give to you, but by searching the corporate register you could probably gather this information anyway. So to the best of our knowledge, there are four owners. They are Judith River Farm, the Newbridge, Coteau Hills potato corporation, and the Marathon Investments.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I wonder if you could give us any information about the Judith River corporation?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — We believe it to be a diversified set of investors from western Canada and the northern United States.

Mr. D'Autremont: — How much due diligence was done on Judith River before entering into this financial arrangement with the Lake Diefenbaker Potato Corporation?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Let me try this. There was no equity investment by Sask Water at all. So in working with Farm Credit Corporation and the Royal Bank, we were dealing in simply a cash flow problem.

We believe that the process that we followed was adequate and that there was no, as I said, there was no equity investment any time on behalf of Sask Water. So we believe that the process that we followed was appropriate.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Mr. Minister, while you may not

have an equity investment in the sense of buying shares in the corporation, you certainly do have a substantial investment of \$5.81 million in this corporation in the sense that you have lent them that much money as security against the buildings and a quarter section of land — buildings and land that were originally Sask Water's.

So, Mr. Minister, I would think it extremely incumbent on you to have done some due diligence on the people who were operating this corporation, who were the owners of this corporation, particularly on Judith River corporation as being not only, I believe, from western Canada but involved heavily in the Idaho potato . . . coming out of Idaho.

(1700)

So, Mr. Minister, I think perhaps you need to do some due diligence on the principals of the Lake Diefenbaker Potato Corporation to make a determination as to what their corporate history is and the history of their investment practices, and whether or not you have made, on behalf of Saskatchewan people, a good investment in this particular area.

And perhaps you have done this and perhaps you haven't. But when you say that we don't have an equity position so there was no need for us to do that kind of due diligence, I think you're wrong, Mr. Minister. I think it's incumbent on you to have done some due diligence, and included in that due diligence is finding out what you can about the principal owners of that corporation.

Now are you doing that now that there is a potential for some difficulties in that corporation, or are you not doing it?

Mr. Kowalsky: — I would ask that we recess at this time, Mr. Deputy Chair.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.

