

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present today regarding enforced municipal amalgamation:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

The people that have signed this petition are all from Wadena, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I rise again today on behalf of people in Swift Current and area concerned about the Swift Current hospital.

The prayer can be summarized as follows, Mr. Speaker, that the people who sign this petition want the provincial government to assist in the regeneration plan for the Swift Current Regional Hospital so that it can continue to serve the entire region; in fact, do a better job of that.

And this petition has been signed by people from Swift Current and Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well to present a petition regarding enforced municipal amalgamation. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

And this petition is signed by individuals from Chaplin and Central Butte.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly on the following matters:

To halt plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

To provide funding for the Swift Current Regional Hospital; and

To cause the federal and provincial governments to reduce fuel taxes.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to colleagues of the Assembly, a number of grade 5 students in my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, if there's any doubt that we're not a growing, up-and-coming constituency, the proof sits in the west gallery with 58 grade 5 students who are here today for a tour, to be present for part of question period, have already responded to one of the members, Mr. Speaker, in a cheer, and certainly I'll be looking forward to meeting with them and answering their questions about the proceedings.

They're here today with teachers from Hawrylak School, Ms. Shirley Wolfe and Ms. Brenda Martin, and their parent helpers, Ms. Greenman and Dr. Radford.

I would ask all members to join with me in a warm welcome for the 58 grade 5 students from W.S. Hawrylak School.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the House, Mr. Lorne Nystrom, who has joined us at the back of the House here, who is the Member of Parliament for Regina Qu'Appelle.

Mr. Nystrom is, as I said, the member for Regina Qu'Appelle, and I had the distinct opportunity and pleasure of being in his employment for a number of years as his constituency assistant. And to continue on in job employment with him and security with him, of course, Mr. Speaker, I had to on a daily basis treat him very nice.

And I have to, Mr. Speaker, continue to do that because Mr. Nystrom is now a constituent of mine.

So I'd ask all the folks here in the legislature to offer Mr. Nystrom a very warm welcome here. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the colleague in welcoming the Hon. Lorne Nystrom to this House.

As we all know it's very rare for an opposition member of parliament to be a member of the Privy Council, but Mr. Nystrom was granted that honour sometime ago for his work on the — not only the Constitution — but his work as, I think, what could only be properly called a real PanCanadian member of parliament. He went to Ottawa representing Yorkton-Melville but did much more than that and represented, in many respects, Mr. Speaker, the whole country.

So I'd like members to join with me in welcoming the Hon. Lorne Nystrom.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Tribute to Provincial Auditor

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I refrain from entering into the introduction of guests and acknowledging Mr. Strelieff in your gallery.

And I would like to at this time speak a bit about a wonderful career that Mr. Strelieff has had in Saskatchewan. And certainly from a personal perspective is a very, very cordial relationship that we had.

I remember very well in 1995 when I was a newly elected member, and had been assigned to Chair the Public Accounts Committee. And with all due trepidation we came to our first meeting for a briefing and I know many other members who are in the House attended at the same time wondering what this task was going to be. And certainly, Mr. Strelieff and his team from the Provincial Auditor's office provided us with a very, very complete and in-depth overview of what the role that we had undertaken was going to be.

And over the years, subsequent to that, Mr. Strelieff and his department have provided exceptional service to the people of Saskatchewan. He's done it in a very professional and non-biased way. He has certainly perspectives and agendas that he would like to see happen.

And we wish him very well. Certainly British Columbia's gain is Saskatchewan's loss. Good luck.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we celebrate 10 years, 10 years of Wayne Strelieff's service to Saskatchewan as Provincial Auditor, and we wish him luck as he moves on to his new career in British Columbia.

The poet Longfellow once wrote, Mr. Speaker: a good life consists of not just in seeing visions and dreaming dreams, but in acts of willing service. By these standards, Wayne Strelieff has indeed lived a good life during his years here in Saskatchewan — a life of active and willing service to all of the people of our province.

At times I know it's been a thankless job, but this week as he concludes his time as our Provincial Auditor, I know that Wayne will be reminded of his many accomplishments and successes.

I got to know him during those 10 years a little bit, and I'd like to recognize here in the Assembly two things that stuck out about Wayne Strelieff. First, he genuinely cared about his job, and his dedication speaks well of his professionalism and of his character.

Secondly, Wayne was persistent and always held to his principles. Sometimes his ideas weren't received with open arms but he persevered and the people of Saskatchewan have benefited.

So thank you very much, Wayne, for your 10 years of dedicated

service. The people of BC (British Columbia) indeed are fortunate to have you as their Provincial Auditor.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Opening of Biggar Central School 2000

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that the Biggar Central School 2000 was officially opened this past Friday. The school is actually a joint-use facility for the people in the Biggar area. It will act as both a K to 12 school, a regional college, and, Mr. Speaker, a teen wellness centre.

The Greenhead Health District values and participates in a number of interdisciplinary initiatives. The wellness centre is another example of a partnership between the Biggar School Board, along with the Prairie West Regional College and the Greenhead District Health Board.

Teen wellness centres help youth gain information and support to help make responsible choices about their health and well-being. Having a wellness centre in a school will only enhance its importance and will benefit both the youth and the community at large. It's appropriate that this kind of program for young people should be housed in the school. The connection between good education and good health is well established.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to commend the Greenhead Health District and the Biggar School Division and the community of Biggar for an innovative, comprehensive K to 12 education, adult learning, and health services available for young people in that area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Davidson Citizen Runs in Boston Marathon

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise today to talk about a constituent of mine — Mr. Bob Bender of Davidson — where he is . . . if you're around there, he is a familiar sight where he is out running every day. Bob originally took up running in 1985 at the insistence of a friend. He runs now every single day of the week, rain or shine.

Today Bob is running in the Boston Marathon. The last time he ran in the Boston Marathon, he finished 248 out of a field of thousands. This time he hopes to finish in the top 20.

In order to qualify to run at Boston, Bob had to compete at a certified marathon in . . . had to complete a certified marathon in less than 3 hours and 30 minutes for his age category. Bob recently celebrated his 50th birthday.

The marathon is a long-distance foot race of 26 miles and 385 yards. For members, this is approximately the distance on No. 11 Highway from the town of Bladworth to the town of Craik.

So I hope with all the members here that they will wish Bob the very best in running today and I will report his progress probably tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Moose Jaw Co-op Agro Centre

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, if there is a group in our province that defines us as a society, I would argue that it's our co-ops. Founded on the principle of co-operation, mutual self-help, and economic efficiencies, our co-ops and credit unions have been the heart of both our cultural and economic development.

I would like to congratulate the Moose Jaw Co-operative Association on the grand opening of their new Agro Centre. Local producers now have another option when shopping for agricultural supplies. The Moose Jaw Co-op Agro Centre will more than double the previous Moose Jaw Co-op's farm supply retail space.

The new 8,000 square foot facility will basically be a farm hardware store. They will stock seasonable supplies such as lawn and garden in spring and summer and snow equipment in the fall and winter.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I should also mention that the Co-op is also planning a \$1.6 million expansion to their gas bar facility in downtown Moose Jaw.

The Moose Jaw Co-op Association consists of over 14,000 members. Through this centre, they are adding to their reputation as a leader in the Moose Jaw marketplace and as a builder in our community.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Swift Current Broncos Still in WHL Playoffs

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the elimination of the Saskatoon Blades this past Friday, there is now only one of the five Saskatchewan WHL (Western Hockey League) cities left in the WHL playoffs. I'm referring of course to the Swift Current Broncos, the 2000 east division champions.

So, Mr. Speaker, I thought it'd be interesting today to look at some of the reasons behind the Broncos' success.

We should probably start with the heart and grit of our players; we should talk about the best goalie in junior hockey in Bryce Wandler. Also the fact that the Broncos can boast the services of the finest hockey coach in all of junior hockey in the country, Todd McLellan, cannot be overlooked. Nor can the amazing community spirit of Swift Current and area; it's the smallest city to host a major junior hockey franchise on the continent. It could even be that the colour commentator on Bronco hockey telecasts is my constituency assistant.

But if we only acknowledge these things, Mr. Speaker, we may be missing a more subtle reason behind the Broncos' success and the lack of success of any other Saskatchewan franchise, for only one WHL city sent a Saskatchewan Party MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) to this place, Mr. Speaker. Sadly the rest of our WHL cities are now suffering under the same fate as the Saskatchewan Roughriders who have never won a Grey Cup under NDP rule in this province, Mr. Speaker.

But there is good news for these cities, Mr. Speaker. Soon and very soon, they too will send Saskatchewan Party members to this Assembly and they might also enjoy the same level of success that the Broncos have enjoyed in Swift Current. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Proposed Health Care Legislation in Alberta

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are all aware of the perennial underfunding for health the federal government offers. We're also aware of the suggestions that Canadians should move towards a system of combined private and public health care. Alberta's Ralph Klein has, as we all know, proposed legislation that will allow private clinics to open in Alberta.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans and Canadians are saying no way to two-tiered health care.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Yesterday in Edmonton nearly 6,000 people protested against Klein's Bill 11. This large show of anger proves that Canadians do not want public money paying for private, for-profit health care. Mr. Speaker, any time profit is introduced into a social service such as health, the service ceases to be a service and becomes a for-profit business.

Listen, please. Universal health care is part of what it means to be Canadian. The New Democratic Party has always been and will continue to be dedicated to universal health care.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — And let me say that we will not in Saskatchewan — the birthplace of health care — follow the lead of Alberta and Ralph Klein.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Prince Albert Volunteer Recognition Awards

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the opportunity to represent the government at volunteer recognition awards in Prince Albert. It was sponsored by the North Central Regional Recreation Association. And this awards ceremony recognized the efforts of volunteers from Prince Albert and area. These volunteers have given of their time, abilities, and dedication.

And I'd like to mention the names of the recipients and the area in which they were honoured: Lorraine Kouznitsoff of Blaine Lake for special services in sports; Lois Frederick of Paddockwood for special services; the Rosthern Old-Timers Hockey Club for culture, sports, and recreation; Hildegard Ryan of Candle Lake for sports; Howard Smith of MacDowall for recreation; Annette Heisler of Christopher Lake for special services; Roberta Burns of Prince Albert for culture; Raymond and Giselle Desjardins for special services — this is in Marcelin, Mr. Speaker — and from Weirdale, Dalton and Marilyn Stacey for special services.

I also want to thank Ron Reves, Chair of this event, and all of the volunteers for making Prince Albert and our community a good place in which to live.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Twinning of Trans-Canada Highway

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

Mr. Minister, as you know, one of the busiest stretches of single-lane highway in the province runs through my constituency. It is also one of the deadliest. And every time there is a serious accident, people ask how many lives are going to be lost before this highway is twinned? Tragically they are asking that question again today — after Friday's deadly crash.

And Mr. Minister, this is the question I pose for you today. When will your government complete the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in the west?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, of course, I want to — from the ministry and behalf of the government — extend our sincere sympathies to the three commercial drivers who tragically lost their lives on Friday afternoon, and certainly to their families and friends who were affected by this tragedy. And our hearts always go out to people who lose their lives prematurely.

I want to also give notice that under . . . I will immediately after question period, or I should say more appropriately, before orders of the day, under rule 46 be asking leave to introduce an emergency motion regarding this tragedy, and the anticipated — or hopefully anticipated — additional support from the federal government to accelerate the twinning.

I want to say first of all as well though, Mr. Speaker, that in 1997, we did make a commitment to twin the two Trans-Canada Highways — No. 1 and 16 — over a 15-year period. And we anticipate, based on the current planning, to have that completed by 19 . . . or by 2012.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, as horrible as Friday's accident was — no one was really surprised by it. There's a sense of inevitability. As long as this stretch of highway remains single lane, we're going to continue to see serious accidents, injuries, and deaths.

Now over a 12-year period, from 1987 to 1998, there were 900 accidents, 358 injuries, and 26 people killed. In fact, I guess since 1979 there have actually been 40 deaths on that stretch of road. And now, Mr. Minister, three more people are dead.

Fifteen years is too long. Even if you do it in half that time, it's too long. It's almost certain that we will see more injuries and deaths.

Mr. Minister, what steps are you taking to speed up this timetable?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, we have in this year's budget committed \$250 million to our Department of Highways — the highest in our department's history. And part of that, Mr. Speaker, includes one of our highest priorities which is the twinning of our Trans-Canada Highway, both No. 1 and 16, where, as well, there is a great need.

For this coming year, Mr. Speaker, on Highway No. 1, from the Manitoba border to Indian Head, we have committed . . . there is . . . I should say, there will be . . . there is 168 kilometres to do at a cost of \$83 million, Mr. Speaker; on Highway No. 1 from Gull Lake to the Alberta border, 108 kilometres at \$49 million; and Highway 16 from North Battleford to Lloydminster, 103 kilometres at a cost of \$57 million. As you can see, these are huge costs.

For this year we will begin construction of . . . on the divided highway from the Alberta border towards Maple Creek — a total of 20 kilometres, all of that in the member's constituency.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noted with interest that the minister indicated that he would be introducing an emergency motion later on in this afternoon's proceedings. I would like the House to know that that idea came to the forefront after we had already filed our intention to present an emergency motion.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to address this question to the minister. The Saskatchewan Party agrees that the federal government has a role to play. Ottawa should be contributing to the twinning of the No. 1 Highway. Unfortunately the federal Liberals have abandoned this responsibility. We agree with you on that particular point.

Mr. Minister, this morning I wrote the Transport minister, David Collenette, calling on his government to work with you to speed up the twinning of the No. 1 Highway. Mr. Minister, have you contacted the federal Minister of Transport since Friday's deadly accident? Have you told your federal counterpart that we need money to complete the twinning of this highway now?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I think first of all let me say that I think the member's been responsible in his concern over the tragedy that occurred on Friday and I commend him for that.

I want to point out though, Mr. Speaker, when I look at the headlines in the paper on Friday, it says that the cause of the accident — is the headline Monday I should say, today's paper — is speed, visibility factors in the crash. And if I could read the first paragraph. It's says in Maple Creek a vehicle slowing down due to swirling snow on the Trans-Canada Highway sparked a chain reaction collision part of it that that killed three

men and injured five, say RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police).

So in this particular case it doesn't appear that the twinning particularly was the issue. Although we acknowledge that it is critical that the twinning be done as quickly as possible, and with federal funds, Mr. Speaker, it can be accelerated to a great degree. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, I want you to know that I'm willing to work with you to lobby the federal government on this issue for funding to complete this vital work. I'm willing to travel to Ottawa with you. I'll even invite the federal minister out to Maple Creek to see for himself. Whatever it takes.

Now let's just get it done. That's the sentiment of the people of the area, and I think of individuals who have suffered injury or death in their family as a result of that stretch of road, would agree.

But, Mr. Minister, right now both levels of government have a role to play in this particular project. Immediately after question period I will be moving an emergency motion calling on both levels of government to work together to complete the twinning of the No. 1 Highway within three years.

Mr. Minister, will you support this motion?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I couldn't agree more with the member in saying that both of levels of government have a responsibility to contributing funds for the construction of the divided highways, both 1 and 16. Right now, the province contributes about 95 or 96 per cent and the federal government about 4 per cent. So I agree that both levels of government have a responsibility to contribute.

I would say as well, Mr. Speaker, that as recently as Thursday, coincidentally, I met with federal Minister Collette, and this was specifically one of our agenda items, that is the lack of federal funding from the federal government towards the twinning of our Trans-Canada Highway.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Municipal Amalgamation

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

Mr. Premier, apparently after being hammered at the polls in the last election and then increasing the PST (provincial sales tax) by \$160 million and then forcing massive amalgamation down the throats of municipal governments, you finally come to the conclusion that things aren't going so well.

Now after a weekend of watching TV with a handful of NDP (New Democratic Party) faithful, you're telling the media that you've heard the rural areas' call. Is that true, Mr. Premier?

Have you heard the thousands of people across Saskatchewan calling on you to drop your plan of forced municipal amalgamation? And will you act upon your deathbed conversion by calling off your plan for forced municipal amalgamation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I detect a very strong note of wishful thinking in the question by the Leader of the Opposition when he refers to deathbed repentances. And may I remind him in politics that when you make these kind of allusions they have a funny way of coming back to the questioner; and I don't want to see you on a death bed repentance when it comes to some of the divided support in your caucus that exists.

But to answer your question specifically, Mr. Speaker, this government never favoured forced amalgamation as the Minister of Municipal Affairs has said. We favour reorganization which is consensual, which is mutual, and which is collaborative.

I've communicated that to SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and to SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association). SARM is holding a special convention right now; we'll see what they decide. SUMA is also considering it; we'll see what they decide. At that point we'll all be the wiser.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Premier for his concern, but I want him to know that everything is well and fine over here.

Mr. Premier, you say you're listening to the people. How is that possible, Mr. Premier, when not a single member of your cabinet attended even one of the public hearings on municipal amalgamation. Why didn't you make it a priority to go to one of those public meetings yourself?

Mr. Premier, if you're really interested in what people think of your government, why didn't you go and listen to the 800 people at the Yorkton meeting on municipal amalgamation? Or if that was too difficult, why didn't you go and listen to the 400 people at Outlook or the 300 people right here in Regina the other day?

Mr. Premier, their message was simple and clear — dump your plan of forced municipal amalgamation. Will you prove that you're listening? Will you dump your plan of forced municipal amalgamation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I wish to make two points in response to the question. First of all as the Minister of Municipal Affairs has indicated time and time again, when Professor Garcea's committee — composed of people like Val Kononoff from SARM, and people like Murray Westby from SUMA, and other distinguished Saskatchewan people — when that report, interim report, was prepared, it was the clear policy

of the government that that committee would go out in the country and to hear the response of the country and would report on what it heard to the government, upon which the government would then take its decision. Those public hearings have been conducted; we are awaiting the report of Garcea. That is why the government did not go, because it was mandating Garcea to do that.

On the second question of forced amalgamation, the only political party that is on record favouring forced amalgamation is the Reg Downs' document — your chief of staff. You are the only political party favouring forced amalgamation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the government keeps mentioning this report, so I looked at this the other day and there isn't a single mention in that report of forced amalgamation. I have no idea what the Premier is talking about.

But, Mr. Speaker, the president of SARM, Mr. Sinclair Harrison, says that your government, Mr. Premier, has betrayed rural municipalities. He says you made a commitment to work with them, and then turned around and handed them an ultimatum. But then last week you said legislation of forced municipal amalgamation was just around the corner. You said the clock was ticking and time was running out.

Well, Mr. Premier, forced amalgamation for you is a ticking time bomb. And if you keep pushing it down the throats of municipalities, it's going to blow up right in your face. If you're really listening to the people, then you'd know what they're saying. They're saying no to forced amalgamation.

Will you do that, Mr. Premier? Will you stand in the House and say no to forced amalgamation? SARM's meeting . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, please.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've already given the government's answer with respect to this matter and I don't think it's of any merit for me to keep repeating it over and over again.

But I am going to, in response to the Leader of the Opposition's question — who seems to have a highly developed sense of revisionism when it comes to history and facts — to remind him in the document called: "A Call to Action — Reforming and Revitalizing Urban Government in Saskatchewan" written by the Saskatchewan Party. The following is said, quote:

It is vital that this process (referring to restructuring) begin immediately. Too often when important changes are necessary people wait for the perfect moment to begin — when they enough money, when everyone is in complete agreement, when they're certain they have all the answers. All of these conditions will never exist, the perfect moment to begin is now.

That is what Mr. Reg Downs and the Saskatchewan Party

wrote. The perfect moment to begin is now. No consultation, do it now. You're for forced amalgamation. Tell me that you're against forced amalgamation. When will you abandon your policy?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier would care to read that whole report instead of one little paragraph, he would find that forced amalgamation is not in that report once. Not once in that report.

Mr. Speaker, my question is again to the Minister of Education. Mr. Minister, we've been asking you for weeks to tell us where you stand on forced amalgamation. The question is simple, do the Liberals in this coalition government . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, please, order. Hon. members I would just bring to your attention Beauchesne's, 6th Edition, paragraph 409, subparagraph (6):

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government.

And further it states as well that ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question again, Mr. Speaker, is for the Minister of Education.

Mr. Minister, do the Liberals in the this coalition government support the NDP's plan of forced municipal amalgamation?

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would just remind the hon. member that perhaps he may wish to redirect his question. I remind you once again, ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities, only on matters with respect to government responsibilities and government competence.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Education Minister said he is opposed to forced amalgamation which has to do with education tax, property tax, and has to do with the education portfolio. But he fully intends to vote for it in the legislature. Unbelievable, Mr. Speaker. He's against it, but he's going to vote for it.

Mr. Speaker, that's a little like saying that you're against drinking water until you get thirsty.

Mr. Minister, you've already betrayed the voters once by joining the NDP. Will you take at least one step towards restoring your demolished credibility, and will you vote against forced amalgamation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I'm going to again give the answer . . . I'm going to, once again, Mr. Speaker, give the answer on behalf of the government.

This is a follow-up question from the Leader of the Opposition.

The position of the government, again I repeat, is that we do not favour forced amalgamation nor stand for forced amalgamation.

But I repeat to the hon. member from Saltcoats, that is not your condition. Your conditions are that, quote: “these conditions for amalgamation will never exist; the perfect moment to act is now.” That’s what you said — the perfect moment is to act now. Not a word on consultation, not a word on how they oppose forced amalgamation, but the perfect time to act is now.

Come clean. When will the Saskatchewan Party abandon their plan for forced amalgamation? We’re against it. What are you for?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, if that member has any credibility at all, let’s let him answer for himself. We’d like to hear from him.

Mr. Speaker, I have another question for the Minister of Education. Mr. Minister, a lot of people say that if you look closely you can see Velcro straps the NDP has sewn to your pants. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan want you to shed that Velcro and stop being a puppet for the NDP government. Your own Liberal Party president says you should leave the coalition government if the NDP forces amalgamation.

Isn’t it time to start listening? Thousands of people attended public hearings on amalgamation and sent a simple, direct message — say no to forced amalgamation.

Mr. Minister, are you really opposed to forced amalgamation, or was that just more political rhetoric? Is your word any good at all? Will you stop hiding . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I thought your ruling was, if I may say so with the greatest of respect, the correct, the correct . . . no, it’s the correct ruling. It is the correct ruling.

We answer questions here for the government decisions taken as a government. We do not answer questions about the New Democratic Party resolutions or about the Liberal Party resolutions. We answer questions on government policy.

And I say to the hon. member from Saltcoats, since he’s in this area, *The Leader-Post* of Saturday, April 15th says clearly that the Liberal leader, Jim Melenchuk, said he opposes forced amalgamations of rural municipalities. There it is in black and white.

Now he talks about Velcro, he talks about Velcro. I would make a little suggestion to the hon. member from Saltcoats and the Leader of the Opposition. When he says quote, the member from Saltcoats, “He has no apologies for whipping up opposition on the issue, no apologies whatsoever.” Both the Leader of the Opposition . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, once again all we’re asking is for that member to stand and tell us where he stands. His comment the other day, and you didn’t follow through on it, was he is against forced amalgamation, but if it came and was introduced, he would vote in favour of it. Let that member stand and tell us.

Mr. Minister, all we’re asking you to do is stand in this House today and tell us where you stand. Tell the public of Saskatchewan. Tell the thousands that they’re against forced amalgamation where you stand on this issue. Will you just do that once, Mr. Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — You see, Mr. Speaker, this is typical of the approach taken by the member from Saltcoats and the Leader of the Opposition. They make no apologies for whipping up the opposition. And they make no apologies, Mr. Speaker, in not following the rules of this House. It is clear — and I invite you, sir, to take a look at Beauchesne’s — that the government speaks on government issues, and we defend on government issues.

If there’s any Velcro and it’s to be placed anywhere, the Velcro should be placed on the Leader of the Opposition and the member from Saltcoats for ripping up people falsely, and tell us the truth that you’re going to withdraw from your plan of forced amalgamation.

Stand up and tell us your approach to that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — This question is directed at a minister that I will, will hope . . . I hope will answer the question that’s directed at him, so the Minister of Municipal Affairs — not that easy.

In all the talk about amalgamation, Mr. Speaker, there is always a suggestion that municipalities aren’t doing it on their own. Some of government needs to get involved and push it to make it happen. But that’s a false idea because due to legislation, RMs (rural municipalities) cannot amalgamate — they cannot — urban and rural — amalgamate.

Municipal councillors are being criticized on some fronts for not being open-minded, not being willing to give up the status quo, for turf protection. But municipalities are co-operating — they’re sharing services already. They can’t go further, any further due to the urban municipal Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Minister, instead of forcing Saskatchewan municipalities into your work model of amalgamation, will you commit to removing the legislative barrier preventing voluntary amalgamation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, this is what the Saskatchewan Party says about what they think about this issue of amalgamation. They say, “Too often when important changes are necessary, people wait for the so-called ‘perfect moment to begin,’ when they have enough money, when everyone is completely in agreement, when they are certain they have all the answers.” And then the Saskatchewan Party says this, “All these conditions will never exist. The perfect moment to begin is now.”

These aren't my words. That's the word of the official opposition, and that's what they would do.

Now the member opposite gets up and he says would we support legislation with respect to voluntary amalgamation? Our position has always been for voluntary amalgamation and for an organized, collaborative way.

It's you people over there who are for the forced amalgamation, and here's your paper to prove it. Disown it. Get out there and tell the public that you are opposed to forced amalgamation. You've never done it because you support forced amalgamation and we don't.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really find it interesting that the Premier of this province will quote from a 1992 SUMA document to defend his government's position. There's something wrong with that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the strong feelings around amalgamation are for one reason — because of scepticism of this government. And why wouldn't people be sceptical of this government. When the health districts services Act was brought forward in 1993, the government said it would bring better services, lower costs, and higher local autonomy. The exact words of this NDP government.

That hasn't happened, Mr. Speaker. There's been hospital closures, service reduction, higher health district debt, and district boards that are under the thumb of this government. You question why people are sceptical about rural amalgamation, about this government's amalgamation . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would ask the member to please go to his question.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Will you commit to establishing voluntary pilot projects over a short term where amalgamation can be studied so it does make some economic sense?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, to hear the hon. member talk about Saskatchewan's health care system and contrast those words with what actually is happening in their model province of Alberta — their model province of Bill 11. Two-tier, bi-level

speakers like the member from Weyburn — I gave you the quotation — she's in favour of privatization, private for-profit hospitals under Bill 11, to stand up by their model and to say that that is better than Saskatchewan's, defies any sense of reality.

Mr. Speaker, I'll stack up this province's delivery of health care to any province in Canada. We have reformed it and we've reformed it not without some mistakes, but we've reformed it in the principles of medicare and we're committed to it. You're not. You are for two-tier, you're for private, for-profit health care; you will destroy it and the people of Saskatchewan know it just like you destroyed local government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, prior to orders of the day, I would ask leave to introduce a motion of urgent and pressing necessity under Rule 46.

The Speaker: — Hon. members, before I acknowledge your request, I would ask your indulgence. Before orders of the day, I would just like to make a statement to the House.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Question Period and Decorum

The Speaker: — Over the past week there has been several developments during question period that have given me cause for concern. These concerns may stem from an unfamiliarity with the traditions of this Assembly or perhaps oversight by more veteran members. Nevertheless, regardless of the origins, I do wish to take this opportunity to remind all members of our practices, and seek your co-operation in respecting the traditions and practices of this Assembly.

Firstly, there have been repeated instances when questions have been addressed to the Leader of the Liberal Party in regards to that party's political platform. Beauchesne's, 6th Edition, in paragraph 409(6) states, and I quote:

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government.

And further — order — and further in paragraph 410(17) that, and I quote:

Ministers may not be questioned with respect to (their) party responsibilities.

Comments regarding the political responsibilities of a minister or the Leader of the Opposition or of any other member are properly matters of debate. As such, they may be raised during debate on relevant topics in bills, estimates, and motions. During question period however, only questions touching upon the collective administrative responsibility of the government or the current individual responsibilities of a minister are properly the subject of oral questions.

Secondly, members will be aware of the prohibition of

attempting to do indirectly what they are not permitted to do directly. In recent days there have been instances when members have quoted from documents and used inappropriate language. Unparliamentary language contained in a quotation delivered by a member is out of order on the same basis as if the language had originated from that member. The member must put their quote in their own terms, in language that is acceptable to this Assembly.

Finally, just a general comment on the general decorum of this Assembly. The development of parliamentary procedure has seen the adoption of a number of practices intended to raise the level of debate in the eyes of both members and the general public. These range from not commenting upon the presence or absence of members in recognition that the work of elected representatives continues outside this Chamber to not attacking civil servants and other private individuals who are not able to respond publicly.

It has also never been acceptable to characterize a colleague in demeaning terms. Despite this, there have been instances in recent days where the choice of words has come dangerously close to impugning the character or motives of a private citizen or to levelling a personal charge against a colleague.

I caution all members to be temperate in their comments and to respect the parliamentary practices governing debates. It is a well-established tradition that all interventions are to be addressed through the Speaker and that members are to be referred to in the third person. The purpose of this tradition was noted in Marleau and Montpetit's *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at page 513, where it was stated that, and I quote:

Since one of the basic principles of procedure in the House is that proceedings be conducted (in the course) in terms (pardon me) of a free and civil discourse, Members are less apt to engage in direct heated exchanges and personal attacks when their comments are directed to the Chair rather than to another Member.

The result, if this practice is not followed, is for the debate to become more direct, more personal, and inevitably, hurtful and offensive. Allowing this to escalate will not reflect positively upon us, as members of this Assembly. In the words of one of my predecessors as Speaker, and I quote:

I have full confidence in the ability of members to engage in forceful and spirited debate without having to resort to such avenues. I ask all Members to show due respect to their colleagues and their institution.

This is a quote from *Journals*, March 29, 1996.

I invite — I invite — and encourage all members to consider these comments as we start this new week.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Hon. member, you've requested to move a motion under rule 46. Would you briefly state the contents.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Joint Resolution for Twinning of No. 1 Highway

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday last the committee of the House was interrupted in its business by the news of another tragedy on the No. 1 Highway in the vicinity of Tompkins and Maple Creek. And we shut the business down at that time and I left the city and proceeded west. I was unable to visit the actual site of the accident, but in travelling there it occurred to me that far too much loss of life has happened on that stretch of road.

There's been tragedy after tragedy and in many cases we think only of the people who are killed in those unfortunate incidents, but the loss of life and limb or maybe capability to work is just as much a factor.

So what I propose to do today is to urge the provincial government and the federal government to work together so that we can expedite the twinning of that very deadly stretch of road in a period of three years. And that is the purpose of my motion today.

The Speaker: — You have heard the request for leave to move a motion.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Last Friday when we adjourned in the spirit of co-operation so the member for Maple Creek could go to his constituency as he did . . . And I listened to him carefully on the radio and I think he was very careful not to make this a political issue.

I wonder if we couldn't, because of the two resolutions that are being talked about, take a 10-minute adjournment and see if we couldn't get a motion that could be moved from the member from Maple Creek or by our Minister of Highways, seconded by the other side, so that we could have a joint resolution in the spirit of co-operation, if he would consider that.

The Speaker: — You have heard the comments of the Government House Leader.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the light of the seriousness of this particular issue and in its timeliness and necessity, we would agree to take a 10-minute recess to negotiate with the government on the wording and presentation of such a motion.

The Speaker: — This House stands recessed for 10 minutes.

The Assembly recessed for a period of time.

The Speaker: — This House will now resume.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an important issue that is before the House this afternoon and I'm gratified that there is emergent consensus and co-operation on this particular subject . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I would seek the leave of the House.

Leave granted.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. I have in my hand the motion that we will be moving. I'd like to just read it quickly before I begin speaking to it, if I may, sir.

That this Assembly, in light of yet another tragedy on the untwinned portion of the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan, urges the provincial government and federal government to immediately develop a plan to complete the twinning of Highway No. 1 within three years; and that the transcripts of this debate this afternoon be sent to the Prime Minister, the federal Minister of Transportation, all Saskatchewan Members of Parliament, and all federal party leaders in the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, this is not an issue of partisan politics; this is an issue of continuing human tragedy. This is not an issue of simply constituency politics; it's an issue of province-wide concern. It's not an issue of simple parochial or even provincial concern; it's growing to be an issue with national implications.

This is an issue that cannot wait for another eight years before final resolution. Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that must be addressed sooner than later for the sake of lives of the hundreds of thousands of people who drive the stretch of road now commonly referred to as suicide alley.

Mr. Speaker, I'm quite familiar with that stretch of road. I've lived in the southwest part of Saskatchewan since 1982. And while there have been improvements made to the road, they haven't been substantive to the point where we can save the lives of many people.

I know the conditions on that stretch of road yesterday were not . . . I'm sorry, on Friday, were not good. I know there were weather-related concerns. But the reality is that twinning that stretch of road would possibly save some lives. It certainly would have precluded some injuries and we wouldn't be in this position today, discussing that section of road once again, for the tragedy it has brought to bear on people.

Having driven that road many times, Mr. Speaker, having lived in the southwest as I said from 1982, I've had the opportunity to experience all kinds of conditions on that road. There are very narrow and winding sections. There are areas of very poor visibility. There are areas where it looks like there's a long, flat plain in which to pass, and yet, all of a sudden over the rise that has been lost in the horizon, a couple of vehicles will appear unexpectedly.

Not only have I had the experience of driving that road in all conditions, Mr. Speaker, I've also experienced the loss of friends and acquaintances on that road. And the tragedy that that brings to bear on the communities of the southwest is substantial.

And as the tally mounts, the loss becomes excruciating. And the question then becomes, how many more people have to give their lives on this stretch of road? How many more injuries will there be? How many more debilitating effects will result out of these incidents?

And even though we ask those questions, we've almost learned to live with the consequences. We've almost learned to tolerate it in a macabre sort of way. We can't avoid using the highway if we want to go west to Medicine Hat or other points, if we want to go east from the communities of Maple Creek, or the points north of the No. 1, for instance Leader or Burstall or Golden Prairie. You have to drive that road in order to go to Swift Current and points beyond to the east.

So every time we get in our vehicles and head out on that stretch of road, we know we are putting our lives at risk. And there's a certain danger that we've been asked to live with, and we have lived with it.

But I believe the people of southwest Saskatchewan have reached a point where they say, enough is enough. We just cannot tolerate this situation any longer. But not only has that attitude been exhibited by the people of the southwest, we're finding now that there are people throughout this province who are beginning to say the same thing.

Mr. Speaker, I remember, I think it was 1997, when there was a mother and daughter killed in a tragic accident just a little further east from this particular accident site. And the mother and grandmother of the two ladies or two people that were killed took it upon herself to initiate a province-wide petition campaign.

And if I remember correct, at that time she was able to generate 30,000 signatures of Saskatchewan citizens on the petitions that she had out in the public at that time, encouraging action on the twinning of the No. 1 Highway. Thirty thousand people throughout Saskatchewan agree in petition form that that particular highway needs to be twinned . . . that for safety purposes and also to accommodate the much greater level of commercial traffic.

Thirty thousand people — we've rarely seen those kinds of numbers on any petition in this province. And I think that it behooves the government to look at those signatures and say, this is a serious issue.

I'm not holding the provincial government entirely to blame in this respect. You have to understand that.

Building highways in Saskatchewan, fortunately, is a lot less expensive than in BC; but it's still incredibly expensive. And it can't be accomplished in the time frame that's necessary, by the province alone. And that's why this motion, Mr. Speaker, addresses the responsibility of the federal government in this particular situation.

We have not had federal government support for highway programs, of any significance, for several years now. And according to the last, or more recent budget that the federal government provided, we're not likely to get any for another four years. It's unconscionable in my estimation that a government that prides itself in being a national government would so clearly abdicate its responsibilities in an area that is clearly their prerogative.

The national highway project or the national highway system is absolutely their prerogative. And with the understanding that

the provincial government plays a role in setting up a timetable and where to funnel the funds most exactly and specifically, those two levels of government together can accomplish what we're asking for today.

We believe that if the federal government even put a portion of the money they raise in terms of fuel taxes into this project — a small portion — we could complete this. We could see it done, and many of these types of accidents prevented in a very short time frame. And that's why my motion today asks for a specific three-year time frame. It is doable. The only thing that is missing here is the will to accomplish what has to be done.

And sometimes I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if the federal government doesn't feel they can ignore our needs out here, because it's been a long time since we've elected a federal Liberal member. And I don't want to press that area too much, but it seems like governments tend to funnel the money to the areas which are most supportive of their agendas. And in this case, the federal Liberals know that there has not been much support for them.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Maple Creek volunteered in a tremendous way, in a very quick manner, to attend to the accident scene. They've been called to do that many times in the past as have other communities in that vicinity. I'm thinking specifically of the community of Gull Lake.

But volunteer fire departments, emergency services personnel, medical people have attended to these types of tragedies time and time again, and even though they have become, I don't want to say hardened but used to attending these types of things because they happen so frequently, this last episode took a maybe a greater toll on the people of those communities than some of the previous accidents may have because it was such a huge mass of tangled wreckage.

The destruction was so complete. If you saw the pictures on TV, the coverage that arose as a result of the accident site, there was nothing left of the buses but a steel frame. I have never seen that kind of consequence in a bus accident before. The livestock tractor-trailer unit was ripped wide open and the tractor burned and the trailer just a mangled mess.

The other unspoken tragedy of this, I suppose, is the complete annihilation of some of the victims in this accident. And when volunteers, who live a daily life that is protected from that kind of disaster ordinarily, encounter these kinds of scenes it can be very devastating for them and can have a lifelong impact.

It's the kind of stuff that nightmares are made of. And I understand that some of the people of the community of Maple Creek are going to undergo, or are going to require some additional counselling to help support them get through this time of difficulty as a result of their attendance at this accident.

(1445)

I can't understand the agony and the shock it might be to the psyche of people who rush to volunteer in these kinds of tragedies, because I personally have never been involved in that. But I do know that it is becoming far too common, Mr. Speaker, for the people of my constituency, for the people of

the communities along what is known as suicide alley, to be involved in those kinds of situations.

I want to applaud them today because without their quick response, without the dedicated action of many volunteers, we may have seen more loss of life as a result of this accident. And I'd like to congratulate those people for doing their duty as a minimum and going beyond their duty to help the people of that particular scene.

As I mentioned earlier, the people of southwest Saskatchewan are most immediately and directly affected. There have been petitions in the past, trying to involve the people of the province.

I think that that may be paying some dividends now, because I know Mr. Doug Archer, the mayor of the city of Regina and also the chairman of the Trans-Canada Highway association, spoke clearly on the radio on Friday afternoon indicating that this particular portion of highway was not only a concern to their association from a safety standpoint, but also very clearly an inhibitor in terms of the economic activities of our province.

And as our province has played host to many of the commercial truckers that traverse the country, tremendous amounts of traffic are narrowed down to a very confined 16-foot surface going either way — eight feet of it paved; in some places several feet of it gravel. You can't funnel that much activity into that narrow a space and not expect at some point or other, unless conditions are absolutely ideal, to have anything but these kind of incidents from time to time.

I might stand to be corrected on this, but I was visiting with I believe it was the former deputy minister of Highways. And if my recollection is right, he told me that 80 per cent of the traffic, the heavy commercial truck traffic that comes into this province uses Saskatchewan as a transit or a conduit to move goods back and forth from the northeastern United States over to Alberta and British Columbia and points beyond.

So that means we're not only playing host to our own commercial traffic, much of our commercial traffic — in fact probably the vast majority of it — is coming from out of province and out of state. And it's all funnelled into that narrow stretch of road.

And we're grateful for the four-lane project that was opened from Gull Lake to just west of Tompkins last spring. But there is a stretch from there to the Alberta border that is in serious need of twinning. And I would say that from a national perspective we've got about 60 miles there of single-lane highway where all of that traffic is concentrated.

And as I have lived there over the last 18 years, I've noticed a significant increase in the number of trucks. The reason I know that the truck traffic is so significantly higher than it once was, was plainly obvious when I was driving home on Friday afternoon. Because of the accident, they were stopping all traffic through the accident zone, at Redcliff or near the Alberta border, and also at the weigh scales just outside of Swift Current. Regular traffic was allowed to proceed uninterrupted until you got close to the accident site and then you had to take a detour.

But the use of that road, the traffic on that road, from the weigh scale west to Gull Lake was almost nil. Having removed all of the truck traffic on that particular stretch of road, there was very little vehicular traffic — there was very little traffic other than the trucks that normally traverse that particular road.

So having said that, I guess the point I'm trying to make is that this is no longer something that is just unique to the southwest and the residents of the southwest part of this province, although we are the ones that live with the tragedies and the clean-up and the consequences, often.

It's no longer just a provincial issue. It has become a national, and in some respects, an international issue. Without making too much of that, I'm just trying to say that the concentration of traffic in that area, from across our country, from across the northeast part of the United States and the central part of the States that comes up all concentrating on that very narrow, lengthy strip of road, creates a ticking time bomb every day.

And I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that this issue cannot be addressed in a partisan way. It's going to require the good graces of this House on both sides and it's going to require the goodwill and the determination of the federal government to address this problem.

And through that motion . . . or through my motion today, Mr. Speaker, I am hoping to achieve that.

One of the things that I have done as the member for that constituency to initiate some action over and above the motion that we have presented in the House today, or will be presenting again, is to offer my support to the government of the day, to the Minister of Highways, to work co-operatively with them to achieve the goals that we have set out here.

I have offered to fly to Ottawa, if it's necessary, to lobby the federal minister. I have offered to host the federal minister and the provincial minister, if he'd like to come, into the constituency of Cypress Hills, to drive the road in question, to point out just how serious the potential for mishaps are on that stretch of road. And I've already spoken with some federal members of parliament offering my request for funds, offering the urgency of the situation to them. And I'm gratified with the response we've had. Now I just need about 300-and-some-odd more members to see the urgency of the matter as well.

But I think we have to start somewhere. This is an issue that may take some time to convince the powers that be of its urgency, but we have to start and I believe that this motion today is the first step in that direction.

So, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would like to read my motion again and put it to the House. I am moving it on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party, and my understanding is that this will be seconded by the Hon. Minister of Highways, Mr. Maynard Sonntag, from the constituency of . . . I'm sorry. Did I spell it right?

Mr. Speaker, the motion again, reads as follows:

That this Assembly in light of yet another tragedy on the untwinned portion of the Trans-Canada Highway in

Saskatchewan, urges the provincial government and the federal government to immediately develop a plan to complete the twinning of Highway No. 1 within three years; and that the transcripts of this debate be sent to the Prime Minister, the federal Minister of Transportation, all Saskatchewan members of parliament, and all federal party leaders in the House of Commons.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me say I'm pleased to rise and second the motion and just say that with very few exceptions, I agree essentially with the motion, but certainly with the intent of the motion. And it's my understanding that the member from North Battleford will be moving following my words just a very few, minor, agreed-to amendments.

It is, first of all let me say, a truly unfortunate set of circumstances that causes us to be here today making this motion. I'd first like to again offer my condolences to the families and friends of the three commercial drivers who tragically lost their lives near Maple Creek just last Friday. There's nothing so tragic as the premature loss of life, Mr. Speaker. Traffic collisions involving fatalities are devastating to families and touch, I think, all of us very deeply. So our hearts truly go out to all of those involved.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it's especially appropriate to accommodate and recognize the prompt response and actions of many people during this tragic collision. We would like to sincerely thank and recognize Mr. Marlin Heidrick who was first on the scene and helped pull one of the vehicles away from being engulfed in flames; certainly the local RCMP and the emergency fire and rescue teams from Maple Creek, Piapot, and Gull Lake who were at the accident site within minutes; the local ground and air ambulance crews who played a pivotal role; and the many passing motorists who helped with the injured.

And of course, the Department of Highways and Transportation crews who assisted with traffic control and reopening the highway to the public. Mr. Speaker, we thank all those involved for their assistance and their caring.

Mr. Speaker, also as a result of Friday's tragic collision, five people remain in hospital and we wish them a speedy and early recovery.

Mr. Speaker, the government understands and fully appreciates the need for twinning Saskatchewan national highways. And as I said in question period, Mr. Speaker, coincidentally as recently as just this past Thursday, I met with Minister Collenette, and one of our agenda items was specifically this issue of the need for the federal government to assist the province in — financially, I should say — assist the province in the many projects that we have in Saskatchewan with respect to transportation, and most specifically the issue of twinning. And we spent some considerable time talking about that.

I also want to say to individuals from that area, I've met with the area transportation planning committee on several occasions. They've indicated to me the importance of the

twinning, and certainly I personally have been through that area on many occasions, as recently as about three weeks ago. So I am not unfamiliar with that area and that stretch of road.

Mr. Speaker, we recognized this fact — the importance of twinning — several years ago. And that's why in 1997 this government announced that we would twin Highway No. 1 from border to border. At that same time, we also committed to twinning Highway No. 16 between North Battleford and Lloydminster within 15 years.

Mr. Speaker, this government, our government made the commitment to twin our two national highways without any federal assistance. After more than a decade of discussions and negotiations with the federal government, we decided that we had to go it alone and get the job done.

Mr. Speaker, it is truly unfortunate the federal government would not join the provinces in a cost-shared program to rebuild our national highways. It's truly also unfortunate that Canada is one of the few countries in the world that does not have a federal or at least a federally assisted national highway program.

In Britain, as an example, 100 per cent of the highways are paid for by the federal government. In France, it's 68 per cent; in Spain, it's 64 per cent; and in Australia, it's 51 per cent. In Italy, it's 44 per cent, and in Germany, it's 36 per cent. And, Mr. Speaker, south of our border, it's 31 per cent. In fact, not so very long ago their government announced it was spending 27 billion to upgrade their interstate system.

Mr. Speaker, in Canada the federal contribution to highways right now is only about 5 per cent, with slightly less than that actually coming to Saskatchewan. The federal government must come to the table, and that's why . . . Mr. Speaker, as well, I would note that in our plan, if we were to go it alone, we have scheduled to finish off the stretch that has brought this motion before us today, to have that completed by the year 2008.

With even 50-cent dollars, Mr. Speaker, from the federal government, we could certainly reduce that time considerably. In fact, we could cut it in half, which would get us having completed that section of road by the year 2004. So in four years, with 50-cent dollars, Mr. Speaker, we could certainly have that stretch completed.

(1500)

Mr. Speaker, since this government has had to go it alone, we've made progress though on our commitment to twinning. We now are on track to complete twinning Highway No. 1 west by 2008, I say — as I just said, I should say — without federal contributions, and Highway 16 by 2010, and Highway No. 1 East by 2012.

Mr. Speaker, we are on track. And with federal funding in a cost-shared program, we could reduce the number of years required substantially, as I've just said.

We have taken a balanced approach to twinning. We are balancing highway and transportation needs throughout the province, Mr. Speaker. We are balancing the needs between

high volume provincial highways, our rural highway system, and our northern highways, along with our need to twin.

Twinning is very expensive, and it can cost up to half a million dollars, Mr. Speaker, to twin one kilometre of highway. And this year we are spending more than \$13 million to the twinning of our national highway system. This year we have already announced that we will building 19 kilometres of Highway 1 beginning at the Alberta border and moving eastward from the Alberta border. And this year we will also complete grading of 33 kilometres on Highway No. 1 East, just east of Indian Head.

And, Mr. Speaker, we will be grading 16 kilometres of Highway No. 1 West . . . 16 kilometres on the highway west of Maidstone to just east of Lashburn, and paving also an additional 11 kilometres from west of Lashburn to east of Marshall.

Mr. Speaker, we are twinning our national . . . Mr. Speaker, we are twinning on our national highways and we have taken a balanced approach with the resources available. I cannot say enough times, Mr. Speaker, that to accelerate twinning we need the federal government to come to the plate.

The bottom line is, though, is that twinning is extremely expensive. To twin from Gull Lake to the Alberta border, as an example, it would cost us \$50 million; from Indian Head to the Manitoba border, the cost will be in excess, Mr. Speaker, of \$83 million; and to twin from North Battleford to Lloydminster it will cost us approximately \$57 million. This is a tremendous amount of highway funding . . . there is a tremendous amount of highway funding and we need the federal government to assist us in that regard.

National highways are very important to the economy of this country and they are the link that holds Canada together from east to west. The federal government has responsibility to become more involved than they are now.

Mr. Speaker, I'm calling on all parties in the House to help the government lobby the federal government to come to the table to help Saskatchewan accelerate its twinning program through an effective federal/provincial cost-shared program.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of the motion which has been very ably put to us by the hon. member for Cypress Hills and seconded by the Minister of Highways.

However, as I think it's already been alluded to by the Minister of Highways, I think we would be remiss in our duties to the province as a whole if we moved a motion on the one Trans-Canada route and ignored the second Trans-Canada route which is also in the process of being twinned.

So while we all feel very deeply the most recent tragedy in our province which was on the No. 1, we also know that the need of the No. 16 or Yellowhead is just as pressing, and we also know that the accident and unfortunately the fatality statistics for the

Yellowhead are just as distressing.

So I respectfully submit to the mover and seconder but to all members of this House, that our concern should be for the twinning program generally for both national routes, and I also submit that we have a strong case to take to the federal government that from sea to sea includes a national highway system to bind this country together.

That was done in the 1950s. That was done in the 1950s, completed in 1959. Unfortunately there are many who would say that our national highway system in many cases, is in a 1950s mode to this day, so it needs to be brought now into the 21st century.

And this is not a case of the provincial government trying to avoid its responsibility or, you know, shove the blame over onto somewhere else. It is a simple case that we do not have the fiscal resources to do everything that needs to be done in this area. And, if we are going to have a highway system deserved by this great country, it requires the assistance and participation of the federal government.

Well, in that regard too, I know that the hon. member for Cypress Hills has made a concerted effort not to be partisan or political in his comments and I appreciate that. But it does have to be said that the twinning of our two national highways across Saskatchewan is a \$189 million project. And of course Saskatchewan to do that in three years is simply, unfortunately, beyond the fiscal resources of our province, particularly if you throw into that mix continual demands for massive slashing of taxes.

The breakdown as I understand it as follows. In order to complete the twinning of No. 1 Trans-Canada east requires 83 million; No. 1 Trans-Canada west is 49 million; and No. 16, Battlefords to Lloydminster, is 57 million. That's the total, Mr. Speaker, of \$189 million for 379 kilometres of highway.

Well, if we look at the statistics for the road sections, and I know statistics seem rather cold and hard compared to real lives that are ruined by the tragedy of motor vehicle accidents. But what we see in the case of the Yellowhead, Mr. Speaker, is that from 1993 to 1997, a total of 13 fatalities, and we see total accidents involving injuries of 52, and total accidents of 151. From 1994 to 1998, total accidents were 153; those resulting in personal injury were 55; and the fatalities were 11.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I certainly don't wish to set up a competition in who kills the most people, the Yellowhead or the Trans-Canada, but I would say that those figures are comparable for the Trans-Canada west. And so I say it would be a . . . it would be crass in the extreme to set up a competition between the two, but I do want to dramatize that we can't be interested in the one without being concerned about the other.

And it is for that reason that I would ask that all hon. members would support me in bringing an amendment to this motion which would provide that we would support the twinning of both the national highways, and that this be completed in four years.

Now the motion by the hon. member from Cypress Hills was

that we complete the twinning of the one in three. I think if we complete the twinning of both within four years that . . .

An Hon. Member: — Major accomplishment.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, that that would indeed be a major accomplishment and far, far better than the 15 years which has already been committed to by the province of Saskatchewan on its own. And I would hope that we would press on the federal government the need, for a country as great as ours, to have a highway system in keeping with the needs of this country.

So in that . . . with those few remarks I would like to move, and I believe it is seconded by the hon. member for Swift Current, that the motion be amended as follows.

That the words "and No. 16" be added after the word Highway No. 1.

And further:

That the word three be substituted with the four.

I so move this amendment, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a sombre but a welcomed opportunity to enter this very important debate today on the emergency resolution put forward by my colleague, the member for Cypress Hills, and on the amendments proposed by the member for North Battleford.

Mr. Speaker, I participate in this debate today, and when I do so I'm conflicted by several different perspectives on this issue. One, of course, as a representative of the people of Swift Current and area in this legislature. Two, as a former member of the Trans-Canada No. 1 West board of directors. And three, as a motorist and as someone who travels the highway often, generally with my family — with my wife and three kids. And we often make trips to Cypress Hills. And so there are different perspectives from which I can view today's debate. Each of them, I think, each of them fairly compelling.

I think it's also significant, Mr. Speaker, that the amendment that has been proposed by the member for North Battleford would receive some bipartisan support because clearly the changes in it not only impact on the length of time that twinning will take; but also, they add the Yellowhead Highway to the motion.

And I think it's important for all of us, when it comes to holding the federal government accountable for federal/national highways in our province, that members on all sides of the House work together. Those of us who live close to the Trans-Canada may not like the fact, Mr. Speaker, but the fact exists nonetheless that Highway 16 — the Yellowhead — has been designated a national highway. And so, it too — as any national highway in any nation — should receive some funding for its maintenance and improvement from the national government.

Mr. Speaker, just first off from the perspective that I have into this issue as a member of the legislature for Swift Current and area; I can tell you that this issue received a lot of discussion

during the election. It was of great interest to people on the doorsteps. It remains a big issue. People talk about it on coffee row. They do so prior to the terrible news such as we heard on Friday. It's just a matter of discussion.

Especially during the wintertime when road conditions can always be a little bit questionable, people generally talk about that stretch of highway, as the hon. member from Cypress Hills has referred to it — suicide alley — as a very dangerous part. It's a part of everyday discussion, especially when the weather turns bad. And then when a tragedy strikes of the proportions of Friday's, we of course hear about it a lot more as MLAs.

I can tell you as well that the people in my constituency, and I think it's fair to say the people in, certainly in Cypress Hills constituency and in Wood River and in the ridings around the southwest part of our province, I can tell you that people there would gladly take the challenge of setting priorities. And I know that the challenge must be daunting. There are a lot of demands out there for highway improvements and maintenance that I know must be on the department and the minister.

But I'm sure they would take the challenge. I'm sure they would even delete a few of their own pet projects, and every area has their own small, little road changes that they would like to make — all groups of people do. I'm sure that they would trade a lot of those off to accomplish what we speak about in this particular motion today — to accomplish the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway to the Alberta border, and also from Indian Head to the Manitoba border, Mr. Speaker.

And while I can't speak from personal knowledge, I don't doubt that people feel exactly the same way in the North Battleford area — the people who live along the Yellowhead Route from North Battleford to Lloydminster.

(1515)

The second perspective that I have when I consider the motion, Mr. Speaker, is that of a former member of the board of directors of a group called the Trans-Canada No. 1 West Association. Many people, many members here will have heard the chairman of that organization commenting on the accident and commenting on the emergent need for twinning of that particular highway.

He is Mayor Doug Archer, and he actually was the founding Chair of our organization of the Trans-Canada No. 1 West Association. And if I may, Mr. Speaker, I think Mayor Archer has done an excellent job as Chair of that particular association.

The goals of our association from the outset — and I as the member for Swift Current wholeheartedly supported them — were twofold: one being marketing the Trans-Canada Highway as a preferred route for both commercial and tourism traffic; and two, twinning, to lobby for twinning, to lobby for the continued capital improvement and maintenance of the Trans-Canada Highway. And I think it's on the latter that the association has had some positive impact, and I think our chairman, Mayor Archer, has done a good job in that regard.

I should also congratulate, Mr. Speaker, those other members of

the board, past and present, who've made the twinning a priority. Mayor Ray Boughen of Moose Jaw has served that association very well in making the case for twinning. The mayor of Medicine Hat very graciously came onto that association's board when perhaps he didn't have to because, of course, when you get to Walsh, it's twinned already. There is very little lobbying he needs to do as a city mayor in terms of twinning the No. 1 Highway; theirs has been twinned for some time.

But Mayor Ted Grimm, I believe his name came on as an original board member to join the mayor of Regina, myself from Swift Current and the mayor of Moose Jaw. And the founding member for Brandon was the then mayor, Rick Borotsik, who's now a Member of Parliament in Canada.

And the association has made a lot of progress, I think, in terms of drawing the attention of federal politicians to this issue. And let's make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, there is precious few people in our province, and frankly in western Canada, that need to be convinced of the arguments that we're making here today. But there is a good number of federal politicians, federal Members of Parliament, who need that convincing; who need to understand the urgency of this matter; who need to be appalled by the fact that Canada is the only OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) nation without a national highway plan, Mr. Speaker.

Federal politicians need to be aware that this clearly is their responsibility. When people send their taxes to Ottawa, when they pay their GST (goods and services tax), and when they file their income tax in a couple of weeks, they have certain expectations, Mr. Speaker, frankly that are meet and right, and one of them is infrastructure — is basic, national infrastructure; basic national safety on the highways, Mr. Speaker.

And so now with this motion we see that the government side agrees that the twinning needs to happen a lot sooner than it has, Mr. Speaker. And we welcome that awareness. We also welcome the fact that they also agree with us that the federal government needs to accept its responsibility in this regard.

I guess, the . . . and I know that there'll be support from the Trans-Canada No. 1 West Association for the efforts of this Assembly here today. Mayor Archer and the association are on record as of Friday speaking to these very same issues and I know they would support the efforts of this legislature here today with regards to both the provincial and federal government coming to the table for the Trans-Canada Highway and for Highway 16.

I guess a third perspective that I come to this debate with, Mr. Speaker, is that of a motorist and someone who drives that highway quite a bit. We have the absolute finest provincial park in the province located in the southwest. It's the Cypress Hills Provincial Park. And the member for Cannington is agreeing wholeheartedly, Mr. Speaker, and I welcome his endorsements.

And like anyone else in Swift Current, we like to take advantage of that beautiful park. We go there quite a bit during the summertime. There's various events and festivals over the past that we've also attended in the Maple Creek area. And of course just generally whenever we travel west, we obviously

find ourselves travelling down this very same stretch of highway that has spawned this resolution today and this debate that we're having.

And I would be less than truthful, Mr. Speaker, if I told you that I was not concerned every single time I took myself and my wife and my three young children down that highway to go to the park, either going to it or coming back home. Because the truth of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that it's a scary situation, that particular stretch of highway, especially when you're driving on a weekend; especially when there are campers on the highway, the commercial traffic's on the highway, there's local traffic, clearly, on the highway; and all of these people are using this particular stretch of road.

The traffic numbers on the road skyrocket in the summer, especially on weekends. And I'm just so very thankful when I get to the twin portion, Mr. Speaker, because I know that the rest of the way will be, you know, relatively safe in terms of travelling.

So those are the three perspectives that I bring to this debate on behalf of my constituents, on behalf of my former colleagues on the Trans-Canada No. 1 Association board and the members of that association, as well as on behalf of all of my friends and neighbours who are simply motorists and have to travel that highway very, very frequently.

And so with that, Mr. Speaker, I would indicate to you that I will be supporting both the motion, Mr. Speaker — the spirit of the motion was that the provincial and federal governments join together to speed up the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway, and the amendment added the Yellowhead Highway as well as substituted the word "three" with the word "four."

And so with that, Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to second the motion by the member of North Battleford.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Amendment agreed to.

The division bells rang from 3:23 p.m. until 3:33 p.m.

Motion as amended agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 51

Romanow	Trew	Hagel
Van Mulligen	MacKinnon	Lingenfelter
Melenchuk	Cline	Atkinson
Goulet	Lautermilch	Thomson
Lorje	Serby	Belanger
Nilson	Crofford	Hillson
Kowalsky	Sonntag	Hamilton
Prebble	McPherson	Higgins
Yates	Harper	Axworthy
Junor	Kasperski	Wartman
Hermanson	Elhard	Julé
Draude	Boyd	Gantfoer
Toth	Eagles	Wall
Bakken	Bjornerud	D'Autremont

McMorris	Weekes	Brkich
Harpauer	Wakefield	Wiberg
Hart	Allchurch	Stewart

Nays — Nil

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I would move, seconded by the member from Cannington, and by leave of the Assembly:

That the resolution just passed, together with *Hansard* and transcript, be communicated to the bereaved families of the accident victims, on behalf of the Assembly, by Mr. Speaker.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of an accountable, forthwith government, I would like to table the answer to question 128. And as usual, we're always pleased to do it.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 128 is tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 24 — The Department of Agriculture Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to the amendment of the financial assistance section of The Department of Agriculture Act. And these amendments will allow the department to enter into a variety of repayment agreements where the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture and Food provides funding for development of new agriculture food products and technologies.

We want to amend The Department of Agriculture Act to include the word food, to reflect the current mandate of our department. The department's mandate is to add value to agriculture by fostering a commercially viable, self-sufficient, and sustainable agriculture, here in the province, and food industry in partnership with the industry.

Mr. Speaker, this mandate addresses the need of individual farmers, and encourages and develops a higher-value production in processing and promotes institutional changes required to meet the challenges and opportunities of the global economy. In addition, of the food and, in some instances, agri-food throughout the Act, we will reflect and it will reflect, the overall mandate of the department.

Mr. Speaker, it is desirable that some of Saskatchewan's Agriculture and Food financial assistance agreements develop new products or technologies to provide for the repayment terms in the event of successful commercialization of products or technology.

Mr. Speaker, the financial assistance section is being amended to include the taking of security and to allow for unique repayment arrangements to be entered into such as share options or royalties from sales. As well, conditions for financial assistance may include the production or manufacture of technology in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments will enable the department to better the particular funding needs of the businesses which we work with and with which we deal while ensuring that the benefits of the funding flow to the people of Saskatchewan in the form of returns and business development and many new jobs.

So in closing, Mr. Speaker, this amendment supports the commercialization and the development for new technologies in a responsible and I believe a strategic manner.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Assembly to support these amendments, and I ask and will move second reading of Bill No. 24, An Act to amend The Department of Agriculture.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a good Bill in that it does provide for some research grants to people, to farmers, to research companies. But, Mr. Speaker, there is also some concerns that have arisen dealing with this particular piece of legislation. And I would like to quote one small section. It says that:

the minister may, on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan:

(a) acquire, by purchase or otherwise, personal property, including securities;

And I just wonder, Mr. Speaker, what "otherwise" means in legal terms. Does that mean that you can use government legislation to take away contracts, as has happened in the past, by this government in the agricultural field? I think the word otherwise certainly does leave a lot of room for interpretation when it comes to this particular government and some of their actions.

You know, they . . . One of the other words that they particularly like when dealing with agriculture is the word, deemed. We deemed it have happened, or we deemed it not to have happened. In this particular case it's this government has a tradition of deeming contracts not to have existed even though they have been duly signed and notarized and been enforced on the other participant in the contract. So in this particular case the minister is going to have to explain what he means by the word otherwise, what kind of actions he interprets being taken that can be taken, and when those kind of actions happen, who bears the responsibility for the results, Mr. Speaker.

There's also one other item of concern, Mr. Speaker. Clearly what is being changed here is simply the name within the

department and the paperwork that they utilize, changing it from Department of Agriculture to Department of Agriculture and Food.

I will hope that the minister, when this takes place, should this Bill pass the House, that they simply don't throw out all of the paper that they have accumulated because the word "and Food" is not included on it. I would like to recommend to the minister that this Bill not be used as a means to completely revamp the entire paper stock within his department, but that they utilize the paper they already have on hand and only add the words "and Food" whenever they're reordering supplies after the old supplies have run out.

Well the fact is if the minister is interested, perhaps he can go down to the rubber stamp company downtown Regina and get a little stamp that says "and Food" and stamp it behind his Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a number of groups that are very interested in how this Bill is going to impact on their lives for financial assistance provided for research, various research groups, the universities, farmers that are involved in research.

Therefore I think they need an opportunity to digest this Bill to determine how it's going to impact them, their lives, and the research that they do in agriculture for the benefit of all the people of Saskatchewan — not just that individual farmer or that individual university or research company, but indeed all of our society. Therefore I would move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 4

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 4 — The Saskatchewan Pension Plan Amendment Act, 1999** be now read a second time.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the Bill before us this afternoon with regard to the pension plan. As I was saying the other day when I spoke to the piece of legislation, the importance of the pension plan to Saskatchewan residents and indeed to the constituency of Kindersley is extremely important.

First of all, the pension plan is housed at the headquarters in the town of Kindersley, and it's very welcome there as a strong contributor to the economy of that town. But more importantly the legislation that's in place, the Saskatchewan Pension Plan, and how it plays in its importance with respect to the people of Saskatchewan.

There are thousands and thousands of people that are involved in the pension plan in this province and they have invested well over a hundred million dollars into that pension plan. The whole purpose and design of the pension plan was to provide for people who don't otherwise have access to a pension.

And it may surprise some people to know that that happens in many cases. If you're not, for example, sponsored in a government pension plan or sponsored in a pension plan at your workplace, as many people are, this is the only avenue that you have available to you for a pension in Saskatchewan.

And there are many, many people that fall into that category you can think of, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So that provides them with the stability of building towards . . . and financial freedom of building towards a pension for themselves into the future. And I think we all know the critical importance of that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are going through a time right now of very tumultuous stock market shifts, and people who have invested in that area of the economy find it somewhat difficult perhaps when you see that kind of range of shifting that is happening. But it also, I think, when people contribute to pension plans, I think it provides them with a degree of security and peace of mind, knowing that they are building towards the future for themselves and their families with respect to the growth of their plan.

(1545)

And you only have to look at the information that financial planners put out to find out the importance and how quickly a pension plan can build for an individual. And you've all seen the tables, and I have as well, where if you start contributing at something like 40 years of age and contribute on a monthly basis, you can expect to have a fairly good pension. If you actually started when you were 20 years of age, it's two or three times what it might have been if you started at a latter time in your life.

So certainly the encouragement that we as a province and as a society towards convincing people to start early and contribute as much as they possibly can to pension plans, I think is very important as a societal change that we can make for people here in Saskatchewan.

The plan has been in existence for a number of years. It was brought in by the previous administration to recognize the fact that there are many people that don't have opportunities to contribute to a pension plan. And I think at the time it was very well received by people in Saskatchewan, and I think it still remains very well received by people in this province. It has grown dramatically over the years.

Unfortunately the government opposite has decided to withdraw the matching contribution to the pension plan. I'm not sure why, and perhaps one of the members on the other side of the House in debate here will be interested in providing their perspective as to the reasons why they removed the matching contribution. And I'd sure be interested in knowing the reasons.

Perhaps you just simply didn't support the plan at the time or you don't support people's ability and the importance of their ability to invest into these types of plans. Or you just simply, because it was introduced by a government previous to you, just don't want to have anything to have to do with something of that nature.

It's interesting. I can't help but note in the last few weeks in the

legislature here, we have debated . . . and there's another Bill on the order paper before us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, dealing with government pension plans and the importance of portability in those plans.

Well I would say to government members opposite that while that is an important piece of legislation and it will likely gain the support of the House in the end, I think it is just as important that people in Saskatchewan have the ability to contribute to a pension plan here in this province. And as a province, we should be recognizing that, and perhaps even in a modest fashion helping to support that plan now and well into the future.

One of the parts of the legislation that is a little bit disturbing and we will want to be . . . we will certainly be asking the minister responsible for this legislation in the future about it, is the whole area of fees that are contained within the legislation.

Currently people pay a very, very modest . . . in fact, I'm not even . . . nominal, if anything, fee for the administration of the . . . I don't believe, and I stand corrected, but I don't believe they pay any fee associated with the Saskatchewan Pension Plan right now. And bringing in this change in legislation allows the government to put a fee and attach a fee to the Saskatchewan Pension Plan holders.

And as we have witnessed in the House in the last number of days and weeks from this government, they have a . . . I certainly have a strong feeling that every time there's a fee, they want to increase that fee. And we've seen that in many areas in this current budget that we will be, and are, debating in the House these days. So I think that that is going to be an area that we will have concerns with and we'll want to question the minister in Committee of Whole with respect to this legislation.

We are getting a number of inquiries from people across the province with respect to the legislation, certainly wanting to know what the government's plans are — long-term and short-term plans for the Saskatchewan Pension Plan. Do you have, on the government side, a commitment to maintaining this plan? Or is it something that you're looking at winding down?

Or as is happening in other areas, are you looking at . . . We've seen this in many financial service industries in recent days — mergers and all kinds of acquisitions. And is it something that you're looking at in terms of selling out this plan to a private plan holder? Or is this an area that the plan, pension plan holders should be concerned about?

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've had a great discussion over the last couple of days about it. But given the number of inquiries we are receiving from people about the Saskatchewan Pension Plan, and many of them are just receiving . . . I noticed that I received and my wife received just the other day our annual statement on the Saskatchewan Pension Plan and the growth that it has had and acquired over the last number of years.

So I think it is an important piece of legislation that we are looking at. But in order to bring in as much debate as we possibly can and as much number of questions and certainly issues surrounding this whole pension plan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate on this item.

The Deputy Speaker: — The hon. member for Kindersley has moved adjournment of the debate. But I wish to remind the hon. member that you previously adjourned the debate, and under the rules of the Assembly are not entitled to adjourn the debate. The debate continues.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to stand today to address the amendment to the Saskatchewan Pension Plan. And I must add to the comments of other members who have stood to speak to this amendment that it is a very, very important pension plan for the people in this province who are stay-at-home parents for instance, or people who have not the ability to access another pension plan.

And so I would hope that the government of the day and successive governments would continue with this plan, because it is most important for the retirement years for many citizens in our province.

The Saskatchewan Pension Plan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the only tax deferred pension plan available to Saskatchewan residents who are not eligible for other RRSPs (Registered Retirement Savings Plan). And living in Saskatchewan it is . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, to ask for leave to introduce a special guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the members, I would like to recognize the mayor from Buffalo Narrows, Ray Laliberte. And, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Laliberte was elected in the last term, but he's part of the New North development and we're seeing changes in many areas, from forestry and other areas of work.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, please say hello to our guest, Mr. Ray Laliberte.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 4 — The Saskatchewan Pension Plan Amendment Act, 1999 (continued)

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's very important for people living in Saskatchewan, especially important for them, that people have somewhere to invest their money and save on their taxes; because as we well know, the taxes in our province are burdensome, very burdensome for most people. Especially when one considers the very meagre tax break that the government is talking about this year.

The Saskatchewan Pension Plan has about 30,000 members, which is quite significant. And there's currently about \$173 million in that plan.

I have some concerns about why there are going to be administrative fees for people that belong to this plan when in fact in the past there was no necessity for that. It seems to me like it's just another way of government's habit of sticking it to the people of Saskatchewan through hidden fees. And that is a concern, considering the numbers of hidden fees that we have heard about in this year's budget.

We are concerned about it and so we will continue to do more . . . a conversation talk with people that are members of this plan in Saskatchewan to see what they think.

The Saskatchewan Pension Plan continues to be really a popular savings tool for the people, and one of only such plans available to people ineligible, as I've mentioned, for RRSPs.

The changes, as I've mentioned to the administrative . . . administrative changes, rather, that have been mentioned, seem to be very nominal. And we hope that they won't be . . . this sort of fee or the opportunity to charge this fee is not going to be something the government takes advantage of to increase that fee in years to come, so that eventually the people that are needing the service actually have a number of monies deleted from their pension plan due to that.

As I've mentioned, Mr. Deputy Chair, the plan is a retirement fund for people in this province. And we are quite concerned that the NDP are now charging a fee on people's retirement fund. And we would really, certainly, ask the government to think twice before they do that kind of thing or they up the fee for any services. We ask them to be very prudent and conscientious of the people of this province who in fact are paying a great deal of taxes already and certainly do not have to look at yet another exorbitant fee.

If the government sees this as another cash grab they must remember that this time they are putting it on the backs of those who are putting their money away in an attempt to avoid the provincial government taxman in the first place. And this will be the case with every bit of government legislation from now on that comes before us. We will be examining all legislation to see what kind of fees are attached in order to protect the people of the province.

If the government is going to be looking to collect a fee, we're going to be asking for details on that in depth. So we have had enough and so have the people of Saskatchewan had enough of basically getting nickelled-and-dimed to death by the members opposite every time we turn around.

So, Mr. Deputy Chair, I would move to adjourn debate on this and to resume debate in the future. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 10

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Atkinson that **Bill No. 10 — The**

Department of Health Amendment Act, 1999 be now read a second time.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak on Bill No. 10, the Act to amend The Department of Health Act. And I would just like to say at this time that it is critical that the principles of health care as outlined in the Canada Health Act remain intact. One of those principles — accessibility — is what I will be addressing here.

Accessibility to quality health care is paramount for all Canadians. For those of us here in Saskatchewan, residents have come to expect that they would be able to access medical treatment wherever they may be. Whether it is here at home or in another province, or regardless of where they live in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, demographics should not be a factor when you are considering health care.

And that brings to mind a problem I'm having right now in my constituency of Estevan with kidney dialysis. Since I've been elected, I have come across several people that are travelling to Regina up to three times a week to have kidney dialysis. And it is just a tremendous stress put on the families, on their pocketbooks, and it makes it virtually impossible for them to hold any kind of a job at all.

(1600)

We are talking about trying to get a dialysis unit in Estevan, and one person involved in health care down there has said that it's too expensive — that it costs thousands of dollars. And every time that the person has completed their dialysis treatment, they have to . . . all the hoses or stuff like that, has to be changed on the machines.

Now I'm not familiar with that stuff, Mr. Speaker, but my question begs: does it not have to be done if they are in Regina? Don't they change them?

I will be also speaking on the reciprocity agreement that exists between the provinces. If someone is visiting from another province and needs treatment here in Saskatchewan, that treatment will be provided to the person.

People also have come to expect that certain things will be there for them. Quality health care being one of them.

In addition to the many issues facing health care in the province, we are very concerned with the increasing number of residents who have been transferred to other provinces to receive medical treatment.

There is also a large number of residents who, frustrated with the extremely long waiting lists and lack of front-line services, have on their own decided to seek treatment elsewhere. What happens to reciprocity for these people? It seems that when they take health care into their own hands, the health system turns its back on these people.

And I know that in my own constituency, Mr. Speaker, several people have gone to other areas, whether it be the United States or other provinces, because they could not stand to wait any longer, and in some cases these same people have paid between

50 and \$100,000 to have their health care.

The waiting lists for standard medical procedures have progressed to the point where we wonder about the medical validity of them. So much time has elapsed. Why are people waiting two months for a biopsy?

Mr. Speaker, the waiting lists for specialists are often six months or more. And we remember a case just this winter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where there was a waiting list and a misdiagnosis that went on for a couple of years, and the woman finally went to the United States to learn that she had terminal cancer. Cases like this are inexcusable.

Even the simplest diagnostic assessments are now a year or more away. The equipment is there but the staff isn't. In this age of technology, medical advancement, and accessibility to information, it's difficult for everyone to fully comprehend why Saskatchewan has the health care problems it does. And again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remind the citizens of this province that we are all paying \$1,900 a year for our health care — that's \$1,900 for every man, woman, and child in this province.

The dictionary's definition of reciprocity is mutual action, a principle or practice of give and take. Now let's take a look at some of the government's own ideas of reciprocity here in the province.

Seven years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP introduced us to a wellness model and the health districts. They said these health districts were a better option for the province's residents. We'd have better local administration, better services, better facilities, and better health care all around. Seven years later, nearly two-thirds of the 32 health districts in the province have deficits totally more than \$50 million this year. That doesn't even count the accumulated debt these health districts have run up trying to operate within the wellness model.

And we all know that health care for the residents of those health districts is in terrible shape. And this also reminds me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the things this government is trying to shove down our throat at this time regarding rural amalgamation. We've seen what they've done to health care and now they're trying to do it to rural amalgamation, so I say to the people of this province, don't be fooled.

The front-line services are suffering, the waiting lists are growing, doctors and nurses are leaving the province in droves. And in my constituency in the city of Estevan, there are four doctors leaving in the very near future. Beds are closing, operating rooms are closing, special care units are closing, hospitals are closing, 55 of them and counting. One of those hospitals went \$50 million over budget.

Rural residents have seen many of their hospitals converted into health care facilities. This may come as a surprise to the government, but many of those areas already had health facilities; they're called medical centres and they've been around for decades. All in all, rural areas are being treated very shabbily and residents of the province are paying the price of the NDP's version of so-called health care. Where's the reciprocity for Saskatchewan residents? What do they get out of this give-and-take principle?

When the NDP closed the Plains hospital, they laid off 600 nurses. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, talking about the Plains hospital, there was thousands and thousands of names on petitions that were circulated throughout the province to keep this hospital open. And this hospital was built for the residents of southeast Saskatchewan, and yet they never had a voice when its fate was decided. In fact the present Minister of Education was going to chain himself to the doors, but I didn't see that happening.

But as I stated before, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they did lay off 600 nurses. And they were told a number of years ago that a nursing shortage was imminent, but true to form, they pretended not to notice and thought that these little things would just go away on their own.

Last spring's nurses' strike saw the province's contingent of exhausted nurses protest working conditions here in the province. What was the NDP's version of reciprocity for our nurses? The NDP legislated them back to work and, to add insult to injury, declared the strike illegal and forced them to pay a fine. Nursing recruitment and retention issues have now reached a critical point. We're still waiting for some positive action in this area from the NDP.

What we've seen so far has proven to be highly ineffective. Every day there are stories coming out about people who have seen and experienced first-hand the horrendous and deplorable state of health care in this province. There have been reports, reviews, investigations, and recommendations. Serious issues with serious implications necessitate serious action. Yet with all these reports and investigations and so on into health care in Saskatchewan, nothing has changed.

Where is the reciprocity for people who have paid the price for the state of health care in Saskatchewan? When will the NDP start listening to its own words? Remember in reciprocity, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you take, you must also give back. The people of Saskatchewan are still waiting.

We are all aware of the current reciprocity agreement that allows residents from other provinces to access treatment here in Saskatchewan, and it also ensures that Saskatchewan residents can access treatment in other provinces. But truthfully, up until now, we are not aware that there were concerns with the current reciprocity agreement. Given that, why the need for amending the current legislation?

Shouldn't the government be more concerned with taking care of other more pressing issues first? It would seem that if the government were to address these very critical issues, then wouldn't reciprocity take care of itself.

In fact we're wondering if the government by amending legislation isn't preparing for the reality that more and more residents will have to be treated in other provinces and even in the United States, simply because the health care system here cannot accommodate the increasing numbers.

Reciprocity is something that's in place so that residents everywhere can access medical treatment wherever they may be in Canada. The Minister of Health has referred to this as a housekeeping duty. If that's so, then why isn't she taking care

of the other items on her list first.

The lack of front-line services, for example, would seem to be more urgent than amending an Act that by all accounts still works and won't speed or change how residents of the province access health care. Once again it's the government making sure that they're getting paid for services rendered, and they are forgetting about the people who need those services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 5

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Belanger that **Bill No. 5 — The Parks Amendment Act, 1999** be now read a second time.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Bill does appear to be fairly run of the mill for the most part. It only covers a few technical changes with the legal land descriptions over parks.

Perhaps the members opposite should consult with the members on this side if they have such difficulty reading and understanding land descriptions before they make errors like this in the future.

The issue in the Bill that needs to be questioned a little bit and perhaps looked into a little more closely is the clause concerning designating a portion of the land near Good Spirit as protected.

Whenever something of this nature is put into effect, it undoubtedly affects the people surrounding it. I believe this government has a habit of making decisions without giving any thought to the negative repercussions it may have later on down the road to the people of our province. We only need to look at the difficulties that certain businesses, such as auctioneers, are having administering the poorly thought-out expanded PST policy, that was imposed upon them through the recent budget, to get some proof of this, where it wasn't well thought out in advance.

Therefore, although this Bill may not appear to be controversial, we feel we should make sure that everyone is in agreement with it over the next few weeks, especially the people in the Good Spirit area that this Bill will affect the most.

In addition, although the Bill itself appears relatively non-controversial, the same cannot be said about other issues surrounding our parks. I have — and so have the rest of my colleagues — been quite surprised with the number of phone calls our offices have received surrounding the parks, and in particular the decision of the government to impose massive fee increases on most services and charges connected to our provincial parks.

Some examples of these is our three-day park entry fees that will increase 42 per cent from \$12 to \$17. And the weekly park entry fees were increased 39 per cent, from \$18 to \$25. Annual transferable fees were increased 40 per cent, from \$40 to \$42, \$42. And it just goes on and on and on.

Most coach daily rates have gone up 33 per cent. Motor coach

annual rates are up 43 per cent. Full-service site per night is up 9 per cent. Electrical site per night is up 11 per cent. Non-electrical sites per night are up 15 per cent. Non-electrical sites, spring-fall discount, is up 22 per cent. Electrical group per site is up 11 per cent. And a full-service site seasonal permit is up 20 per cent. Non-electrical site seasonal permit is up 20 per cent. Electrical sites, monthly rate is up 16 per cent. Non-electrical sites, the monthly rate is up 17 per cent.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, we could just go on and on and on all day, and I know the members opposite are encouraging me to go on and on all day. And that's not to begin to mention the increases in the fishing licences, the hunting licence, and so on and so forth.

Amazingly on budget day not one word was mentioned about the dozens and dozens of fee increases that were about to be imposed on the Saskatchewan people. Although there were somewhere around 45 separate fee increases imposed by the new NDP budget, they were never mentioned by either the Finance minister or the Minister of Environment. You can imagine our surprise, Mr. Speaker, when only a few days after the Finance minister introduced his budget, that our phones started ringing off the hook. The people connected to our provincial parks were both shocked and devastated by the fee increases. And when we asked the Minister of Environment why his department had not forewarned the parks officials and why his department, through the presentation made by the Minister of Finance, had not announced these fee hikes publicly, his response was, no one asked.

Incredible, Mr. Speaker! Another NDP if they don't ask, don't tell policy.

And then when the Minister of Finance was asked about these hidden fee increases, he told reporters that it wasn't his job to tell people about the hidden tax increases included in the budget, that's the job of the official opposition.

(1615)

And if that's our job, Mr. Speaker, may I suggest to our Minister of Finance that we would be quite happy to just help him write the whole budget as well as to find all the problems in it. And so keep that in mind for next year when he's doing up a budget.

Meanwhile, for this year's budget we have to be just content with uncovering the hidden facts that the NDP seems so reluctant to let the people of this province know. So much, Mr. Speaker, for the open and accountable government we've heard so much about.

But to get back to the theme of our Saskatchewan parks, I was very disappointed to hear about the bizarre phone conversation that took place between the executive director of the Regional Parks Association and the Minister of Finance.

The minister, I was told, was extremely rude to Mr. Gardiner because he had dared to send the government a letter thanking them very much for the \$75,000 in funding that the regional parks received in the budget but suggesting that it probably wouldn't be enough.

This was apparently enough to send our Minister of Finance into a tirade on the phone, and then a refusal on his part after to apologize for his uncalled comments to Mr. Gardiner.

The hypocrisy of this whole incident, Mr. Speaker, is rather ironic. It wasn't that many days ago when their own Minister of Health criticized the federal budget for under-funding health care — and rightfully so. And yet I never heard a mention of the federal Finance minister, Paul Martin, phoning and blasting her for her statements.

This phone conversation by our Finance minister is just another sign of a government drunk on its own arrogance.

This Bill may not seem all that controversial, Mr. Speaker, but given all the areas that this government has been trying to hide information from the public over the last few weeks, I think it would be best to adjourn debate to make sure that nothing is hidden in this case too. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 13

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Melenchuk that **Bill No. 13 — The Education Amendment Act, 2000/Loi de 2000 modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur l'éducation** be now read a second time.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to add some comments with regards to this particular amendment because in my earlier life I spent some time in the education system, both as a teacher and on the school unit board in the Lloydminster area.

So there's some things that I wanted to commend the minister on for trying to put into the amendment, and there's also some concerns that I felt needed to be addressed in this particular series of amendments.

Some of the things that I feel that really need to be looked at are pertaining to some of the areas of the post-secondary education. That's mentioned in the amendments. They want to try to separate all of those decisions regarding post-secondary education, move them out of The Education Act, 1995, and move them over toward the separate Act for post-secondary education.

Maybe there's some good reasoning for that; I'm not sure. But I know that there seems to be a lack of confidence — certainly on my part. And from what I've read so far in the amendments, a lack of confidence that moving the sections from post-secondary education out of the present Act to its own separate Act, if it will actually help the situation in terms of accessibility for students that want to attend post-secondary education and maybe, more importantly, is it going to improve the ability to save money and allocate money to the right sources for the right reasons in a timely manner?

I think the timeliness of the money being spent is just as important as the amount of money that may be saved in these kinds of amendments. And again, I'm not sure in these amendments that is specifically addressed.

Nor is there going to be benefits, particularly for these students, by moving it into a separate Bill under post-secondary education. That, in my view, is still questionable. I'm going to have to do a little more work to see if in fact those concerns are addressed. Because, after all, if they don't provide benefits to the students, if they don't allow more accessibility for the students, and if they don't save money for the students, I feel that it would just be a waste of time to put it into its own Act.

As you know, when you have a separate ministry administering its own Act that's even expanded, I think you're going to find that the minister in charge of that particular Act will increasingly expand the budget and the numbers of people that are involved in that ministry. And I'm not sure that that is a desirable effect, particularly now when a lot of money is being cut back, very needed funding is cut back to the school system as we know it.

If we move some of these things into a post-secondary education format, my suspicion would be that things like administration of the department would increase. And I wonder if that's the reason when I noticed in the *Estimates* for 2000-2001 that the administrative costs for post-secondary education, in fact, is projected to be increased by 4.4 per cent, which is a bit disconcerting when we understand that the amount of funding going to post-secondary education, as well as education, is going to be at a premium in a lot of the programs, student programs, and also the operations of the schools might be placed in jeopardy.

So that's certainly a concern I need to spend a little more time researching and a little more time in our debate.

There's some issues here that I would also like to look at in these amendments that really have to be addressed on an individual basis. When I looked at the amendments, it covered a whole range of amendments and applied to many, many aspects of the Act. And because we have such little time, I have a concern that we don't get full understanding of these issues and some of the things that we want to ensure will be included, will be in fact debated. So I want to spend some additional time with that.

Specifically, I noticed that there is some clarification in setting up the separate school divisions and also the school divisions based on minority faith. And I think the rules and regulations surrounding those are addressed in these amendments, and I'm very pleased to see those. I think those are areas that have to be clarified.

It's based on some of the things that occurred in the past: for instance, the size of the school division and the numbers of students in those particular school divisions; who is going to be allowed to vote on whether there is in fact a minority established so that a separate school can be developed in that area. And I think those are commendable amendments, in fact that will clarify that.

I guess when I looked through the amendments, I couldn't find anything in there that really addressed such things as private schools. There's an increasing interest in private schools in this province, as there is across other provinces. And I think that that is an area that should be clarified, and I see that that is not

mentioned in these amendments, at least from what I've been able to determine. So that's an area that I think also needs some debate and clarification.

Also, increasing in popularity in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the home-schooling, and parents are taking the responsibility of teaching at home in a home-schooling scenario.

I think some of those things, again, were lacking from what I've seen in the amendments. This might be an opportunity to expand on the standards needed for home schooling. As parents become more and more interested in taking on the responsibility of education, I think those concerns need to be addressed, and now would be a timely opportunity to put those amendments in place if they're not already there.

Such things as other kinds of specialized school and instructions — whether it is community college at a high school or a post high school level — I think is very important. I know in certain areas around the province there is a lot of request for things like community college, focusing on agriculture particularly.

I've noticed in Saskatchewan the availability of post-secondary training for our young farmers is lacking compared to some of the other jurisdictions in other parts of Canada. Ontario has a much broader base of agricultural schools. Here in Saskatchewan we have one main school at the University of Saskatchewan and a diploma course, but other provinces certainly have accessibility for students for that kind of training.

Apparently Saskatchewan accepts the notion that agricultural training is handled by on-the-job training primarily. And I think in today's sophisticated world of business, and farming business particularly, that kind of training should be made much more available using, for instance, some European models where almost all towns in a farming area has accessibility for that kind of training.

There is another area that I saw in here that I should commend the minister for including in the amendments and that is making sure that we're providing education for students with disabilities.

There has been a very focused thrust of directing children with disabilities into not only specialized training but integration into the normal classroom, and I think that is a very positive approach. It has worked very well. It has shown that students can adapt and are adapting, both the students with disabilities, but also other people and other students in those classes are accepting people with those disabilities. And I think that's very positive.

One of the things I've noticed in these amendments is the number of consultations that the minister has indicated that he's made. He's had consultations with the school trustees' association, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, and even associations like the LEADS it's called — that's the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents — and also with the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials.

I think those were consultations, very timely, and I think with

the appropriate people, and I would certainly encourage the minister to include in these amendments the things that he heard in those discussions.

Listening to people, as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is very important. The people are the ones that are going to be affected by these regulations, and in fact through them, the students of this province. And the students of course become the asset that we are counting on in this province to sustain the way of life and also to sustain the culture of our Saskatchewan province. So I'm pleased to see that that was included.

I just wanted to make sure that these people, because they're working first-hand both in teaching and in the administration, are listened to and everything possible was put into those regulations and the amendments.

I think I have to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, talk a little bit about the status as I see it of the province today. And of course that can be included . . . or at least it should affect our ability to be able to have confidence in these amendments.

We have to be able to see that these amendments are achieving some of the vision and some of the directions that, I think, are absolutely necessary when we pass these because these amendments are going to direct how the students are going to fare in our schools; also, if the schools are going to be sustainable and whether they are achieving any particular objective that we in the province feel they have to address.

(1630)

The immediate concern of course is the amount of money that is available for education generally. And although these amendments do in fact talk about a lot about the issues and some of the concerns that need to be addressed, I guess the confidence of the taxpayers is certainly in question when the amount of money that has been put toward education in the past has been a declining value over the past number of years.

And even this year in the budget, although there is a number that is being used — I think it's around 25 to \$29 million — I think in actuality, when you take everything into consideration, that's only about an \$18 million. My calculations would be that that is going to be hardly enough to actually cover whatever the projected negotiated raise is in teachers' salaries that, in fact, is still pending. And my understanding is that that is far from being settled. That's just another element, in my view, that creates a non-confidence feeling or a lack of vision from this particular department.

There is several severely restricted things that because of this lack of funding some of the severe restrictions are going to have to be applied. And we've heard time and time again from the people of the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) that they're going to have to reduce areas of special programming, areas of some of the services, and even some of the operational activities in their schools.

One of the problems that the schools are having, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is an expansion of the amount of interdisciplinary activity that is downloaded onto the schools. I'm talking about the amount of time that is spent — time and energy and

therefore cost — that is involved by the school administration in trying to accommodate special needs children, some of the Social Service cases that are being directed to the school, and in trying to implement those people into the curriculum.

One of the realities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about education today is that although things remain relatively constant in the cities, the difference between the cities and the rural areas is becoming more and more pronounced all the time. There is becoming, like in other areas of our province, almost a two-tier system, and the farmers are moving and the population is decreasing. There is an ability . . . a non-ability for schools to compensate adequately, and they're going to increase expenses such as bussing and decreased populations. And therefore that funding is particularly important to these school divisions in the rural areas.

This increased funding for the special programs and services, I don't see any inclusion in this particular Bill. And so I would certainly ask the minister to look into those situations particularly.

I did notice too that there was some capital funding budgeted under the Centenary Capital Fund. I think the number that was included is about \$5 million going into that fund. That's certainly going to be a benefit, but I'm not sure just where that will go and under what conditions. That too has to be clarified before these amendments can be voted on.

A lot of the schools in my constituency have run up against a real serious problem of having not the money to be able to do the improvements, make the normal repairs. Certainly the additions to schools have been postponed and postponed again.

And in fact, even the schools that are holding their own in terms of population or increasing are not being able to get any funding for them because the priority of the . . . the small amount of funding that is available, the priority goes to things like safety of the students. And there's a lot of schools that need that kind of work.

So because of that grant money that has dropped pretty substantially over the past while, it certainly doesn't add to the confidence or the vision that people have with regards to their schools.

So I guess what that means to the taxpayers of the province . . . and that is a very important issue, in my view, because again there you have a real discrepancy between the rural areas and the urban areas. And in more and more cases the so-called topping up to the necessary funding has been allocated back to the particular taxpayers of that school division. The school division's given the authority to be able to set assessments . . . mill rates, rather, on assessments have to take on more and more of that responsibility.

That is a particular problem in the area where I come from, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The rural assessments, very fortunately, are pretty substantial. And with the granting of . . . the grant formulas of this particular government, it shows that the rural areas, the school divisions in my area, and the rural divisions are not getting the average of the 40 per cent operational grants from the provincial government. In fact, it's nowhere near the

60 per cent that it used to be when I was on the school board or the 60 per cent that I know has entered the conversation in the campaigns over the years.

In my constituency most of the school divisions are, in fact, contributing 100 per cent of the operational funding not 40 per cent — 100 per cent; with the school, with the department, supplying zero per cent to the operation.

Now that is very critical because in comparison to a city school the traditional funding for operations come at 40 per cent which seems to be close to the provincial average. And I think that that is, that is a very serious problem, and certainly a problem from my area where tax revolts are, in fact, occurring on a pretty regular basis as they are right across the province.

When I read things in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix*, for instance, where they talk about a rate hike, a meagre . . . and this is a quotation from the teachers. The teachers are the ones that are going to have to work into this as well. For instance, they are saying and I quote, “Why aren’t the concerns of kids coming ahead of the mill rate?” And I think that’s a very good question.

The concerns of students seem to be secondary. Or if they are a concern, that whole concern is pushed back to the taxpayers of the community. For instance, the public board trustee Bill Altman, who lamented his board’s low increase last week saying it is detrimental to the children — that I think is a very serious condemnation of the particular system.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the things that I’ve seen in terms of program cuts; in fact there’s some warnings and some red flags being presented to us by the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association about having to actually close schools, having to relieve teachers or they will actually be leaving the profession and in fact the province altogether.

Those are major concerns that I don’t see . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, members, order. Members on both sides are engaging in some good debate back and forth, but for the moment the hon. member for Lloydminster has the floor and I’d encourage all members . . . and I would encourage all members to honour the hon. member for Lloydminster’s right to be heard.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was referring to some of the problems that I could see in terms of confidence and vision in the education system, none of which from the amendments I can see contribute to that.

I think the confidence of the taxpayers and therefore the parents and therefore through them to the students is really reflected in a lot of the conditions that are happening in the school, and I’m not sure that in the amendments they are being addressed adequately.

The teacher student ratio has been increased significantly, and that’s a real problem in terms of morale of the teacher, and also the ability of the teacher to get through the necessary information to that student. And it’s their . . . Although when you’re sitting in school it might appear a long time, when we look at it from my age, that time goes by very quickly. There is

a very definitive time that . . . with a lot of information.

And fortunately students these days are much more clever than I was at that age and they’re accommodating, but it’s certainly not because of the help that’s coming from increased operational grants or programming.

So I guess I would ask the Minister of Education to bear in mind that some of these classroom ratios of 1:25, 1:30, or even sometimes higher is not the right way to administer our schools, and it looks to me like that that might continue.

There are many extras that are cut in the schools as well. And again I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the problems I have between a city school and a rural school. Not only is the teacher ratio different, actually the curriculum is different. The programs that are being offered are much more, much more enriched and enhanced when it comes to the city schools. And I think that’s rather unfair. It’s an unfair way to treat our students that their parents choose to live in the rural areas.

But students still I believe have the right, and the school boards and the government has a responsibility to try to keep that as equal as possible. And cutting extras is not going to help that situation at all. I’ve heard that some teachers take this so seriously that they’re actually buying some of the books themselves to present to the students. Because they feel these books, or videos or learning aids, are so critical that it’s important that the student have exposure to them. And I certainly commend the teachers for trying to do the very best they can in a situation where the funding is short and the teacher/pupil ratio is increasing as we go.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — I wanted to talk a little bit as well about some of the things that I think are new; that are certainly around the corner and should be looked at. Again, I don’t see them in the amendments but I wanted to draw this to the minister’s attention.

The debate, very recently, about advertising in the school, I think is a very critical issue. I know a lot of the schools have banned this Youth News Network because in fact that they were including commercials in some of their broadcasts. I guess, personally, I don’t have a particular problem with that because I remember when I was in school, I saw maps unfold and there was things like Neilson chocolate bars across the bottom of those maps. And I don’t think that I turned out to be a chocolate junky because of that. And I’m not sure that that influenced our students unduly. And I’m not sure the little bit of commercialism that’s involved in that Youth News Network has anything near the content of television that most students look at when they’re at home.

(1645)

But I guess the point that I was trying to make is the fact that those new techniques of trying to acquire some extra funding, whether it’s in partnerships with the industry or any innovative way at all, must be looked at. And I think those kinds of things have to be addressed in the amendments because now is the ideal opportunity to put those in while the amendments are, in

fact, before us.

Another issue that I think is really critical is the choice that the schools are left with. The choice is really no choice, just because of the funding problems that they're experiencing, the increasing cost. I know that there's a demand for budget dollars in lots of different disciplines and departments and all equally important, I'm sure. But the students and the program that they're achieving does in fact affect our future as well as their future and I think it has to be looked at very, very seriously.

One of the problems that I have again in the confidence issue, is that when the boards of education and the SSTA are complaining to the minister and stating the problems that they're going to have, the minister just dismisses them arbitrarily and says, all you have to do is raise the mill rate to compensate.

Well again, that is not the appropriate solution for education in the short or the long run. And I think that, again, downloading the cost of education that way is irresponsible. And I believe that there has to be a better way in order to achieve that kind of funding sustainability and education generally.

One of the things that I noticed, and I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, was the sections dealing with setting up separate school divisions based on the . . . on minority faith. And I think that where the minister is going in that particular issue, I think is appropriate. And certainly I would support that aspect of it.

It clarifies some of the restrictions, some of the conditions needed to establish what a minority is, where the minority is, who can be . . . participate in that kind of discussion, and in fact allow these minorities to set up a school division at their particular request. That aspect I believe is quite good.

The boundaries involved with school divisions is a concern that I think spills over from this whole municipal realignment debate that is currently going on in the problem. I think that has peripheral implications here. And I'm very concerned that the educational . . . the school divisions don't arbitrarily get set by a top-down government directive, but in fact focuses particularly on the trading areas, particularly where the students want their . . . where the parents want their children to go.

And in fact in a minority separate school situation, the boundary should be set by the numbers of people in that division, as outlined in the amendments. And so I feel that that has some positive aspects.

All in all, the direction of these amendments, if they are housekeeping only, I think that has some . . . has a lot of merit. But I think it's an opportunity missed when some of the things that I've mentioned, some of the concerns are not considered because after all it is the vision of education. A vision that the taxpayers have, the people generally, and the vision that creates the confidence in our education system that needs to be brought forward.

And I wish these amendments gave me more comfort that that was happening. And I think with further debate that we may just be able to help the minister in that regard.

Again the final section that I'd like to discuss is really dealing with the school divisions and the tendering process that the school divisions must go into. These are addressed in fact in these amendments, and again I think they are going in the correct way. I think I could support them for at least what I've read in the amendment so far.

I know the tendering process is quite important, but I would caution the minister to realize that tendering in different school divisions is not the same as it is in all of them. The tendering in a city school division for services or materials is one thing; tendering in a rural school division is certainly another. And I'm not sure that that is as talked about in these amendments and I really think it should be.

It's very important in a small community that I came from to have the ability to supply a service or a material. And the school division administration should have some particular leeway in those cases to make sure that the economy flows through to the small towns as the materials or the services are supplied. Otherwise all we're doing is reinforcing and complementing the businesses of the larger centres surrounding these small communities. And we certainly know that these communities are in jeopardy in terms of sustainability and commercial viability and that has to be addressed. And so I would like to see some further flexibility in these amendments to address that particular issue.

When we talk about these local suppliers, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make sure that the amendments are really quite clear, and these amendments are showing not only the flexibility for the rural communities in tendering, but shows some flexibility for the rural school divisions as well because that whole idea of different services, different programs, and different teacher ratios, is a real concern that has to be addressed before too long in this province. And I was hoping to see some of that in these amendments and we'll certainly be debating that to make sure these amendments are expanded to include just those things.

So there's other issues that I want to explore and talk about, but I need a little more time to go through these amendments. And I think there are some recommendations that I possibly could give to the minister as we debate these issues further.

If there was some evidence that the minister in fact was listening to the people that he did meet with, and all of their concerns had been considered and tried to be put into the . . . into this, I feel that that would be of great value.

The more and more stress that comes onto our schools, the more and more, first of all, costly it is in terms of dollars and also in terms of our teacher ratios. I mentioned earlier some of the things that these schools have to contend with nowadays, and that is they have to add a social services aspect to students that are placed into the schools rather than being dealt, dealt with and addressed outside of the school divisions. I think that's, that's certainly an important aspect.

I think there's psychological services that need to be presented to some of these schools as they adapt. Certainly in my hometown of Lloydminster there's a lot of those kind of students that are being attracted into the schools. And also I think some of the non-functional home atmospheres are cause

for those kinds of things because in an area that is attracting a lot of itinerant workers, often the students and the home environment isn't healthy as it should have been normally.

So at this time, Mr. Speaker, those are the comments I had to say. And I look at the opportunity to maybe address some of these further, but at this time I would move to adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:56 p.m.