

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to present a petition on behalf of Humboldt constituents who are concerned about the loss of their community-based ambulance services. And the petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and to affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the community of Cudworth.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today regarding the EMS (emergency medical services) report and the ramifications to people in our constituency:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

The people that have signed this petition are all from Rose Valley.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of people in Swift Current and in the southwest concerned about the state of the hospital in Swift Current. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners will humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to carefully consider Swift Current's request for a new hospital.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition's signed by people in Swift Current, in Admiral, Cadillac, and Pontoix.

I so present.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of some students from Balfour Collegiate in the city of Regina who are concerned about the health hazards of tobacco use.

The prayer in the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive provincial legislation to protect children and youth from second-hand smoke and protect them from the health hazards of tobacco use.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are concerned about maintaining local control of their ambulance service. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

And the prayer is signed by citizens of Radville, Weyburn, Pangman, Ceylon, and Khedive.

I so present.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition from students in the Regina area. And the prayer is as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive provincial legislation to protect children and youth from second-hand smoke and protect them from the health hazards of tobacco use.

Thank you.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Speaker, I rise again on behalf of concerned citizens in southern Saskatchewan that are worried about the further cuts at the Assiniboia Pioneer Lodge. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure that, at the very least, current levels of services and care are maintained at Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by citizens from Assiniboia and Limerick.

I so present.

Mr. Addley: — Mr. Speaker, I also rise to present a petition on behalf of students concerned about tobacco use, and they're students in Regina. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon.

Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive provincial legislation to protect children and youth from second-hand smoke and to protect them from the health hazards of tobacco use.

As in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

And this is signed by school students in Regina.

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition on behalf of youth in Regina:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive provincial legislation to protect children and youth from second-hand smoke and protect them from the health hazards of tobacco use.

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition on behalf of students against tobacco use. These students are from Regina. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive provincial legislation to protect children and youth from second-hand smoke and protect them from the health hazards of tobacco use.

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

Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have the honour of providing a petition today, Mr. Speaker, from students in support of comprehensive tobacco control legislation. If I may read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive provincial legislation to protect children and youth from second-hand smoke and protect them from the health hazards of tobacco use.

Mr. Speaker, the signatories of this petition are from Regina and it's my honour to table it on their behalf.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province on the following matters:

The centralization of ambulance services;

The request for a new hospital in Swift Current;

Level of services at Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia; and

An energy rebate to Saskatchewan consumers.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 21 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation: why has the provincial government not utilized the allotted funds from the 2000-2001 fiscal year for the cultural facilities grant program?

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice I shall on day no. 21 ask the government the following questions:

To the Minister of Health: why have large sections of The Psychologists Act, 1997 not yet been proclaimed?

And also, Mr. Speaker:

To the minister of the Public Service Commission: what are the estimated increased staffing costs to the provincial government for the current fiscal year as a result of the recent decision to have hundreds of managers in the government departments become unionized workers?

And also, Mr. Speaker:

To the Minister of Finance: has the increased staffing cost to the government that will come about as a result of the recent decision to designate hundreds of out-of-scope managers in government departments as in-scope employees been accounted for in the 2001-2002 provincial budget; and what will the financial effect of this decision be to the government?

Thank you.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 21 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Government Growth Fund: (a) how much money has each of SGGF II, SGGF III, and SGGF IV put into Big Sky Pork, broken out in terms of grants, loans, loan guarantees, and equity investments; and (b) what percentage of Big Sky Pork does SGGF II, SGGF III, and SGGF IV currently own?

Also, Mr. Speaker, I give notice on day 21 that I shall ask the government the following question:

To the minister of SOCO: how much money has CIC put into Big Sky Pork, broken out in terms of grants, loans, loan guarantees, and equity investments; and (b) what percentage of Big Sky Pork does SOCO currently own?

Also, Mr. Speaker:

To the Minister of CIC: how much money has CIC put into Big Sky Pork, broken out in terms of grants, loans, loan

guarantees, and equity investments; and (b) what percentage of Big Sky Pork does CIC currently own?

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 21 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Health regarding the role of approved private homes in Saskatchewan: is the Saskatchewan government planning to reduce occupancy in approved private homes; (2) is the Saskatchewan government considering imposing expensive new regulations on approved private homes; (3) does the Saskatchewan government believe that approved private homes have a legitimate role in providing care to Saskatchewan residents?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce through you, Mr. Speaker, to all members of the House a visitor — two visitors today — a visitor from Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Ms. Peggy Sluzalo, and with her, her sister, Ms. Betty Calvert. I'd ask all members to join in welcoming these two individuals to the gallery today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly members, some very special people in your east gallery. I have with us today or with me today my daughter, Sherri Solar. Sherri is a nurse in Saskatoon and she is accompanied by her father, Robert Julé.

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to the Assembly 28 grade 8 students from Cudworth and Bruno schools. Welcome today. And they are accompanied by their teachers Mr. Brad Hauber from Cudworth School, as well as Mr. Jeff Marshak from Bruno School.

And they have also accompanying them — because they're such a good group we have to make sure that they have with them parents that they can teach lessons to — we have with us Mrs. Eiler, Mrs. Hoppe, and Mrs. Sand as chaperones.

And I look forward to meeting with these students after question period today. I'd ask all members of the Assembly to join with me in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce through you and to you a gentleman sitting in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. Larry Spencer, the MP (Member of Parliament) for the riding of Regina-Lumsden-Lake Centre. Mr. Spencer represents about half of my constituency. And the constituents I've been talking to have been saying he's been doing an excellent job since he's been elected.

And I want to welcome him here, and hope all the members will join me in welcoming him here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the member opposite in welcoming Larry and Larry to the legislature. As things happen in this legislature, Mr. Speaker, Larry was leaving as I was entering and . . . but I did get a chance to know him over the years.

So welcome on behalf of the government members to both you gentlemen today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members, a constituent of mine seated in the west gallery, Gord Gunoff, who is the business manager for IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) Local 2067; and with him is Pat Therrien, I understand his communications director.

And please welcome them to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Region 7 Saskatchewan Drama Association Competition

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Drama Festival for region 7 was held Thursday, March 29 through Saturday, March 31 at the Hudson Bay Composite High School, with 157 students participating in the event. This is the first time that this event was held . . . has been held in Hudson Bay.

The Saskatchewan Drama Association provides 12 festivals across the province each year involving 4,000 students.

The drama festival included nine performances. The schools that participated included Tisdale Middle and Secondary School, Porcupine Plain Composite High School, St. Mary's High School in Prince Albert, Hudson Bay Composite High School, Birch Hills School, Melfort and Unit Comprehensive Collegiate, Sandin High School in Shellbrook, and Carlton Comprehensive High School in Prince Albert.

(13:45)

The event ended on Saturday with an awards banquet. And a very special thanks is to be given to Leanne Ukrainetz, who was the festival host coordinator for the event.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of the Assembly to join with me in congratulating the community of Hudson Bay on a job well done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Visudyne Approved for Macular Degeneration Patients

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to inform the House today about more good news in our health

care system. More than 200 people in our province who suffer from macular degeneration — an eye disease that eventually leads to blindness — will see relief, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday our government approved the coverage of a new and innovative way to treat this disease. With that announcement, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan became just the third province to cover the cost of this treatment since it was approved by Health Canada last June.

The treatment consists of two steps. First, the eye specialist gives the patient a drug called Visudyne. The specialist then uses a laser therapy to activate the drug. As many as six treatments may be needed at a cost of \$2,500 each over a two-year period.

While this treatment is not a cure, Mr. Speaker, for the disease, it does offer hope to those affected. It gives patients a chance to enjoy the visual beauty of life for a longer period of time than ever before possible.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to offering a broad range of treatments to ensure good health for all people in Saskatchewan. We are committed to doing so in an affordable, reasonable manner.

Mr. Speaker, we are also committed to wellness because we know that healthy citizens equal a healthy Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Bruno Midget T-Birds Win Gold

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Broomball has been big in Bruno forever. And the tradition has continued this year also. The Bruno Midget T-Birds competed in the provincial playoffs hosted in Debden and brought home gold once again.

Congratulations to the team for your victory and to the coaches, Ray Bender and Jeff Basset.

And the Bruno Junior Axemen also captured the provincial title this year, hosted in Big River. They went on to the national championship held in Kitchener, Ontario at the end of March. The team, representing Saskatchewan, played hard in the preliminary rounds of the tournament. In the final game the Bruno Axemen were up against the defending champions, a team from Quebec.

With goals from Cameron Weiman, Jeff Basset, Lee Huber and Kyle Soli, the team was victorious, winning the game 4 to 2 and capturing the bronze medal. Game most valuable player was Ryan Bender.

Besides collecting the team bronze medals, some team members were also recipients of special tournament awards: Ryan Bender, the Tournament Team Most Valuable Player; Michael Weiman, the Tournament Team All-Star Goalie Award; Jeff Basset, Tournament First Team All-Star Forward Award; and to Ray Bender, the Tournament Coach Of The Year Award.

Congratulations to all those individual award winners and to the team, the Bruno Axemen for a very fine effort.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Regional Science Fair

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had a wonderful experience last Thursday. I was at the regional science fair in Lumsden. I was very impressed by the innovative projects these young people had developed. The overall winner, who will go to the nationals, was Derek Heisler. Derek's project was called fog harvesting.

What is fog harvesting you may ask? Well, Mr. Speaker, it uses screens to harvest fog from the air and provide water in desert lands.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I want to mention a project that caught my eye as soon as I entered into the fair. The purpose of this project that I saw was to discover the effects of second-hand smoke on mealworms. And let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, the effects are not good.

The two grade 10 students, Chris Butler and Paul Felix, created a project in which half of their worms were subjected to second-hand smoke and the control group was not. The mealworms who were subjected to the smoke, Mr. Speaker, three died, and all of them were slowed down in their activity. All this took place in just 24 hours. Imagine the effects of long-term exposure.

This project proved that the effects of second-hand smoke are very real and very dangerous, Mr. Speaker. No one wants to end up like those mealworms, so I'd encourage all those who are able to butt out and live a healthy lifestyle. It'll be good for you; it'll be good for those around you.

Mr. Speaker, I would like all of us to congratulate these insightful young people and all those who worked so hard to make their science fair such a tremendous success. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Governor General Award for Bravery

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, recently over 150 people turned out for supper and an award ceremony in the hamlet of Simmie where two young men from the community were presented with the Governor General Award for bravery, by Her Honour Lieutenant Governor Lynda Haverstock.

Mr. Speaker, the event that merited this award occurred on June 8, 1998, when Craig Hoisington and Craig Braun were at the local fishing hole to do a little fishing. And seven-year-old Jason Hofer was playing along the edge by a bridge and lost his balance and fell in.

Seeing young Hofer thrashing in the water, Braun jumped in without hesitation. As Hofer grabbed on to him, Braun tried to get to shore. Struggling with exhaustion, he called to Hoisington for a hand. When Hoisington reached them, he dove in and helped his friend and the young boy get out of the water.

What's most remarkable about these two young men's heroic

skills, Mr. Speaker, is their lack of swimming skills.

Jason Hofer's father, Leonard, said Jason was so lucky there was an angel, or maybe I should say two angels were with him that day.

It's all too often we do not recognize people for extraordinary deeds. So often we hear anyone would have done the same thing. As time passes, this story may fade into history, however, the unique bond that was formed between these two brave individuals as they risked their own lives to save another will last forever.

I think it is appropriate, Mr. Speaker, that we should acknowledge Craig Braun and Craig Hoisington for their heroic deeds.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Districts Receive Awards

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Those in public service usually get noticed when there's a glitch of some kind and they don't often receive recognition for the outstanding work they do as a matter of course day in and day out.

So in a small way today I want to help correct this imbalance by bringing to the attention of the members of the Assembly, four Green Ribbon awards given to health districts in Saskatchewan for excellence in particular areas of health care.

And I'm especially happy to make this report, Mr. Speaker, because two of these awards went to our own Prince Albert Health District.

The first award went to Moose Jaw-Thunder Creek in the human resources category for a safety review program designed to improve workplace safety. The health promotion award was given to Midwest Health District for its Mobile Agriculture and Safety Resource Centre program designed to advise farmers on how to reduce specific risks on the farm.

And, Mr. Speaker, the Prince Albert Health District won awards in the community involvement category and for the continuum of care category. The first one is for the creation of a specially designed treatment room for cancer patients receiving chemotherapy; the second is for the creation of an early childhood development team, a team of professionals who work together to streamline work with the families of individual cases.

Mr. Speaker, I only have time to congratulate the districts with each award. Of course there's a team of dedicated people behind all of these awards and I want to congratulate them all. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Girls Basketball Team Wins Championship

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pride that I rise this afternoon to bring

recognition to 10 talented young ladies from the constituency of Saskatchewan Rivers.

On the weekend of March 17 in the city of Moose Jaw, these young ladies brought their A game to Hoopla, our provincial basketball championships. Mr. Speaker, on the aforementioned weekend, the Birch Hills Marauders girls basketball team were crowned the Provincial 1 AA champions. The team, coached by Ken Morrison and ably assisted by Cathy Mills, has been to Hoopla four out of the last six years.

This in itself is a tribute to the coaches and school. But, Mr. Speaker, this is the first time the Birch Hills girls have walked away with a first-place finish.

Although these young ladies dominated their division during Hoopla, the toughest game they played was in the final when they were able to best their long-time nemesis, the Meath Park Mustangs, also from Saskatchewan Rivers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join me in congratulating the Birch Hills Marauders girls basketball team on their remarkable achievement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Canadian Wildlife Federation Recognizes Schools

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, we all hope that what we do ultimately is for the good of our children. Regardless of our profession, it's our desire to pass on a community, an economy, and an environment that will nurture the next and future generations. What we sometimes are not aware of is that often the next generation is already ahead of us showing us the way to a better world.

This is especially true when it comes to protecting and conserving our environment. Two schools in our province, one in my constituency of Regina Lakeview and one in the northwestern town of Canwood, have received national recognition from the Canadian Wildlife Federation for their Habitat 2000 projects. And in the process they have provided excellent examples for their elders.

The week of April 8 to 14 is National Wildlife Week. Both projects are connected to this year's theme which is "Our Community Includes Wildlife: Does Yours?"

Students from all grades at Canwood School, under Principal Jeff Kyliuk, created a shelter belt near the school to provide habitat for many species, and a teaching instrument for future students.

The students of Marion McVeety School in Regina under Principal Peter Looyesen, have created gardens of native grasses and flowers, planted trees, and built birdhouses that create wildlife habitat.

Mr. Speaker, the students and teachers at these two schools, and I am sure at others across the province, deserve our congratulations and our gratitude.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

SaskPower Management

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister responsible for SaskPower. Last Thursday StatsCan confirmed that the NDP (New Democratic Party) continues to chase people out of the province. In fact, last year the NDP posted the worst population loss in a decade. And on Friday, StatsCan confirmed that the NDP continues to chase jobs out of Saskatchewan — 11,300 of them over the last year.

Yesterday we learned that the NDP is actually paying people to leave Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, SaskPower's senior vice-president is being paid by SaskPower to relocate to Victoria but keep his job. And just for good measure they're giving him a 7 per cent salary increase.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is this. Yesterday SaskPower officials indicated that this was a good move for the corporation. The question to the minister today is, does he agree with that assessment, and if he does will he table both the new contract for the former senior VP (vice-president) as well as the early retirement plan that he could have accessed?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I said yesterday that as a minister I will not get involved in the day-to-day operations. It was that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, that asked our Crowns to be more autonomous, Mr. Speaker. They asked ministers to get off of the board, Mr. Speaker. They asked them to get off of the board. Mr. Speaker, I am not on the board. I will not get involved in day-to-day operations of our Crown corporations.

While I'm on my feet though, Mr. Speaker, our Crowns provide great service in this province and I think it's inappropriate that we go after people who have worked in the Crowns for in excess of 30 years, Mr. Speaker. I think it's just inappropriate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the minister may not want to answer these questions but we will continue to ask them on behalf of Saskatchewan people who want some answers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday one of Saskatchewan Power's vice-presidents that's actually staying here in the province of Saskatchewan, confirmed that SaskPower has added 200 new managers over the past five years.

Mr. Speaker, the big question for the government and that Saskatchewan people are asking today is why? Why? Is it that SaskPower is serving more businesses? No. We've lost jobs over the last year. Is it that there are more SaskPower customers? No. We have 4,200 fewer people in Saskatchewan now than we did a year ago.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain why SaskPower under these circumstances needs a massive expansion in its executive suites?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well first of all, Mr. Speaker, I do want to point out, under the previous government I would not take advice and you do have to be careful when it comes to numbers from that side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again I want to say that on this issue, as on the other issue, as a minister responsible I will not get into the day-to-day operations of our corporation. SaskPower, Mr. Speaker, provides wonderful service across the province, Mr. Speaker. They provide reliable, safe service, Mr. Speaker, at the lowest possible cost, Mr. Speaker, and we should simply not get into attacking the people who work within the corporation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about minutia here; we're not asking the minister to go over and park the president's car. We're asking him important questions, general questions about the corporation in terms of keeping their costs down. If we can keep the corporation's costs down, maybe we won't have to endure six per cent rate hikes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, according to the former SaskPower president, Jack Messer . . . and apparently Mr. Messer has some concerns as well. And Mr. Speaker, it's pretty bad when the voice of austerity at SaskPower is the same man that the NDP gave a \$300,000 golden handshake to.

Mr. Speaker, he indicates that there are at least 600 more people working for SaskPower today than there was in '95. The head of SaskPower's largest union says the company has hired 200 new managers since '95. And the union says SaskPower has hired another 600 consultants.

To the minister: the question is clear. Will he clear up the confusion? How many new managers and consultants has SaskPower hired in the past five years and why are these people being hired when SaskPower isn't serving any more businesses or customers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I see him toss that in the garbage. That's a good place to put that question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, over the last five years, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's economy has grown, Mr. Speaker. That's a good thing, Mr. Speaker. Over the last number of years, Mr. Speaker, SaskPower's business has grown. That's another good thing, Mr. Speaker.

The Sask Party has continually called on our government to provide better service in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. With our economy growing, with SaskPower's business growing, Mr. Speaker, it is logical, Mr. Speaker, that maybe there are . . . we need more people, as we do in Highways. They ask for more service in Highways. We have more people to provide those

services, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I do not understand the logic from that member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister doesn't understand the logic and believe you me, it's not hard to see why he doesn't understand it. It's a lot . . . it's common sense, Mr. Speaker. Here's the logic of the official opposition. We want to ask questions in this legislature about keeping the overall costs of Crown corporations down so that we can save taxpayers money and avoid rate hikes. That's the logic, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — And you can bet this government doesn't understand it. Mr. Speaker, the big question that we have for the minister today is why? Why is SaskPower increasing management by 50 per cent? Is it producing 50 per cent more power? No.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we also know that SaskPower has confirmed yesterday that there are 350 SaskPower managers and they will receive a 7 per cent increase in their salary — twice the rate of inflation and three times what unionized workers are getting . . . (inaudible) . . . SaskPower has decided to hire hundreds of new managers. And why are they getting 7 per cent increases in salary when the corporation is charging 6 per cent increases in utility bills to Saskatchewan people?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it incredulous that that member would talk about keeping overall costs down, that member who worked as an MA (ministerial assistant) in Premier Devine's government who racked up the largest debt in this province's history, Mr. Speaker. That's a lesson on keeping costs down, Mr. Speaker. That's incredulous, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to the *Times Colonist* which talks about . . . it's a quote out of Los Angeles, Mr. Speaker, that says: California's power crisis will likely lead to higher taxes and hurt out-of-state investment, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, here in Saskatchewan we kept our rates down. And on top of that, Mr. Speaker, our taxes are going down as well, Mr. Speaker. We need to compliment what our corporation SaskPower does for the people of Saskatchewan and the services that it provides, not ridicule them, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister clearly doesn't want to answer some very basic questions that we're asking on this side of the House. These are questions that he should be answering as the minister responsible. And if he's not prepared to ask these questions on behalf of Saskatchewan people, he should get out of the way and let someone sit there who will ask those questions, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the people . . . He doesn't want to give an answer in this legislature, but he owes an answer to the shareholders of this corporation, which is the people of Saskatchewan. They deserve to know how many managers have been added to the SaskPower payroll and how much of a salary increase those managers will be getting.

And while we're at it, they need to be able to . . . they deserve to know, Mr. Speaker, whether the 7 per cent salary increase that SaskPower management will be getting this year will also be extended to the other Crowns. That's the question of the minister, Mr. Speaker.

Will the minister confirm that all Crown corporation managers — SaskEnergy, SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), SaskTel, CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) — can look forward to a 7 to 9 per cent salary increase as well? Will he answer that today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well again, Mr. Speaker, as the minister's office, we're not going to get involved in the day-to-day operations, as I answered this question a number of times, Mr. Speaker, to this member.

Mr. Speaker, I want to again, while I'm on my feet and we're talking about power rates, Mr. Speaker, refer to the *Calgary Herald* which talks about California, Mr. Speaker, which will face a 50 per cent likely power rate hike.

It says that increase would come on top of already a 9 percent to 15 per cent increase the Public Utilities Commission approved in January as well as an additional 10 per cent increase already scheduled for next year, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, our utilities, SaskPower included of course, Mr. Speaker, I think and I think most of Saskatchewan people believe, provide great service, Mr. Speaker, across Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, it is just simply inappropriate that we go after our public servants who provide this great service to the people and the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crown Corporation Debt

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the minister responsible for CIC.

Mr. Minister, according to last year's budget, Crown corporation debt for 2001 was supposed to be about \$3.3 billion. However, Crown debt is projected to be over \$3.5 billion, an increase of over \$200 million, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the minister: can the minister explain why Crown corporation debt jumped by over \$200 million over your projected estimate?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, if there's anybody in

this province that should know about debt, it's the members sitting over there because they saddled this province with a \$15 billion debt.

But while the member is referring to the budget document — and these numbers are at page 84 of the budget, Mr. Speaker — and he notes that the estimate, which is an estimate at the beginning of the fiscal year for Crown debt, was \$3.3 billion . . . billion dollars and it is . . . the debt forecast now for the March 31, 2001 would be \$3.5 billion, an increase \$200 million dollars as the member says.

The next line I notice that the government debt was estimated — estimated — at \$7.9 billion, Mr. Speaker; it turned out to be 7.65, a decrease of \$250 million but he didn't mention that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think we'll take that as a confirmation that indeed government debt did jump up by \$200 million in the Crowns.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — You know, Mr. Speaker, it's also going to jump up by another \$200 million over the next three years.

Last week the member for North Battleford raised this very issue and the minister didn't seem to have a clue what he was talking about.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's all on page 54 of the budget. It says, and I quote:

Crown corporation debt is projected to rise from \$3.4 billion at March 31, 2000 to \$3.5 billion at March 31, 2001 and . . . rise to \$3.7 billion over the medium term.

Mr. Minister, that's what it says in your document. Why is the Crown debt projected to rise by an additional \$200 million over already a confirmed increase of \$200 million last year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, this is just how ridiculous and unreliable anything that comes from that side of the House is. If the member referred to, Mr. Speaker, the last line of the page he's looking at it says: total debt estimated, \$11.187 billion; total debt forecast at the end of the year, \$11.153 billion. Mr. Speaker, that is a reduction, as anyone who can add can see, of \$34 million.

Now the government debt has gone down in the last year — both government and Crowns — \$34 million. The member says it's going up. The only time government debt ever went up, Mr. Speaker, in this province was when those members were in office and we're going to make sure that doesn't happen again, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr.

Speaker, last week the minister responsible for CIC didn't understand the question raised by the minister from . . . for the member for North Battleford. Today the Minister of Finance does not understand the very paragraph that he has within his own document.

So let's turn, Mr. Speaker, to SaskPower. Last year SaskPower's debt was \$200 million higher — from 1.6 billion in last year's budget to well over 1.8 billion. SaskPower rates are up; SaskPower's debt is also up 14 per cent. Yet we see SaskPower managers rewarding themselves with a 7 per cent salary increase.

Mr. Speaker, why has SaskPower's debt jumped by 14 per cent, over \$200 million, from last year's budget? And why is the NDP giving SaskPower managers a big pay hike when SaskPower's debt is increasing?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the test of whether the debts in the Crown corporation are appropriate is whether they have an appropriate debt-equity ratio.

And I want to say to the member opposite that yes, yes, as I said on budget day — if the member would listen for a second instead of just yelling from his seat — as I said on budget day, Mr. Speaker, the Crown corporation debt will go up. And in the case of SaskPower it will increase by about \$430 million by 2005, as a result of SaskPower's plans to expand its cogeneration capacity at Cory and Muskeg Lake.

These are investments, Mr. Speaker, that will increase SaskPower's ability to produce and export power. And what I want to know and the people want to know is this: are those members opposed to the expansion of SaskPower's generating capacity? Yes or no, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is using two calculations. He's using government debt and Crown debt. So let's look at those two things, Mr. Speaker.

The auditor says that the total debt is actually a lot higher. But even using the government's own figures in this year's budget, total debt will increase by about \$175 million over the next three years. According to the budget, total debt this year will be 11.153 billion. By 2004, total debt will be 11.328 billion. I think the Minister of Finance read those numbers to us this afternoon. That's an increase of \$175 million.

Mr. Speaker, the government is actually planning to increase the debt. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier confirm that his government plans to increase the debt of this province by 175 million over the next three years?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the test of whether the province is on the right track when it comes to debt, is not to be determined by listening to the opposition. It's to be determined

by listening to the credit-rating agencies.

And what I can tell this House and the people of the province, Mr. Speaker, is this — in the last five years this province, this government, has received nine credit-rating upgrades.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — What do credit-rating agencies look at, Mr. Speaker? They look at whether we have a sustainable debt. That's what they look at, and whether we're going to operate at a balance.

My question to the people would be this, Mr. Speaker: does anyone believe that these members over there who created the debt in the first place know more about debt management than the credit-rating agencies themselves? I don't think so, Mr. Speaker, I don't think so.

When it comes to these members and taking advice from them about debt, we've been there and we've done that and we ain't doing it again, Mr. Speaker.

(14:15)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is still for the Premier and I'd ask the Premier to answer it.

Mr. Premier, on pages 83 and 84 of your government document, you indicate that the government debt plus Crown debt is 11.153 billion this year, and by 2004 it will rise to \$11.328 billion — an increase of 175 million.

Mr. Speaker, we're simply asking the Premier to confirm the numbers in his own budget. Will the Premier confirm his government will drive the province \$175 million further into debt over the next three years? Mr. Premier?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, while the member is trying to act like he's somehow revealing information to the House and the public, I want everybody to know that these numbers were released on March 29, and I think even the day before there was a briefing about these numbers to the media. The member isn't revealing anything.

But I'll say this, Mr. Speaker. The debt to GDP (gross domestic product) ratio in Saskatchewan is going down almost as quickly as the popularity or lack thereof of the Saskatchewan Party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Because the people know, Mr. Speaker, that this government has a good record when it comes to debt management.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that this government is also going to build, and we are going to use the Crown corporations to build, Mr. Speaker. We're going to build more in terms of

power export capacity. And I might add, SOCO, which is part of the increasing debt, is going to expand and develop research parks, Mr. Speaker. That's what . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I think we'll take the Minister of Finance's words as confirmation that indeed the debt of the province of Saskatchewan is going up.

Mr. Speaker, you know, people in this province have been waiting for the new Premier to make his mark on this government. Well he's made his mark and it's in red ink. High taxes, bigger government, and now more debt. That's the kind of government the new Premier is running.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the NDP bus has taken a sharp left turn. Mr. Speaker, under Roy Romanow this government used to, and I say used to, put a priority on debt reduction. Why have they abandoned debt reduction as a priority? Why are they planning to drive Saskatchewan taxpayers \$175 million further into debt?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what's taken a sharp turn in the last couple of weeks. It's the political popularity of the party opposite. That's what's taken a sharp turn. And it's down, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, and I'll tell you why it's down. I'll tell you why it's down. Because, Mr. Speaker, they sit in their benches day after day with their prophecy of doom and gloom while on this side of the House we deliver a budget that is going to improve the prospects for the future of Saskatchewan people, border to border, north to south, Mr. Speaker. Because what you've got on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, is a government that believes in this province and in its people and in investing in the future of this province. That's why the left turn over there, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Government Investment in Potato Industry

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister responsible for the Crown Investments Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, we now know that the Crown debt in this province is expected to grow significantly and it's easy to see why. Yesterday I asked the minister how much money Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation lost last year. And the minister didn't know. How do people expect the NDP government to control the debt if the cabinet ministers don't even know how much money their investments are losing?

Mr. Speaker, a CIC official confirmed to the media yesterday that the Sask Valley Potato Corporation did indeed lose money last year and expects to lose money this year and possibly the year following. I ask the minister again: what was the total operating loss for this corporation for the year 2000?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, first of all, Mr. Speaker, as a farm boy, let me say how much I love potatoes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, look, I've answered this question a number of times, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in that area, Mr. Speaker, we have over \$120 million with the federal government invested in infrastructure by way of irrigation equipment. It was a process that we went through, Mr. Speaker, to try to add value and create jobs out in that area, Mr. Speaker. I think the nucleus of that is there, Mr. Speaker. What we have now is jobs and we're going to add value to an industry that I believe will last long into the future, Mr. Speaker, and it clearly, that mandate, stays in place, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, this is amazing. The NDP government is forecasting major increases in the Crown corporation debt, resulting in higher government debt overall. The minister in charge of CIC is refusing to tell the public how much more his failed venture in the potato industry has lost. And yet . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Question period is not over yet. Would you allow the member to put the question please. The member will proceed.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They're still meddling in the industry, even though they expect to lose money. The potato growers out there are saying, stay out of it. They've already developed the industry years ago; they don't need the government to come in.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — The people who have been stung by the government over the SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) fiasco can't believe the NDP is still pursuing this. Yet Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation is still out there buying equipment, leasing land. Mr. Speaker why is CIC still pursuing this venture?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that Stockwell Day has an employee that is looking for work right now. Maybe they can get him to do some investigation on potatoes.

Mr. Speaker, look. Mr. Speaker, day after day, the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, criticize us, criticize this government for investing outside of Saskatchewan. So what do we do — we invest inside of Saskatchewan. They criticize us for that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, look, what we've got, Mr. Speaker, is an industry that is growing. We export seed potatoes to Prince Edward Island now, Mr. Speaker. And it is my estimation, and I think probably the people of Saskatchewan, that we have a good industry growing there, Mr. Speaker.

Clearly, when we are able to, and when there would be no loss to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, this will be turned back over

to the private sector, as was always our mandate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 207 — The Regulatory Reform Act

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill No. 207, The Regulatory Reform Act.

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

Bill No. 15 — The Credit Union Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 15, The Credit Union Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 16 — The Film Employment Tax Credit Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 16, The Film Employment Tax Credit Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 17 — The Professional Corporations Act

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 17, The Professional Corporations Act be now introduced and read the first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, revert to orders of the day, with leave.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I ask leave of the Assembly to move two motions regarding the sittings of the Assembly.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Hours of Sitting

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Souris-Cannington:

That notwithstanding rule 3(4) and the *Rules and the*

Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, that when this Assembly adjourns on Thursday, April 12, 2001, it do stand adjourned until Wednesday, April 18 at 1:30 p.m.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move as well by leave of the Assembly:

That notwithstanding rule 3(1) the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*, that when this Assembly adjourns on Wednesday, April 25, 2001 it do stand adjourned until Friday, April 27, 2001 at 10:00 a.m.

Motion agreed to.

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great deal of pleasure to table the questions to no. 55 through 58.

The Speaker: — The answers to questions 55, 56, 57, and 58 are tabled.

Why is the member on his feet?

(14:30)

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly, I would move that at this point we proceed to private members' public Bills, second readings, item 1, Bill No. 202, The Holocaust Memorial Day Act.

Leave granted.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 202 — The Holocaust Memorial Day Act

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll begin my remarks by thanking all members of this Assembly for allowing us to proceed with discussion today on this important Bill.

Normally, a Bill of this nature would be brought to the Assembly through private members' private Bills. However, because of the time frames involved, the Jewish Council has asked that we consider this Bill as a public Bill, and I am pleased to sponsor it as such today.

Holocaust Memorial Day is celebrated throughout the world as a day of remembrance, a day when we have an opportunity to think about some of the enduring lessons from the Second World War.

And, Mr. Speaker, I have brought forward this particular Bill so that this legislature may enact legislation which will bring forward Holocaust Memorial Day, or Yom haShoah, as it's known throughout the world, on an annual basis.

This year, the Yom haShoah will be recognized on April 22nd

in our calendar. It moves about in terms of a date because it is set by the Jewish lunar calendar.

This is a day when we have an opportunity as Canadians — and in particular here in Saskatchewan — to reflect on some of the important lessons from the Second World War and some of the important lessons that we have learned, since that time, about the Holocaust.

Mr. Speaker, members of this Assembly need not be reminded and of course know that the Holocaust was one of the darkest periods of human history and need not be reminded of the important role that Canadian citizens — and people, men and women, from Saskatchewan — played during the Second World War in fighting against these atrocities as well as the other many injustices that were occurring in our world at this point.

I have agreed to bring forward this legislation, Mr. Speaker, in part because I'm of a generation that has largely not known war. My grandfather fought in the Second World War; indeed, as many other members of this Assembly have spoken during this session of relatives of theirs who fought in that war as well.

Today, Canada's role in the world is largely one of a peacekeeper. But I think it's important that we continue to remember that there are great atrocities that occur in our world, even today.

Over the past several years, I have had the honour of being invited to address the Jewish Council, and speak to people here in Regina about the importance of us remembering the lessons of the Holocaust. During the Holocaust, more than six million men, women, and children were murdered by the Nazi authorities.

The vast, vast majority of these were Jewish people. But of course, there were others who were singled out because of their physical disabilities, mental disabilities, sexual orientation, race, and religion.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the Saskatchewan Jewish Council on the work that they have done to invite in other groups to participate in their services of remembrance, and the work that they have done reaching out to other communities here in Regina and across the province, in terms of making sure that we all remember the enduring lessons of the Holocaust.

One of the most important of those lessons, Mr. Speaker, is the lesson that basic human rights transcend all laws, and are inherent to our nature as people, and that we must work hard and remain ever vigilant to ensure that these rights are protected.

Mr. Speaker, the fact that we turn on the news on, pretty much, unfortunately, any given day, and look around the world, we can see that many places, the lessons of the Holocaust have not been taken to heart, have not been remembered, and in fact we continue to see atrocities committed.

The Jewish Council in bringing forward what I believe to be an excellent program of education for Canadian people and for Saskatchewan people, help to remind us all that in our

day-to-day lives, there's much that we can do to ensure that all people continue to enjoy basic human rights in our democratic societies.

Canada has played a great role in the world as a peacekeeper, in ensuring that the atrocities that were allowed to happen throughout the last part of the 1930s and early '40s, are not allowed to escalate as they did during that time.

A couple of years ago, Mr. Speaker, the member for Kindersley, myself, and two other members of the Assembly had the opportunity to travel to Germany to participate in an exchange of parliaments. It happened on the 10th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

I was particularly . . . Perhaps I should say it this way. I was unprepared for what I came across when I was in Germany. This was, although not my first trip to Germany, certainly my first trip to Berlin. As I was wandering about the city the day after I arrived, I stumbled across a very pleasant looking small park right in the centre of the city, and there was a large sign erected on it in front of the train station. On that sign listed several communities I guess you would call them, several stops that were made there.

And I asked one of the German ladies that was standing next to me at the crosswalk what this sign was. She said that the sign was there to commemorate the fact that it was from a small one-story train station that they had deported the Jews out of Berlin to these various locations.

I was, I have to say, quite taken aback that here in the middle of this beautiful, modern city was a small stone structure that served still today as a train station, but it was from there that the deportation of the Jews off to the death camps had occurred.

I was surprised when I was in Berlin, by the way that the people there have taken to heart lessons of the war and are ever mindful of it. Whether it's the signs that point out as a constant reminder to these commuters of the great terror that had happened during the Holocaust and the fact that they had exported or deported so many of the Jews off to the death camps. Whether it was the fact that they have in the middle of their community a large bombed-out church that stays as a reminder of the war and of course the destruction that it brought about. Or whether it was even just simpler things such as I found when I was out for a walk and came across a pawnshop.

In that pawnshop was a beautiful brass menorah. And I stopped and I thought not much of it except for the fact that this was really quite a beautiful and large menorah. And I came to think as I was looking at it, the history that this one item must have seen.

These are not items that families would of course pawn, and here some 50 years after the war this item ends up in a pawn shop. Why? Well obviously, or I would assume it was confiscated during the war, had turned up at some later date, and now simply had lost track of its original owners.

In Europe people have constant reminders of the war. They have constant reminders of the importance of the issues that were dealt with by, in my case, my grandparents; in other

people's cases their parents, and for many people who still live in Saskatchewan that they themselves went through during that time period.

There is, however, Mr. Speaker, a new generation of people for whom these events are not as clearly remembered. And for whom this is merely an item of history.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, I hope will help to provide an opportunity for generations of people, different generations of people to share their views and experiences so that the younger generation may understand the importance of the Second World War and the enduring lessons we've learned from that Holocaust — the importance of multiculturalism, the importance of tolerance.

Mr. Speaker, I won't say a great deal more on this, except to again thank members for their consideration of this Bill. And I would move, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Southeast that this Bill be now read a second time . . . sorry, Saskatoon Eastview.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I was 12-years-old I read the book *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William Lawrence Shirer. It was an astounding revelation of horrors to my young mind and has left an indelible impression with me to this day.

My family has strong ties to the Jewish community and I attend many Jewish celebrations and memorials. It never fails to move me as I witness the strength of spirit and belief that has carried the Jewish people through such a catastrophic period in our history as the Holocaust. I hope that as a civilization we learn from our history and don't repeat our mistakes. Only by always remembering will we never forget.

Edmund Burke once said that all it takes for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.

We must remind ourselves yearly, even daily, that what happened once could happen again if we allow racial hatred to fester and bloom.

Ceremonies like the Living in Harmony Awards in Saskatoon recognize our diversities and promote respect for those differences. We must continue to encourage more of this recognition of people or organizations who show leadership in promoting tolerance and understanding of our cultural differences.

The enormity of what man did to man in the Holocaust is eternally a just cause for grief and solemn remembrance. It is my fervent hope that by proclaiming in legislation The Holocaust Memorial Day Act, we can at least once a year remember and pay heed so that we never again tolerate such despicable actions.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to second this motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to stand in this Assembly and just to make a few comments in regards to the legislation we have before us, The Holocaust Memorial Day Act, on behalf of the official opposition, the Sask Party caucus.

Mr. Speaker, as we give thought to what this Act signifies and the importance of the Act, we're mindful of the circumstances that have brought about the debate, and a debate that continues to take place in, not only in our country but in other parts of the world, Mr. Speaker, and the fact that we need to recognize that each and every one of us were created equal.

It doesn't matter what the colour of our skin is; it doesn't matter what nationality we are, Mr. Speaker. I believe in the mind of the Almighty God who created us that he did create us equal and he did create us with the value of recognizing that each and every one of us are important.

The legislation before us however brings out a specific area and a specific people and that being the Jewish people and the Jewish nation, and just is a reminder of the atrocities that this people in this nation had faced through the years and certainly in the Second World War.

Mr. Speaker, anyone who has taken the time to do some Biblical studies and certainly has done studies in the Old Testament has seen on numerous occasions where this people, this Jewish nation that God called his people, were really put in very difficult circumstances. And many times those circumstances came as a result of their failure to recognize the importance of God in their lives.

And however, it also points out the fact that the God who called them his own continued to reach out to them even in their difficult times. And I think it refers to each and every one of us as well that this God who loves us so much is reaching out to us even when we turn our backs on him.

And I think it's important for us to realize how significant it is for us to recognize the value of each one in the human race. Mr. Speaker, when we think of the atrocities that took place during the Second World War — and even today we see atrocities; we see just most recently in the Bosnia situation and we see that exemplified in the Rwandan situation, Mr. Speaker — it re-emphasizes the fact that it's important for us to really begin to evaluate the value that we put on human life and human dignity.

(14:45)

And, Mr. Speaker, our caucus certainly stands in support of this motion today, pointing out the fact that we do value human life. We do value each individual for who they are and their importance in this broad family of individuals and people that we have in this world that we recognize today.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand here and offer this voice of support for this special recognition. And, Mr. Speaker, we trust that as a result of this, that it's just another motivating point encouraging us to have greater value for those around us

and to show the respect to each individual that we come in contact with.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am also pleased to rise this afternoon to be able to give my support to this important motion. But may I say that I hope that this Bill does more than just honour one people who suffered a great injustice and does more than merely commemorate one historic event — the Holocaust — no matter how horrific that event may have been.

The event was tragic, but what is even more tragic is that it was not unique. Racism remains prevalent throughout our world and even genocide is still not unknown.

I hope that in passing this motion it will cause all of us to examine ourselves and our society for any lingering prejudice, hate, and racism which we may nurture and which continues to hamper our spiritual and social progress, both as individuals and as a society.

Certainly commemorating the Holocaust is important both in terms of those who suffered so at that time. And it certainly hit me as an individual that Anne Frank was murdered on the day of my birth.

But as I say, it is more than merely commemorating one terrible injustice of our history. This is a time when I would suggest that all MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly), and I hope the people of Saskatchewan generally, come together to combat those negative forces and emotions that I frankly doubt any of us are totally free from.

But I think this is a time for us to renew our efforts to say that racism and prejudice have no place in our society or in our hearts as individuals. And on behalf of the Liberal caucus, I am pleased to express my support for this motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me . . . it's with a great deal of humility actually that I join in on the debate on this Bill. And I would like to say straight up that I am very pleased that this Bill has been introduced. It's been a long time coming and I'm very pleased that the legislature of Saskatchewan will be recognizing Yom haShoah Holocaust Memorial Day.

Even though the Second World War for many people is only something that they learn about in their history books and even though for many of us the Second World War is a very, very dim memory, for all of us who care about democracy, who care about tolerance, who care about fighting racial and social injustice, it is imperative that we pass this Bill and that we understand that all of us have a duty and an obligation to remember the Holocaust.

Mr. Speaker, as well as understanding and recognizing the tremendous loss of life that occurred by the Jewish people, we need to also understand that during the Second World War many gypsies were slaughtered, many homosexuals were killed

and imprisoned, people with physical and mental disabilities were summarily taken away to the death camps. And we need to understand and never let down our guard that this may never happen again.

Mr. Speaker, I lived for some time in Europe in bombed-out Holland. I lived there in the early '70s. And I was very impressed with the Dutch people who, not only as the speaker just before me said, sheltered Anne Frank but also had as a national sense of mission never to forget about the atrocities that occurred during the Second World War.

And that experience of living in Holland, seeing the bombed-out homes, seeing the people on the streets still remembering the events of that horrible time, talking with my parents-in-law who were personally very affected by the hunger winter of 1944, talking with my two . . . the brothers-in-law of my parents-in-law who had been carted off to the death camps but managed to return — all those events left an indelible mark on my heart and on my attitudes, Mr. Speaker.

And I hope through the majority of my actions in my life, I have been able to take strong stands to fight against racism and to fight against prejudice and intolerance of all sorts. And I know that all of us constantly have to look in our hearts to avoid the silly little sayings, the easy off-the-cuff remarks that somehow manage to creep into our language. And I know that all of us as legislators have worked very hard to ensure that we are all free of all racism and prejudice.

When I was growing up, Mr. Speaker, it used to be a very common statement to refer to Jewish people in a derogatory way, as we were talking about trying to get a good bargain when we were shopping. That is very wrong language, Mr. Speaker, and all of us would be aghast if we heard somebody use those kinds of statements that used to be commonplace even 30 years ago.

And I use that as an example to encourage all of us to continue to be vigilant and to constantly examine our behaviour, examine our speech patterns, and to ensure that in word, in deed, and in thought, we are conducting ourselves in a way that is as free as possible of intolerance and hatred.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this Bill, An Act to recognize Yom haShoah as Holocaust Memorial Day in Saskatchewan will be an important Bill for all people of Saskatchewan so that we recognize that we have to constantly — yesterday, today, and tomorrow — be on guard against hatred and intolerance.

So it is with a great deal of humility and a great deal of pride — and I realize those are paradoxical — but with humility and with pride I will supporting this Bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and, by leave of the Assembly, referred to a Committee of the Whole later this day.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 202 — The Holocaust Memorial Day Act

Clause 1

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This Bill is relatively brief, having only three items in it.

I would simply point out to members of the Assembly that the Bill has been reviewed by the Law Clerk and meets the requirements of this Assembly.

Additionally, I would note for members of the Assembly that it is similar in nature to that passed by other legislatures throughout our nation.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members. I think this is a very worthwhile Bill that has been presented today on private members' day and allowed to go forward — a private members' Bill — which is an unusual circumstance in this legislature as a whole.

Very seldom, Mr. Chairman, does a private members' Bill actually even receive second reading, let alone go to Committee of the Whole and pass through this Assembly. In the time that I have been here, since 1991, this will only be the third time that that has happened.

I believe that the Bill that the member opposite has presented is a good step forward in bringing our communities together and in recognition of what has happened in previous times and, in some small way, Mr. Chairman, is a step forward in reconciling for all of us the events that happened in the past.

I wonder if the member could tell us what the plans are for the communities in recognizing Holocaust Memorial Day, when it will be celebrated and, to what extent he can, how it will be celebrated across the province.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would say to the member that April 22, as I understand, is Yom haShoah. The Regina Jewish community will be observing Yom haShoah on the 22nd and will be having a ceremony at the temple here.

And Saskatoon, as I understand it, will be a week later on the 29th. I understand that they will be having their service as well; they'll be observing it at that point.

In terms of the details, I can certainly provide members of the Assembly with greater detail on those two services when they are held.

I trust that answers the member's question.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Member of Regina Albert South. We in the official opposition, are pleased, Mr. Chairman to be able to support this piece of legislation.

(15:00)

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.

Preamble agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 202 — The Holocaust Memorial Day Act

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I would ask, by leave of the Assembly that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

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

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I ask leave of the House to revert to the 75-minute debate.

Leave granted.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Saskatchewan Rural Revitalization

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise today to speak in favour of this motion to commend the government for initiating a plan to revitalize rural Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, I come to this debate from a fairly wide-ranging experience of life in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, I spent the first few weeks of my life in the town of Kelvington, and I think if I go through all of the places that I've lived in Saskatchewan, it sounds like a bus schedule.

But I like to do that. From the time I was little, I moved from Kelvington to Assiniboia to Kindersley to North Battleford to Regina, and then I left home and moved around a lot. I lived in Birch Hills, Alameda, and Indian Head.

Mr. Speaker, much of my life has been spent in rural Saskatchewan. And I believe that many of the people in this province have deep roots in rural Saskatchewan, either in the small towns and communities or in the farms.

Mr. Speaker, for many decades now this province has been facing the reality of rural depopulation. But rural depopulation is not just a phenomenon of Saskatchewan. It is a reality in most of the places around this world. As farming practices have changed and industrialization has become more and more centred in the urban areas, the rate of rural depopulation has increased.

People go where there is a possibility of getting a job — a job that will help them survive and build for a future. Most often, Mr. Speaker, the places where there are jobs are in the cities.

Unfortunately this reality is a reality that builds upon itself. As people leave the rural areas there are fewer people in the rural workforce. Without an adequate workforce, business is not as likely to locate in these rural areas. It can, and to some extent has, become a vicious circle. Without good jobs available in the rural areas, young people will not stay. They will go to the

urban areas to find work, to seek a future.

In our situation, Mr. Speaker, we have some added difficulties. Because of rural depopulation, services have had to be cut. The rural tax base erodes and less and less people are expected to cover the costs to maintain the services which are essential. Because these services have been cut, rural depopulation increases.

The local general store that has been run by one family for generations closes because there is no one left who is willing to take it on; no one left who's willing to work the long hours that a general store in a small town demands; no one who will give the seven-days-a-week commitment for the small return that it brings. So with no local store, no local grocery, people who retire don't want to settle there. They move to the larger town down the way, at least there there's a grocery store.

Mr. Speaker, as this movement goes ahead the grocery stores shut down, the schools amalgamate, and there are fewer teaching jobs. Mr. Speaker, it feels like, to the people who are living there, that their communities are dying. There is grief. There is pain. And there are not the jobs to sustain the community.

The hospital isn't used enough any longer to justify keeping it open and so more jobs are lost. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those jobs in the hospitals very often are the jobs that supplement farm income that enable the farms to continue. This truly is a vicious circle.

The elevators are shut down in favour of the new high throughput elevator that is capable of serving many communities. More jobs are eliminated. With local elevators closing down and virtually no grain being hauled on the local branch line, the railroad company chooses to shut down the branch line and to tear it out. And again jobs are lost.

This is the story of rural depopulation, the story that causes so much agony for so many people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on. With fewer jobs available and fewer people living in rural communities, the community and the volunteer sectors begin to suffer and break down as well.

As the population drops, the churches are no longer self-sustaining. They operate with grant money for as long as they can, and then they too must amalgamate just so that the basic services are provided for people. Sometimes they close their doors and again there is grief. The church in which my children were baptized, the church in which my parents were buried, or my grandparents were buried shuts down and more of the community is lost.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we are aware of these kinds of grief and when we are aware of the breakdown of community, we can understand the emotions and the pain of the people who live in those areas as they wonder will there be a future here for me, will there be a future here for my children or my grandchildren.

These communities have had good histories, a place where children could grow up. There were many volunteers in small

communities that enabled rinks to operate. But as the jobs closed down, as the communities grew smaller, as the people grew older, they could no longer keep the rinks going and so the communities slowly and more and more quietly shut down. Many people just gave up and moved to the cities.

This is the story of rural depopulation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which causes so much pain. This story . . . this vicious cycle grinds people down. It leaves them feeling frustrated, angry, and hopeless. And in their pain, Mr. Speaker, many of these people look to the government and say what can you do to help us? How can you help rebuild or strengthen or help us revitalize our communities and our rural economy?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have not abandoned the people of rural Saskatchewan. In contrast, we have been working with many of them, seeking ways to support and to help build rural Saskatchewan for today and for the future. This is no small task.

But there are signs of hope. Part of that hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is in our government's view of this province. We see Saskatchewan as one province, as a whole. We do not believe in the politics of division. We do not hire experts from the East to come out here and tell us the way to win elections is to divide people one against the other, to pit urban against rural, or Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal against each other. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we do not pit North against South. In contrast to that, we do see this province as a whole and we recognize that in order for the province to thrive, each part must work to sustain that whole.

It is in this wholeness, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Saskatchewan throughout its history has found its strength — communities pulling together against incredible odds. And we just expand that sense of community out to the whole province and it becomes the people of this province pulling together to overcome the odds, to strengthen the weaker neighbour, to strengthen the weaker partner.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in trying to deal with the realities that some portions of our economy thrive at one time and then fall apart at another time, we have to pull together like that.

We look to the North of our province and we see that there has been little development in decades past. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this last decade and sometime before that, there has been tremendous commitment to help build the North, to help develop the economy there.

And in doing that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government set up a Department of Northern Affairs, which has been ably staffed by the minister from Cumberland. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Department of Northern Affairs has provided much incentive and much encouragement to the people of the North to help build their economy.

With this model, we looked at the need in the rural economy and we realized that there is special need for a focus on that area at this time. And I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that working together we will be able to revitalize the rural economy. Our government is not prepared to let rural Saskatchewan atrophy and break down. We are no more prepared to do that than we would let urban Saskatchewan

break down or northern Saskatchewan break down.

The work of this new ministry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be to help build the economy of rural Saskatchewan. Now it's not that we have been ignoring the needs of rural Saskatchewan. We've been working through our departments of Agriculture and Food, Economic and Co-operative Development, Energy, Mines, and Resources, and most of the other departments to try and help encourage and stimulate the rural economy.

(15:15)

But we believe that this new ministry will help to focus the work of those areas; will help to facilitate that work and make it more productive. We will make sure through this ministry that everything possible is being done to help revitalize the rural economy. This ministry will make sure that the needs are not ignored and that the opportunities are not missed, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is vitally important for us to note that there are opportunities in rural Saskatchewan. It can be a tremendous place to live. Fresh air, fresh water, great neighbours, community, and many other resources make rural Saskatchewan a place of countless possibilities.

Last year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government set up ACRE, the Action Committee on the Rural Economy, and I've been privileged to serve as a member of that committee. Many of the members of ACRE live and work in rural Saskatchewan.

They are business people; they are involved in local government, in local communities, in schools, in agriculture. They are involved in a wide variety of aspects of the rural economy. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can say they are a bunch of great people who are very committed to economic development in rural Saskatchewan.

Their committee mandate makes this clear. The recommendations of ACRE will be crucial to the work of the ministry of Rural Revitalization.

Listen, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the goal of ACRE:

A network of strong dynamic rural communities all across Saskatchewan, communities that can grow and prosper through sustainable rural economic development: a viable agricultural sector that provides opportunity and prosperity for today's and tomorrow's rural residents; communities where people are secure in the knowledge that they and their children can look forward to a bright future.

This is a laudable goal, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a big challenge that is set before the Action Committee on the Rural Economy, and a big challenge that is set before the ministry of Rural Revitalization. But working together we will reach that goal.

In ACRE the work is divided up as follows: agriculture, dealing with the agricultural situation; agri-value, where value is added to agricultural products; resources, which can be mines resources, it can be oil and gas; rural manufacturing; rural service; farm structure and farm incomes . . . (inaudible) . . . in evolution, and tools for economic development. Through those

various areas, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will work together with ACRE and with the rural communities to help develop a great future.

The local REDAs (regional economic development authority) have been working very hard; have come up with many good ideas. This ministry will continue to work with the REDAs to help bring those along.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wanted to talk about — but my time is running out — I wanted to talk about TWC, the amazing corporation, financial corporation, that is set up in Radville. I wanted to talk about the potential with ethanol because there is tremendous potential for the rural areas, and a whole number of other things that are already in place, but my time is running out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my understanding, my belief, that this ministry will provide tremendous success for rural Saskatchewan. And so I move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Sutherland:

That this Assembly commend the Premier and the government for initiating a plan to revitalize rural Saskatchewan through a series of new and ongoing programs to bring diversity, innovation, and an improved quality of life to our rural communities.

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Just before the Chair recognizes the hon. member from Saskatoon Sutherland, I'd like to point out to the hon. member and other hon. members that will participate in this seventy-five minute debate, that the display clocks on the side indicating their time for debate are not working this afternoon, so that they'd keep a close eye on the clock.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I can assure the House I had nothing to do with fixing the clocks so they only go to 10 minutes, because I've become known for my 50 minute speeches, so I've already used up 45 . . . 15 seconds of my time so I'll move right to my comments.

I'm very pleased to second the motion put forward by the member from Regina Qu'Appelle. And I have a couple of points that I want to talk about.

The first thing I'd like to do is quote from a book of a good friend of mine. The second thing I'd like to do is outline some of the plans that this government has in place and also to touch on some of the results of our initiatives in the past years and share some good news stories with the House concerning the entrepreneurial spirit in rural Saskatchewan.

The book I'm referring to is *Don't Turn Out the Lights* by my good friend, Al Scholz. And the subtitle is *Entrepreneurship in Rural Saskatchewan*. And the first paragraph in the introduction reads, quote:

"Would the last one to leave, please turn out the lights!" is a quip familiar to Saskatchewan residents, particularly in times of economic uncertainty. Yet the Human Development Index of the United Nations, which has consistently listed Canada as the best country in the world in which to live, lists Saskatchewan as the leading province in this great country. But do we celebrate this achievement? Not often enough! Modesty often does not allow us to admit that we are not only good, but the best!

"Saskatchewan," we are quick to tell ourselves — and anyone else who will listen — "is far from perfect." That may be true, but we're still better than anywhere else in the world.

It goes on later on, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

It may surprise us to learn that as entrepreneurs, we are among the best in the world. And we prove it every day! Our province is rich in both human and natural resources, and our products and services find their way into every corner of the globe.

Mr. Speaker, there's many good news stories out in rural Saskatchewan. But is there enough? Absolutely not.

I was born and raised in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know about rural Saskatchewan and I know what needs to happen to keep people in rural Saskatchewan and to grow in rural Saskatchewan. There's no reason to . . . Unless there's a reason to live there and to grow, people won't stay in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

The Industrial Revolution that started in England 150 years ago basically . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I was not there, as the member from Estevan attests, and I'm sure she can witness the fact that I wasn't there. She didn't see me when she was there.

But one of the things that happened during the Industrial Revolution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that people organized and provided services on the needs. And a little bit of that happened in Saskatchewan. The depopulation of rural Saskatchewan to urban; the people moving from rural England to urban England — that happened because of the Industrial Revolution.

And I can attest to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The community that my father was born and raised in, by all intents purposes does not exist. Yet he tells stories of having the three or four stores, the grain elevator, the school, all of these wonderful things, the gas stations.

In fact, his father told him that he remembers the first time that the government of the day decided to clear the roads in the wintertime, and he thought that that was the biggest waste of money. That's an aside for the critic for Highways, that we've come a long way in the last 75 years. But I digress.

What I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker, is that the time . . . the distance between communities in rural Saskatchewan is shrinking and shrinking. Where you used to be able to haul your grain into town and be back in time for supper — that was only a six-mile trip. Now it can be 120-kilometre trip.

So what are the plans that this government are implementing, basically are in the rural revitalization and on the ACRE committee.

Rural Saskatchewan is an excellent place to live and raise a family. It affords a quality of life that is second to none, with clean environment and safe communities. But is only with the co-operative effort through all people in that community that rural Saskatchewan will grow and prosper.

Some of the examples in this most recent budget relating to oil and gas industries, which are playing an increasingly important role in the rural economy. This government significantly expands geoscience research, mapping and technical data services to encourage further exploration.

Small businesses, Mr. Speaker, are the key — are the key — to rural revitalization because without small businesses, small businesses are the ones that actually create the vast majority of jobs in this province, and all across this country in fact. And what this government has done is bring in a small-business reduction in the income tax that they're required to pay; in fact, a 25 per cent reduction.

I notice, Mr. Speaker, in some of the clippings a week before the budget, some of the business groups in Saskatchewan and in my community, Saskatoon, were calling on this government to send a signal to the business community all across the province, including rural Saskatchewan. What they were asking for was a reduction in the corporate income tax rate from 8 per cent to 6 per cent. The Minister of Finance reduced the corporate income tax from 8 per cent to 6 per cent.

They also asked for the amount of income, the tax rate, be increased from 200,000 to 300,000. The Minister of Finance did that on budget day, Mr. Speaker.

As well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Small Business Loans Association will make available \$5 million in loans to medium and small businesses throughout Saskatchewan. Over 80 per cent of these loans will be made to companies in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, there's two important components that are required for people in rural Saskatchewan. The first one is education. We need to have an educated workforce, and that is happening in this budget through education. Some of the key points in education are the largest tax . . . largest increase in education spending to happen in some time.

In fact, one of the most important points that the Minister of Finance pointed out, and seared in my brain, that 10 years ago approximately, more money was spent on interest to service the debt than was paid in education. That's horrible, Mr. Speaker.

But what we've done today, with a lot of the good stewardship that we've been provided with consecutive Finance ministers on this side of the House, is that we now spend twice as much money on education than we do on servicing the debt. And I think that that's a testament to the forethought of the members on this side of the House.

A second point is transportation, Mr. Speaker. I know the

member . . . the opposition critic on Highways genuinely raised some serious concerns on the twinning of the No. 1, and also the conditions of the roads.

We've responded, Mr. Speaker. It's important that the market . . . the products that the markets are made in rural Saskatchewan, can be transported. And that's happening. Another point is technology, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With CommunityNet, Saskatchewan will be the leader in bringing high-speed broadband Internet access to all of its residents. There's a significant number of building blocks that are occurring, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in rural Saskatchewan.

Some of the examples in Europe where they've been able to grow their business and have their economy turn around, is Ireland. And what they've done, Mr. Speaker, is they've focused on two points — education, which I've already covered, and taxes, which I'm now about to cover in greater detail.

The personal income tax that was announced last year, over three years, is now implementing. That will be putting over \$400 million back in the pockets of Saskatchewan residents. So there's all sorts of good news stories out there, Mr. Speaker, and in the last minute I'd like to talk to a few of them.

Parenteau Gourmet Foods in Langham is one example of the business that they've had. And this is based on entrepreneurial spirit, as well as assistance from the government.

Some of the fastest growing companies in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, are in rural Saskatchewan. IMI Brokerage Company in Duck Lake, employing four people. A couple of others ones, and many of them are co-operatives, Mr. Speaker. The Lake Lenore Co-op, employing eight people. The Tugaska Co-op Association, employing 17. Schweitzer Enterprises in Eston with twelve. A whole number of communities, Mr. Speaker.

Used oil recycling depot opens in Meadow Lake — that's another good story. Organic food produces family business. Yorkton teen grapples with its success, over 29,000 hits on his Internet Web site, Mr. Speaker. There's all kinds of good news that are going on, Mr. Speaker. A local company develops software for North American building industry. There's tons of good news stories in this province, Mr. Speaker. And we need to ensure that we provide the infrastructure required. And this government is doing that.

(15:30)

I'd like to conclude, Mr. Speaker, with a quote again from Al Scholz's book:

It is better to aim for the sky and hit the post than aim for the post and hit the ground.

Mr. Speaker, this government is aiming for the sky, and I believe that we can succeed in hitting higher than the post. And I'm pleased to support the motion put forward by the member from Regina Qu'Appelle.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It gives me pleasure to stand and to speak today on this particular motion that has been brought forward by the member from the government side. However, I want to say that when I read the motion I was struck by the sheer audacity of such self-congratulatory expression.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've had 10 years of this government and, all of a sudden, rural revitalization has come to the forefront. What happened to the previous decade, the lost decade of rural revitalization initiatives? What happened in rural Saskatchewan? What concern did this government show to rural Saskatchewan in the last 10 years?

I think the answer is very clear and plain. I think the people of rural Saskatchewan would say almost unanimously that this government has ignored rural Saskatchewan in almost every way by their policies and their initiatives and their sheer disdain of their concerns in the rural areas.

I'm pleased to stand here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to address this issue for one specific reason, and that is that I believe the concerns of rural Saskatchewan were what propelled me into the political arena.

I've said on several occasions previously that I moved to this province in 1982, took up residence in rural Saskatchewan, and was happy to be part of a very industrious and proud people in southwest Saskatchewan. I think I can say with some certainty that that industriousness and that pride is exhibited by people throughout rural Saskatchewan, throughout the entire province.

I can say with some certainty, too, that those people have done everything possible to not just maintain their standards of living, not just to maintain their communities and the viability of them, not just to maintain the status quo, but to persevere and to try and move forward.

In most of the instances where those initiatives have been undertaken, it has only been the perseverance of the local people that have allowed progress, and many times in spite of the policies of this government.

Let me tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the population decline in the area where I live. I alluded to this in a speech I gave earlier and I accredited the regional library in Swift Current with these statistics. So they're not my own statistics, they're not fabricated in any respect.

But in the last 30 years a population of 15,000 people has disappeared from southwest Saskatchewan. That's roughly an area twice the size of the constituency of Cypress Hills. So by extrapolation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could say that roughly half of those people who have gone, have actually vacated the area now contained in the perimeter of the Cypress Hills constituency boundaries — 7,000 people gone in 30 years.

If you look at that number of people, that would wipe out the entire community of Maple Creek, the entire community of Gull Lake, and I believe the entire community of Leader. Those are the three largest communities in my constituency. The 7,000 people that we have lost in the last 15 years would obliterate those entire communities.

Now I have to say that we are sparsely populated and underrepresented in terms of government services. But this decline in population is, as the member from Regina Lumsden alluded to, part of the problem in terms of services in rural Saskatchewan.

And even though we might say that the decline in rural population is endemic in countries around the world, that it's not unique to this province, the question I need to ask is: why did it have to happen at the rate it did? Was it accelerated? Was that depopulation trend accelerated by the policies of this government over the last decade? I think conclusively the answer is yes.

And I believe that this government has to take a lot of responsibility for the situation that has developed. When I listened to the member from Regina Lumsden speak in defence of his motion, I noticed that he gave us a history lesson of what has been.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am here today to say that that's not good enough. A government needs to deal with what ought to be, what can be, what the promises need to be for the future. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that the record of this government speaks loud and clear to the failures of this government.

I brought with me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, several expressions of concern that have come from constituents. This particular report here was prepared by the Cypress Hills Regional Economic Development Committee. And it talks about the desperate need for highway infrastructure and initiatives in the area of transportation renewal for the southwest.

What this document outlines is the intricate and detailed steps that voluntary committee went through to put forward a workable plan. They brought it to the Minister of Highways in May 1998, and I'm quoting from the document here that says:

We presented a brief outlining our concerns, indicating that these roads required upgrading, not a lowering of standards if economic viability of the region was to be maintained.

They requested that the province lay out a long-term plan that would see these routes rebuilt to a standard that would meet the current and emerging needs of the region. But this is the most telling part of this paragraph, these few short words:

This presentation was for the most part ignored.

Immediately following the appointment of the subsequent Minister of Highways, the committee again presented their concerns to the department in Regina. Again the presentation appeared to fall on deaf ears, and to date no effort has been made by the province to sit down with this group to develop a long-term plan that would meet the transportation needs of this province.

This document goes on to say:

We pride ourselves in self-reliance and in our ability to adapt to changing environments. And all that is missing in our equation for a prosperous future is co-operation from the provincial government in providing a transportation

system that will accommodate the needs of our residents.

I could go on and quote from this document at length, but I think you get the point. The point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that the people of the southwest, and by extrapolation we can assume the people of the entire rural region of this province, are prepared to take the initiative and do what they can for their own sake. They are prepared to invest their time and energy into seeing their communities prosper.

What they find to be the most degrading impact on those initiatives is a heartless government or a government that has so much red tape and bureaucracy associated with regulation that these initiatives are stymied right from the outset.

Let me read, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a letter that appeared in one of the local papers in rural Saskatchewan. And it comes from the mayor of the town of Eastend, and she says that:

After looking at the budget and the lack of support for municipalities, there's one thought on my mind — forced amalgamation. The method of forcing and accomplishing this has changed but the effect is certainly there in my view.

She goes on to express her concern with so much of what has happened in rural Saskatchewan, but she goes specifically to the issue of municipalities being hit with the high cost of operating the communities and the loss of the tax base. In particular she mentions elevator closures:

We struggle with our budget, trying to decide what services we can . . . (inaudible) . . . in order to protect our property owners from large increases in the mill rate. There comes a point it is too costly to our residents to live here with the loss of services.

She goes on to explain that this government has failed rural communities in a big way, not just with this last budget but with previous budgets.

This letter here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is from the RM (rural municipality) of Frontier. They are talking about removing themselves from the province. The frustration levels are so great in that RM, they have written this letter to the Premier. It's addressed to the Premier of the province in which they outline exactly why they want to leave the authority and the jurisdiction of the province of Saskatchewan.

Do you think that comes as a result of initiatives that a government has shown that they care about rural Saskatchewan? I think it proves exactly the opposite, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I have another major letter here from a supplier who had a business. He was based in Alberta. He set it up in Gull Lake, and all the government regulations that have forced him to withdraw his operation and centre it in the city of Medicine Hat.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are positive things happening in rural Saskatchewan, but they are not a direct result of this government. They are a direct result of the absolute total commitment of people in rural Saskatchewan to survive.

They're innovative and they are determined.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in conclusion today, I would like to move an amendment to the motion. I think the best amendment I could summarize would be: too little, too late. But I have a little more lengthy amendment.

I would move:

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

that we urge the government to finally put forward a real vision and a plan for strengthening the economy of rural Saskatchewan and the entire province that extends beyond slogans and the creation of another government department and bureaucracy with a mandate that even the minister can't fully explain.

This is moved by myself and it's seconded by the member from Saltcoats.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to take part in this that's something as near and dear to my heart. Because I've sat out there in rural Saskatchewan for the past 10 years and watched what this government has done to rural Saskatchewan and, in turn, what hurts rural Saskatchewan, hurts urban Saskatchewan, hurts all of Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I found it quite interesting that in the budget we have the new office of revitalization and, when asked questions, the Minister of Highways and Transportation last week couldn't really explain what the office would be doing to revitalize rural Saskatchewan.

Well in the media scrum I think her comment was that really all they were there for was to coordinate departments that are already there. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if these departments had anything going for them at all, we'd have seen some life out in rural Saskatchewan out of this government, and we have saw nothing to this point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can't go out into rural Saskatchewan, choke them off for nine and a half or ten years and then come running around Saskatchewan with a half a little bottle of oxygen and say, oh here — air, everything's going to be fine now. I mean, hello, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it just isn't going to work. People out there are not going to fall for this one from this government.

I'm glad to join the member for Cypress Hills and to put in an amendment to this somewhat . . . Well I won't go there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it's nothing more than a joke — revitalizing rural Saskatchewan — after you've underfunded, choked them off, cut them in every department you could probably find, and wonder why in the last election in 1999 you pretty well got shut out in rural Saskatchewan; you hardly got a seat out there.

And they sit there now and think, well, we'll turn this around; we'll replace some of the people in this side in the next election. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I got news for them — no one on this side in the next election is going to lose. In fact the only thing we're going to lose on this side is this side because we're going to be on that side, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to do a little review, a little review for the members opposite. What have they done for rural Saskatchewan since they came to power in 1991?

I'd like to start with agriculture, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because agriculture, one of the most important parts of this province, is hurting badly out there. And partly because of low grain prices, low commodity prices. But partly because this government cancelled GRIP (gross revenue income program), said they were going to replace it with a long-term safety net, and to this point, what have we got? Nothing. Rural revitalization and nothing more. Another broken promise by this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

(15:45)

I'll tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in '90-91, the Saskatchewan budget for Agriculture was \$1.1 billion. Do you know what it was last year, Mr. Deputy Speaker? — \$240 million, less than 25 per cent of what it was in 1990.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they wonder why rural Saskatchewan is going down the tubes. Here is a prime example when you pay that kind priority to one of the biggest parts of our economy in this province. You pay lip service to it, but that's all you pay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a number of other policies that are really detrimental to the well-being of our agriculture industry and some of the things that that government has actually stood up and hollered for, is the protection of our Canadian Wheat Board, for an example.

They want to be able to control farmers — where you sell your grain, how you sell your grain, how much you get for that grain. But when it comes time to helping those farmers, because they aren't getting much for their grain, they run and hide and they aren't there to help us.

That's why we were stuck with AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) and that's why we're probably going to be stuck with a new program, because they don't get to the table when they should be there and we don't have part in making up these programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I'd also like to go on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and talk about municipalities. Municipalities, another thing near and dear to my heart. Municipalities who were front and centre last week. Municipalities that were cut out of this budget completely, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

One thing, if you want to help revitalize rural Saskatchewan, help our municipalities build our infrastructure out there, that we need for a number of things. We need it for our economic

development. We need it for tourism. Everywhere we turn for business in rural Saskatchewan, we need our road network.

Your government has saw fit to cut two-thirds of the municipal budget for rural Saskatchewan in the last 10 years. That's not how you revitalize rural Saskatchewan. That's how you help kill rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's move on to health care, another area where this government is definitely lacking.

Tommy Douglas would be just rolling in his grave if he could see today what these people have done to medicare and our health system, which he was known for helping to build. And these people opposite like to say, well Tommy was one of us.

Well I'm sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Tommy had a vision. This government has no vision for rural Saskatchewan. In fact for that matter, they don't have a vision for any part of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, part of the leader's program, when he was running for the leadership, said he was going to buy a bus. Well my advice to the Premier and to the members opposite, it's time to get on the bus, Gus, because you've got to get out there and see what's really happening.

I mean you can sit in here and talk all you want, but the members on this side, every weekend when we're in here, go home and talk to rural people. We talk with intelligence, because . . . we talk because we know these people out there; we know what's hurting them out there; we know what they need out there. And the members opposite haven't even got the bus fuelled up yet, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, education — another integral part of Saskatchewan. And what's happening to it out in rural Saskatchewan? Schools are closing. In every constituency we either know of schools that have closed or others that are fighting to stay open. It's on a continuous basis, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In my own area last year, MacNutt school closed. This year I have the school in Bredenbury fighting for their survival, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In areas around me — the member for Yorkton would appreciate this — Ebenezer, Theodore downsized, Rhein, all in our local area. That's five, six schools in a small area, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That can't continue if we're going to survive out there.

When we get to government and get things turned around, and the population in rural Saskatchewan starts to grow, we're going to need them schools open, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it would be far easier to keep a number of them open now than have to build new ones at that point when the government with a vision gets in power in this province, turns this province around, and instead of a million people we'll have a million-five people in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our towns and villages out there are hurting. In every town out there right now we could probably show you an example of where a school is closed, a store is closed, a restaurant is closed, we may have lost the post office.

A number of small towns, due to a lot of our environmental regulations, don't even have gas pumps in those towns right now. And this government is saying we're going to help rural Saskatchewan. To this point they've done everything in their power to run rural Saskatchewan into the ground.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, again we have a government that's old, tired, with no vision. It's time to move over, members opposite, call an election, and let a government with a vision take over, people that know what it'll take to get this province back on its feet.

As I said before, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's time to get the bus fuelled up. It's time to get on the bus, come out and see what we're talking about, what we hear every day from rural people. Because I realize they can't help it at this point. They have no rural members on that side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but they can come out, visit rural Saskatchewan.

Rural Saskatchewan people are friendly, and even in spite of what they've done for 10 years, I think will treat them with respect and explain to them what we need in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it should have been a sign to these people when in the last election we elected 26 rural members. The message should have got across. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was from a party that was two years old. Many in this province didn't even know if we were here for real.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they know now — we're here to stay. The next election, urban Saskatchewan's coming over like that. We'll be over there, you'll be over here, the few that are left.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm supporting the member from Cypress Hills on the amendment. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker, rural Saskatchewan is a great place to live and raise a family. Now this we know from the people we talk to and from our experiences in rural Saskatchewan, because it's not something we're ever going to hear from the members opposite.

Rural Saskatchewan offers a quality of life that is second to none, with a very clean environment and safe communities. But rural Saskatchewan also faces many new, along with old, challenges that require a co-operative effort to overcome. And, Mr. Speaker, we can speak of this in terms of rural Saskatchewan, but really it affects us all in urban and rural. These are problems that we all have to look at and address.

That is why this government created the ministry of Rural Revitalization to help develop solutions in the long-term plan for the future success of our communities. Working with provincial departments and other agencies, the Rural Revitalization office will ensure that provincial programs and services contribute to connecting rural Saskatchewan to the future.

Mr. Speaker, on a per capita basis our government provides more support for the agri-food sector than any other province, and well over three times the support provided by the federal government. Saskatchewan's expenditures in this sector were \$310 per capita in 1999-2000, compared to the federal expenditures of \$94 per capita in the same period.

Saskatchewan also provides significant support to our producers through tax exemptions, tax rebates for fuel, fertilizer, machinery, and a wide variety of other farm inputs.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is committed to working with other provinces and the federal government to ensure that this funding leverages appropriate federal support for farm programs that make sense for our producers and our province. The 2001-2000 budget provided 95 million in new funding for the farm sector initiatives.

This budget also provides a future look with new investments in key areas that will help farmers continue to adapt to change. There is also increased investment in agriculture research and development, and this will help our Saskatchewan producers maintain and advance their place in world markets.

The commitment of this government to the growth and prosperity of rural Saskatchewan is strong and more alive than ever, Mr. Speaker. This commitment was displayed in the recent budget through the forum of new and existing initiatives to keep rural Saskatchewan strong.

Geoscience research, mapping, and technical data is significantly expanded to encourage further exploration of oil and gas. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all agree that this is a very important part of our Saskatchewan economy. The CO₂ enhanced recovery projects such as the one in Weyburn, as well as various tax incentives, will also help the industry expand.

Mr. Speaker, Small Business Loans Association will make 5 million available in loans to small- and medium-sized businesses in Saskatchewan. And these businesses are one of the largest generators of jobs in our province.

As well, the regional economic development authorities will receive more than 2 million this year. And beginning July 2001, small-business corporate income tax rates will be reduced from 8 per cent to 6 per cent — a 25 per cent decrease that was very well-received throughout Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I sat for a time on the South Central Community Futures Board where we promoted small-business creation throughout rural south central area. It was always an amazement, the creativeness of the people of Saskatchewan — the ideas they had for small businesses in their communities and in their rural areas. These businesses were extremely successful and there was a number of them. Initiatives like this throughout the province have helped a great deal.

Mr. Speaker, our government was proud to announce the pushing ahead of plans for twinning on the Trans-Canada Highway. The twinning will be completed between the Alberta border and Tompkins in the year 2004 — four years ahead of schedule.

This year on that section we will pave and open 19 kilometres from the Alberta border to the east. We will also begin grading 21 kilometres that will take road construction to the junction of Highway 21 at Maple Creek.

Our budget ensures that rural roads will be improved as well. In partnership with the federal government, we will be investing 67.5 million for major improvements to our rural and northern road systems. These roads are the veins in and out of rural communities and we must keep them running smoothly for the rural communities to survive and prosper. Without the proper transportation systems, economic development cannot happen.

Mr. Speaker, we are a province that exports almost 40 . . . or 80 per cent of the goods and products produced in this province. And without good roads, we lose markets. The commitment to restore these roads and to expand on the system is a good one for all us in Saskatchewan.

The federal government will help by providing \$106 million for the prairie grain roads program over the next five years to upgrade highways and roads impacted by grain haul. The province will receive from this program 14.9 million for each of the next five years from the federal government and will match the funding to enhance this program in our province.

The first stage in connecting rural communities to the future will be done through the CommunityNet program. CommunityNet will encourage the development of enhanced Internet services to rural communities across our province. Schools, post-secondary institutions, and the health care sector in 366 communities will receive improved Internet and networking services.

High-speed Internet access will develop all over Saskatchewan, allowing businesses in rural communities to plug in, participate, communicate, and thrive in this new digital economy.

The quality of life in rural Saskatchewan has, I mean, just tremendous potential, and when you look at our population spread over this huge area of this province that we call Saskatchewan, the Internet is . . . the opportunities are just boundless, Mr. Speaker.

To build on that potential and to help rural communities grow, the province will enhance immigration programming. Bringing skilled, successful people to this province and keeping those people here is important to the rural communities and the province as a whole.

As well, making sure that our bright and educated students stay in Saskatchewan is another commitment of this government. In keeping with this commitment, our government will invest 8.7 million to upgrade infrastructure, provide Internet access, and develop on-line learning resources.

(16:00)

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's many more opportunities to speak of that affect both rural and urban Saskatchewan. But one thing that we know in this province is that the well-being of one sector depends on the other, so these are things that we have to work at together.

Despite the challenges, rural Saskatchewan boasts many economic success stories. Increases in intensive livestock operations, food processing, local businesses, and a strong investment in agricultural research and biotechnology are creating diversity and growth in many regions of the province. Revitalizing rural Saskatchewan is a key focus for this government, Mr. Speaker. Working closely with rural residents and communities, we will provide the education, transportation, and technology needed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not be supporting the amendment but I will be pleased to support the motion put forward by the member from Regina Qu'Appelle.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Deputy Speaker, pardon me. Mr. Deputy Speaker, certainly a pleasure to stand in this Assembly this afternoon to speak to this debate. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I look at the motion before us, and I'm somewhat appalled as I read this motion:

That this Assembly commend the Premier and the government for initiating a plan to revitalize rural Saskatchewan through a series of new and ongoing programs to bring diversity, innovation, and improved quality of life to our rural communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, why I find this motion very interesting is that it appears that this government is finally beginning to realize that there are people living in this province who live outside of the two major centres of Regina and Saskatoon. And it's unfortunate, however, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it has taken the government that long to begin to realize that fact.

I think the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow, I believe, just talked about the fact that in the province of Saskatchewan we trade and we export basically 80 per cent of the commodities that we produce, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which shows the importance of the rural community in the revitalization of this province.

And it's unfortunate that the government and the newly elected Premier have all of a sudden just decided now, we've got to pay attention a little bit to rural Saskatchewan. In view of the fact that when they were elected in 1991 . . . I believe the public of Saskatchewan elected the NDP in good faith, or at least they thought they were voting in good faith. Unfortunately, they barely cast their ballot and the ink barely dried on the ballots and then the NDP began their major program of dismantling rural Saskatchewan.

And my colleagues have talked about it; they've talked about the GRIP contracts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They've talked about the closure of 52 hospitals in this province, including the Plains Health Centre, which is 53 hospitals, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And then I hear members opposite who are talking about debt that has been created for a number of years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And as my colleague from Canora-Pelly pointed out today, the government likes to talk about and the Finance minister and the newly elected Premier of this province like to talk about how well they've managed.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we have seen, as they have done with rural Saskatchewan, they are trying to snow the public of Saskatchewan again with the way they manage the books, with the way they present the books.

And if we want to get into the debate on the budget of this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if they really want to talk about finances, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will accommodate them. We will certainly accommodate them and we will let the public of Saskatchewan know that they need to look beyond that nice little picture of the General Revenue Fund and begin to look at the overall picture. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of this province and the taxpayers of this province are responsible for that overall debt that is accumulating in the province of Saskatchewan.

But as we talk about rural revitalization, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the government would have given more consideration, would have given more thought to the dismantling of the GRIP program, and if, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as they indicated when they dismantled GRIP, they indicated that they would come up with a long-term safety net that would meet the needs of rural Saskatchewan, meet the needs of the farm community so that young families could continue to live in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, had the government even paid attention to the comments and to the recommendations that they were making at the time back in 1991, we may not be debating this topic right now.

Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while GRIP was dismantled, while people said it was unaffordable, while they said it wouldn't work, the facts are, had that program continued to develop . . . It basically had nine years to build upon itself so that today it would have something that the farmers could look at as a guarantee. And I'll guarantee, Mr. Deputy Speaker, people would still find holes in it, but would do more than what this government is doing today to agriculture in Saskatchewan.

And I believe my colleague from Saltcoats pointed out the fact of the commitment that this government has to rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What is their commitment? Prior to 1991 when this government was elected to form government in the province of Saskatchewan, that agriculture was recognized for the importance and the economic value and activity, economic activity it presented in the province of Saskatchewan. But where do we see it today? It's basically on the bottom of the list, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and yet it plays a very integral and important role in our economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as well when it comes to health care. Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . (inaudible) . . . we closed 52 hospitals across rural Saskatchewan and 53 including the Plains Health Centre, Mr. Deputy Speaker. People in rural Saskatchewan need access to health care as well.

Not everyone can come and be accommodated in the cities of Regina and Saskatoon. In fact I think that people in these large urban centres would say we really can't; we really don't have the beds to look after the patients that we have and the health care needs of our two larger centres.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a need for health care delivery services in rural Saskatchewan and it's taken this government

almost 10 years to recognize that fact. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we look forward to the Fyke Commission report that is going to be released, I believe, tomorrow, and then see what Mr. Fyke is going to recommend in regards to health care delivery services in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we talk about rural revitalization. I checked with some of my RMs today just to see exactly where they stand in regards to the funding or the lack thereof that this government has provided to rural municipalities.

And what I'm finding, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm finding that most of the RMs are finding that they are going to probably have to increase their mill rate — some marginally, some even higher. And in some cases, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are finding that also they're very worried about what the mill rate will be coming from the local school boards, the district school boards.

Some of my RMs are already indicating that they're hearing that they're going to be asked to add another mill or whatever to the tax base, which means, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while the Minister of Finance, while this Premier, while this government talks about reducing taxes, on one hand that may be true, but on the other hand they turn around and they reach into your other pocket and they actually draw the taxes out in another form.

They draw the taxes out through the rural tax base or through the property owner. Let's, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's get this clear. It's the property owner, not just in rural Saskatchewan but in the larger urban centres, that are facing the tax grab in the area of property taxes and education taxes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at this motion we have to ask ourselves: how sincere, how sincere is this government in their commitment to governing all of Saskatchewan, not just a small area?

The only reason they're talking about a bus, the only reason they're talking about revitalizing rural Saskatchewan, is because of their desperate attempt to cling to power in the province of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe when the next . . . when this Premier calls the next general election the people of Saskatchewan will let him know exactly what they think of his rural revitalization program. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I wish to advise the Assembly that the 65-minute debate has expired and that we will be now going into a 10-minute session for questions and comments.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question is for the member from Regina Qu'Appelle, the farmer from northwest Regina.

Mr. Speaker, the hiring of eight new bureaucrats for \$800,000 to build the Department of Rural Revitalization is nothing but featherbedding for the NDP, a place to put people like Dennis Gruending, the defeated NDP MP . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, what about John Solomon. The whole NDP initiative, Mr. Speaker, has been to build bigger government to aid the NDP in the cities, not to provide any revitalization into rural Saskatchewan.

Will the member from Regina Qu'Appelle support our amendment to change the wrong-headed direction of this government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really . . . I have some difficulty with the tone in which the question is asked. Because I've made very clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am not a farmer and I resent the sarcasm that continually comes from that member pushing on that. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I make very clear that I am not a farmer but I do care about farming and I do care about rural Saskatchewan, as our government does.

This \$800,000 that goes into this department, as you well know if you look at it and think about it, is money that will be well used — will be well used — to help bring together the work that is being done from the various departments. We'll focus it and make it much more effective.

It is absolutely foolish, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to think that you can do these programs without people involved and in order to get people involved you have to pay them. The foolishness that comes from that other side around this issue is unbelievable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do they not care about the good employees who work to try and improve this province? That's my question to you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question is for the member from Cypress Hills. I noted with great interest that he felt that an impediment to growth in rural Saskatchewan was regulations.

So I had a couple of questions for him. The Economic and Co-operative Development minister has released a Partnership for Prosperity and in that was a goal to reduce regulations by 25 per cent. But my question for the member from Cypress Hills is: does he support that portion of the Partnership for Prosperity; and secondly, which regulations would he identify that he would like removed as impediments to growth in rural Saskatchewan?

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I don't object to a question of that nature at all. Frankly I would support any initiative by any government to reduce regulation. And if the government has undertaken an initiative in that area, I think it's well-intentioned and probably long overdue.

I guess the thing that confounds me about this is that regulation has been a detriment to development in rural Saskatchewan and indeed all of Saskatchewan for a long time. This sudden interest in elimination of regulation, I would say, represents possibly the greatest conversion of history outside of the one which St. Paul experienced on the road to Damascus some centuries ago.

The fact of the matter is that there are regulations of all types in all jurisdictions that confound initiative, that stymie development. And I will not speak directly to specific regulations, but if the other member would like to look at the

letter I referred to in my speech earlier today, I'd be glad to share that with him. That will give him an idea of some of the regulations that need attention.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question is for the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

In his motion I believe he says, part of it is, to bring an improved quality of life to our rural communities.

Well I have a community out there, Marquis; they're closing the school. They'd approached the Rural Revitalization minister's office over a month and a half ago. Never got an answer back.

They've got a plan. They're close enough to Moose Jaw; also they've got some younger kids, about two, three, four, that they know that's going to be coming to that school; Marquis being close to Moose Jaw is going to grow. They wanted some direction from that office, minister's office, to work on a business plan.

They've got a business plan that they were working on with the school board and they wanted some help, and they phoned over a month and a half ago. To this day yet, have yet to get an answer back. And this is people in that community that are fighting to keep that school open. And I thought that's what this office was supposed to be for.

My question is: how come they have yet to get an answer back?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(16:15)

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the answer to that, Mr. Speaker, is no small potatoes. The fact is that we do care about the citizens of Marquis. We do care about rural schools.

And one of the things that we are doing is we are trying to develop distance education which will help in those areas where the population can no longer sustain a school building and a school operation. We're convinced that that will help.

In direct concern, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last question asked about why we were spending \$800,000, we're spending that money to try and get staff and we are beginning to build this ministry. And when we've got the staff in place, I'll tell you those answers to questions that are mailed in/phoned in will come a lot quicker. We are in the process of doing that.

We've just got this together and they will get some support and they will get some help. They will not be left out there hanging.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the member from Cypress Hills. Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member, did he not vote against a budget that put \$95 million into new farm sector initiatives, Mr. Speaker?

Did he not vote against a budget that put, for the first time, community schools in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker?

Did he not vote against a budget that speeded up the twinning of a highway in his own constituency that he stood time and time again in this House complaining about, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, that member, I've asked him, did he stand and vote against that budget. But that budget also increased overall spending in Highways, Mr. Speaker, a significant amount and over the next three years will spend \$950 million. And he voted against it, Mr. Speaker.

I also ask him, did he not vote against tax cuts, the thing that they pride themselves on, they talk about every day, Mr. Speaker. Did he vote against it?

The Deputy Speaker: — I ask the member to proceed directly to his question.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought we were asked to answer one question, not several.

But in reference to maybe the first question, I think that what I would like to say is that I'm prepared to give credit where credit is due, and I have done it publicly. I have published it in the newspapers of my constituency. I did say that the four-year plan for twinning the highways in the part of the southwest that goes through my constituency was money well spent, and I appreciate it. And I don't mind giving credit where credit is due.

I did vote against the budget. And I don't mind saying that here right now because the budget is an all-encompassing document. I can't support all the rest of the stuff that's in there. There's all kinds of initiatives in that budget that I simply cannot represent in fairness and in good conscience to the people of my constituency.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have a question for the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow. I noted with interest that she was talking about the Internet and all that the government was doing to connect people in rural Saskatchewan to the Internet.

No doubt she will be aware of the initiative in the budget called CommunityNet that was brought in with much ballyhoo by the Minister of Finance at a cost of \$71 million, I think was the price tag on that.

I wonder . . . I have a two-part question for the member. Is she aware that that particular project will be sole sourced by SaskTel? In other words, that it completely excludes all other small IT (information technology) businesses in the province who would like to get involved in that — good private sector businesses.

Is she aware of that, and if she is, does she support that, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. CommunityNet is going to provide services to over 366 communities within this province. And when you look at Saskatchewan, that covers a huge area with just over a million in our population. This is an ideal way to go for us. It is a solution for Saskatchewan for many of the problems that we have.

When you look at the people wishing to upgrade education, I mean this is perfect. You can stay at home, you can do the things that you want to do, you can stay in your community, you can continue with your work, but still advance your education.

And yes, I support SaskTel supplying whatever they can.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — The time of the 75-minute debate has now expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 1 — Information Technology

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure today to be able to rise and speak to a motion that I'll move shortly in the Assembly speaking very specifically to the rapid introduction of modern information technology across this province and through the various sectors.

I was interested to listen to much of the debate that just occurred during the 75-minute debate and the discussion about rural Saskatchewan. I thought it was interesting, the contrasting views that were put forward by members on each side of the Assembly, with the members on this side taking a rather, a rather optimistic approach to how rural Saskatchewan could move forward in these times and the very pessimistic approach put forward by the members of the opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the resolution that I'll be moving at the end of my remarks is:

That this Assembly endeavour to promote the rapid introduction of modern information technology to education, health care, and to individuals, organizations, and businesses across Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are many good things that we can talk about in Saskatchewan today, not the least of which is the way in which our economy has continued to grow during the nine years that this government has been in office.

When I was first elected in 1995, we had just come through a difficult time of balancing the budget, of seeing the economy start to rebound from what had been a very significant recession that the province had entered into. A recession that was not helped by the dramatic overspending of the previous administration or by the fact that it had driven up the debt to such an extent.

Today, of course, the members opposite would like to pretend that they had nothing to do with that debt being built; they had

nothing to do with the billions and billions and billions of dollars in interest that flew . . . that was sent out of this province to pay for the interest costs alone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have come a long way since 1995, and a much longer way since 1991, in terms of the way that this economy of this province works. One of the reasons this economy has responded as well as it has is because of sound investments in infrastructure that we've made across Saskatchewan. Investments made in large part — and I know the member for Swift Current will appreciate this — made in large part by none other than that Crown investment of ours known as SaskTel. SaskTel is a very important part of the economic growth . . . the economic engine of this province, and I think people often miss that point.

Technology today is essential for us to have a modern economy. Well there are many in this Assembly who — I think at least on this side — understand that when that technology is employed in support of industrious labour, that when it is employed by our community organizations, when it is employed by co-operatives across our province, we are able to make better connections to an economy that this . . . that is forever changing in the world.

Saskatchewan's economy has always been linked very significantly into the world economy. We have been fortunate to have enjoyed very good trade relations with many countries around the world. We have been fortunate to find good solid markets for our agricultural products, for our woods products, and for other commodities here in Saskatchewan.

Today, though, we need to think about how to move that economy forward in a new way. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we need today is an investment in more than simply lines of steel that run across our province. We need more than just an investment in good solid asphalt. We need more than just an investment in air transportation services.

We need the ability, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to have our people connect, our businesses connect, individuals connect with the markets across the world.

The Deputy Speaker: — Why is the member on her feet?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Permission to introduce guests, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like to introduce a very special person who is sitting up in the Speaker's gallery. This is a young woman who has just recently graduated with a degree in English literature and is incredibly literate, and as a result is using her good education to good advantage — she has just recently joined our caucus office.

I am referring of course to Miss Sarah Still, who is sitting in the Speaker's gallery. Another reason that I would like to introduce her is because yesterday was a very special day for her —

yesterday was her birthday.

So I would ask all hon. members to join me in welcoming Sarah Still to this Legislative Assembly and in wishing her all the best with her birthday.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 1 — Information Technology (continued)

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's always a pleasure to have young people join us in the gallery, because I think that they understand a great deal of what we are talking about today and the need for us to invest in modern information technology.

I'm saying that one of the things we need to understand today is that our economy is dependent on a lot more than simply the traditional transportation system that has hauled our commodities off to world markets. And certainly today we have an opportunity through modern technology to really enhance the ability for our economy to respond to new opportunities and to help Saskatchewan people stay here in Saskatchewan and make a good solid living.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk today about really five different areas that I think are of very significant importance. Let me start by talking about the investments we made through our Crown sector, and in particular through SaskTel.

SaskTel is one of the oldest Crown corporations here in Saskatchewan. It has a very well-qualified, industrious workforce. It is extremely innovative in terms of its approach, and it is a very successful corporation for us, not only here at home but in terms of its involvement abroad. We've been able to see SaskTel expand a great deal over the past several years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And in terms of its investments that it's been able to make, we have been able to see it support a transition in our economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that the member for Arm River will be interested in SaskTel, even though it has nothing to do with potatoes, but will be interested in what it has to do in terms of helping people in his riding communicate with markets across the world.

One of the things that we have seen members on that side call for over the last several years has been an end to agricultural marketing boards as we know them; that we have seen a rather aggressive attack by several of those members on the Canadian Wheat Board.

I think it's interesting to note that one of the reasons that they make this attack is they say today we no longer need these boards because people can make the decisions themselves, the farmers can make the decisions themselves by working on . . . by making use of modern technology. It's interesting that they say that because of the investments that SaskTel's made in terms of making sure we have high-speed Internet in our rural communities, that people can connect directly into the markets.

I would say to a certain extent they're right, that technology investment is there. That doesn't mean that we should be dismantling our marketing boards, as the members opposite say. But I say this because I think it's interesting in the way that even they have to recognize that our Crown investments are doing a good job of helping Saskatchewan people, Saskatchewan farmers, connect to the modern economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are aware that these are changing times in terms of our economy. It's interesting that in the past year we've seen mining and other . . .

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

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: — Would the member state his point of order.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, just in the previous 75-minute debate, I listened with interest to some of the questions that were brought forward. And there was a question brought forward for the member from Regina Qu'Appelle . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, Regina Dewdney, pardon me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, referring to the way a member votes in the Assembly. And according to rule 32, no member may reflect upon any vote of the Assembly except for the purpose of moving that such a vote be rescinded.

I would ask the Deputy Speaker to review the question that was posed, and whether or not the question did actually supersede the rules of the Assembly, and come back with a ruling.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(16:30)

The Deputy Speaker: — I'd like to thank the hon. member, and yes, we'll come back with a ruling on that. Thank you.

Why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, to bring comment regarding the point of order raised by the hon. member for Moosomin.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the point of order made by the hon. member and I listened carefully to the questions raised by the member from Regina Dewdney earlier.

The hon. member from Regina Dewdney, if I remember correctly, Mr. Deputy Chair, was simply asking for a statement as to what a member did, what position the member took regarding a vote that has been taken in this House.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that the question as raised is entirely in order, is not in violation. It is not unusual in this House. Questions can be asked of members not only at question period but during debate regarding their position, and it is simply in that context that the question was asked. And I would encourage you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to rule the point of order out of order.

The Deputy Speaker: — I thank the hon. member for his

comments, and I will be reviewing *Hansard* and will come back and report accordingly. Thank you very much for your comments.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That 75-minute debate caused a lot of interest among members obviously as we see. And I want to return to my initial comments which were: I think one of the most important things that we are seeing shape up in this Assembly today is the separation between the government members who have an optimistic view for rural Saskatchewan, who have an optimistic view of how we can make our economy move forward, and the opposition members who seem to be suffering from a sense of gloom and doom and unfortunate pessimism about the ability for their neighbours to succeed in this society.

One of the things that this Assembly, in this particular session, the legislature is focusing in on is the important investments that our government are making in terms of infrastructure — infrastructure in highways, infrastructure in terms of investments in new technology.

The motion that I'll be moving later on today focuses very much on information technology. As I was mentioning, one of the things that we are seeing is that new technology is allowing us to connect to different markets and to new markets, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this is of significant importance to us.

One of the things we are noticing as the economy moves forward is that people have an ability regardless of where they live now to find employment connected to other parts of the world. I think of consultants who work in my riding and may very well do business with companies in Toronto or in Calgary or in the United States. They are able to do this in large part because we have the ability through modern information technology to communicate. We have that ability now for us to hook up and hook into other people's economies without us having the actual . . . having to be there.

That's a very important change for us, and I think it's something that is very useful for us here in Saskatchewan to take a look at.

SaskTel has been a very important part of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because SaskTel is a leader in innovation. It is a leader in terms of making sure Saskatchewan is competitive. It's a leader in terms of making sure we have the technology here at home for Saskatchewan people to succeed.

I would say to the members opposite, who I have listened to over the last several weeks deride our Crown corporations, I would say to them: how else are we going to see those kind of investments made here in Saskatchewan, except for the fact Saskatchewan people are making those investments themselves through the Crown Investments.

Is AT&T going to step in? Is Sprint going to step in? Is Rogers going to make the investment? Who are going to make those investments on behalf of Saskatchewan people if not Saskatchewan people themselves?

Now we've seen over the past many years, the members say simply let the market rule. Let the market make the decisions.

They'll come forward. They'll put the money up. They'll ante up and not to worry.

Well we've waited for years and I haven't seen the investments. We've waited for years and we haven't seen anybody else step forward. SaskTel has stepped in, SaskTel has stepped in and has acted on behalf of Saskatchewan people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it will continue to as long as we make sure those members opposite stay on that side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite seem to be exuberant today in terms of their sense that somehow they are going to transform and transcend their past and their history and be able to convince people to once again put them into power over on this side of the House.

I think it's interesting as we take a look at what they've been saying over the past several months when we haven't been in session. When we take a look at what the Leader of the Opposition has been saying in terms of how he would handle those major Crown investments like SaskTel that are making massive investments in infrastructure. What's his solution — sell them off. He's going to put the silverware in the garage sale, I tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is something we are not going to allow happen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite are pessimistic. They say we can't do anything in Saskatchewan. They say, oh, things are going down the drain. It's not true. It's not true.

I take a look around Regina and I see the growth that we have in our economy in a very important area. What's that area, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The area's call centres. We see a lot of growth in terms of jobs in call centres.

Now why is that? That investment is able to happen because SaskTel's put in place an infrastructure that allows these private sector companies to come to Saskatchewan, take advantage of well-educated, well-trained labour, and be able to employ Saskatchewan people to provide services across Canada — across Canada, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That happens because of the big investments that SaskTel's making here in Saskatchewan, here at home.

They're not doing that because any other private sector company has stepped in to help out. They're doing that because they are able to work in partnership with SaskTel and in terms of take advantage of some of the major infrastructure investments that we've made in terms of technology.

Thousands of people today, in Regina, have a job because of the infrastructure investments that we have made on behalf of Saskatchewan people.

The members opposite will say, and I see the member from Wood River leaning back and thinking, you know, that's creeping socialism. That's not creeping socialism; that's assisting capitalism, I would say to that member. And that is

what we are interested in as long as people are able to participate and Saskatchewan people see some return on that investment.

Gone are the days of the big giveaways. Gone are the days when we simply open up the bank account to whoever wants to come in and temporarily take advantage of a situation. We are moving forward in terms of investments and infrastructure. SaskTel is moving forward in terms of its investments here at home. And we are seeing those benefits across Saskatchewan.

Just the other day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Economic Development was able to go and open a high technology communications link, what they call, in simple layman's terms, a big pipe between our two universities of Regina and Saskatchewan . . . the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. This big pipe is going to be able to move a great deal of information back and forth between researchers through SRnet. This is a great advantage that we have been able to work with our universities to be able to involve them in our investment plans and to be able to help spin off additional research money, enable to assist them help Saskatchewan move forward.

As I look back over the record of this government and this administration — for even just the brief six years that I've been here — I reflect on some of the thoughts that we were going through back in 1995-96 about how to better integrate our approach to government; how to get things out of the stovepipes that they came in with the various departments and the various Crowns all operating separately; how were we going to be able to integrate our investment platform so that we could move forward and employ Saskatchewan people and help them move in the next economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a big part of that was the work that we had done through the Department of Post-Secondary Education in terms of making sure Saskatchewan people have access to the knowledge that it takes to participate in the new economy. Part of that has been through investments we've made through SaskTel, part of that has been through investments that we have made by employing very specific tax credits, part of that has been by being able to reduce the sales tax in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all of these things have helped moved our economy forward into the new information age. And I think this is something we have a great deal to be proud of.

SaskTel has done a great job in terms of helping to make sure that very core infrastructure is there for Saskatchewan people, not just here in Regina, not just in Saskatoon or Swift Current or P.A. (Prince Albert), but throughout the province.

This August, this past August, I was particularly pleased to be in Minneapolis, Minnesota at a conference. It was through the CPA (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association). It was with the . . . it was the Midwestern Legislative Conference, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One of the things that we were discussing at this conference was how to take better advantage of technology in terms of helping to stimulate rural communities and to be able to backfill some of the job losses that we were seeing across the Great Plains states and across the Canadian Prairies in the agricultural sector.

It was a particularly interesting set of discussions to listen to American legislators talk about some of the problems they were facing in their communities because indeed they're very similar to some of the problems that we face in some of our rural communities today.

As we see a decline in employment related to agriculture, we know that in order to keep our rural communities stable, in order to maintain services we need to be able to maintain a good, solid economic base. Saskatchewan communities have been able to see a fair amount of diversification and we've seen a great advance in terms of the amount of manufacturing that is going on, but we've also been able to see them be able to take a better advantage of the modern infrastructure, technology infrastructure that's in place as well.

Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota has proposed a Bill in the American Congress which would assist Americans and American communities to be better able to take advantage of this technology. As I reviewed Senator Wellstone's Bill, I was impressed by how similar it was to many of the initiatives that we have introduced here in Saskatchewan in terms of providing incentives, both through SaskTel, through our Department of Post-Secondary Education, and through the telecommunications SCN (Saskatchewan Communications Network) network that we have in place.

I thought it was interesting because often I think that we feel somewhat isolated here in Saskatchewan and we think, oh . . . And certainly if you listen to the opposition, they think it's something only unique to Saskatchewan that we're seeing a loss in agricultural employment. That's not true.

What we're seeing is across the Great Plains states, across the Prairies, many of the similar circumstances, and I think it is interesting that we're are looking at many of the same solutions to respond to them.

I think it's interesting that many of the solutions that we're looking at actually cross partisan lines. Certainly nobody would accuse us on this side of being like the American Republicans. Certainly nobody would accuse us of being like the Democrats in the US (United States). And yet many of the initiatives being taken in American states are very similar to initiatives being taken here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about two other areas that are particularly important to us here in terms of new technology and information that are happening in terms of support of our economy. One of those is the investments that we have been able to make in terms of our Petroleum Technology Research Centre here in Regina. New technology is important for us to make sure that we have a sustainable economy, both that we're able to make the most of our resources but we're able to do it in an environmentally sensitive way as well.

The PTRC here, the Petroleum Technology Research Centre, is a premier centre in terms of us being able to focus on better resource recovery. We're able to do this in large part because we're able to make use of research that happens across the country and be able to work with private sector companies here. An important part of that is the sharing of information and the

information technology component which links up the universities.

This is extremely important to us as we move forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker, into a new economy, an economy that is more conscious of how we should make use of our natural resource wealth which Saskatchewan has an exuberant amount of. But we also are very aware that we need to be cautious in our development approach, that we cannot afford to waste resources through bad technology and through bad decisions as may have happened in the past.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this past month we have been very fortunate by working with the federal government, and I want to congratulate the federal Liberal government for their assistance in establishing the Greenhouse Gas Research Centre here at the University of Regina.

I want to talk just briefly about some of the issues which are happening to shape our economy right now and some of the pressures and how technology makes an impact on our information technology.

Five years ago nobody was talking really about greenhouse gases. We didn't really think it was a great concern. There was a sense that, well this was simply bad science, that there was no need for us to deal with greenhouse gases.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that as we have come to pay attention to what is happening around the world, as we look at things in terms of the technology that's available to us, we have a better understanding of the impact of some of these issues on our economy.

(16:45)

In the olden days of the 1980s, in those olden days of the 1980s, we may have had to respond to this issue province by province, university by university, in terms of setting up research. Today we don't need to do that because we are able to have one centre to focus in on greenhouse gas research. That centre will be here in Regina. It will move forward and take advantage of all the information technology access that will be provided to our campuses in terms of making sure researchers across the nation are able to access some of the good work that's going on here.

In addition to the work that we do with the economy and the support that information technology has, there's also a very real social component to it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe it was two years ago that we announced that we would be moving forward with a Telehealth project.

Telehealth, as members will likely remember from discussions we had in the Assembly at that point, focused in on the ability for us to make sure that people regardless of where they were in Saskatchewan, were able to have contact with the best of specialists in the nation. That we were able to have a direct contact between doctors in smaller communities who may feel that they were operating an isolated practice to be able to talk to their colleagues in other centres . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The member opposite says, well we call that the telephone. Yes, in the olden days that would be the telephone. It'd be pretty hard to send an X-ray across the telephone. It's pretty hard to

send a CAT scan (computerized axial tomography) back across the telephone.

Today we are able to make use, today we are able to make use of the new technology through the Internet, and through this high-speed connection we are able to transfer a great amount of data back and forth. But people are able to see, particularly in the northern part of this province, better access to health care professionals. I think that we will see in terms of members across the province, doctors talk about the abilities that they have to feel less isolated.

This is probably a good point for me to allow the seconder of this resolution, the member for Saskatoon Eastview, an opportunity to speak. And as such I will move — as soon as I find the motion — I would move, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Eastview:

That this Assembly endeavour to promote the rapid introduction of modern information technology to education, health care, and to individuals, organizations, and businesses across Saskatchewan.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Junior: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm very happy to second this motion. And today I'd like to talk about the benefits of information and the technology to support the gathering and the sharing of that information.

I want to focus my comments on areas in health and in health's role in our CommunityNet initiative.

Mr. Speaker, we have a million people spread over a vast geographic area. Directing these people . . . connecting these people to health services, education, and business opportunities is critical to our growth and success as a province and to our health as a people. Government and business must work together to ensure that all citizens are able to participate successfully in the digital world.

Information technology is not about using technology for technology's sake. It is about using technology to fundamentally change the way we do business, be it in health, education, economic development, or any other sector of our endeavours. Technology is very dynamic and it requires all of us to adopt a culture of innovation and co-operation to mutually succeed.

The key point in information technology is that it is forcing us to fundamentally rethink how we organize our work and our everyday lives. We need to embrace this new way of thinking and use technology to our full advantage. To achieve our potential however, Mr. Speaker, I think government must show leadership. We will help drive the change. It is essential that we provide the tools, the service, and the information that people need along with leading-edge projects.

Mr. Speaker, as an original member of the Saskatchewan Health Information Network Board, I have maintained a keen interest in health information, its collection, and its use. When SHIN

(Saskatchewan Health Information Network) started, the board had a major challenge to convince stakeholders that investing in information systems was necessary and a prudent expenditure of scarce health dollars.

Now, Mr. Speaker, SHIN is coordinating the CommunityNet into 250 health facilities that will be directly connected, and 150 facilities that will use other cost-effective means of access. We put all our long-term care facilities as a high priority to receive CommunityNet access and SHIN is in charge . . . is playing a key role in coordinating a common security approach for the health sector.

As the infrastructure and infostructure has slowly been put into place, the necessity of having quality, accurate, and timely information has become even more imperative to the operation of the health system. Our need for information is acute.

Mr. Speaker, to make sound decisions, especially in the health sector, we need that quality, accurate, and timely information. We need to decide which services that the health sector delivers actually make a difference to people's health, actually make a difference to people's health — it's worth repeating. Simply doing more or adding more money does not necessarily make the system better.

Mr. Speaker, in 1999 a study was done by the Health Service and Utilization Research Commission assessing the impact of the 1993 conversions of hospitals to health centres in 52 communities. Interestingly enough the findings were, and I quote the report:

That despite widespread fears that health status would decline, residents in these communities reported that their own health was not adversely affected.

It goes on to say:

Although some communities continue to struggle with changes to health care delivery, others appear to have adapted as a result of strong leadership, the development of widely accepted alternative services, and local support for creating innovative solutions.

Mr. Speaker, many of these communities have a primary health care model in place which delivers health services that directly impact on the health of their population, such as promotion of active living, healthy eating, and accident prevention. These are key components of making and keeping people healthy.

As we see more and more of these types of centres going into communities, both urban and rural, we see a need to identify what types of programs will have the most benefit on the people that they serve. This is when we need information.

We have to be able to collect data about people in a given area, say for diabetes health services. We have to know how many people are diabetic; if they follow their diet and their exercise programs. Are they following up on foot care to prevent further damage to their feet and legs. Primary health centres have a computerized recall program for diabetic patients. Any necessary follow-up is automatically flagged by the computer program to prompt follow-up appointments.

Mr. Speaker, another area where we are using information and technology to assist planning for the best use of our resources is in our tracking of critical care beds. We communicate with all the districts that have critical care beds. We find out how many beds are available and where they are available for time periods when there may be less coverage by personnel and increased demands due to emergencies or accidents. We can then best direct the movement of patients in an efficient manner.

Mr. Speaker, we are planning to connect all laboratories and doctors' offices and health facilities in the province. We can streamline booking tests and sharing test results. Follow-up treatment could be started earlier if test results were known sooner.

Mr. Speaker, another exciting use of technology that is not far away from implementation in our province is the connection of all pharmacies so that all prescriptions written can be tracked. When you go into a pharmacy to fill a prescription, the pharmacist will know your previous drug history and this may help avoid overmedication, polypharmacy, and even harmful drug interactions.

Mr. Speaker, waiting lists must be decided by using standard criteria for determining who should be on the list and when they should go on. The terms emergent, urgent, and elective, must be defined and people should have the option of seeing where they are on the list. We will need also to have a mechanism to be reassessed so you can move up on the list if your condition changes.

A system for one million people should be able to be designed for maximum efficiency and the best possible uses of our resources to deliver quality services to all the people of the province. Mr. Speaker, all of the situations I have mentioned are possible. We have the technology and we are putting it to use.

Technology is also key to learning. Connecting people to education centres by technology helps us recruit new learners, especially in the health sector. If you can learn in your home or community, there's a greater possibility you will stay in that community. It also helps us to retain health providers.

With innovations like Telehealth, as the member from Regina South was talking, we cannot only have specialists consult and diagnose connected to remote areas, but we can connect providers up to each other for sharing learning experiences and to support each other in decision making.

Mr. Speaker, we recently received the emergency medical services report with recommendations on how emergency services could be best delivered to a million people, given our unique challenges of geography. The report has shown us that what is most important is to have the best-trained provider at the scene of an emergency in the quickest possible time.

The standard of excellence that we can attain is to have an EMT (emergency medical technician) in a well-equipped emergency vehicle respond 90 per cent, 90-plus per cent of the time in 30 minutes or less. In the North and very remote areas we need to have more discussions with the communities and existing systems to determine how we best use our resources to deliver emergency services there.

The golden hour, Mr. Speaker, does not start when you arrive at the hospital; it starts at the scene of the emergency. So we need to have the individual with the highest possible training at the scene in the shortest time. We need to have the best-equipped vehicles on the road. We need to have a central dispatch system so that we know where our personnel and equipment is at all times.

I've seen the system where you can literally see the ambulance moving along the road on the map. This eliminates the need for someone standing on the highway to direct an ambulance into a farmyard. It reduces the need for ambulances to travel empty on a return trip, as trips can be coordinated better for transport or transfer of patients.

This in no way undermines the value of the first responders, local ambulance drivers, or of volunteers. It does however show us that we can have a standard of service to over 90 per cent of our population that is in keeping with technology and citizens expectations of excellence in emergency response and non-emergent transport.

Mr. Speaker, I recently heard that it is not how many people you have working in the health system, it is more important to know what they are doing. It's imperative that what we do, what we spend our money on, is going to make us healthier as a population. We'll only be able to track that progress if we have good technology and well-trained personnel to gather information.

And we need to be ready as a population to move ahead with the results of that information. We need to make decisions about where we will have certain services and who will deliver those services. These decisions will have to be made based on information and not on an attachment to what we had or what we did. We are hanging on to the definition of a hospital when what we really want is reassurance that we will have access to the services we need — emergency, home care, mental health, long-term care, acute health . . . acute care, and public health.

We cannot circle the wagons and fire inward. Our communities will suffer, as will our people and particularly our health. We are ready now to connect to the future and our government is providing the opportunity. It is up to us as Saskatchewan citizens to say yes to the future. And I proudly second the motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to enter into debate in support of the resolution before us. We've had outlined by both hon. members a significant reason for Saskatchewan making a significant investment in information technology, to improve the quality of life of many of our people. I support its many applications in the education world, Mr. Speaker.

And having said that, let me simply move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:59.