

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today on behalf of people from the Consul region of the extreme southwest of my constituency. They're concerned about the implications of the EMS (emergency medical services) report and the impact it would have on ambulance service in that very remote area. And the prayer reads as follows:

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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition today concerning the Fyke report.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Wadena health centre be maintained at its current level of service at minimum, with 24-hour acute care, emergency, and doctoral services available as well as laboratory, physiotherapy, public health, home care, and long-term services available to users from our district and beyond.

People that have signed this petition are from Wadena, Rose Valley, Margo . . . (inaudible) . . . Thank you.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of citizens concerned about the high energy costs. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to use a portion of its windfall oil and gas revenues to provide a more substantial energy rate rebate to Saskatchewan consumers.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Melfort, St. Brieux, Watson, and Naicam.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the possible conversion of some paved highways to gravel. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to set

aside any plans to revert Saskatchewan highways back to gravel, commit that the government will not download responsibility for current numbered highways onto local governments, and to consult with local residents, and to co-operate in finding and implementing other alternatives.

And this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Avonlea; Ottawa, Ontario; Smithville, Ontario; Mossbank; Swan River, Manitoba; and Moose Jaw.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of petitioners concerned with the state of the hospital in the community of Swift Current. Mr. Speaker, the prayer of this petition 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.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition today . . . these petitions today were signed by people from the city of Swift Current, from Pennant, from Fillmore, from Ponteix, from Cabri, Rush Lake, Cadillac, and Waldeck.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are very concerned at the lack of in-patient treatment centre for drug and alcohol abuse. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to support this in-patient treatment centre in the city of Weyburn and provide funding for the same.

And it's signed by citizens from the city of Weyburn.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present petitions on behalf of citizens of the province regarding the EMS report. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that the 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 intention to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from the Maryfield, Redvers, Bellegarde, Tilston, Antler areas.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have petition from the Redvers Health Centre. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Redvers Health Centre be maintained at its current level of service, at minimum, with 24-hour acute care, emergency, and doctoral services available as well as well as laboratory, physiotherapy, public health, home care, and long-term care services available to the users from our district, southeast Saskatchewan, and southwest Manitoba and beyond.

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

The petition, Mr. Speaker, comes from the good people of Bellegarde, Redvers, Storthoaks, Antler, and Wauchope. I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to read a petition from citizens who are concerned about the EMS report. 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 this petition is signed by the good citizens of LeRoy.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of concerned constituents. The prayer reads as follows:

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.

Signatures to this petition come from the community of Wynyard, Roblin, Manitoba, and Spruce Grove, Alberta.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding the energy rate rebate program.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to use a portion of its windfall oil and gas revenues to provide a more substantial energy rate rebate to Saskatchewan consumers.

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

And the signatures, Mr. Speaker, on this petition are from Leoville, Meeting Lake, Stranraer, and Spiritwood.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I have a petition with concerned citizens, and the prayer reads as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by folks from Assiniboia.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I rise again also with a petition from concerned citizens reference the Assiniboia Pioneer Lodge. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary actions 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 from the good citizens of Willow Bunch, Limerick, Coronach, Lisieux, Mossbank, and Assiniboia.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

This is the petition of citizens of the province asking the Assembly:

To abandon plans to reduce health care services in the Shellbrook-Spiritwood constituency.

And further petitions are submitted that are addendums to previous petitions as of sessional papers no. 3, no. 4, no. 10, no. 58, and no. 121.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 37 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management: how many times in the past year did the city of North Battleford report discharges of raw sewage into the North Saskatchewan River to SERM as required by provincial regulation; and what were the dates of those reported discharges?

I have a second question, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 37 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management: is SERM aware of any discharges of raw sewage by the city of North Battleford into the North Saskatchewan River which were not reported to SERM as required by provincial regulation; and if so, what was the date of those discharges?

A third question, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 37 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management: when did SERM first become aware that the city of North Battleford occasionally discharges raw sewage into the North Saskatchewan River; and what specific steps has SERM taken to ensure that these discharges do not compromise the safety of the drinking water in North Battleford?

A fourth question, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 37 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management: which Saskatchewan communities are currently under a precautionary drinking water advisory of an emergency boil-water order; and in each case, what is the reason for the advisory or order?

And a fifth question, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 37 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management: how many times in the past year did any municipality report discharges of raw sewage into any water body to SERM as required by provincial regulation; and what were the dates of those reported discharges?

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 37 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture: how much agricultural land in acres does the provincial government currently own or lease; how much agricultural land in acres in Saskatchewan does the federal government currently own or lease; and how many acres of agricultural land does Ducks Unlimited currently own or lease in Saskatchewan?

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a written question also. I give notice that I shall on day no. 37 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: how much funding was provided to the Office of the Fire Commissioner during the 2000-2001 fiscal year?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to stand in the House and introduce to you and to my colleagues here in the Assembly and to everyone

here that's watching the proceedings, 10 Powerview area students from Manitoba who are getting ready, being escorted by members of the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police).

They're going to be here in Regina to tour the training academy and other attractions in and around the Queen City.

Powerview 2001, Mr. Speaker, is a project that identifies high school students who are interested in a career in law enforcement or in the justice field. I want to commend these young people for being here.

Just a couple of comments with respect to this program from the previous year, some of the comments that I'd like to quote off the communiqué. Last year eight students were selected for this trip. Some of these people have never been out of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

One of the comments was:

When we went to where the cop cars are kept, did the guys ever drool; and

We watched cadets in drill class and all agreed that the female drill sergeant yelling had a wicked voice; and

The RCMP training is not all fun and games.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of this Assembly to welcome these people and their chaperones who are Keven Burke and Tammy Burke, as well as Cst. Anthony Hernandez and Cst. Rudy Gegenfurtner. I hope I've pronounced that right.

Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Weyburn Women of the Year Awards

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 2 the Quota Club of Weyburn held its Women of the Year awards luncheon. The Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, Her Honour Lynda Haverstock, was the guest speaker, and she brought a special prestige to the awards ceremony.

I'd like to extend sincere congratulations and best wishes to this year's winners of the Women of the Year awards.

The award for Weyburn community service was presented to Linda Rydachuk. The award for exceptional entrepreneur went to Janet Ledingham. And the award for workplace excellence went to Shelley Hippe.

(13:45)

Mr. Speaker, I'm particularly pleased and proud that Shelley received an award this year because when she was still attending high school, she was an employee of mine at the Weyburn Dairy Queen. I'm honoured to have had the opportunity to work with her, and I wish her, along with the other award recipients, much success in their future endeavours.

Congratulations also to the Quota Club for putting on a first-class event and for its commitment to enhancing and recognizing outstanding women in the Weyburn community.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

North American Occupational Safety and Health Week

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week, May 6 to 12, is the fifth annual North American Occupational Safety and Health — or NAOSH — Week observed in Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

Mr. Speaker, every year too many Saskatchewan people die and thousands more are injured or become ill in their workplaces. While we can't undo the suffering and grief caused by workplace illness, injury, or death, we can help prevent these terrible accidents from occurring.

Prevention efforts such as education, training, and public awareness campaigns like NAOSH Week are important tools to help reduce the unacceptable human toll and the rising financial cost of workplace illnesses, injuries, and deaths.

NAOSH Week reminds everyone — employers, workers, and the public — of the critical importance of workplace safety. This year's theme, Prevention is the Cure, appropriately reminds us of the three rights of Saskatchewan working people. The three rights are: the right to know about hazards in the workplace, how to identify them, and how to protect themselves; the right to participate in occupational health and safety decisions; and the right to refuse work believed to be unusually dangerous.

Mr. Speaker, safety is everyone's business because everyone pays the price when there is a breakdown. I invite all hon. members to recognize NAOSH Week by supporting efforts to reduce illnesses, accidents, and deaths in our workplace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Accomplishments of Swift Current Youth

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in recognition of the accomplishments and character of Swift Current youth this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, April 25, I was honoured to be invited by the grade 8 students in Fairview School to participate in a panel, along with several local distinguished residents from Swift Current, to talk about what it means to be Canadian.

The discussions were a part of the "So You're Canadian, Eh" unit of study undertaken by the grade 8 students of Fairview School at the time. They asked excellent questions of the panellists in order to get us ready to make our presentations; questions that had all of us taking stock and value of our own Canadian citizenship.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to recognize the efforts of the Swift Current Comprehensive High School music department

who, between the dates of April 25 and 30, competed in the Heritage Music Festival competition in Colorado Springs.

And, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you with some pride that four groups from the Comp High School went — the Meistersingers; the wind orchestra; Thursday Night Jazz Band; and the vocal ensemble, By Design. And each of the four groups won first in their respective category.

So congratulations to the McLeans, the directors of the music program at the Comp, all of the students in the music program there; and to the grade 8 students at Fairview School for their excellent study of Canadian citizenship. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Shaunavon Credit Union

Ms. Higgins: — More good news for the province of Saskatchewan. This time it's from Shaunavon and their local credit union. The Shaunavon Credit Union enjoyed a successful start to the millennium, reporting a banner year in 2000.

This local financial institution saw its assets grow by almost 3 million to reach 72.1 million by year-end. Mr. Speaker, member deposits totalled 65 million at year-end, representing an increase of 2.5 million from the previous year. As well, Mr. Speaker, total revenue for the credit union was 5 million, an increase from the previous year.

The board also announced the approval of a 10 per cent return allocation to its members. A total of 462,000 is being allocated to members in retained equity and cash payouts.

Along with the strong, positive fiscal report, the Shaunavon Credit Union has also continued to maintain a supportive role in the community. It helped sponsor and made donations to more than 30 different projects, events, and organizations last year alone.

The credit union is also continuing its high school bursary program, handing out \$2,000 worth of bursaries to students in the area.

The credit union's commitment to work in partnership with the community and its commitment to the education of Saskatchewan youth are both great examples of the path the credit union movement has always taken.

Mr. Speaker, congratulations to the Shaunavon Credit Union.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Supernumerary Special Constable Sworn In

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on April 12, 2001, Mr. Will Collins was sworn in as a Supernumerary Special Constable by Chief Superintendent R. Holdright, criminal operations officer for Saskatchewan. Mr. Collins has been hired to work as an investigative assistant with the Saskatoon commercial crime section.

He is trained as a lawyer and will be providing advice and taking an active role in various complex white collar crime investigations. Mr. Collins's previous training and experience as a lawyer will benefit the RCMP in providing an enhanced legal perspective in their investigations.

This opportunity will provide Mr. Collins with an insight into the RCMP and how investigations are done. He will be taking an active role and working closely with commercial crime investigators who are mandated to look into allegations of commercial and securities fraud, theft, counterfeiting, telemarketing, and other federal statutes and programs.

The hiring of Mr. Collins is a pilot project designed to attract people with specific skills into specialized programs such as the commercial crime and to encourage them to pursue careers with the RCMP.

Mr. Collins is the first legally trained person hired under this initiative. I would ask all MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) to join me, Mr. Collins's father, Bill Collins, and Bill Collins's partner, Teresa Lindholm, in congratulating Mr. Will Collins on this historic appointment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Aboriginal Employment Opportunities

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to announce that a fourth post-secondary institution in Saskatchewan has signed on as a partner with the Aboriginal Employment Development Program. And in doing so, the North West Regional College will be playing an integral role in shaping the employment future of our province.

The North West Regional College covers the entire northwest region of the province, including the constituency of Meadow Lake. Ours is a diverse population, and the college is designed to serve the needs of everyone. As part of its mandate, it has agreed to prepare its workplaces for the Aboriginal workforce and to work with the Aboriginal community to promote and provide training linked to employment.

In Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, we believe that every person should be able to fully participate socially and economically. The purpose of the Aboriginal Employment Development Program is to increase the number of Aboriginal people in our workforce and to ensure that they are represented at all occupational levels in proportion to their numbers in the provincial population.

And, Mr. Speaker, it should be emphasized that the purpose of this program is to enable Aboriginal people to compete for and gain jobs based solely on their skills and qualifications.

Mr. Speaker, the AEDP (Aboriginal Employment Development Program) is a far-sighted program that is dealing now with the nature of our province tomorrow. Twenty-eight business, health, union, co-operative, and educational partners have signed on. This is very good news for Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Unity in National Communities in Bloom Competition

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The town of Unity has been invited to enter into the national Communities in Bloom competition for communities of population from a thousand to 3,000.

The town of Unity will be competing against communities like Burin, Newfoundland; Cardinal, Ontario; Souris, Prince Edward Island; Gibbons, Alberta; Millet, Alberta; Sundre, Alberta; Picture Butte, Alberta; Fort Smith, Northwest Territories; Watson Lake in the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, the national judging competition for Unity is July 23, 2001. Two years ago, Unity won the provincial Communities in Bloom competition. We wish Unity the best of luck in the national competition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskTel Mobility's Cellular Expansion in Rural Saskatchewan

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More good news for rural Saskatchewan. SaskTel Mobility is investing \$24 million over the next three years to expand its digital cellular network in rural Saskatchewan, resulting in a complete overlay of today's analog cellular network.

Mr. Speaker, this will be the largest expansion project ever for SaskTel Mobility. When the project is complete each and every community SaskTel currently serves with analog cellular service will be served with digital, offering all customers wireless products and services as advanced as anywhere in the world, Mr. Speaker. This digital service continues to revolutionize mobile communications.

For this year, SaskTel Mobility will invest \$7.7 million for cellular expansion in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. This project is good news. When it is completed SaskTel Mobility will have invested more than \$54 million dollars in our digital network, offering digital cellular service to more than 90 per cent of Saskatchewan's population.

This expansion is another example of the Crown corporations working for the benefit of all the people in this province, Mr. Speaker. This investment goes hand in hand with our commitment to long-term plans to provide the people and communities of this province with the tools they need for the future, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Financial Assistance to Improve Water Quality

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Yesterday the Premier travelled to the city of North Battleford to meet with the mayor, members of city council, and discuss the contaminated water situation.

Media reports say that the Premier said that there may be provincial money to help the people of North Battleford. He said there may be some money to help people buy bottled water or there may be some money to help the city deal with temporary solutions to the water problem, such as the water filtration stations being brought in from Colorado.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier detail how much money the provincial government is prepared to present the city of North Battleford to deal with their water problem and what it is to be used for?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report to the House today that I did have an opportunity to meet with the mayor and the city council of North Battleford in addition to other citizens of North Battleford.

I want to report also to the House that the mayor and the city council were appreciative of the fact that we have initiated the process of a judicial inquiry that will probe all of the matters surrounding the circumstance in North Battleford.

And in conversation both with myself and the minister of Municipal Government, we talked about a variety of ideas that might assist the community of North Battleford. I cannot document for the House today any specifics because no specifics were actually presented or discussed. We talked about the need generally of, first of all, restoring quality drinking water to the people of North Battleford.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course the Premier knows that the needs are pretty immediate and I would hope that in light of the nature of this situation, that he wouldn't ponder this for weeks and weeks and months.

Mr. Speaker, last week in this House during estimates, the Minister of Environment said that besides North Battleford and the towns of Battleford and Weirdale, 37 other Saskatchewan communities were under boil-water advisories.

It is our understanding, Mr. Speaker, that several of these communities have been under such advisories for many months and people in these communities are either boiling their water or, like the people in North Battleford, purchasing bottled water.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Will the Premier be clear? Is he extending financial help to the people of North Battleford with their water difficulties, and will he be extending this offer to the other 37 communities in Saskatchewan who also are under boil-water advisories?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very serious challenge for all of Saskatchewan. In reference to all the communities that have boil-water advisories, I want to inform the House that we will continue having those boil-water advisories until the problem is settled.

We will not take any risk of any community and any lives of the people of Saskatchewan. And if we have those boil-water advisories in place for the next year, they will stay in place for the next year, until the water is safe.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Water Quality in Saskatchewan

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Environment minister. Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago I tabled a number of written questions regarding the routine operating procedures of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management. Now given the current crisis in North Battleford, the minister should be able to answer these questions today.

Mr. Speaker, when did SERM first become aware that the city of North Battleford occasionally discharges raw sewage into the North Saskatchewan River?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a minister I was first advised that the city was discharging sewage on April 30, which is roughly eight days ago.

I think the most important thing that we want to also point out, Mr. Speaker, is that we are trying to get to the bottom of this. We welcome the inquiry as announced by our Premier. This is very important work.

But in the meantime we're going to continue working very hard to make sure: (a) that the city of North Battleford does not have the continuing health problems; and (b) that their water is safe. Those are our priorities.

And as a government member we welcome the inquiry. We want to see what went wrong, where, and when. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, prior to the current problems with the North Battleford water supply, what specific steps did SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) take to ensure that the discharge of raw sewage into the North Saskatchewan River did not compromise the quality of the North Battleford drinking water?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that's very, very important is that the inquiry will answer a lot of questions. And we have welcomed the inquiry.

The most important thing here, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to know what happened when and where. And one of the things that we spoke about as a government is we called for the

inquiry. Our Premier went down to the Battlefords and announced the inquiry — very important work.

The opposition called for the inquiry and today now they're saying now it's a cover-up. So what is it? Do you want the inquiry to happen? If you want the inquiry to happen, the inquiry is going to happen. We take our role very seriously, Mr. Speaker.

And what I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, is that we not play politics with this very important issue. This is a challenge all across Saskatchewan, and I would ask that member to do a decent thing and come on board and help us with this inquiry and get to the bottom of the problems with water quality in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is that minister suggesting that all department operations and policies will be suspended for the duration of the inquiry and every municipality in this province will be on their own until then?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, the last thing we should afford this process is speculation. We have asked, we have asked to do a very thorough analysis of what went wrong. That inquiry is going to be . . . it's going to happen.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue working with the city of North Battleford and with all the 37 communities. And what we're not going to do, Mr. Speaker, is not play politics with this whole issue. This is very important.

And I ask the members opposite, please show some decency and let us work together to solve this particular challenge because it's facing all of our communities.

However, in the meantime, the inquiry's going to happen, the standards are there, the SERM staff are out there now as we speak. We responded very, very quickly. And again the most important thing is we are going to make every effort possible on this side to make sure this doesn't happen again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, once again on a matter of routine operating policy and procedure where the department requires that these types of events be documented.

Mr. Speaker, how many times in the past year did the city of North Battleford report discharges of raw sewage into the North Saskatchewan River to SERM as required by provincial legislation? And could the minister provide us with all of the dates of these reported discharges?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — As I've indicated, April 30 was the first time that I was notified that there was some problems with the

manner in which they were disposing of their waste water.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that the inquiry will get to the bottom of this. We have welcomed the inquiry. We want to see where we are able to improve our system as a government.

Number one is I've always believed, and I'll continue to believe that the most important point I want to make, is that our standards are national and we ensure that people are following the standards. And furthermore, Mr. Speaker, if there are some deficiencies, which I doubt there will be, we want to hear about them. We are prepared to learn from this.

But the most important thing is, I would ask; let us not allow politics and speculation to play a role here. Let's have some very broad-based facts and some solutions in front of us as quickly as we can so we can help all of Saskatchewan and all of the country lead in a fashion in which we are able to respond to water quality problems.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was in North Battleford last evening, Mr. Speaker, and the one thing that is very evident is, is that people want answers. And the answers that they are looking for today and that we are looking for today, Mr. Speaker, do not relate to the findings of an inquiry. They relate to regular, routine operating procedures and policies of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management.

One of the questions that was asked, Mr. Speaker, last night was: were any discharges of raw sewage reported to SERM during the period in late March and early April that the water treatment plant was not functioning properly?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, the answer is on April 30 we were advised that this problem was occurring. And number one, Mr. Speaker, is what the people of North Battleford want is they want to be able to ensure that the public health is not at risk. What the people of North Battleford want, they want to make sure that their water quality is safe and within standards, Mr. Speaker. And then they want answers as to how this happened. Those are the processes in which we're working towards.

As the government we're going to work with the city, with the district health. We're going to work in SERM. We're going to make sure that we take a collaborative approach in how we can fix this problem right now, Mr. Speaker.

What I would suggest, I would ask that member once again, to not play politics or speculate on this. Allow the inquiry to do the work. As the Minister of SERM, I am looking forward to the inquiry, I'm looking forward to the inquiry to see what went wrong, when, and where.

And what I'd also say, Mr. Speaker, this is not about scrutiny of the facts. This is about mutiny of decency in terms of trying to get to the bottom of this particular matter. And I would ask those members across to please, be part of that team to find

solutions that will benefit all of Saskatchewan residents to water quality.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister's answers are cold comfort to all the other communities out there who are relying on his department for guidance and for the regulatory leadership that they are supposed to be providing.

Mr. Speaker, with respect, with respect to the discharge that the minister is indicating that he is aware of. Was that discharge reported to the minister, Mr. Speaker, by the city of North Battleford? Or was he made aware of it through some other third party?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Once again, Mr. Speaker, April 30 was the day that I was advised that this problem was occurring; April 30 was the day that the minister was advised.

And what I would again ask, Mr. Speaker, the inquiry will go through all these questions. The inquiry will have a lot of answers to the questions that people have and I welcome the inquiry.

Now the most important thing, Mr. Speaker, is I've asked that member three or four times today, is please allow the inquiry to do the work. Do not allow speculation, do not allow speculation to dictate the value of that inquiry. Do not allow politics to get in the way of trying to make sure this never happens again.

Let us work together to ensure safe water to all Saskatchewan residents. And I implore the members opposite to do exactly what we're trying to do — get to the bottom of this, fix it up, and make sure it never happens again. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well perhaps I will take a little different approach.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the minister when was his department and when were his officials aware of any discharges by the city of North Battleford?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, as I've mentioned three or four times, April 30 was when I was first advised by my staff that we were advised that the sewer was being dumped into the river and we had to make certain of those facts, Mr. Speaker. That is the most important thing. And I'm prepared to share that information, as I've mentioned time and time again, with the media.

Now what I would say to that member is this whole process, Mr. Speaker, in the initial stage, it should not talk about assessing blame, not pointing fingers, not saying this went wrong or that went wrong. We are not prepared to do that, Mr. Speaker.

What we are prepared to do is to work with the city to make sure this problem is rectified and it never happens again. And

we welcome — as the Minister of SERM — we welcome the inquiry, but we encourage you to not play politics, and to not speculate on this very challenging issue for all the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that people understand what the minister and what the department knew, and when they knew it.

Mr. Speaker, we now know that the minister was aware of a discharge a number of days ago. Mr. Speaker, did the minister and did any of his department officials understand, or were they aware of any discharges in the period in late March and early April, while the water treatment plant was not functioning?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday we attended a news conference in the building here, and we explained exactly some of the challenges facing this whole process.

And one of the things that was reported at that conference was that there was a document that was being forwarded by the city to various people interested in finding out what exactly happened in the Battlefords area. And I'm prepared to share that document at any time.

What we told the media was we're going to be open, honest, and accountable. We want to find out exactly what went wrong, where, and when. And I'm prepared to share with all those members across, this document that talks about that.

But what I would be very, very careful on, sir, is make sure that you don't speculate, and make sure that you don't politicize . . . politicize the process and the problems. We want to find out what went wrong, when, and where, and we also want the inquiry to come back and give us some good, solid points in terms of how to rebuild our confidence with safe water in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, time after time this morning in North Battleford, the minister kept saying that the policies and procedures were adequate. Yet over the past few minutes the minister has clearly demonstrated he can't answer the most basic questions about those policies and procedures.

Mr. Speaker, this is absolutely incredible. We have the biggest water quality crisis in Saskatchewan history, and the minister can't answer basic questions about routine — routine operating practices and procedures, which he has declared to be adequate. He doesn't even seem to know what they are, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, how can the minister suggest that they are adequate, and how can he expect the people of Saskatchewan to have confidence in them?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, once again, the report is here, and I'll share it with all those members. It's a public

document. Okay. And the document says that April 30 we found out that there is a problem with the sewer and that is the point I made here about four or five times. But the most important point, the most important point I'm making today, Mr. Speaker, is this government, this Premier announced an inquiry and as minister I welcome the inquiry because if there are things that we have to learn or things that we could do better, we certainly want to do that, Mr. Speaker.

And that's the most important thing and I implore at this time all members opposite to stop playing politics and to stop speculating because you're doing more damage to this process by doing that. Let us take a rational, common sense, together approach to fix this problem once and for all so all future generations can benefit from safe water guidelines and practices throughout the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in response to the question of the Leader of the Opposition, the minister indicated there are currently 37 Saskatchewan communities under a boil-water advisory. Will the minister provide us with a list of all 37 of those communities and why in each case they are under a boil-water advisory?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the communities that are under a boil-water advisory or order will stay under the order until we're absolutely certain that the water quality are within standards. We are not going to take any chances.

And, Mr. Speaker, what I also said a number of times is that we want to make sure that the inquiry does their work, thorough work. We want to know what went wrong, where, when, and how. Open, honest, and accountable — that's what we want, Mr. Speaker.

And what I'll also point out, Mr. Speaker, on two occasions — now this is the third occasion, Mr. Speaker — first they wanted the inquiry, then next day they say it's a cover up. Then the talk about tax cuts, then we hire ten extra people to help with the water quality problems. They complain about it. Now once again, Mr. Speaker, they're playing politics with a very important issue

And I ask you, I ask you again . . .

The Speaker: — I just want to ask the minister in his total response to direct all remarks through the Chair please.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, aside from North Battleford, are there any other confirmed cases of people becoming ill due to bad water in any of these other communities?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, once again I can say that we have got no official documents to suggest that, or telephone calls or any notices. Thank you.

(14:15)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week there was a meeting in Winnipeg of provincial Environment ministers. One of the issues discussed was water quality. Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, the minister didn't bother to attend that meeting.

Mr. Speaker, why wouldn't the minister attend a provincial ministers' conference on water quality?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, one of the things that's very important is the meeting that was held with all the ministers from across the country are very important meetings. And if the member would know, the Minister of the Environment was sitting here in these very Chambers answering questions on a number of issues facing SERM.

And I think it's very unfair, Mr. Speaker, to talk about the fact that we had to be here to do our duty in this Assembly and we could not be at a meeting a number of miles away. So it's unfair, Mr. Speaker, to say why weren't you at that meeting.

But, Mr. Speaker, a very important thing is that we did send our deputy minister and a number of other officials to that meeting to make sure that Saskatchewan's interests were maintained and that our presentation was heard and our presence was felt, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — The minister talks about his duties to the Assembly. What about his duties to the people of Saskatchewan?

Mr. Speaker, this seems to be a clear case of misplaced priorities. The NDP (New Democratic Party) has Crown executives globe-trotting all over the world trying to sell technology that doesn't even exist. Meanwhile the Environment minister won't go to Winnipeg to discuss water quality.

It's just like the ag crisis, Mr. Speaker. Once again we have a crisis in Saskatchewan and our minister isn't even at the table. Mr. Speaker, why wasn't he there?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, once again, what an amazing opposition. Mr. Speaker, it's an amazing opposition. First of all, they criticize us for hiring 10 additional people to talk about water quality. Secondly, they call for an inquiry and they say . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I think one of the things that's amazing about this place is the opposition. You know this is a really misguided opposition, Mr. Speaker. First of all they, talk about the 10 people we hired for water quality testing. They say, oh that's too much — fire them all.

And then we ask for an inquiry and they say, oh, an inquiry is good. But the next day they say it's a cover-up.

And now they say why weren't you at the meeting. Well the

member knows very well, Mr. Speaker, I was here in the Assembly where I have to be, Mr. Speaker, as part of government. We're answering questions in this very Assembly. And I think that's not a very good tact at all for that member to talk about where we were instead of at a meeting. He knew very well we were here, Mr. Speaker.

And once again I would ask him, out of decency, say, please do not politicize or speculate on this particular issue. It's very damaging. Let us work together to find solutions to these very strong and long-standing problems.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statement by Member from North Battleford

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Mr. Premier, last week the member for North Battleford made some very serious allegations. He alleged that the CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) officials had offered him and his wife a trip around the world in exchange for his silence when it came to criticizing certain CIC investments.

Last week the Speaker ruled that this did not constitute a question of privilege, but that it can be brought forward in private members' day. A similar case has been referred to the legislature in 1916.

Mr. Speaker, later today I will call a motion of this Assembly to refer this allegation to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for investigation.

Mr. Premier, will you support our motion and allow a full investigation of these allegations?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the member opposite about some of the facts and some of the occurrences that have happened in the past few days. And I want to begin by saying that the member from Battlefords has been backtracking so fast I'm afraid he's going to lap himself.

In this House, Mr. Speaker, he said, first of all, on hearing about this motion, he said that "I wasn't bribed" — in a letter to you, sir. He also said that he does not want an investigation and he does not request an investigation.

And I want to say as well, Mr. Speaker, when that same member was asked by the media if there was ever a suggestion that he should take this trip and then be quiet, his quote was no, no, absolutely not.

Mr. Speaker, what this is about, is this is about the opposition members who want to embarrass an already embarrassed member of this legislature. It's nothing more than that. It's nothing but petty political pricks by the members on that side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there were very serious allegations made by a member of this

Assembly dealing with a Crown corporation. One way or another, Mr. Speaker, we need to find out what the truth of the matter is. It either impugns the members of this Assembly or it impugns the reputation of our Crown corporations. One or the other is the fact, Mr. Speaker, and we need to be able to determine which it is.

In fact from the 1916 example, Mr. Speaker, and I quote, it says:

... no particulars are given as to names, dates and ... attendant circumstances. On the ground of the lack of specific detail, the Government would probably be justified in refusing to give the matter further consideration. (However) ... the Minister in question, who has denied the allegation, prefers, however, to have it investigated and for that reason it has been ... (referred) to Select Committee ...

Mr. Speaker, in that case again there was very little evidence but it was investigated to make that determination.

Mr. Premier, will you allow ...

The Speaker: — Would the member, would the member please rephrase his question through the Chair?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier allow this motion to go forward and support the motion for an investigation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, what members of this House won't do is be part of a political game that that member wants to initiate in this House.

Mr. Speaker, he knows full well that any member of this legislature or any member of the general public has any, any, any evidence to suggest political or inappropriate activity, they have a responsibility to forward that to the proper process, which is the police.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is a pick-and-choose opposition. There's an issue before this province on health care. We have suggested a committee. We have suggested their participation. But, Mr. Speaker, they'll have none of it, but they want to play political games with the committee that they're suggesting.

Mr. Speaker, that member has been backtracking. It's not an issue. He has refuted every part of the allegation and, Mr. Speaker, that member knows it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 26 - The Hearing Aid Sales and Services Act

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 26, The Hearing Aid Sales and Services 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.

**Bill No. 27 - The Corporation Capital Tax
Amendment Act, 2001**

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 27, The Corporation Capital Tax 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. 28 - The Commercial Liens Act
/Loi sur les privilèges à base commerciale**

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 28, The Commercial Liens 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.

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

Ms. MacKinnon: — With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to the Assembly, through you, some very special guests in the west gallery. They are grade 5 and grade 7 students from Caswell Community School. And they're here today with two teachers, Mr. Tim Gultzan and Mr. Dion Pfeifer, and with a number of chaperones who are Mrs. Daelene Guttermson, Mrs. Wendy Loken, Mrs. Betty Myrfield, Mrs. Connie Wagner, and Mrs. Clothier.

I would ask all members to give them a very warm welcome.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Southeast. Why is she on her feet?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, is a gentleman that many of us met with this morning as part of the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board.

He is also the sparkplug behind the FSIN's (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) corporate circle, and I would ask all members to welcome Mr. Milton Tootoosis to this Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

The Speaker: — Members of the Legislative Assembly, pursuant to rule 27, it is your duty at this time to elect a Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Committee of the Whole. The procedures to be used in this election are the same as those used to elect the Speaker.

I now ask the Clerk to initiate proceedings.

Clerk: — Members of the Assembly, pursuant to the procedures specified in Rule 27(1) and (5), the following members have declared their intention to stand as candidates for election to the Office of Deputy Speaker.

The candidates are, in alphabetical order, Mr. Graham Addley, the hon. member for the constituency of Saskatoon Sutherland.

The second candidate is Mr. Ron Harper, the hon. member for the constituency of Regina Northeast.

In preparation for the vote, the Sergeant-at-Arms will bring in the ballot box, it will inspected, and the sealed ballots will be opened.

The list of candidates has been distributed to all members and has been posted in the polling booth.

The registration Clerks will now enter the Chamber and take their places at the Tables. And then we will prepare for the vote. And I will give you that signal. Thank you.

(14:30)

Members of the Legislative Assembly, I will now ask those members who wish to cast their ballots to proceed to the registration table behind the bar on your respective side of the House, receive your ballot paper, and proceed then to the polling booth.

And may I remind you, please, to print the first and last name of your candidate on the ballot paper. Thank you.

The members proceeded to cast ballots.

Clerk: — If there are any members who have not voted and wish to do so, would they please vote now.

The Speaker: — All members having voted, the House will recess to the call of the bells while the Clerks at the Table count the ballots. The bells will ring for three minutes to recall the members to the Chamber when the results of the first ballot are ready to be announced.

The Assembly recessed for a period of time.

(14:45)

The Speaker: — The House will now come to order to hear the results of the ballot.

Members of the Legislative Assembly, it is my duty to inform you that you have elected Graham Addley, the Hon. Member of

the Legislative Assembly for the constituency of Saskatoon Sutherland, as your Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments.

I'm very humbled by the trust that's been placed in me by this Assembly and by the members of this Assembly. And I'm particularly grateful to the support, given the quality of the candidates that have let their names stand.

And just to assure the House that I will endeavour to work as best as I can for all members of this Assembly as your Deputy Speaker. So thank you very much again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate my colleague from Saskatoon Sutherland on his victory here.

I put on a fine campaign. I'm pleased, Mr. Speaker, that the campaign was intense but short and I offer my congratulations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The House will now proceed with orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 4 — Allegations by the Member for North Battleford

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise on a very important motion today that deals with the integrity of this Assembly, of its members, and of its institutions. This is not entered into lightly, Mr. Speaker, as we all understand the ramifications of this kind of motion and what it can do, where it can lead if it is allowed to proceed, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the member from North Battleford is quoted in a newspaper article of having made the accusation that there was something untoward happening during his tenure in cabinet, that he was approached by a representative of the Crown corporation.

And in fact, Mr. Speaker, the headline in the newspapers read, on May 1, and I quote: "Hillson alleges bribe to shut up." The second line of that quote, Mr. Speaker, is: "Claims CIC offered world excursion to MLA in exchange for silence." End of quote, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, that allegation is very, very serious. It says that the members of this Assembly . . . that a member of this Assembly has been approached to seek his silence, to not perform his duty as a member of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, that allegation also contends that the approach, if it happened, was presented to that member by one of this province's own Crown corporations. Mr. Speaker, I guess the questions have to be asked. Why was the minister — because he was a minister of the Crown at the time — approached? What was the Crown corporation seeking to gain if they made that approach?

Mr. Speaker, as was debated . . . not debated last week . . . as was brought before the House last week and ruled by the Speaker that this was not a point of privilege as indeed, under the rules, it is not. It was not an event that occurred in this Assembly. It was not an event that dealt with an issue currently before this Assembly. Nor was it an event that dealt with the results of an election.

But, Mr. Speaker, in the ruling that was made last week, it did point out some other very interesting things. I would like to read from *Hansard* so that everyone is familiar with the decision that was made last week. And I quote from page 877 of *Hansard*; it's issue no. 28A. And I quote:

Before concluding the question of privilege, I want to address the second part of the case made by the Opposition House Leader. The member states, and I quote:

The member for North Battleford has made allegations that impugn the character of every member of this Assembly by suggesting that members' support on important issues can be bought.

Although the member for . . .

Again quoting from the Speaker's ruling:

Although the member for North Battleford has stated that he does not call the incident in question a bribe, he . . . (nevertheless) makes a very serious allegation. As Speaker, I share the concern of the Opposition House Leader and feel that (this matter) is a matter not to be treated lightly because it diminishes the respect for the House and its members.

It is stated in Erskine May, page 112, that:

Any person who is found to have offered such a corrupt consideration is also in contempt.

Again quoting from the decision last week:

When allegations or bribery or similar misconduct have been made at Westminster, the House of Commons has referred the matter either to a select or privilege committee for investigation. In Saskatchewan we have a comparable precedent.

In 1916 the member for Prince Albert City made an allegation that certain members had been offered and had accepted bribes in return for political support in the House. The issue was referred by direct reference to a committee for investigation.

Although I have found that this case does not constitute a

prima . . . case of privilege and therefore should not take precedence over all other business at this time, members still have the opportunity to pursue this matter further by submitting a motion with the proper notice.

Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we have proceeded to do is to present a motion to this House that would deal with this issue and ask that the allegations be referred to the appropriate committee of this legislature, that being the Committee on Privileges and Elections.

This committee has been constituted for a considerable number of years; it is not a new committee by any means. It is a standing committee of the Assembly. Members are appointed at the beginning of every legislature, so there are, I believe, nine members already appointed to sit on that committee.

While I do not believe that the committee has met up until this time — they would have to appoint a chairman at their first meeting — the rules and procedures for that committee have already been established and outlined in our standing orders. It's not a new committee, it's not a question of what their mandate or reference would be, Mr. Speaker. That has been established by the committee.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's not a question that we have to establish a special committee to deal with this. It's already in place.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* book as it deals with these particular kinds of issues. Page 67, and I quote:

Thus, the House also claims the right to punish, as a contempt, any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions; obstructs or impedes any Member or Officer of the House in the discharge of their duties; or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House, such as disobedience of its legitimate commands or libels upon itself, its Members, or its Officers.

Further, Mr. Speaker, another quote:

In that sense, all breaches of privilege are contempts of the House, but not all contempts are necessarily breaches of privilege.

And that is indeed the case that we are discussing before us today, Mr. Speaker. While the issue at hand may not be a breach of privilege, I believe, Mr. Speaker, that it is a contempt of this House and of its members. That if the allegation of a bribe is true, Mr. Speaker, then that is an insult and a contempt to this institution and to its members and must be dealt with, Mr. Speaker.

(15:00)

The allegation has been made. If the case is not true, Mr. Speaker, then that would clear the Crown corporation of wrongdoings that have been alleged that they have performed, Mr. Speaker. Either way we need to investigate to determine, Mr. Speaker, exactly what happened. Because until that occurs,

Mr. Speaker, the cloud of suspicion will continue to remain over this institution.

Is it possible for members to be approached and offered considerations for either performing their duties in the House in a particular manner or for not performing their duties, Mr. Speaker, in the manner that they were elected to do for the benefit of both their constituents and the people of this province?

The allegation presented by the member from North Battleford says that there is a belief that members are susceptible to receiving compensations for either the performance of a special duty or for not performing their duties as they were elected to do, Mr. Speaker.

Those allegations cannot be allowed simply to remain at large in the public without being addressed, Mr. Speaker. Nor can the allegation that the Crown corporations are prepared to further their own interests by seeking to corrupt members of this Assembly and its institutions.

The questions need to be asked, Mr. Speaker. They need to be resolved so that we know one way or another, Mr. Speaker, exactly what happened in this particular case.

Whenever a member either carries out his function in this House, asks a question or fails to ask a question, the question will out there in the public: what is the reason that that member did that particular item? What is the reason they didn't do a particular item? Is it because they have been approached by someone to not perform their duties as they were elected to do?

Whenever a member of this Assembly is absent from the House in the performance of their duties, are they absent because they have received some consideration from someone that allowed them to be absent, that they received a consideration from the Crown corporation that they might have visited some location?

Mr. Speaker, every time a member performs a function in this Assembly or outside of it, the question can always be asked, unless we settle this issue, what is the purpose of that member's performance of his duty? Was he given a consideration to do so? Or was he given a consideration not to show up at a meeting, not to ask a question in this House?

Those are very serious. It impinges on our ability, Mr. Speaker, to perform our duties in this Assembly. We need to be able to perform our duties in the Assembly, both government and opposition, Mr. Speaker, in the manners that we were elected to perform, to perform the duties that are required by the people of this province, to carry out our duties without undue suspicion, Mr. Speaker, on what our motives are.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, both sides of the House are partisan. The public understands that. They understand when we raise issues with the government that we're doing so both for the benefit of the public and in a partisan manner. And the government in turn, Mr. Speaker, responds in the best interests of the public and in a partisan manner. That is expected.

But when members may or may not be performing their duties because of outside considerations, remunerations, bribes, Mr.

Speaker, those allegations bring contempt on all of us.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's very important that we be able as an Assembly to look at these issues and to make a determination. Is there any basis for the allegation made by the member for North Battleford? If they are, then they need to be dealt with by the proper authorities.

If the allegations are not true, Mr. Speaker, then that needs to be dealt with as well by the proper authorities. And in that particular case, Mr. Speaker, that may very well be this Assembly. But that is something that the Committee on Privileges and Elections needs to determine and needs to recommend to this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Therefore I call on all members, as happened in 1916, to allow this allegation to go forward to the proper constituted committee of this legislature, the Committee on Privileges and Elections.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would move, seconded by the member from Rosthern:

That the allegations made by the member for North Battleford in the May 1, 2001 Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* article entitled "Hillson alleges bribe to shut up" be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for investigation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been a member of this Assembly for approximately a half dozen years and I think what we're doing today, and the issue that's in front of us today is without a doubt by far the most serious.

A lot of the things that we deal with and we discuss and we make speeches on — we're vitriolic, we're humorous, we're bombastic, and we cover up sometimes a lack of information or answers with those sorts of things. But this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, we're dealing with things of the gravest concerns.

As politicians, we've seen all sorts of ratings where we're rated, as far as respect is concerned, with other groups and other occupations. And I'm sorry to say, Mr. Speaker, we don't always rate as well as we would like.

And I think today we have an opportunity to deal with that issue to some extent and to ensure that the one thing that we all want to have left when we're through with this Assembly, or the public is through with us, is our integrity. The money will be spent, the speeches will be forgotten, but I think we want to be left with our integrity.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, the very same thing goes for the civil servants that we have in this province, and any civil servants in our country. Doing a job for the paycheque, doing a job for the province, doing a job for the company that they work for, they want to be seen by the public in the same light — that they are doing that because they are good employees and they're doing their job well. And they don't want to have anything happen that will hinder that particular reputation. They want to be seen as hard-working, diligent, impartial, and honest.

When I look at the headline in the paper that was already referred to, "Hillson alleges bribe to shut up — Claims CIC offered world excursion to MLA in exchange for silence," if today we do not take action on this particular issue, Mr. Speaker, that statement, or those two statements basically is what we're left with.

As politicians we're left with "Hillson alleges bribe to shut up." We will never know whether when we're opening this particular situation about trips being offered or not being offered, how often that we as politicians go on trips and we know there's a purpose for them — whether it's CPA (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) trips; there are trips to go ahead and attend committee meetings and learn how things are done in other provinces, in other countries.

It needs to be made very clear to the public, Mr. Speaker, that those are not things we were given in return for services or in returns to keep our mouth shut. And I think as our public employees do their jobs, they need to be able to go home and face the people on their street knowing that no one there says, I think this might be one of that group of individuals that offered a bribe.

If we don't deal with this issue, Mr. Speaker, in front of us today, no one in this province is going to know what really happened. And because of that then, Mr. Speaker, they can look at any of the 58 of us and wonder, is a bribe being offered. The only thing that we can probably be left with when we leave this place, Mr. Speaker, is our integrity.

And so we need to take this a step further and look into the issue. We need to look into the allegations and see what has actually happened there.

When I look at the reference that was referred to earlier on, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, between 1913 and 1958, when we look at that particular aspect, this whole thing became a frivolous thing where individuals would call that particular point on any issue that had no validity.

And so in 1958, and reading from that and Beauchesne's from page 63, that particular privilege was limited. It says:

Whether on the first impression the matter raised appeared to be a matter of privilege and whether the matter was raised as soon as it could have been.

So it's taken very seriously that this can only happen in certain particular cases. While those applied . . . And we dealt with this last week, Mr. Speaker. Those are the two guiding principles.

If we read the headline, okay, on first look, any person in this province, all million of them, read, "Hillson alleges bribe to shut up." That raises the difficulty.

The second part, this was raised as immediately as we possibly could, the ruling was given, and that brought us over to where we are today.

The question this afternoon goes to the perceived integrity of each one of us. Our province and our country, Mr. Speaker, is full of incidents that have left questions unanswered —

unanswered questions in the minds of citizens. And often we do not have the opportunity to defend ourselves.

Today, Mr. Speaker, if we follow through with this motion, we have that particular opportunity — the opportunity to defend ourselves and show that the MLAs of this particular province do not take bribes. And we need to take that step.

Let us review . . . and if we look at some of the situations that are hanging over the heads of politicians, and in some way they hang over the heads of all of us. And I won't go into detail on these but I'll just briefly mention them.

And as these are mentioned, we're all very aware that when these are talked at on our street at home, in the coffee shop, at a family reunion, and someone brings these up, and they refer to a politician in a different sphere, in a different province . . . but there's a question that's raised that has never been fully answered. And then someone looks at us with that look on their face, and do you do that same sort of thing? And that question hurts all of us as politicians today. And I repeat, Mr. Speaker, we have that opportunity to deal with it in specifics.

We have — and it comes up on the news fairly often, and it's a federal issue — the matter of the golf course and the hotel. None of us know for sure what happened there because that matter has not been settled. And therefore the possibility that politicians may actually be involved in these sorts of things, hang over all of our heads.

We look at the Channel Lake situation. And there was money that was never totally accounted for. And people kind of say, well exactly where did it go, who got it, where is it? And because it hasn't been fully answered, that cloud hangs over our heads.

And one more I would like to mention. We recently had the statement made in one of the newspapers that a particular union had underwritten a political party loan — it was the NDP loan. Well the question comes up, what favours had to be granted, or were any favours granted? But just like that, that cloud hangs over all of our heads, not just that particular political party.

But the question is asked, who signs everybody's loans or anyone's loans, and what do they get in return for it? So that question is there and, Mr. Speaker, we can answer that today.

(15:15)

We as members need to carry out the jobs that we've been elected for. We do that sometimes, as was mentioned, with a lot of enthusiasm. Recently, Mr. Speaker — and recently I'm speaking as far as history of democracy — we had in Saskatchewan the Conflict of Interest office set up just to ensure that when politicians make decisions and vote on things, that there isn't something hidden out there that would influence how we act and react.

I think that was one of those things, Mr. Speaker, that gave us a lot of credibility. That when people back home asked us, well maybe he has something to gain by it, we can say . . . All of us, each one of us, all 58 of us, Mr. Speaker, have had to declare what our financial situation is. And there are people there that

are prepared to look at that and declare where there's a conflict of interest when we make a decision, when we vote in this House. That was one of those things that this House did, Mr. Speaker, that helped in a major way to clear our reputations.

This afternoon, Mr. Speaker, we can go further. We have the allegation made, and I'll read it one last time, "Hillson alleges bribe to shut up." None of us want that hanging over our head for the rest of the time that we're going to spend in this Assembly. And for that reason I would hope that the members of this House would support the motion that is before us today. And it is because of that this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to second the motion made by the member from Cannington.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I want to begin my remarks by first of all saying that I'm very pleased to enter this debate today. And I want to say to all members of the House and to the people of Saskatchewan that government members do not take this issue lightly. We haven't when it was raised and we haven't subsequent to that.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that some of the words that were spoken by members opposite we agree with. The reputation of members of this legislature and the jobs that we do I think are of a very high calling, and the work that we do as members of the legislature is very noble work.

And I also want to say that I agree that not on all occasions we are viewed as doing positive work for the people of Saskatchewan, and that sometimes our motives are questioned. And I think I understand that, and we need to do what we can to ensure that we as individual members, but as importantly as that, we as members of caucuses, whether we're on the government side or whether we're on the opposition side, maintain a high level of credibility.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, in entering this debate, that that's what I believe this debate is about. It's about credibility and it's about believability. And I think, Mr. Speaker, no one can debate that.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite indicates there are times when questions will be raised that perhaps there is no answer for. And he cited a number of examples, the member from Rosthern, some hypothetical. And I want to say that members on this side of the House hear those kinds of questions raised as well. Some are founded, perhaps, and some are unfounded.

I can recall a conversation, Mr. Speaker, that I had with a gentleman some years ago who said to me and asked me, is it true that the Saskatchewan Party is funded by the two and a half million dollars that was left in the PC (Progressive Conservative) metro fund? And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, it's a legitimate question.

I don't know the answer to that, Mr. Speaker, but I want to say that it's one of the issues that are outstanding, as issues were cited by the member from Rosthern, that gives some question to the credibility, Mr. Speaker, of members and of caucuses. And I want to say as well, Mr. Speaker, that that is not the kind of

question that we want out there without answer.

But I want to speak today specifically, Mr. Speaker, to the motion put forward by the Opposition House Leader. Now I know that we've all followed the media in the past few days and we all understand the partisanship that takes place in this legislature. And we all understand, Mr. Speaker, as well, that opposition members would like nothing more than to embarrass the member from Battlefords.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, there are far more important issues in North Battleford right now and there are far more important issues facing this province right now. And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, although the words were noble by both members, and claim that the actions are not of a partisan nature, we all know better than that. But I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we have no intentions of being part of the opposition's political gamesmanship.

Mr. Speaker, I can't see how supporting this motion would benefit the people of this province. I can't see how supporting this motion would benefit the need for some dialogue and some solution with respect to health-care matters that have been put before members of the legislature and the people of Saskatchewan as a result of the Fyke report.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on one hand members of the legislature on the opposition side are very anxious to introduce this motion that would bring the Privileges Committee to work. And on the other hand, they vehemently oppose any involvement in a committee that would listen to the people of Saskatchewan with respect to their comments as it relates to Mr. Fyke's Commission that makes some recommendations in terms of health care.

So I want to say, Mr. Speaker, not partisan? I think not. Totally partisan and clearly partisan, and shouldn't be misrepresented for being anything other than what this motion is. And it's pure Saskatchewan politics — Saskatchewan Party politics, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I said this has something to do with credibility, and I want to speak to the issue of credibility. I think there's no doubt that people understand the member from Battleford's history as it relates to these kinds of issues and statements that he would make, Mr. Speaker. I think we all remember back to the bouts of reality loss that that member has faced. And I mean who can forget his ridiculous comments in an attempt to link the company who purchased Channel Lake Petroleum with the Russian mafia. Mr. Speaker, he wanted everyone in this province to believe the Russian mafia was hiding under everyone's bed.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are chirping, and that's fine. I was quiet as they delivered their comments, and I expect the same from them when I am speaking. But if that's not to be, I'll speak over top of them.

But I want to remind members opposite of that delusional episode and how much money that cost the Legislative Assembly in that action, Mr. Speaker. These outrageous comments cost the Legislative Assembly a \$33,000 legal bill.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we're not interested in adding to the costs incurred by comments made by the member from Battleford. That's not what we're about.

Mr. Speaker, this member has been back-peddalling since the media reported that, that very morning. Mr. Speaker, I think that member has been reversing himself so quickly, as I said a little early today, if he's not careful, he may in fact lap himself.

So what's happened? Let's look at the facts, Mr. Speaker. What happened since that newspaper article that is quoted in the Opposition House Leader's motion today? And I want to quote:

The allegations made by the member for North Battleford in the May 1, 2001 . . . *StarPhoenix* article entitled "Hillson alleges bribe to shut up" be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

And that's what they're asking. That "Hillson alleges bribe to shut up," — that headline was the basis for their argument.

Now what has happened subsequent to that newspaper article on May 1? Let's consider the facts. Firstly, the member from North Battleford, when he heard about the opposition's motion to refer this to the committee, stated clearly and unequivocally that he was not bribed. And I want to state what his quote was, Mr. Speaker: "The word bribe never crossed by lips, but was added by the media." So, Mr. Speaker, that's one issue, and that's one area where there's been a change.

And what happened as well, Mr. Speaker, in the same statement to the Assembly, the member from Battleford indicated that he doesn't want an investigation, and I quote: "I do not want an investigation."

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, when he was asked outside of this legislature by the media whether there was ever any suggestion that he should take this trip and then be quiet, I want to read again into the record what his answer was. His answer was: "no, no, absolutely not."

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that member's position, the member from Battlefords position is quite clear. He's been backtracking ever since he made these unfortunate statements outside of this legislature.

Now, Mr. Speaker, so the question here, I believe, is one of credibility. This member has a track record. We should not forget that. And it would appear very much, to me, that this is another example of what occurred some time ago when he had to apologize for comments he made in a legislative committee with respect to allegations of a company incorporated in this province, and ties to the Russian mafia.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think the issue of credibility is quite clear. The issue of credibility is very clear.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that members on that side of the House used a headline in one of the major papers in this province as a reason to refer this issue to a committee. Well, Mr. Speaker, there are headlines that stand on the other side of that issue as well. And I want to quote from the *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, the fifth of the fourth of 2001, and the headline

is, "Hillson should put up or shut up on CIC." That's the headline. That's the headline, Mr. Speaker.

And that might be a very valid and legitimate request. And why I say that, Mr. Speaker, is if the member from Battlefords or any member on that side of the House has any evidence of criminal activity or impropriety of an official of the Crown Investments Corporation or of any arm of executive government, they have a responsibility, Mr. Speaker, they have a duty.

And what is that duty, Mr. Speaker? If there is evidence and if the evidence is clear, they have the responsibility to refer it to the police. Mr. Speaker, that is quite clear.

Now we can debate here the validity and the role of that member as it relates to cabinet and what the function of a cabinet minister is as he sits or she sits on the board of a Crown. And we can describe what might be appropriate activity in terms of investigation of assets of that Crown, how they function, how they operate.

But, Mr. Speaker, I say what we have here is no more or no less than a delusion. That's what this is. We have an MLA who left the government, left the cabinet, and sits as an independent. And quite clearly, that member is starved for media attention. That's what this is about; that's what this is about.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we are not interested in satisfying the approach that this member has taken with respect to this issue at all. I say this: if there is evidence of impropriety or wrongdoing, let that member take it forward to the police, and let the police investigate. And if there is improper action, let the results of that be determined in the courts.

(15:30)

Mr. Speaker, there are some things that members on this side of the House are interested in, and I want to tell you what they are. They're in finding resolve to some of the issues as it relates to health care. And we're concerned about the unfortunate circumstances in North Battleford that need this government's and need this province's and need the people of this province's attention. Those are priorities, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're sent here.

Members opposite can play their silly little games, and they will. And they will, and they do, and we've got evidence of that every day in this House, but they shouldn't try to disguise them for any more or any less than what they are. To stand here and talk on the moral high ground with respect to this particular issue, Mr. Speaker, I think is not appropriate. Because people know what it is, they see it for what it is, and they see those members for what they are, Mr. Speaker. And that's why they're rapidly losing respect in this province, because it's one issue after another.

They want the Committee on Privileges and Elections to hear a non-issue, and at the same time they refuse to be involved in a committee that would hear the people of Saskatchewan with respect to the Fyke Commission and its report and recommendations with respect to health care.

So, Mr. Speaker, people know who they are and, Mr. Speaker, people know what they are. They're a very partisan group of men and women who seek nothing but political power at any cost. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that members of this side of the House will have no part of their political gamesmanship and their political opportunism.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I indicated in my remarks last week that we would abide by your ruling, and that we respected your ruling, and that we took this matter seriously, and we do, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, following this thing from the day it started, it became very, very clear that this was a delusion created by a member who perhaps mis-spoke himself outside of this House. And, Mr. Speaker, I think if there's evidence of criminal activity or wrongdoing on behalf of any official, I've said before, in terms of their employment in this government, if there's any shred of evidence, if there's any shred of credibility to that member, then every one of those members have a responsibility to forward that information to the RCM police or to the city police and that's the process, Mr. Speaker, that's appropriate in this case.

Mr. Speaker, we are not going to involve ourselves in a committee that will cost the taxpayers of this province thousands and thousands of dollars to no end — to satisfy their political desires. Mr. Speaker, we're not about that and we're not into that.

And members should not count on members on this side of the House to be supporting this motion because we know what it is. It's nothing more than cheap political gamesmanship. Mr. Speaker, this House has more important issues to deal with than the politics of members on that side of the House and the little tricks that they want to play in this legislature, Mr. Speaker.

We're focused, Mr. Speaker, on passing what was the best budget in the province.

We're focused on reducing the small-business tax by 25 per cent, Mr. Speaker, which is what this budget does.

We're focused on passing a budget that will include a large increase for education, Mr. Speaker.

We're focused, Mr. Speaker, on changing this province into a have province, developing this economy and building on this economy. And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, we have little time for actions of members on that side of the House as it relates to this motion.

Mr. Speaker, I think the issue is clear. You have a member who has lost credibility across this province. You have a member who may have, Mr. Speaker, misspoken himself. I can't speak for him.

Mr. Speaker, I say there is no evidence. There is nothing to substantiate what may have been allegations with quickly backtracking. And, Mr. Speaker, that's why I'm saying that members of this House will not support this motion.

I therefore move, Mr. Speaker, the debate on this motion be now adjourned.

The division bells rang from 15:36 until 15:46.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 29

Calvert	Kasperski	Hagel
Lautermilch	Atkinson	Serby
Melenchuk	Cline	Sonntag
Goulet	Van Mulligen	MacKinnon
Thomson	Prebble	Belanger
Crofford	Axworthy	Nilson
Hamilton	Junor	Addley
Jones	Higgins	Harper
Trew	Osika	Lorjé
Yates	McCall	

Nays — 22

Hermanson	Elhard	Heppner
Krawetz	Draude	Gantefoer
Stewart	Eagles	Wall
Bakken	McMorris	D'Autremont
Weekes	Bjornerud	Kwiatkowski
Brkich	Harpauer	Wakefield
Wiberg	Hart	Allchurch
Huyghebaert		

Debate adjourned.

Motion No. 5 — Strategy for Early Childhood Development

Mr. Prebble: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to enter into this important debate on early childhood intervention. And at the end of the debate, Mr. Speaker, I'll be moving a motion:

That this Assembly work with the Government of Saskatchewan to implement the Strategy for Early Childhood Development, a program built on initiatives begun with the Child Action Plan, a program that will support the healthy growth and development of Saskatchewan children.

Mr. Speaker, what I'd like to do this afternoon is outline first the government's plan for a significant investment on behalf of our children in this province, an investment that sees an intervention in the early years of life of our children, Mr. Speaker, and particularly children at risk.

And I'd also like to talk, Mr. Speaker, about some of the benefits that we expect that this investment will result in.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to address the question of other initiatives in the future that we may look at taking in this early childhood intervention arena.

But first, Mr. Speaker, let me say a word about the child action plan which essentially this new early childhood development initiative builds on. Because, Mr. Speaker, our child action plan is, I think, one of the real contributions that we have made on

the national stage in the last decade since our government was elected in 1991, Mr. Speaker.

The child action plan is a long-term strategy to enhance the well-being of Saskatchewan children, youth, and families. And essentially, Mr. Speaker, this action plan has first of all focused on reducing poverty in our province.

For instance under the child action plan, we've initiated the Saskatchewan Child Benefit and the Saskatchewan Employment Supplement, which have helped to take many work . . . low-income working families with children in the home to a higher income level and often an income level above the poverty line.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the child action plan has focused on enhancing family literacy, fighting the sexual abuse of children on the streets, and it is also — and this is what I particularly want to focus on this afternoon, Mr. Speaker — it has also provided dollars to expand investments for early childhood development and for children at risk. So those are some of the areas that the child action plan has focused on.

One of the examples of an initiative that's gotten a lot of attention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the investments that we've made in programs . . . in school lunch programs to help feed children, particularly at some of our elementary schools and also in other community contexts where children are not getting three good meals a day. And the funding through the child action plan has helped to finance nutrition programs and feeding programs.

So those are some examples of areas that the child action plan has contributed to, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And what I'd particularly like to focus on this afternoon is the contribution that we're now planning around a much more expanded initiative in the area of early childhood development, early children intervention, particularly focused on children at risk.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think traditionally in our province we've tended to focus our investments on children in the later years of life. So apart from the time of birth itself, we've not tended to invest heavily in the preschool years; rather our investment has tended to start at kindergarten and then, of course, throughout the elementary and high school years.

And much of the evidence and research that's built up in the last two decades increasingly points to the fact that we've been missing the boat and that our opportunity to have the greatest impact in terms of child development is in the very early years of life — in the first five years of life and particularly in the first three years of life, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when there's a great deal of brain development.

Most of the brain development in a child happens in the first three years of life, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And therefore it makes sense to invest in those early years, and traditionally governments at the provincial and federal level have not done that. And what this early childhood initiative that we're discussing this afternoon represents is an important investment in those years, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The research also demonstrates, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the

benefits to taxpayers by investing in these early years is very significant. For every dollar that is invested in these early years, we can expect a return of \$7 in terms of future savings to taxpayers.

So if we invest in children when they are one, two, three, four, and five, we can expect to see for every dollar we spend, \$7 of savings later on in terms of expenditures on the justice system, expenditures on social assistance, expenditures in health care later on in life. So there's a lot of long-term savings with this kind of an investment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And therefore I think it's good for our children and good for all the taxpayers of this province.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to give some examples of the sort of cost that we face right now when we don't support, when we don't provide a high level of support to children at risk. And I want to just give two examples of children at risk in our communities and how difficult it is once children reach an older age, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if interventions haven't been made early, how difficult it is to break the cycle of poverty in our communities.

One of the things that we're finding in this province, for instance, is that if children are in the care of a foster parent or the child welfare system, generally, 76 per cent of those children, when they're adults, are likely to rely on social assistance at some point in their lives. That's a pretty staggering statistic, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Similarly, of young offenders who are involved in the justice system, when they become adults, 69 per cent of them are going to rely on social assistance at some point in their lives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are examples of two groups of youth in our community — older teens — one group who is in the care of the Minister of Social Services in a foster home; the other group who has gotten into trouble with the justice system and have had young offender status who, when they go on into their adult lives, find that for a significant portion of their life they end up relying on social assistance at much, much higher rates than the average citizen in our province.

And that demonstrates how tough this cycle of poverty, once it starts, is to break, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that's why we're of the view that we have to start early in our interventions.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been investing through the child action plan in Saskatchewan over the last decade, significantly, in the area of early childhood development. And our potential to invest even more significantly in this area is now enhanced by the announcement of the federal government last year that they were willing to contribute financially to early childhood development initiatives across Canada.

And so in Saskatchewan we'll be receiving \$10 million in new money this year from the federal government. For the first time we're seeing an important federal contribution in this field. And we have made a decision as a government to take a coordinated approach between the Department of Health, Education, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, and Social Services to launch an expanded early childhood development initiative in Saskatchewan.

And we're going to . . . I wanted to say a word about the goals of this initiative, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because the focus is going to be on high-risk children, and we want to try to ensure that those children are born healthy and that to the greatest extent possible they remain healthy throughout their childhood and throughout their lives.

We also want to support the families of those children, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . .

(16:00)

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, a quorum call please.

Clerk Assistant (Committees): — Mr. Speaker, a quorum is present.

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, our goals in this early childhood development initiative are to give support to high-risk children and high-risk families with respect to enhancing their health, supporting the functioning of those families, reducing abuse and injury and the risk of disability and disease for these children, and ensuring that children who are at risk in our province have access to comprehensive and an integrated system of supports and services.

So that is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we're hoping to achieve here. And I want to say a word about the group that we're trying to reach. And we're hoping, I might say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the first year of this new initiative, to reach at least 900 children who are at risk and to provide home visitation supports to about 500 children.

I want to say that we're focusing here on families and their children who are hard to reach. For instance, we've found that there is approximately 6 per cent of mothers in our province who don't access any prenatal care during pregnancy. So that will be an example of a group of mothers in our province that we're particularly trying to target and provide supports to.

We're also wanting to provide supports to teens who, of course, are having children early in life. Those teen mothers particularly need support, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that'll be another group that we're targeting in this early childhood development initiative, is the children of those teen mothers and support for the mothers themselves.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we want to provide support to families that have a history of substance abuse, violence, and have had serious problems with addictions in the hope that we can reduce the incidence of domestic abuse in home situations.

I might say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this initiative in part is modelled on work that has been done in some US (United States) states, and particularly the state of Hawaii where, through a home visitation and support program to high-risk families, rates of domestic abuse in the home have been sharply reduced by in excess of 70 per cent. And we're going to be trying to achieve similar results here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in an ideal world we'd be able to provide these support services to the entire province. But as has been the case with other jurisdictions that have begun this kind of an initiative, we've started by targeting communities that we believe are . . . would most benefit from these services.

So part of this early childhood development initiative will be province-wide. For instance, there'll be universal screening of all children at birth to identify children that might particularly benefit from supports. But many of the specific programs under this initiative will be targeted at those communities that are . . . where it's believed that it would be the greatest number of families who would benefit from the service.

So communities have been selected based on the incidence of poverty in communities; communities with very high poverty or neighbourhoods with very high poverty have been given priority. Also we've been looking at neighbourhoods and communities where there's been a high incidence of low birth weight, children born at birth with very low birth weights.

We've been looking at communities and neighbourhoods where there's been a particularly high rate of infant hospitalization, where there's a very high incidence of families headed up by a single parent member, and we've taken all those kind of factors into consideration in targeting neighbourhoods and communities that are going to be our first priority in terms of benefiting from this early childhood development initiative, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And what these communities will receive is more support in terms of preschool programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker. More support in terms of daycare initiatives, daycare spaces. More support in terms of home visitation from lay workers who'll be hired to visit families that are believed to be at particularly high risk and to provide those families with the kind of support that they need to raise their children in a healthy way.

Now some of the communities that will be benefiting from this initiative, Mr. Deputy Speaker, include the communities of North Battleford and Nipawin, Moose Jaw, Meadow Lake, and Yorkton. All of northern Saskatchewan will receive these additional services, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And then also some of the higher-risk neighbourhoods in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert where there's a higher percentage of families where children are believed to be at some risk are also going to receive the support. That will include four neighbourhoods in Regina, six neighbourhoods in Saskatoon, and two in Prince Albert, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And the approach that we're hoping to use, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the approach that the government will be taking is, first of all, more attention in terms of prenatal outreach and screening. We're particularly interested in reaching out, as I mentioned earlier, to the 6 per cent of women who we know right now don't access any prenatal care during their pregnancy.

There'll be a universal screening service provided. All babies born in Saskatchewan hospitals will be screened to help identify those facing challenges such as poverty, low education levels, single parenthood, or dependence on social assistance. And those who are determined to be at higher risk will be given

priority for follow-up support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the focus will then be on home visiting. As I said, these visits will be done by lay workers, non-professionals from the community. And these visitors to families will be non-judgmental, and they'll offer support and advice, helping parents access programs, wherever there's an interest by the parent in doing that, to ensure the best possible development of their children.

And these home visitors, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will also be offering friendly advice and support in helping parents of young children to develop their parenting skills and to overcome many of the challenges that one faces in the early years of parenting.

In addition to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, through this program which we're calling Kids First, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there'll be additional support in terms of early learning opportunities, both through the expanded daycare spaces that I made reference to earlier and also through the enhancement of early learning programs for four- and five-year-olds in a preschool setting.

In addition to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there'll be investments to support parents in terms of literacy training, nutritional counselling, and parenting programs.

And all communities in Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will benefit from some aspects of this initiative in the sense that there will be community developers hired who will work with communities to align existing programs and services and make sure that they are being accessed by all families that have particular needs.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're looking here then at an enhancement of prenatal services which will focus on things like preventing fetal alcohol syndrome, preventing fetal alcohol effect. We're looking at the establishment of home visiting services to support families and to also connect them to important services in our community.

We'll be looking at an expansion of daycare services in neighbourhoods that are given priority in this early childhood development initiative, and we're hoping this year to create at least 195 additional licensed child care spaces. And then we're hoping to increase access to early learning opportunities in the neighbourhoods and communities that are targeted by this program.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say a few words about some of the outcomes that we're hoping for in terms of this investment. We're hoping of course to improve parenting skills in families that often don't have a lot of experience in parenting and may have come out of family situations themselves which were very difficult. We're hoping, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to improve the lives of parents and to increase parental participation in both schooling and in the workforce. And of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're hoping for some significant gains in terms of the lives of children themselves.

So we're hoping that through these initiatives, Mr. Deputy Speaker, children will receive better grades when they enter into school, that there will be more children from families in . . . who are living in difficult circumstances that will be successful

in graduating; fewer children that will ultimately rely on social assistance; fewer children getting into trouble with the law; and much lower rates of domestic abuse and neglect in the home, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I might say in this regard that we are optimistic in light of the success that those US states that have made this kind of investment have achieved, particularly with respect to lower rates of domestic abuse and neglect in the home. As I was saying earlier, the case of the state of Hawaii, we saw reductions of as much of 70 per cent in many parts of the state.

Now I want to say a word, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about how this program would be delivered, because the plan essentially is that the province has selected the communities where this program will be particularly targeted and we're going to be allocating the funding by community. And as I mentioned earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're hoping to invest \$10 million in this first year of the initiative, and we're hoping that by year four and five we'll see an investment of as much as \$16 million per year.

We'll be setting the overall policy and direction obviously for this initiative. But at the local level, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're hoping that Aboriginal government will play an important role in the planning and delivery of these services. We're going to be fostering partnerships between our health districts, our school divisions, Aboriginal government, and of course, departments like Social Services and Education in terms of this work.

And we expect the service delivery to take place at the local level, and we're going to be encouraging an integrated approach by community organizations and local governments in terms of setting local priorities and delivering these services.

(16:15)

Let me just say a word, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the broad allocation of the monies for this year. We're hoping to spend approximately 45 per cent of this year's funding on supporting the home visitation program, which we really see as the core of this initiative. It's the support that visitors in the home, knowledgeable visitors in the home, will provide to families at risk that I believe will make the greatest difference in terms of the successful functioning of those families and the kind of support that's needed for them to raise healthy children in a successful way.

We're going to be investing about one and a half million dollars in the early learning initiatives in this early childhood development thrust, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we're also hoping to invest approximately the same amount, about one and a half million dollars, in expanded child care. In addition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there will be an expansion of pre-kindergarten spaces where we're hoping to invest at least another \$200,000.

And an expansion of the early childhood intervention programs which I believe these ECIP (Early Childhood Intervention Program) programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, play a very important role in our communities across this province. Working with children who have disabilities, diagnosed disabilities, and providing support to parents in terms of how to help their children, at least partially, overcome the disability and lead the

fullest life that they possibly can. And again we found in these ECIP programs, which are targeted at children with disabilities, that intervening early makes a huge difference in the life of the child and their success later in life. So there will be an important investment there, Mr. Speaker.

Those are some examples of how we'll be investing the \$10 million that I made reference to earlier that provides the overall funding framework for this initiative.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to provide an opportunity for other members who may wish to enter the debate to do that.

But what I want to do is, in having explained the central framework of this initiative, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is make reference to, well some of the other important work that's being done in terms of supporting children, and particularly children at risk in our province. And also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to make a few comments about where we might go in terms of building on the very good work that's already been done through the child action plan. And this new initiative which I'm extremely excited about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I think this is an expenditure of money that's going to make a really concrete difference in the lives of many families across our province.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the things that our government has announced this year is that effective January 1, 2002 — so towards the end of the fiscal year that we've just started — effective January 1, 2002, the child tax credit will be increased from \$1,500 per child to \$2,000 a child. And that's something that will benefit every family with children, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's an important initiative.

I also want to say that . . . I want to report to the House on the difference that the investments in the children's action plan have made in terms of reducing poverty in our province. And again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to say that we have now been the . . . last year we were the only province that showed a reduction in its rate of child poverty, and we've now had several consecutive years of reduction so that we've been able to take the child poverty rate down to about 18.7 per cent. There was a time just a few years ago when it was well in excess of 20 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so we are making some progress on that file. But it's also clear that much more needs to be done.

I want to give an example of the kind of concrete help that the investments that Saskatchewan has made in terms of tackling child poverty as part of the overall child action plan has resulted in. For instance, before the introduction of the National Child Benefit that we championed here in this province under the leadership of our former premier, Mr. Romanow, a Saskatchewan single parent with one child, working 32 hours a week at minimum wage, had an annual disposable income of \$11,160. After the introduction of the National Child Benefit, including the Saskatchewan Child Benefit, and the Saskatchewan employment supplement, this same single parent with one child could now receive an annual disposable income of \$14,760 from working in the same job at the same wage.

Now here's an example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of a family that's now \$3,600 a year better off as a result of the kind of initiatives

that this government has launched in Saskatchewan and has persuaded the federal government to launch at the national level. And I think that is progress, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a very concrete way.

Now I want to say that if we are going to reduce the number of children at risk in our communities, I'm of the view that we have to go even further in terms of addressing poverty. What the early childhood development initiative is going to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it's going to help provide a lot of support to families in terms of improving parenting and it's going to invest in reducing the risks that children face in many ways. But what it's not going to do is provide families that need yet additional financial help with the kind of financial help that they need.

And it's my experience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that many, many of the families that are at the highest risk are families who are on social assistance. I see frankly only two ways of providing those families with additional financial assistance. The most promising way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to provide those families with enhanced opportunities for employment and enhanced income supplements when they're successful in getting jobs to make sure that they all live above the poverty line.

The second approach, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which I believe we have to consider, more so than we've done today, is the need to increase social assistance rates for families with children in our communities because the practical reality, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that in some areas of the rate structure there's been no change now for almost two decades. And in terms of the clothing allowance, the allowance for shelter, the allowance for food, those things have not changed for a very, very long time.

And I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that until we decide, and I know this is not the most popular thing from an electoral point of view, but until we decide that we're going to reinvest in our social assistance program and move families up, not necessarily to the poverty line but closer at least to the poverty line. We are going to continue to see a very disturbing level of family dysfunction in some of the higher risk neighbourhoods in our communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In my home city of Saskatoon the rate of child poverty among the group of children that we're considering here now, children zero to five, the rate of child poverty is 31 per cent. And this cannot be addressed just through this kind of early childhood development initiative.

I think this needs to be addressed through an investment in employment opportunities for these families, and also where employment opportunities are not possible, which is the case in many families that may be headed by a single mother with several preschool children in the home, or headed by a parent who's disabled, headed by a parent that's got fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effect. In many cases, full employment may not be an option for these families. And I believe we need to look at higher social assistance rates for them.

I also want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am very excited about the initiative here, that we're talking about this afternoon, as it pertains to expansion of preschool programs and expansion

of daycare programs. And I think we would do well to look at going beyond the enhancements we're now planning and try to ensure that we have a high-quality preschool program and a high-quality daycare program with a much higher level of access to licensed daycare in the province as a real foundation of government planning, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We're serious about investing in the preschool years. We need to look at expanding licensed daycare even further than this initiative proposes. And we need to look, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at expanding our investment in preschool even further than the initiative proposes.

So I think this initiative is an excellent start and I hope it'll pave the way for an even greater investment.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's time for me to stop. But I'm very excited about this initiative and it's my pleasure to move the motion.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is with a great deal of pride that I stand this afternoon to second the motion of the member from Greystone. Connecting to our future depends greatly upon enhancing the development of our children, Mr. Speaker.

In our early childhood development strategy, there's a comprehensive, long-term plan to do just that, Mr. Speaker. It's to ensure that children from birth to age five get the very best possible start in life, Mr. Speaker. That we do all we can to help children be the most productive citizens they can in our communities.

The strategy will support the healthy growth and development of children in many ways. It will provide intensive support to high-need families through initiatives, partnerships among families, communities, schools, health districts, Aboriginal organizations, and of course, the government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our strategy is a new approach to delivering services for high-needs families. It sets out long-term goals and actions and will guide our efforts and commitments to measure and report on progress towards these goals each year, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we started down this path with a vision, a vision of what we want for our children and for our children's futures, Mr. Speaker. Our vision is that vulnerable children enjoy a good start in life and are nurtured and supported by caring families and communities.

And that's premised on a couple of things, Mr. Speaker: that our children and our communities are the responsibility of the entire community; that we all need to work to help children to be the best that they can be — that they'll develop to their full potential, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have a number of goals in this program, Mr. Speaker. We want to see that high-risk children are born healthy and remain healthy throughout their lives. That we, as a government, do what we can to help those children in high-risk situations, to get

those services to their parents in the prenatal stages, Mr. Speaker, and through the early years of their life.

(16:30)

We want to make sure that high-risk children are supported and nurtured by healthy, well-functioning families. That for a young child to develop properly and to nurture within our community, you must have a well-functioning family, with a family unit that's working towards the goal of having healthy children and keeping healthy children, Mr. Speaker.

We want to help high-risk children able in their ability to learn and cope and solve problems as they encounter them, Mr. Speaker. And we want to make sure that high-risk children are free from abuse, injury, disability, disease, and death.

Mr. Speaker, we are gauged by how we deal with our children. Children are the most important thing to all parents. They're very important to our communities. And those of us who are parents, which many of us from both sides of this Assembly are, know how important our children are to us. And we want every child in our communities to have the same potentials as we want for our own children, Mr. Speaker, and that's very important. We care about children. There isn't a single member in this Assembly that doesn't care about their children and the children in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, we want high-risk children to have access to comprehensive, integrated, and developmentally sequential systems of supports and services. We want them to have those services they need when they need them, Mr. Speaker, and with the access that they believe they should have, and our communities should deliver to them, Mr. Speaker.

For we are going to endeavour, Mr. Speaker, to work to put in progress a program that's going to increase and enhance the lives of all children in the province, but in particular will identify those children at most risk, and provide special services to those communities, and to those parents and families that most need it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about what our budget this year did. Our budget put forward a number of initiatives to help children and families in our communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And this government stands behind its strategy for children in early childhood intervention and development, Mr. Speaker.

This strategy brings together several departments of government — Health, Education, Social Services — and combines their efforts and resources and commitment and energy towards one objective, ensuring that all Saskatchewan children have a healthy start, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we all want our children to have a healthy start in life, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We all know that early intervention improves the chances of success for our children; that those vital services that children get at their earliest possible point in their lives will determine their success in future years. And this is the fundamental principle behind the early childhood strategy that builds on our success in the Action Plan for Children.

The early childhood development strategy focuses on special services for children with serious health, education, or developmental challenges, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in communities where they need the services . . . the need for those services, pardon me, are exceptionally high. Helping the children who most need the help is putting our values to work. That's the Saskatchewan spirit and the way we do things within our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The early childhood development program will ensure that all babies born in Saskatchewan hospitals, and their families, will be screened for risk factors that may affect the child's development. It will provide intensive support services for high-risk children and the families in need, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Early childhood development will be employed across the province to aid Saskatchewan children in getting a healthy start to life. Mr. Deputy Speaker, progress in improving the quality of life for our children is what this province is all about.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk today about a number of programs that this government's introduced to help children reach their maximum potential.

And I'm going to start first about a kid . . . a program called Kids First. Saskatchewan's child care programs will be expanded to meet the needs of vulnerable families in targeted communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as part of this program. Investments in early learning programs provide children an opportunity to learn skills and enhance their social development, school readiness, and their ability to learn — all things that all members of this Assembly will support.

Mr. Speaker, the early childhood development program is a combination of commitments between government, communities, and our stakeholders. These programs will be coordinated provincially but will be managed and delivered locally rather than by the provincial government.

The members opposite want to debate this issue and I hope that they get the opportunity to get into the debate, Mr. Speaker.

The provincial government will provide central leadership to the program by setting policy and program direction, including program priorities and standards. And it will include methods of accountability, reporting, and outcome measurements, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They will select targeted communities for these programs to be delivered in; they'll allocate funding to those communities.

They'll be approving community plans for the initiative. They'll establish the accountability framework within each community and there will be public reporting to the minister and to the Assembly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, health districts, school divisions, and others will partner to deliver services through partnerships where existing service providers will deliver the services, including appropriate Aboriginal service delivery partners, Mr. Speaker. It's important that we deliver those programs in a culturally sensitive way for those Aboriginal children and other children of other cultures to feel comfortable within our

programs.

Individual communities will develop community-specific plans to be approved by the government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There will be local determination of service delivery and mechanisms — delivered by the people in those communities and designed by the people in those communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There will be local management determined by those communities and those agencies. They'll build on existing community resources that already are there in those communities. And we'll realign services where possible to get the maximum benefit for children on the delivery of our services.

Within the first year, Mr. Speaker, of these programs we expect that we'll be able to achieve some targeted results. First off, that 96 per cent of all births in the province will be screened in hospital; and 22 per cent of these births are going to be targeted in high-needs communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker; 9 per cent of all births each year will receive in-depth assessments where there will be greater in-depth assessment of the family needs; 5 per cent of all births will receive an intensive home visiting program as well as significant parent-community supports.

So not only are we going to support the children, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're going to support their families within those communities. And over 50 existing early learning programs will be enhanced to better meet the needs of children in our communities, in our high-risk populations, Mr. Speaker.

On top of that, there will be 250 additional daycare spaces for the targeted high-risk population. That in itself talks about where this program is going in its first year, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But I want to talk a little bit about the need for this program, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think there are a few facts that many people may not understand or know. That 6 per cent of Saskatchewan women do not receive prenatal care. There are communities within Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where some of these services aren't readily available. And then there are situations and circumstances, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where for various reasons people have difficulty obtaining these services.

Each child with FAS (fetal alcohol syndrome) costs 1.5 million in supports and lost productivity over a lifetime, Mr. Deputy Speaker — each child with FAS costs 1.5 million in supports and lost productivity in their lifetime, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is estimated that every dollar spent on prevention, or early intervention saves \$7 in later costs to the government. Very important to understand the importance of early intervention and understand that saving . . . that putting money forward today will save in the future.

It is increasingly clear to experts that the first three years of life have a tremendous impact on behaviour, health, and learning patterns of children, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that prenatal and early childhood periods are critical in the development of children and that children today are the healthy, productive citizens of tomorrow.

So it's more important than ever that we understand that early

childhood development strategies are about our future, and not just about today.

We need to ensure that all children have an opportunity to reach their full potential, and be meaningful contributors within our society. Making investments early through prenatal care, or spending dollars on early intervention can have a big payoff down the road, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we need to understand that, and we need to work towards that.

I want to talk a little bit about child development theory and strategy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In terms of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social well-being, the period from conception to age six is the key to subsequent growth, development, and ultimate productivity, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Children have different needs depending on where they are within the stages of that development from ages zero to six, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but those are the most important years of an individual's life.

Infants from birth to age one need a number of things, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They need protection from physical danger; they need adequate nutrition; they need adequate health care; they need adults with whom to form attachments; they need adults who can understand and respond to their signals. They need things to look at, touch, hear, smell, and taste. They need opportunities to explore the world, and opportunities for appropriate language stimulation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now toddlers age one to three, have different needs. They need the same things that the zero to one need, but they also have some new and enhanced needs. They need support in acquiring new motor, language, and thinking skills. They need a chance to develop some independence. They need help in learning how to control their own behaviours, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They need opportunities to begin to learn to care for themselves. And last but not least, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they need daily opportunities to play with a variety of objects. They need somebody to help them learn to play, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And children age three to six need other things on top of what we've already talked about, and those are as follows, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They need opportunities to develop fine motor skills; they need encouragement of language through talking, reading, and singing; they need activities which will develop a positive sense of mastery; they need opportunities to learn co-operation, helping, and sharing; and they need the opportunity to experiment with pre-writing and pre-reading skills.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I've indicated through this theory of child development, a wide variety of inputs are required to support children's growth and development. An early childhood strategy is designed to deliver those needs of children.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the factors that influence a child's development. One is the parenting style of parents; the other is the availability of social supports within our communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As well we need education . . . the education level of parents make a significant difference in the ability of our children to

learn to grow. Single parents have a more difficult time. Employment status of the parents, their ability to earn money and to feed their families make a significant difference. And of course the income level of the parents has a variety of factors on the rest of the family as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There are a number of potential risk factors for children. The presence of these factors does not guarantee a child will face developmental challenges. However, it increases the risk that they will encounter problems, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The age of parents also has an impact on young children. The younger the parents the greater the chance that a child's development will be impeded, because those parents have not yet learned the skills they need to be adequate parents.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we have circumstances like that, we need to step in and have a strategy and a plan to help parents be parents; to help them teach and develop their children, monitor them; provide them with the necessary skills and support to be effective parents, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, multiple risk factors create an exceptional effect and the results are cumulative in families where there are high risks.

To have the greatest long-term impact we need to intervene during the earlier stages of a child's life, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If we wait too long to provide support and address the needs of high-risk children and families, it becomes too late to have a greater impact, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The cycle of poverty is extremely hard to break. Children currently in care receiving social assistance after age 18 are 76 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Young offenders receiving social assistance after age 18 today is 69 per cent.

So those statistics indicate for us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the earlier we can intervene in a child's life and the greater supports we can provide will enhance their ability to get out of the cycle that they have been put in and make a more meaningful contribution for their own well-being and for that of society as a whole. That's why programs to deal with children at the very earliest ages are so very important to our society, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

(16:45)

The way to break the cycle is concentrating on the important formative years of life, addressing the determinants of health at the outset, and being there for children in every way we can. And that's what our strategy for early childhood development is all about, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What's our commitment to early childhood development? Well over the next five years there will be \$73 million available to work towards enhancing the well-being of children, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is very clear that we need to invest more of our energy and of our money towards this goal. And that's what this government is doing through its early childhood development strategy, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is working towards the values that this government wants to

put forward as the people's agenda, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we have heard from people across the province they want. They want to have our children have the greatest opportunities possible in life. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this commitment will allow us to expand the services we already provide for children and continue to build on those strengths that we have.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the vision of Kids First. It is that vulnerable children enjoy a good start in life and are nurtured and supported by caring families and communities. In high-needs communities, supports and services are provided through partnerships between families, communities, and service organizations and government.

This is not a top-down approach, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is about involving our communities, our stakeholders, and our families in developing the best possible potential for the children in our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And what are our goals? Mr. Deputy Speaker, our goals are that high-risk children are born and remain healthy; that high-risk children are supported and nurtured by healthy well-functioning families; that high-risk children are able to learn, hope, and solve problems, Mr. Deputy Speaker; high-risk children are free from abuse, injury, disability, disease, and death. And finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that high-risk children have access to a comprehensive, integrated, and developmentally sequential system of supports and services to help them reach a goal of a healthy future, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This goes beyond addressing the health needs or education needs. It encompasses the whole child and his or her family, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's about providing what's best for not only the child but for the entire family.

Who is trying to reach this goal? Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people who we're trying to help are those who are hard to reach. They don't access programs and services today for a number of different reasons. Promotional materials are beyond their reading levels and people were apprehensive about using formal supports.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're trying to reach those who are most vulnerable in our society, those who most need our help, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We want to reach those who receive little or no prenatal care. The first point of contact is at birthing time in the hospital, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We want to reach those mothers before birth and help those mothers learn the skills they need — nutrition and other elements in order to deliver a healthy baby — in the prenatal stages, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We want to begin . . . By having children in early teens continue to bear children frequently — we want to deal with those who are most vulnerable, having children when they are still children, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we want those who have conflicts, socio-economic issues, substance abuse, violence in their home, poverty, and lack of education, we want to target those people, Mr. Speaker, to help them become . . . to help their children break the cycle in which they may be born into.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a targeted program to our province's most vulnerable children and their families — what we call high-risk families. The programs will address the needs of children from before they are born until age five. This is the period when we can have the greatest impact on the future of our children, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now where will we deliver those services, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We're going to target communities with a significant number of high-risk children, where a comprehensive range of community-based supports and services will be delivered. Selecting communities on a ranking process, based on factors associated with poor child development; those factors being poverty, incidents of low- and high-birth weight, infant hospitalization rates, lone parenting rates, the number of births in the community.

Because dollars are limited, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to channel our efforts to where the need is greatest and the families in need are concentrated. And in short, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we want to focus on where we can have the greatest impact with the funding available.

We will be targeting communities that have a significant number of vulnerable children and families who need a range of community supports — literacy, parenting support programs — as well as treatment services such as mental health, drug and alcohol counselling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We're going to target first where we can make the best and most profitable outcomes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but also where the need is the greatest, where we can help those who need it most.

I just want to touch on some of the communities that have been identified for need: Regina in north central, Core and Al Ritchie areas, northeast; in Saskatoon, Pleasant Hill, Riversdale, Holiday Park, King George, Meadow Green, and Confederation; Prince Albert in the Westflat and East Hill, Mr. Deputy Speaker; in Meadow Lake; Moose Jaw; North Battleford; all of northern Saskatchewan; and Yorkton, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

How are we going to reach these high-needs children and families? We're going to start with an aggressive prenatal outreach and screening program, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And then we're going to follow it up with a universal screening program at birth.

The prenatal outreach and screening will address the issues of FAS and FAE (fetal alcohol effects) children, Mr. Deputy Speaker, trying to reach women as early as possible in their pregnancies to ensure that they understand the impacts of their nutrition and health on their unborn babies, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are particularly interested in reaching out to the 6 per cent of women who do not know or do not have access to prenatal care.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the universal screening program, all babies born in Saskatchewan hospitals will be screened to help identify those facing challenges such as poverty, low education levels, single parenthood, or dependence on social assistance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Those who are determined at high risk will be given priority for follow-up treatments, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What services will be offered? There'll be intensive support home visiting programs for those families most in need, addictions and mental health services, Mr. Deputy Speaker, enhanced early learning and child care options, and parent support programs to help parents become parents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, intensive home support visiting in certain communities — this will be the follow-up that will take the form of home visits in communities where we have the highest risk children. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are going to do everything we can to help those parents effectively work towards the development of their children, help them obtain health services when they need it, social supports, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and parenting skills they may not have at this time.

Our early learning and care programs through Kids First will be expanding daycare spaces in high-need communities to offer support to those families that need it the most. We will also enhance our early learning programs for four- and five-year-olds. These programs will help high-risk children develop social skills and prepare them for kindergarten.

These programs will also support parents through literacy training, nutrition counselling, and parenting programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Research shows that home visiting programs improve parenting skills, improve mothers' lives, increase parental participation in the workforce, increase parental participation in formal education, and reduce the need for health care for preventable illness, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Research also shows that early learning programs increase school readiness and achievement for high-risk children, Mr. Deputy Speaker, increases chances of completing high school, improves parent/child interaction, and decreases criminal activity, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the model for service delivery. It will be provided through central leadership but delivered through community participation in the local communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It will include local partnerships in health districts, school boards, Aboriginal stakeholders in our communities, and others in our communities that apparently are delivering programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And what are the implications for our partners, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The implications are that we'll have . . . our Department of Health will provide universal screening, assessment by public health nurses, mental health and addiction services, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Department of Education will provide early learning and Social Services will provide child care services, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to talk for one minute about our guiding principles before I wrap up my talk on early childhood and development, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our guiding principles include five . . . or six fundamental foundations. That the inclusion of Aboriginal organizations are essential to any programs that we develop, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That community involvement and input is absolutely essential to the development of our program.

We need to build on existing services and strengths within our

communities, and we need to ensure that our services are culturally appropriate. Our programs need to all be voluntary; these are not forced programs. They desire to enhance the willingness of families and their children to be involved in our programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And they must be innovative and flexible.

Now this is the foundation in which we have put forward an early childhood development program, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that program and strategy is going to guide us over the next number of years to enhance the quality of life for our children. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a program that we believe in as a government. It's a program that I am very, very proud to say that I stand behind.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for those reasons I am very proud to stand and second the motion for the member from Saskatoon . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Sutherland, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Greystone, pardon me, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Nothing could be more important to any one of us than the health and safety and well-being of our children. Children are not only are the future of the community but also the future of the province. We know that if we can take care of the babies today it'll have a deep and lasting impact on their growth and development and define them as adults.

We've all heard that if we spend \$1 on preventative programs now, it'll save \$7 in associated costs in the future in areas such as social services, remedial education, and crime. I wish this government believed this. Based on its own track record, I don't believe so.

Remember the child action plan is an NDP program that's linked to brighter futures, a federal initiative also aimed at prevention. This means federal money is funnelled to this NDP government and they turn around and use it as they see fit and then take credit for the program. Sadly, we all know not too many of their programs have been successful so far, so there's really not a lot to take credit for.

In fact when it comes to early childhood development it's interesting to note that this is not really anything new for this government. It's basically the same old package tied up with a different coloured ribbon.

Four years ago they trotted out something called early childhood intervention, which targeted pre-kindergarten children. Interesting to note that in this government's budget address just a few weeks ago, they talked about the need to eliminate child hunger to give Saskatchewan children the best possible start in their lives.

I think we all remember the former premier, Mr. Romanow, promised that he was going to eliminate child hunger in his first term of government.

If this government is so committed to stopping child hunger, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why is an increasing number of the province's families regularly using the food bank. The Regina and District Food Bank feeds nearly 9,000 people a month, and

half of those are children, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Eight years after the child action plan was announced, we still have numerous school programs in school . . . in place whose sole aim is to prevent child hunger. A child who is hungry is not able to concentrate and is therefore not able to learn. Teachers have known this for years.

Eight years after the child action plan was announced, we also have an increasing number of community programs in place. Some of these programs collect sweaters for children, some provide sports equipment, and still others exist to provide a lifeline for children who need intervention and support.

Mr. Speaker, the motion put forward by the government members promises this government will renew their efforts in raising the level of care for our children. We read between the lines that this government again pledges to put children on our list of the province's number one assets.

Mr. Speaker, the opportunity afforded by this motion to even try to make 10 government departments work together is breathtaking. Add to that the issue of children's health and well-being benefiting from such a program, and we believe that the motion must be applauded by everyone in this Assembly, regardless of which side of the House.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I support the government's motion on behalf of the official opposition. And although I will not be putting forward an amendment, I will put forward my commitment that I will be very vigilant watching the government to ensure they fulfill their commitment to implement the program on behalf of the children of Saskatchewan.

I would like to adjourn the debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 17:00.