

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Wadena who are concerned about the reduction of services at the Wadena health centre. 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 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, long-term care services available to users from this district and beyond.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by folks from Wadena, Nut Mountain, Kuroki.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of still more petitioners from southwest Saskatchewan who desire a new hospital in the regional centre of the southwest and Swift Current. Mr. Speaker, I have enough petitions that I could probably stand every day until about the middle of August and present them.

Mr. Speaker, the prayer of the petition reads as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the petitioners today come from the great city of Swift Current, from Wymark, from Gull Lake, from Hazenmore, and Ponteix.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Weyburn-Big Muddy and the Weyburn Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse who are interested in building an in-patient treatment centre in the city of Weyburn. 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 and provide funding for the same.

And this petition is signed by citizens of Weyburn.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present regarding the EMS (emergency medical services) report, 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 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 in the Alida, Carievale, Glen Ewen, and Antler area.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present on health today. 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 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.

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the Carnduff, Alida, Carievale, and Glen Ewen areas.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present a petition calling for immediate implementation of province-wide 911 emergency service. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to fulfill its promise to the people of rural Saskatchewan by immediately implementing the 911 emergency telephone service province-wide.

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

Signed by the citizens of Perdue, Biggar, Grandora and Saskatoon.

I so submit.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition opposed to the possible reduction of health services in Kamsack. 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 health care services in the Kamsack Hospital be maintained at its current level of service at minimum, with 24-hour acute care, emergency and doctoral services available.

The petitioners, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Mikado, Kamsack, Russell.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents' concerns with the centralization of ambulance services. 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 improve community-based ambulance services.

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

And signatures to this petition come from the communities of Wynyard, Regina, and Mozart.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise in this Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding concerned citizens of the Shellbrook-Spiritwood constituency in regards to the Fyke report.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon any plans to reduce the current levels of available acute care, emergency, and doctor services.

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

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Spiritwood, Meadow Lake, and Mildred.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise again with a petition from concerned citizens with regard to the lack of cellular telephone coverage in rural Saskatchewan. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause government to provide reliable cellular telephone service to all communities throughout the Wood River constituency.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good citizens of Cadillac.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

The petitions are nine in number and they are addendums to previously tabled petitions and sessional papers.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING, SELECT AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Health Care

Clerk Assistant (Committees): — Ms. Junor, Chair of the Standing Committee on Health Care, presents the first report of the said committee which reads as follows:

Your committee recommends that it be authorized to use the Legislative Chamber to facilitate the televising and Internet streaming of its public hearings.

Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Northwest:

That the first report of the Standing Committee on Health Care be now concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 55 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming: how much money did SLGA pay to Larson Consulting in 1996-97; what services did Larson Consulting provide to SLGA; were all of these services tendered for bids from other companies and, if so, what was the tendering process?

Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have many guests in the Assembly today, so I would be pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, 38 grade 3 and 4 students, seated in the west gallery. They're joined today by their teachers, Mrs. Reding and Mrs. Erichson, and a chaperone, Ms. Muntean.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity recently to be at St. Gabriel School with our Premier to announce the CommunityNet program and launch it by, not a ribbon cutting, but a plug-in ceremony. We were warmly welcomed and I hope I have the opportunity to do that for these students. We'll meet after a tour and have some refreshments in room 218 and answer any questions they might have.

I ask all members to join with me in welcoming the students

from the new, joint new school within the constituency of Wascana Plains. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the legislature, 26 grade 6 students from Massey School in . . . The school is located in Regina South but I think this particular class has students from Regina Lakeview, Regina South, and Regina Centre as it's the French immersion class.

And they're sitting in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. And I want to make a special welcome to my daughter, Solveig, who is in this class and this is all of her classmates. So let's welcome the class from Massey School.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I want to introduce 17 students from Minahik Waskahigan School. And translated into English, Mr. Speaker, it is Pinehouse School out of Pinehouse Lake, Saskatchewan.

They travelled many, many miles to be here so I want to introduce them in a very special way, that they've taken a great amount of time and effort to get here and I think we should commend them for the huge travel. But also to recognize the work of the people that are chaperoning. It's their principal, Ron Skage, and I'm not sure if that's his daughter Jacquie or his wife Jacquie, but Jacquie Skage is up there as well.

So I want to welcome all here to the Assembly. And I also would encourage them to go to my office after they're done. I can't join them because I've got a meeting at 3, but I've asked my staff to make sure that there's coffee and juice for the youth if they want to see the office and spend some time with my staff.

So once again, Mr. Speaker, I would ask all the Assembly to welcome the well-travelled students from Pinehouse Lake. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Skills Canada Competition

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Skills Canada had the national championship competitions in Edmonton on June 1 and 2 with participants from across Canada. Students from the Estevan Comprehensive High School, accompanied by their teachers, Kevin Reiter, Elaine Miller, and Joyce Mack did very well.

The students were Leah Penley, who won the gold medal in men's hairstyling; Lynn Van De Woestyne, who won bronze in ladies' hairstyling; Scott Mehler, who won silver in welding; and Danny Dyck, who placed fourth in precision machining. And it should be noted that only six points separated Danny from the person who placed first.

Saskatchewan students brought home a total of 17 medals.

Please join me in giving Leah, Lynn, Scott, and Danny the recognition they deserve. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier Klein Compliments Moose Jaw

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, even the premier of Alberta has more faith and praise for the Saskatchewan spirit than the members opposite. Before Premier Klein left the premiers' conference in Moose Jaw last week, he was asked how he liked our city. Premier Klein said, and I quote:

I like Moose Jaw. It's like entering a home. Some homes you enter and immediately you feel that sense of warmth. That is the feeling I had entering Moose Jaw.

Premier Klein goes on to compliment the people in the community of Moose Jaw. He stated, and I quote:

The spirit and enthusiasm of this community, in terms of bolstering its economic opportunities, is really something to behold.

Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised that the opposition members still struggle with all the positive aspects of Saskatchewan. Premier Klein understands community; he seems to focus on the positive and not on the doom and gloom that the opposition likes to believe exists.

Mr. Speaker, there is one other group that should be hiding out in the tunnels of Moose Jaw, and they are sitting on that side of the House.

Premier Klein managed to sum up in a 20-second radio quote what we have been trying to tell the opposition for years. The partnership with business, community, and government is strong and necessary for this province to continue to prosper.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Fire Destroys Dysart Business

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Early yesterday morning a fire destroyed D R Sales & Service, a farm machinery dealership in Dysart. The fire devastated a successful business operated by the Zatylny family for more than 30 years.

D R Sales & Service provides a valued service to ag producers and is the major employer in the Dysart area.

Mr. Speaker, in true Saskatchewan tradition, the Zatylnys announced yesterday afternoon that they would be open for business today. They have ordered parts, set up a temporary service area in a Quonset, and established an office in the home of one of the partners.

I am told that D R Sales & Service will be rebuilt as quickly as possible. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, service technicians were out

on calls this morning. This demonstrates the Zatylny family's dedication to their customers and the tenacity of rural Saskatchewan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ranking of Saskatoon and Regina Health Regions

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The month of June brings more good news for Saskatchewan, again from an outside and impartial source.

I am referring, of course, to the annual health report of *Maclean's* magazine. The report ranks 54 Canadian health regions with populations over 125,000. Saskatoon ranked number 5, one behind Edmonton and two ahead of Calgary. In the category of communities with medical schools, Saskatoon ranked second.

Perhaps the most encouraging news is that Saskatoon improved its rating over last year, as did the wonderful city of Regina.

Mr. Speaker, we can read the numbers and we can be pleased that they support what we have always said about our health system — that there is room to improve, but there is no cause for alarm or doom and gloom. The *Maclean's* report is encouraging.

However the report does not say what we all know to be true, Mr. Speaker. The Saskatoon Health District did not achieve this high national ranking by magic. It happened because of the people who work there. It is the hard work, diligence, and dedication of the staff, administrators, and health care professionals that make for the superior health care.

As my friend, Carol Teichrob, used to say: things don't happen, they are made to happen. The people of the Saskatoon Health District made this recognition happen and we are all proud of them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

75th Anniversary of the Prince Albert Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, Saskatchewan Command

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I had the fortunate opportunity to attend an important milestone marking the 75th anniversary of the Prince Albert branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, Saskatchewan Command.

On Saturday evening, June 2, 2001 the Prince Albert branch held a banquet as part of its weekend celebration of this important achievement. The guest speaker was none other than our Lieutenant Governor, Her Honour Dr. Lynda Haverstock.

Mr. Speaker, Her Honour congratulated the branch on its many achievements in and around Prince Albert, making clear reference to the importance of volunteerism in this Year of the Volunteer.

But the thrust of Her Honour's speech focused on the

volunteerism of those men and women who served our country so that all of us may enjoy our present day freedoms.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Prince Albert branch had a unique and illustrious membership that also needs to be mentioned. The Rt. Hon. John Diefenbaker was a 50-year member, Mr. Speaker. And it was through his efforts another important event occurred in legion history. In 1959, at the then Prime Minister Diefenbaker's request, Queen Elizabeth II granted the name, Royal, to the then Canadian Legion.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join me in congratulating the Prince Albert Legion on achieving 75 years of loyal service to Prince Albert.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Swift Current Connection to Oscar-winning Movie

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize today the Swift Current connection to an Oscar-winning movie. Mr. Speaker, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was one of the top movies at the box office in 2000. In fact it won four Oscar awards and was also the highest grossing foreign language film in the United States, earning over \$100 million just last year.

The movie is based on a book by Dulu Wang, a popular Chinese writer from the 1930s. In the 1980s his family republished some of his works and now one of those novels has gone on to become a very successful motion picture.

However, Mr. Speaker, what's unique to this story is that the author of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is also the father and father-in-law of a couple in my constituency. Mr. Speaker, Hong Wang works at the research station in Swift Current, and his wife, Ching Liu, is also a resident of Swift Current. She was here not long ago at the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, with a group of students from the Cypress Hills Regional College, learning English as a second language.

Mr. Speaker, the huge success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* has brought much pride to their family in Swift Current and I'm sure they were watching the Oscar awards much more closely than the rest of us and for good reason.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Partners in Motion Win Awards

Mr. Wartman: — There are many talented, creative artists and entrepreneurs throughout this province. Mr. Speaker, Partners in Motion illustrates that point very clearly.

At the recent Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival, the Regina production company, Partners in Motion, took home three Golden Sheaf Awards including the award for Best of Saskatchewan. The awards went to the film *13 Seconds, The Kent State Shootings*, a one-hour documentary revisiting the events that occurred 31 years ago last month at that Ohio university.

The film was directed by Chris Triffo and produced by Ron Goetz, both constituents of mine. In addition to the best picture award, Kent State won two technical awards for best editing and best sound.

And, Mr. Speaker, a few days before the Yorkton festival, the same team won seven awards at the 2001 WorldFest International Film Festival in Houston, Texas, again including the highest award given at this festival.

But this time for two other films. *Disaster of the Century* was given the Platinum Award for best reality-based program, and *Men of Valour — Heroes of the Victoria Cross* won platinum for best biographical or autobiographical documentary. Ron Goetz was executive producer. Chris Triffo directed both films. As well, *Kent State* received a Bronze Award for best documentary.

The talent is here, Mr. Speaker. The reputation of Partners in Motion and other local filmmakers is everywhere. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Strike Notice by Health Care Workers

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health. It is my understanding that CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees), which represents 12,000 health workers in the province, have served strike notice and will be in a legal position by Thursday morning.

In their press release today CUPE says they have had little to show for the conciliation process so far. Mr. Speaker, should these health care workers actually begin strike action, health care delivery in 18 health districts and one northern hospital would be seriously affected.

Will the Minister of Health detail how his department and the health districts are preparing to deal with the possibility of strike action and how will he ensure health care delivery in Saskatchewan will not be compromised?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the CUPE is in negotiations with SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations), which is the bargaining agency for the various health facilities that are represented by . . . or where CUPE represents the workers, and that process will continue.

We understand obviously that notice has been given by CUPE that they would be in a position to go into strike action. What happens in that particular situation is that the districts work together with the union to identify those kinds of services which are essential and they basically try to set up the services there. There are other contingency plans that come into place with the management people in each of the districts.

We as a provincial Department of Health work on various things that apply across the 18 districts. But basically the people

are working to make sure that health care will be provided for everyone.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the fact that these health care workers are having to take strike action before this NDP government will deal with the important issues like workload depicts exactly how much trouble the health care system is in, in this province.

The chronic NDP (New Democratic Party) mismanagement of the system, the questionable allocation of resources, the continuing inaction of staffing shortages, all by an NDP government who insists that everything is fine, has led to a system that is barely able to cope any more.

Two years ago we had a nurses' strike and the government promised to deal not only with the monetary issues, but also with the workplace issues. Now we hear on a daily basis that health care workers are under the same pressures that were supposed to have been fixed and addressed by this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit to deal with the priority issues of these valuable health care workers, and this time will he deliver on those promises?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, we do value the workers and we will work together with management and the various health care providers to make sure that we get the best contract that will address many of the needs that are there.

What I will say is that we did not run on a platform to freeze health care spending as they did across the way. We've added in the money that we've needed to address the needs that are there.

I think we have heard here now since yesterday about the fact that Saskatoon and Regina, as health districts, rank very high across the country.

What we have to remember is that in a bargaining process there is some time where people have to end up setting out their positions. What we encourage all parties to do is to work together to come to a solution, and we hope that this process will work.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskEnergy Gas Purchases

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister responsible for SaskEnergy. Mr. Speaker, the new gas year begins on November 1, 2001. To the minister: how much natural gas has SaskEnergy locked in for the upcoming gas year and at what price?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not a technical expert on this but my understanding is that they have not, that they have not locked in specifically. They've purchased what I would describe as insurance, Mr. Speaker, that would set a maximum cap. But my understanding is technically they've not locked in.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the answer however I heard the minister say and confirm for the House that SaskEnergy for insurance, or some such reason as he's pointed out, has purchased some natural gas ahead of time. That's what he said.

Now, Mr. Speaker, SaskEnergy has said countless times that they use a gas-price hedging strategy to lock in a price. That means you buy it in advance of the gas year. In fact, in fact, in SaskEnergy's submission to the rate review panel, SaskEnergy said that is what they do, that they buy gas prior to the gas year.

How much natural gas has SaskEnergy purchased, locked in, for the next gas year, Mr. Speaker, and at what price?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, if that member's being critical of SaskEnergy and its investors about what they have done with respect to investing, I would say he ought to look at their record, Mr. Speaker. They have, over the last 20 months, saved the people of Saskatchewan some \$175 million by their investment strategy, Mr. Speaker.

To answer the question, Mr. Speaker, I'm not absolutely certain about what they have, what they have locked in. My understanding is, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that they have purchased insurance, as I would describe it, that would maximize what they would have to pay if the price went above a certain level. I don't know the absolute maximum amount of what that price is. I would be happy to provide that information to the member at a later time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, this is a little disconcerting. The minister apparently went all the way to La Ronge to negotiate the price of a bottle of rum but he didn't come to question, he didn't come to question period today with the information on natural gas, the number one issue in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — That's not acceptable. He can't have it both ways. He can't deal with that level of detail in one ministry and come here unprepared for question period on this important issue. We'll ask him to answer the question again in terms of insurance or whatever he wants to term it as. SaskEnergy has said their policy is to hedge, to purchase prior to the gas year. How much have they purchased or hedged? And at what price?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — If that member wants to get personal . . . and it's easy to do for me as well, Mr. Speaker. That member used to deliver, as we were told, liquor in rooms in the legislature here, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to get personal.

Mr. Speaker, if, if you want to look at the record of SaskEnergy that has saved the people of Saskatchewan some \$175 million over the last 20 months, Mr. Speaker, I think we ought not to be

critical of what they have . . . their investment strategy.

Mr. Speaker, again I say, as I understand it SaskEnergy has purchased what I would describe as insurance which will maximize, I repeat maximize — if there was another spike up in the cost of energy — maximize what they would have to pay. If the member wants specific detail, Mr. Speaker, if the member wants specific detail about what that price is, I'd be happy to get that information for him. I don't have that level of detail here with me. He's . . . it's appropriate that he would ask that question in Crown corporations as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — This gas rate hike will affect every facet of life in the province of Saskatchewan. This is an important issue. It goes to the heart of the price that SaskEnergy is paying for natural gas.

So with respect to the minister — with respect to the minister — will he then explain what this insurance is he's talking about to the people of Saskatchewan?

(14:00)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, what I would say to this House, and to the people of the province is be very wary about information coming from that side of the House. And I want to remind the House, and the people of the province, Mr. Speaker, what that member said one month ago. And what he said was this. He said we should not go to the rate review panel; that cabinet should decide what the increase will be.

And I want to quote from *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, where that member said this. He said:

. . . why are you putting SaskEnergy and the rate review panel through the expense of (the) rate increase application? Why are you putting Saskatchewan people through this process? Why doesn't the minister just make the announcement? Why is the minister playing politics with Saskatchewan families?

So, on May 4th, Mr. Speaker he said no panel — no panel, let cabinet decide.

What did he say yesterday after we got the report from the panel — no cabinet, let panel decide. There's no credibility there at all, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, all of the yelling in the world from the Minister of Finance doesn't change the fact that he's trying to bail out the minister of SaskEnergy. These are SaskEnergy questions, and we'll direct this question to the minister of SaskEnergy.

In their application, SaskEnergy's application to the rate review panel, they say and I quote:

SaskEnergy's past practice has been to lock in a price prior to the start of the gas year . . . (I'm quoting, Mr. Speaker)

for a portion of the volume purchased . . . And thereby avoid or minimize the gas cost variability. In a rising price environment . . .

This strategy (it goes on to say) enables SaskEnergy to have rates that are below the market value for gas.

Mr. Speaker, that is true . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Would the member put his question.

Mr. Wall: — That's true when the prices are rising in the industry but it is not true when the prices are falling. And that means that SaskEnergy may have locked into a price that's simply too high.

Mr. Speaker, why won't the Minister of SaskEnergy tell us how much natural gas they've locked in, and at what price?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is fond of getting up and saying maybe this will happen, maybe that will happen, maybe the next thing will happen. The Minister of the Crown Corporations, Mr. Speaker, has advised . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Crown Investments has advised the House that SaskEnergy, to his knowledge, is not locked in. The Minister of Crown Investments will make it clear what the detail is.

But what I want to say to the House is, how credible is it that one day the member from Swift Current can say, don't have a panel, have the cabinet decide. Then he comes in to the legislature when we've got a recommendation of the panel and he says, don't let the cabinet decide, go to a panel.

Well the problem is, Mr. Speaker, when you contradict yourself day after day after day, eventually you trip all over yourself, and that's what this farcical display is all about, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, again I direct a question to the minister of SaskEnergy. SaskEnergy's entire rate application is based on the assumption that the price of natural gas is going up. SaskEnergy says, and I quote:

Natural gas prices will be under upward pressure as all the competing users vie for supply. SaskEnergy must cap the cost of gas . . . (that's what the minister was referring to earlier) so that consumers are protected from a significant rise in price.

Mr. Speaker, SaskEnergy obviously assumed natural gas prices were going to continue to go up. This means they would use their gas price hedging strategy to lock in the price. And that's what we're asking. How much did SaskEnergy lock in and at what price? Come clean with the people of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — What SaskEnergy has done for the people of Saskatchewan is save them \$175 million over the last 20 months, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, again I refer to a Mr. Peter Linder who said:

I want to congratulate SaskEnergy first for their astute hedging program and using the storage facilities to offset these high gas prices. (Mr. Speaker) I would suggest the people of Saskatchewan are extremely lucky to have been paying 4.52 a gigajoule when the price here in Alberta is much higher; precisely twice as high (Mr. Speaker).

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to add to what the member asked. And he suggests to the people of Saskatchewan that somehow you could buy roughly at \$5 per unit or gigajoule, \$5, for the next number of years if you lock in today. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. I would challenge him to give me the phone number for me and/or for SaskEnergy where he could buy a contract for \$5 for the next two years. I am quite sure you can't do it, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, SaskEnergy's rate application says, and I quote again:

The cost for purchase gas for November 1, 2001 to October 31, 2002 . . . (that's the next gas year) is forecast to be \$471.4 million. This is the cost of gas in SaskEnergy's gas purchase contracts . . . Including the price resulting from the gas price hedging strategy (the minister alluded to).

Mr. Speaker, this suggests that SaskEnergy has already entered into significant gas purchase contracts for the upcoming year. It's right there in their application to the rate review panel.

So again, to the minister: how much have they purchased and at what price?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, again I will do my very best to answer the question as he asked, Mr. Speaker. They have been buying, as I understand, on the spot. They've been limited and have been selling at \$4.52 a gigajoule.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I am told that that they have purchased . . . and I describe it as insurance. Members opposite ask what is insurance. I do not know how they would not understand what insurance is. But, Mr. Speaker, I understand that they have purchased, as I would describe, insurance that would limit the maximum cap of what they would have to pay if as an example, they spike back up to 16 or \$18 a gigajoule.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that's the best that I can provide for them today. If they want specific detail, I will be able to . . . I'll get that information for them, but it would be most appropriate if they would ask that question as well in Crown Corporations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to its own rate application, SaskEnergy's forecasting the cost of gas to be 471 million, and that's for 65.7 million gigajoules. So you do the math and that works out to \$7.17 a gigajoule.

This morning's contract price for the upcoming gas year — for the whole year, Mr. Speaker — for the same year we're talking about on the Alberta Natural Gas Exchange was \$5.56 a gigajoule. And we'll provide that information to the minister, Mr. Speaker. That's nearly 30 per cent less. In fact at 5.56 a gigajoule, SaskEnergy could buy all the gas it needs for the upcoming year for \$365 million, a savings to the taxpayer of over \$100 million.

Mr. Speaker, why is SaskEnergy's estimated gas price so much higher than the current price? Did they lock in at a higher price? If so, how much?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, when they were members in government in the 1980s, why did they overestimate their revenues by a billion dollars a year, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, I think it is incredible that that member would stand up here and somehow become the expert on investments and gas, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if you look at what SaskEnergy has done, they have saved the people of Saskatchewan \$175 million over the past 20 months. That member's agenda is clearly to discredit SaskEnergy so that if they ever became government they could privatize and sell SaskEnergy, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question too is to the minister of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan).

About a month ago the Sask Valley Potato Corporation was making news. Making news for not paying their taxes. Making news for shipping frozen potatoes to Prince Edward Island. Making news for leasing more land to get into the production of potatoes. It wasn't good news, Mr. Speaker.

Well today we've learned of some more bad news. We've learned that the NDP-owned potato venture is dumping thousands of rotting potatoes on the land near the town of Broderick. There is literally a wall of potatoes going up, Mr. Speaker. The great wall at Broderick is what it's called.

Is the government unable to sell them? Or are there just too many in storage and they were rotting? Or are you trying to make room for more potatoes that you can't sell?

My question to the minister: why is the Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation dumping truckloads of potatoes that they can't sell?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I've not been informed of the specific detail about it. But, Mr. Speaker, this does happen and has happened in years past as well.

We're late into the season. The potatoes have been stored all year long, Mr. Speaker. This would not be an unusual circumstance. I would question also whether the member knows

for sure whether those potatoes belong to the Sask Valley Potato Corporation.

Generally what has happened, Mr. Speaker, is the Sask Valley Potato Corporation first of all owns the facilities and stores potatoes, Mr. Speaker. So I'd question for sure whether or not those potatoes actually belong to the Sask Valley Potato Corporation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the word in the industry is that the NDP government is venturing back into potato production. They are purchasing equipment and they're buying and leasing land. This in spite of the fact that the NDP government has lost tens of million dollars so far in failed potato ventures.

Government involvement in the potato industry directly affects private producers. It opens up all sorts of problems with trade retaliation from the United States.

So we hear that they are back in the business of growing potatoes. And just like two years ago, they're dumping the potatoes they can't sell. Has this government not learned anything?

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why is this NDP government getting back into the direct production of potatoes? And when will it learn?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well again, Mr. Speaker, if I have to go back through the history, I will.

But, Mr. Speaker, we had some, with the federal government, some investment of around \$120 million in infrastructure, irrigation infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. There was cereal grains grown out there. It was determined that we should look to add value to our agricultural industry.

Mr. Speaker, the decision was then made to look at growing potatoes. I think if you talk to a lot of the potato producers out there, they're happy that the provincial government, along with, at the original, SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) and now with the Sask Valley Potato Corporation. And I continue to receive phone calls from the growers out there that are happy with this investment, Mr. Speaker, that we continue to support them in this industry.

And I am predicting, Mr. Speaker, that into the future we will continue to see this as a strong industry and the people in that community will continue to be happy with our support.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, in early May we asked this same minister why the Sask Valley Potato Corp had not paid its taxes to two RMs (rural municipality) in the area, one being the RM of Rudy. At that time, the minister said that their officials would be working with these RMs and that they had quite . . . Well he was quite confident that there'd be a resolution found

in the very near future.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that near future has come and gone. Over the past month, the Sask Valley Potato Corp still had not paid any taxes to this RM. What's the hold up?

The Sask Valley Potato Corp, Mr. Speaker, owes the RMs over \$300,000 for taxes in the year 2000. And they're not paying them. They're totally irresponsible. Every other business and taxpayer in this province has to pay property tax. What's up with the Sask Valley Potato Corp?

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why is the Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation not paying its taxes that were owed to these RMs?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well again, Mr. Speaker, that is a very legitimate question, Mr. Speaker.

My understanding is that the discussions between Sask Valley Potato Corporation officials and the RMs that are involved in this particular case — because not all of the RMs who currently have storage facilities in their RMs have chosen to make the decision about recategorizing the storage facilities— but, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that my officials within Sask Valley Potato Corporation and the elected representatives of the RMs continue to discuss and try to find resolution to this difficult situation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I wish I could just continue to discuss whether I should pay my property tax also.

Mr. Speaker, once again, the government has ventured into the potato business which is more than just questionable; it sounds a little bit ludicrous. They are getting back into the direct production of potatoes. They haven't paid their taxes to the local municipalities, and now they are dumping more potatoes into the fields around the Broderick area. It's unbelievable, after losing millions of taxpayers' dollars already that the government would continue to forge ahead.

I don't understand. Is it that the minister has a deal with the president of the Old Dutch potato company? We'll produce the potatoes and you won't buy them. Is that the deal they've got going?

Mr. Speaker, will the minister please tell the House how much money the Sask Potato Valley Corporation has lost last year? And, Mr. Speaker, better yet, how much money does the Saskatchewan Potato Valley Corporation plan on losing this year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that politics is being played with a difficult situation.

Mr. Speaker, for the member's information and for the public's information, what has happened here is that there has been a recategorization of the storage facilities from farm to commercial.

And the issue is that this has not happened in every single RM. In some RMs they've chosen to leave them classified under the farm category, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, there is obviously even a difference in view within RMs that are adjacent to one another as it pertains to these facilities. It's a difficult situation.

I've instructed my officials to meet and try and find compromise if that is possible. And my understanding, Mr. Speaker, is that that continues to happen. And I ask the members opposite to not make a political situation out of a very difficult one that currently exists.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — With leave to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House, 17 grade 7 to 9 students from Pasquia Hills Christian School in Carrot River.

They are visiting the legislature today. I understand that they have a fairly tight schedule and won't be able to spend that much time, but hopefully I will be able to catch up to them in a few minutes and discuss what they have had the opportunity to observe this afternoon.

They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Gladwin Loewen, and their chaperones, Leland Penner and Wayne Megli. And I would ask all members of the House to join with me in welcoming them here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Junor: — With leave to introduce a motion regarding the televised proceedings of the Standing Committee on Health Care.

Leave granted.

MOTION

Televised Proceedings of Standing Committee on Health Care

Ms. Junor: — This motion flows out of the report the committee made that was concurred in just recently in the

Assembly. And the motion reads, moved by myself and seconded by the member from Regina South:

That the Standing Committee on Health Care be authorized to use the Legislative Chamber to facilitate the televising and Internet streaming of its public hearings.

Motion agreed to.

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

Mr. Addley: — Mr. Speaker, with leave to table answers to questions that was asked of me during Committee of the Whole in consideration of The St. Thomas More College Act, 2001.

Leave granted.

TABLING OF ANSWERS

Mr. Addley: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. During the Committee of the Whole I was asked some questions by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, which I was not able to answer at that time, but I made a commitment to the House to bring back those answers.

And it specifically — I won't go into all of the details, but just for members' edification — it's the differences between the 1943 Act of incorporation, the 1972 Act to amend the Act of incorporation, compared to The St. Thomas More College Act, 2001.

And so I'd like to table those answers and thank the hon. members for their consideration.

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

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Speaker, to ask for leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this afternoon, in the east gallery, my daughter, Dana Hetherington, who is here today from Calgary. She's in Regina for a couple of days to spend a little time with her dear old dad. If I could ask her to just rise and stand up, daughter, and wave at everybody.

I'd ask all members to please join me in welcoming her here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Natural Gas Prices

Mr. Wall: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I think the priorities of the Assembly over the last two days have been exactly right, Mr. Speaker. We have been talking about an issue that clearly is the most important issue currently facing the province of Saskatchewan and that is, Mr. Speaker, the largest utility rate hike in the history of our province, the current recommended rate hike of an average of 35 per cent currently before the cabinet of the province of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important to point out that while the average increase is 35 per cent, when you take out the distribution fee from the equation — around, ranging up to \$2 a gigajoule — we are talking about a 60 per cent increase in the price of natural gas. That's what we're talking about and that's significant for the larger institutional customers of SaskEnergy and of other companies in the province because for them, the distribution isn't as important as the cost of gas. And so a 60 per cent increase in the cost of gas is crippling, Mr. Speaker, for those institutions.

Now we know that the government, based on the commitment of the Minister of Finance — and we'll take him at his word — is looking at options to provide relief for Saskatchewan people, should they approve that increase. But before we decide that issue and before that cabinet decides that issue, Mr. Speaker, they ought to decide if this increase is needed as it is presently constituted before the cabinet in this recommendation. That's the heart of the question that we've been asking here for a couple of days.

And I think finally Saskatchewan people are waking up to the fact that this rate request, even though it's been diluted slightly by the panel, is based on \$7 a gigajoule going forward to October of 2002. And we have demonstrated without equivocation that the price going forward to 2002 is much, much less.

In fact we've demonstrated today that if you go to the Alberta Natural Gas Exchange, the intra-Alberta settlement . . . Well the Minister of Finance has a confused look on his face. That's where you purchase gas, on the . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Pick your exchange then, Mr. Speaker. I'd say to the Minister of Finance, pick any exchange he wants today and the price will be in the range of \$5.56 a gigajoule — that's the price.

And it's not just for today. Later on in this debate someone like the member for Regina Dewdney, Mr. Speaker, will stand up and say, well that's the price today. That's what he said yesterday — that's the price today but tomorrow it'll change.

No, Mr. Speaker. We'll explain it slowly for the members opposite. This is a futures market and for the gas year — and the initials here, GY — November 2001, and that gas year, Mr. Speaker, is November 1, 2001 to the end of October 2002. That's the gas year. And what's the price? Is it \$7 a gigajoule, Mr. Speaker? Is it 6.50 a gigajoule as proposed by the government? No. Is it 6.50 as offered by EPCOR even yesterday, which we raised? No. The price is 5.56 today — 5.56. And 5.56 it . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, here we go again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow says well it was \$5 yesterday. In point of fact, on the spot

market yesterday it was \$4.80. We are . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well \$5 then. Round it up. I can't believe this, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But if you want to secure the supply — if you want to secure the supply — over the entire period of this increase all the way to October 2002 you can still buy it, you can still buy it, for \$5.56. And the comments we get from across the way and the looks we get from the Minister of Finance clearly demonstrate that they don't have a clue. They do need to take an arithmetic class. This is the minister responsible for coming up with our provincial budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I can't believe it. Here are the facts from the exchanges of the world. And the member for Moose Jaw North will want to get on the Internet and find out what the price of gas is before he makes his decision at the cabinet table. He'll have a role to play when cabinet decides what they're going to do. And he'll want to do that from an informed perspective. And the informed perspective is to know what can you buy natural gas for through until October 2002 and the answer is \$5.56, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's the answer. It's not 7.22 as proposed by the government.

And so we have another motion before us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to discuss this important issue. And it refers specifically again to the confusion of this government as regard to the price of gas. Because we have SaskEnergy basing their entire application on \$7 a gigajoule . . . actually 7.62 a gigajoule. That's the price they based on for their entire application to SaskEnergy, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What is the price that the minister based his projections on in the provincial budget? What was that price? Well was it half of 7.62? No it was even lower. For the same period, it's \$3.39 a gigajoule. That's the price the Minister of Finance has come up with for the price of gas.

And then he gets up and smugly answers all of the questions that we have on this issue — specific questions. He throws back rhetoric, Mr. Speaker, when we have asked this basic question on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. Why is there such a difference? And why, when we ask Ron Clark at the Crown Corporations Committee, when we asked him what he thought of Eric Cline's numbers, he told the committee . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order. You may not refer to the member in the individual. You should refer to the member's constituency or to the portfolio that the member holds.

Mr. Wall: — For that transgression, the members opposite are asking me to resign, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And there is too much . . . we have too much work to do on this side of the House to even be thinking about that, including dealing with this motion. But I'll apologize for my reference to the minister in the first person.

And what I was saying though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is we had Ron Clark, the president of SaskEnergy before the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations, and the member for Regina South did an able job of chairing that particular meeting, and he'll remember that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And so we asked Ron Clark, we asked him, well what do you think of the Minister of Finance's projections for natural gas? Because we had heard rumours about a pending SaskEnergy increase. So we said, Mr. Clark, how do you feel about the Minister of Finance's projection for the price of natural gas at \$3.39 a gigajoule to the end of 2002?

And do you know what he said, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I'm going to paraphrase a little bit, but he said the Minister of Finance was all wet. He said he was wrong. He said, I'd like to buy some gas from the Minister of Finance. That's what he said to the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations. He didn't believe him.

So we came to the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and my colleague the member for Canora-Pelly asked a question, and it was an important question, given what Mr. Clark had said. And given that the consumers of the province have a huge stake in what the price of natural gas is.

So the member from Canora-Pelly and our Finance critic, stood in this Assembly and he asked the question, who's right? Who's right in the government, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Was it the Minister of Finance at \$3.39, or was it the minister of SaskEnergy at \$7 a gigajoule. Who was right?

The Minister of Finance, as I recall, fielded the questions that day and he seemed to imply that he was right. But there was still no definitive answer. Why? Because the rate request was proceeding. And the rate request was based on 7.

So the minister's projections were proceeding at 3.39, maybe lowballing the revenues the government were expecting from the gas royalties. Maybe that's what he was doing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Purposely lowballing the numbers so he could build up his election slush fund.

But here's the question. If he was . . . if his projections were going forward at 3.39 and SaskEnergy's projections were going forward at \$7 as they were going through the rate review panel process, then they continue to maintain two sets of books. One for the Minister of Finance to lowball his revenue projections, and one for SaskEnergy to justify an increase that we have now learned may be up to \$2 too high — per gigajoule, per gigajoule.

(14:30)

And you spread that out over the consumer base and over what SaskEnergy says they're going to buy, and the figure you come up with that taxpayers will be on the hook for because they didn't act at \$5.56, is \$100 million plus. That is what they cost the taxpayers because they couldn't get their act together; because they couldn't decide what the price of gas was.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a constructive reason for the motion. It isn't just to get a final and definitive explanation as to why these prices are different.

There's the other constructive motive behind this particular motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to make the government fully understand the gravity of the situation. To present to them what the price of gas is, through until October 2002, as defined by

the markets today and yesterday and Friday when it was announced, and to plead with the cabinet to make their decision based on the real price of gas, not the imaginary price of gas, not the price that apparently — and given by the answers we got in question period today — not by the price that SaskEnergy apparently has locked us into.

Because this government opposite has stood on every occasion and trumpeted the accomplishments of SaskEnergy. And we also have recognized what the hedging program did for consumers over the winter months — there's no question of that; it's a matter of the public record, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But if you are practicing hedging, when the prices are falling, it is . . . it absolutely will lead to disaster because you will lock in at a higher price as the market falls. And that is the basic question we ask and we will continue to ask until we get an answer: did SaskEnergy lock us in at a high price for natural gas, higher than \$5 to 5.56, for example? And if they did, and if they did, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how much did they lock in at that price, and exactly what was the price?

How can the people of Saskatchewan have a meaningful discussion about potential relief this government might provide them, that this government might provide them, without a knowledge of what SaskEnergy has charged for the gas, what they've locked in at?

And now the House Leader is yelling from his seat, as he often does, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The House Leader is yelling from his seat. And it's a sign, Mr. Speaker, because he leads in terms of this Assembly, in this House, he leads a group of people whose track record is all about broken promises.

He leads a group of people who thought nothing of breaking their health care promises in terms of the wait to get emergency attention. He leads a group of people that say they oppose privatization and in the back room they're . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I'm quite interested in hearing how the member will tie that into the motion before the House today. And I invite the member to begin doing that. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, truth be known, I'm also interested in how I might tie that to the issue that we're discussing, except to say this: that this motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again speaks to the fact that the government seems to have two sets of books.

And now we know that in this debate — and now the House Leader's listening and I'm glad to hear it because he'll agree with this I think — in this debate there are three prices that we're talking about.

There's the minister of SaskEnergy's price. There's the minister of SaskEnergy's price . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Would the House please come to order. I would like to hear the speaker who has the floor at the moment and that is the member for Swift Current.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There are three

prices in this debate we're talking about. Two of them are referenced in the motion.

There is the price of the minister of SaskEnergy. That's about \$7 a gigajoule. And they have been firm on that. They have been firm on that. It's all over their rate application. It's all over it. It's what the minister has said. It's what Ron Clark told the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations. They've been on that, Mr. Speaker.

There's a second price and that's the Minister of Finance's price for natural gas. And that price is 3.39 a gigajoule to 2002. And he's been all over that one too, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He stood up in this House and basically said his colleague, the minister of SaskEnergy, is all wet. He said he's wrong; I'm right — 3.39 is the price. And he's never bothered to realize, amazingly enough, he's never bothered to realize that that means we will be getting gouged if the price will be 3.39 by the end of this year — the one we're talking about. We are going to be gouged. We will be gouged, to be sure, by this government. But anyway, that's the second price — \$3.39.

And then there's the third price, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There's the third price. And that's the prices we've been raising in the Assembly; the one we raised today; the price the market has determined. The real price for natural gas bought over until October 2002.

I'll make that point again because they'll stand up and say, well what happens if the price changes tomorrow? No, no, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you could have bought as much gas as you wanted today through until October 2002 for \$5.56 a gigajoule. That's the real price and it's time this government — this government in this debate — stood up and explained why they've got two prices for natural gas and none of them are right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's time they had an explanation for that.

And so I move, Mr. Deputy Speaker, seconded by the member for Saskatchewan Rivers:

That this Assembly request that the Minister of Finance and the Minister of CIC immediately give a full explanation regarding the discrepancy between the budget projections for natural gas prices of \$3.39 per gigajoule for 2002 and SaskEnergy's projection for natural gas prices of approximately \$7 per gigajoule for 2002 on which the NDP government based its request for a 42 per cent rate increase to SaskEnergy customers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is my pleasure this afternoon to rise and speak on this motion that's been brought forward by the member from Swift Current in the seventy-five minute debate.

As we participate in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's going to be very curious as the afternoon progresses how the members opposite are going to be able to put a spin on the serious, serious discrepancy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the pricing that

CIC, through their subsidiary SaskEnergy, and the discrepancy that is showing up when we listen to the Minister of Finance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we looked through the motion and I prepared myself a few notes, I was really curious, I'm very curious, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how a government can have such a far-ranging discrepancy in prices when actually the two members, the two members on the government side, the two ministers — the Minister from Crown Corporations and the Minister of Finance who sit right beside each other, across the aisle from each other — are double the amount of difference between their projections.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you begin to wonder how it is that a government can operate in this province when they can't even talk to each other when they sit beside each other, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How is the province supposed to be run when the cabinet ministers don't even talk to each other — the left arm doesn't know what the right arm is doing? That should be two left arms, they're all left-armed over there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I guess that's why they don't talk to each other, they're so busy beating each other on the head.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a bit of a disaster that is going to take place in this province. We have . . . the Crown corporation of energy is asking for a raise of 38 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for residential housing in this province — 38 per cent. Going to put great hardship on the families of Saskatchewan.

But what made this very curious for me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that this so-called NDP government for years and years has trumpeted that they are the champion of the underdog, that they are the ones who stand up in this House on a daily basis saying that if it wasn't for them those who are less fortunate than others, they are the government that will look after them.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I travelled throughout my constituency on the weekend talking to people about this rate proposal by SaskEnergy that is being looked at by this so-called independent rate review committee, what is it going to mean to those people out there who live below the poverty line? Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's all negative and it's negative in a big time way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I spoke to a man who is a landlord in the city of Prince Albert, who owns a couple of duplexes, he's not a big landlord, just a little bit of retirement income that he uses. And I said to him, what's this going to mean for your renters? He says he doesn't know what he's going to do because in his rental property, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's been a huge increase in property taxes.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, unfortunately in order to break even he's going to have to have an increase in the rent so that he can offset those costs. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, SaskEnergy is talking about a rate increase of 38 per cent. That 38 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is picked up directly — directly — by those renters.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he did not hear at any given time in the last several weeks where those people living in these

lower-income rental properties are going to be having the type of rate increases in their income, whether they work at minimum wage or a part-time job. What kind of rate increases they're going to have in their salaries so that it would be offset . . . would help offset these massive increases that are being proposed by SaskEnergy?

That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a disgrace and a humiliation heaped upon this NDP government who stands in this House daily promoting the fact that they are the champion of the underdog, when the reality is setting in is that what they really are is they are the taxer. They are the taxer of the underdogs. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are the capitalists of the, of the underdog, not the protector.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wanted to speak for a few minutes on how this affects other families. Now as we've heard several times in this Assembly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that what . . . that there is a crisis in agriculture — a crisis in agriculture.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, throughout many areas of the province where the . . . when it comes into the fall time of the season, a lot of the crop is taken off at a higher moisture content than is accepted by the elevator companies. And so these farmers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have to dry the grain down.

So what's going to happen now, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Well, I'll tell you what'll happen now. In many areas of the province the government, the previous government in the '80s, was very aggressive at getting natural gas out into the farm community of Saskatchewan. The farmers out there saw this as a great advantage — low-cost heating for their farms, low-cost fuel for their grain dryers. And so many of them took advantage of this and have plumbed their farms for natural gas. Now, this year, when farm prices are at some of the lowest, when farm income is at the lowest in the history of Saskatchewan, here we are stuck with this so-called NDP government, this weak ineffective NDP government, who are proposing this huge, massive increase in energy prices.

So what's that going to mean for the farmer, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It means a further hardship on those farm families out there that are already struggling on a day-to-day basis in trying to make ends meet, in trying to pay their power bills, trying to pay their energy bills, in trying to pay their fuel bills, in trying to pay their property taxes which thanks to this weak and ineffective NDP government is going up even again.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how is it that this NDP government who through the 1930s championed among the farm families of Saskatchewan that they were the answer for all their ills and woes? In fact what we're seeing now into this new millennium, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that this NDP government, this so-called weak and ineffective NDP government, is starting to attack, attack the very roots that helped to get them established in this province to begin with.

(14:45)

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, unfortunately for the NDP Party, and fortunately for the Saskatchewan Party, is that the tide has turned. Those very people that they now attack on a daily basis, on a regular basis in this legislature, are starting to understand

that if they don't turn to the Saskatchewan Party, things can only get worse.

Now it's hard to believe things can get worse in this province. But actually this NDP government, through their own economic forecast, are showing a downturn for the next six years. And it's because of this exact mismanagement in energy that that's what's happening to our province.

And then you begin to really wonder how an NDP government, who promotes themselves as the champion of the people of Saskatchewan, can actually sit there . . . and the members opposite are gloating that they know what they're doing, that they know how to run this province.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what we're seeing with this rate application by SaskEnergy is that this NDP government doesn't have the foggiest clue what's going on over there. And actually we're beginning to wonder if they're even interested in what's going on outside this legislature.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the things that we noticed in the past, under the previous leadership of this NDP government, was that there was a certain presence. On this side of the House we may not have agreed with the policies that were brought forth, but we always understood that there was a presence in this government; there was a sense of power over there of what was going on.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, throughout the province of Saskatchewan, people are asking me what is this new government like? And we have to keep telling them over and over again . . . In fact it's reached a point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we see that a Crown corporation like SaskEnergy is asking for such a massive increase, a massive increase in rates for natural gas is that . . . what people are telling me — I don't even have to ask them any more, Mr. Deputy Speaker — is that what they're seeing is that this government has become so weak and so ineffective at running this government that people out there are actually starting to give up. And on a daily basis, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to promote and promote and promote — don't go to Alberta; it can get better here.

So that, Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure this afternoon to second the motion brought forth by the member from Swift Current.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm extremely pleased to enter into the debate today. And at the conclusion of my remarks I'm going to move:

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

that SaskEnergy continue to provide Saskatchewan residents with the lowest possible natural gas rates.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's very important to reiterate to the members opposite that SaskEnergy has provided the lowest natural gas rates in Canada, Mr. Deputy

Speaker. And I'd just like to go through and reiterate again to the members the rates that SaskEnergy has charged at 4.52 a gigajoule and what their counterparts across Canada have charged.

If you lived in Vancouver today, you'd be paying \$8.82 a gigajoule. If you lived in Edmonton, you'd be paying \$8.77. If you lived in Calgary, \$9.81, Mr. Deputy Speaker; in Winnipeg, \$8.42; and in Toronto, \$9.54, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite are very concerned about a natural gas rate increase. Well I want to share with the members opposite that the members on this side are extremely concerned as well with a natural gas increase.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a natural gas increase hurts all the people of this province. Because as natural gas goes up, so do the costs to businesses, to producers, and all those costs eventually flow back into the costs of products that consumers consume, even if they're not direct consumers of natural gas, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So let me point out a few things, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When SaskEnergy put in the request for a review, the rate increase review, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the rates were at a certain value. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if those rates go down, of course that will affect what will be the outcome of any actual rate increase, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But I want to point out a few things. First of all, the issue of higher natural gas prices is not unique to Saskatchewan; it is actually a problem faced by all consumers in North America — by more than four million natural gas consumers in Canada and more than 60 million across the United States — all of which are feeling the crunch as new uses for natural gas are being put on-line and as consumers are, in many cases, using more and more natural gas to generate electricity, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

SaskEnergy has to buy its natural gas on the open market and therefore is subject to whatever price the market dictates. We don't set the price, Mr. Deputy Speaker; we have to buy on the open market.

However, over the last number of years SaskEnergy, I think, needs to be credited with doing an exceptional job at finding natural gas at its lowest possible point and buying it for the consumers of Saskatchewan. Why do the members opposite believe it will be any different this year than in previous years? We have managed to lock our natural gas supply in at the lowest, possible point, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I'd like to quote over the last 18 months that SaskEnergy has saved consumers \$125 million over true market prices that consumers in other provinces like Alberta and Ontario have paid. And they've done that by very carefully looking at the market and buying natural gas and at the most optimum time for consumers in this province.

That being said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, SaskEnergy faces the same high prices that every utility in North America faces, and indeed, what every consumer faces.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, why would we believe SaskEnergy would

operate any differently than it has in the past? It has worked in the best interest of the consumers of natural gas in this province. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's make something clear. When I say the market today is still much higher than SaskEnergy's \$4.52 a gigajoule that it's charging consumers today, that is very true. Even the members opposite can't argue with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And if I went to the market today, the winter price is \$6 a gigajoule, Mr. Speaker. Contrary to what the members opposite lay out at 4 . . . or 5.52 or 5.56, Mr. Speaker, if I went to the utility today, \$6 a gigajoule, Mr. Speaker. And I might add that SaskEnergy also has a significant amount of deficit in its cost variance account that it needs to collect from the consumers for the past winter.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, members opposite talk about 6.69 a gigajoule from EPCOR in Alberta. Actually, Mr. Speaker, he may be accurate with that number, but as per usual he's omitting a number or two.

SaskEnergy's rate recommended today by the panel is \$6.57 a gigajoule, if you were to take that recommendation — lower than EPCOR's 6.69. What the members opposite are not including is the cost of putting back into the coffers of SaskEnergy that deficit from the cost variance account, which is 71 cents per gigajoule today. That's what brings the recommendation to \$7.28 a gigajoule, Mr. Speaker.

But that is based on a price the day the rate review committee made its recommendation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's very important that when we look at an issue like purchasing natural gas, you understand some of the factors involved in that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And as we look at the issue of what SaskEnergy's task is over the next few weeks, it is to buy natural gas when it's at its lowest optimum point that they can purchase it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And SaskEnergy's done that for a number of years and they're going to do it again this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now we hear they've locked into high natural gas rates. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they haven't locked into high natural gas rates. What they have done is bought insurance in case natural gas rates going higher, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They haven't locked into any long-term natural gas rates. It makes perfect sense to hedge your bet and lock in, buy insurance against an increase in cost.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are continuing — continuing, Mr. Deputy Speaker — to look at the cost of natural gas, as SaskEnergy should.

Now the members opposite, the members opposite are empty. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite are trying to indicate to us that SaskEnergy doesn't care about the rate in which it will buy natural gas or has already bought it at an inflated price than one would have to buy it. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's simply not true. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they will buy the natural gas at the lowest possible price they can.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to again quote from an article entitled "Natural gas price slump eases

concerns." This is talking about the natural gas prices going down across North America. And I want to talk about the comments made by a Janet Holder, vice-president of market development for the Ontario gas distributor. She says:

If these prices stay and stabilize here, we will see a reduction in prices next winter. Ms. Holder said current consumer rates of \$9 per thousand cubic feet would be cut significantly.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would hope they'd be able to cut their rates from \$9 a gigajoule, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because right now in Saskatchewan, consumers are paying \$4.52 a gigajoule. Half — half of what the consumer is paying in the province of Ontario.

So when we have a gas company in Ontario saying, if things stay like this, they can cut the rates, well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope they can cut the rates. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're now paying twice what consumers in the province of Saskatchewan are paying.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even as you look at the amount of money that needs to be repaid in the cost variance account, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it doesn't take it up to the \$9 a gigajoule that the people of Ontario pay.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how can the members opposite say that SaskEnergy has not acted in the best interest of the consumers of this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to move, seconded by the member from Regina Northeast:

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

that SaskEnergy continue to provide Saskatchewan residents with the lowest possible natural gas prices.

Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's my pleasure to second the amendment to the main motion.

But at the same time, Mr. Speaker, it's too bad that we have to be debating this issue in the House here today. It's too bad because, Mr. Speaker, I think we have to take a close look at what increased energy prices really do. And for perhaps you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and myself and the members in this House here, an increase of 25 or \$30 a month in energy costs really isn't going to have a big negative effect on either one of us.

But there are people in our society and there are people in our economy and there are people in our constituencies that it will have an effect on. And that's primarily low-income earners and many of our senior people who are living fixed incomes. And that's going to have a negative effect on them, Mr. Speaker.

But I think we have to deal with the reality of the times, and

high energy prices is not unique to Saskatchewan. In fact it's something that's being faced by natural gas consumers all across Canada and the United States. And that's part of the effects of the private expansion to the pipelines by the US (United States) private companies and to the strong growing . . . American growing economy.

(15:00)

But I think we also want to take a few moments to look at the history of this, of this issue, Mr. Speaker. And it goes back, it goes back a number of years to when the members' opposite federal cousins were in power in Ottawa — the Brian Mulroney government — and their desire to negotiate with the United States a freight agreement . . . a Free Trade Agreement that allowed Canadian products to flow freely into the US.

An agreement, which also indicated or tied, I guess you'd say the price that the consumer in Canada has to pay compared to the price the consumer in the United States, which quite frankly is that the Canadian consumer has to pay the same price for a Canadian product as it is sold for in the United States.

Mr. Speaker, this has had in turn a definite negative effect upon the Canadian consumer because natural gas in Canada for example is used in industry. But it's also used in many cases as the sole heating of residential housing. That's not quite the case in the United States where the natural gas consumption is primarily used in the commercial sector down there.

But what's that done then is had a negative effect on Canadian residential heating costs and the impact upon people's disposal incomes for their need to heat their homes here in Canada.

And it's doubly sad I think, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the fact that previous premiers of this great province of Saskatchewan had envisioned the natural gas as an energy source of the future. And at that time when it was not under great demands, they were able to pick up huge, huge reserves of natural gas in Saskatchewan and in Alberta.

And we as Saskatchewan government and we as Saskatchewan residents owned huge resources of natural gas that was there to meet the needs of the Canadian and Saskatchewan consumer when the time was, was at hand. Now that time is at hand and what's happened to these reserves, Mr. Speaker?

Well as you know, and I'm sure most members in this House know, and I know that the vast majority of Saskatchewan people know that those were sold off when those people over there were the Government of Saskatchewan in the '80s. They were sold off by the Grant Devine government and the sad part of it is, Mr. Speaker, they were virtually given away.

They lacked to see the need in the future. The need to serve Saskatchewan people with the lowest energy costs. We had that opportunity. We had that opportunity here, Mr. Speaker, but those people over there in the 1980s when they were the government of this province gave that away.

They sold and . . . they sold off the natural reserves. And we can remember, Mr. Speaker, their attempt when they were government in the '80s their attempt to privatizing SaskEnergy.

We remember that real well. And we remember the opposition in this government — this party was in opposition at that time — and they drew the line in the sand. They said on behalf of Saskatchewan people, we're not going to accept that, and they stood their ground.

And quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, they stood their ground and they won. The people of Saskatchewan rallied behind the opposition — the NDP opposition at that time — to force that government over there of the day, that government over there of the day, to back off the privatization of SaskEnergy.

And I know, Mr. Speaker, I know, Mr. Speaker, those members opposite will say no, no, that wasn't us. That was the Grant Devine Conservatives.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting, I find it interesting that a quote from the August 6, *The Telegraph*, the North Battleford, Saskatchewan August 6 edition. And there's a article in there, and the headline says, "Maybe Crowns have to go — Hermanson".

The first question asked by the reporter is, and I quote:

Should Saskatchewan get rid of its Crown corporations?

The answer:

"Maybe we should", Sask Party Leader Elwin Hermanson says.

Maybe we should privatize it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I know, I know that those members opposite once again, those members opposite once again will say, oh that's not us. We're the Sask Party. That was what the privatization of the Crown corporations was, the agenda of the Grant Devine Conservatives. And we're not the Grant Devine Conservatives; we're the new Sask Party.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to give you an example of what Saskatchewan people think of this so-called new Sask Party. It's an example of the old car that I drive, a 1985 Ford Mustang. And, Mr. Speaker, I will be the first to admit it needs a paint job. And it needs a muffler. And it needs a tune-up. And, Mr. Speaker, it has over 200,000 kilometres on it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that I could take that car to Elite Auto Body and the boys there would do a wonderful job on it. They would take off the old paint, they would fix the rust spots, they would prime it, they would paint it, and it would come out of that shop shiny and bright, just like a new one.

The only problem, Mr. Speaker, it would still be a 1985 model. It would still need a muffler. It would still need a set of tires. And it would still have 200,000 miles on it. Just like that party over there, Mr. Speaker. They can change their name, but the people of Saskatchewan know they haven't changed their game.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I'm very interested in how this relates to the motion before the House. And I invite the hon. member to start bringing it back to the motion.

Mr. Harper: — I'll explain that, Mr. Speaker. Just like the Conservatives in the 1980s attempted to privatize energy in this province to drive the prices up, that's exactly what that group over there would intend to do if they were ever given the reins of power in this province.

Well I'm pleased, Mr. Speaker, to assure you that that won't happen — that won't happen because the people of Saskatchewan know that those people over there may have changed their name, but their policies, their rhetoric, and their hidden agenda is exactly the same as it was in the '80s, the time that drove this province into debt and lost to the people of Saskatchewan energy reserves that could have served us very, very well today. Would have put us on more than a competitive basis with other provinces — not only that, would have put us on a competitive basis internationally, Mr. Speaker. That won't happen.

And we must take a few moments, Mr. Speaker, to acknowledge the fine work that's been done by SaskEnergy over the last particularly 18 months. And if you look at the information that's made available to all people in Saskatchewan you will soon note that SaskEnergy has saved Saskatchewan consumers some \$125 million over the true market prices — \$125 million in the last 18 months over what consumers in Alberta and consumers in Ontario were paying.

Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to second the amendment put forward by the member from Regina Dewdney.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to speak on this topic today, as we know it's a very relevant topic to the taxpayers of this province. The taxpayers and the customers of this province are very concerned about their rising energy costs.

And the member just finished giving his view of history. And I'd like to crack that member's view of history. If the member would recognize that in the 1970s in the former Blakeney government it was called, everything was . . . the economy of Saskatchewan was working around the family of Crown corporations.

And one of the theories they had that they keep oil and gas in the ground for future generations. But they really missed out on a number of opportunities and we see the repercussions today with higher energy prices.

And what the member forgets to mention is that his socialist doctrine doesn't work, never has; and what we have is a worse off situation than if the government of the day back in the '70s, in the Blakeney days, had decreased the royalty rates and got development . . . oil and gas development in this province.

And that's what the government should be doing today. The government should be increasing . . . encouraging oil and gas development in this province. They shouldn't be relying on their family of Crown corporations to do everything because it's the most inefficient way of running economy.

It's been proven around the world again and again that

socialism doesn't work and the free enterprise system does work. Supply and demand does work. And what we need to do in this province is to lower the royalty rates, lower taxes, get the economy going and that's directly related to the oil and gas industry.

And companies . . . we talked to the oil and gas industry that is mainly based in Alberta now. It used to be based in Saskatchewan but unfortunately because of the socialist governments we've had in the last 50 years we've chased the oil and gas industry out of this province. And these companies say to us, if you would change the royalty rates, put Saskatchewan on the same even footing as they have in Alberta and other provinces and other countries around the world, that they would come into Saskatchewan and develop reserves in this province for the betterment of the taxpayers and the customers of this province.

And unfortunately the government across does not understand that and it seems that they're lost in their old ways of trying to run the whole province through their Crown corporations at the expense of the taxpayers of this province.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that we have two ministers that don't really agree on what's going on concerning the price of natural gas. The Finance minister's own budget estimates states that natural gas will be 3.39 per gigajoule for 2002; and even lower, 2.91 per gigajoule for 2003-2005. Then of course SaskEnergy is stating that the price will be around \$7 per gigajoule. And so that's quite a difference in estimates.

The rate review panel, it states that the cost to purchase gas for the November, 2001-October, 2002 will be \$471 million — that works out to \$7.12 per gigajoule. That's a huge discrepancy between the two departments.

Then, I'd like to quote from . . . on April 19th, the committee of Crown corporations, where Mr. Ron Clark says:

. . . Mr. Chairman, we'd love to have some of that 3.59 gas that (you've) . . . got . . . We don't think it's going to be that low . . . If you've got \$4 gas, I'd love to buy (it) some of it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, now SaskEnergy is saying that they are paying \$7 per unit. We'd like to know which number is right. It seems that the Minister of Finance is . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. There appears to be several debates going on all at one time. And I believe the member from Redberry Lake has the floor, and I'd like to hear his contribution to the debate. So would hon. members please come to order. I recognize the member for Redberry Lake.

Mr. Weekes: — We'd like to know whose books are right or if possibly both books are wrong. They seem to be able to cook up numbers at will.

It could be that SaskEnergy officials have already made purchase of natural gas . . . (inaudible) . . . at inflated rates. And as we know, the trend is downward on the natural gas scale.

Now the Finance Minister is predicting lower rates, and so the

SaskEnergy officials already have made . . . possibly have made some purchases and locked it in at a price that it could be \$2 lower to save the taxpayers some money.

Now the NDP has bragged about how efficient SaskEnergy was in locking in what was described as good prices last year. But it seems that we are now stuck with paying \$7 for natural gas, when we could be paying the current price, which is about \$5.50, and possibly falling even further.

Or there's another option. Maybe it's that the prices have been locked in already at a lower price and SaskEnergy has maybe done its due diligence and purchased at the lower level. But the government — the high-handed NDP, the arrogant NDP — has muzzled the SaskEnergy officials. And they're just saying well, let's just leave it high, the Saskatchewan people won't recognize that it's high and we'll just put some more money into our coffers and maybe we'll buy some more dot-com companies with it. Or, you know, just throw some more taxpayer money out the window instead of taking the money, lowering taxes, lowering rates.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government forgets something. What they forget is the people of Saskatchewan, the seniors of Saskatchewan, families of Saskatchewan, the small-business people of Saskatchewan, the towns and cities and municipalities of Saskatchewan.

(15:15)

And it's interesting, when we ask the Finance minister about the discrepancy in prices; he says we're just crying crocodile tears. Well, Mr. Speaker, the seniors of this province are probably crying tears all right, because they can't afford another \$400 in energy price increases this year. How do seniors, who live on fixed incomes, live and buy the daily necessities of life when they're having to take on the extra burden of higher natural gas prices?

And also we talk about increased costs. Our small-business people in this province, which is the backbone of our economy despite what the government says and is the backbone of every economy in the world that is growing and prosperous, they already have to pay possibly some of the highest rates in tax rates in Canada. And now they're going to have to pay thousands of dollars more in higher energy costs to run their businesses.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we have to take a look at what the higher energy costs are doing to our hospitals. Already many hospitals are over budget. They have shortage of staff. They are having troubles with their waiting lists. People's health are suffering because of the circumstances in health care. And now these hospitals will be having to pay even higher energy prices, which will come directly out of their budgets which are already stretched too thin.

And again, look at the schools in our province. The schools are going to have to pay higher energy prices. And again this government is forcing the school boards to raise the taxes at the municipal level. And once again, this government has put the school boards in an untenable situation where the taxes are going to have to go up again.

And you look at small towns and RMs and the cities who heat curling rinks and skating rinks and swimming pools. Their costs are going to continue to rise, and either they're going to have to increase their user fees or else increase taxes again to cover the shortfall, Mr. Speaker.

And again we talk about revitalizing rural Saskatchewan. Rural Saskatchewan needs basic things. Rural Saskatchewan needs lower taxes, proper infrastructure, hospitals, schools, even proper cell phone service. And when you increase the cost of energy, that affects small-town rural Saskatchewan and again it's a detriment to the economy of Saskatchewan.

At this time, I'd like to just end my speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by saying that the government has to get . . . the two ministers have to get together and decide whose numbers are right and do the right thing for the people of Saskatchewan and have the lowest possible natural energy gases for the customers. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I've listened to this debate with some interest this afternoon. And I want to talk about some of the issues that have been raised by members on both sides of the House.

I am going to stay very specifically focused on the actual resolution and the amendment in front of us today, but let me say when we take a look at the issue of the projections that we have in the budget document and the rate review request from SaskEnergy, there should not be seen to be some great difference or some great argument here.

What we are talking about is the rate that we expect to receive our royalties on and the rate at which SaskEnergy needs to both buy the gas that it's going to sell to Saskatchewan people and also to make up for the variance that we have in the gas variance account, the \$80 million deficit.

The natural gas application deals with those two factors. One is the increase that we've seen in natural gas prices. The second is to make up for the last several months that we've been selling gas at a loss. People on this side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, believe that we have to pay our bills. We believe that when deficits are rung up, the deficits need to be paid off. We don't believe that we can simply leave them for our future generations as the members opposite did when they were in power.

There's \$80 million there that needs to be dealt with. Now if the opportunity had been there to charge what we were replenishing the supply at, we would have done that. The decision was to wait and see what natural gas stabilized at. Now we should understand that this is where this \$80 million variance is. The \$80 million has to come from somewhere, Mr. Deputy Speaker. SaskEnergy has asked that it be added on to the gas prices in their rate application and that the rates that they expect to be buying gas at will be reflected.

The member for Swift Current says, well which is it? You know, there's two prices. The real price and the imaginary price. I would say to the member from Swift Current, Mr.

Deputy Speaker, that the only imaginary price is the one that he comes up with on the floor of the House after looking on the Internet in the morning. Because it is not an accurate reflection of what we can buy natural gas at. It is not the price we can buy natural gas at. If you were to go to the market today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and buy one gigajoule of gas for one day you might get it at the amount that the member opposite has listed it as. That may well be the case.

I think for a lot of us when we talk about these things, gigajoules and prices per gigajoule, it gets complicated. I liken it to go and getting a mortgage. We know that there's a certain mortgage rate charged that the banks have. We know that when we as individual consumers go into the bank and sit down with our bank that we have a series of options on what those mortgage rates are. If I go on a very short term I get a better rate than if I lock in over a longer term. But if I lock in over a longer term, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I may protect myself from the rates going up.

This is analogous to the situation that SaskEnergy does in purchasing natural gas. What they do — and we have benefited from this for years and years under the good investment policy of SaskEnergy — they have been able to protect us from upswings in the market by purchasing it at a reasonable price.

This is where the \$7 comes from. This is the rate that they believed that they needed to charge as to where that market would stabilize plus cover off the \$80 million deficit that's been rung up over the last six months as we've had to replenish our stock at a higher price.

It's an average price, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's not a case that you simply walk in and pick up a gigajoule and move it over to your supply. This is the average price that we've looked at. And we need to understand that. Some of the gas we bought is significantly higher in cost. Some of the gas we're buying today is certainly at a higher cost than the 4.52 that we're charging consumers.

This is a very simple debate. And it's a debate that people have around their tables any time they go to renew their mortgages. Do you lock in for a short amount of time at a lower price, or do you lock in for a longer amount of time at a slightly higher price to protect yourself from rate increase? I think it's a perfect analogy.

This is why I don't understand why the members opposite seem so perplexed by this. We know that the Saskatchewan treasury will get its royalty rebates, its royalty revenues based on a certain value of gas. We know though that when SaskEnergy goes to buy it, they will likely buy it at a different price.

If we simply owned all the gas fields, the price would be the same because we could simply transfer it over. We could pull it out of the government's gas fields and put it into people's homes.

We do not own the gas fields, thanks in part to the members opposite. But the other thing we need to understand, and the members opposite will I am sure appreciate this as the great crypto-capitalists that they are, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the price of natural gas has gone up because demand has gone up.

Demand has gone up because unlike in the 1970s, we have pipelines now that take natural gas down into the United States. That means greater demand. No longer do we simply burn it off at the oil field. That is part of why we've seen gas prices go up.

And for the members opposite to somehow believe that there's something untoward going on here, is ridiculous. It shows that they don't understand the oil and gas industry; it shows they don't understand SaskEnergy's pricing; and frankly, I think it goes to show they don't understand basic finances that anybody that has a mortgage understands.

It says to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the members here — the Minister of Finance, the Minister of CIC — have a good understanding of how government works, and the members opposite are no better prepared to govern than they were in the disastrous time that they were here in the 1980s.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to take a look at the facts — the facts — not simply the outrageous innuendo and allegations and imaginations that the members opposite have. Gas prices fluctuate.

I frankly would put my trust in people like Ken From far before I'd ever put it into my good friend, the member for Swift Current. And thankfully, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as long as we're in government, the good officials in SaskEnergy will have the ability to continue to purchase gas in the best interests of Saskatchewan people, as we have benefited from over the last decade. And I have every confidence that they'll continue in that way.

The second issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the issue raised by the member for Dewdney, and that concerns the future of SaskEnergy. Let us not forget that these parties in this House are ideologically divided — as if you could forget that by listening to the member for Redberry Lake sputter on about socialism, and who knows what else he was talking about.

The members opposite are ideologically hidebound to selling off our Crown investments. They tried in '89 to sell SaskEnergy; they're setting it up now again. And I will tell you that, God forbid, if they ever form a government they will try and sell it again. And then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we'll see is we'll see fluctuations widely, like they are throughout every other jurisdiction on this continent. Not here in Saskatchewan, not today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but that's what would happen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — The sixty-five minute portion of the debate has expired. We'll now proceed to 10 minutes of questions and comments.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I guess I have a question for the member for Regina South on this issue that we've been debating here today. And specifically it relates to the fact that in the SaskEnergy's application to the rate review committee, Mr. Deputy Speaker, SaskEnergy clearly indicated that they would be hedging in terms of . . . in a rising market, that they'd try to peg a lower price as they did late last year.

Just outside the legislature, Mr. Deputy Speaker, SaskEnergy

officials confirmed that indeed they're buying on the spot market. They're buying today on the spot market, and so they haven't bought any gas forward to October 2002. Now that represents an opportunity. Well that represents an opportunity because the price today is \$5.56 plus 3 per cent, plus 3 per cent transmission charge — much, much lower than the rate they're considering.

The question to the member for Regina South is: wouldn't he support then SaskEnergy locking in at the current price and saving Saskatchewan customers of SaskEnergy about a dollar a gigajoule, up to \$100 million. Would he support that?

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, what I get from the members opposite is that they in fact were wrong in what they were saying, that they were accusing us of having locked in, because clearly we haven't.

SaskEnergy is, as the member opposite is saying, buying on the spot market. It would seem to me to make sense — it would seem to me to make sense that we take a look at what's happening. Why lock in at a high price if it's going to drop? But on the other hand, if the expectation is the market's going to go up, of course we would expect them to take a look at that and to protect us on the price.

That seems to be the way they've always bought gas. It seems to be the prudent way to continue to buy gas.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was intrigued listening to the member for Sask Rivers talk about this government being the capitalist of the underdog.

Can I just ask, what the heck did he mean by that?

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's interesting that member from that side of the House, the so-called NDP government, would ask a question in regards to capitalism. We're certainly well aware in this province, and even more aware on this side, and also in our own constituencies, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this NDP government is more interested in a socialistic aspect of life rather than capitalism, where it would be an opportunity for corporations such as SaskEnergy to be able to operate in a more efficient and prudent manner.

And as we of course heard just now from the member from Regina South, is that it seems as though SaskEnergy at this time is simply wandering in circles and has absolutely no idea what they're doing, and waiting for direction from this socialist government. And I think it's just a clear indication that nobody on that side has any idea what's going on.

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a question for the member from Swift Current. The member from Swift Current talks repeatedly about how the government is doing this and that, and referring to the rates used in the budget and the rates used in the SaskEnergy proposal.

I'd like to ask the member opposite, does he know what rate per gigajoule that SaskEnergy used in their rate proposal, rate

application, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Could the member tell me that please.

(15:30)

Mr. Wall: — Well there's a couple of figures in the rate application, Mr. Speaker, that SaskEnergy uses — \$7.62 a gigajoule is the initial number that they discuss in the application to the rate review panel. The submission that they made however is around \$7 a gigajoule. That's what it was based on. That was SaskEnergy's request to the rate review panel.

Mr. Thomson: — My question is to the member for Sask Rivers. I was wondering if he could tell us what rate he thinks SaskEnergy should be charging for natural gas.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was a very curious question I guess from the member and curious indeed from the member from Regina South that he would expect us in opposition to be able to help SaskEnergy and the rate review panel set pricing for natural gas in this province.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I last looked I believe the members opposite are actually supposed to be in government, and here they are again asking us for advice on how to set prices for natural gas.

Well I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if this is the type of attitude that they have on that side of the House, I think maybe they should just call a general election and we'll take over government and then we'll be able to help set the natural gas price within the . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — That's an interesting question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and very germane to the debate so we'll put it to the member for Regina Dewdney. What price does he feel SaskEnergy should be charging for natural gas?

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm extremely pleased that the member opposite asked the question.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe SaskEnergy should charge the very . . . the lowest possible fair price to the consumers of Saskatchewan.

But I'd also like to point out . . . I'd like to point out to the members opposite that the number SaskEnergy used on page 13 of their application, for the cost of purchasing gas per gigajoule, was \$6.05.

Now what they don't seem to understand is the need to pay back the cost variance account, the transmission costs. All those things are factors in what the rate review has to look at.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they were using a figure today that you could buy on the Alberta commodity, natural gas commodity at 5.56. He's right. But it was based on 6.05, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the member for Regina Dewdney is my question, and it's pretty simple. The rate review panel has recommended . . . they actually didn't give SaskEnergy the full increase. But their recommendation is \$6.50 a gigajoule for the cost of gas, plus 71 cents to pay off the gas cost variance account per gigajoule, for a total of 7.28.

If the member for Regina Dewdney does not believe that the 6.57 is all the cost of gas in terms of this increase, if he believes that 6.05 is the number, what is the other 52 cents for?

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member opposite wants to very selectively pick numbers from the application, Mr. Deputy Speaker — the rate 6.05 on page 13, the average cost of a gigajoule.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite, they want to ask all these . . . a number of questions about how the process works. Maybe before they go and make assumptions about how — they talk about how the province is gouging the consumer — they should understand the process, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During the debate, the member for Sask Rivers made reference to the independent rate review panel and its qualifications.

I would like to ask the member for Sask Rivers what his qualifications are and why they are superior to Mr. Lacoursiere's and Mr. From's, who have clearly dealt with this issue.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Again, a very curious question from the member from Regina South. Again he's standing in this House asking for advice from the opposition side. And certainly we're always willing to give it, and we give it freely and with an open mind.

And I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to try to help the member from Regina South understand that he is actually in the government, and it's the government's duty in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to run the government and not to be seeking advice on a regular basis from the opposition. So here we are again this afternoon, the member from Regina South asking for advice on how to operate the government.

Now certainly if they need help to operate the government, call a general election, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We'll gladly win the next election on their behalf, help this province to run in a prudent and effective manner.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question to the member for Sask Rivers is what his qualifications were.

One of the things we understand in government is that you trust your officials and you hire people who know what they're doing — i.e., Mr. From in SaskEnergy; i.e., Mr. Lacoursiere in the independent rate review panel.

I would appreciate the member for Sask Rivers not dodging the question and certainly answering it.

While we appreciate his advice, I would certainly also note that

we are paying fair market value for it, which is about nothing. But if the member would like to explain his qualifications, I would be more than willing to listen to them.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it would be my pleasure to speak for the next 15 seconds in response to the question from the member from Regina South — down to eight seconds now, I see. Thank you, the member from Swift Current.

And I had 14,000 people who are quite aware of my . . .

The Speaker: — The 75 minute debate has expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 8 — Tourism Industry Important to Economy

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me switch files and switch approach. I am quite happy to stand concerning a motion that I have put on the order paper concerning Tourism Week and the value of the tourism industry to Saskatchewan's economy.

This is in fact Tourism Week here in Saskatchewan. It runs June 3 to 9, I believe. And this is an excellent opportunity I believe for this Assembly to recognize the good work that Saskatchewan businesses are doing throughout the province to attract tourists and the partnerships that we've entered into — government, industry, and communities — in terms of fostering what I think to be a very good tourism product.

Mr. Speaker, in some ways it's unfortunate, I think, that Tourism Week falls in the middle of summer. I guess it makes sense because that's when we have most tourists here. But Saskatchewan has tourism opportunities throughout the year, and it is something that I think we should take this week and celebrate.

I look at having grown up in central Saskatchewan, in the Prince Albert area, and the great recreational opportunities that we enjoyed during the winter months, be it snowmobiling or cross-country skiing — not a lot of opportunities to downhill, but some places they've been able to develop fairly decent downhill ski facilities as well.

Saskatchewan is a four-season tourist destination, and I think that we should really be celebrating that, Mr. Speaker.

As we take a look around Saskatchewan today, I think all of us can see just how increasingly important tourism is becoming to Saskatchewan's economy. Whether that is in Moose Jaw, or as we've heard several statements in the Assembly over the last few days with the work that they've done repositioning themselves as a tourist destination.

Whether it is the work that we've done here in the city of Regina to try and open up many of our very nationally renowned institutions. I think of the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) that we are very happy to have their training headquarters here. The importance of things like the sunset ceremony that I know tourists from across the continent enjoy coming to take a look at. The museum that celebrates the

activities that the RCMP have participated in over the last hundred years of opening up the West.

As we look across the province, there are some very unusual things that we find here in Saskatchewan that are not simply located here in our cities. And this is one of the reasons I also think that we should spend a great deal celebrating what's happening in the province's tourist industry.

I take a look at the remarkable find that there was in terms of the Tyrannosaurus Rex fossil discovery in Eastend, I believe it was. This was a remarkable scientific discovery, but it also is proving to be a very important tourist opportunity for the southwest part of our province.

Mr. Speaker, from every part of this province there is some remarkable, remarkable event, remarkable location, remarkable people that I think have a great deal to offer Canadians, to offer North Americans, and offer people from around the world as they come to visit.

As we've toured . . . if any of us have toured the United States, I think that we often will see that they make a bigger deal out of their tourist attractions. Every town seems to have a thing down there; it doesn't matter what it is — it's the biggest something or other — and this is their tourist attraction. We've not opted for so much the gimmicks here as we have to try and build these things around our communities' history and our own values.

I want to speak for a minute about the situation in Moose Jaw. Because I was a little surprised the other day when the member for North Battleford took such a strident attack on the citizens of Moose Jaw and the work that they have done in developing the historic tunnels of the city in terms of trying to provide a greater tourist draw.

The city of Moose Jaw, 10 years ago, I think was trying to figure out where it would go. A medium-sized city, I think it's the third or fourth largest in the province — it's always been a bit of a debate between Prince Albert and Moose Jaw, which is larger — but a very decent sized city with a lot of opportunities.

The city was taking a look at how it could expand and how it could move forward. And it made I think a remarkable set of decisions to embrace tourism and use some natural advantages it had, as well as its own history, to promote a new product to attract people to Moose Jaw. Not simply to draw them away from Regina or draw them in from other communities, but to attract them to Moose Jaw.

We take a look coming out of that, the redevelopment of the city's downtown, the work and the money that they spent to do that. We take a look at the redevelopment of the tunnels. We take a look at the expansion of new facilities and new draws like the mineral springs, which I guess really is a redevelopment of an old facility that was there back in the '30s or '20s.

These are kind of innovative ideas that Saskatchewan people came up with that said, not only do they have to be a tourist attraction or can they be a tourist attraction, but this can help make the cities a better place to live and make our communities a better place to live.

And I salute the people of Moose Jaw for the work that they did in establishing themselves as a tourist draw. And I really do think that it serves as a model for communities across this province and indeed across the Prairies to see some of the benefits of how we can attract people in to enjoy our scenery and our communities.

I think it was unfortunate the other day, and perhaps the member for North Battleford didn't mean to be so strident in his attack on the people of Moose Jaw for their redevelopment — I'll give him the benefit of the doubt that he didn't — but I do believe that it is important we recognize the initiatives that people have gone through.

When I take a look at the city of Regina, we are remarkably blessed in this community with a large number of draws. This Legislative Building is one of the top tourist attractions in the province. It's one of the top tourist attractions in the province because it's a beautiful, remarkable facility that springs out of the prairie.

Positioned on the lake, surrounded by a beautiful park that I think any of us in this city know is very well used by joggers, cyclists, people out walking their dog, by families. People use this area. This is something that is both a tourist attraction and also makes our community a better place to live.

Mr. Speaker, I was watching the CBC Newsworld the other day and I was surprised to see two stories on the CBC Newsworld back to back, celebrating Saskatchewan. One dealt with the wildlife sanctuary actually, the bird sanctuary over in Wascana Park not too far from here, just over by the Centre of the Arts, and talking about what a draw it was to Saskatchewan people and to people from across the country.

Mr. Speaker, we can take a look at communities throughout the province. I want to spend a minute talking about Saskatoon because they've opted for a slightly different approach to attracting tourists that has been equally successful.

Saskatoon is very fortunate to have a very creative and artistic community. They have gone forward with some very innovative ideas to foster community tourism growth. And I take a look at one of the long-standing productions that they put on up there. I think it was one of the first in the country, this Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan.

Now it's somewhat in vogue that we would see Shakespeare reperformed. I think Halifax does Shakespeare by the Sea. There's Shakespeare on Princess Island in Calgary. Winnipeg has something similar. But Saskatoon in a lot of ways was a pioneer in this by bringing Shakespeare to the people and modernizing it, and bringing I think a very positive artistic and cultural draw in the community.

If I'm not mistaken the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan starts running in about the middle of July, about the same time that the jazz festival starts in Saskatoon.

(15:45)

Saskatoon is very fortunate to have a very good set of . . . a beautiful venue in their river valley. They certainly play off of

the remarkable landscape that they have around them. And they have integrated this into a very good tourism product.

Cultural activities like the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan, like the jazz festival, which is held — I would note to the members opposite who are always interested in selling off the Crown corporations — held in partnership with SaskTel, sponsored in a large part by SaskTel, which adds to the community.

They also then have the ability to draw into other things like Wanuskewin Heritage Park. Wanuskewin is I think remarkably turning into one of our great natural treasures. For those of us who have had the opportunity to be out there, I am always, always impressed by the sense of peace and tranquility that one gets from travelling there, and this reminder that people have been living here on these prairies for thousands and thousands of years.

And it is I think a remarkable work that was done by the community, by the provincial governments over the last decade, two decades, 15 years I guess, and the federal government in terms of recognizing this as a heritage park.

Mr. Speaker, we have, as I say, these things are certainly not limited to our large cities. You take a look at the . . . we need only take a look at the situation in Batoche and the excellent facilities there the federal government has invested in. The 1885 uprising and rebellion was a time in history that I don't know that many people would think anything good could have come out of. But as we take a look at what has been done today, we understand that there is a market there for people who want to learn more about their heritage; who want to learn more about their country.

And this is one of the things that we see out in Batoche, in the Duck Lake area, the Duck Lake Interpretative Centre. These are remarkable facilities which draw thousands and thousands of people from across the country, and across the continent every year.

We see these sorts of situations, and I hear the member for Wood River has decided to re-enter the Chamber, and I wanted to congratulate the people in his riding for the work that they've done in terms of developing a tourist product . . .

The Speaker: — I'd just remind the member from Regina South that he's not to make any remarks about the presence or absence, directly or indirectly, about the presence or absence of any members.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I apologize for that. I do however hear the member for Wood River, from his seat, talking about the situation. And I do want to say that the people in the . . . throughout the province have done a remarkable job and indeed the people in his riding have done a remarkable job also in developing tourism product.

We take a look at one of the things that I think is relatively new in south Saskatchewan, and that is this march back across the Red Coat Trail. The Red Coat Trail . . . I forget what it's named. It runs through several of the ridings. I think it's Highway 13 or something of that nature. But it is a remarkable

opportunity to travel across that part of the province where the North West Mounted Police came.

And I had the opportunity a couple of years ago to travel across some of that. And I am hopeful that we are going to put some money into a highway upgrade there because it felt a little bit like the old trail, I think, did back then. But it was remarkably beautiful, beautiful scenery. And I know that the communities take great pride along that part of the trail in terms of celebrating the sort of tourism opportunities there and enjoying the visits with people from across the country as they come through.

Mr. Speaker, we have attractions across this province that we have not yet opened up. I think it is unfortunate that more of us have not had an opportunity to travel Saskatchewan's North.

Well the Churchill River of course has been designated as a heritage river, and it provides a great canoeing opportunity for many of the hardier in our midst. I'm not one of those, but I believe the Minister for CIC has canoed this river at some length. I have not doubt the member from Cumberland, if not recently, certainly in his younger days will have spent some time on that river as well. And I think that we have a great deal to open up in the North for people to celebrate.

When I was growing up, I had the opportunity to spend summers, several of my summers in La Ronge, where my dad was working. And I was always impressed by the approach that particularly the American tourists had when they would come up to La Ronge which tends to be a dropping off point to the further northern lakes. Northern Saskatchewan was unlike anything they had ever seen or experienced before. And it is so truly unique as part of our province. It is something that we really should encourage more people to go up into.

Certainly there are challenges. We are aware of the problems that the federal government's gun laws are having potentially with this tourist industry. But nevertheless there is a great deal of fishing to be done up there and I know that the outfitters that are in the north central part and northern part of this province do an excellent job of providing a good product.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that in time we will see greater development in our North. That we'll have a very . . . continue to have a very prosperous outfitters' operations, and that we will continue to see people move throughout this province and experience the various different regions and the different cultural and ecological offerings of this province.

Saskatchewan people often I think underestimate the beauty of the place that we live and what a draw it can be. I've never had the opportunity to travel much in The Great Sand Hills or travel up to the Athabasca Sand Dunes. But I believe these too are also great opportunities. Increasingly, Grasslands National Park is becoming a draw. This is very good news for people in the deep south part of the province, as it draws many people into the communities.

And we would also be remiss if we didn't mention the good work that is done, particularly in the autumn, as we're fortunate to have a large number of those ducks and geese fly across our province, Mr. Speaker, and it attracts in a great deal of

American hunters who have an opportunity to come up and enjoy Saskatchewan's hospitality.

We are getting better I believe as a province in terms of attracting and branding ourselves as a tourist destination.

One of the projects I had an opportunity to work on before being elected of course was Casino Regina. It was our belief in bringing in casino expansion that not only would we deal with some of the economic issues that were . . . there were some compelling arguments put forward on the part of Aboriginal people, but we would also have an opportunity to develop an additional tourist draw.

Casino Regina has proved very much, no doubt to the skeptics, to the dismay of the skeptics, but it's proved very much to be a very positive draw for tourists from across Canada and from across the continent.

I was not long ago in Minnesota, and it was interesting that we . . . I talked to some people who were aware both that we had direct flights from Minnesota into Saskatchewan, but also that we had excellent hunting, and happened to have a very good, a world-class casino here.

I have no doubt that these sort of things are helping draw people into our province, helping stimulate our economy, and helping build a very well-branded Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, tourism is a great, great economic benefit to Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan people. And I have every reason to believe it will continue to be so.

As we continue to develop our tourism industry in the winter, as we move more and more towards further development of our snowmobile trails, we take greater advantage of recreational opportunities, and the fact that people throughout the continent are taking advantage of the abilities to travel more and they have seemingly more discretionary income to spend on tourism, we are making sure Saskatchewan stays as part of that.

Back in the early part of the opening of the West, we are reminded that there was actually I believe a Hollywood movie made, called simply, *Saskatchewan*. I don't know if Mary Pickford was in it but it wouldn't surprise me. And they had this — there's of course a classic painting for the poster of this of Saskatchewan — this beautiful flat prairie and this gorgeous woman and this rugged mounted policeman and these beautiful mountains.

Well it didn't quite turn out that way. Unfortunately we can promise just about everything except for the mountains here, Mr. Speaker. But everything else, we have been able to deliver on. I think if we could just airbrush that poster a little bit we could probably use it again to market the province.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, as we talk about the . . . as we talk about opening up Saskatchewan, one of the things that has also helped, I think, has been the fact that we are seeing an expansion of the film and video industry here and seeing more and more of Saskatchewan landscapes in our movies. The fact that we are seeing these landscapes, I think, help to show some of the beauty of Saskatchewan to the world.

It is important for us, I think, to understand that . . .

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

Mr. Toth: — With leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I noticed in the west gallery a gentleman who's joined us this afternoon from the Langenburg area — well known in the seed industry — Roger Kaeding. And he's not only well known in the seed industry and for his farming techniques, but also he's very involved in the political sphere as well and has a keen interest.

So we'd like to extend a warm welcome to Roger joining us this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 8 — Tourism Industry Important to Economy (continued)

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I of course would like to welcome the guests that are in the gallery as well.

But I want to pick up on where I had left off in terms of the great opportunities we have in this province to market ourselves and to promote Saskatchewan as a great tourist destination. There are so many things for people to do here, whether it's to enjoy the excellent cultural activities that we have, the festivals that go on.

I was entertaining a friend who was in from Calgary, last week I guess it was, the week before, and he was bemoaning the fact that he couldn't be at Calgary — he had some festival on. We happened to wander down to the Cathedral Arts Festival and this particular individual was surprised at just how lively things were; couldn't believe that this was possible in his old hometown of Regina, that we could have so many people out enjoying such a great street festival.

This really is a remarkable place that we live. And I have seen over the last several years more and more Saskatchewan people involve themselves in helping to foster this.

I believe it is this next weekend that we will be hosting Bazaar here in Regina which is of course a great festival to foster, for various people in the craft industry to show their wares and to . . . we attract in people from all across Saskatchewan who will come to Regina to enjoy this.

Festivals; great facilities like the spa, like the casino; a beautiful environment, whether that's the northern lights that people have a chance to see during the winter months in particular, whether it is our fabulous lakes, whether it is an opportunity to fish and hunt here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, there are very, very few things that we cannot do in this province. And I can tell you

that people from across this . . . across the country and across North America are interested.

I want to share with the members a brief, very brief story. I was down in Louisiana. I had taken a road trip one summer and I thought I'd do this great American road trip and had a map that seemed to go down to Louisiana and I thought, well I might as well follow it down there. I was driving back through Arkansas, decided to drive up through the Ozarks and got hungry, stopped just outside Branson — Branson, Missouri — at a Denny's. It happened to be what there was . . . the restaurant there was.

I came out from the restaurant and there sitting on the hood of my car was the biggest guy that I have just about ever seen. He was even bigger than the member for Saltcoats, Mr. Speaker. And I thought oh, oh, this is not good news. All of a sudden I thought about every bad stereotype that I could ever come up with.

An Hon. Member: — Why are you looking at me?

Mr. Thomson: — And I don't look at the member for Saskatoon Southeast for any reason. But I'll tell you, all of a sudden that banjo music from *Deliverance* started playing in my head and I thought this is not going to be pretty.

So I thought, well I'll wander over to the car and see . . . just kind of wander past, and looking at this guy and wondering why he's sitting on my car. And he says, is this your car? And I said yes, it's my car. And he says, you're from this Saskatchewan place? And I said yes, yes. I said, do you know where it is? He says no. He says, but I hear you've got big, big white-tailed deer up there. And I thought oh, okay, I think I'm going to get off lucky on this one.

And he asked basically about how you get information on Saskatchewan. All he had heard is that buddies had come up here and gone hunting and he wasn't sure whether you could in fact fly up from Missouri. I don't know what the answer was. I just politely said yes, of course you can, in hopes that he would accept my answer and let me get on with my drive home.

But it was interesting that even there, deep in the Ozark Mountains, that people had heard of Saskatchewan. And I think that we often underestimate the draw that even the name of the province has in terms of attracting people.

I want to say — I won't speak very much longer, Mr. Speaker — except I do want to say to all the people in the tourism industry across this province, congratulations. Congratulations because this is an excellent product that they are developing and I am very proud of my fellow citizens who have been able to develop these products throughout the province, be it from the Moose Mountains through to the Cypress Hills and up north into the heartland of this great province, up where I grew up in Prince Albert, and further north.

(16:00)

Mr. Speaker, I will with that . . . I just want to make one final comment. I shouldn't say that this was the end of my speech. I want to make one final comment. And that concerns the attitude that I think that we need to start exuding as Saskatchewan

people. I had the opportunity this last winter to take in a couple of Action Saskatchewan meetings that the chamber of commerce were putting on as they were talking to people about what they thought needed to happen. In fact I took in a meeting in the member for Estevan's riding in Estevan.

And it was interesting listening to what people had to say there. Almost every single person that came to these meetings said that we needed to be more positive about Saskatchewan. We needed to be more positive. We needed to stop trash-talking this province of ours and we need to start celebrating the many, many good things that are here. Not simply the natural resources, but also the people and the businesses and the enterprises that we've been able to develop over the last 100 years. And in the case of Wanuskeewin, I guess over the last 10,000 years here on this prairie.

Mr. Speaker, that is part of the key to us continuing to build this province. We need to continue to think about this province as a great place to visit, a great place to live, and we need to tell everybody that. If we simply say, gee aren't we hard done by here, you know what, they're going to look at that poster and they're going to see the mountains and they're going to go west. And they're not going to stop here and enjoy this great, beautiful prairie of ours and the beautiful communities that we've built up around it.

That is something each and every one of us here in this Assembly can do. And something that I hope each and every one of us does over the next several months as we just make a little bit of an attitude adjustment ourselves. I'm not saying that we shouldn't debate how we can make Saskatchewan better, but it is time that we stop trash-talking this province. And it's time that we take a more optimistic approach.

I believe that that — especially if we do that in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker — that that will not only serve our province well but will put us more in line with the people who sent us here to represent them because they feel good about Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, with that I am pleased to move, seconded by my colleague from Regina Dewdney:

That this Assembly, during Tourism Week, recognize the value of the tourism industry to provincial employment and economic development; and join with the editors of many Saskatchewan newspapers and with the members of the tourism industry in urging Saskatchewan residents and people from across North America to visit the many attractions our province offers the traveller.

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased this afternoon to rise and second the motion made by the member from Regina South. Like the member from Regina South, I very much appreciate the tourism opportunities within our great province, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . or Mr. Speaker.

Now having lived my entire life in the province of Saskatchewan, I have had the opportunity to visit many, many

of Saskatchewan's tourist attractions. It doesn't matter what corner of this province you go to, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is clearly many, many fine tourist attractions that the people of this province have worked very, very hard to put together to enhance tourists to come to our province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk about a few of those great tourist attractions in southwest Saskatchewan, where the member from Cypress Hills will know of all of these, if not a few more that maybe even I have forgot about. Because it's been a few years since I grew up there, and some of these places I haven't seen since I was a boy.

But nestled in between the town of Shaunavon and Eastend is a little regional park called Pine Cree Regional Park. And the member may well have spent some time at that park, but I have very, very many fond memories as a boy picnicking, running, and playing in Pine Cree Park. A little regional park nestled in a valley between two small communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but yet it in itself holds many attractions.

When I was a boy there was a cave there that they had that a hermit lived in. And we used to walk up and see where the hermit lived. And the cave was actually still there. We could go in and there were some of the artifacts from when the hermit lived there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There's a little creek runs through it, one of the most picturesque spots I've ever seen in the province of Saskatchewan. And that's nestled in southwest Saskatchewan among the flat prairie, a little south from where it's a little bit flatter, I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but still nestled in the prairie between the towns of Eastend and Shaunavon.

And you don't have to go very far there to go to Eastend, where one of the most expansive finds in archaeological history has been found, Mr. Deputy Speaker — Scotty, the T.Rex. And around that is built an entire industry, tourist industry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And the community of Eastend is today reaping the benefits of that industry in that community.

Go a little bit further west, you have the Cypress Hills, Mr. Deputy Speaker — the highest spot east of the Rocky Mountains, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Cypress Hills, Saskatchewan — a tremendous provincial park, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with all the opportunities that any tourist would like to find in a provincial park anywhere in this country or, in fact, anywhere in North America, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Beautiful lake nestled among cabins and a pine tree forest. Very, very picturesque, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And you go a little further west and you have Fort Walsh. You can't forget the unique history that the North West Mounted Police played in the development of our country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and in particular the role they played within our province.

Now Cypress Hills is a beautiful, beautiful territory, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And within the west block of Cypress Hills, you have Fort Walsh. You have the settlers' trading posts there. You still have, today, the opportunity to take an old wagon ride from the fort down to the trading post, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Things that many, many of our children . . . their only

opportunity to see that type of activity or participate in that type of activity is at a place like Fort Walsh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in that same southwest corner of the province, you have some of the most unique badlands in the province or in the country, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Where you see the prairie change instantly to picturesque badlands — different terrain, different opportunities, different wildlife, Mr. Deputy Speaker, considerably different. It changes over in just a matter of a few miles.

Also in the southwest part of the province, we have the Grasslands National Park. We have the Red Coat Trail, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that's only a few of the many, many tourist attractions in southwest Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, southwest Saskatchewan is the most sparsely populated area with the exception of the far north in our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But yet it offers one of the greatest opportunities for tourism in our province.

Not to mention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, hunting. Many, many tourists come to our province and many, many of our Saskatchewan citizens hunt. Well southwest Saskatchewan is also one of the nicest places in Saskatchewan to hunt, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That Cypress Hills area and the Shaunavon/Maple Creek area has an expanse of mule deer, white-tailed deer. And in the Cypress Hills they have both moose and elk as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Opportunities for those people in our province who want to travel to hunt in our communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about other provincial parks across the province. Our network of provincial parks in this province provides opportunities for the citizens of this province and for people across Canada, and for that matter, for international travellers. We have in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, numerous provincial parks. And many people in this province probably aren't even aware of all the provincial parks we have.

But if you go to the southeast part of the province you've got Moose Mountain Provincial Park nestled against a beautiful valley scene, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The member who represents that area is extremely pleased and happy with being a member for Moose Mountain. And I believe that he should be, because Moose Mountain Provincial Park provides great recreation opportunities for people in our province, provides the opportunity for people to participate through friendship, work together within their communities, and then go away for the weekend, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But we also have in that part of the province many, many other tourist attractions as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But the member from . . . excuse me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can't think of the name of his constituency at this moment. But the member from the Moose Mountain area of the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has many, many, many tourist attractions.

Yes, the member reminds me that it's the member from Souris-Cannington. Now he should be very pleased and very excited about the tourism opportunities within his constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Red Coat Trail goes through his constituency right down along the southern part of the province, right through to the Cypress Hills — one of the most historic routes in Canadian history, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Over that trail literally hundreds and hundreds of two-wheeled carts, pulled by oxen and pulled by horses, made the trek across Canada to open up what we know as Saskatchewan and Alberta, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A very historic trip along what today is Highway No. 13.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we can't forget for a second some of the tourist attractions that our cities represent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We only have to look at Regina or Saskatoon, Yorkton, North Battleford, Moose Jaw. Each one of these cities offers unique tourist attractions to the people of our province, for that matter the people of Canada, the people of the world.

You look at Regina. Regina has the Royal Canadian Mounted Police museum, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police training centre. Every Mountie in Canada, our red serge that's recognized across the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker — those Mounties were all trained here in Regina.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the members opposite asked me to name each one of them. Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I couldn't name them all. I would ask the member opposite if he could, but the member opposite obviously couldn't either, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You only have to go 40 miles down the road from Regina to Moose Jaw to talk about the Tunnels of Moose Jaw, Mr. Deputy Speaker — one of the most fundamental tourist attractions developed in the last decade in Saskatchewan. They represent the depiction of an era of the 1930s, and the smuggling of alcohol and the Al Capone of Canada.

The Tunnels of Moose Jaw represent a part of our history that's forgotten in many places. Now Moose Jaw represents some unique history in itself, but the tunnels are becoming a world-class tourist attraction.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Moose Jaw also has the Western Development Museum dealing with transportation. In the Western Development Museum in Moose Jaw, you can see the earliest farm equipment and machinery used in our province. You can see automobiles that have long since quit being manufactured, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Some of those automobiles in the Western Development Museum are one of a kind, and the opportunity to go see some of our history, transportation history, is also available in Moose Jaw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you want to look at tourism in Saskatchewan you can't forget Batoche, the Riel Rebellion, and the opportunity that Saskatchewan people have to see a great part of Canada's history in a very short time span . . . at the church at Batoche, and the ridges around Batoche, the graveyard. Mr. Deputy Speaker, history in our province is significant to the development of Canada. And people have spent a great deal of time developing these sites. In this case, Batoche is largely developed by the federal government. But Canada's history can be seen first-hand at Batoche, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are many, many other tourist attractions across our great province. We would be remiss if we didn't talk about many of them. I'd like to talk about a few of them throughout the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in various parts of the province.

(16:15)

Now the members opposite are so excited about tourism, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so they're just glued to their chairs and that's good, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to talk about Prince Albert National Park. Now we need to talk about our great, great forest, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And the fact that we have many, many lakes and many, many recreation opportunities within our northern Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are just so excited about tourism that they're just glued to their seats and listening. But we want to talk about Prince Albert National Park. Not only does it support two of the nicest golf courses in Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it has great activities around the lake. A beach that's just absolutely beautiful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has opportunities to . . . nature trails, it has a paddle boat, Mr. Deputy Speaker — many, many things for tourists to participate in.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite are so interested in it, I could talk about each grain of sand on the beach, but we're not going to go that far, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We can't; there's so many things to see in Saskatchewan that we can't talk about the grains of sand. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those members opposite would seem to like to talk about that.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we have many, many beautiful parks in our northern Saskatchewan. We have Candle Lake, another beautiful park, nestled on a great lake with many opportunities for both boating, fishing, waterskiing, and other recreation activities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There's great camping, swimming — it's unbelievable the things, the opportunities that are presented within Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have . . . we'd be remiss if we didn't go further north and talk about recreational and tourist opportunities in far northern Saskatchewan because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Prince Albert National Park is the geographic centre of Saskatchewan. Half the province is north of Prince Albert National Park.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we would be remiss if we didn't talk about the great Athabasca Sand Dunes just south of Uranium City. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've had the opportunity to walk in those great sand dunes south of Uranium City. Had the opportunity to take a boat ride across the lake and walk in the sand dunes of the Athabasca area. And, Mr. Speaker, there is some very, very unique vegetation found in those sand dunes.

And many, many of our Saskatchewan residents even haven't had the opportunity to see some of that great tourism opportunity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, now we're just starting to open up parts of the North with roads, the Far North. And as we do that, there are many, many new opportunities for tourism that are being developed.

And tourism in conjunction with economic development as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because as you develop new areas for tourism, along with it comes opportunities for stores, cabins, motels, gas stations. So that all the tourists in our province have the opportunity to buy those necessities as they're out exploring our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You get into the central part of our province, I'd be remiss in not talking about both North Battleford and Saskatoon as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The city of Saskatoon offers many, many tourist attractions. Not to mention just a few, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but they have a Western Development Museum as well. They have a number of very, very, very good attractions, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It's known as the city of bridges and they have some of the most beautiful bridges along the Saskatchewan River that we've ever seen, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And you have the opportunity to see the historic Delta Bessborough, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And many people may not know this but you can actually go on a riverboat ride in the city of Saskatoon. It loads just behind the Delta Bessborough and goes along the bridges and see all the bridges in the city of Saskatoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I need to talk a little bit about a few other communities, but I want to mention the city of North Battleford and the town of Battleford, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Both those communities have played a role in the development of our country. At one point, at one point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government House in North-West Territories was located in North Battleford, Saskatchewan . . . in Battleford, Saskatchewan, pardon me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And today that historic site still sits, still stands in Battleford, Saskatchewan.

Not to mention there's the historic fort in North Battleford . . . in Battleford, Saskatchewan, pardon me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Many, many of these tourist attractions draw thousands and thousands of tourists each year from across Saskatchewan, across Canada, and indeed from across the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd also like to talk about a couple of other historic communities in our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that attract a large number of tourists.

Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, just a short 45-minute drive from Regina, the capital, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has two beautiful lakes divided by the highway. But it also is one of the communities that was at one point in consideration to be our capital, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At one point, it was looked at as the capital of Saskatchewan should be on the historic banks where Fort Qu'Appelle sits today. Now none of us were alive when that decision was made and when Regina was selected, but you can look at Fort Qu'Appelle and you can see many, many picturesque advantages to having the capital in Fort Qu'Appelle.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to talk about the community of Indian Head, the community of Indian Head. As you're driving down the No. 1 Highway, there are many, many beautiful tourist attractions. But as you drive by Indian Head, you will notice the unique, the unique tourist attraction that Indian Head presents. It's a beautiful teepee, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The forestry farm. Many things that also played part of our heritage.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite have probably had the opportunity to spend time in this province looking at its tourist attractions, but I want to talk a little bit about Meadow Lake Provincial Park; Blackstrap Provincial Park, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Meadow Lake Provincial Park has within it five lakes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And some of the nicest camping and fishing available anywhere in the world.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite, the members opposite are so excited about tourism that they want to tell me more things about . . . that I haven't seen, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they want to tell me about attractions I have not had the opportunity to see. And yes, there are many, many things I haven't seen within the province of Saskatchewan, but I have had the opportunity to do extensive travel and see many, many of the tourist attractions within the province.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to talk a little bit about Blackstrap. Now one of the unique things about Blackstrap Provincial Park is in fact the man-made mountain, what we call Mount Blackstrap. Now Mount Blackstrap, if you drive along the highway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will see this great big hill. In Saskatchewan, that's what we call Mount Blackstrap.

Now it was made, I'm told, by piling used cars and other types of refuse together to make a mountain. Now I wasn't there when it was made, but one of the members opposite said they were there when it was made. But just the fact that we in Saskatchewan would go to the extent to build a beautiful ski hill on the plains right beside that picturesque valley, in itself is unique about our tourist attractions, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd also like to talk about some of the unique tourism opportunities on the road from Green Lake to Buffalo Narrows and La Loche, some of the most beautiful terrain to drive through, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's one of the things that Saskatchewan offers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The opportunity to drive through some of the most picturesque, undisturbed parts of the province, and in fact undisturbed parts of our country, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have more lakes in our province than we could ever hope to develop for tourism opportunity, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have more opportunity for natural tourism than virtually anywhere in the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our Far North presents many, many opportunities. And the people of the North want to develop those opportunities for both tourism and economic development potential, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And the developing of that economic potential in northern Saskatchewan through tourism provides a base of jobs for those people in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A base of jobs that's extremely important to the people of northern Saskatchewan, and in fact extremely important to the people of

Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite want to know if I'm going to go to 5 o'clock and tell them all the great things about the province of Saskatchewan. I haven't quite decided that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I think there's much more to talk about, about tourism within our province. Now the members opposite would like me to go to 5 o'clock, they'd like me to go to 10:30, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I don't think I'm going to go to 10:30 tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite remind me of one of the significant things we need to talk about. And that . . .

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Harper): — Order, order. Order.

Mr. Yates: — The members opposite remind me of something significant that I need to say. That the development of our tourism industry in Saskatchewan requires the people of this province not to trash-talk our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now the members opposite need to understand that tourism requires people to have a positive outlook of their province. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members on this side of the House are very proud of this province; they're very proud of our tourism opportunities, and they're very proud of the economic development that goes around our tourism industry.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Americans see Saskatchewan as a place to come and a land of opportunity for tourism, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Many, many Americans every year take time to come to this province to hunt, fish, and just simply relax in the beautiful Saskatchewan terrain, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They like to sit around our beautiful, clear, cold lakes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where there's clean water, where they don't worry about all the things they have to worry about in some . . . (inaudible) . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker.

They like the opportunity, they like the opportunity to rent a boat and water ski, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, here the members opposite are trash-talking our province again.

What clean water, they say. Have they never been outside Regina? I wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they seem to forget that this legislature sits in the largest, largest city park in Canada, Mr. Deputy Speaker — Wascana Park, beautiful Wascana Park. You only have to go out the front doors of this legislature to see the beautiful Wascana Park, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But the members opposite, they don't want to talk about the good things in this province. They tend to want to talk about the negative things about our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's too bad because they could be contributors towards positive tourism or they can be negative towards our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've spent a fair amount of time talking about the good things in our province and the opportunities for tourism. It would remiss of me not to give the members opposite an opportunity to talk about this issue as

well. So with that I'm going to conclude my remarks and just say that I'm extremely pleased to second the motion made by the member from Regina South. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make a few comments about the motion that we have before us this afternoon. And for once I'm probably going to have to acknowledge that this, the motion itself is a fairly positive motion and it's a motion worth discussing because certainly we do have a good tourism industry.

I would have to question some of the speeches that have been given on this motion though as well. But, Mr. Speaker, as the member from Regina Dewdney has just indicated, yes, there is a lot to talk about when you talk about tourism in Saskatchewan. And in the southeast part of Saskatchewan we do have a lot to brag about when it comes to tourism.

We do have one problem though, Mr. Speaker. It's a matter of creating a highway system and a network so that people can come to this province and access the tourism centres.

(16:30)

For example, Mr. Speaker, if you were to be in Manitoba and came just directly . . . travelled directly west of Virden to the Saskatchewan border you would arrive at the Saskatchewan border and you would see this nice big sign on the border that's saying . . . welcoming people to Saskatchewan and it says, Saskatchewan Naturally. The unfortunate part is when you drive across the border it is Saskatchewan naturally. It reminds you of the horse and buggy days, the highway network that people have to travel across when they're coming to visit our communities and our centres, Mr. Speaker.

So I guess what we have to say, Mr. Speaker, if this government really wants to promote tourism then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, maybe they should take a little more . . .

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Harper): — Order, order, order. The floor belongs to the member from Moosomin.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that if the government in promoting their tourism — and certainly my colleagues and I promote tourism very excitingly in our constituencies — the government's going to have to move a little further ahead and start promoting a highway network that people can access and be able to travel on so they can access their tourism centres.

Mr. Speaker, there's more to tourism than Regina and Moose Jaw or Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker. There are centres like the Rafferty-Alameda, Kenosee park, Greenwater Lake, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I would like to say in regards to tourism, yes we do have a lot to offer in this province. We've got the resources on hunting. We've got parking . . . or parks, Mr. Speaker. We have camping, beautiful camping. We have nature trails. All of that's available, Mr. Speaker, but we just

have to create the opportunity for people to access it, and not only promote it but encourage people to come north, not turn them away because we don't have a highway network that gives them the opportunity to access these facilities.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know there's a lot more that can be said in regards to the tourism issue but I believe there are other issues that need to be addressed as well. And therefore at this time I move to adjourn debate.

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I feel that this motion is extremely important. Tourism is a huge industry in this province. We have a lot of things to talk about and to praise and this is Tourism Week, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it is . . . This is an extremely important motion to be debated and I don't feel that it should be adjourned.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at Moose Jaw and all the things that have gone on in Moose Jaw, a city that was dying. A lot of our storefronts were empty. The citizens and business got together and put a lot of hard work into the process of redeveloping our downtown and our city.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at not only Moose Jaw itself but what that has spawned in the outlying areas, other projects have been given new life. The Claybank Brick Plant, Chaplin, with their natural resources, and the shore birds, how that has been developed.

And when you get the major developments that have sprung forth over the last number of years, you also get smaller ones that begin to fill in and pick up the slack and fill in areas that encourage people not only to stop and visit these main areas, but what they do is encourage people to stay in those areas for a longer period of time.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the things I just attended in Moose Jaw was from Agriculture and Food. They put on a seminar about tourism, rural tourism. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what this did was talk about all the areas in rural Saskatchewan and the things that can be done there — a guest ranch, working ranches. There was a whole variety.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could go on for quite a while, but I realize that there's other things that people wish to debate this afternoon, but this is a very interesting area. And I said Saskatchewan has huge appeal in many areas, and whether you talk about natural tourism or whether you talk about destinations, rural tourism which is a . . . can be a huge business for rural Saskatchewan and has huge appeal not only in the United States but across Canada, but also Europeans love to come to Canada. They can't believe our wide-open spaces and the things that we have here.

So, Mr. Speaker, I feel we should continue this debate, but I will move a motion now that we do adjourn.

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to enter into this debate, I believe, on the motion put forward by the member from Regina South:

That this Assembly, during Tourism Week, recognize the value of the tourism industry to provide employment and

economic development; and join with the editors of many Saskatchewan newspapers and with the members of the tourism industry in urging Saskatchewan residents and people from across North America to visit the many attractions our province offers visitors.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, there's many aspects that I'd like to highlight in my brief comments today. And it's up to the members how brief they'd like me to be, but the issues that I'd like to talk to are about the value of the tourism industry as it pertains to economic development and employment, and as to positive aspects to our society in this province.

With regards to initiatives and programs that Tourism Week and Tourism Saskatchewan actually supports economic development, one of them is working alliances with tourism sectors associations — such as Saskatchewan Country Vacations Associations, Hotels Association of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Outfitters Association, and Ecotourism Society of Saskatchewan, as well as the Saskatchewan Snowmobile Association.

As well, the annual production and distribution of the highly rated Saskatchewan Literature Series, including the Saskatchewan Vacation Guide and the Accommodation Resort and Campground Guide, and that sort of thing, and on-line Saskatchewan events calendar featuring information on 2,300 events around the province.

As well, an establishment of an outfitters database used at US outdoor adventure marketplaces to identify lodges that meet specific needs of marketplace contacts and to provide qualified leads to fishing and hunting operators. Saskatchewan TourNet worldwide Web program linking Saskatchewan Tourism Web sites to participating businesses.

Some of the successes, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, include tourism expenditures reaching \$1.16 billion in 1999, an increase of 2 per cent over 1998 and 23 per cent over 1994.

As well expenditures from other parts of Canada and United States and overseas grew to \$443 million in 1999, an increase of 9 per cent over '98 and 46 per cent over 1994. United States visitors' average expenditures per overnight or longer trips grew to \$788 in 1999, an increase of 31 per cent, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees.

In 2000, tourism-related employment hit almost 50,000 jobs, representing one in every ten Saskatchewan worker — 69 per cent of these jobs were full time.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on. There's many good news stories that are going on in the province of Saskatchewan for tourism.

We've tested a test banner Internet advertising campaign, and in 2000 Tourism Saskatchewan had won two summit creative awards in the consumer and trade magazine advertising categories from among 3,000 entries from Canada, Europe, Australia, and the United States.

The centenary enhanced signing program was launched in

partnership with the tourism industry and Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation — a three-year, \$1.2 million initiative to enhance tourism signage throughout the province.

As well, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, the annual Saskatchewan tourism award of excellence gala honoured 20 businesses and individuals for their outstanding contributions to success and growth in the province's tourism industry.

The on-line Saskatchewan events calendar launched in April of 2000 now involves all events Saskatchewan partners and features information on 2,300 events around the province, an increase of 80 per cent over last year. This is the most comprehensive calendar of its kind in Canada and is available on all five partner Web sites.

Mr. Speaker, there's some very good news in the area of tourism education and training that I just wanted to highlight on briefly. A record of 127 people were certified in tourism occupations in one year to September 30 of last year. Saskatchewan continues to have the highest per capita registration in tourism professional certification in Canada, involving more than 2,200 people from 350 businesses and 78 communities.

And Saskatchewan exceeds its tourism careers for youth goal by training 485 youth over two years to enter the tourism workforce. More than half of these are Aboriginal youth with 70 per cent successfully gaining tourism-related employment. Mr. Speaker, we also worked with SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) to establish a two-year diploma course in tourism management.

There's all sorts of good news, Mr. Speaker.

As hon. members previous to me have mentioned, this is Tourism Awareness Week from June 3 to June 9, and I'll read briefly from a news release that was issued earlier this week and it goes like this, quote:

From pristine, natural settings, to adventurous escapes, to attractions rich in cultural and historical significance, Saskatchewan's tourism industry offers something for everyone.

... Tourism generates \$1.16 billion in revenue for Saskatchewan each year and directly and indirectly employs more than 49,000 people —that's one in every 10 workers in the province.

... The public can learn more about Saskatchewan's vibrant tourism industry and the more than 2,000 events which take place in communities across the province year-round, by visiting Tourism Saskatchewan's (the) web site, at www.sasktourism.com/events.

Just briefly, Mr. Speaker, as my time is running out, I just wanted to reiterate that the department ... the Post-Secondary Education department supports training in the tourism industry through our programs like JobStart and Future Skills and through our sector partnerships with organizations such as the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council or STEC, a division of Tourism Saskatchewan. It's a very important partnership is

the one between STEC and the Apprenticeship Trade Certification Commission.

The commission has provided journeyed persons' certification to graduates of the STEC training programs in food and hospitality trades. And this is very important, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, Saskatchewan was one of the first provinces to designate tourism and hospitality trades as apprenticeable trades.

Make no mistake about it; tourism is a growth industry with more than 42,000 full- and part-time workers contributing an estimated 1.4 billion to the provincial economy. It's an industry with a bright future and many opportunities for success.

Saskatchewan is not only rated the best place in the world to live, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, by the United Nations, but it also is a great place to visit.

I'd like to speak a little bit more about some other matters and that is related to the motion that was put forward by Regina South and that is to talk about editors and the tourism industry, to urge Saskatchewan residents to visit people, visit Saskatchewan's many attractions.

And I'll just briefly quote from, from some of the editorials that are in the ... for example, the *Grenfell Sun*, "Taking a vacation in Saskatchewan," this individual ... (inaudible interjection) ... Okay.

This individual visited the Motherwell Homestead in Abernethy and I'll quote from it. Quote:

People from all over the world have visited the Motherwell Homestead (he said). More people from outside of Saskatchewan have seen this farm than from those who live in this province.

Here was a tangible piece of our province's history unknown to hundreds of thousands of Saskatchewan residents.

(16:45)

It was also then that the writer was struck with the realization of how much she hadn't seen of our province. And she also realized that she's one of the many Saskatchewan residents who are not taking advantage of the attractions of this province, and what all this province has to offer.

She goes on to speak about the misconceptions that people of Saskatchewan have that Saskatchewan is flat, and that there's very much ... very little for it to offer. But some of the good examples were the badlands, which lie near the southern border; the prairie fields that most people are aware of. But also in my neck of the woods, which is the northwestern Saskatchewan, which is the areas that have all the lakes and the rivers and the streams and the wildlife.

And so with that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go on just for one more moment and quote from the *Eston Press Review*. And I quote like this, quote:

In acquiring the *Press Review* we've come up squarely

against the main problems facing this province, and that's a negative perception.

Mr. Speaker, tourism, I think, is something that can bring all of the people together. It's good for Saskatchewan people, it's good for the businesses in the community. And having worked at Makwa Sahgaiehan Provincial Park, and also Pike Lake Provincial Park, I'm very much aware of the importance that tourism plays to this province and to this economy.

And I'm quite pleased to support the motion. But seeing the lateness of the day, Mr. Speaker, I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:48.