

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure today to stand and present a petition on behalf of producers from the community of Eastend and one from the town of Webb on a subject different than the petitions I've been reading lately. This petition is regarding crop insurance increases that the government has instituted for the current crop year. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to have Sask Crop Insurance reverse the 2003 premium increases and restore affordable crop insurance premiums to our struggling farmers.

Mr. Speaker, the coffee stains here ought not to be taken as editorial comment.

I do so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I again today have a petition that I will present on behalf of the people of my constituency who are very, very concerned about the condition of Highway 47. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action and make necessary repairs to Highway 47 South in order to avoid serious injury and property damage.

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

And this is signed, Mr. Speaker, by the citizens of the city of Estevan, as well as those in surrounding areas.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition concerned with the sharp rise in premiums for the crop insurance for the coming year. And the petition reads, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to have Saskatchewan Crop Insurance reverse the 2003 premium increases and restore affordable crop insurance premiums to our struggling farmers.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed from the good folks at Kindersley.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here

dealing with the high cost of drugs:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reinstate a reasonable annual deductible amount for prescription drugs in Saskatchewan.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens of Bladworth, Davidson, Elbow, and Estevan.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition today to present on behalf of constituents concerned with the condition of Highway 22, particularly that section between Junction 6 and Junction 20. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action and make necessary repairs to Highway 22 in order to address safety and economic concerns.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Earl Grey, Lipton, and Bulyea.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring forth a petition signed by citizens of Saskatchewan that are very, very concerned with the government's handling of the Crown land leases. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure current Crown land lessees maintain their first option to renew those leases.

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

The signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Parkside and Spiritwood.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional papers no. 12, 18, and 19.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

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

To the Environment minister: which municipal drinking water supplies fail to meet with provincial standards of 2002?

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

To the Health minister: how long is the waiting list for autism assessments; and further to that, how many patients were sent out of province in the year 2002 and to where?

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

To the Minister of Government Relations: of the municipalities including cities, northern municipalities, rural municipalities, resort villages, towns, and villages approved to have projects funded under the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program in the year 2001-2002, could the minister please provide the amount of funding each project received?

And, Mr. Speaker, I have a similar question regarding the year 2002-2003.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, 61 students from St. Theresa School in my constituency, both in the gallery and on the floor, Mr. Speaker, and their teachers, Mr. Barry Wittal and Ms. Joanne Nelson.

Mr. Speaker, I must say that this is a very special school to me as well because Mr. Wittal and the teachers at St. Theresa educated all three of my children and they did a terrific job. And I just want to say to the students, you couldn't attend a better school and you couldn't have better teachers.

Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

World Seniors' Curling Championships

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week this Assembly had the honour of congratulating two Saskatchewan rinks on winning the junior women's and men's curling championships.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Canada has just won two more — two more world curling titles. And of course I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Tom Reed, the rink from Edmonton, on their Senior Men's Championship.

But I would particularly like to congratulate Nancy Kerr, Linda Burnham, Kenda Richards, and Gertie Pick of the Callie Club here in Regina who won the Senior Women's World Championship in Winnipeg over the weekend.

And, Mr. Speaker, the senior women's team has more in common with the junior women than a world championship, Mr. Speaker, for like the juniors, the senior women went undefeated through the entire week to claim the world title.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure this entire Assembly will join me in congratulating Nancy Kerr and the other members of her rink on their fine achievement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Western Drag Racing Championship

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The sport of snowmobiling is growing in Saskatchewan, and part of the sport which people are finding very fascinating is drag racing sleds.

The Western Drag Racing Championship was held at Montreal Lake in March. This event takes place once a year and is open to drivers who are 18 years and older. It is seen as a way to feature your stock and your abilities in front of some of the most influential people in the industry.

The two-day event is considered an excellent learning experience because snowmobile technicians closely monitor it to make sure the races are conducted properly. Most competitors attended with mechanics and several machines.

Eighteen-year-old Mark Olson of Wadena went with his father and raced his brother's F7 Arctic Cat and his own Mach Z. At the end of the first day, Mark had taken first place in all seven events he participated in. In the semi-finals and finals, he took four first-place finishes, as well as first place in the 800 Pro-stock event, second in the 1,000 event, and third-place finish in the King of the Snow. These finishes earned Mark the overall championship at the event.

Two different companies expressed interest in having Mark drive for them in the next year.

Mr. Speaker, I would like this Assembly to join with me in congratulating Mark and his success at racing and wishing him well in his future endeavours.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Yorkton Harvest AAA Champions

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House today to congratulate the Yorkton Harvest on winning the Saskatchewan AAA hockey championship last Thursday, Mr. Speaker.

The Harvest now advance to the Air Canada Cup Western Regionals in Thunder Bay where the experience they have gained over the last series will certainly stand them in good stead as they go on to win that, Mr. Speaker.

To win the title, Mr. Speaker, the Yorkton team had to get past the tough and determined Saskatoon Contacts. And by all accounts it was a hard-fought series with all the games being decided by only a single goal.

The Harvest won the final game in a 2 to 1 victory with Scott Woytas and Neil Kodman combining for the first goal, and Sheldon Dubnyk assisted with Clayton Geiger — good name Clayton Geiger — and Dustin Nehring got the winners. As well, Mr. Speaker, Harvest goaltender, Justin Mrazek, he made a scintillating, just a scintillating glove save in the dying seconds to preserve the win.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that all members of the Assembly will want to join me in congratulating Coach Hoffman and all the young men of the Yorkton Harvest for capturing the AAA crown and wishing them well and good luck in the Air Canada Cup venture in the next couple of weeks, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Maple Creek Baseball Players

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although Saskatchewan weather conditions during this past week might have suggested otherwise, utmost in the minds of two young constituents of the Cypress Hills constituency are thoughts of spring training and baseball.

Maple Creek students Amanda Bacsu and her brother, Kirk, have accumulated amazing histories in their short lives. Both have played baseball since a young age and have competed at many levels. Parental support has been instrumental to this success and will continue as these young people pursue competition at provincial, national, and international levels.

Amanda was chosen to represent Saskatchewan on the provincial girls team twice in the last three years at the Western Canadian Championships. Her next quest is to attend the Canadian Championships to be held in Windsor, Ontario this summer.

Her brother, Kirk, enjoyed success in 1998 when the Maple Creek team won the provincial title. And that same year he was asked to assist the Swift Current Indian Peewees at the Western Canadian Championships. Now during 2001 and 2002, Kirk made the Saskatchewan Selects baseball team and in July 2002 was awarded the Top Catcher of the Tournament award at the Canada Cup in Melville.

Plans for this year include a tryout for the Canadian Junior National Team, attending Disney's Wide World of Sports in Orlando, Florida, and the possible opportunity to travel to the America's World Tournament in Netherlands Antilles in July 2003.

So at this time could you please join me and take a moment to congratulate these two on their achievements to date and wish them good luck as they continue their careers in baseball. They are true ambassadors of the Southwest for Saskatchewan and Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Film Industry in Saskatchewan

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the words of one of their own hopeful candidates, the Sask Party is, and I quote,

“too easily taken in by simplistic right-wing dogma.”

Mr. Speaker, though I rarely agree with the Sask Party, I must say that in this case truer words were never spoken. In keeping with the Sask Party's right-wing dogmatic stance, they are opposed to the involvement of the government in business, albeit with a few glaring exceptions, Mr. Speaker.

Be that as it may, there are endless positive examples of this government partnering with business and today I want to mention one of them.

In the early 1990s in keeping with our policy of investing strategically to meet the needs of Saskatchewan people, we invested in the film industry, Mr. Speaker. And here are the numbers. In the early 1990s the film industry's economic contribution to the province was \$5.2 million. By the year 2000 that figure had risen to \$70 million.

To cite one example, this year Minds Eye Pictures alone spent \$56 million in production volume. It employs 100 people full time — many of them young people, Mr. Speaker — and contracts with hundreds more. Furthermore, Minds Eye is but one of the . . . of this province's many successful production companies.

Mr. Speaker, forging partnerships and making strategic investments to meet the needs of Saskatchewan people is a good thing. And only simplistic, right-wing zealots would disagree. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Humboldt Broncos Win Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League Title

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, congratulations to the Humboldt Broncos on winning . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — . . . the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League title. I'm sure that much to the consternation of the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from Melville, the Broncos trounced the Melville Millionaires in four games straight to take the league championship and to advance to the Anavet Cup.

This was the Broncos third trip to the finals in the last four years and the teams and coaches are ecstatic with the victorious outcome.

Coach Bob Beatty said that defence and goaltending was the difference. According to the Humboldt Bronco defenceman, Craig Olynick:

Winning the league championship was the goal of the team. We worked so hard this year. This was our goal. Now our goal is to get to the Royal Bank Cup.

The Humboldt Broncos will play the OCN (Opaskwayak Cree Nation) Blizzard in the Anavet Cup with that series beginning April 19 in The Pas, Manitoba. And from here the winner will advance to the Royal Bank Cup, the National Junior A Hockey

Championship tournament to be held in May, the 3rd to the 11th, in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

Congratulations to Bob Beatty and Dean Brockman and to the players of the Humboldt Broncos for a job well done, and best of luck in the next series.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Reduction in Price for GreenPower

Ms. Atkinson: — I rise today to tell the House about another example of Saskatchewan's leadership in an area of renewable energy development.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Effective April 1, SaskPower is reducing the price for one block of GreenPower to \$2.50 per month. That's a 28 per cent reduction. The new price is possible because of a federal incentive to promote wind power development worth \$2.6 million over the next 10 years.

Buying one block of GreenPower can operate five computers and a printer in an office or do 20 loads of washing and drying or operate two high-pressure farmyard lights every night. As for the environmental benefits, over the course of one year, one block of GreenPower reduces greenhouse gas emissions equal to the efforts of 200 full-grown trees.

At the end of 2002, Saskatchewan was Canada's third largest wind power producer. And our Throne Speech confirmed that SaskPower will add another 150 megawatts of wind power by 2005. Our government plans to meet about 20 per cent of our electrical needs with wind power.

I would urge all members of this Legislative Assembly to go green and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by signing up for GreenPower for \$2.50 a block. And for those people looking for Easter gift ideas for your family or friends, I can't think of one better gift than GreenPower.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

North Battleford's Assyrian Community Celebrates Centennial

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, people from around the globe settled in Saskatchewan. Today I would like to tell you about one group in North Battleford which is celebrating their centennial this year.

The Assyrians were living in Persia, today called Iran. They were persecuted because of their Christian beliefs. Dr. Isaac Adams, an Assyrian who had been trained in Scotland, arranged for the group to emigrate to the North-West Territories. Much of the journey across Asia was on foot, travelling by night and hiding by day.

They arrived in September 1903. The first homesteads were taken up on what is now the grounds of Saskatchewan Hospital.

At the time, North Battleford was a tent city and the settlers had to ford the North Saskatchewan River to get supplies from the more established community of Battleford.

The Assyrians quickly became involved in community life and were successful in farming, business, and sports. They were instrumental in establishing the Presbyterian church. Names like Yonan, George, Backus, and Odishaw continue to be prominent in our community.

This September the Assyrians, under the leadership of Margaret Beach and Don Backus, will be holding a reunion. I know all members of this House will want to join me in wishing the Assyrian community a successful celebration and in offering our very best wishes to this small but courageous community on achieving this important milestone.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mega Bingo

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The minister of Liquor and Gaming has now admitted that the NDP (New Democratic Party) government spent \$6.2 million on mega bingo without a business plan and without cabinet approval. Doesn't that concern the Premier? Because that's a huge amount of money being spent without any approval from cabinet.

My question to the Premier is this: how did his government let Liquor and Gaming spend \$6.2 million without a business plan and without cabinet approval?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to answer the Leader of the Opposition's question.

In 1997, Mr. Speaker, cabinet did approve a gaming strategy that included linked bingo as an initiative that could help to rebalance gaming revenues and to assist our 1,500 or more charities right across this province. And those are the people, Mr. Speaker, that do rely on bingo. This was an initiative that was in conjunction with what that industry was asking the government to do at that time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to make it clear I'm asking my questions to the Premier about the way his government is managed because it really makes you wonder who's running things over there.

After months of lobbying, the city mayors of this province couldn't get 6.2 million new dollars out of his government. Yet somehow Liquor and Gaming is allowed to blow that much money without a business plan and without cabinet approval. Yet the Premier isn't even concerned about it enough to stand up and answer the questions.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier should be outraged at this — that his officials, that his government, are spending millions of dollars without a business plan and without cabinet approval. So my question again, to the Premier of Saskatchewan, is: what is he doing about this matter? Why is he allowing millions of dollars to be wasted without cabinet approval?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess because of the noise of the din the members opposite did not hear my response.

In 1997 cabinet did approve a gaming strategy that included linked bingo as an initiative that could help the bingos that rely . . . the charities that relied on bingo throughout the province. So, Mr. Speaker, SLGA (Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Association) proceeded with the development and implementation of a linked bingo game as identified in the gaming strategy that was in fact approved by cabinet, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, again I ask the Premier of Saskatchewan. Yesterday his Finance minister stood in this House and he screamed that he couldn't fund the College of Medicine because they hadn't gone through the proper budget process. Yet somehow the NDP blows \$6.2 million on bingo without any business plan and without cabinet approval. It's absolutely unbelievable, Mr. Speaker, how mixed up the NDP's priorities are. They have no money for the College of Medicine but they have \$6 million for bingo — without a business plan and without cabinet approval.

So my question again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier of Saskatchewan: if he couldn't fund the College of Medicine because they didn't go through the proper process, how on earth did they give \$6.2 million to bingo without a business plan and without cabinet approval for that new project?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps I need to speak a little louder and indicate to the Leader of the Opposition that cabinet did in fact approve a strategy that included bingo.

Mr. Speaker, linked bingo was initially projected to be cost neutral to the government. The game was expected to pay for itself, Mr. Speaker. When it became clear that the game was not attracting new players overall and therefore the costs would not be covered, those costs were incorporated into a budget and the minister of the day ended that particular project.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now maybe the minister of Liquor and Gaming doesn't understand the rules, but I'm sure the Premier knows that section 10(1.1) of The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act states:

The authority shall obtain . . . approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council before making any grant . . . that is

greater than \$50,000 . . .

Mr. Speaker, wouldn't that have applied in this case? This was new spending of \$6.2 million and it was financed entirely by the government. Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that it should have required cabinet approval.

So, Mr. Speaker, for the fourth time to the Premier of Saskatchewan: was the Liquor and Gaming Authority within its rights to spend \$6.2 million on mega bingo without cabinet approval or did they violate their own Act?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. For the fourth time I will say to the Leader of the Opposition, cabinet approved a gaming strategy that included linked bingos and initiatives that could help people that were relying on bingos.

Now he also quoted The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act. Well, Mr. Speaker, that Act gives the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority the statutory authority to operate and regulate liquor and gaming activities in this province. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? They do a fine job because each year they generate revenues of over \$300 million that goes into our General Revenue Fund. They are doing a good job.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. I would just ask the students who are visiting us today from refraining in participating in the applause.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on March 5 the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy asked SLGA officials if the \$6.2 million mega bingo project went through a tendering process. The officials told her that they would have to check on it and get back to her. They never did.

Mr. Speaker, did the mega bingo contract go through a tendering process and if so, will the minister today tender those details of that process?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, the Western Canada Lottery Corporation, which looks after all gaming activities in Western Canada was the organization that became involved in assisting us in introducing the . . . and putting out the tenders for this particular initiative.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — That, Mr. Speaker, should be taken as a no.

Mr. Speaker, of the \$6.2 million, \$1.2 million went to a software development contract. That went to a company called Wascana Gaming. Mr. Speaker, we'd like to know who owned Wascana Gaming and what connections they had to the New Democratic Party.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as usual we have to answer our own questions. Wascana Gaming was run by a person called Virgil

Cairns. Mr. Cairns has very strong ties to the NDP over there. He has . . . was the NDP constituency president for Regina Sherwood. He worked on the Dwain Lingenfelter election campaign and then ran for the NDP nomination after Mr. Lingenfelter quit.

We know that this mega bingo scheme never had a business plan; it was never approved by cabinet. Mr. Speaker, what we want to know: was this contract tendered; how was it tendered; and how was it decided to give it to Wascana Gaming?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess this is number five. Cabinet did approve a strategy for the linked bingo initiative in 1997. The Western Canada Lottery Corporation was engaged to assist SLGA in tendering out the contract. And I'm not sure . . . Is the member suggesting that there was something untoward with respect to Western Canada Lottery Corporation tendering process?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's become obvious from that answer, Mr. Speaker, obvious from that answer that that little bit of a cabinet statement that's out there allowed the NDP to give those contracts to their friends and their political hacks. That's what that answer said.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister table details of the tendering process that resulted in \$1.2 million contract for a mega bingo being awarded to Wascana Gaming? Specifically, the question is: how was it advertised; who else bid on it; what were the other bids; and on what criteria, Mr. Speaker, on what criteria was this contract awarded to Wascana Gaming?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I regret that I sense that there are some pretty serious allegations being made by the member opposite with respect to the Western Canada Lottery Corporation. It's too bad. They are a well-known, well-renowned corporation, Mr. Speaker, that do some good due diligence throughout Western Canada in the gaming industry.

Mr. Speaker, they were the ones that were engaged in becoming involved in the tendering process. We have confidence that they were above-board in their actions, Mr. Speaker. I'm a little concerned about those allegations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Financial Support for College of Medicine

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member from Melfort-Tisdale and I asked the NDP government a series of questions related to the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan as to why there was no funding for the college in this year's budget.

Mr. Speaker, in response to our questioning, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance both indicated that the recommendations from the academic health sciences group had been received in late February but couldn't be included in this budget process. And both ministers stated they had received no financial estimates, no dollar figures for what might be required for the college in this budget year.

Mr. Speaker, is the Minister of Finance suggesting for one minute that the Academic Health Sciences Network submitted recommendations for improvements but no corresponding dollar figures?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the process of setting up a budget, we talk about our Treasury Board process and we talk about our cabinet finalization. I think everyone recognizes and certainly the members opposite would know that proposals come from departments. The departments receive requests, they analyze those requests; they then present these requests, in terms of the funding required, to the Treasury Board and then finally on to cabinet.

If we have not had an opportunity to look at the numbers or the proposal and we haven't assigned a dollar amount to that, then we can't look at that proposal in this current budget process.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'm not too surprised that the members opposite would not recognize that from their track record in the 1980s where they ran nine consecutive deficit budgets, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance said, and I quote:

. . . we have not yet got a dollar figure from the Academic Health Sciences Network . . .

Then he went on to say, and I quote again:

As soon as we have that information, we will bring that forward. Right now we don't have a number to put into our budget estimates because we haven't got that number, Mr. Speaker.

That's the end of the quote.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I wish to table today a document dated February 25 from Ken Coates, vice-president of academia at the University of Saskatchewan. And it was sent to the deputy minister of Learning and the deputy minister of Health. It is a detailed proposal of recommendations for the College of Medicine from the Saskatchewan Academic Health Sciences Network and it includes the budgetary requirements for each recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, why did the Minister of Finance tell this Assembly that they had received no numbers, no financial requirements from the health sciences network?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Mr. Speaker, when I commented that I had not received the proposal in terms of the Finance officials, the Finance officials and the Treasury Board has not seen any request from the Academic Health Sciences Network. We have not seen it, Mr. Speaker.

The reality of the fact is we cannot even put that into the mix of budgeting and looking at our estimates until we have had a chance to receive that proposal. And, Mr. Speaker, I would quote from Regina *Leader-Post* Friday, April 4 where it said:

The university hasn't settled on a specific financial request from government, Coates said. But it was hoping for at least a verbal commitment to solving the college's problems in the budget speech.

But, Mr. Speaker, what we're saying is that once we've had a chance, the Department of Learning, the Department of Health, has had a chance to analyze the proposal from the Academic Health Sciences Network, and that proposal is then brought forward to the Finance officials, we will look at it, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday, yesterday in this Assembly, the Minister of Finance lost his temper, and here's his quote:

Mr. Speaker, this is . . . ludicrousity of the members opposite. Here we have a Finance critic who says we should put a number in when we don't even know what the number is. Is it 4 million? Is it 8 million? Is it 10 million? We don't know that number, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in late February the Department of Learning and Health did receive the numbers from the Academic Health Sciences Network. And that number needed for this budget year was \$5.3 million. In fact, the network submitted a four-year budget plan with very detailed financial requirements to help the college meet the accreditation standards it desires.

Mr. Speaker, why did the minister say he'd received no financial figures from the health sciences network when indeed the government did receive that information?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not too surprised that the members opposite haven't been listening to the answer.

I've explained to them clearly that the Academic Health Sciences Network, which includes representation from the departments, would have put forward a proposal. The Finance officials and myself, and certainly the Treasury Board, have not received a request or have not seen this proposal, Mr. Speaker. So how could we possibly budget or put it into our budget estimates, Mr. Speaker?

The process is respected on this side, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you what we did put into health care in this budget, Mr. Speaker — \$2.5 billion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, let's just take a look at the plan that the minister's just talked about. We have a national accreditation program that has indicated to the University of Saskatchewan, last April, that they had two years to correct their accreditation standards.

This is April, one year later, Mr. Speaker. Now the government is indicating they received no plan. Clearly there was a plan proposed to this government. That plan was for a four-year strategy, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Now the minister can stand there, the minister can stand there as one of my colleagues has already said, as Rome burns, while the accreditation at the University of Saskatchewan Hospital is in jeopardy.

One year from now, Mr. Speaker, we might lose that accreditation. Isn't the minister concerned? There was absolutely no mention of the college in the budget and no money allocated to help them begin to address the deficiencies in accreditation.

Mr. Speaker, why did the NDP government ignore the needs of the College of Medicine in this budget?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Mr. Speaker, I can see that the member from Canora-Pelly is getting quite animated.

And I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite in their last election platform in 1999 did not mention the College of Medicine once, not once, Mr. Speaker. And they have the nerve to tell us what we should be doing when we don't even have the final recommendation. We have . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Mr. Speaker, there were only two parties in the last election that talked about the College of Medicine and supporting the College of Medicine, and they're both over here. None of them are over there. Mr. Speaker, we support our College of Medicine.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Government Priorities

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some days, you know, I almost feel sorry for the Premier. He's got one minister that knows nothing about . . . nothing but rhetoric that he doesn't mean and he has another minister over there who says, I don't really know what's going on in my department.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's clear . . .

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

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that the

College of Medicine made a big mistake. Their mistake was that they wrote up a business plan. Their mistake was that they took it to cabinet. It's no wonder that they didn't get any funding. The way to get money out of this government is to have no business plan and not to take it to cabinet.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, in all seriousness, these two issues really speak to the priorities of the NDP government. They have no money for the College of Medicine but they have \$6.2 million for bingo.

My question to the Premier of Saskatchewan: when did the NDP get so mixed up in its priorities that they put funding for bingo ahead of the College of Medicine?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me speak to the priorities of this government — the priorities which you will see reflected in this budget which is now under consideration by this House. Priority: 8 per cent new funding to health, \$2.5 billion; 5-plus per cent new funding to education.

The priorities of this government, Mr. Speaker, are today what they have been, and that is to work with Saskatchewan people, whether it's working with charitable institutions and organizations in this province, whether it's working with business people in this province, whether it is working with young people in this province. That's the priority of this government, not the priorities of the party opposite who in that last election we all remember — and Saskatchewan people remember — when it came to the funding of health, what did they say? Freeze health funding. That was their party platform. Now they get up and say we should spend more.

Mr. Speaker, we're working with the people of Saskatchewan to build quality health care and a quality of life in this province like none other in the country.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the Premier said that he is spending more money on health care but we are concerned because there is no planning for that spending on health care.

Mr. Speaker, spending more money and not spending it according to good planning is a mistake. Now, Mr. Speaker, if you read any studies about gambling addiction, you will learn that one of the sure signs of a gambling addiction is when you start to take money from important areas like your children's university education and start blowing it on gambling.

Now, Mr. Speaker, isn't that ironic? Isn't that exactly what the NDP government is doing? They have no money to fund the College of Medicine, a priority for the people of Saskatchewan, but they have \$6.2 billion to blow on bingo without a business plan, without any accountability, without approval from their cabinet. Mr. Speaker, it might be time for someone, perhaps the Premier, to call the gambling help line.

My question to the Premier, why are the NDP's priorities so mixed up that they put bingo ahead of funding for university?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — There's no mix-up in the priorities here. The priorities are growing the Saskatchewan economy, expanding the Saskatchewan economy, providing a quality of life like none other in Canada in health care, education, infrastructure . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I'll tell you where the priorities are mixed up in this legislature. They're mixed up across the House. Mr. Speaker, we come into this legislature, we're dealing with an issue here today that's — what? — 3, 4, 5, 6 years old. I don't know what.

How come, Mr. Speaker, I ask and the people of Saskatchewan ask, how is it that this opposition is not asking us about the 11,600 new jobs . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — How come this government is not asking us about 10 consecutive balanced budgets? Nine credit upgrading? Mr. Speaker, how come this opposition is not talking about the new daycare spaces for child care? How come this opposition isn't asking us about the new support for disabled people in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I wonder about that, Mr. Speaker. How about this opposition asking about the \$61 million dedicated this year to the renovation and construction of new hospital facilities?

I'll tell you whose priorities are mixed up. Their priorities are political. They will say, they will do, anything in their search to get elected. Our priorities are good government for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 13 – The Parks Amendment Act, 2003

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 13, The Parks Amendment Act, 2003 be now introduced and read for the first time.

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

Bill No. 14 – The Registered Nurses Amendment Act, 2003

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 14, The Registered Nurses Amendment Act, 2003 be now introduced

and read the first time.

The Speaker: — Order, please, members.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of government and respond to written questions no. 50 through 53 inclusive.

The Speaker: — Responses to questions 50, 51, 52, and 53 have been submitted.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Agriculture Support Programs

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as most of rural Saskatchewan is well aware of, it's been well over a year now since the federal government announced that it's going to redesign the entire agriculture policy for the country. And in June of last year, Mr. Speaker, a preliminary agreement was introduced and signed by the majority of the provinces. And that agreement at that time, Mr. Speaker, was a fairly lengthy and it was a fairly ambitious outline of what goals the government hoped to achieve and guidelines with which they would follow in order to design a new agriculture policy framework for the entire country.

There were five envelopes in that agreement, Mr. Speaker, or pillars. And for today I wish to concentrate what I would like to say to one of those pillars, and that is the risk management component of the agreement.

Under that component, Mr. Speaker, the only money commitment that was made by the federal government to the risk management was \$1.1 billion for each of the next five years, and beyond that there were no details to the agreement, Mr. Speaker. There was no set allocation of the funds to each of the provinces, and there was no set design of a specific program that could be examined by the provinces or the industry leaders to see how the program would work in their region or in their area of interest. And all of those details were supposed to be negotiated in the following months and were. And they were negotiated with the federal government, the industry leaders, and the provinces who chose to sign the agreement, Mr. Speaker.

And there was concerns I believe by, you know, sort of throughout the whole, entire nation with the initial agreement. And I think that a lot of those concerns, both sides of the House can agree on.

The federal minister said that the new APF (agricultural policy framework) is all about making the agriculture industry more profitable, but there is no indication in the initial agreement that that will indeed be the case, and there is nothing in the agricultural policy framework that will mitigate the price. So,

therefore, it has nothing in it to address trade injury that's affecting the producers quite seriously in this province and in other provinces, Mr. Speaker.

There was also serious concerns that the new program will not be adequately funded. There is concerns about the allocation of only \$1.1 billion for the entire nation. And as this minister should well know — because you know we have the same difficulty here in our province with the crop insurance program — it is virtually impossible to enhance programs in any meaningful way without adding more dollars, Mr. Speaker. And the federal government has refused to do that.

But, Mr. Speaker, since I was elected in 1999, we have always been constantly lobbying the federal government to address the impact of trade injury. It has been an ongoing, going process. And the Minister of Agriculture has said that it's never happened, but I was actually talking about his government. So I think he should be very, very careful because he's being very touchy. When I said we, I was meaning the province of Saskatchewan. So maybe he would like to perhaps be a little quieter and listen a little more carefully.

Now the problem with that continual lobbying, of course, is the lack of interest by our eastern government and they have not addressed this issue. We have basically achieved zero amount of funding for that portfolio and I have no doubt that we will have to continue that process of lobbying the federal government for dollars for . . . to address the trade injury problems.

But in the meantime, Mr. Speaker, we need to negotiate what is on the table right now to ensure the money available is in a program that is designed properly. Any new program needs to meet the needs of our producers in this province in the best way possible. And it has to be a program, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that the producers of this province know what it is, that they can understand it, and they can support it. And that's extremely important, Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about a new long-term program.

Now there has been a tentative program that's been introduced, but sadly the details of that program are a moving target. And the rumour has it that how it looks on any given day is directly dependent on who the federal bureaucrats are that have talked to the . . . or who they've talked to most recently. They keep on changing the program and the details are evolving. And there's absolutely nothing that stays the same from one month to the next.

They have named it the new NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) or the super NISA but in fact it will be nothing like NISA as we know it. The only reason that I can even think of that the federal government is calling it NISA is because in 2001, Mr. Speaker, Ipsos-Reid prepared a NISA review report for the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and it showed that overall the NISA was a very well-liked program across the entire nation. And the report did offer some recommendations of how it could be improved, but overall it said that it was an extremely well-liked and well-received program.

And I'm sure that the federal government thinks that if they just call a new program new NISA or super NISA, and use the word

NISA, that the producers will look at this program favourably. But in all honesty, Mr. Speaker, it would be more rightfully be called CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program) with a premium because that is more what it is like. It is nothing like NISA as we know it.

This program, Mr. Speaker, has been very hastily put together. It's been slapped together quite frankly with no comprehensive, independent analysis performed to even give an indication of how it will work.

And it seems unfathomable to me, Mr. Speaker, that they're going to roll out a program that is going to affect the entire industry, an industry that accounts for one in every seven jobs in our country. They're going to roll this out across the entire nation with no data to back up whether or not it'll even be effective.

Why are we so afraid, Mr. Speaker, to test this program against actual farm scenarios? Or better yet, why are we not running a pilot project first in each of the provinces and in each of the different sectors to see if this program will even remotely work for our country? Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, what we know about the new NISA leaves us with more questions than answers.

What is going to be the administration cost of this program, Mr. Speaker, both for the government and for the producers? We all know that AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) and CFIP were so complicated that the producers had to pay hundreds of dollars . . . thousands of dollars in the entire province just to fill out the applications.

And we also know that the administration to the government levels for both of the programs were well over budget. There was millions of dollars spent, and we have to have some concerns here that this might be another gun registry fiasco where the federal government's rolling out a program with no thought as to what it's going to cost to administer, and millions and millions of dollars that could possibly be in producer's hands is going to be spent on administration alone.

How will the new NISA, Mr. Speaker, be tied to our crop insurance program? Will the claim from one program cancel out the claim from another even though the producers are going to be required to pay two premiums? I have yet to hear an answer for that question, Mr. Speaker, and yet it is so vitally important.

Will the producers be forced to be in both programs? And if so, is there an advantage to that, for them to be in both programs? Is there an advantage, Mr. Speaker, of going to production margins, which is what the federal government is talking about, rather than gross margins? Do we know if there's an advantage to the producers for that, or is that another hindrance that's going to make the program less effective?

Mr. Vanclief, the federal minister, Mr. Speaker, has done a lot of talking about how this will stabilize the industry but are we not, in many cases here in Saskatchewan, going to stabilize a margin that's too low for the farm families to live on? Is that going to stabilize the industry in Saskatchewan? Will this program not require a total wreck before it can be triggered, and how does that stabilize the industry in our province?.

The latest rendition that I've looked at of the program, Mr. Speaker, requires a producer to have 26 per cent upfront in order to participate in the program. How in the world is that going to be affordable to the producers of this province, Mr. Speaker, especially considering that they have suffered now, in many, many areas in our province, two years of a drought?

How are the producers of this province, Mr. Speaker, supposed to plan their risk on their operations when the design of the program is changing like the rainbow flavour of the week? Is the new program going to be predictable, adequate, and bankable? Well the designing of it has definitely not been predictable and there is nothing, quite frankly, right now for the producers to base a business plan on.

Mr. Speaker, the industry leaders in this province and across the entire nation have been very vocal in their request for the federal government to extend existing programs so that this can be designed properly. It undoubtedly has been the most unified and strong voice that has ever come from our agriculture industry. The avalanche of individual farmer e-mails demanding a delay has overwhelmed Parliament Hill communications system on March 17, and actually temporarily shut down the computers in 301 Member of Parliament offices.

The motion today that I will be putting forward, Mr. Speaker, is a plea for the provincial government to actively and assertively lobby the federal government to extend the existing programs for one more year in order that the risk management component of the APF can be adequately designed with the industry leaders of our country. Surely the minister must have some grave concerns about how this program is unfolding — beyond the fact that it will be inadequately funded, and beyond the fact that it does not address the trade injury payment, and beyond the fact that the 60/40 split is an enormous burden for our province.

The minister must have a lot of questions about what is on the table and how it's being planned. Even though he said on March 11, and I quote, the minister said:

What's left for us to negotiate? So what is it that we will be holding out for?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I just went through a few questions and they're just a few to the number of questions that are out there: that's what's left to negotiate; that's answers that producers want to know; that's answers the industry wants to know; and that's things that he has to look into before he solidifies a final agreement.

Mr. Speaker, he must know that as this program sits it will be a disaster for our province. It is a huge concern. And it's not just he that will be standing alone lobbying against this final, final program. On March 31, Progressive Conservative Agriculture critic, Rick Borotsik called it the biggest April Fool's joke perpetrated on Canadian farmers.

(14:30)

Canadian Alliance Saskatchewan MP (Member of Parliament) David Anderson said, the country was entering a policy vacuum.

In Toronto, Ontario, Agriculture minister, Helen Johns said, the launch of the APF under such controversy is bad news for farmers.

On Parliament Hill, Canadian Federation of Agriculture Vice-president Laurent Pellerin said, it was an insult to farmers that Ottawa was refusing to extend existing programs for a year to satisfy farmer complaints about the design.

Mr. Speaker, this is going to be so vitally important to the producers of this province and it's going to be vitally important to the province as a whole. So therefore, Mr. Speaker, I wish to move the motion, seconded by the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood:

That this Assembly recommends to the federal government that current agriculture support programs be extended for a minimum of one year to allow the agriculture policy framework to be fully developed and a complete set of details made available to producers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, certainly look forward into entering into this debate calling for the delay of implementation of the federal agriculture policy framework for one year.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at some of the issues that are facing Saskatchewan agriculture and our agricultural producers, there are a number of global forces that our producers will have to contend with and are already contending with. And it's important that we have well-thought-out, well-designed programs there to help our producers in times of production and revenue downturns. And I think it's increasingly important, and we needed some of those programs in the past. And in the future, I think it's doubly important that we have those well-designed programs.

About a year ago, Mr. Speaker, we were debating the effects of the new US (United States) farm Bill that was being signed, the richest farm Bill in the history of US ag policy, some \$190 billion of support to the US farmers and its impacts on our Saskatchewan farmers. That Bill hasn't gone away. In fact this will be the first production year that we will see the full effects of that US farm Bill. We don't know the full extent of the effects on Saskatchewan agriculture but they will be massive, Mr. Speaker.

We will see massive increases in the pulse crops in the US because of the heightened subsidies levels to crops like lentils and peas, and chickpeas, Mr. Speaker. Those are the very crops that our farmers in Saskatchewan have been depending on to pay the bills over the last few years. If we see those large increases, Mr. Speaker, we will most likely see price declines.

Another area where our farmers are seeing increased competition is from the European Union. In recent months we've seen the European Union return to export subsidies on a selective basis, something that we haven't seen in the last couple of years. And it makes you wonder why they would use those subsidies in a time of contraction of global grain supplies. They've been using them to buy market share to help subsidize

unproductive regions of the European Union. And they've done it in the past and I'm sure they will continue to do it in the future.

One of the most challenging events, Mr. Speaker, that our producers will be facing in the upcoming years is the increased production in some of our competitors of grains and oil seeds. Brazil is often referred to as the sleeping giant in agricultural production, Mr. Speaker. They have vast resources that are just now starting to come on stream. We look at this year's projected soybean crop from Brazil and it's going to be a record production. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Our farmers have seen in the past year or two and will continue to see an increasing evidence of competition from the former Soviet Union countries, an area of the world which not many years ago was one of our major customers for our products. Now they are our competitors, Mr. Speaker.

And with all those global forces that are coming to play on our producers, Mr. Speaker, it's imperative, as I've said, to have those support programs there.

Not only in challenges from our competitors, Mr. Speaker, but we also . . . in the production area we've seen over the last few years an increase in weather extremes that impact negatively. We just have come through two years of back-to-back drought, as an example. And therefore it's important that we have a superior production insurance, Mr. Speaker, and not detract and lower the levels of coverage and the options that producers have.

So we've heard from this Minister of Agriculture over the last year or so that the new agricultural policy framework is going to address a number of issues and provide the type of coverage and security for our producers that they will need in the future. And when it comes to the area of risk management, we've been told by this Minister of Agriculture and the federal Minister of Agriculture that the cornerstones of those risk management areas will be a super NISA and an enhanced crop insurance.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we're wondering whether . . . what these programs are, what they're going to look like, as are all the producers in Saskatchewan. Back on March 11 when our minister finally got around to signing the framework agreement, he said that his government will be bringing forth an enhanced crop insurance and that the program details will be out shortly.

Well that was March 11, Mr. Speaker. Here we are, it's April 8 — almost a month later — and as far as I know I don't think any of the producers have received any of the program details to date. They may be in the mailboxes. I checked . . . The minister is shaking his head. I checked my mailbox last night and our program details certainly weren't there. And I've asked some of my colleagues and they haven't received anything.

What's the holdup with this? If these programs were in the can and they were being designed, the producer should have their information shortly or should have had it a long time ago, Mr. Speaker. As far as the overall details and knowledge at the producer level of this new policy framework, it's just not there. The farmers, the people who are going to be impacted by this new ag policy just don't know hardly anything about the details.

I sat in on a seminar that SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) had arranged for their convention delegates dealing with the APF. And most of the producers just shook their heads and rolled their eyes and said well, we don't understand it; what we do understand, we don't like. And what they were saying is give us some time to become familiar with the program, understand it, make suggestions for change and improvements, and we think that probably it should be delayed for a year or so that . . . first of all, so that the program could be adequately designed. Because when they ask questions of the official with Agriculture Canada about program details, more often than not the answer is, well those are administrative details that need to be worked out yet. But yet both the federal Minister of Agriculture and this provincial Minister of Agriculture are bound and determined to implement this new program on April 1.

There's a whole range of questions and my colleague from Watrous touched on a few. There's a whole area of the environmental envelope of this agreement, that were questions like pesticide use, reduced pesticide use, certified operators to apply pesticides, sprayer calibration. One might interpret that part of this agreement, are we going to have sprayer police that are going to be going around and checking farmers' sprayers or seeing if they have the proper qualifications. People have been safely applying pesticides for 20, 30, and 40 years, and now they're going to have to have a certificate so that they can go and do what they've done for a good part of their life, Mr. Speaker.

And so farm groups including the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Grain Growers of Canada, APAS (Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan), the Ontario corn growers are saying let's delay the implementation of this program for a year and so that, for all the reasons I mentioned earlier, that we can . . . they can learn about it, understand it, and make improvements.

I concur with their ideas and their questions. What's the rush? I think they're very skeptical. They feel that there is probably a lot in this ag policy framework that both levels of government really don't want producers to know about because, Mr. Speaker, there was limited farm group involvement in the design of this process.

And, Mr. Speaker, as we rush . . . as this Minister of Agriculture rushes us forward down this track, the NDP will go . . . what will their legacy in agriculture be? Well I'll tell you what it will be. They will be the party that were in power when we saw the death of two of the most popular programs in agriculture — that being GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) and NISA, Mr. Speaker.

So therefore I wholeheartedly support the motion, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the end of my remarks I'll be moving the following amendment, and that is to remove all words after "Assembly" and replace with the following motion.

I move, seconded by the member from Meadow Lake:

That this Assembly commend the government and the Minister of Agriculture for successfully negotiating a new national agricultural policy framework that moves away from the Fredericton formula to a demand model that will provide broader safety net programs for Saskatchewan farm families.

I have a few words to say in favour of this amendment, Mr. Speaker. First I want to remind the members of this Assembly of the reliability of the source of the original motion, the Saskatchewan Party.

Now sometimes, Mr. Speaker, memories are short in politics so just for a moment let's take a trip down memory lane. Let's go back to the first days of this first session of the twenty-fourth legislature of the Saskatchewan government. Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about December 1999, the last month of the last century of the last millennium. I remember it well, Mr. Speaker, because it was my very first experience in this Chamber.

We had a special session to discuss and debate the injury being done to Canadian farmers in general, Prairie farmers in particular, and in particular by trade subsidies provided to farmers by the US and European Union governments — in violation of international treaty I might add. We had formed a coalition of the three Prairie governments and the three opposition parties to go to Ottawa and to demand federal action to protect our farmers. This was clearly a federal issue, we all agreed, and only the federal government and the federal treasury were able to respond properly.

The feds of course wanted the provinces to chip in, as they always do. I'm not sure if it was 60/40 or 50/50 at the time, but without question that's their common negotiating tactic. All six partners in the coalition resisted that tactic and felt that it was a federal issue, but then something happened. I said all six, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but really I think you can make that five of the six. The coalition was just nicely formed when the Sask Party broke ranks and told the feds that Saskatchewan had lots of money and could pay the shot.

That same December, Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party demanded that we have an emergency debate on farm security. It had to happen; it was an emergency, they said. Well everyone but the Leader of the Opposition, from a rural constituency, seemed to think it was an emergency. But as I recall, I don't believe that the Leader of the Opposition even bothered taking part in the debate.

(14:45)

So I mention this bit of history, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it marks the beginning of what has come to be known as the Sask Party agricultural policy, speak loud, carry a big stick, or as some of my colleagues on this side of the House have been saying recently — twist and shout. That's their policy, proclaim their support for the Saskatchewan farmer but don't suggest anything concrete. Time and time again this is what we've seen.

I'm sure that my two colleagues in this debate will have some other examples that they might want to put forward in this debate but my first memories are usually the sharpest ones and I would think that that's probably true for everyone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government, under two excellent premiers and two outstanding ministers of Agriculture, is proud to support our agricultural industry and our farmers. Agriculture accounts for 10 per cent, about 10 per cent of our gross domestic product. It's a significant employer and it is still the core of our way of life here in Saskatchewan.

We, on this side of the House, are committed to a strong and vibrant agricultural industry. It goes without saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we've faced two consecutive years of drought, in addition to more than two years of unfair international trade practices. The provincial crop insurance program paid out over \$1 billion in claims for the 2002-3 crop year.

The current crop insurance program, Mr. Deputy Speaker, might not be perfect but after a year like last year I think farmers have come to count on a reliable crop insurance program. One can certainly appreciate its importance in providing stability not only to agriculture, not only to the agricultural sector, but to the entire rural economy.

And our crop insurance program is getting better. New options to help farmers insure non-traditional crops are being added. Last year we added the forage rainfall insurance program to assist the growing livestock industry. This year we improved on these programs to help provide producers with improved coverage, and it is in this context that our Minister of Agriculture has been negotiating with the federal government and his provincial colleagues for a new agricultural policy framework.

Now the minister resisted signing in order to get a better deal for our farmers. In recent months Saskatchewan has consulted diligently with members of the agricultural industry on the proposed agricultural policy framework initiated by the federal government. We held off signing because we were determined to get a better deal for our farmers. As the minister has said in this House, we have to get a better deal.

Our tough negotiating strategy on the agricultural policy framework has resulted in improved crop insurance program for our farmers. We fought hard for a system where federal funds available for risk management programs are allocated based on demand or program use and not on the size of the industry in the province. And that's the way that it was under the old Fredericton formula.

The minister has told us that now is . . . now it is in the best interests of the province to sign on to this national framework. By signing on to the APF, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we'll be . . . we will help to provide an element of stability to our producers. We have committed to be a full partner and to fully fund the APF for the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, provincial and federal funding combined will enable our industry to compete on a number of fronts — through solid business risk management program, sound environmental planning and programming, through enhanced food safety and quality, through renewal of skill improvements and technology adoption, and through investments in science and innovation.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will continue to press the federal

government to do more to help Western Canadian agriculture. That's why we signed the APF. That's why I will be supporting the amendment.

Now the resolution put forward by the member from Watrous, as I said, is not a policy but really it's a wrench in the works. It's not a solution; it's a delaying tactic. And in the process it reveals once again her complete misunderstanding of how our federal system works.

We've negotiated a good deal for Saskatchewan farmers. The Sask Party wanted us to sign an earlier version which was more favourable to Ontario and Quebec, less so for us. The Minister of Agriculture resisted and got a better deal for Saskatchewan.

But, Mr. Speaker, the feds are sort of funny. They have a hard time contributing their share to farm support programs in the West at the best of times and I can assure you they certainly will not kick in their share if the agreement is not . . . was not signed.

So Sask Party logic — and I use the term loosely — says sign the bad agreement, hold off on the better one. I might live in the city, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but that sure doesn't make any sense to me.

Mr. Speaker, this . . . or Deputy Speaker, this government commits more than 4 per cent of its budget to agricultural programs — roughly \$430 for every man, woman, and child in the province. It's the highest per capita expenditure of all the provincial governments in Canada. And the federal government contributes just a little more than 1 per cent of its budget to agriculture.

And our investment in agriculture is paying off as we move to a more sustainable, diversified economy that includes more processing, more specialty crops, more value added, more organic production, and more research and development.

Proud to have grown up in a rural community, proud to be a representative of government, and therefore I'm proud to move the following amendment to the resolution.

I move, seconded by the member for Meadow Lake:

That this Assembly commend the government and the Minister of Agriculture for successfully negotiating a new national agricultural policy framework that moves away from the Fredericton formula to a demand model that will provide a broader safety net program for Saskatchewan families.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm absolutely thrilled to second the motion by the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

You know the APF agreement is an important step, in my estimation, for our industry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The APF outlines a national approach to advance our agricultural industry.

The agreement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not only covers programming in the areas of business risk management, but it also provides for programming in the areas of environment, renewal, food safety and food quality, and science and innovation. These are all, in my estimation, very important areas to help position our industry to meet the future challenges that it will face, and to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in agriculture.

The existing framework agreement expired March 31, 2003. By signing on to the APF we ensured that our producers did not see any interruption in agricultural safety net coverage, and our signing gave us the scope to enhance the crop insurance program for 2003 and into future years.

The APF agreement, and in particular the business risk management chapter of APF, has some good features from the Saskatchewan perspective. The federal business risk management funding will be used for two main national programs: first of all, a revised NISA program to provide both stabilization and disaster protection; and secondly, a crop insurance program to provide protection against production losses. Now both of these programs will have national parameters.

The federal government has indicated that the goal here is to treat farmers in similar circumstances in the same manner. We support that goal, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Allocation of federal funds will be on a demand-driven basis so that the federal funds to producers are based on their participation in the national programs and not based on the size of the industry in the province.

This should result in Saskatchewan receiving about 10 to \$12 million more — I repeat 10 to \$12 million more — than our current allocation in the first year and possibly even more than that as a demand-driven allocation is fully implemented.

The federal government has allocated sufficient funding for the crop insurance program that will allow for some enhancements to the current programming in Saskatchewan. Some of these enhancements were announced this year — as an example, yield coverage updating and improved forage coverage levels — and there is the scope to make more improvements in two future years.

Now while Saskatchewan would have liked to have seen more federal dollars for business risk management programs, the federal government has been very clear that this is all that there is for now. The federal government has committed \$1.1 billion per year for business risk management programming and they have committed to two years of \$600 million per year in transition of bridge funding.

The federal minister has also made it very clear that provinces must sign on to the APF in order to get federal funding for programs for the 2003 production year, including crop insurance. Clearly, running a Saskatchewan-only crop insurance program is simply not an option. We simply do not have the capacity to fund a provincial-only program with the level of protection needed by our farmers and producers.

So based on that information and the advice provided by our

farm leaders, Saskatchewan signed on to the APF agreement, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now the 1.2 billion or the 600 million per year of transition funding is really trade injury compensation, however the federal government will not call it by that name.

While Saskatchewan has signed on to the APF, that doesn't mean that we are going to give up the fight on trade injury. We will continue to push the federal government to level the playing field internationally through substantial reductions in the use of trade distorting subsidies by other countries, namely the United States and the European Union, or by providing compensation to our producers until they negotiate a level playing field.

While Saskatchewan has signed on to the APF which commits us to the funding and to moving forward on finalizing the APF programming, we have not yet signed the implementation agreement with the federal government which will outline the details of the new programming. And nor has any other province signed an implementation agreement yet — no other province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The federal government and the provinces are continuing to discuss some of the details on the APF programming and continue to work on the legal text of the implementation agreements.

There are a number of farm organizations in Canada, most of whom are members of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, who have raised concerns about the proposed redesign of the NISA program.

The new NISA program is scheduled to replace the existing NISA program and the existing Canadian Farm Income Plan or CFIP, as it's more commonly known, program starting with the 2003 production year.

These producer groups say that they want to see more analysis completed on the revised risk management programming to ensure that it is an improvement over the existing set of programs.

Now last week, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Minister Lyle Vanclief — on the insistence of the CFA (Canadian Federation of Agriculture) — agreed to have a third-party independent assessment completed on the proposed program and the existing programs. This work will be completed in a timely manner by three, highly qualified, independent individuals who will make their report public. It's my understanding that the report is to be completed by April 17 or later this month of this year.

Farm organizations and other stakeholders will be able to look at the results of this assessment and then consider their position on the proposed programs. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan will be watching this independent review very carefully and we will be discussing the results with Saskatchewan farm leaders.

Throughout the process though, Saskatchewan has consulted with a group of farm leaders in this province and we will continue to consult with them to ensure that we get the best possible — I repeat, the best possible — deal and the best possible programs for Saskatchewan producers.

Producer groups have also raised the issue of whether there is enough time to implement the new NISA program for 2003. Now in 2003 Saskatchewan producers will continue to apply for and receive — I repeat, and receive — benefits under the existing NISA program for the 2002 stabilization year, as well as benefits under the CFIP program for the 2002 claim year. I think that's worth repeating, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In 2003 Saskatchewan producers will continue to apply for and receive benefits under the existing NISA program for the 2002 stabilization year, as well as benefits under the CFIP program for the 2002 claim year.

(15:00)

Now benefits for the 2003 new NISA program would not normally flow to producers until the spring or summer of 2004 after producers have completed their 2003 tax returns. However, the federal government has assured the province that the federal administration is positioned to deliver the changes to NISA in a timely and coordinated manner if they proceed with the changes for the 2003 year.

Our goal has always been to get the best deal for Saskatchewan farmers and we have made our decisions around the APF based on this philosophy — that's getting the best deal for Saskatchewan farmers that we can possibly get around the APF. Our decision on whether to support the proposed programs will continue — I repeat, continue — to be based on that strategy. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is with a great deal of pleasure that I second the amended motion with the following amendment:

That would commend the government and the Minister of Agriculture for successfully negotiating a new national agricultural policy framework that moves away from the Fredericton formula to a demand model that will provide a broader safety net program for Saskatchewan farm families.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's very timely now that we're coming into our seeding programs for farmers and that they're thinking of safety net programs and the crop insurance programs that they're going to have in place to help look after their situations that they're going to . . . that are going to arise this summer. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think would be a good time now with an election in, you know, the near future, that we kind of review this NDP government's record with agriculture and how they've dealt with farmers for the last 10, 12 years.

And let's . . . just a reminder, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let's go back to the different Ag ministers that we've had in this province and the programs that we've had. And we start off and the first name I think of — when I was newly elected, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and actually was farming at that time when we lost the GRIP program, Mr. Deputy Speaker — was Berny Wiens.

And I remember Mr. Wiens saying that this had to be done because it was good for the province of Saskatchewan. Well they cut the GRIP program, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I know,

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you're well aware of what I'm talking about is that it cost every farmer in this province thousands and thousands of dollars?

It would be like having fire insurance on your house, Mr. Deputy Speaker, your house burning down, and SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) or Wawanesa or one of those companies coming along and saying, well for the good of the people we're not going to pay you that insurance. Because that's exactly what happened when they cancelled the GRIP program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that many farmers — many farmers — in Saskatchewan have never recovered from the loss of that program because it was at a time when we needed that program most. That program wasn't ideal, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it was certainly better than anything we've seen since.

The next Agriculture minister, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that brought us a new program was Mr. Upshall. And we have to remember too, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I speak, where are all these NDP Ag ministers? Long gone. And I think it will be something that the present-day Ag minister should really keep in the front of his mind because I'm afraid very shortly he's going to be joining that crowd.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remember going down east when Mr. Upshall was Ag minister and we ended up with the AIDA program. And partly we ended up with the AIDA program because that minister and that government would not stand behind the farmers of Saskatchewan. They would not put any money on the table.

In fact, when asked by the federal government, will you stand behind your farmers, I remember Mr. Upshall saying, if it costs us any money, no we won't. And that was his response, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and look where it got Mr. Upshall — out of politics in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Then we go on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the next Ag minister we had was Mr. Lingenfelter and I don't have to remind the Deputy Speaker where Mr. Lingenfelter is. He went to brighter pastures and went to Alberta, along with a bunch of our young kids, probably went on the same bus for all I know.

The program we ended up with, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was CFIP and it again, how long did it last? About two years, because it wasn't made for Saskatchewan. It wasn't good for the farmers in Saskatchewan.

In fact, it was such a bad program, the rest of the country didn't even like it and yet it was designed for an Ontario and Quebec. It was designed by Ontario and Quebec.

And do you know why, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because once

again this NDP government and the current day Agriculture minister stuck his head in the sand and said, I'm not going to the table; I'm not taking part because we don't care about farmers in Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, guess where we are again today? Once again, we have an Ag minister that will not get to the table, will not represent farmers in Saskatchewan, will not go to Ottawa and say, look, this government that I represent, this NDP government, we'll stand behind farmers. The reason he won't say it is because they've never done it in the 10 years, the 12 years that they've been in power, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and have absolutely no intention of getting behind farmers now.

I find it amazing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that for the first 10 years, 10 years that this NDP government's been in power, they neglected agriculture in this province, would not . . . put very little into our programs that we had for farmers. And now when a drought comes they blame all the woes of the province on agriculture and the farmers and ranchers in Saskatchewan.

But of course we know the Finance minister's going to solve that problem because farmers are going to have a tremendous bumper crop and are going to grow the economy in this province by 6.8 per cent.

Well I don't know, Mr. Deputy Speaker. None of the other countries in the western world are thinking of being anywhere near half of that, but in this province they're going to do that on the backs of one crop, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would suggest instead of thinking that they're going to balance the books or only have a \$500 million deficit, they ought to lower the taxes and let some of the farmers keep some of that money and maybe they could prosper.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, our present-day Ag minister all the way through this new program has hid, has not been at the table, and said to start with, I'm not signing on to anything.

I want to read you a little clip, interview by Barry Wilson, Mr. Speaker, how our present-day Ag minister does not even understand how the programs are designed. And I quote:

After signalling in late August that he was ready to sign the APF deal agreed by seven other provinces, Clay Serby now says the province has some conditions. (Doesn't surprise me, of course.) First among them is that the province be guaranteed a greater share of the federal dollars and the 22 per cent share it gets under the existing Fredericton formula. (Fine.) It is absolutely crucial that Saskatchewan be guaranteed a share before we sign.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what he was signing at that point was to get a chair at the table to have input into the program and maybe for once represent the farmers in this province. And the minister is laughing because I know he doesn't get it. He never gets it when it comes to looking after farmers in this province. And once again, do you know what we're going to end up with, Mr. Speaker? We're going to end up with a program that does nothing for Saskatchewan farmers.

Mr. Speaker, why in the world can we not design a program in Saskatchewan by that minister and that government, if need be — and they better do it quick because they're not going to be there long — design a program in this province for our farmers, take it to Ottawa, and say to Mr. Vanclief and the federal Liberals, this is what we need in Saskatchewan. Not wait for them to design a program for Ontario and Quebec and then say, well it's no good here so we're not taking part.

The present-day minister should have done this long ago. The past minister should have done this long ago. And they haven't learned a thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And do you know who pays the price? The people that pay the price are the farmers of Saskatchewan, but also the business people of Saskatchewan that rely on farmers. And in the end the province of Saskatchewan is hurt by this government not backing our farmers, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — The Agriculture minister, Mr. Speaker, should probably have listened to the Premier, because I quote from what the Premier had said here — I believe it was in May 2002 — and I agree with the Premier. And this is a quote. He says:

The reality is Ottawa can come here and spend some time on our province and then leave, and then they don't have the same kind of influence. When you're in their backyard and you're able to provide the kind of details we need to, it seems to me it has far more impact.

It seems to me the Premier had it right; he just forgot to pass the message on to our Agriculture minister.

Mr. Speaker, my time is running short, but I think what this proves once again is that every program that we've had for the last 12 years, Mr. Speaker, has proved to be a failure. And why is it a failure? It's a failure because we have a government that doesn't care about agriculture. I guess if we had a farm right in the middle — the centre of Regina possibly — they would pay some attention to it. But that isn't the way it is.

And taking a bus trip once a year — and hurrying for bathroom stops, jumping back on the bus — in rural Saskatchewan doesn't give you the understanding you need of agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, there's a song Stompin' Tom's got out. It's called Margo's got the cargo. Do you know something, Mr. Speaker, there was more agricultural intellect in that song than I heard from both speeches by the members on the other side.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — And do you know, Mr. Speaker, we change agriculture programs in this province far oftener than we change our herd bulls. We never get it right. That government does not understand agriculture, Mr. Speaker. That government as long as they're in power are not standing behind the farmers in this province.

It's time for an election. It's time to get a premier that's elected by the people of the province. It's time for a Sask Party

government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, when the . . . I'm really pleased, Mr. Speaker, to join the debate this afternoon. And it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, when the member from Saltcoats stands up and says he's run out of time, he has run out of time . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — You know when Mr. Schmidt's made sure that he's run out of time; even his own constituency doesn't support him. And so clearly, Mr. Speaker, he's run out of time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to begin my comments . . . And I listened very carefully to the members opposite about, their diatribe about what in fact they know about agriculture. And on this particular piece, Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a couple of comments.

The members opposite should know that we've been, along with the provinces across Canada and the federal government, at tables talking about the agricultural policy framework for 18 months — all the provinces. Every province in Canada, Mr. Speaker, has been working on the agricultural policy framework.

And what have we been talking about, Mr. Speaker? Well we've been talking about a new safety net program and we've been talking about four other pillars, Mr. Speaker, within the agricultural policy framework. And speaker after speaker today, including the member from Watrous and the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood and now the member from Saltcoats, said, you know, we should be extending this thing for one more year because we don't know what's in the document, Mr. Speaker.

Well how is it that they wouldn't know what's in the document, Mr. Speaker? Because for the past nine months the agricultural policy framework and the structure of the document has been publicly known by Canadian farmers all across the land. People know what's in it. And the only people who don't know what's in it appears to be the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker, right here in our province.

Because, Mr. Speaker, and I said to the members opposite just a while ago, the member from Watrous and the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood said, well we don't know how much money's in the fund. Well we know how much money's in the fund and we know exactly how much has been allocated to it and all the farmers in Saskatchewan who are involved in farm organizations know how much is in it, Mr. Speaker. They know that Saskatchewan's portion is going to be this, Mr. Speaker — that Saskatchewan's getting \$153 million of federal money for production insurance, matched 60/40, Mr. Speaker, by the province at 100 million. And we're already in. All producers know that except the Saskatchewan Party.

We know that the NISA contribution, Mr. Speaker, from Saskatchewan will be, under the new program, \$130 million. And we've got our money in this year to match that portion,

Mr. Speaker. And we know how much, Mr. Speaker, is in the, in the . . . We know, Mr. Speaker, how much is in the transition sleeve. We know exactly what the funding is as all do — as all do — all other provinces in Canada except the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, who say, we don't know how much money's in the fund. Well we know exactly how much is there.

Mr. Speaker, we also know how much is in the transition pool, in every one of the transitions pools, in all the other pillars. We've set aside for Saskatchewan our share of \$18 million. It's in the budget. It's there, Mr. Speaker. It's ready to roll out on the other pillars.

The federal government's putting in an additional \$25 million when and if we sign the implementation agreements, Mr. Speaker. And that's what Saskatchewan's share would be. And every province in Canada knows what their share of the implementation agreement will be on the other . . . (inaudible) . . . except the Saskatchewan Party says, we don't know what that is, Mr. Speaker. And I say, where have they been?

(15:15)

All they need to do, Mr. Speaker, is just call up their friends in Ontario or call up their friends in Alberta who are saying today that they're prepared to sign the implementation agreements. They're Conservatives as well, Mr. Speaker, and they know how much is in the agreement. All they need to do is give them a call and they'll tell them that they're prepared, in those two provinces they're preparing to sign the implementation agreements because, Mr. Speaker, they know that there isn't any more than the \$1.1 billion.

And I was very interested, Mr. Speaker, to hear them say, well this is a hasty agreement that we've put together. Well we've been working on it for 18 months, Mr. Speaker, and they say, well this has been hasty. The federal government and all the provinces of all different stripes have been putting this together and they say this has been done in too fast a fashion.

And farm groups and farm organizations have been at the meetings with the federal government and we've been interchanging and dialoguing in this province. Every five or six weeks I meet with farm organizations and we have the conversation, and then we travel off to Ottawa and to Toronto and into parts of Alberta and we have the conversations about what should this look like. And at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, the agriculture policy framework is well articulated. It's well known by farm groups and organizations.

The issue, Mr. Speaker, is that farm groups and farm organizations and provinces, on most cases, don't like the agreement. Why? Because, Mr. Speaker, there isn't enough money in the farm safety net package. And we've been saying that all along. There is not enough money to restructure farm policy in Saskatchewan and in Canada today, and we should be trying to get a larger chunk for the money.

Now what did the member opposite from Saltcoats say a minute ago, Mr. Speaker? Well, he said, well we didn't like CFIP; we didn't like CFIP and we tried to get CFIP killed, and we tried to get AIDA killed.

And what's their motion say, Mr. Speaker? That we should leave the farm programs exactly like they were for another year, so that we should leave CFIP in place. That's their motion. We should leave CFIP in place, Mr. Speaker, for one more year.

So here they are arguing for the better part of three years, Mr. Speaker, in this House, saying that AIDA and CFIP doesn't work, and the very first time they have an opportunity to stand up in the House and make a motion on agriculture, Mr. Speaker, what do they say? We should keep the same old show for one more year because we didn't like it. So we should leave it exactly the way it was, Mr. Speaker.

Now I say, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member from Wood River says, what's our program? Well I can tell the . . . (inaudible) . . . what the member from Wood River is.

We have an enhanced crop insurance program in this province today, Mr. Speaker, with 150 million federal dollars going in, matching 100 million, Mr. Speaker. We're putting additional money into renewal, Mr. Speaker, today which we lead the country in. That's our plan, Mr. Speaker — to put more money into renewal, Mr. Speaker. And we're putting more money today into a NISA program, if in fact that's what it's going to have at the end of the day. That's our program, Mr. Speaker, nationally, where all provinces support it — Conservatives and Liberals and New Democrats from all across the country, Mr. Speaker. That's who supports it.

And who do they quote, Mr. Speaker? They quote the Canadian Alliance Party on a regular basis about farm policy in this country, Mr. Speaker. Or they quote Mr. Anderson, Mr. Speaker. And the other day she quoted Mr. Hilstrom — the member from Watrous.

Where do they get their farm policy from, Mr. Speaker? They get their farm policy from the Canadian Alliance, Mr. Speaker. And it's the same guy, it's the same party from whom the leader represents, Mr. Speaker, who was against subsidies forever, Mr. Speaker, voted in the House of Commons to be against subsidies, Mr. Speaker, and today they have the audacity to stand up here and say we support, we support today, Mr. Speaker, subsidies in Canada. What a joke. What a joke, Mr. Speaker, that the member of the opposition will be leading that campaign, Mr. Speaker.

The member, Mr. Speaker, from Saltcoats said, you know what? Who believes the 6.8 projection because it's tied to the farm economy, Mr. Speaker. Who believes that? Well you know who believes it? Farmers in Canada and Saskatchewan believe it. Farmers believe it. Farmers in Saskatchewan say on a regular basis, can we grow more than 14.1 million tonnes in this province? Can we do more than that when the provincial average on a regular basis has been 25, 25 million tonnes, Mr. Speaker?

Everybody in Saskatchewan believes in agriculture that we can grow an average crop in this province, except who? The Saskatchewan Party. They don't believe that we can grow an average crop in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Farm groups and farm organizations and farm leaders all believe that we can grow a crop that's average at 25 million tonnes, except the

Saskatchewan Party. And on a regular basis they get up in the House and they say, well how are we going to get to the 6.8? Because you know what, we're not going to grow five point . . . 25 million tonnes, Mr. Speaker. It goes to show, Mr. Speaker, about what little knowledge these people have of agriculture.

It was demonstrated again today, Mr. Speaker, where you have today, Mr. Speaker, a group of men and women who are absolutely bankrupt when it comes to the debate about agriculture, Mr. Speaker, and it's demonstrated best, it's demonstrated best, Mr. Speaker, in the recent, in the recent written questions that were provided by the leader . . . by the opposition.

And this is the question that they write to the government to ask, Mr. Speaker. This is what it writes. And it's the member from Watrous. She asks the government the following question which was answered by us — to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization: how much money did the province of Saskatchewan receive from the 600 million transition fund announced by the federal government in 2002?

That's the question, Mr. Speaker. How much money did the province get from the transition fund, Mr. Speaker? Anybody in Saskatchewan knows, Mr. Speaker, that the province never got one penny of that, never got one penny; that all of that money, Mr. Speaker, went to producers in Saskatchewan, went to producers. The members opposite don't even know that the transition fund isn't paid to the province's treasury; it's paid to producers, Mr. Speaker. They don't even have a clue about where in fact the money at the end of the day is paid for, Mr. Speaker.

Transition fund today, Mr. Speaker, is paid to Saskatchewan producers and it was paid at 33 per cent, of which we negotiated, Mr. Speaker, at the table from 22. This government and this Premier and this minister were responsible for the changing of the formula, Mr. Speaker, and today the members opposite are saying, you know what, we should leave this intact for yet another year and we shouldn't sign an implementation agreement.

Well I'll want to know, Mr. Speaker, from those members opposite, are they prepared, Mr. Speaker, to see a rollback of the Fredericton formula, Mr. Speaker, because this is what they're advocating. Are they prepared to leave an additional \$20 million on the table of federal money and are they prepared to leave an additional \$50 million of federal money on the table? Are they prepared to . . .

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to enter the debate this afternoon. I'll be speaking in favour of the motion, which I'd like to now read:

That this Assembly recommends to the federal government that the current agriculture support programs be extended for a minimum of one year to allow the agriculture policy framework to be fully developed and a complete set of details made available to producers.

Specifically what I'd like to speak on with regards to the APF is the first pillar with regards to risk management.

The first problem that many producers in my area are having, Mr. Speaker, is with regards to the name change or the misnomer of the super NISA program. The NISA program in its current form has been very successful and it's been producer friendly. Producers have been . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Sixty-five minutes of the seventy-five minute debate has now elapsed. We will now proceed to a 10 minute question and comment period, up to 60 seconds per member.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's with amusement that I heard the Agriculture minister state that this side of the House is bankrupt in agriculture knowledge. That is rather humorous and if he wants to play a quote with words, I've actually got a quote where he says that he is in favour of the Fredericton formula. So if we want to play with words and use them out of context that would be rather interesting.

But my question, Mr. Speaker, is for the minister . . . or for the member from Saskatoon Meewasin. If, you know, she has such knowledge of agriculture — she's going back to 1999 and referring to her briefing notes — can she please list the five pillars of the agriculture framework and give a brief explanation on each of those pillars.

Ms. Jones: — Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am not, in the time allotted to me, able to accommodate the member. However I think that it would be most appropriate for her to stand in the House and tell us why it is that earlier the member said that we ought to sign on and get to the table, and then now more recently has changed her mind.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the member for Watrous. I've been quite interested to follow some of her views on agriculture and I was wondering if she could perhaps articulate for us what exactly the member for Watrous's position is on crop insurance in particular and how that can play an important role for stabilizing farm incomes.

Ms. Harpauer: — It's rather humorous that the member opposite would ask for a question on my viewpoint on crop insurance because I don't think we've ever said we don't support crop insurance. But it has to be affordable and it has to have coverage that's meaningful to the agriculture producers of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — And that is something that I can't say that this government has ever done. So to talk about supporting farmers and agriculture, these members of the House have not supported agriculture, they have not kept their crop insurance program so that it is . . . (inaudible) . . . and if he thinks that there is . . . that it's the best crop insurance program in the country, he should check the neighbouring provinces because it by far outleagues ours.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member from Meadow Lake. My question, Mr. Speaker, is: could the member please comment on this new or super NISA program? Will it require accrual accounting of all our farmers in the province? And what kind of cost will the individual producer incur having to move from a cash-based accounting to accrual-based accounting?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — The answer to the question is absolutely it requires accrual accounting. Mr. Speaker, if the member doesn't know that, he should do a bit more research on this issue, Mr. Speaker.

But I would say as well, in signing on to the APF, Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Agriculture and our government I believe negotiated the best possible agreement that we could possibly negotiate with an additional 10 to \$12 million coming here to Saskatchewan and the potential for even greater amounts of money in the coming years, unlike those members opposite and that member from Kindersley who advocated some time ago that we should sign early, early, early and we would have lost all of this revenue that we now have coming to Saskatchewan.

So I again support the motion and congratulate our minister for having negotiated the agreement that he negotiated.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to ask the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood about the Fredericton formula. Because the Fredericton formula today under the current agreement gives Saskatchewan 33 per cent of the pool on the demand driven program. By not signing this agreement over the next . . . the implementation agreement, what will happen, Mr. Speaker, is that we will lose our advantage in the 33 per cent.

Does the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood support the notion that Western Canadian farmers and provinces should be losing their advantage of the 33 per cent of which we have negotiated now in Western Canada over the last several months? Would he not be supporting that position?

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister of Agriculture for the question. The Minister of Agriculture contends that if we don't rush forward and sign the implementation agreement, we are going to lose all that federal money. Well I don't think that's going to happen.

The other day in the House, the minister said, and I believe I understood him very clearly, that the province of Alberta has signed the implementation agreement. And yet today he says no other province has signed the implementation agreement. I wonder what it is.

It just seems that this minister seems to spin whatever he thinks is appropriate for the day, Mr. Speaker, but I don't think that we would lose 1 cent by delaying it for another year, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Speaker, I'm looking at a brochure that was sent to the

farmers of the province here recently and in fact it arrived in the mailbox last week. And it uses phrases like, work is under way, would be — that sort of thing. And one of the questions that I would ask the minister is, what is the date on this brochure? Because by reading it you would think that it probably came a year ago, explaining the basic concept of the program and that sort of thing.

And one thing that is of interest, that caught my eye, is that it says an investment component will be introduced in 2006, and that's under the business risk management. I wonder if that Minister of Agriculture actually knows anything about this program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I was listening carefully to the member when he was giving his statements. And it looks like he's finally found his mailbox because he couldn't find his mailbox, he said, because he hasn't got the crop insurance . . . said he hasn't got the crop insurance forms yet, because they went out on Saturday, Mr. Speaker, to producers.

And now that he has found his mailbox, he's also found the brochure that the federal government has sent out, Mr. Speaker, because that . . . what he is reading from is the federal government mail out talking about what, in fact, the agricultural policy framework is all about, generically, Mr. Speaker.

And so I say to the member opposite, if you want a special, if you want a special kind of audience, Mr. Speaker, on the agricultural policy framework, I would be happy to spend some time with him and provide him with full detail and will even take that information that the federal government has sent out, Mr. Speaker, and try to interpret it for him so that he could take that information and share it with the rest of his colleagues so that we might then get a fairly responsible, a fairly responsible question on agriculture, Mr. Speaker, and to some degree a question or two or maybe some farm policy even from that side of the House.

(15:30)

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a member . . . I have a member? I have a question for the member from Kindersley, Mr. Speaker.

My question is as follows, Mr. Speaker. My question is as follows. That member has always been a strong advocate of the privatization of corporations, Mr. Speaker. I want to know, given the fact that Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation lost nearly a billion dollars last year, is that member in favour of the sale of Sask Crop Insurance Corporation? Is he in favour of the privatization of that corporation?

That corporation has partnered with producers. Apparently they're against partnering with anyone in Saskatchewan and especially if you lose money. Is he going to sell the Sask Crop Insurance Corporation, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: — To whom is the question directed? I ask the member.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — The question was directed to the member from Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

First and foremost, before we get into the details of the answer of what would and would not be sold, we state unequivocally that we would not be raising crop insurance premiums 52 per cent in the year after three consecutive years of drought, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have never contended that we would sell the crop insurance program. We have contended that we would improve it, make it farmer friendly, and make it, Mr. Speaker, so that farmers could have confidence in their government. Not like the 16.2 per cent return the NDP received in the constituency of Kindersley less than six months ago, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Ag minister is somewhat confusing us over here a little bit with his comments. I want to go back, I want to go back to last fall in one of the comments that that minister made, because he just said that if we don't sign on this program now we're going to lose funding from the federal government. That's totally contrary to what he said last fall. And I quote, an interview done by Barry Wilson:

Serby expects Saskatchewan farmers to get their fair share of the federal dollars whether the province signs or not. I don't see that it makes much of a difference.

What are we to believe, Mr. Speaker? What the Agriculture minister is saying today or what he was saying the other day? He keeps changing his mind. What is it? Is it today or is it last fall? What are we to believe, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly if we did not sign the agricultural policy framework, we would have not received the funding, Mr. Speaker, to fund our crop insurance, Mr. Speaker. We would have not received the money. Because we stood, we stood with farm organizations and producers across this country and said, you know what, we're going to hold out for the money. So we held out for the money and we held out for the formula . . .

The Speaker: — I thank the members for their participation in the debate.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 1 — Value of Crown Corporations

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of my remarks I will be moving a motion to the effect that this Assembly affirm the value, the value to the people of Saskatchewan of our Crown corporations; and make the point that these Crown corporations provide essential services throughout the province, create jobs for Saskatchewan people, contribute to the social, cultural, and recreational life of

Saskatchewan communities; and to point out that our Crown corporations have generated in the neighbourhood of \$1.6 billion in contributions to the General Revenue Fund over the past eight years.

Mr. Speaker, why would it be necessary that members of the Legislative Assembly would want to take the time in the House to essentially affirm the value of the Crown corporations? The reason we do that is that so much of the debate that takes place in the House takes place in question period, and so much of that debate tends to focus on negative aspects of things that the government is involved in, including the Crown corporations. And I guess that's the nature of opposition, Mr. Speaker.

The nature of opposition is to criticize the government and so when you have something as large as the government, which is an enterprise that involves in excess of \$6 billion, when something goes wrong in one small aspect of that enterprise then the opposition tends to focus on that small part of the pie and then people might be forgiven if they think that's the only issue that the government is involved in. So from time to time it's important — and we do have an opportunity on private members' day — to put forward motions and to reflect more broadly on the contributions that are made to our province, to our economy, to our way of life by various aspects of government activity.

In this case what we want to talk about is the Crown corporations and the value that these Crown corporations present to the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Before getting into some of the contributions that the Crowns make, I would like to, for a minute, talk about the historical context which has led us to today's Crown corporations. When Saskatchewan was established, we found very quickly that in our towns at that time, that by 1891, there are three towns in the then North-West Territories: Regina, Moose Jaw, and Prince Albert.

They, for example, had private generating plants for electricity. But within a few years, by 1905 when the province was founded, these private generating plants had become part of a municipal Crown electrical utility. So even then, at the turn of that century, Mr. Speaker, we saw private activities or private utilities becoming municipally owned electrical utilities.

Similarly with the telephone service. The first exchange was established in Regina in 1887, and by 1908 the provincial government had established the Saskatchewan telephone system with a combination of 18 telephone exchanges. Also, the territorial government, that is the north-west territorial government, was selling hail insurance before Saskatchewan became a province in 1905. So there was in Saskatchewan, at the very outset, a reliance on publicly owned utilities — in that case, municipally owned utilities — as a way of generating and then distributing the power, and also to provide for a more effective telephone system than had been the case with private utilities.

This type of development and municipalities becoming involved continued through the '20s and '30s. We saw a major shift to establishing far more integrated and far more encompassing Crown corporations to deal with these utilities in

the 1940s following the election of the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) in 1944. That would be the government of Tommy Douglas, Mr. Speaker, that was central to establishing the centrally integrated provincial Crown corporations, and they did this during their first term in office.

And I guess that's in part what led members of the opposition to refer to Mr. Tommy Douglas as Tommy the commie in some of their remarks, Mr. Speaker — those remarks that were uttered by the member for Kindersley in this Legislative Assembly, and remarks that were wildly cheered by members of the opposition. To think, Mr. Speaker, that the person who was that key, that central, and who has been recognized over the years not only as a man of principle but also a man of action — a man of principle action — would be referred by members of the present-day opposition in such disparaging terms. To refer to him as Tommy the commie, Mr. Speaker, I think is a reflection as to how far to the right the opposition has swung in our province.

I remember in 1982 when Grant Devine was elected, in part of his campaign he said that he was the true inheritor of Mr. Devine's legacy because he shared, or in his view shared, some attributes that Mr. Douglas had and therefore people should vote for him because he best reflected the kind of vision that Tommy Douglas had for Saskatchewan.

That the opposition has now swung so far to the right that they would utter in this Legislative Assembly, for the people of Saskatchewan, extreme views to calling . . . that, if you like, Father of Saskatchewan in many ways, Mr. Speaker — a premier and later a leader of a federal party in Ottawa, who was greatly respected not only for what he did here but the principles that he was espoused — that he would be called Tommy the commie . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. We have in the past established a protocol in this Assembly that we should not be using and referring to people as Fascists or as Communists or any similar names. And I remind the member of that.

I do not recall the previous quotation, but at anything from now on, let's try to avoid that kind of thing. I think it is demeaning in the legislature to be able . . . to refer to members in that fashion.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm just simply referring to *Hansard* and I would . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. I would ask the member just to continue with his remarks and accept the ruling.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, it was in 1944, Mr. Speaker, that the CCF was elected. And then in 1945 they organized, one year after election, Saskatchewan Government Insurance, which to this day continues to provide very good insurance coverage for the people of Saskatchewan at very good rates.

The Saskatchewan Transportation Company, in 1946, to provide an integrated transportation service between the various communities in Saskatchewan that were not being well served by the sporadic service being provided by private individuals in

those years. Saskatchewan Telephones as a province-wide system in 1947; the Saskatchewan Power Corporation in 1949. There were other smaller ventures in fish marketing, forestry, mining, and so on. Many of these corporations have of course succeeded — SGI, Telephones, SaskPower, STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company). Some of course did not.

And I think that continues to be the truth today that not everything that government does succeeds wildly beyond its expectations, wildest expectations. But there are, at the end of the day, I think — or it's fair to say — that at the end of the day that many of the government's initiatives do succeed and do meet their objective of providing good service for the people of Saskatchewan at reasonable rates for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

I might say too, that the developments in Saskatchewan are not dissimilar to the developments that occurred in the other Prairie provinces and some of the other provinces in Canada. I know that Manitoba for example saw the development of Manitoba Hydro, which is a publicly owned utility, over the years. We had the Manitoba Telephone System, which was a publicly owned system until it was sold off by the Filmon Conservative government a few years ago, was a publicly owned system. Alberta as well saw the development of the Alberta Telephone company which was a publicly owned system until it was privatized by the Conservative government in Alberta.

The utilities, the electrical utilities, were never really developed as a single-integrated utility in Alberta, but there is a very strong presence by the municipalities in Alberta in terms of the provision of power for their customers in their particular municipalities, Mr. Speaker.

So the trend in Saskatchewan is not unlike the trend that we saw in the other Prairie provinces and some of the other provinces. Ontario, for example, never did see a publicly owned telephone system as such covering the province. It does or did have . . . I'm not sure what kind of system they have any more, but they did have Ontario Hydro which is a publicly owned system, which not only generated or produced its own power but distributed its power to customers across Ontario. I understand that has undergone a change. BC (British Columbia) as well saw the . . . BC Hydro, which is a publicly owned system. Some of the Maritime provinces also had publicly owned systems, Mr. Speaker, and I believe Quebec Hydro is an example again of a publicly owned system.

(15:45)

In Canada we have chosen to do things a little bit differently than our neighbours to the south in terms of a collective community response to our needs through Crown-owned utilities, Mr. Speaker. And I think it's fair to say that our approach has been a good approach. It's an approach that I think to this day enjoys the strong support of the people in Saskatchewan.

I think that if one were to ask the people of Saskatchewan how they view their Crown corporations and the services they provide at the rates that they charge, I think most people — and not all — but most people would tend to view our Crown

corporations in a positive way, and I think in the main, not for many of the reasons that are advocated here, but in the main because these Crowns provide services at rates that the public perceives to be among the lowest of all rates in Canada.

Auto insurance, for example auto insurance rates, people recognize that rates for the coverage they receive are the lowest in Canada. There may be the odd sort of rural area where the risk of accidents is so low that insurance can be sold at very low rates that might compete with Saskatchewan as a whole, but I'd be hard-pressed to identify those, Mr. Speaker. But in the main, people appreciate the fact that they have good automobile coverage at very low rates.

Power and natural gas, telephone services. Saskatchewan continues to have the lowest rates in the country for . . . among electricity and natural gas and phone services across Canada. I think it's fair to say that these rates have been kept low while enhancing and extending the service.

SaskTel is an example. Our rates are very low. But if you look at the reach of those services for all of the people in Saskatchewan — not just people in our cities but for all the people in Saskatchewan, including very importantly our rural customers and the kind of service that rural customers can have — and then you look at the service they have compared to rural customers in other parts of North America, at the prices that they pay in Saskatchewan, I think it's fair to say that rural customers in Saskatchewan are fortunate and I think are supportive of the services being provided by our Crown utilities.

This, I might say as an aside, Mr. Speaker, is one of the grave concerns that people in rural Alberta are expressing given a vigorous round of deregulation of the environment in which their utilities operate because they perceive that not only are they paying higher prices for the utility services they get, but also are receiving poorer service from the various corporations that provide the services in the area of electrical and telephone.

So this is a matter of some concern to rural people in Alberta. It's the subject of discussions at their counterparts of our rural municipalities' conventions. It's also something that factors into their political conventions. I understand the government is taking some heat from their constituents for the changes in rural service.

I understand that a number of the members of the government caucus in Alberta, Conservative members, are looking for ways to try to improve the service that are being received by their rural customers by now again re-regulating some of the deregulated service that they voted in and that they put into place — so we'll see where that goes. But I can tell you that there is some unease, as it were, in rural Alberta and in urban Alberta too with some of the rate issues that have been put into place in Alberta in the last three years, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, one of the values that the Crown corporations present to the people of Saskatchewan are the fact that Crown corporations contribute to the economy in Saskatchewan. There are many people that are employed by Crown corporations that if it weren't for the fact that we have these Crown corporations might not in fact . . . we might not in fact have those jobs in

Saskatchewan.

There will always be, there will always be in any utility, people that we need to provide the various services. It might be someone that works on the telephone lines. It might be somebody in the electrical utility who maintains and looks after the power lines. It might be somebody from SaskEnergy that is responsible for hooking you up or disconnecting you. It might be any kinds of jobs that any utility, whether they were privately owned in Saskatchewan or publicly owned, that would be provided here.

But it doesn't necessarily follow that if you have private corporations that necessarily those corporations would be headquartered in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And so it's interesting to note that of the more than 9,500 people that are employed all across Saskatchewan, there are almost 4,000 . . . 3,700 head office jobs in Saskatchewan as a result of those Crown corporations, well, having their headquarters here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And it doesn't necessarily follow that if those Crown corporations were to be sold off that we would retain those jobs.

In fact we have seen over the years where we've had Crown-owned entities that have been sold off where it was indicated that, oh well, simply because we have a change in ownership doesn't mean that the head office jobs won't stay here — Sask Oil being a very good example of that; that we had a corporation called Sask Oil.

Sask Oil was sold by the Devine Conservative government in the 1980s, probably at the instigation of the, probably at the instigation of the member for Swift Current who was a key adviser to the Devine administration in a department called the Department of Public Participation, I believe it was called. The idea was . . . It was essentially a department of privatization but they euphemistically called it the Department of Public Participation because their idea was to sell off government-owned enterprises to the public, and he was a key adviser to the government that resulted in this sale of Sask Oil to private interests.

And of course we were all assured that Sask Oil's head office jobs would be retained here. But over the years that corporation made its case that they could not continue to survive in Saskatchewan unless, increasingly over the years, those head office jobs were moved to Calgary where the oil industry is in the main located.

So for those who say that, well selling off Crown corporations would have no material impact on the economy of Saskatchewan because, you know, there always will be somebody who will be needed to hook up the power or somebody that needed to hook up the electricity, or if you have a problem with your telephone line there always will be somebody to repair that.

Well that may be true; that may well be true. But they'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, there's no reason for a corporation, a private corporation say, headquartered in Calgary, that buys up our telephone system to keep head office jobs here in Saskatchewan. Or if some organization in BC buys up our SaskPower, there'd be no reason necessarily for them to keep

head office jobs here in Saskatchewan. Now they would have to keep people who provide the services on the ground, but they don't have to keep the head office jobs.

And that, again, that's . . . my understanding is that's pretty close to 3,700 jobs, and that's a lot of jobs in our economy, Mr. Speaker. And those are the direct jobs and those jobs also support many other indirect jobs. If you have a job in the economy, that job will support other jobs as well, Mr. Speaker. What do I mean by that? Thirty-seven hundred employees, 3,700 families — 3,700 families create demands for X grocery stores, create demands for X numbers of teachers, create demands for all kinds of products and services in our communities. And if those 3,700 jobs weren't there then we would see a reduction in those other jobs as well, Mr. Speaker.

So the point I wanted to make is that in talking about the value the Crown corporations present to our economy, is that Crowns make a major contribution to Saskatchewan's economy. Again, more than 9,500 people are employed by Crown corporations across Saskatchewan.

Crown corporations too support more than 12,000 Saskatchewan businesses every year through their policy of buying goods and services from local suppliers. They spend about \$2 billion every year on local purchasing and systems improvements. They also donate more than — when we talk about the impact they have on the social and cultural and recreational life of the province — they donate more than \$5 million each year to local charities, community projects, and events. I think one would be hard pressed to not find a significant recreational or cultural or community project in Saskatchewan that isn't supported in one way or another by one of Saskatchewan's Crown corporations.

Now that's something that all major corporations do, they try to provide support for local charities. They try to provide support for local community projects. But I can tell you if those corporations aren't headquartered in Saskatchewan, it's fair to say that there would be far less support for those kinds of activities in our communities, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again jobs, and the jobs that are provided by the Crown corporations is not something that people think about when they think about Crowns because in the main they think about the service they get and the rates they provide. But I did want to reflect on that because the jobs that are provided by Crown corporations, although they may not directly affect people in our province, at the end of the day I think they will indirectly affect just about everybody, everybody in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

They also affect us in another way and that is these Crowns not only contribute in the sense of providing good service at reasonable rates and contributing to our economy, these Crowns also contribute to the General Revenue Fund of the province.

And what do I mean by that? Well the General Revenue Fund is the source of all of the funds that the government uses to pay for health in our province, which is about \$2.5 billion this year; for all of the educational expenditures in Saskatchewan that the government makes, which is in excess of a billion dollars. All of the highways funding comes out of the General Revenue

Fund. The funds that go to municipalities to support policing comes out of the General Revenue Fund. The funds that are to go to support people with disabilities in Saskatchewan comes out of the General Revenue Fund. All of the government's spending comes out of the General Revenue Fund and the Crown corporations have, since 1995, returned about \$1.6 billion to the General Revenue Fund.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — And that is worthy of applause, Mr. Speaker, because that is a lot of money and that is very welcomed by the government as the government tries to manage its way through some years of grave drought that has a big impact on government revenues. And it is very helpful that we have that revenue source from our Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker, to assist us to meet our obligations in the areas of health and education which, I think, as the Minister of Finance was explaining earlier today, have seen significant increases in this budget even though we've come through a year of extreme drought and all that presents in terms of impact on the government budgets. It's revenue from entities such as the Crowns that help us to maintain our commitment to support worthwhile public services in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

(16:00)

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak for a minute about the fact that because these services, utilities, are provided through Crown corporations as opposed to private corporations, it means that the public has access to information about how those corporations are run — which is far different than any expectation they might ever have with respect to private corporations, Mr. Speaker.

What do I mean by Crown corporations? I mean that these are corporations that at the end of the day are administered on behalf of all of the people of Saskatchewan who might be viewed as the shareholders in those corporations, administered by the government of the day. And so in a sense the government of the day is the active or participating shareholders on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. And as such, our expectations about . . . Because these are Crown or public entities if you like, our expectations about what these Crowns should be providing in the way of information for their shareholders, it's much higher than would be the case for a publicly traded private company as an example, Mr. Speaker.

Annual reports and financial statements. All Crown corporations are required by law to publish annual reports and financial statements. The government also publishes summary financial statements which provide an overview of all government financial activities including those of the Crowns. These reporting standards, Mr. Speaker, and practices, have improved, I would say, substantially since 1991 when the present government was first elected. And we were elected in part because there was a concern about the . . . on the part of the public that the previous government had not treated with respect the public's right to know how it is that the various Crown entities were being managed, Mr. Speaker. And we set about to change that, and we have made, I believe, significant improvements in those reporting standards and practices.

And that's not to say that we couldn't be making more. And I would remind people that the Minister of Finance indicated in his budget speech that we would be looking at making additional changes in the way that we budget in Saskatchewan so that the people of Saskatchewan not only will have a complete view as to how Crown activity has gone in the previous year, but now will also have a better idea as to how Crown revenues and expenses will impact the provincial budget of the day — that is to say, future spending, Mr. Speaker.

I think that's a welcome improvement. That is something that I know that members of the government side, backbenchers, have argued for over the years. We don't do that publicly, Mr. Speaker, like the opposition can. But I can tell you that government members, backbenchers, have worked diligently to get the government to take the point of view that that kind of summary financial planning should be part of budgets in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And so I want to recognize the role played by government backbenchers, Mr. Speaker. And that's not something that backbenchers would necessarily do in a public forum — disagree with their government — but it is something that we do in our own circles and in our . . . and we have our own opportunities for doing that, Mr. Speaker.

I again just want to make the point that these annual reports and financial statements are made available. The Crowns are required to publish these by law and they do so, Mr. Speaker, and that those reporting standards and practices have improved — and, in my view, significantly — since 1991, Mr. Speaker.

Also there is a Provincial Auditor. The Provincial Auditor is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly who reports to the people, to the public, through the Legislative Assembly.

The Provincial Auditor works with private accounting firms to make sure the books of the Crowns are in order. I think it's fair to say that not only has the Provincial Auditor's capacity to work with these private auditing firms to look at the books of the Crown corporation, not only has that been enhanced over the years, I think it's fair to say that the independence of the Office of the Provincial Auditor has been strengthened since 1991.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — And that's important because if the public, if the public are to have confidence, confidence in the financial reports, in the financial reports and activities of Crown corporations that are published, then they want to know that there's someone independent who's able to look at those books and to report to them as to his or her view on those financial statements. And then a key part of that is to ensure that that office not only is independent but that that independence is strengthened over the years, Mr. Speaker. And again, that is something that has been, in my view, substantially improved since 1991, Mr. Speaker.

There are also various other opportunities for people to get information about how our Crowns are operating. There is, or was, of this Legislative Assembly a Crown Corporations Committee which is a committee of members from both sides

of the House where detailed reviews of Crown corporation activities are conducted and again by members from both sides of the Legislative Assembly. And in that committee, the presidents and the chief operating officers of the Crown corporations are brought in to answer questions by members of the Legislative Assembly, questions based on the annual reports that these Crowns put forward, questions about comments raised by the independent officer, the Provincial Auditor, about Crown corporation activities.

And members take their job seriously and they, I think it's fair to say, do vigorous questioning of those individuals, Mr. Speaker, so as to get a full appreciation of what kind of activity those Crowns have been involved in. They even stray into current issues of the day, Mr. Speaker, to try and get an understanding as to how Crowns are involved in those issues. And then, if members are not satisfied with the answers they get or they believe that those answers provide the need to ask the government about policy issues or decisions that are made by the government with respect to these Crowns, then of course members are in a position to ask questions in question period about the activity of those Crowns as well.

And I don't think there's a person in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, that doesn't understand that members of the Legislative Assembly do, can, will, have, continue, will always be asking questions of the government about the government's handling of the Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker.

And that's something that would not happen with respect to private corporations, Mr. Speaker. Opposition members can't come into the House and say, I want to know about what Esso is doing about the price of gasoline at the pumps.

Well the government has no control over Esso. The government doesn't own Esso. So members of the opposition don't ask here about how it is that the government is handling Esso, because we don't handle Esso.

But the members can and the members do ask questions about the rates of Crown corporations, the activities of Crown corporations, the investments of Crown corporations, all kinds of questions about Crown corporations.

And those issues then tend to become the things that are reported on for the public, and we accept that as a government. We think that's an important part of having open and transparent government, and to have an accountable handling of Crown corporations in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and we wouldn't have it any other way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — I tell you, Mr. Speaker, on any given day there may be questions raised about the conduct of Crown corporations, or some investment by a Crown corporation, or an activity by a Crown corporation that in the short run we don't find embarrassing.

But I tell you, Mr. Speaker, too, that notwithstanding these transitory issues that are raised, we on this side of the House take the point of view that we strongly, strongly believe in open and transparent government, and in accountable government,

Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Finally, Mr. Speaker, the government also has put into place something called the Saskatchewan Rate Review Panel to conduct independent reviews of rate change requests from Crown corporations so that if SaskEnergy wants to increase its prices — and those things do occur; none of us like it but those things do occur — then in addition to everything else, Mr. Speaker, they have to appear before a Saskatchewan Rate Review Panel. And those panel holds public meetings to which the public, at the end of the day, also has an opportunity to make their comments known.

SaskTel, of course, is regulated by the federal government's Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, also known as the CRTC. So if SaskTel wants to increase its rates it has to appear before a federal regulatory body, Mr. Speaker.

Now, if people want to know more about these Crown corporations and what it is that they do, people can go to the Internet and go to www.cicorp.sk.ca, so that's www.cicorp.sk.ca and that Web site has links to many of the Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker, which describe their activities, which describe all of the things that they do, a bit of their history, Mr. Speaker. And if people don't have the Internet, I think that if they could write any of their members of the Legislative Assembly, a member of the Legislative Assembly would be more than pleased to provide them the information that is available on those Web sites or answer any other questions that people might have about Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that I'm very concerned about, because I think they potentially can impact our Crown corporations, and that is the question of deregulation that's sweeping our country as it has swept through much of the United States. What do I mean by that, Mr. Speaker? For example, in the area of electrical utilities, in Saskatchewan we have a regulated public system in which we have public control over prices and generating capacity.

Now that's not to say that we can influence all of the factors that influence prices, Mr. Speaker. For example, we cannot dictate the price of coal. We cannot dictate the price of natural gas which are used to generate electricity in Saskatchewan. So if the price of natural gas goes up or if the price of coal in Saskatchewan is increased because of whatever demands there might be, then SaskPower, which uses that natural gas or uses that coal to generate electricity and they have to pay more, then yes, the customers have to pay more, Mr. Speaker.

But as I mentioned, there is a rate review panel which can assess whether or not the increase that's being applied for by SaskPower is a reasonable one. Unlike Esso which . . . or a gasoline company, major gas companies, they can increase the price of gas if they want or decrease it and they don't have to justify that to anyone, Mr. Speaker. But in a regulated public system these utilities do have to justify at the end of the day the prices that they hope to charge to their customers.

Mr. Speaker, in a deregulated jurisdiction, the basic idea is that anyone can generate power and sell it for whatever price a buyer is prepared to pay for it. And the basic idea is that like any other market item, supply will be produced to meet demand and then you have competition and competition will keep the prices down.

(16:15)

I'm not sure that theory, which comes from right-wing circles and comes from groups like the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker, that that theory is working out as well in practice as those who support the theory would like to see.

There have been many attempts across North America to deregulate the electrical systems and it has not been wildly successful in my view, or in the view of the people that live in various jurisdictions in North America.

The people of California, for example, is one that many people in Saskatchewan will be familiar with because of the coverage that was in the media during the course of the last number of years about brownouts in California, wildly escalating rates in California, Mr. Speaker, that caused grave concern for electrical customers, the consumers in California. And people in Saskatchewan will know about that.

They will also know that Alberta has gone the same route, Mr. Speaker, of electrical deregulation. Essentially anyone that wants to can set up a electrical generation and sell it into their electrical grid and it'll be sold to and sold through something called the Alberta power pool, Mr. Speaker.

Well I'm not sure that the people of Saskatchewan are as wild . . . or the people of Alberta are as wildly enthusiastic as the planners of this system had anticipated, Mr. Speaker, because in part it seems to have meant a larger-than-ordinary increase in electrical, in electrical costs in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. It seems that electrical costs are about 60, 70 per cent higher for most consumers in Alberta than when deregulation was first put into place.

The kind of increases in electrical capacity that they were hoping for in the sort of unfettered market economic approach to electrical production have in fact not turned out in Alberta. Reports that are put out by Hydro Quebec and Manitoba Hydro which survey electrical prices throughout the country, they suggest that electricity prices in Edmonton and other Alberta communities have gone from being among the lowest in Canada to the most expensive in Canada.

And, you know, at the end of the day you hope to see governments do things that has a practical bearing and do things that will benefit the greatest number of people in their jurisdiction. And you don't like to see governments do things that are, you know . . . I guess the proper term is too strictly illogical, that you do things because you believe in something. That it should work that way; never mind that it doesn't practically work that way. But you don't want to see governments do that. And that seems to have been the case in Alberta where the right-wing people seem to have gotten control of the government and convinced the government of the day to go in this way of deregulation.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would be very interested to hear in this debate what it is that the members of the Sask Party have to say about this. They will likely point out that in Saskatchewan, oh, we've already deregulated and so what are you talking about? Well there is some limited deregulation.

If we want to, for example, sell surplus power in Saskatchewan — and sometimes we do have surplus power in Saskatchewan — to communities outside of Saskatchewan, well then we have to open up our transmission lines to people being able to sell to communities inside Saskatchewan. In the main, that's benefited SaskPower and the people of Saskatchewan. And SaskPower's been able to generate revenues through that process, which has allowed it to keep electricity prices down for the people of Saskatchewan even while they're being ratcheted up for our neighbours to the west, Mr. Speaker. So in a very limited way, there has been a benefit. Now I might point out that those lines are still owned by SaskPower for the benefit of the people of Saskatchewan.

So we've seen some limited deregulation and I know that the members of the opposition will talk about, oh, we've already seen deregulation. Well not really, Mr. Speaker, and we would like to hear their views on the wider question of deregulation and how they would approach the production and the sale of electricity in Saskatchewan in the years to come, Mr. Speaker. We look forward with great interest to what comments the opposition might have to make about that.

This deregulation, Mr. Speaker, is a . . . is in my view an experiment, an adventure that's fraught with great difficulty. And we've seen this in Alberta, not only for the people who are the electrical customers but also some of the businesses in Alberta.

I was able to visit the Lethbridge Ironworks a few months ago with some of my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, to talk to people who run the Lethbridge Ironworks and their experience with electrical deregulation and how deregulation means that their prices have gone up and that an extraordinary amount of their time is now spent in trying to find, on any given day, where it is that they can buy the cheapest electricity to keep their plant going. This is a company that's operated in Lethbridge since 1898 and they depend very greatly on electricity; it's a major input cost for them.

They looked at extreme measures such as moving production from days to nights — as opposed to having people work from 8 to 4 during the day to produce the goods that they produce, people would then start at midnight when the electrical rates were cheaper in their deregulated environment. And to their credit they didn't do very much of that because they are a family-owned company and they understand that families do not work well when the, when workers have to work throughout the night hours, Mr. Speaker, to put bread on the table.

But that, I think, is some of the problems that deregulation is creating for individuals in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated we would very much like to hear from the opposition what their views are on deregulation, and also more generally on the position of Crowns.

I might say that the opposition has presented a confusing picture of Crown corporations. It's almost as if on the one hand they're sending out a message to their right-wing supporters that they wouldn't for a moment continue on with the kind of Crown corporation activity that we see in Saskatchewan and that they would move to change that — as has been the case in the part of right-wing governments in Saskatchewan. The Devine government too made some significant changes in the area of Crown activity, and I do remember a very significant debate taking place in Saskatchewan over their attempts to sell SaskEnergy, Mr. Speaker, that the public strongly opposed.

We still get, you know, yes on the one hand they seem to be sending out messages to their right-wing support base that they would make drastic changes, drastic changes in Saskatchewan's economy because it's through those drastic changes that they see Saskatchewan being able to make a drastic impact on whatever, supposedly in their view, is troubling Saskatchewan economy . . . which, you know, at the end of the day Saskatchewan economy is not doing all that badly, Mr. Speaker.

Again this last month we saw an increase of 11,000-plus jobs over the same period of the previous year. Oil activity is up tremendously over the previous year. Welfare caseloads continue to drop in Saskatchewan. So there are a lot of things that are good about Saskatchewan's economy, Mr. Speaker. But they, of course, they don't believe that. They think that they can make huge, drastic changes in our economy so . . . And they seem to be indicating that Crown . . . changes to how we approach Crown corporations would be a major part of that and somehow they seem to be signalling that. And you have people like the member for Arm River who makes statements about, given time and the right opportunity, that they would sell off Crown corporations.

An Hon. Member: — Did he write that in the paper?

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Sell off Crown corporations? Well that's what he wrote in the paper, Mr. Speaker, that they would sell off Crown corporations, the major Crown corporations. So he says that, you know, he said here in the paper, he agreed the province should sell off its Crown corporations. And he noted that the Sask Party — that is the Saskatchewan Party, the former Conservatives — has always talked about getting rid of the Crown corporations.

And, Mr. Speaker, that seems to be one message that they send to their right-wing supporters about how they need to do that, and that's been a major part of their economic platform. But on the other hand they have members who are saying, oh no, we wouldn't touch a thing. We wouldn't do anything. We love the Crowns. Maybe make a few changes here and there, but we really wouldn't touch them.

So I might say that it's a confusing picture that comes from the Saskatchewan Party. And their own right-wing supporters will be interested to know where it is that their party, the Saskatchewan Party, clearly stands when it comes to the question of continued public ownership of the Crown corporations.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I've gone on at length here about the value of Crown corporations to the people of Saskatchewan and

at this point, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the contribution by other members in this debate. I know that members on this side of the House will speak positively about the value of Crown corporations in our province, in our society, in our economy. And we certainly look forward to the contribution by members opposite so . . . because they now do have an opportunity to clearly articulate where it is that they stand on the important questions, Mr. Speaker, of continued Crown ownership for our utilities and the important question of deregulation and what impact that might have on Crown corporations.

And having said that, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Nutana:

That this Assembly affirm the value to the people of Saskatchewan of our Crown corporations which provide essential services throughout the province, create jobs for Saskatchewan people, contribute to the social, cultural and recreational life of Saskatchewan communities, and which have generated \$1.6 billion in contributions to the GRF over the past eight years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I think this is an important debate that is going to become more evident to the people of Saskatchewan in the months ahead because we have certainly heard, over the past several months and years, in the Saskatchewan Party that should they form the majority government in the province of Saskatchewan that they would not be unopposed to privatizing Crown entities in the province of Saskatchewan.

And in 1986 when I became a member of this Legislative Assembly, we came to understand what privatization meant for our citizens when their forebearers or forefathers and mothers, the Devine Conservatives, came into this Legislative Assembly and brought several Acts before this House where they were going to privatize major Crown corporations in the province of Saskatchewan. And let me give you some examples.

Their predecessors, the Devine Conservatives, privatized the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan and I can tell you that members on this side of the House that were in opposition in those days spent hundreds of hours on their feet opposing the decision to privatize the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, PCS. And why did we do that? We opposed that privatization because we did not want that Crown entity to leave the province of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the one thing I learned as a young child, one of the things I learned as a young child in this province, growing up in this province, is that when wealth is created in a province or in a community, you do everything that you can to make sure as much of that wealth stays in your community in order to support services and to support citizens.

(16:30)

And, Mr. Speaker, their predecessors privatized the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, allowed the shares to be held by

people outside of this province. Any revenues or wealth that was created in the form of dividends went to people mostly outside of Saskatchewan. The board of directors, most of the people on the board, came from outside of the province. The decisions were made for the good of the shareholders, who weren't necessarily the citizens of this province. And therefore we now have basically a shell of a corporation with its head office in Saskatoon. That's point number one.

In terms of their . . . What they do here in the province of Saskatchewan, the head office jobs, if you compare the numbers of head office jobs in Saskatoon today, compare that to 1987, you will find a significant difference. That's point number one.

Point number two. Then the predecessors, the Devine Tories, of which many of these people worked for or were associated with, decided to privatize SMDC, Saskatchewan Mining Development Corporation.

Now fortunately for the province, the majority of uranium in the world is located here. And I can say, Mr. Speaker, that if you look at the companies that are located here, many of those head office jobs are here. They are not elsewhere.

But one of the things that disturbed us at the time, and my colleague for Cumberland was the critic for SMDC, was that there was \$1 billion, \$1 billion worth of gold in the ground that we were concerned was not going to be the property of the people of Saskatchewan.

Now gold has not yet been developed, but should gold ever be developed in Saskatchewan, I can tell you this, that the dividends from that gold will not be owned by the people of Saskatchewan in the form of dividends that come through the Crown Investments Corporation, but they will go elsewhere.

Then let's talk about SaskEnergy. The brilliant minds in the Devine government decided that they were going to privatize SaskEnergy — the brilliant minds. And, Mr. Speaker, we stopped them dead in their tracks and they knew that we rang the bells in this Legislative Assembly for over 17 days, I believe, and guess what? They created a little committee and the thing went away and we came into the House after the general election in 1991 and gave them a thorough thumping, Mr. Speaker.

And these people, they have petitions in the legislature day in and day out and day in and day out. Well guess how many signatures we got on that SaskEnergy petition? Guess how many signatures? It wasn't 10; it wasn't 20; it wasn't 30; it wasn't 40. How many hundreds and how many thousands did we get on a petition? We got over 100,000 signatures on a petition to deny the Government of Saskatchewan, the Devine Tories, of which many of these people are associated with, and we defeated them in the polls in 1991.

Now, Mr. Speaker . . . Oh, Mr. Speaker, the member from Swift Current says he was too busy doing whatever he was doing. But I can tell the member that I think he was the ministerial assistant to Mr. Gerich during those heady days when they were busy privatizing the various resource Crowns in the province.

Now let's talk about Sask Oil and Gas. Now we had a little

company called Sask Oil and Gas that provided dividends to the Crown Investments Corporation, and those dividends were used to pay for important public services, like in health and education.

And these people over here decided that they were going to privatize SMDC. And guess what? And we predicted this was going to happen. That SMDC which became Wascana Energy, that we would get to the point where those jobs and head office would not be located in the province of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, what we predicted in the '80s came to be, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these people like to think they're the big business people. They know all about the stock market, they know all about wealth creation, and they are the heady business people in the province of Saskatchewan. And business is apparently represented in the legislature by the members opposite. They know how to make a buck — they think, they say.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I remember very well — and it may even have been the member from Cannington, it may have been him; and certainly Mr. Boyd from Kindersley, which apparently he thought he was a big-time business person — when it came to the heavy oil upgrader in Lloydminster and, Mr. Speaker, the Devine government decided to invest in the heavy oil upgrader in Lloydminster, along with the Government of Alberta, which I think was Tory at the time, and the Government of Canada, which I think was Tory at the time. So we have three governments involved in the construction and ownership — partial ownership — of the heavy oil upgrader in Lloydminster.

And what the members opposite were saying to us when the whole thing was kind of going apart and the price of oil was down, they said get rid of your share of the heavy oil upgrader. Don't let the taxpayers of this province be on the hook because of that bad little deal which their predecessors, the Devine Tories and the Mulroney government and I think it was the Getty government, got themselves into the 1980s.

And we decided we weren't going to do that. What we decided that was that we were going to buy some of those shares of the Canadian government, Mulroney's shares, and the Alberta government, I think it was Mr. Getty — we were going to buy their shares. And guess what happened? Their busy . . . The big-time business people over there telling us what we should be doing with the heavy oil upgrader, and guess what happened? We made a whole pot of money for the people of Saskatchewan.

And I listened very carefully to the member from Kindersley who likes to call us the socialist hordes — the socialists. And apparently he comes from a socialist background according to what he said in his, I think it was his Throne Speech, that we are the socialist hordes that don't know how to run anything.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say we do know how to run, we do know how to run things. I would say that there is probably more people on this side of the House that read the financial pages in our various financial magazines than anybody over there.

I don't even think they read *The Globe and Mail* financial pages

every day. Well I know that there are people on this side that do. I know that there are people that subscribe to various financial journals, trying to understand what's happening to the market. I know that for a fact. And in fact, Mr. Deputy Chair, I think you might even do that.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say this: that if you look at what's happened in this province in the last 10 years, we have seen more than \$1.6 billion . . . billion dollars to return to the people of Saskatchewan through dividends from Crown Investments Corporation.

And where has that money come from? Well, Mr. Speaker, it has come from Crown entities that are owned and controlled by the people of this province. And when those Crown entities make money, where do the dividends go? Do they show up on the Toronto Stock Exchange, or the New York Stock Exchange, or the Canadian stock exchange? No, they don't. They show up over at CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) in the form of dividends that are then paid to the Gross Revenue Fund to pay for things like health, education, transportation, municipal government, the environment, and so on and so forth.

Those dividends don't go into my personal pocket as a shareholder or the members opposite. And I'm sure some of us do have private holdings of individual stocks in this legislature. And we know that if the company makes money, we will get paid a dividend on our share. That is when a company is owned by private shareholders.

But in the case of Saskatchewan, we have Crown corporations like SaskEnergy, SaskTel, SGI, SaskPower that pay their profits into Crown Investments Corporation which then pays those profits over to the people of Saskatchewan in the form of a dividend. And we can pay for our health, education, and social services. And I think it was 300 million last year, and I believe it's 200 million this year — I may be incorrect — but it's a lot of money, Mr. Speaker. And I know it's about the size of the health budget increase. Health spending is going up by \$186 million. Well I can say with some certainty, that money could have come from the dividends paid by our Crown corporations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have Crown corporations that employ people. Now if we had, let's say, AT&T or Bell Canada owned SaskTel, do we think those head office jobs would be in Saskatchewan? Do we think the technical support jobs, the computer jobs, would be here in Saskatchewan? Well, Mr. Speaker, I think maybe the maintenance jobs would be here. I think maybe some of the supports to make sure the lines are operating would be here. But I'm not sure the president would be located here or the vice-president or the executive director. There might be a little manager here, Mr. Speaker. That's what I know.

I also know if you watch telcos across the world in the last decade — across the world — and look at what's happened to the share price of those telephone companies across the globe, you will note that they're in the tank. They haven't made any money.

Now I can report to the people of Saskatchewan that SaskTel has made money. And it's made money while providing high-speed Internet when many of those international telephone

companies won't provide high-speed Internet into some parts of Toronto and Calgary and Vancouver and Edmonton. Well guess what? High-speed Internet is in Moose Jaw and Saskatoon and Regina and P.A. (Prince Albert) and North Battleford and many, many other small communities and villages.

I know that SaskTel has cellphone coverage. And I also know that many of those telcos that aren't making any money, Mr. Speaker, haven't got telephone coverage in the form of cell coverage in areas of those private telephone companies, Mr. Speaker.

So I can say to the people of Saskatchewan, our Crown corporations employ over 9,000 people. They have head office jobs that are located right here in Saskatchewan, and those individuals pay taxes and buy goods and services right here in Saskatchewan and support our business people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — The other thing I know, Mr. Speaker, is that those Crown corporations do \$2 billion worth of purchasing from business right here in Saskatchewan. Now I'm not sure if those Crowns were privatized whether the shareholders in New York City or Toronto would want to buy those goods and services from Saskatchewan people. What do you think, Mr. Speaker? Do you think they would? I don't think they would. I don't think they would.

Let me give you another example. Now the members opposite try and do this little game where, oh, something lost a little money and that means that Crown corporation is bad — it is bad.

Well let's talk about that, Mr. Speaker. If you are a shareholder in a private company, those private companies make investments and as any shareholder knows, you have winners and you have losers. The trick is to have more winners than losers. The trick is to make sure that the winners make a lot more money than any money you might have in the form . . . or a loss in the form of the loser. That's called business, Mr. Speaker. And for the members opposite not to understand that is shocking, Mr. Speaker. It is shocking, Mr. Speaker. Because any business person . . . Ask any business person. You will make a decision that ends up being a loser. The hope is the other side of your business makes more money so it balances off the loss, Mr. Speaker.

And those folks over there don't understand it. Unless they don't want to understand it because their game plan, their game plan, is to so destroy the images of Crown corporations in Saskatchewan that it'll be all ready to privatize should they ever become government.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I know this: 80 per cent of the citizens — obviously including some people who support the Sask Party — 80 per cent want our Crown corporations to remain in public hands.

(16:45)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — And, Mr. Speaker, the Crown that they try to discredit the most is SaskTel. And guess what, Mr. Speaker? We have competition in Saskatchewan in long-distance rates. And guess what, Mr. Speaker? Ninety-three per cent of Saskatchewan citizens have SaskTel as their long-distance carrier. How many of the opposition have SaskTel?

Well, Mr. Speaker, they want to try and discredit SaskTel. They would like to see nothing other than SaskTel privatized. But let them understand, 93 per cent of the citizens that have telephones in this province, and long distance, use SaskTel. It's not Sprint, it's not Rogers, and so on. And guess why they do, Mr. Speaker? Because they want jobs here. They know Rogers and IT&T and Sprint don't have jobs here, not like SaskTel.

They want to support their telephone company — their telephone company. And that's not ideological, Mr. Speaker. That's not an NDP thing or a Liberal thing, it's not ideological at all. It's about supporting SaskTel in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to what the member from Arm River had to say. Now . . . and I also, you know, go on to the Sask Party Web site every once in a while just to see what kind of policy they've got going for them. Well, for the people of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Party Crown corporation policy is as follows, regarding privatization . . . Now I ask you, does the NDP have a policy on privatization? No, we don't. But these ideologues over here have a policy on privatization. And what's their policy say?

The Saskatchewan Party policy of . . . oh it's of privatization, is set out as follows . . . And for people who want to get on to building Saskatchewan a new century, their Web site, it is CC9701. First point:

Privatization will be considered if it is demonstrated that continued government ownership is no longer in the best interest of taxpayers.

Well, you know, I asked my colleagues, I asked the people of Saskatchewan, what does that mean? Who decides whether it's in the best interest of Saskatchewan taxpayers? Is it the Saskatchewan Party? Is it the citizens of Saskatchewan? Who makes this decision? Do they make the decision in some little backroom like they did under the Devine Tories to privatize? Do they make the decisions?

Or is it the . . . Or is it the Executive Council of the Sask Party? You know, that committee that decided that Grant Schmidt shouldn't have his nomination. Sixty-one people decided he shouldn't have his nomination when 1,200 people went out to the nominating meeting in Langenburg and decided that Mr. Schmidt should be their candidate in the next general election. Is that who's going to decide?

The second thing they say is:

Privatization of a Crown utility will be accomplished through an initial public share offering made available first to . . . (citizens) of Saskatchewan.

Well I ask you, how does that work? How do you have a

publicly . . . an initial share offer that's only made to the citizens of Saskatchewan? How do you get on to the Toronto Stock Exchange? How do you get on to the New York Stock Exchange? This thing doesn't work. Third thing:

All net revenues from the sale of any Saskatchewan Crown asset will be applied directly to Saskatchewan's debt.

Well we'll see about that. Four:

Any legislation required to pursue privatization of a Saskatchewan Crown Corporation will contain clauses requiring the corporation's base of operations and head office to remain in Saskatchewan.

Well let me tell you how that works. Here's how it works. Here's how it works. So you have a . . . Let's use the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan which has shares sold on the Toronto Stock Exchange and the New York Stock Exchange. And the shareholders get to the point of view where they don't want to be hidebound by some sort of little piece of legislation that says you have to have your operation here. They won't accept that. They won't accept that. And they might even say, if you want us to do business in your province, you're going to have to relax that. That's how that works, Mr. Speaker.

But these people over here don't understand how it works three years or four years or five years or six years down the road. But I can say with certainty that our government has had some experience with the kind of aftermath of their privatizations in the 1980s, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the other thing I want to say is that the Conference Board of Canada rated our Crown corporations as amongst the best-governed corporations in Canada. That really does say something about how we have set up the governance structure. And, Mr. Speaker, you know what? You know what, Mr. Speaker? A vast majority of the board members of our Crown corporations are citizens of the province of Saskatchewan.

Now I ask you this. When you're on a board — let's use PCS as an example — and you're an international shareholder and you may come from the United States of America and you're sitting on this board, do you really think those shareholders think about how we're doing down here in Saskatchewan when they're representing those shareholders? I don't think so, Mr. Speaker.

But I do know this — that when you are a representative on a board of directors of a company, whether it's a Crown company or a private company in the province of Saskatchewan, you do think, you do think about what the people in your home province care about — care deeply about, Mr. Speaker. That I do know.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the other point I want to make as . . . for the citizens is that our Crown corporations have helped restore Saskatchewan's financial position. There's no doubt about that. No doubt about that. When we came to government in 1991 we had close to \$15 billion in debt. In debt. And, Mr. Speaker, Moody's . . . and they're chirping over there, you know, obviously you know . . . and you throw the dog a bone and it yelps — you might have hit him. That's what I can say about

the people opposite, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — Members of the Assembly, it's my duty to ensure that the member who's speaking, in this case the member for Saskatoon Nutana, has the ability to speak without undue interruption. And I think we're getting a little, a little too noisy on both sides of the House. So I'm wondering if we could have order, wondering if we could have order, and let the member for Saskatoon Nutana complete her remarks. Thank you.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, Crowns have helped restore Saskatchewan's financial position and Moody's investment service has reviewed Saskatchewan's finances and has commended CIC for rationalizing and restructuring its operations and investments in the Crown corps and reducing the province's guaranteed debt exposure. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's something to be proud of and we should be congratulating those Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to point out that the Crowns in our province every year invest over 400,000 . . . or \$400 million to expand and improve services, and by doing that they create thousands of construction jobs for our tradespeople right here in Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, the most important thing is that our Crown corporations benefit our citizens by providing some of the lowest overall rates for public services in Canada. Mr. Speaker, Crown corporations deliver services to areas where other companies wouldn't go because of high infrastructure and operating costs.

Now, Mr. Speaker, no taxpayers' money has gone into Crowns since the Devine PC (Progressive Conservative) years when the government of that day — when the government of that day — stripped equity from the Crowns and thus forced them to borrow.

Now the members opposite don't like that. And if they weren't so sensitive about the Devine government, I don't think they'd be yipping and yapping the way they are. But, Mr. Speaker, the reality is — the reality is, Mr. Speaker — that they have their associations with the Devine Conservatives. There's no question about that. In fact the member from Estevan, who I can hear over the din, I think she was Grant Devine's constituency assistant, Mr. Speaker. I think that's who she was, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well it's true. It's true. She was Grant Devine's constituency assistant so she knows all about Grant Devine, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I just want to make this point and this is important. Let's take the Crown dividend paid last year and I believe it was \$300 million. Well, Mr. Speaker, that 300 million helped pave 700 kilometres of highways. Because if you look at the budget for highways, that's what about the budget for highways was, Mr. Speaker. Every dollar earned by Crowns that is surplus to the reinvestment and debt-servicing needs is a dividend dollar. And that's money that goes into our provincial revenue or our gross or our General Revenue Fund which is important, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I could go on for some time on this issue but I'm sure we'll have many opportunities to debate the roles of the Crown in the Legislative Assembly and it'll be really curious to hear what the members opposite have to say about that.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of this debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:58.

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