



SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

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The Honourable Don Toth
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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 Premier — Hon. Brad Wall
 Leader of the Opposition — Lorne Calvert

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Wilson, Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Wotherspoon, Trent	NDP	Regina Rosemont
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney

[The Assembly met at 10:00.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — Members, before I recognize other members, I would like to introduce to you the Acting Chief Electoral Officer, David Wilkie. And joining him today is Beverlee Graf, the acting administrative coordinator from the Electoral office. I invite members to welcome them to their Assembly.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Humboldt, the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to this Assembly, it's my great pleasure to introduce Mr. Victor Prettyshield. If Victor could give us a little wave. He is seated in your gallery.

Victor is the Regina coordinator of Child Find Saskatchewan. He has been in his role with Child Find for two years now and works tirelessly for the cause of missing children within our province.

Mr. Speaker, dedicated individuals such as Victor and his colleagues at Child Find Saskatchewan and the many volunteers throughout our province remind us that a missing child is everyone's responsibility. Victor has joined us today to help promote the Green Ribbon campaign and to recognize the month of May as Missing Children's Month in Saskatchewan.

I know my colleagues in this House will want to join me today in commending Victor for his work on behalf of Saskatchewan children, and I ask all members to join me in welcoming Victor to his Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

Mr. Quennell: — Mr. Speaker, you may have noticed over the years that all school groups that come to the legislature are bright and good-looking, from great schools located in fine constituencies, and today is no exception. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, 25 students from — 25 bright and good-looking students — from the great school of St. Anne School in Saskatoon Meewasin — the fine constituency of Saskatoon Meewasin.

With the 25 students are their teacher, Rob Herrick, and chaperones Dolores Maurice, Treena Zdunic, Lori Froehlich, LeAnn Wright — probably not such an unbright or ungood-looking group themselves. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. LeClerc: — Mr. Speaker, to you and through you, I would like to introduce in your gallery Friends on the Outside. They are an ecumenical and intercultural charity providing support for inmates in the Regina Correctional Centre with programs such as journaling, guitar lessons, self-esteem building, and one-onto-one counselling. They offer liturgies as requested and support for community integration and family reconciliations. Their goal is to create a culture that accepts, receives, and fosters reconciliation and healing.

And I had an opportunity to speak at their annual fundraiser this past March 5. And I would like to introduce the founder, Father John Matheson — if you'd just give us a wave — and the current executive director, Ruth Robillard, and the members along with them today is Sister ReAnne, Father Matthew, Chris, and Ben. Welcome to your Assembly. Thank you.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Wascana Plains, the Minister Responsible for Sports, Culture and Youth.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you and to all members of this Assembly, a very talented young lady who resides in my constituency. Seated in the Speaker's gallery is Janean Lowenberger, accompanied by her parents Jean and Fred, and by her grandmother Janet Perkin. Janean is 17 years old and attends Greenall High School in Balgonie. She's looking forward to a fantastic summer, not only because she graduates from high school this year, but also because she will be realizing one of her dreams.

In July, Janean will be playing in a softball tournament in Central Park, New York City as a member of the 2009 Triple Crown USA [United States of America] team. She was selected by an American college coaches to be on the Triple Crown team and is the only Canadian to have been chosen. I'm told that Janean comes by her athletic ability quite naturally. Her grandmother Janet, sitting beside her, was a pitcher for the all-American girls' baseball team, the Kenosha Comets in 1946. So Janean is proudly carrying on the family tradition.

In addition to her skills at fast pitch, Janean is also an outstanding student. She maintains a 90-plus average, is a trainer for the football team, plays the flute and piccolo, has performed lead roles in the school musicals, and excelled at track and hockey. This young lady is clearly very talented and very accomplished. Our hope is that even if sports or schooling takes her out of the province for a while, that she comes back to her home province to live and work.

Please join me in wishing Janean great success. Thank you.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you, through you and to all members of the Assembly, someone who is a very, very close and a good personal friend in my life, and her name is Roxanne Senft. Perhaps she could stand so we could properly recognize her. She provides me a great deal of support. She is a great support for my family. And without individuals like her in the lives of us politicians and our crazy schedules, it makes things much more difficult. So I want to express my sincere thanks to her and her family and welcome her to the Legislative Assembly today. Thank you.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Indian Head-Milestone, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly, I'd like to introduce 14 grade 8 students from Milestone, Saskatchewan, about 30 miles south of Regina. And their teacher is David Hawkins. Certainly I welcome them to the Assembly.

I think it's very significant, especially this week as the SSSI [Saskatchewan Social Sciences Teachers' Institute on Parliamentary Democracy], the teacher's institute was taking part in the building over the last couple of days, and David attended that. And I know from that, certainly I think the students from Milestone have benefited absolutely from it. And I think it's always really beneficial when the teachers understand what happens in this room.

We get to meet with the students shortly after and try and explain it in about a 20-minute exchange. But when you have teachers like David who has done his homework over the last number of years and brings a class in every year, I think it really is beneficial to our youth of the province. So I'd like to thank him for all the work that he does in promoting our parliamentary system. Thank you.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to present 938 signatures on the petition. These will be the last opportunity I have to present the petition before we enact some legislation. This petition, Mr. Speaker, is in support of changes to *The Highway Traffic Act*, to be referred to as the Gallenger amendment. And the petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to enact changes to *The Highway Traffic Act*, to be referred to as the Gallenger amendment, which would require all vehicle traffic to slow to 60 kilometres per hour when passing a snowplow with their warning lights activated on Saskatchewan roadways.

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

Mr. Speaker, I've reviewed these 938 signatures that make the total more than 2,000 on this petition. They are from literally all across Saskatchewan. I noted as far away as Leader, Quill Lake, P.A. [Prince Albert], and many, many other communities, some from Swift Current. I don't want to omit communities, but in the interest of time I'm not going to read all of the communities, but it's a broad section from the province of Saskatchewan. I'm proud to submit these.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition that speaks to the need for the Government of Saskatchewan to recognize the essential role of all health care providers as valued members of the health care team, and that there needs to be a realization that the utilization and value of the full range of professional skills is promoted through retention and recruitment and by ensuring adequate staffing levels, and that there also needs to be a commitment to adequate funding and the installation of good faith in the provincial collective bargaining process.

And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to commit to maintaining health care services and job security for all health care providers.

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

Mr. Speaker, I so present on behalf of Saskatchewan working people and families. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition in support of indexing minimum wage. Mr. Speaker, the minimum wage increases are often sporadic and do not always reflect the rising cost of living faced by minimum wage earners. And the petitions reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to commit to indexing Saskatchewan minimum wage to ensure that the standard of living of minimum wage earners is maintained in the face of the cost of living increases.

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

The petitions are signed by residents of Prince Albert and Shellbrook. I so submit.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of rural residents of Saskatchewan who question why the Sask Party government is leaving them behind with respect to providing safe and affordable water. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to financially assist the town of Duck Lake residents for the good of their health and safety due to the exorbitant water rates being forced on them by a government agency, and that this government fulfills its commitment to rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, these petitions are signed by the good residents of Prince Albert, Duck Lake, Rosthern, Laird, Beardy's. I so present. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

Mr. Quennell: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition in support of preventing criminals from profiting from their crimes. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to enact legislation prohibiting any and all convicted criminals from receiving payment or remuneration for the recounting of their crime or for any memorabilia connected with the crime, and that the government enact this legislation in time to prevent Colin Thatcher from profiting from his murder of JoAnn Wilson.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever prayer.

Signed by citizens of Regina, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions in support of needed expansion of the graduate retention program. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately expand the graduate retention program to include master's and Ph.D. graduates.

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

These petitions are signed by concerned citizens of Yorkton, Canora, and Regina. Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

Missing Children's Month in Saskatchewan

Ms. Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has proclaimed May as Missing Children's Month in Saskatchewan. Child Find Canada is recognizing this month with their 18th annual Green Ribbon of Hope campaign. This campaign starts on May 1 and aims to increase public awareness of National Missing Children's Day held on May 25. My colleagues in this Assembly and I are wearing a green ribbon today to show our support and compassion for missing children. We wear the green ribbon to raise awareness of the problem of missing children. We wear it as a symbol of hope for families and friends who are missing loved ones.

The Government of Saskatchewan has adopted the Children's Advocate's office children and youth first principles as part of this plan to strengthen the province's child welfare system. Child Find Saskatchewan is guided by the very same principles. Recognizing the rights and protection of children and youth is paramount, and the safety and well-being of Saskatchewan's youngest citizens is everyone's responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Child Find Saskatchewan for making a difference in our communities by helping to protect our children. Child Find not only locates missing children, but delivers educational programs and raises awareness about missing children. I sincerely thank all the staff and volunteers of Child Find for the hard work and express our government's support for the Green Ribbon of Hope campaign. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to express my support and the support of the NDP [New Democratic Party] opposition caucus for the 18th annual Green Ribbon of Hope campaign. The green ribbon of hope represents a symbol to remember missing children and seek their safe return.

This month-long campaign is championed by Child Find Saskatchewan in partnership with Child Find Canada. This campaign, along with National Missing Children's Day on May 25, serves as an important reminder of those families whose lives were changed due to a missing child.

The green ribbon of hope was originally created by the students and faculty of Holy Cross Secondary School in St. Catharines, following the abduction and subsequent murder of one of their students, Kristen French. In memory of this heartbreak, the students and faculty directed that their idea for the green ribbon be used exclusively by Child Find Canada as an avenue to increase national public awareness and to raise funds to support our education and search programs for missing children.

It is with this story and the Green Ribbon of Hope campaign

that we take time to remember the tragedy families endure in Canada and Saskatchewan still today. By wearing this ribbon we recognize and show our support for these families, children, and friends of all those affected by a missing child.

It is our role as Members of the Legislative Assembly to raise awareness on important issues, and I do not think one could be more worthy than this. Children are the most vulnerable members of our society and whose futures will guide our great province forward. Therefore I would encourage the Assembly to recognize the vital work of Child Find Saskatchewan and Child Find Canada and to wholeheartedly support this campaign by wearing a green ribbon of hope. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[10:15]

The Speaker: — I recognize the minister from Indian Head-Milestone.

Notre Dame Hounds Win Championship

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, fellow members of the Assembly, I'd like you to join me in congratulating the Notre Dame Hounds on capturing the National Midget AAA Hockey Championship. The Hounds are located in the village of Wilcox, just south of Regina as well, and produce some of the best hockey players in North America.

Athol Murray College of Notre Dame is a Catholic, co-ed, independent, residential high school for students in grades 9 to 12. Father Père Athol Murray was appointed to St. Augustine's parish in Wilcox in 1927. The institute's name was eventually changed to honour his contribution. Though Père died in 1975, his legacy lives on. His beloved Notre Dame Hounds continue to produce many of North America's finest students through a balanced program that emphasizes the values of good character, leadership, and community living.

This past weekend, the Hounds had a 4 to 0 win over the Calgary Buffaloes in Selkirk, Manitoba, giving the Notre Dame Hounds their first national title since 1986. The Telus Cup was only one victory in this year's season. The Hounds won the Saskatchewan Midget AAA Hockey League with a resounding 34 wins, 7 losses, and 3 tie record. And on that, then went on to sweep three straight playoff series.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like everyone to join me in congratulating the fine young men on their phenomenal season.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Northern Hockey Champion

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Ty Gardiner is the Sergei Fedorov of the North. This is the case because Ty, a resident of Ile-a-la-Crosse, plays both forward and defence for the Beardsy's Blackhawks AAA hockey team.

Like Fedorov, Ty is a champion. Last year he helped

Saskatchewan win gold at the National Aboriginal Hockey Championship, and tomorrow Ty will join Team Saskatchewan to defend this national championship in Winnipeg.

In June, Ty will graduate from grade 12. In the future, Ty would like to go as far as his hockey will take him and then eventually attend university. However, Ty understands that his goals can only be achieved with hard work. His father has said that Ty spends his summers training for hockey and that Ty will be trying out for the La Ronge Ice Wolves.

Ty's father is Big Lou, or Louis Gardiner, the first person from Ile-a-la-Crosse to play in the WHL [Western Hockey League] junior hockey league. He played with the Flin Flon Bombers. As Louis has been involved in his community as the community recreation promoter, school board trustee, and municipal councillor, he's now the regional representative for the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan.

Ty has large shoes to fill, but if he skates with the La Ronge Ice Wolves, he will have accomplished one of his father's milestones. Ty has the Gardiner spirit and a Fedorov-like uniqueness within him. These have made him a leader amongst his peers, and in the future he will be a leader within the Métis nation.

Mr. Speaker, I wish Ty very well and tell him I'm very proud of him. Ty and his father, Louis, and his mother, Mary, are great Métis people from Ile-a-la-Crosse. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw North.

Business Excellence Awards in Moose Jaw

Mr. Michelson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, the 8th Annual Business Excellence Awards were held last night in Moose Jaw with several businesses being recognized for quality and distinction in eight categories. Although our province and my community of Moose Jaw is not immune to the economic turndown, it was inspiring to see businesses come together to recognize their excellence and achievements.

Community leaders, staff, and friends came out to celebrate the fortunes of their accomplishments in Moose Jaw with the business of the year going to the Moose Jaw Co-op. Over the last 10 years, the Moose Jaw Co-op has returned over \$10 million of its earnings to its members besides being involved in other aspects of community.

Mr. Speaker, all nominees are recognized for their success. Other winners included: Hopkins Dining Parlour for the Pioneer Award; Mid West Efficiency Ltd. for job creation; Guys and Dawls of Hollywood for a new business venture; SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] Palliser Campus for healthy workplace; Velvet Hair Salon for marketing; Boh's Cycle & Sporting Goods for business innovation; Hoopla Clothing for young entrepreneur; Moose Jaw Tourism for customer service; and the Royal Bank for community involvement.

It was a gala event of achievement, Mr. Speaker, success and celebration and a reflection of entrepreneurial attitude in Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Prince Albert Northcote.

Prince of Wales Scholarship Recipient

Mr. Furber: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Stephanie Sasakamoose is a student at Wesmor Community High School in Prince Albert Northcote. Stephanie is a recipient of this year's Prince of Wales Scholarship. The scholarship was established during the Prince of Wales's visit to Saskatchewan in 2001 as a way to help students with the cost of education. The scholarships are awarded to grade 11 students to encourage them to graduate high school. Ten students across the province receive this scholarship each year in recognition of their hard work both in and outside their respective schools.

Mr. Speaker, Stephanie is most deserving of this award. She worked 20 hours a week at a part-time job and volunteered with the firefighting mentorship program in addition to being active in several school sports. Stephanie has since left her part-time job and cut back on some of her volunteer work so that she could focus more on school. This decision is one that school principal Shelley Storey lauds as a testament to Stephanie's strength of character and her maturity. Dr. Storey commends Stephanie for taking the time to prioritize in order to succeed.

Stephanie believes that she has succeeded because she is determined not to let difficulties in life keep her down. She has set for herself goals and is working to achieve them.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join me in offering congratulations to Stephanie Sasakamoose on being Prince Albert's recipient of the Prince of Wales Scholarship. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cut Knife-Turtleford.

2008 Income Tax Savings

Mr. Chisholm: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today is the deadline to file your 2008 personal income tax returns. As tax filing season comes to an end, Saskatchewan families are seeing the effects of the historic tax cuts introduced by our government last fall.

Many people will or will have already received larger refunds than expected. And all residents of this province are benefiting substantially from our government's legislation. Eighty thousand low-income families and individuals will pay no provincial income tax at all. These savings are primarily the result of our government's decision to increase the basic and spousal personal exemption by \$4,000 each. We also substantially increased the child tax credit to \$2,000. We also introduced a new low-income tax credit, Mr. Speaker, to ensure

that even people with little or no income, such as seniors or students, also benefited from these historic measures. When you factor in low-income tax credit, indexation, and the retroactive aspect of our legislation, Saskatchewan families are saving more than \$700 million this calendar year.

Mr. Speaker, while the Saskatchewan economy remains relatively strong, we are not immune to the effects of the global recession such as affordability; however, through these measures, our government is taking action. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

Minimum Wage and the Government's Record

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, in December 2007 the Minister of Advanced Education and Labour said the government would make a decision on linking minimum wage to the low-income cut-off, LICO, and indexing minimum wage by the first quarter of 2008.

In April 2008, the minister was asked if this government would be indexing the minimum wage and he said he was reviewing it. Mr. Speaker, that was a year ago. Tomorrow the last of the NDP's scheduled increases to the minimum wage takes effect, and this government hasn't given any indication that they are going to index the minimum wage.

Now to the minister: is the Sask Party government going to link the minimum wage to LICO and index it, or is the minister still reviewing this?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the opportunity to provide an update. I think as I've said previously in this Assembly, my first analysis on the timing was probably a little bit optimistic. That review still continues, Mr. Speaker.

But the news, Mr. Speaker, the news that just came out yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the average weekly earnings are up 3.5 per cent over February 2008, Mr. Speaker — the average weekly earnings, \$804. It's a record in Saskatchewan's history, second largest growth in wages in Canada. The national average, just over 1.8 per cent, Mr. Speaker. The third highest average weekly earning right across the country, Mr. Speaker.

We're pleased to be moving forward with the increase in minimum wage to 9.25. It's one of the largest minimum wages in Canada and, Mr. Speaker, we'll ensure that this work continues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I would make a suggestion. There's an easier way for this minister to avoid these questions. And rather than spinning what he's been doing over there on reviewing forever, he should just agree to index the minimum wage. That's my suggestion to him.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Iwanchuk: — When the NDP announced a plan that would link minimum wage to LICO and pass legislation that would index the minimum wage, the then Finance critic and now Minister of CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan] said he supported this idea. He was going around everywhere saying he supported this idea. In fact he said, Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party was the first to recommend indexing of minimum wage. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker.

Now considering the minister has the support of not only the Minister of CIC, but all the Sask Party, will he commit today to indexing the minimum wage?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Before I recognize the minister, it just seems that we have too many participants in the questions being asked and the response being given. I'd ask members to allow the minister to respond. Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite just made reference to forever. Well 16 years wasn't forever, but it was sure long enough for the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, as I've just said, we are moving forward with this commitment that we made. It was a campaign promise, one of over 100 that we've kept, Mr. Speaker. Not only have wages just gone up, Mr. Speaker, but what we can see from the employment stats is that we've gone up more than 10,900 people since March 2008. We've seen First Nation and Métis employment go up by 7.9 per cent. We've seen women's employment go up by over 8,900 positions, Mr. Speaker.

We know we're not immune from what's going on around us, Mr. Speaker, but on a relative scale we remain very confident in Saskatchewan's economy and the communities right across this fine province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, review, review, review. But, Mr. Speaker, the NDP believe that a person working full-time should have a high enough income to meet the low-income cut-off. Our plan was to match future increases in a minimum

wage to the poverty line.

We know that under the Sask Party many Saskatchewan families are under financial stress. Take for example the 40 per cent increase in the number of families going to the Saskatoon food bank. Now to the minister: does the Sask Party believe that a person working full-time in Saskatchewan should be able to meet their basic living expenses, and if so, what are they prepared to do about it other than review?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to talk about the work that we've done — the largest income tax reduction in Saskatchewan's history; the increase in the low-income tax credit, Mr. Speaker; new active families benefit for children's . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I recognize the minister.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than doubled the seniors' income plan for the first time in 16 years. We've just increased student loans for the first time since the mid-1990s. And just yesterday our Minister of Finance announced that there is 700 millions in tax savings for the people of this province. Delighted to stand on this record and compare it to the members opposite any time, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Utility Rates and Emissions Reduction

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party's excuse for their broken promises on climate change is their new-found desire to keep SaskPower rates affordable. Affordable utility rates didn't seem much of a concern when they were asking for a 13 per cent rate increase, mind you. And they didn't seem to be an issue when they trashed the \$320 million Green Future Fund the former NDP government established to meet our climate change targets.

To the minister: where was the Sask Party's commitment to keeping utility rates affordable when they squandered the money the NDP set aside to address climate change?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for the Environment.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting what the NDP consider squandering. And to begin, I would like to state yet again that the \$320 million was nothing more than a press release. It wasn't anywhere except in the GRF [General Revenue Fund]. It was never allocated.

But, Mr. Speaker, the \$320 million we used, \$140 million went

to highways and road construction — something that was completely neglected under the NDP; \$40 million in additional go green funding for environmental initiatives; and, Mr. Speaker, \$215 million for debt reduction. Only the NDP would consider that squandering.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[10:30]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Well, Mr. Speaker, they used our money that we left them in the \$320 million Green Future Fund to balance their budget. So the money that we left . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Throw a stone and hear what yelps. Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party says the Sask NDP has to choose between affordable utility rates and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. But the fact is, the Sask Party is providing neither. In fact the report from the rate review panel made it clear that the real problem is the Sask Party's inability to manage costs at SaskPower.

To the minister: how can the Sask Party ask for a 13 per cent rate increase, promise years of further rate increases, and then claim that they can't keep their climate change targets because they want to keep utility rates affordable?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for the Environment.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, I think what we just heard was the NDP true colours coming out — their absolute sense of entitlement that they think that the profits realized are their money. Not the money of the people of this province to be used for the benefit of the people of this province, but the NDP's personal little cash cow. I think it's absolutely a ridiculous position.

Mr. Speaker, a *StarPhoenix* article said, and I quote:

For years under the former regime, Saskatchewan was accused by environmental groups of being the country's worst laggard in acting to cut emissions. That goal was sacrificed year after year at the altar of offering the lowest-cost utilities bundle.

Mr. Speaker, it goes on to say, and I quote: "But it's a fool's game to believe [that] this province can reduce emissions without cost."

That's exactly our position. We will continue to do whatever we can to make life affordable for the citizens of our province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh

Acres.

Ms. Morin: — And I guess that plan included cutting out the lowest cost utility bundle for the poor citizens of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP acted to begin reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We built enough wind energy capacity in just six years to provide electricity to 73,000 homes. Over 16,000 homeowners benefited from rebates and grants for programmable thermostats, Energy Star appliances, and home upgrading programs.

The Sask Party has continued these programs but has done nothing to build on them since coming to office. Instead they promised emission reductions in 2020 from the nuclear power plant they seem so intent on building.

To the minister: what is the Sask Party doing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions this year, not years from now?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for the Environment.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, the \$320 million that the NDP is so fond of bringing up over and over again, it was one-time money, one-time money, Mr. Speaker.

And if the member opposite wants to know what we're doing, starting in 2008: SaskPower low-carbon energy sources, \$1.7 billion; renewable energy, \$139 million; energy efficiency and conservation, \$105 million; solid waste and water resource management, \$51 million; natural resource conservation, \$37 million; research and development, \$52 million; education and awareness, \$7 million — Mr. Speaker, over \$2 billion. I think their \$320 million pales in comparison to what we're doing.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Well unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, money to address greenhouse gas emissions in this province — zero dollars.

The Sask Party's excuse for everything is to blame the NDP. But as a prominent columnist pointed out yesterday in yesterday's *StarPhoenix*, "But it was your party's promise to meet these standards, Ms. Heppner."

In other words, if the Sask Party really thought it was impossible to keep affordable rates and address climate change, they should have said so during the election. But they didn't, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister: did the Sask Party ever have any intention of meeting the NDP's climate change targets or was it just a cynical ploy to convince voters that they had changed?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for the Environment.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, apparently the member opposite wasn't listening when I just read off this list. But I would point out that SaskPower low-carbon energy sources would reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

So, Mr. Speaker, as to the targets, the member opposite said in April 2008, and I quote, "I would say the federal targets are something they should clearly be adopting." And, Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader last September, and I quote from an article, "Calvert said the Conservatives' own federal plan will mean significant costs for Saskatchewan."

Mr. Speaker, they were concerned about the federal plan costing the residents of this province money. Imagine what their higher targets are going to cost the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

Profits From Crime and Victims' Rights

Mr. Quennell: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Justice passed off on to the opposition a responsibility to introduce legislation preventing criminals from profiting from the recollection of their crimes. The government has all the resources of the Ministry of Justice at its disposal, but according to the Minister of Justice, it's the opposition's responsibility.

My question then to the minister is this: if we take him up on his invitation, will he make the resources of the Ministry of Justice available to us to help prepare the best possible legislation?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. Yesterday I did in fact invite the members opposite to introduce a private member's Bill. Upon reflection and upon discussion with my colleagues, I and my colleagues feel that such legislation would in fact be better done if it was prepared using the resources of the Ministry of Justice, and accordingly I'm prepared to announce today that I directed my staff to prepare a piece of legislation that will be introduced next week. We will be looking for the members' opposite support in passing that so that it goes to a third reading within a day or two of having been introduced.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also announcing today that we will be undertaking a broad public consultation to deal with victims' rights generally to ensure that we've got broad future legislation that can enhance victims' rights not just with regard to specific items but with regard to all sources of revenue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Severance of Public Servants

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, a few days ago, we asked for an update on the cost of severance packages for the fired professional public servants. Now the Minister of Justice tried to claim he couldn't talk about issues before the courts — never mind that there are no issues before the courts, never mind that the government had made this type of information available to the public in the past.

To the Minister of Justice: can he confirm that the total cost to date of severance packages is in excess of \$10 million?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, we anticipate the cost of transition, it will be in the range of \$10 million, yes.

Mr. Speaker, when governments change, some employees change in order to carry out the new direction in government. Our government dismissed about 70 people as a result of the transition process.

Mr. Speaker, many of the members opposite were there in 1991 when in fact the NDP fired 200 Crown corporation and government employees in its first two months. Mr. Speaker, at that time a senior NDP cabinet minister said senior government officials had to be dismissed "without cause" in order to replace them with people "who better reflect the needs of the government." Mr. Speaker, that was Dwain Lingenfelter that said that.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, as I recall, the former Devine government did not terminate employees in this building. It was left to the incoming Romanow government. As I recall, Mr. Speaker, the Devine government had taken a number of employees out of the classified service, and they were orders in council. Now, Mr. Speaker, the people that this government fired were members of the professional, classified public service.

Now the minister has advised the media and now today he's advised the House that the number is in excess of \$10 million. Yet the Sask Party was asked a written question: what was the total cost of the severance packages? Yesterday the government claimed it would take them six more months to make that number available. This is the day after the minister told the media the number of 10 million.

So to the minister: why is he telling us the number today is 10 million when he's not prepared to put that in writing? Is that Sask Party stonewalling?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I can advise the member opposite there are still some matters that are not settled. I do not wish to prejudice or cause any damage to the negotiations that are ongoing. I would like very much — and I think the members opposite would share that view — that we would like to treat these people with care, compassion, and give them a reasonable settlement as quickly as possible.

Mr. Speaker, a new government needs new people in place in order to carry out the direction of the new government. That's the approach our government followed upon taking office, and it's the approach the NDP government followed upon taking office.

Mr. Speaker, in December 1991, the NDP fired Liquor Board chairman, Ted Urness. Darrel Cunningham, the minister at the time, said:

I'm not going to be critical of Mr. Urness's work. He's done a credible job. I'm not knocking the guy. I'm just saying we're moving in a different direction.

Mr. Speaker, we are treating these people appropriately, fairly, and moving as quickly as we can to get settlements. We will collect all of the information and we will provide detailed spreadsheets with all of the information on it.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — You know, Mr. Speaker, we have people in Duck Lake that are having their water cut off because of outrageous water rates, Mr. Speaker. Yet this government has over \$3 million . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I recognize the . . . Order. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — Yet this government has over \$3 million for a temporary pavilion during the Olympics, Mr. Speaker. This government has over \$10 million to fire and pay severance payments to public servants that got their jobs through the classified service, Mr. Speaker — \$10 million. I say they seem to have access to more money than brains, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker . . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker — Order. Order. Order. I just want to remind members to be mindful of the words they choose and how it reflects on the character of individuals. I think we all as members want to respect that. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — So, Mr. Speaker, why would anyone believe that it's \$10 million, according to the minister, when the Sask Party government isn't prepared to put this in writing?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, this is a government that intends to be and will be and will continue to be open, transparent, and accountable. If matters are before the courts, we're not talking about them. If there are things that involve specific personnel matters, we're not talking about them.

We have prepared a spreadsheet in accordance with the written question that was asked. They have been supplied information as it comes available and, Mr. Speaker, they will get all of the information.

Mr. Speaker, they are a government that when they came into office they actually went out and fired single women on Christmas eve. They were the most cold, callous, and unfeeling people imaginable. Mr. Speaker, they had no compassion, no sense of reasonableness. I quote former Premier Romanow. He said if they are politically incompatible with an NDP administration, he said, "it makes the person not competent to carry out the job."

I can't imagine something more offensive to a long-term career civil servant to find out that if they're not NDP supporters, they are not competent. What a thing for a former premier to say.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice claimed in the press scrum apparently that his government wanted people who "wanted the province to grow." Now, Mr. Speaker, we believe that's an insult to the people who were fired who got their jobs through the Public Service Commission.

To the minister: is he really prepared to stand in this House and say that the 70 people that came out of the classified public service that were fired by the Sask Party government did not want the province to grow? Or will the minister do the right thing and apologize to the professional public servants whose commitment and loyalty to our province has been attacked in the media?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, we want to hire people that are philosophically compatible with the new direction for this province, that they will have this province grow and take its rightful place in Confederation.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, they're the ones that are saying that they want growth now. What about when they were in government? They said, we will always be in and out of equalization; we will always want not to grow; we will be a wee province; there will be more there for the rest of us.

That is a group of people over there, Mr. Speaker, that have no

desire for the province to grow, no ability to make it grow. And for them to stand announcing, we're pro-growth, what a ludicrous thing for them to say. The member from Riversdale is the one that's on record as saying, we're not going to be a growing province. I don't know where they think they're coming from for now to say they've got a public service that was supportive of growth. It just wasn't on, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[10:45]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Gender Equity Issues

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the government about the gender gap in the pay of the Sask Party employees and also if there was any commitment to pay equity legislation. The minister not only didn't answer the question; he wasn't even in the right time zone.

In the Premier's office and in ministers' offices under this government, women get paid much less than men, much less. In this government, in the Premier's office, women get paid much less than men. Since the minister clearly has no idea how to answer the question, I'll ask the Premier.

To the Premier: does he feel this is acceptable?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, delighted to talk about the significant growth in opportunities for women in this province. Is there more to do? Yes, there is, Mr. Speaker, but based on the March 2009 data, women's employment was up 8,900 jobs.

What we just saw yesterday, Mr. Speaker, wages on the rise, Mr. Speaker, setting records. Mr. Speaker, \$804, it is now the third highest across the country, Mr. Speaker. Is there more to do? Of course there's more to do. That's part of a shared legacy that those individuals are responsible for. They made changes to the Status of Women office in 2002, Mr. Speaker. Is there more work to do? Yes, there is, but the data out today says we're making progress, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, women in this province on average earn 84 cents on every dollar that the average male makes. But in their offices, women make 53 cents for every dollar a male makes. That is a poor example for the government to be setting for women across this province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, this is a calculation done using the government's own numbers. And I know the minister likes to read, so I will recommend a couple of pieces: *Balancing the Scales of Pay Equity*, a document put out by CCPA [Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives], and also one that he may find informative, the former pay equity policy framework that was put in place by this government to provide equity for Saskatchewan women.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, when will the minister start valuing the contribution of Saskatchewan women and put in place pay equity?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the opportunity to reiterate the latest employment numbers, the latest numbers regarding wages, Mr. Speaker.

Regarding our government, Mr. Speaker, this government employs people based on merit, Mr. Speaker. The cost of government is less during this administration than it was during the previous administration. The cost of political staff salaries in the Saskatchewan Party government will continue to be lower than the NDP government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, what we can see, what we can see, Mr. Speaker, is a blatant attempt to try to resuscitate a very, very stagnant leadership campaign, Mr. Speaker. That's what we're seeing, Mr. Speaker. We're seeing poor NDP politics while we practise solid public policy.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day . . . Order. Before orders of the day, earlier I introduced our Acting Chief Electoral Officer and the manager in the office. They're here today to observe the presenting, pursuant to section 286, *The Election Act, 1996*, the report of the Chief Electoral Officer. I so lay it on the Table.

I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request leave to introduce a motion requesting leave for a member.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader has requested leave to present a motion. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed.

I recognize the Government House Leader.

MOTIONS

Granting of Leave of Absence

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move by leave of the Assembly:

That the privilege of exemption of a member from attending as a witness before any court while the Assembly is in session shall be waived, with respect to the voluntary attendance for the member for Saskatoon Sutherland at the Court of Queen's Bench with respect to her previous capacity as a peace officer.

And further, that the member for Saskatoon Sutherland shall be granted a leave of absence from the Assembly for this purpose from Monday, May 4 through Thursday, May 7, 2009 inclusive.

I so move.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader has moved a motion regarding the attendance of a member in the Assembly. And we'll ask, will the members take the motion as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. Carried. I recognize the member for The Battlefords.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to make a short statement.

The Speaker: — The member from The Battlefords has requested leave to make a statement. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from The Battlefords.

STATEMENT BY A MEMBER

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to offer my apologies to the members of this House, members of the public including the media, on comments that I made the other night, Mr. Speaker. While I realize the comments that I made were made in committee, I believe that those comments have implication beyond the scope of the committee. And I wish to make my apology more broadly than just to the members who were in that committee that evening.

Specifically, Mr. Speaker, my comments came near the end of a series of questions to the Minister of Energy and Resources during a public meeting of the Economy Committee Tuesday afternoon. More specifically, Mr. Speaker, on reviewing the committee *Hansard*, I see that I have said that a question I was about to put to the minister was requested to be put by a member of the media.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear to all members of this House, all members of the public, that although the question I was about to put was based on a transcript of media questions asked previously of the minister, no member of the media — not from Regina, not from my constituency, not from any other Saskatchewan constituency — asked me to put this question to the minister.

Mr. Speaker, I respect the role of the independent media. I was wrong to bring them into the debate of the committee. In my enthusiasm to hold the minister accountable for his earlier comments, I inadvertently misled the minister, the members of the committee, and by extension the members of this Assembly.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the minister, to the members of the committee, to the members of this Assembly, and to the members of Saskatchewan's hard-working media. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I thank the member from The Battlefords for that apology.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Carrot River Valley.

Support for Rural Saskatchewan

Mr. Bradshaw: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to have the opportunity to enter into and lead this debate this morning.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to start out with my motion. My motion is:

That this Assembly recognizes the actions of this government in providing more support to rural Saskatchewan in 16 months than the previous NDP government did in 16 years.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the important role rural Saskatchewan plays in growing and sustaining our current economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, the former administration spent 16 years systematically dismantling rural Saskatchewan. They allowed the highways to fall into disarray. They ignored the imbalance of education funding and didn't have a plan to reduce the education portion of property taxes. They closed rural hospitals. I could go on and on.

This is why this government has focused on the challenge of rebuilding, rebuilding rural Saskatchewan. We went ahead and fulfilled our promise to reduce the education portion on property tax to the farmers — to everybody, but especially farmers — to achieve a fairer balance for education funding.

And our government is spending \$152 million for 13 new

long-term care facilities right across Saskatchewan, most in rural Saskatchewan where they have been ignored for years. Mr. Speaker, we're planning and committed to rebuilding rural Saskatchewan — that, Mr. Speaker, is our vision.

It is evident, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP, and in particular their leadership hopefuls, have no clear vision for rural Saskatchewan. When you look through each individual hopeful's policy statements, they're scarce when it comes to rural population. What I'm going to do is I'm going to give you some of the quotes, some of the quotes of their various leadership candidates.

The leadership candidate Mr. Meili has said that:

... the party's disengagement with rural voters has grown so much, the NDP should hire rural employees to help rebuild those relationships.

"At this point ... [to me] the distance is so great, we need to invest some money."

"They really do feel that the NDP left them behind."

Mr. Speaker, the NDP had 16 years to build those relationships, and instead they burned the bridges. Not only burned them, they didn't fix them up. You should see our rural municipality.

Leadership candidate Mr. Pedersen said that the previous NDP government "... had an attitude that rural Saskatchewan was on the decline and didn't warrant the kind of investment required by urban areas." What a statement. Even a leadership candidate and former party president has acknowledged that their party has abandoned rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Pedersen also noted that it troubled him that many in his party seemed to have the attitude that rural Saskatchewan was in an inevitable decline, and there was nothing that could stop it. Mr. Pedersen is not the only one who is troubled by this attitude. The people of rural Saskatchewan who were ignored for 16 years are troubled by this as well.

Leadership candidate and former cabinet minister, the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow, has said that meeting with rural municipal councils in her constituency gave her a chilly reception. Go figure. Maybe because that administration has left them out in the cold for so many years. She recently said that the NDP missed a huge opportunity by not putting forward a more comprehensive platform in the last two elections. They had 16 years — 16 years — to work on rural issues. Why were they ignored?

The member from Moose Jaw Wakamow says that they need to be meeting with rural people face to face at all times and not just during a campaign. Isn't it common sense that you should listen to your constituents? Apparently not with the NDP.

Leading candidate Dwain Lingenfelter has said that his party made tactical mistakes in targeting cities while ignoring rural seats. He goes on to stereotype rural Saskatchewan by saying he can win rural votes simply by being a farmer. Rural Saskatchewan knows which party understands rural issues, Mr. Speaker, and that includes more than just agriculture. The

record is clear on who closed the hospitals and the schools and who is building new ones.

We have another quote that was from the *Prince Albert Daily Herald* of Mr. Lingenfelter. It says, "I think ... " and this is a quote:

I think that we've made some tactical mistakes in the way we prioritized seats. For example, cities like Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon are big priorities and then we have a few rural ridings that are a stage down and then we have a whole bunch where we [have] more or less [and] don't do a lot of work in.

Anyway. And it continues on; here's another one. In a recent forum, Mr. Lingenfelter said, "There are many issues a New Democratic Party government can reconnect with in rural Saskatchewan. We simply need to go and listen and find out what it is that they want and need." They, rural residents, have been telling them for 16 years, Mr. Speaker, what they wanted, and they just got ignored.

[11:00]

In the NDP publication, *The Commonwealth* had a stark assessment of the situation. "The NDP was blown out in almost every rural seat in the 2007 election so it is clear [that] a rural disconnect is now more prevalent than ever and the party has much work to do in this area."

Why did it take an election loss for the NDP to recognize that they cannot write off rural Saskatchewan? Rural issues are important, and they matter regardless of whom the residents vote for. Mr. Speaker, it is clear — it is crystal clear — that the NDP and their hopefuls are only concerned with rebuilding their own party support in rural Saskatchewan. They lack the vision to do any actual rebuilding themselves.

Mr. Speaker, there are many things that we can be sitting here talking about, what the NDP has done, or basically has not done in rural Saskatchewan. And I can't do it all in 15 minutes, believe me.

Now let's go back to their record. Let's go back to their record. Since the NDP came in, since the NDP came in, they closed ... This is on the health, and they closed 52 rural hospitals — 52.

Mr. Speaker, I have a story about this one because I was born in Arborfield. I was born in Arborfield and our first-born unfortunately had cerebral palsy. And we kept her at home for a long time, and finally it just got to be too difficult. She had to be tube fed. She had to be looked after on the 24-hour basis, Mr. Speaker. We were fortunate the hospital in Arborfield took and put her into long-term care. And Arborfield was only 15 miles away from Carrot River so this was good. This really helped our family out.

Unfortunately she passed away just before she was 10 ... Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. But what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is we were very fortunate to have that hospital there.

Shortly after that, shortly after that, they closed the Arborfield hospital. And they told the people that okay we're closing this

hospital, but Carrot River is only 15 miles down the road. While shortly thereafter, another couple years later, they closed down the hospital in Carrot River and they said, don't worry about that; Nipawin's only another half an hour down the road. Boy am I ever glad that we got in, Mr. Speaker, because I'm afraid that they would have ended up closing down the Nipawin Hospital and saying, don't worry, don't worry; Prince Albert and Melfort are just down the road a little further. They neglected, they neglected our health care in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. There is no denying that.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Bradshaw: — This government, this government is seeing people moving back into Saskatchewan. We want, we want to move this province forward. We're going to end up having to build hospitals. Actually we're building one right away in Humboldt, something that was talked about by that administration for a long time, Mr. Speaker.

You know as Health minister, as Health minister, the member from Battleford said in 2006 that the suspension of hospital services in rural Saskatchewan is a fact of life. No, Mr. Speaker, it is not. And now that same member from Battleford stands up and insists on building a brand new hospital in North Battleford. He was Health minister. He had years to do it but he didn't do it.

An Hon. Member: — Didn't get it done.

Mr. Bradshaw: — Didn't get it done. Didn't get around to it. Didn't get around to it, Mr. Speaker. This government will get around to it.

Mr. Speaker, I also have to bring up . . . and boy, I'm rapidly running out of time. Mr. Speaker, I also have to bring up about the tax cuts, the tax cuts that, in this province, that my friend, the member from Rosetown, went and diligently went to work on figuring out how we could go about cutting the property tax. Farmers were paying an inordinate amount of money on taxes.

Now when you went back and looked at the NDP platform, they didn't have anything. They had some property tax rebates, but in their platform, when they ran in the 2007 election, they had absolutely no tax cuts for the farmers. They didn't care about rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. They didn't care about rural Saskatchewan.

You know, the member from Kelvington-Wadena said, you don't put oil wells in the middle of Regina. You don't have potash mines in the middle of Saskatoon. We have to have rural Saskatchewan, and we have to keep them vibrant. We can't keep them as second-class citizens. This government, this government is going to put those people back on the standard that all the people of Saskatchewan should enjoy.

Let's just take a look at what was done to agriculture back throughout the years. They closed, that administration closed 31 rural offices over 16 years. They didn't care. They didn't care about the people in rural Saskatchewan. They especially didn't care about the farmers, the farmers.

One thing they really were quick on was ripping up the GRIP

[gross revenue insurance program] program — their own program, their own contract that they signed. Mr. Speaker, this hurt the farmers. This hurt the farmers big time, Mr. Speaker.

They had a terrible time trying to figure out how to fund CAIS [Canadian agricultural income stabilization]. Fact is, there were times that they just didn't do it. They didn't get around to it, Mr. Speaker.

This government is committed, is committed to fully funding agriculture. From 2001 to 2006, the crop insurance premiums went up and the coverage went down. Mr. Speaker, we are putting money, we are putting money into crop insurance.

Mr. Speaker, I'm really running out of time here. I wanted to get in a few quick quotes from Dave Marit. This is a quote from Dave Marit who's the SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] president: "This is the best budget for rural Saskatchewan in history. With this budget, Saskatchewan truly is open for business."

Another quote. Another quote. This is also from Dave Marit.

When you see Agriculture as number 3 winner at today's budget, that's probably the first time in years that I can remember where agriculture was right behind education and health, as far as increased funding that they received. So that's great news.

Mr. Speaker, again I want to — because I'm running out of time — I want to re-say my motion:

That this Assembly recognizes the actions of this government in providing more support to rural Saskatchewan in 16 months than the previous NDP government did in 16 years.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — The member for Carrot River has made the motion:

That this Assembly recognizes the action of this government in providing more support to rural Saskatchewan in 16 months than the previous NDP government did in 16 years.

Is it the pleasure of the . . . I recognize the member for Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to enter into this debate this morning because I think it's a particularly timely debate. The Minister of Agriculture and I have just gone through the spending estimates for the Sask Party Ministry of Agriculture. And what has become extremely clear to me, that if you look at the money that was put into the agriculture budget, it's clear that it deals only with risk management, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party tries to spin that we have seen a dramatic increase in the agriculture budget. And might I say this: that under the federal agreement for AgriStability, the federal government advises the province what we should expect

in terms of provincial input into this program based on last year's numbers, Mr. Speaker. And the Government of Saskatchewan had no alternative than to put this money into these risk management programs because that is their obligation under AgriStability.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we are talking about a dramatic increase in the Ministry of Agriculture's budget, it is because the expectation is that farmers will be accessing AgriStability as a result of negative margins, Mr. Speaker. And this is not particularly good news for those people in the farming sector.

The other thing I might note, Mr. Speaker, is that since this government has come to office, we have seen a dramatic decline in the number of hogs in our province, and we've seen a dramatic decline in the size of our cattle herd — so dramatic, so dramatic that XL Beef in Moose Jaw has laid off 200 workers because they don't have access to cows, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it took this government over a year, over a year to recognize the crises in the livestock and hog industry. It took them over a year. And we can see the numbers dwindling, Mr. Speaker. The numbers of cattle in this province have dwindled dramatically, and the number of hogs in this province and producers in this province has been reduced dramatically.

But this government sat for over a year and did nothing, saying that any kind of direct payment to these producers would have trade implications. That was their excuse for a year. And yet shortly before this legislature reconvened in March, the minister finally found some money, about \$72 million, as a stopgap measure for the livestock and hog industry. And we saw \$40 per cow and, you know, \$20 for weaners, Mr. Speaker.

So I would say this: that if you had looked at where the cattle and the hog industry was before this government came to office, we had a very large cattle herd. We had a number of hogs in this province. And we've seen a dramatic decline, Mr. Speaker. So that's what this government has done for rural Saskatchewan. We built up the herds over years. A lot of work went into increasing the size of our cattle herd and our hog industry, and what we see is the complete collapse of these two industries in the province. And what has the Sask Party done? Very little, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they like to say that nothing occurred in the province for 16 years. Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously something was occurring because the NDP government was elected for four terms, so something must have been taking place.

Now they would have you believe that there was no investment in rural infrastructure, no investment in facilities, no investment in educational facilities, no investment in highways. And yet, Mr. Speaker, year after year after year, at a time when oil was between 20 and \$30 a barrel, at a time when — when the NDP government took over — there was a \$15 billion debt in the province, we were able to invest in infrastructure and in services.

And in fact, Mr. Speaker, when we took over, if you were a diabetic living outside of Saskatoon and Regina, you didn't have access to satellite dialysis. And in fact the member from Carrot River, he talks about his constituency. The very first

satellite clinic that the NDP funded was the Tisdale Hospital in order that people that were living in the Northeast could have access to those services.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, when the NDP government took over, there were CAT [computerized axial tomography] scans only in Saskatoon and Regina, and we made sure that there were CAT scans in the various regions of the province so that rural residents would have access to those medical services.

Now the Sask Party would have you believe that the NDP did very little when it came to ensuring that rural Saskatchewan had access to education and training. And in fact it was an NDP government, when we had access to very little money because of the debt left by their predecessors, we began to very systematically move community colleges to comprehensive high schools in the Estevan, Weyburn, North Battleford, Tisdale, Nipawin, in order that rural residents — Humboldt — so that rural residents could have access to education and training to support industry out in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

[11:15]

Now they would have you believe that there wasn't a school built in the province during the 16 years that the NDP was in office. Well you know, the member from Carrot River, all he has to do is look at Tisdale which is in his neck of the woods — a brand new, joint-use facility, where we have health services, high school services, our education and community college all under one roof, Mr. Speaker. And it was something that the citizens in that area thought was appropriate. And the NDP government made sure that that facility came to fruition.

Now you know, we have other rural members. The member from Biggar regularly talks about nothing done in rural Saskatchewan. Well I can tell you that there was a lot of road work done in the Biggar constituency; a brand new high school, a joint-use facility with the Prairie West community college done where there was the new Biggar comprehensive high school and the regional college so that people in Biggar could have access to post-secondary education and training.

Then we have — I think it was Wynyard — brand new nursing home in Wynyard, as well as Moosomin, the Speaker's riding, an integrated facility. And these are just facilities that I can think of very quickly.

When the NDP came to government there were no pre-kindergartens in the province, and we made a decision — I believe it was 1995 — to start funding pre-kindergartens in the province. And pre-kindergartens are now available to people living in rural Saskatchewan. In addition there was very little work that had been done when it came to child care facilities, and under the previous NDP government, a lot of work and a lot of spaces went into rural Saskatchewan to support rural residents and their employment.

Mr. Speaker, in addition rural business was having difficulty attracting and recruiting skilled workers, and the NDP brought in the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program, and we now have increasing sizes of communities as a result of that program. I think of Tisdale, the member from Carrot River. All

he has to do is go to a large manufacturer in Tisdale, and he will see a number of immigrants that have come to the province as a result of the immigrant nominee program. Gravelbourg is another place, Trailtech, where we have a number of people who have come from the Philippines and are working at Trailtech, a very successful rural business. And all of this was done as a result of a significant investment through the NDP government into the immigrant nominee program.

Mr. Speaker, in addition if you drive along the No. 1 Highway in the southwest part of the province, you will see the centennial wind farm which is a tremendous investment in rural Saskatchewan, a 150-megawatt wind farm. All of that was done by an NDP government.

Now these people, I know that they have their spin and their revisionist history, and they would have you believe that the NDP has never invested in rural Saskatchewan. And I just want to put it on the record that the NDP was elected for four straight terms, and a tremendous amount of money was invested in rural infrastructure as well as people in rural Saskatchewan, and so I would find this motion not acceptable, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Sutherland.

Ms. Schriemer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to enter this debate concerning rural Saskatchewan. I grew up in rural Saskatchewan, actually pretty close to Regina, and moved away from my home town to attend university and eventually got married and living in Saskatoon. But when you grow up in rural Saskatchewan, you always go back. You go back to your roots, visit your parents, see your friends. It's very common, you know, that people who grow up in rural Saskatchewan go back. And I have family that farms. I have family still in that small town.

And there was a lot of relief when the Sask Party won the 2007 election. The rural communities were very, very relieved that they were going to be able to get out from under a very non-supporting government. Since we've taken office we have done some very good things in agriculture. Our minister is an excellent minister. He definitely knows what he's doing and has led our party and this government into giving lots of help to rural Saskatchewan. Actually we have done more for rural Saskatchewan in our 16 months than the previous government had for 16 years.

We can talk about what we've done or what they haven't done, but I want to tell you a story about my hometown and health care. One of the big issues with the former government was the closures of hospitals. In Montmartre we had a hospital since the '50s. My father, Dr. Lionel Prefontaine, was actually the physician that practised medicine in that small town.

The first hospital was a three-storey house, and he would carry the patients up the stairs. That's how he got to access the third floor. He would carry — literally carry — the patients up the stairs. Now eventually in the '60s, a new hospital was built in Montmartre, and it had an area for a doctor's office. It had lab X-ray. It had about 20 beds. Babies were born there. Appendix

were taken out there. This hospital serviced the community very well.

A lot of other communities had similar situations back then, and Wolseley, Indian Head, Fillmore, those are places that had hospitals. And the physicians would have operating room days and go together and do an O.R. [operating room] slate in Fillmore, for instance. And then one would be the anesthetist and they'd do the surgery. And if they needed blood, the plane from the Red Cross would drop blood in the field behind the hospital. People were taken care of and the community was very strong.

If you had a parent who was very ill, the patient wouldn't have to leave the community. And there were some, you know, long-term patients in the hospital in those days because they had the room and long-term care was dealt with in that way. So a new hospital was built in the '60s.

Then in the '80s, the hospital — late, no, early '90s, '91 — the old hospital in Montmartre, the one that was built in the '60s, was torn down and a new hospital was built, brand new hospital. That hospital has never functioned as a hospital. They don't have a doctor any more. The health region won't make beds available so a physician can admit the patient to hospital. There's a lot of bureaucracy and rules that just sometimes defy common sense as far as what are we doing to take care of sick people in our province.

The new hospital is now a long-term care facility. So a couple . . . I believe it was Mr. and Mrs. Shiplack. They were very elderly, and the husband had to go into the home. He needed more help than his wife could give him in their own home, so Mr. Shiplack was admitted to long-term care. Mrs. Shiplack eventually needed to go into care as well, but they wouldn't allow them to be in the same care home. And that happens very often in rural Saskatchewan where you have parents that one is admitted to a facility and the other one can't be admitted to the facility, or they're admitted to a facility that's 15 miles apart. And that's a shame; it's a real shame. And I believe that our patient-first review is going to look at those issues for rural Saskatchewan.

My father, who pounded nails into hospitals and in the community, suffered a heart attack while he was curling. There was no access to ambulance services, paramedic services in the town now, and there was no physician. Some people from the community put him in the back of a half-ton truck in the middle of winter, drove him to the hospital which is the care home, and I mean they didn't even attempt resuscitation. But here's a man that worked in the community to provide health care to the population, a community that thought, you know, that their community was strong and supported the hospital. He spent his life there, and he died there without a doctor coming near him, without an ambulance, without a hospital. And I think that's a shame. And I believe that our government is going to . . . well we are looking at those issues, and that's very very important.

The NDP, when they were in power, closed hospitals. They closed schools in rural Saskatchewan. They didn't respond to agriculture demands that were made during those years. They cut agricultural funding. They ignored droughts in the livestock industry. Crop insurance premiums went up as coverage

decreased, and producers were left out in the cold.

That doesn't bode very well in rural Saskatchewan for the opposition. And the people will remember. They will remember how they were treated, how rural Saskatchewan was neglected. They will remember that. And I believe they will remember that for a very, very long time.

Under the NDP, \$315 million was cut to agriculture — \$315 million, Mr. Speaker. You just can't do that to a population and then expect that you can go and visit rural Saskatchewan and get their trust back. You just can't. So I'll close with that, Mr. Speaker, and I'll be supporting the motion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — I recognize the member for Regina Northwest.

[11:30]

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and represent the fine folks of Regina Northeast in this debate. First of all, I want to say to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the members here, I'm fighting a bit of a cold, so if my voice cracks or makes strange noises, I apologize for that.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the motion brought in by the member from Carrot River, we can't help but think it's a pretty bold statement, a pretty strong and pretty bold statement. And it's one that I think needs to be held up to the light of facts and reality to see if the light shines through or perhaps as . . . [inaudible] . . . we need to pour some water on it to see if it holds water. But what we need to do is let's examine what has happened in rural Saskatchewan in the last 16 months under this government.

One of the first things that we notice, one of the first things we notice is that we're seeing the livestock population, the livestock industry of this province being decimated. We're seeing the livestock industry, the numbers of livestock, the numbers of cattle in this province dropping dramatically. We're at a point in time where we're probably teetering on losing the entire industry as producers simply exit the business at a rapid pace.

Mr. Speaker, about two or three weeks ago, I had the opportunity to talk to a farmer from the Canora-Yorkton area, and he was telling me of a situation. I believe it was a neighbour of his who ran a small herd — probably the total cow herd of about 100, 125, somewhere in that area — decided that he was getting out of the business simply because he could no longer afford to stay in it, could no longer just hang on. So he culled the cow herd. He took out the old cows. Any cow that wasn't a good, solid quality breeding animal, he culled those cows. Then he held a dispersal sale — he had about 90 or 92 head, I believe it was — had a dispersal sale of red cows. These were quality cows. These were good solid animals that would produce well into the future. Mr. Speaker, every one of those cows went to slaughter. Not one of them re-entered the breeding system. Not one of them re-entered the industry. They all went to slaughter.

Mr. Speaker, that tells us that we have an industry out there that is teetering on bankruptcy, an industry that we're about to lose. And what has this government done to address that problem? A small, small — after nearly a year — a small, small cash, one-time cash ad hoc payment which is really nothing more than a bad Band-Aid solution for a broken leg. Mr. Speaker, too little too late for most of the people in the beef industry in this province. We're seeing the same callous disregard for the beleaguered hog producers who are finding themselves with their backs to the wall, who are in an industry that has experienced a tremendous downturn for a long time, Mr. Speaker. And has this government come to their rescue? No. Has this government even approached the federal government to come up with a meaningful support program for our livestock industry, whether it be cattle or whether it be pork in this province? No, they haven't. They have failed our producers in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, some day, some day the pork industry will return to profitability. Unfortunately I don't think we'll have an industry left in this province to enjoy that time, simply because this government has not reacted. It's fallen short, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government carried out, a while back, a review of Saskatchewan Crop Insurance which . . . I think crop insurance is a very good program, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a program that well serves the farmers out there. Is there room for improvement? Yes, there's room for improvement. I think if you look at the agricultural industry today, the extreme high finances it requires to operate that industry, there needs to be a meaningful insurance program in place to protect those producers out there.

And if we check back in *Hansard*, the members who are today in government when they were in opposition, I think if we check back in *Hansard* I think we'll find reams and reams of calling — by those members — calling on the government of the day, calling on crop insurance to include spot-loss hail.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this government took the opportunity to review crop insurance to make some changes around the edges. I think it was really no surprise to anybody that there was no rosy, rosy solutions to the problems of crop insurance and trying to make it more lucrative. But one of the things that I really, truly suspected that they would do when they reviewed crop insurance, Mr. Speaker, was to bring in the inclusion of spot-loss hail. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I'm not alone there. I know from talking to farmers across this great province they had expected that too.

But what do we see? The review of crop insurance, the review of crop insurance and the finalization of crop insurance review, and what happened? No spot-loss hail. Something that producers were led to believe by the members opposite that would be included in their review of crop insurance was left out.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say that farmers were disappointed. They were disappointed in that, but they were also disappointed, Mr. Speaker, in the fact that this government is sitting on mounds of money — mounds of money — and yet they would not take a close look at taking crop insurance and

making it more sensitive to the reality of farming today, to the cash flow reality of farming today by increasing the cost of production coverage. It's still at 80 per cent; maximum coverage is at 80 per cent. Mr. Speaker, with the mountains of money that this government's sitting on, I would have thought that they would have been able to review that aspect of crop insurance and increase the coverage — maybe not to 100 per cent, but maybe up to at least 90 per cent.

That would have been well received by farmers. But what they're seeing now, Mr. Speaker, is the same level of coverage as they've had in the past, nothing that really reflects the increase, the dramatic increase in costs of operating their farm today, the dramatic increase in cash input costs — nothing to insure them against that.

Mr. Speaker, we noted lately that this government who pretends to have the concerns of farmers at heart have announced power rate increases of 13 to 15 per cent. That means farmers in Saskatchewan today will be looking at the increase of their power bill by 13 to 15 per cent — not just on their homes, Mr. Speaker, not just on their homes but on their shops and their entire farming operation, which if you've ever been involved in a farm, you know that the electricity is a major part of that. Well we're seeing this government increase the burden of cost of operating that farm by announcing a 13 to 15 per cent increase in power rate costs, but not just for this year but for the foreseeable future, each year in the foreseeable future, Mr. Speaker.

Last fall we've seen SaskEnergy . . . this government directs SaskEnergy to increase its rates just in time for not only the winter months and the heating of the homes, and in farmers' cases many of their shops, but also there's many farmers out there who use natural gas as the source of heat to dry their damp crops, Mr. Speaker. So what did they find that they were facing last fall? They were facing increased costs to operating their farms, thanks to this government.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister for Saskatchewan Government Insurance has just announced rate increases, rate increases as high as 12 per cent. Many of these rate increases, Mr. Speaker, will be affecting those farmers directly. If you know, Mr. Speaker, farmers have a number of vehicles, licensed vehicles that they need for their farming operation. They need that to support their operations, and they're now looking at increased cost of insurance on those vehicles. Mr. Speaker, all of these are increased costs, Mr. Speaker, increased cost to the farming operations out there without any meaningful increased support for farmers.

We're seeing, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing all kinds of increased costs and all kinds of interesting situations. We're looking at input costs, at perhaps all-time high input costs. Fertilizer costs, perhaps they're down a little from the high point of last year, but still very dramatically high. This in spite of the fact that last year at this time, natural gas — which is a very important and major component for the production of nitrogen fertilizer — natural gas was trading on the market somewhere around \$8.50 a gigajoule. This year it's a little over three, a little over \$3 a gigajoule.

But have fertilizer prices come down at that same rate? No they

haven't, Mr. Speaker. They have softened a little bit, but they're still a long way, still a long way from being reasonable as compared to the cost of production, compared to cost of natural gas, a major component in the production of nitrogen fertilizer.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind that when you test, when you test this motion, there is no doubt that farmers will say that with friends like this government, they certainly don't need any enemies.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — I recognize the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Deputy Speaker. When I get up to this motion, I wanted to speak to it because it speaks to the reason why I ran and why many of our members are here — why we were voted in.

When we, prior to 1999, we were approached, myself, to run, I was with the municipal government. And there was a disconnect from the present government to rural Saskatchewan, I won't go as far to say that they purposely ignored rural Saskatchewan, but there was a total disconnect with that.

And it was the attitude of that government at that time, and persisted right through till they were defeated, that basically rural Saskatchewan was not going to grow. And yet the people out there had a very different opinion of that. And when we ran and we were chosen to run, and I ran in my riding, in my new riding of Arm River-Watrous — at one time was considered, some of the communities, to be NDP strongholds. In fact there was certain cabinet ministers that lived in some of them towns and were very prominent in the party.

And when I went door knocking, the people, the residents even in them towns were switching their votes and they just said, you know, that the party has left them. The NDP party had left rural Saskatchewan, had left them a long time ago, and that they were never going to vote with them again. And that shows. The last election I think I won by 50 plus . . . [inaudible] . . . in seats, and in polls that in the history I looked back that the NDP always controlled. And I will give a few reasons of that.

One of them is the town of Watrous. In about '92 or '93, Mr. Speaker, they started a fund to replace a long-term care facility, and by '93 they pretty well had all their money in place. So every year they would approach the government for the government's share of their funding to go ahead. They had their 60 per cent coming in, and every year they were turned down. They didn't expect the first year to be passed. But they would have liked, after a number of years, to at least know where they actually sitting.

And I know when I first was elected there, they had almost given hope that their long-term care facility would ever be replaced. And I know in opposition I read petitions. I brought that issue forward many times. And I know the staff, when we went there, had said that they could never remember a minister of Health coming to visit them. And I won't argue that. I can't remember far back if it ever did. But all I know is when we became government, I asked our Health minister if he would tour the facility. And he did last fall. And our government made that a priority, the simple reason because it needed to be

replaced.

I can remember them taking me there with the roof leaking when it rained. You can't have a long-term care facility with roofs that leak. I mean, it just was a shame, the way it had been run down. And with our government, we wanted to make that a priority of many things with rural Saskatchewan. We didn't want to be any better than the cities. We just wanted to be treated equal. And that is what the residents of rural Saskatchewan were asking for. And under our government, Mr. Speaker, I think, I know we've accomplished that. We view rural Saskatchewan as just as important as every part of the province.

I mean, you can talk about other things — the school closures. Under the NDP watch, there was over 190 school closures at that time. That speaks to the people that were leaving. And why were they leaving? Because it was the attitude of that government that Saskatchewan was not going to grow. They were not putting the resources into rural Saskatchewan. They were not trying to work with the communities and to work with business to say what can we do to help some of these businesses come? What do you need for these businesses to come in, for these communities to start to grow?

In 1999, after I was first elected, I used to meet with the town councils. The first thing that they would talk about was how many empty houses they have in their communities and that the young people were leaving for jobs. That we need jobs. We need the people back.

What's the problem now when I deal with these towns, is these towns are looking for funding for infrastructure for subdivisions which we provided, which we are helping them with. That \$100 million that says to these towns that we know that you're growing, that you're going to keep growing, that we want to help you any way we can. And that is something that this government has been famous for and very good at is saying, we will work with you. And that is something the other government did not do. Their agenda was, well you're on your own. If you're dying, you're dying; I don't know what we can do to help you. Where this government is looking at how we can help you grow.

[11:45]

Cellphone coverage was another one. We can go into the investments that the Crowns made out of the province. That was a priority for that government. We made it a priority that we strengthen the Crowns and to work with the people in Saskatchewan, that you work with businesses. One of them was cellphone coverage. That's what they said — businesses — we need full cellphone coverage. We need Internet access across, so we can open up these businesses in towns. That is something that we provided, that we're doing over the number of years with plans.

Another one is highways, Mr. Speaker, is highways. That was another thing that businesses and towns and villages say, we have to have a plan for infrastructure. We know that every highway can't be fixed the very first year, but give us a plan. Give us an idea when our highway will be fixed or what highway's a priority, where business can build along. And our

government has come up with that.

I can talk about my constituency. Highway 20 and Highway 2 were both done last year, and they needed to be done. I can remember getting calls and that in on Highway 20. I think by the town of Drake they were driving in the ditch in the spring because the vehicles had to go on the shoulder and partly in the ditch because the middle of the road was basically gone. It was just one big, huge pothole and a mudhole. Well we repaved that and built that up and worked on that, trying to make that stretch of highway a primary weight.

Those are the things that this government has done. And that is why I want to speak to this motion because it speaks to what we have done. And we recognize that the province has to grow equally; it has to grow together. You cannot separate one segment of the province from the other, which is . . . that government, I think, used to try to do with rural Saskatchewan. It kind of had a divide that, you know, leaving you on your own and trying to work that rural-urban split with that.

You know, agriculture. I mean the member talked about opposite about the hurt in that. And yes, there is. But this, you know, this government put in \$40 a head. That's what the producers were asking — at least a show of support and respect that we recognize that your industry is suffering and that we will try to help you the way we can.

And you know, I have a lot of cattle producers in my area, and they were happy with the \$40. I mean, yes, they'd like to see more money. Right now the prices are slowly on the rise. But you know what they said? At least you've showed a commitment that you were there, trying to help us through some difficult times. And we know that if difficult times persist, we will be there to help any way that we can at that end of it.

When we talk about CAIS and AgriStability, was another thing the opposite government — when they were in power, the NDP — did not do was fully fund them. So you never knew at the beginning of the year if you were going to be getting your full money from that program. And I know there was, I think, one or two years that they didn't fully fund it. We've at least made that statement that any of the federal programs that are out there, we will be participating in them and working with the federal government to make sure that them dollars flow to the producers' pockets and to help them any way that we can.

We talk about the tax on land. We talk about the education portion of the tax problem. That's been a problem around for many, many years. I mean all governments have talked about it. All governments realize it, that has been a problem. The difference with this government is that we took action. We knew that that problem has to be addressed.

And that's something that I'm very proud of this government; when it recognizes a problem, it will work to work solutions. It won't just put its head in the sand and say, you know what, we're going to ignore this problem and maybe it'll go away, or it could be a slightly controversial, we may have to make an odd tough decision. This government's not like that. It knows that some decisions have to be made, and that's what the people respect. What they want is a growing, strong, vibrant province, and that's what we have under this government. We have that

all through it.

We have it in rural Saskatchewan which is growing now. It never grew under their administration. It never grew once under that. And with our government, it has grown. And it's going to keep growing because we're willing to do something they were never do. We are willing to listen to the people out there. We are willing to work with them and try to help them any way we can — the communities, the villages, the schools. And that is why the people have returned us and myself to government and put us in government. And with that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the time on speaking on the motion.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise up and speak to the motion. I want to point out as well, Mr. Speaker, that I would assume that anything outside of the major cities in Saskatchewan — which includes northern Saskatchewan — would be considered rural. And I want to make sure that I also contribute to the discussion here.

I want to point out very quickly, Mr. Speaker, not so much as a response to their rope-a-dope motion here because what's happening, Mr. Speaker, is these guys are so busy trying to deflect from their dismal performance as a government that they throw out these little motions, whether it's potash privatization, or whether it's oh, you ignored rural Saskatchewan for 16 years.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are very intelligent people. They know what this is all about. It's about pure crass politics, and what they are trying to figure out is, how did these guys manage to win this amount of seats that they won? And, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, it's going to catch up to them.

I'll point out, after the last election I got interviewed by the *Northern Pride* newspaper out of Meadow Lake and the interviewer said, well how do you feel about this whole process? The Sask Party's claiming that after 16 years of government you guys are gone. How did you feel about that? You didn't do a lot of things that you wanted to do. And, Mr. Speaker, the absolute answer is yes, the NDP had a lot of plans and wanted to do a lot of wonderful things. But the problem we had, Mr. Speaker, is it took us 13 or 14 years to clean up their mess, Mr. Speaker, and that's the bottom line.

When we took over government in 1991 — and I wasn't part of that, but so many of my colleagues were; many of my colleagues were, Mr. Speaker — they were almost to a point where they couldn't even make payroll, Mr. Speaker. And that's how difficult it was to be government in 1991. When the Sask Party comes along and says to people, oh we didn't do anything for 16 years, well every time they say that, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we say that's how long it took us to clean up their mess, Mr. Speaker. That's how long it took us to clean up their mess.

And I'll point out that the most amazing thing about the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker, as they throw out these little motions here and there, you know, they're trying to deflect from what they're doing. Whether it's trying to bring a private

nuclear plant or whether they're trying to do a lot more privatization of our Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker, they're trying to deflect from what they're all about, Mr. Speaker.

They're trying to deflect from their inability to govern and inability to lead. So what do they do? They go back to their old tried-and-true method of the Sask Party, which is: well every time we get stuck for an answer and every time we're asked a complicated question and every time we're asked to provide leadership, oh we'll talk about, oh 16 years, 16 years there those guys there didn't do anything.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are a lot more intelligent than that. They're a lot more intelligent than that, Mr. Speaker. And the most amazing thing about the Saskatchewan Party — as we sit over here, we listen to what they have to say — is that they're so critical of the NDP, Mr. Speaker. They're so angry at the NDP. They're so different from the NDP. And yet, Mr. Speaker, the money and the economy that they're currently sitting on is compliments of NDP policy and the people of Saskatchewan. And that's the most amazing thing, Mr. Speaker.

So when they talk about 16 years versus their 16 months, Mr. Speaker, I will tell people right now that there's no question that on this side of the House, every time the Sask Party mentions 16 years, on this side we say, that's how long it took us to clean up your mess and start developing an economy for the people of Saskatchewan, alongside the people of Saskatchewan — and that includes rural Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker.

So it's a shame. Every time we had a tough decision to make to try and bring this province back from the brink of bankruptcy, those folks over there ought to know it was caused by them. It was caused by them, Mr. Speaker. There's no way, there's no way that a party can come and make all the changes that is necessary if you've got a fifteen and a half billion dollar debt hanging over your head.

And, Mr. Speaker, as much as they want to argue about 16 months versus 16 years, I'm going to say one thing, Mr. Speaker. It took us seven or eight years to balance the budget, seven or eight years of tough decisions on this side of the House. And, Mr. Speaker, we did it. Mr. Speaker, it took us 16 years to pay down \$11 billion in interest payments alone, Mr. Speaker, interest payments alone. And I want to talk a bit about that every single day, between what we paid in interest, Mr. Speaker, versus what we paid down in debt as a governing party during those 16 years. It's almost \$2 million per day in interest payments and \$1 million per day that we were in government to pay down the debt, Mr. Speaker.

So you come along and say, oh you didn't do this; you didn't do that. And, Mr. Speaker, there's no question in my mind that it's a result of the tough choices made in those 16 years that we sat in government that today that the economy's doing well, and the debt is being paid down. It has nothing to do with them, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely nothing to do with them.

And, Mr. Speaker, when I look at some of the history — not their history, the revisionist history over there — I look at some of their history and I say, oh my goodness. I couldn't believe at

one time when the NDP took over government, our education budget was one-third of our interest payments each and every year. Our education budget was one-third of the interest we paid every year. Now how do you manage an economy, how do you build a province on that kind of debt hanging over your head?

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues — and I was not here at the time — they made the tough choices. They made the tough choices to pay down some of that debt. And yes, the rural parts of Saskatchewan and yes, the urban parts of Saskatchewan and the northern parts of Saskatchewan, we all buckled down together because we knew we had a job to do. We knew we had to make certain that this debt was slain and that the monster of this huge deficit each and every year was tamed. And this government showed leadership. It showed vision, and it showed perseverance in doing that.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — And those guys across the way should be happy we done that, Mr. Speaker. Because all they do today, as my colleague from Saskatoon said, they're out there spending money. They're out there spending money. And we congratulate them on a few initiatives, but we warn people, be careful. Be careful, because they don't want to go back to their style of government which is budget deficit and, of course, more debt for the people of Saskatchewan. We don't want that. And anybody that's not learned off our history is repeated to make the same mistake again. That's the danger. They're going to repeat the same mistake again, and people of Saskatchewan know that.

And I'm listening with great intent here, great intent, and they say to us, oh you guys didn't fix our highways. You didn't fix certain roads. And, Mr. Speaker, when we took over government, not only we didn't have no money, we barely could make payroll as a government. We had to make some very tough choices. But we said, we'll still continue building so let's go fix some of the roads. Then we find out, well we can't now because they sold the highways equipment. Oh okay. So we have no money. We have no highways equipment. So how are we supposed to fix these roads they're talking about?

And, Mr. Speaker, the most amazing thing is they sold that highways equipment for 10 cents on the dollar. And now the people of Saskatchewan are saying to us, well how did the roads get so bad? Well because a) we had no equipment; b) we had no money. And now all of a sudden after 16 years of hard work, Mr. Speaker, they come back and they promise to do everything for everybody.

And what's going to happen? History is going to teach us if you trust the same party again, Mr. Speaker, you're going to make the same mistakes. In five to ten years from now we're going to see evidence of what those guys are doing today. That's why it's important in 2011 to get rid of them, Mr. Speaker. Get rid of this government because they're using all these silly messages. They're insulting the people's intelligence of Saskatchewan because, quite frankly, thank goodness for the NDP and the 16 years they were in government, because they're the ones that worked with the people to rebuild this province's economy and rebuild our finances, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — We're not some rich, spoiled kid that all of sudden gets this huge inheritance and tries to be friends with everybody. Because at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day that money will be gone and true leadership will be shown, Mr. Speaker, as to how to govern and how to manage this party in this side of the House. The New Democratic Party has nothing to be ashamed of, Mr. Speaker, of the tough choices that were made. And we'll continue making those tough choices. Mr. Speaker, every time you say 16 years on that side of the House, we say that's how long it took to clean up your mess.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Time has elapsed on the 65-minute debate. Time for questions. I recognize the member from Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, during 16 years of NDP government, rural taxpayers were promised relief from an unfair portion of education property tax. In fact the former NDP premier announced in 2003 at the SARM convention — and I was there, Mr. Speaker — he announced that the status quo was not on. The government of the day did nothing for another year and then re-announced in 2004. The NDP never did deliver a long-term plan, yet in 16 months our government has delivered a long-term plan for education property tax relief.

My question is for the member from Regina Northeast. Why does the member not support education property tax relief for rural Saskatchewan?

[12:00]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Northeast.

Mr. Harper: — Mr. Speaker, the . . . And I want to thank the member for his question. The reality of rural Saskatchewan today is being able to exist and be able to run a profitable operation in your farming operation, Mr. Speaker. And a part of that is being able to insure yourself against unforeseen losses such as through crop insurance. Crop insurance is a very worthwhile tool for farmers to be able to protect themselves against the unforeseen, against weather, and so on and so forth.

And that is why farmers out there across this great province of ours have wanted to have spot loss hail included in crop insurance. But, Mr. Speaker, with the review of crop insurance, spot loss hail was not included. And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that farmers across this province are disappointed, very disappointed and really let down by this government. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the member from Arm River. And I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, no government in the history of Saskatchewan or the country have ever received any kind of dollars in a booming economy that

that government has, ever, ever, ever inherited in the history of Canada. Of all the provinces, no government has ever inherited that kind of benefit.

So I'm going to ask the member from Arm River: does he believe that the debts that we had — the debt that we had that we had no choice but to buckle down, as the rest of the people of Saskatchewan had, to make sure that we regained our financial footing as a province and that we didn't have to worry about bankruptcy and making payments to people that work for the provincial government — does he believe that that debt is a fictional debt? Does he believe that, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what I believe is I believe that government couldn't govern very well under the number of years that you were there. This government has worked with business to increase profits and increase people coming here to Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and that is why this province is growing right now.

Under that present government when it was government, that government never grew. There was 190 school closures. There was highways in disrepair, businesses leaving. They chased out the oil business under that. They chased out every manufacturing because they would not work with business. They wanted to have a closed shop when it came to Saskatchewan. They did not want to work with other provinces, and they ran this province . . . If they'd have kept in power, this province would have been in a lot worse shape than when they first came in because every year that they were in it was getting worse and worse. That, Mr. Speaker, is what I believe.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

Ms. Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the NDP dozens of rural hospitals closed. We were left with massive health care infrastructure deficit for 16 years and the NDP denied that there was a critical nursing shortage. Our government has made significant investments in health care and infrastructure. We are opening new hospitals.

We have entered into a historic partnership with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses which is already producing results in terms of addressing the nursing shortage.

To the member from Regina Northeast: do you support these initiatives to address the health care deficit that was created when you were in government?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Northeast.

Mr. Harper: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the question because we have always enjoyed in this province a very good health care system. We even do today and we have

enjoyed that in the past.

And, Mr. Speaker, I can attest to this personally because in the mid-1990s a very close family member of mine, at nearly midnight on a Tuesday night, suffered a heart attack at our home on the farm. She is still with me today because of the reaction of our health care system when she was treated with the quality system that is out there, was out there, still is out there. And I'm so thankful that we have that system so I can have my loved one with me today. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatchewan Rivers.

Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the NDP, farmers were overtaxed. Agriculture funding was cut. Parched farmers and ranchers struggling to make ends meet because of drought received no assistance. Crop insurance premiums rose even as coverage dropped. Our government has taken action — cut farmers' taxes, increased agriculture funding, implemented a drought relief program, and lowered crop insurance premiums while increasing coverage.

To the member from Saskatoon Nutana: why do you and your colleagues not support Saskatchewan producers?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, one of the things I can tell the members opposite, that when we were in a position we significantly increased the rebate to agricultural producers when it came to education tax on farm land. I believe we started that in 1998 and in fact we went to . . . 60 per cent of funding for education on agricultural land came from the province and 40 per cent on average was paid by agricultural producers.

Secondly, when the member talks about increase in premiums and reduced coverage in crop insurance, we went through a number of years of drought in the province, particularly in the mid-2000s or about 2002, 2003. And we had about a \$1.2 billion deficit in crop insurance. And of course the member knows that you have to pay that back through increase of premiums, and the government had to put more money into it in order to get crop insurance stable. I'm now pleased to report that crop insurance has money in the kitty, and that's good. And . . .

The Speaker: — The member's time has elapsed. I recognize the member from Regina Northeast.

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fertilizer prices being what they are, and the cost of fertilizer a major, major cost of input to our farming community out there. And we look at nitrogen fertilizer being a very major component to seeding in this great province of ours and we look at the fact that natural gas a year ago was trading on the market at somewhere around \$8.50 a gigajoule and today is trading just slightly over \$3 a gigajoule, but yet fertilizer prices today are very near what they

were a year ago.

So my question is for the member from Carrot River Valley. Does he believe that his farmers in his constituency deserve to pay the price they're paying for fertilizer today?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Carrot River Valley.

Mr. Bradshaw: — Thank you for the question from that member. He talks about the fertilizer prices. You're right. They were very high last fall. I think what we're going to see this spring is . . . I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the fertilizer prices are coming down. And actually I've heard that at home, that they will be coming down.

The other thing is, is we have given the farmers so much more money now, it makes it easier to pay some of these higher prices because we did the tax cut. We did the tax cut on the farmers' land; that makes it way easier.

Not only that — we're making the farmers safer because the other thing that we're also doing, Mr. Speaker, is we're going ahead with our power supply in the yard site to make it safer for farmers so they don't have to worry about catching their auger on a power line as they're dragging it around. These are some of the good things that we're doing for our farmers, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to start with a quote: "People in my constituency have to deal with horrendous road conditions . . . Road conditions that could affect the safety and yes, even the lives of these people." Another quote: "Hundreds of people become stranded every season because the road conditions are atrocious and maintenance is non-existent."

Mr. Speaker, these statements were made by the member from Athabasca when he was a Liberal and he was condemning the NDP. Now he says the NDP were doing a good job. We can't have it both ways. So will he now support our program for highways?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I'll point out, Mr. Speaker, that it's amazing that we put \$65.5 million into northern roads strategy, so a job accomplished. Those guys come along and they not only cancelled projects to Patuanak, they not only cancelled projects on Highway 155, they cancelled . . . [inaudible] . . . Pelican Narrows projects and they cancelled Cumberland House's projects.

So before that member from Batoche starts spouting off old statements that I've made, and I stand by every statement I make in this Assembly, but before he goes around spouting off old statements that I've made, I stand . . .

The Speaker: — Time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park. Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, to ask leave for an extended introduction.

The Speaker: — The member has asked for leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank all members of this Chamber for granting this. I'll try not to make it too extended.

Here today to witness the passing of the highway traffic amendment Gallenger Act, we have in the gallery Mrs. Sharon Gallenger. I'm going to ask, just give a wave rather than everybody popping up and down. So when I mention your name, just give a wave. Sharon, of course, we introduced earlier in the Chamber.

With Mrs. Gallenger is her son, Trevor; a grandson, Tanner; Kim Gallenger. The late Jim Gallenger's father, Joe Gallenger, is here. Darlene Spock is a sister of Jim's; and Mick is Jim's brother. We have Pat Lasby. We have Patty Katzberg that's Tanner's other grandma. We have Brian and Maxine Hanofski, and that's Mrs. Gallenger's brother and his wife. We have Barry Hanofski and Dave Hanofski, Yvonne Schmalenberg, who's a neighbour that works at Highways. Part of Jim's crew are here today and we're very honoured that they were able to share some time with us. We have Jim's bunkie, Reg Robinson. These were absolutely best pals. I know that. We have Ken West and Kim Lupichuk. As well as from Highways we have Shelly Jorstad.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members to welcome our guests for this historic passage of a Bill in a few moments.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Elhard: — With leave to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Highways has asked leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways.

Hon. Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at

this time I would like to join my colleague from Coronation Park in the introduction once again of the Gallenger family. We've had the opportunity to do this on a couple of occasions. What we have that's unique today is we have not just the immediate family members, but the extended family members. And I think that's an appropriate presentation of the family having their presence in so many numbers here today because we're going to do something quite unusual in this legislature today. We're going to work together with the opposition to move a piece of legislation that is appropriate to the circumstances for which Mrs. Gallenger has advocated.

I'd also like to recognize the various members of the Highways ministry who have joined with the family to be here today. I know that there's an intimacy that develops when you work so closely with an individual over the number of years that many of these Highways employees spent with Jim Gallenger. And I think that it's appropriate that they be here to witness the proceedings of the House as well.

I'd like to thank each one of you for the part you played in this proposal and this endeavour today. Thank you for your support of Jim's family. Thank you to the family members for their courage and for their attendance here. We respect the efforts that you've put in and offer our condolences publicly once again.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 605 — *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers — Gallenger) Amendment Act*

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you very much. Thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank all members. I thank the Minister of Highways for his kind remarks of welcome to our guests. And I've enjoyed working with the minister in the creation of what we're about to do today and look forward to that continuing.

Mr. Speaker, before I move the Bill, I do have some remarks and in those remarks or maybe even outside of those remarks, I want to acknowledge two people that are in the gallery that should need no introduction and certainly don't to me. One is my wife, Lorna, who members know how we depend on our partners, our spouses through life. And today is a good example of, in my intent on this Bill, I overlooked recognizing my wife, the love of my life, Lorna. And my constituency assistant beside her is Fred. So welcome to the Legislative Assembly, both of you.

[12:15]

Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of my remarks, I will be moving Bill No. 605, the highway traffic maintenance workers Gallenger amendment, that it be read a second time.

Today we're taking the opportunity to make a good choice. And we're taking this opportunity to pass legislation that will make highways safer — safer for all highway workers and safer for the general public. We are starting with snowplow workers and extending it to all aspects of highway operations. Because this legislation says that vehicles can only pass highway vehicles when they have their warning light, their ministry-issued warning lights flashing, you can pass them only at a maximum of 60 kilometres an hour.

And I want to say that the ministry — and before that when it was known as the department — has had a very long-standing policy of no one riding in ministry vehicles. And I'm not saying that I did, and I'm not saying that I didn't. But if I had ridden in a snowplow with my brother-in-law some years ago on a Christmas Eve, if I had, I would have witnessed an incredible attention to detail.

If I had been there, I would have witnessed my brother-in-law out at 2 o'clock Christmas Eve, keeping the highways clear so that everybody could get to their families Christmas Day. If I had been there, I would have seen this plow hitting drifts, and I think I would still remember to this day the thrill of the deceleration when you enter into the snowbank — if I had been there. I also know from talking to highway workers that they take safety incredibly seriously. And highway workers deserve to be safe.

I know that when I was talking with Crystal Gallenger, Jim and Sharon's daughter who is not able to be with us today . . . She's down at, I believe it's apple city about half an hour out of Minneapolis. She's down on some work-related training and just was unable to be here today.

But I know that Crystal shared that . . . not saying she was or she wasn't out with her dad the evening that the Riders won the Grey Cup, but I will say that if she had been out with Jim that night, they would have come across some roadkill right about at the corner of the highway intersection and the northwest part of Pilot Butte. And if Crystal had been there, she would have witnessed her dad put on the warning lights and lighting up the area kind of like a movie, just very, very, very bright. She would have witnessed Jim put on the highways-issue vest. She would have witnessed him waiting at the side of the road while traffic whizzed by, waiting for an opportunity to rush out, grab the roadkill, and try and wrestle it off the highway, keeping the highway safe for everyone else.

Mr. Speaker, today's legislation is to provide a level of safety and certainly a reminder to all people in the public that we have an obligation to each other. We have an obligation to make highway workers know that they're valued, and make them know that they have every right to get home safely just as you or I have every right to expect to get home safely today.

And so that's really what today's legislation is about. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that highway workers are out in all conditions. Snowplows, the thing that predicated this — we've got to recognize this — snowplows are out in many conditions on Saskatchewan's highways. But the many conditions typically involve snow, freezing rain, sleet, slush. Very seldom does it involve 80-degree weather where the sun is shining. Highway trucks, snowplows are out in the worst of weather.

They're out trying to keep our highways passable. Mr. Speaker, I think it is asking very little of us to slow down at the appropriate times. Any time we see the flashing light, we should slow down to a maximum of 60 and proceed passing only when it is absolutely safe to do so.

Before I take my place, Mr. Speaker, there's a couple of things I want to do. One is to point out I'm wearing an orange wristband that Sharon Gallenger gave to me last night, and it says on this: Support our highway workers; slow down. And Sharon made this available at her own expense and has done so, and that's very nice and I thank her for that. She's starting an advertising campaign all on her own. This family has gone through petitions and gotten over 2,000 signatures for petitions. They've pushed us to do some legislation, which I'm happy to report we're responding to. And then they've also provided this wristband which I have taken steps to make available so that all MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] will have access to these wristbands. And for that, I thank you for that, Sharon.

Mr. Speaker, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Sharon Gallenger, to all of her family, and extended friends for giving us as legislators an opportunity to do something very, very worthwhile and to enhance safety and to pass a piece of legacy legislation, a piece of legislation to the legacy of the late Jim Gallenger who, from everything I've heard of Mr. Gallenger, nothing would make him much prouder than knowing that at least, at least we're trying to make some improvement in the lives of his co-workers and of the general public of Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 605, *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers — Gallenger) Amendment Act* be now read a second time.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The question before the Assembly is a motion moved by the member for Regina Coronation Park that Bill No. 605, *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers — Gallenger) Amendment Act* be now read a second time. Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the Minister of Highways.

Hon. Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan, it's a pleasure for me to speak to this piece of legislation, Bill No. 605, *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers — Gallenger) Amendment Act*.

As I indicated earlier, Mr. Speaker, this is a piece of legislation brought forward by my colleague from the opposition benches. He has worked on behalf of the family who have put a tremendous amount of effort into this particular initiative. I want to commend them again for taking this particular opportunity to not just memorialize the life of Jim and the sacrifice he paid, but to make it available as a broader opportunity to recognize the sacrifice and the efforts on behalf of all of us by highways workers in very difficult and sometimes trying circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, when this Bill was first brought to our attention, I think without any doubt that my member colleague opposite could say that our response was positive to this. And when I had an opportunity to speak to Mrs. Gallenger and to her daughter,

Crystal, in my office, we made it very clear that we would do whatever we could to support this legislation.

And I said at the time, that if this particular Bill wasn't the final sum and totality, that we would look at improving the Bill at some level. And we've also indicated that to the member, that this is the introduction and likely to be the passage of this legislation, but it may be an opportunity for us to look at other ways of expanding this same protection, the same allowance for safety to other workers that represent other government agencies and maybe particularly workers on behalf of the Crowns who might be in circumstances where they are utilizing flashing lights and where their safety needs to be addressed as well.

And so we'll take that opportunity as the summer unfolds. We'll continue to engage the family and our colleagues in the opposition on this particular topic to make it the best Bill we possibly can. But that doesn't mean that this Bill shouldn't be addressed today, that it shouldn't be passed today.

This particular piece of legislation is what we would refer to as a legacy piece. And I think by its nature, it's appropriate that we address the sacrifice of Jim Gallenger on behalf of the public of this province, that we take this opportunity to say thank you through this piece of legislation, and that we try to make sense of tragedy through this particular piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I've had opportunity actually to talk to a number of snowplow operators. I've sat in the cockpit of one of those trucks and, you know, that's really what it is. If you've driven truck before, you haven't seen anything until you sit in the seat of one of these snowplows because they are so well equipped with so many different pieces of safety equipment and operational equipment. And whether it's a snowplow you're operating or a wing that you're dropping and having to move, given the circumstances, whether you're spreading sand or salt — there is quite a collection of buttons and lights and whistles and so forth.

So when you operate a snowplow, it's just not a matter of getting a truck and driving down the road. You're engaged as a specialist operating a very unique and significant piece of equipment. These are not small trucks. They are large, tandem trucks as a rule. They're heavily equipped, and there is a lot of complicated material and gadgets that need to be attended to. So I would refer to operators of snowplows as specialists. And as such, not only are they operational specialists, but they are specialists in terms of the conditions they operate that particular equipment. It is never a nice day when a snowplow is expected to be on the road. Conditions are always wrong in some way or other, and so in every instance those operators put themselves in a very difficult and potentially harmful circumstance.

To bear witness to the potential of hazard that exists, we have 300 snowplows situated in various locations around the province, about 85 different communities. And at any given time, almost all those 300 trucks, if the conditions make it necessary, those trucks are on the road. So we have operators that are in harm's way, putting themselves at risk, in significant numbers all around the province.

Our ministry has worked very hard to try and improve the

safety record, though, of snowplow operations. We haven't been perfect. Unfortunately we have had a number of accidents. I believe since records were kept going back to 1998, I believe there have been 50 separate instances where snowplows have been involved in accidents. That's far too many. It's not a satisfactory statistic to our ministry. And so as a consequence, we have undertaken a fairly aggressive advertising and media campaign. You've all seen, I'm sure, the ads about slow down in the snow zone and the couple who were talking about "where did that come from" and hit the back end of a snowplow. That's been the reality for our operators far too often.

As a consequence, Mr. Speaker, the ministry is undertaking a very significant initiative to try and reduce the potential for those kinds of mishaps. We have created a new visibility effort for the back of snowplows, where we've got an illuminated checker board that is mounted on the box of the truck. And if that happens to get covered by snow, of course it renders it irrelevant I suppose, so we've also introduced a wind scoop that is unique to our trucks in this province. And that wind scoop catches air, blows down over the face of the box, and cleans the checker board-illuminated sign so visibility is much more constant. But if that's still not enough, we've established or introduced highly placed wigwag lights to catch the attention of people before they penetrate that snow zone and accidentally engage the rear end of one of our trucks. Those are some of the things we've undertaken.

[12:30]

Most of these safety initiatives, Mr. Speaker, have not been brought into practice by our ministry or by our executive team on their own. Most of these new safety initiatives have been at the — not just request — but at the insightful concern offered by our own ministry members, people who are operating these trucks. That's where a lot of these ideas originate and they're great ideas. They move it forward, and as we are able, we try to implement these new safety measures.

Most recently we have tried, on a pilot project basis, getting the attention of the motoring public by creating a system where we have a vehicle trailing the snowplow as a warning. So we have two vehicles in fact in place. We have the snowplow operating and . . . I don't want to call it a pilot vehicle because it's behind the snowplow, but it provides warning for drivers on the road. And we found that to be reasonably successful, and we're hoping that if that pilot project proves its worth, that we'll be able to introduce that in some of our more heavily travelled areas.

But, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that has troubled me the most, I suppose, is that no matter how many measures we might undertake, how much public attention we might draw to these issues, how much public education we can achieve — and that's part of the reason for having this Bill — there is still the dilemma of what to do about drivers who are absolutely insistent on getting from point A to point B within a record time frame. You know, the willingness of our drivers on our public highways to take the issue of safety seriously is compromised on a minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour basis.

I know that to be true from personal experience. When I drive down No. 1, it's a twinned highway and, by and large, pretty

straight and people don't see any road hazard necessarily. We get so intent. If I'm driving the speed limit, if I set my cruise at 115 . . .

An Hon. Member: — 110.

Hon. Mr. Elhard: — 110, oh that's right; that's the speed limit. 110, Mr. Speaker, I'm the slowest car on the road. I might even be the slowest truck on the road, except for a few that are governed at 90 kilometres an hour.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this is an important initiative that we're undertaking here today. But until we can make it absolutely clear to the motoring public that the safety of other people on the highways, the safety of our Highways workers, the safety of motorists generally is a responsibility for each of us — and when we drive accordingly — we will not have achieved what we want to achieve.

And so I see this particular piece of legislation as important, as a legacy piece, as an information opportunity, as a public awareness opportunity. I certainly see it as an important part of the equation in providing greater safety for the employees of the Ministry of Highways. But it's not the end of this exercise.

And so having said that, Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the fact again that the family has put a tremendous amount of effort into raising our awareness by promoting this legislation, by having our ministry respond to it, by having our government say, we agree that this is a piece of legislation that we move forward for all the right reasons. But the work isn't done, Mr. Speaker.

And so I would conclude my comments on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan at this time, and we'd like to see this legislation move forward.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The question before the Assembly is the motion moved by the member from Regina Coronation Park that Bill No. 605, *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers — Gallenger) Amendment Act* be now read a second time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: — Second reading of this Bill.

The Speaker: — To which committee shall this Bill be referred? I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I designate that Bill No. 605, the highway traffic (maintenance workers — Gallenger) amendment Act be committed to the Committee of the Whole and request leave for this said Bill to be considered in the Committee of the Whole immediately.

The Speaker: — The Bill stands referred to the Committee of the Whole, and the member has requested leave for the Bill to

be considered in Committee of the Whole immediately. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. I do now leave the Chair for the House to go into Committee of the Whole.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ASSEMBLY

Bill No. 605 — *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers — Gallenger) Amendment Act*

The Chair: — The item of business before the committee is Bill No. 605, *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers — Gallenger) Amendment Act*.

Clause 1, short title. Is clause 1 agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 4 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers — Gallenger) Amendment Act*. I recognize the member for Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Chair, I move that the committee report the Bill without amendment.

The Chair: — It has been moved that the committee report Bill No. 605 without amendment. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Will a member move the committee rise and report progress and ask to . . . I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chair: — The Opposition House Leader has moved that this committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of the committee.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the committee to report Bill No. 605, *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers*

— Gallenger) Amendment Act without amendment and ask for leave to sit again.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be read the third time? I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By leave, I move that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — The member has requested leave for Bill No. 605, *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers — Gallenger) Amendment Act* to be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. Leave has been granted. I recognize the member.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 605 — *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers — Gallenger) Amendment Act*

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member from Regina Coronation Park that Bill No. 605, *The Traffic Safety (Maintenance Workers — Gallenger) Amendment Act* be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Clerk Assistant (Committees): — Third reading of this Bill.

The Speaker: — When shall the committee sit again?

Mr. Trew: — Next sitting.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that this important work has been completed, I move this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader has moved that this Assembly do stand adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — This Assembly stands adjourned until Monday afternoon at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:42.]

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GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN CABINET MINISTERS

Hon. Brad Wall
Premier

Hon. Bob BJORNERUD
Minister of Agriculture
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Crop Insurance Corporation

Hon. Bill Boyd
Minister of Energy and Resources
Minister Responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff
Minister of Crown Corporations

Hon. Dan D'Autremont
Minister of Government Services
Minister Responsible for the Saskatchewan Liquor and
Gaming Authority
Minister Responsible for the Information
Technology Office

Hon. June Draude
Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations
Minister Responsible for Northern Affairs

Hon. Wayne Elhard
Minister of Highways and Infrastructure
Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission
Provincial Secretary

Hon. Rod Gantfoer
Minister of Finance

Hon. Donna Harpauer
Minister of Social Services

Hon. Nancy Heppner
Minister of Environment

Hon. Darryl Hickie
Minister of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing

Hon. Bill Hutchinson
Minister of Municipal Affairs
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Gaming Corporation

Hon. Ken Krawetz
Deputy Premier
Minister of Education

Hon. Don McMorris
Minister of Health

Hon. Don Morgan
Minister of Justice
Attorney General

Hon. Rob Norris
Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour
Minister Responsible for Immigration
Minister Responsible for the Workers'
Compensation Board

Hon. Lyle Stewart
Minister of Enterprise and Innovation

Hon. Christine Tell
Minister of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport
Minister Responsible for Capital City Commission