



THIRD SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

of the

**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

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**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

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(HANSARD)

Published under the  
authority of  
The Honourable Don Toth  
Speaker



**MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN**

Speaker — Hon. Don Toth  
 Premier — Hon. Brad Wall  
 Leader of the Opposition — Dwain Lingenfelter

| <b>Name of Member</b>         | <b>Political Affiliation</b> | <b>Constituency</b>       |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Allchurch, Denis              | SP                           | Rosthern-Shellbrook       |
| Atkinson, Pat                 | NDP                          | Saskatoon Nutana          |
| Belanger, Buckley             | NDP                          | Athabasca                 |
| Bjornerud, Hon. Bob           | SP                           | Melville-Saltcoats        |
| Boyd, Hon. Bill               | SP                           | Kindersley                |
| Bradshaw, Fred                | SP                           | Carrot River Valley       |
| Brkich, Greg                  | SP                           | Arm River-Watrous         |
| Brotten, Cam                  | NDP                          | Saskatoon Massey Place    |
| Chartier, Danielle            | NDP                          | Saskatoon Riversdale      |
| Cheveldayoff, Hon. Ken        | SP                           | Saskatoon Silver Springs  |
| Chisholm, Michael             | SP                           | Cut Knife-Turtleford      |
| D'Autremont, Dan              | SP                           | Cannington                |
| Draude, Hon. June             | SP                           | Kelvington-Wadena         |
| Duncan, Hon. Dustin           | SP                           | Weyburn-Big Muddy         |
| Eagles, Doreen                | SP                           | Estevan                   |
| Elhard, Wayne                 | SP                           | Cypress Hills             |
| Forbes, David                 | NDP                          | Saskatoon Centre          |
| Furber, Darcy                 | NDP                          | Prince Albert Northcote   |
| Gantfoer, Hon. Rod            | SP                           | Melfort                   |
| Harpauer, Hon. Donna          | SP                           | Humboldt                  |
| Harper, Ron                   | NDP                          | Regina Northeast          |
| Harrison, Hon. Jeremy         | SP                           | Meadow Lake               |
| Hart, Glen                    | SP                           | Last Mountain-Touchwood   |
| Heppner, Hon. Nancy           | SP                           | Martensville              |
| Hickie, Darryl                | SP                           | Prince Albert Carlton     |
| Higgins, Deb                  | NDP                          | Moose Jaw Wakamow         |
| Hutchinson, Hon. Bill         | SP                           | Regina South              |
| Huyghebaert, Hon. D.F. (Yogi) | SP                           | Wood River                |
| Iwanchuk, Andy                | NDP                          | Saskatoon Fairview        |
| Junor, Judy                   | NDP                          | Saskatoon Eastview        |
| Kirsch, Delbert               | SP                           | Batoche                   |
| Krawetz, Hon. Ken             | SP                           | Canora-Pelly              |
| LeClerc, Serge                | SP                           | Saskatoon Northwest       |
| Lingenfelter, Dwain           | NDP                          | Regina Douglas Park       |
| McCall, Warren                | NDP                          | Regina Elphinstone-Centre |
| McMillan, Tim                 | SP                           | Lloydminster              |
| McMorris, Hon. Don            | SP                           | Indian Head-Milestone     |
| Michelson, Warren             | SP                           | Moose Jaw North           |
| Morgan, Hon. Don              | SP                           | Saskatoon Southeast       |
| Morin, Sandra                 | NDP                          | Regina Walsh Acres        |
| Nilson, John                  | NDP                          | Regina Lakeview           |
| Norris, Hon. Rob              | SP                           | Saskatoon Greystone       |
| Ottenbreit, Greg              | SP                           | Yorkton                   |
| Quennell, Frank               | NDP                          | Saskatoon Meewasin        |
| Reiter, Hon. Jim              | SP                           | Rosetown-Elrose           |
| Ross, Laura                   | SP                           | Regina Qu'Appelle Valley  |
| Schriemer, Joceline           | SP                           | Saskatoon Sutherland      |
| Stewart, Lyle                 | SP                           | Thunder Creek             |
| Taylor, Len                   | NDP                          | The Battlefords           |
| Tell, Hon. Christine          | SP                           | Regina Wascana Plains     |
| Toth, Hon. Don                | SP                           | Moosomin                  |
| Trew, Kim                     | NDP                          | Regina Coronation Park    |
| Vermette, Doyle               | NDP                          | Cumberland                |
| Wall, Hon. Brad               | SP                           | Swift Current             |
| Weekes, Randy                 | SP                           | Biggar                    |
| Wilson, Nadine                | SP                           | Saskatchewan Rivers       |
| Wotherspoon, Trent            | NDP                          | Regina Rosemont           |
| Yates, Kevin                  | NDP                          | Regina Dewdney            |

[The Assembly met at 10:00.]

[Prayers]

#### TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

**The Speaker:** — Before routine proceedings I would like to table the 2009 progress report for the Children's Advocate office entitled *Foster Home Overcrowding in Saskatchewan*.

#### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of introductions. First of all I'd like to introduce a number of people in the east gallery from SaskFEAT, Saskatchewan Families for Effective Autism Treatment. I know there are a number of parents, family, and friends here today. I also realize that it has been a little difficult for them. I think they've had a couple of days that they had planned on being here, and for different circumstances those dates have changed. But I'm glad that they were able to change their calendars and be here today in their Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I think there'll be much discussion on the whole issue of autism spectrum disorder as we move through the routine proceedings, Mr. Speaker, and I'll have more to say at that time. So I'd like all members to join me in welcoming them here today.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, I would also like to introduce, sitting in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Janice Klein and her daughter Brandi. If you could just give us a little wave, please. Thank you. Janice was the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation co-family walk ambassador in 2009, and her daughter Brandi was the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation co-youth walk ambassador. Brandi is a type 1 diabetic.

Also with them, Mr. Speaker, is Randy Durovick, fundraising coordinator for Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. I had the opportunity of being at the walk this spring — I think it was in the spring, summer, in June — and it was a cooler day, I remember, but a great turnout. And one of the persons that was there to introduce and start the walk on its way was none other than our all-star defensive end, John Chick, who is a diabetic and plays at a very high level — obviously — of football as a diabetic. So I want to welcome the three here today that are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and thank them for the great work that they do.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

**Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I too want to introduce the family members seated in the east gallery who are here with us today. Many of them are representing family or family members who have autism. We know that they represent only a small percentage of the many families who

wanted to be here today, largely because other families couldn't find caregivers or just couldn't make it here.

But I do want to say that the statistics now show that one in 98 children are diagnosed with this disease. It's something that governments right across the country and in fact across North America are grappling with, and I look forward to meeting you later and also the debate that will go on in the Assembly. Mr. Speaker, I welcome the members of the families here and hope that their stay is worthwhile.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Crown Investments.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I am very pleased to introduce a number of guests who're here today to support the legislation on banning texting and hand-held cellphones.

Today we have with us from the Saskatoon Police Service, Deputy Chief Bernie Pannell. We have from the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] traffic division, Staff Sergeant Ian Mitchell. From SADD [Students Against Drinking and Driving] Saskatchewan, we have Tim Spelliscy, the provincial director. From the Saskatchewan Automobile Dealers Association, executive director Susan Buckle.

From Sheldon-Williams Collegiate, the SADD chapter, we have adviser Delaine Anderson. And with her is a number of students who I'm very pleased and proud to see in the gallery today, and thank you for your support. And from SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] we also have Kwei Quaye and Kim Hambleton, and I'm very pleased to see you.

Please, everyone, help me in welcoming everybody to their legislature.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

**Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two things I also want to say. I just want to add my welcome to Janice and Brandi and Randy from the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. Welcome to the legislature and congratulations for all the work that you do.

And I too want to talk about the parents and families of autistic children who are up in the east gallery. Actually the board of directors from SaskFEAT, many representatives are here today. Tim Verklan is here, if you could wave, Tim. Arden and Calvin Fiala and their daughter Elene and Hartley, their son. And Travis and Patricia Dugan are here. And Corrine and Rod Glover are here. Welcome to all of you. And as the member from Saskatoon Douglas Park said, I know you represent a lot of the families who couldn't make it here today.

And also in the gallery with the families are a lot of the therapists who provide the services to the children and families. So welcome to all of you for today. I think this will be a very interesting discussion and very worthwhile. And thank you so much for coming to hear it.

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

**Mr. Michelson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sitting in the west gallery is my son Brent. Brent is here to see the proceedings today. He feels very special about himself. He graduated from the University of Regina last spring, and shortly after that got a job, bought himself a brand new car. And the significance about it is that the same day that he bought that car, General Motors went out of bankruptcy protection. So I would ask you to welcome him here and thank him for saving General Motors.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs, the member from Meadow Lake.

**Hon. Mr. Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce somebody who needs no introduction to this Assembly, Mr. David Marit, the president of SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] — recently held a very successful convention over the weekend. I know I had the opportunity to attend as did many members of this caucus as well. So I introduce Mr. David Marit. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Enterprise.

**Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the minister in welcoming Dave Marit to his Legislative Assembly. Dave is one of these individuals that wears many hats in our province. Not only is he the president of SARM, but he also is a member of the Enterprise Saskatchewan board — an organization that is providing great advice for our government, for the economy of Saskatchewan.

And Dave, I want to thank you on behalf of all citizens of Saskatchewan for serving your province in many, many ways. Thank you.

### PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

**Mr. Harper:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are concerned about the condition of Highway 22.

The petition goes on to state that Highway 22 has significantly deteriorated, and it's to a point now where the petitioners believe that the highway is a potential safety hazard for the residents who travel on it. And it's clear, Mr. Speaker, that Highway 22 requires an upgrade immediately. I'll read the prayer, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the Sask Party government to commit to providing the repairs to Highway 22 that the people of Saskatchewan need.

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

And this petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by the good folks from

Regina, Earl Grey, and Southey, Saskatchewan. I so present.

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

**Ms. Higgins:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition that speaks to the problems that Saskatchewan renters are facing in this climate of combination of rising rents and low vacancy rates in many communities right across the province.

And many of those communities have a vacancy rate of less than 1 per cent, which has been devastating for some of the communities. And, Mr. Speaker, it also speaks to the issue that the argument that the private market would deliver sufficient affordable housing in the absence of rent control has been proven to be false. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to consider enacting some form of rent control with a view to protecting Saskatchewan renters from unreasonable increases in rent.

And, Mr. Speaker, these petitions are signed by residents of Moose Jaw and area. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise today to present a petition calling for wage equity for CBO [community-based organization] workers.

And we know that the workers in community-based organizations have traditionally been underpaid and many continue to earn poverty-level wages, and that CBO workers care for and provide valuable service to some of the most vulnerable members of our society, such as persons living with mental and intellectual disabilities, women and children in crisis, low-income, at-risk individuals, young children, youth, Aboriginal, immigrant, and visible minorities. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Assembly may be pleased to cause the development and implementation of a multi-year funding plan to ensure that CBO workers achieve wage equity with employees who perform work of equal value in government departments.

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

Mr. Speaker, these folks come from the city of Regina. Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition in support of a new long-term care facility in La Ronge. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your

honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately invest in the planning and construction of new long-term care beds in La Ronge.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

It is signed by the good people of La Ronge and area. I so present.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to present a petition in support of fairness for students here in Saskatchewan through the necessary expansion of the graduate retention program. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable 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.

Mr. Speaker, the individuals who signed this petition are from the good community of Melfort. I so present.

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

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Mr. Speaker, I stand today and present petitions in support of maintaining quality health care services.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Saskatchewan hope that Saskatchewan government realizes that in order address their issues of retention and recruitment and ensure safe staffing levels, that they have to commit adequate funding and installation of good faith in provincial bargaining, Mr. Speaker. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

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

And the petitions are signed by residents of Middle Lake, St. Brieux, Cudworth, Yellow Creek, and Wakaw. I so present.

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

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions on behalf of concerned residents of Saskatchewan as it relates to the unprecedented mismanagement of our finances by the Sask Party. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the Sask Party government to start managing our

provincial finances responsibly and prudently to ensure that it does not continue its trend of massive budgetary shortfalls, runaway and unsustainable spending, equity stripping from our Crowns, and irresponsible revenue setting.

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, are signed by concerned residents of Assiniboia, Saskatoon, and Regina. I so present.

#### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

#### Olympic Torch Relay in La Ronge

**Mr. Vermette:** — Mr. Speaker, on the morning of Saturday, November 7, 2009, the 2010 Olympic Torch Relay hit the town of La Ronge. It was the first Saskatchewan stop on the torch's journey across the country. This was a huge celebration for the town of La Ronge, the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, and the village of Air Ronge.

Many community members came out to enjoy the festivities. The day began with a beautiful version "O Canada" in Cree by Aileen Searson. Chief Tammy Cook-Searson provided welcoming remarks, followed by FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations] Vice-Chief Morley Watson.

[10:15]

The Olympic torch departed from Elder Demar Mirasty's house at Jackpine Reserve carried by Tanner Cook to the Lac La Ronge Indian Band office. Once the torch reached the band office, it was blessed by Elder Catherine Charles. From the band office, it was passed to Elecktra Charles who ran to the hospital. Natasha Boyes finished the run at the Mel Hegland Uniplex, where many activities were held from morning until late afternoon, including a pancake breakfast and a community walk.

This event was a great opportunity for leadership and dignitaries to bring greetings and best wishes. I was honoured to take part in this. It was a moment that will be remembered for a long time for the torch carriers and for the people of the town of La Ronge, Lac La Ronge Indian Band, and the village of Air Ronge. As Chief Tammy Cook-Searson put it so clearly, "May the 2010 Olympic flame, passing through our Woodland Cree territory, ignite the spark in all of us to reach the full potential of our dreams." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Share Similarities and Celebrate Differences

**Ms. Wilson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I am sure many of our guests seated in the gallery know all too well, living with autism spectrum disorder can be challenging for both the individuals affected and also their families. Right here in Saskatchewan about 1,800 of our children are living with autism. These children may be born with autism but they live

full lives, surrounded by the important things: truth, loyalty, intelligence, and love. I know that the parents of autistic children, like moms and dads all around the world, put the needs of their children before their own but they face unique challenges, ones that you and I can only imagine.

All children are unique, and autistic children are no different but their special needs require a special kind of parent. It was once said that we should share our similarities and celebrate our differences. Today should be no exception.

Kim Peek was the inspiration for the well-known movie *Rain Man*. She said it well:

Recognizing and respecting differences in others, and treating everyone like you would want them to treat you, will help make our world a better place for everyone. Care . . . be your best.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

#### **Saskatoon Lions Support Coronary Artery Rehabilitation Group**

**Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday, November 6, Saskatoon Downtown Lions Club generously presented CARG, the Coronary Artery Rehabilitation Group, with a cheque for \$3,600.

CARG is a self-help, volunteer, non-profit group dedicated to promoting a healthy lifestyle for persons with cardiac problems, with the assistance of cardiac specialists. CARG offers group support and fellowship, an opportunity to participate in a supervised exercise program, and continuing educational and supportive events. This recent donation of 3,600 will be used to purchase stationary bikes at the new Shaw Centre.

I'd like to thank the president of CARG, Dr. Mohindar Sachdev; vice-presidents, Dennis Johnson, Peter Scott; and volunteer, Antoinette Honoroski. In particular I'd like to recognize my constituent, Dan Danaher, first vice-president of CARG.

The Saskatoon Lions Club, CARG's most recent donor, has been providing quality community programs in our community for decades, including blind bowling, blind skiing, diabetes awareness, the sled dog track meet, and the Saskatoon Speed Skating Club, just to name a few. They also operate the Lions eye bank, Lions guide dogs, and the Lions Band.

I would like to thank Mike Slonowski, Marlene Belke, and Bob Korpan from the Saskatoon Downtown Lions Club for their dedication and contribution.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in thanking the Saskatoon Lions Club for their generosity, and in thanking the executive and participants of CARG for making us aware of our need to be heart-smart. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Cypress Hills.

#### **World Diabetes Day**

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saturday, November 14th is World Diabetes Day. According to the World Health Organization, more than 180 million people worldwide are living with diabetes.

This year the focus of World Diabetes Day is diabetes education and prevention. The campaign slogan is, Understand Diabetes and Take Control.

Mr. Speaker, this disease is a major health problem in our province for people of all ages, from all walks of life. In Saskatchewan a provincial diabetes advisory body was established in 2001 to provide the Ministry of Health with advice on diabetes programs, and it's been instrumental in the development of a number of excellent diabetes educational materials. One such educational item received the Practical Diabetes Resource Award from the Canadian Diabetes Association.

Mr. Speaker, health promotion and disease prevention programs such as these help us achieve a healthier population and reduce dependence on the acute care system. We continue to add new drug therapies based on the advice of the government's expert drug review committees, assisted by the national common drug review process.

Mr. Speaker, fellow members, please join me in officially recognizing World Diabetes Day. Thank you.

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

#### **Visual Art Program Engages Participants**

**Ms. Atkinson:** — Recently the Broadway Theatre hosted the National Film Board premiere of the film *A Year at Sherbrooke*, directed by Saskatoon filmmaker, Thomas Hale. The film explores the creative process for people with physical and/or cognitive disorders in Sherbrooke Community Centre, a long-term care home in Saskatoon.

The film follows two artists, Thelma Pepper and Jeff Nachtigall, as they work with Sherbrooke residents. A studio was set up to give residents an opportunity to experiment in the visual arts. Initially a few residents dropped in to paint and draw. Within a month the studio was overflowing with 100 participants, most of whom had never engaged in making art before. Participants were people living with paraplegia, quadriplegia, acquired brain injury, Alzheimer's, or mental illness.

Despite challenges and limitations, the artists created their own methods of making art. Driving a wheelchair through puddles of paint and then onto paper laid onto the floor turned the most colourful track designs into a work-in-progress. A wheelchair was converted into a mobile painting machine.

Ninety-year-old Saskatoon photographer, Thelma Pepper, also took part in the art program through her show of photographs and interviews with Sherbrooke residents.

This original program has linked with elementary schools, other long-term care facilities, SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology], and the University of Saskatchewan. Many nursing and social work students have participated as volunteers to gain training experience for their professional studies.

Sherbrooke is working to secure stable funding for the art program, and then hopes to become a provincial training centre for other long-term care homes that are eager to join in this program.

Mr. Speaker, congratulations to Sherbrooke PR [public relations] and communications leader, Patricia Roe, along with Thelma Pepper, Jeff Nachtigall, and the residents and artists of Sherbrooke Community Centre on this innovative and inspiring program.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Sutherland.

#### **Saskatoon Curler Inducted in Sports Hall of Fame**

**Ms. Schriemer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on November 7th I represented the Premier at the induction of the Saskatoon Sports Hall of Fame. There were several athletes and builders that were inducted. The team inducted was our 2003 Saskatoon Hilltops, undefeated that year, sir.

Also a fellow from my constituency, Mr. Jerry Shoemaker. He's been active in curling as a player and an administrator, reaching the highest level possible as an executive when he was elected for a one-year term as president of the Canadian Curling Association. He began curling as a 10-year-old in Plunkett, Canada and moved to Saskatoon where he was a member of the Granite Club, Nutana and CN.

He was elected to the Granite board in '82 and became its president for '87-88. He was the first president of Curl Saskatoon in Saskatchewan, and he was elected to the Canadian association board in '98 to 2002. He was an organizer, director for CCA [Canadian Curling Association] liaison in successive order for the last three Briers to come to Saskatoon.

He holds a lifetime membership in the Saskatchewan association and he was inducted into the Canadian Curling Hall of Fame in 2007. He also shared with me that our Minister of Highways isn't a bad curler. Please assist me in congratulating Mr. Shoemaker on his induction. Thank you.

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

#### **Take Our Deputy Ministers to Work Day**

**Mr. Furber:** — Well, well, well, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate the government on an important initiative in workplace education that benefits everyone in Saskatchewan. Last week, parents across Canada participated in Take Our Kids to Work day, the program that offers young people first-hand experience in the world of work in a wide range of workplace settings.

As successful as the Take Our Kids to Work program has been over its 15-year history, government cabinet ministers have found a new way to build on this day's success with an innovation all their own. I refer of course to the very popular take our deputy ministers to work day. Allow me to outline a few of this day's special and innovative features.

First, Mr. Speaker, this day is special because it gives deputies real world, first-hand experience answering reporters' questions in scrums after question period. These are questions such as, what is your government's policy on disclosure that baffled the Minister of Corrections, or how did you respond to documented safety concerns that stumped the Minister of Labour.

Second, Mr. Speaker, this day affords special educational opportunities to the ministers themselves, such as when the Minister of Health learned his ministry was negotiating a surgical tourism program with British Columbia.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this day is unique in that unlike Take Our Kids to Work day, it has no fixed date on the calendar, but can be held whenever the people of Saskatchewan need a lesson in the incompetence of this government's ministers and in the poor judgment of the man who named them to cabinet. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — Before we move to oral questions, just let me say this to our guests. You're more than welcome, and we welcome you to your Chamber, but we ask that you refrain from any involvement in the debate on the floor. And we thank you so much.

#### **QUESTION PERIOD**

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

#### **Autism Spectrum Disorder Issues**

**Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister of Health. Mr. Speaker, in 2007 it was estimated that 1 in 150 children in Canada had the disease autism, and by 2009 that estimate had jumped to 1 in 98 children. Mr. Speaker, as one of the directors of SaskFEAT said, and I quote:

It is with heavy heart that all I can do, when I receive a phone call from another parent that has just received their child's autism diagnosis, is to support them by listening. When I am asked what is next, I need to inform them there is no Sask autism strategy, and there is a minimal number of trained professionals that have qualifications and training to work with their child.

To the minister, Mr. Speaker: when will your government come forward with a fully funded plan and strategy to deal with this most important issue?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Order. I'd ask the guests to respect the rules of the Assembly and we would please ask members not to participate in any form. And unfortunately there's only one other option if members don't regard the rules, and that would be we'd have to

ask you to leave. And we do not want to do that.

I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity in the two years that I've been the Minister of Health to meet with parents and family, to meet with parents in my office, with some from other constituencies, some parents from my constituency that have children that suffer from autism spectrum disorder. I've had the opportunity to go to different constituency offices and meet with parents that have children with autism spectrum disorder. I talked to MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] on our side whose nieces and nephews suffer from the disorder. I had the opportunity in my constituency office, through the work placement program in the community that my constituency office is in, to have a young lad that had autism spectrum disorder work in our office for about six to eight months.

But, Mr. Speaker, in no way will I ever pretend to know the issues that those parents, the issues and the challenges that those parents face. Mr. Speaker, I don't think any of us do until we live 24-7 with a child that suffers from autism spectrum disorder.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the family and friends for the support, and from our government, tell the parents that we admire the day-to-day challenges that they face, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to talking more on where we've come from, where we're at today, and where we will be in the future.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health. And I want to say that I'm sure all members of the Assembly have met with parents who are struggling with this disease in their family. The question to the minister is, when will we have a proper program, properly funded, with a proper strategy to deal with this issue?

The mother of a little boy named Andy wrote to the minister a short while ago, and in the letter said, and I quote:

What you have done so far with your \$3 million was a wasted \$3 million. The consultants you hired can now send more children with diagnosis of autism to a provincial system that does nothing. We waited for diagnosis for months, and currently we are on the Autism Resources Centre's wait list at number 138. The three hours of therapy per week offered by ARC once off that list will do nothing to help my son.

[10:30]

The question to the minister: when will you have a properly funded strategy in order to take care of the needs of these families?

**The Speaker:** — Order. Just a reminder to members in addressing the question, they're not to address the individual directly. I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr.

Speaker, when we came to office in November of 2007, we looked at, you know, many different programs. And what have we found? It's always easier to maybe add on to certain programs — whether it's a drug plan, to add Avastin to a drug plan, whether we're talking about surgical wait times now and how we can reduce those surgical wait times.

What we found when we got to the autism file, that really there had not been much done. Mr. Speaker, in the last budget, leading up to our government taking over, there was \$500,000 put in on an annual basis in just that last year for autism supports.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we did in May of 2008, I struck a provincial autism advisory committee that had people from a number of fields — whether it was clinicians, whether it was people from SaskFEAT, from community-based organizations — from as many groups as we could on this committee to look at what would be a proper strategy as we move forward.

Mr. Speaker, seeing that we were starting with a budget of only \$500,000 we, in our first budget, moved it up to \$3 million, Mr. Speaker. And on the advice of the committee, we're looking at how we can best spend that \$3 million. I'll be looking forward to explaining that in the next question.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Mr. Speaker, the minister has indicated that the government is providing \$3 million for programming, but as the previous question indicated from the parents, this is wasted money because of the lack of training and support for the workers who are coming into the system.

Mr. Speaker, the consultants and support workers the minister put in place lack the training and experience in dealing with this disorder. And the speech pathologists and occupational therapists and psychologists, who have little or no experience with autistic people, need and want that kind of training. As one father of autistic teenager said, and I quote:

We have had to continually place our son in the hands of inadequately trained people. Our son has the ability to learn, but he is only as good as the people that work with him.

Mr. Speaker, the minister has indicated that he is spending \$3 million. The problem is we don't have a strategy. We don't have the experienced workers to work with these individuals. When will the minister and this government come forward with that kind of a program and strategy?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Mr. Speaker, the work that the provincial autism advisory committee did was work on a strategy. And they presented that strategy to me in October 30, about a year ago, and it's a framework and action plan for autism spectrum disorder in Saskatchewan.

What it looks at is making sure we can hire the proper complement of health care professionals throughout the health regions. It targeted 33 health care professionals that we needed



to hire, some consultants and paraprofessionals that we needed to place in the various health regions that can supply more services for these children and young adults, Mr. Speaker.

We're about halfway there. We've got a little over 18, 19 of these health care professionals that have to have a background in autism spectrum disorder. That isn't easy to find when there had been very little work done in the past, Mr. Speaker. We're looking around the province and across Canada for these professionals. We're a little over halfway there, Mr. Speaker. But we want to get to the 33, see how that provides service across the province, Mr. Speaker, and then we'll certainly evaluate it. But we're about halfway through the action plan that was put forward by the advisory committee.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

**Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents are telling us, and the minister has indicated that they're telling him as well, that raising a child with autism and trying to provide the proper therapy for their child is costing them thousands of dollars per year. And the strategy that was presented to the minister a year ago isn't helping them with what they need now. When these parents ask for help, they are told to go through the cognitive disabilities strategy. Unfortunately many don't qualify for CDS [cognitive disabilities strategy] funding because it's income tested.

Mr. Speaker, in 2007, PEI [Prince Edward Island] eliminated income testing from parents of children 18 years of age and younger who receive benefits from PEI's disability support program. To the minister, Mr. Speaker: will the minister agree to remove income testing from the CDS so that all parents with children with autism can access funding?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can certainly understand that income testing is a bit of an irritant for many, many people. It is the policy of Social Services through the cognitive disabilities strategy. That policy was put into place many, many years ago.

Income testing is not new in many programs. Many programs in Social Services have income testing. Many programs in the Ministry of Health have income testing. If you look at long-term care placement, if you look at home care, if you look at the drug plan, if you look at many different programs, there is income testing already in place, Mr. Speaker. That is the case in the cognitive disabilities strategy, Mr. Speaker. I know it's an irritant, but it is a program that is in place for many different programs throughout government, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

**Ms. Junor:** — One of the good things about being a minister, Mr. Speaker, is that you can change the policy. This is cold comfort to the parents and families who are dealing with autistic children to have the minister say this is a policy that has been long standing. It doesn't work. It isn't meeting their needs now, and it's not the answer.

Mr. Speaker, autism is a complex disorder, and parents need the opportunity to choose the best treatment options for their children and their unique circumstances. To the minister, Mr. Speaker: considering this government has failed to establish an adequate and proven strategy that works for everyone coping with autism, will the minister agree to immediately adapt the individualized funding program so parents of autistic children can access funds to pay for the therapies best suited to their children?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Social Services.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Mr. Speaker, I would just like to correct the member opposite. It was not a policy change. The cognitive disabilities strategy was designed and implemented in 2005. It was implemented. And when it was introduced in 2005, it was a model that had income testing. So it was their strategy, their policy, that had income testing. They had looked at other models across the province, and at that time it was in alignment with other models across our country.

We acknowledge that individuals impacted by autism and their families continue to require substantial supports. And it's very important that we now work with the groups, as the Minister of Health has said, and the stakeholders involved, as we can do better as we go forward.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

**Ms. Junor:** — Mr. Speaker, again I say to the both ministers, you do have the power to change the policies, and it's time to do it. They are not working. And it's cold comfort to the parents who are sitting in the gallery and the people that they represent that are sitting at home to have finger pointing going on.

This is the only province, Saskatchewan is the only province without an autism strategy and is considered an autism wasteland by the rest of Canada. Parents are telling us that they first wait for months to get a diagnosis, and then once their child is diagnosed with autism, they again wait two to three years to access three hours of therapy a week.

Instead of waiting, Mr. Speaker, many parents try to pay for the therapy for their children, and this costs them thousands of dollars per year. When they seek financial assistance from the government, they are told they don't qualify for individualized funding or their income is too high to get CDS funding.

Mr. Speaker, to the ministers: will they provide parents with the funding they need to access therapy, or will we continue to have Saskatchewan be a wasteland for autistic children?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, what I would say to that question is that there is a framework, an action plan that was put forward by people from SaskFEAT, from people in community-based organizations, from people that were involved in the whole delivery mechanism for autism spectrum disorder. There is an action plan. We've had that plan in place for a year. We expect to have the full complement of

professionals hired in the next few months and see how that plan works as we move forward, Mr. Speaker.

We're not opposed to reviewing it after two years. But there is no use to changing course just after a plan which came from the advisory committee to the Ministry of Health is implemented. There's no use changing in mid-course.

But, Mr. Speaker, they did say that well we as the government could change certain things. And we certainly did — \$500,000 in the last budget of the NDP [New Democratic Party] government, compared to \$3 million from this government, Mr. Speaker. We won't take advice from those members.

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

### Availability of Government Vehicles

**Ms. Higgins:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Battlefords Interval House, like many CBOs across the province, protects vulnerable women and children. But like many other areas of rural Saskatchewan, in The Battlefords there is no public transportation. And thus women and children fleeing domestic violence need access to vehicles.

For 25 years, the Government of Saskatchewan has allowed CBOs like Interval House to lease central vehicle agency vehicles. But now they're told this practice has come to an end. To the Minister of Government Services: why is this government denying access to vehicles to protect vulnerable women and children?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Government Services.

**Hon. Ms. Tell:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We understand the importance that leasing CVA [central vehicle agency] vehicles, what that provides to community-based organizations. As of today, there are no changes. There is no change in policy in regards to providing vehicles to community-based organizations. It will be as it has been. I understand the member relating to a CBO out of North Battleford, and their vehicles will be maintained as the guarantee has happened. Thank you.

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

**Ms. Higgins:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, we have here a letter from the Minister of Government Services confirming that Interval House, and presumably other agencies around the province, are being denied access to government vehicles. In her letter, the minister cites budget constraints as the reason why these women and children are being put at risk. Again this practice has been in place for 25 years through multiple administrations and even during the massive cost cutting of the early 1990s.

So to the Minister of Government Services: is she claiming that the financial situation of the government is worse now than at any time in the past 25 years?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Government Services.

**Hon. Ms. Tell:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as the members opposite are aware, that our purchasing of vehicles for this budget year was that of 500 vehicles. So not every CBO in the province of Saskatchewan can expect to receive new vehicles.

However, Mr. Speaker, the vehicles that are currently had by various CBOs throughout the province of Saskatchewan will continue to have vehicles throughout the province of Saskatchewan. And our government will continue to maintain them, and they are a guarantee. And we will provide safe transportation to all CBO and their clients. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms. Higgins:** — Mr. Speaker, this CBO isn't waiting for brand new vehicles. They're using used vehicles because they are solely for use within the city of Battleford and within a very close region, mostly within the city. So we're not talking about highway miles. They are looking for used vehicles, not new.

So we know that this government's mismanagement is causing some cutbacks, but the Minister of Finance has made a commitment, and I'll quote, we will fight very hard to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected. But then they turn around and cut the services from CVA.

So to the Minister of Government Services: how is denying access to vehicles that help women and children escape domestic violence really put in force what the minister said, protecting the most vulnerable?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Government Services.

**Hon. Ms. Tell:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I will reiterate what I said and stated earlier. The vehicles provided to community-based organizations throughout the province of Saskatchewan will continue. CVA will continue to provide and maintain the current vehicle complement within its mandate, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to point out for the members opposite and for their information, our government increased funding to Transition House, which is what she's referring to, and sexual assault agencies to \$1.1 million, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

[10:45]

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

### Management of Provincial Economy

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday the Minister of Finance finally threw off his rose-coloured glasses and agreed that Saskatchewan is going into a recession, a fact that everyone else in this province already understood. The minister also admitted that his \$1.3 billion mistake on potash revenues is going to be even larger when he tables the mid-year report next week, something this opposition has

contended from budget day and has reiterated at first quarter.

A straightforward question, Mr. Speaker: how much larger? And how did the minister and the Premier get this budget forecast so very, very wrong?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Mr. Gantefer:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would like to say is that Saskatchewan is not going into a recession, we're coming out of one. You know, in fact, Mr. Speaker, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the Conference Board of Canada has released a forecast today that predicts that Saskatchewan will post an economic growth rate of 3.7 per cent in 2010 — the second-best in the country, second only to BC [British Columbia].

Mr. Speaker, I've said that we're going to acknowledge next week that the current year's economic projections are negative. That's true. But we are working our way out of it, and we're going to lead the nation or be second-best in the nation in economic growth next year. That's an incredibly positive story, Mr. Speaker, and one all of us should be very proud of.

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

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I thought for a minute there, Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister was saying that we went in on Tuesday and that we came out on Thursday. But now, he's talking again about next year country. I thought we're talking now about this year country.

But the Finance minister says the budget process in March was the same as it's always been, and the professional public servants were the same as they've been for some time. So the only change was, this Minister of Finance and that Premier were in charge of the decisions, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and the minister both said, I quote, we took our advice from Finance officials.

Mr. Speaker, I have a freedom of information request we made to the Finance department asking for all documentation and analysis on which they based the forecast for the \$1.9 billion in potash revenues in this year's budget. The answer: we don't have it; talk to Energy and Resources.

To the minister: why would you ignore the advice of your professional public servants and let the minister, the member from Kindersley, set your potash estimate?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Mr. Gantefer:** — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, there is a whole number of factors that we take into consideration when we set projections and make assumptions, and make assumptions for any budget year or that what we'll actually have in mid-year. Mr. Speaker, we use independent agencies. We use our Energy and Resources professionals. We use members of the Ministry of Finance. All of these professionals are used to determine what the best advice is. And we've taken that best advice, Mr. Speaker.

Now it's easy to say now, in retrospect, that we were wrong. Of course we were. That's a documented fact, and I'm not pretending that it isn't true.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we have done our very best to use the best numbers we can. And they're consistent, and they're consistent with the information and the advice that was given to Saskatchewan by all of these factors.

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

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. We've been straight on this from day one on budget day with our concerns, and that minister and that Premier said that they got their advice from Finance.

Mr. Speaker, we sent the same FOI [freedom of information] request to the Department of Energy and Resources, and they refused to provide any information on the grounds that it was advice to ministers. The biggest mess-up in the history of Saskatchewan budget making, and they've decided to hide the information which they based this disastrous budget on. When will this government come clean and present the news media, this Assembly, the people of Saskatchewan with all the material upon which the Finance minister and the Premier based this foolish decision?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Mr. Gantefer:** — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should know that we're not going to release confidential advice that comes to cabinet as part of a budget-making process. No one ever has. No one ever has, and no one ever should.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the public forecasters that publish information, in terms of the growth rates and the assumptions for potash prices or oil and gas prices or any others, are generally posted for public consumption. And the members opposite are quite able to go into those websites and see the range of forecasts that there are when you're leading up to any budget preparation process. Those same informations come to us, and we take that advice.

Mr. Speaker, on hindsight of course we were wrong. But at the time, we believed that we were exercising a fair measure of prudence based on previous years' actual production and results that were achieved, based on the forecasters that were communicated publicly and based on our own internal projections, Mr. Speaker. So we were doing the very best we can and using the very high talent of professionals in this province.

**The Speaker:** — Member from Regina Rosemont.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I remind the minister that in this House the day after his budget was introduced last March he said, I quote, “. . . we've made sure that we've built in a fair bit of caution in all our assumptions . . . even if our finance officials are wrong by half a percentage point, that is \$50 million . . . our surplus vastly exceeds it.”

False bravado, Mr. Speaker, and now Saskatchewan is paying

the price.

Has the minister taken the time to read the analysis that came from CIBC [Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce] on October 23? I'd urge him to do so. I quote, "... we continue to have concerns about potash pricing and demand over the next 12-18 months." It goes on: "... our thoughts remain that we are looking at a 2+ year recovery in potash demand."

When is he going to start listening to his officials and stop trying to create fantasyland budgets based on phony revenue projections and the minister and the member from Kindersley's gut feelings?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are some important facts to bring to the discussion here today including this: that when this budget year has concluded, this province will have 40 per cent less debt than it had when this government was elected.

We also know that, at the end of this budget year, that people will pay historically less in education property tax than they ever have in the history of the province of Saskatchewan.

Here's another fact, Mr. Speaker. Another fact is that families will be paying less in income tax than they ever did under the previous government, Mr. Speaker. Another fact is that there have been \$2.5 billion invested in capital in the province of Saskatchewan in infrastructure. Another fact, when this budget concludes is that there will have been . . .

[Interjections]

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Wall:** — Another fact, Mr. Speaker, when this budget year concludes is that there will be historic investments made in people who are vulnerable, Mr. Speaker, in health care and education across this province.

And when this budget year concludes, here is another fact: that the 75 per cent of the people of this province that think we're on the right track will be saying the very same thing, Mr. Speaker. The same group of people are saying that if they had a choice today, they'd pick this Minister of Finance over anyone over there. It will also be true at the end of this budget year.

**The Speaker:** — Order. Order. I'd ask members to come to order, so we could go through introduction of guests, and so we hear the Bills that are being called.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

### Addictions Advisory Committee

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, early today our government announced the establishment of a new addictions advisory committee. Mr. Speaker, formation of this committee is a significant step in

fulfilling our mandate commitment to establish a provincial addictions agency. This committee will give independent review and advice on how the new addictions agency can best provide leadership, support, and resources to regional health authorities and other stakeholders on prevention and education initiatives, professional training and development, research, and evaluation.

Mr. Speaker, this committee will shape the vision, mission, and principles and the name of the new agency — its size, composition, and the board of governance model. The committee will look at the scope of the programs offered by a new provincial addictions agency and funding criteria for addictions programming.

Mr. Speaker, this committee will examine the establishment and effective linkage with the Ministry of Health, regional health authorities, other government ministries, schools, community-based organizations, and First Nation and Métis organizations. The committee will recommend a framework for a provincial drug strategy that connects the national anti-drug strategy and incorporates unique differences and challenges of programs delivered in northern Saskatchewan communities while building partnerships with First Nations and Métis and national alcohol and drug abuse programs.

Mr. Speaker, the committee will provide a mechanism for reviewing current alcohol and drug services with the goal of improving access to quality and timely treatment, prevention and education, partnership development, coordinated training for clinicians and addictions professional, and outcome monitoring.

Mr. Speaker, the committee members include a list of well-respected individuals in the addictions fields. They are Dr. Peter Butt, director of the Northern Medical Services; Dr. Kevin Kok, board certified psychiatrist; Barbara Robinson, program lead for the addictions counselling diploma program at SIAST Woodland Campus; Foster Monson, executive director of the Regina Recovery Homes; Chuck McCann, manager of Addictions Services for Prince Albert Parkland Health Authority; Darlene Arnault, registered nurse from northern Saskatchewan; Greg Drummond, director of mental health and addictions for the Saskatoon Health Region; Bryan Dykes, community advocate; Shauna Lafontaine, executive director, Métis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan; Bev Whitehawk, director of primary health care, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations; and Kyla Christiansen, health education consultant, Ministry of Education.

Our government is committed to strengthening the current system of prevention, education, and treatment services. Mr. Speaker, we will continue to build on the work that the Ministry of Health, the regional health authorities and their partners are currently providing to improve the increased capacity of addictions treatment programs in the province.

Mr. Speaker, the creation of this committee demonstrates our progress in achieving our election commitment to establishing a provincial addictions agency. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

**Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the minister for his advanced copy. I must say I'm a bit skeptical, given the framework that we're dealing with, with the autism strategy sitting with the minister for a year and so little done on it. I'm thinking this is another framework and committee that's going to have their framework and their advice ignored or at best slow locked.

I am also concerned with the comments made about the needle exchange program. And putting this in place, I'm assuming that when the report was done for the minister on the needle exchange program and the scientific consensus was that the needle exchange program we are currently working with in this province is the most appropriate and effective way to go, that the minister will not be using this committee to undermine that report as well.

I am very happy to see the people that are on it will represent many of the areas in the North because the North has, I think they have, quite a high need and not very many services that we provide up there. And I'm hoping that the people that are on the committee will have a strong voice and many things that need to be done in the North will be done through the work of this committee, if its work is heeded and actually act upon.

So I thank the minister for his copy, and we'll certainly be watching what the committee does and what comes about from their work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### Bill No. 108 — *The Cities Amendment Act, 2009*

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs.

**Hon. Mr. Harrison:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 108, *The Cities Amendment Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — The Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs has moved first reading of Bill No. 108, *The Cities Amendment Act, 2009*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

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

**The Speaker:** — When shall the Bill be considered a second time? I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs.

**Hon. Mr. Harrison:** — At the next sitting of the House.

**The Speaker:** — Next sitting.

### Bill No. 109 — *The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2009*

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs.

**Hon. Mr. Harrison:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 109, *The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — The Minister of Municipal Affairs has moved first reading of Bill 109, *The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2009*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

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

**The Speaker:** — When shall the Bill be considered a second time? I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs.

**Hon. Mr. Harrison:** — At the next sitting of the House.

**The Speaker:** — Next sitting.

### Bill No. 110 — *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2009*

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs.

**Hon. Mr. Harrison:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 110, *The Northern Municipalities Act* be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — The Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs has moved that Bill No. 110, *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2009* be now read the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

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

**The Speaker:** — When shall the Bill be considered a second time? I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs.

**Hon. Mr. Harrison:** — Next sitting of the House.

**The Speaker:** — Next sitting.

### Bill No. 111 — *The Northern Municipalities Consequential Amendments Act, 2009/Loi de 2009 portant modifications corrélatives à la loi intitulée The Northern Municipalities Act, 2009*

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs.

**Hon. Mr. Harrison:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 111, *The Northern Municipalities Consequential Amendments Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — The Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs has moved first reading of Bill No. 111, *The Northern Municipalities Consequential Amendments Act, 2009*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

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

**The Speaker:** — When shall the Bill be considered a second time? I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs.

**Hon. Mr. Harrison:** — The next sitting of the House.

**The Speaker:** — Next sitting.

**Bill No. 112 — *The Justices of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009/Loi de 2009 modifiant la Loi de 1988 sur les juges de paix***

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

**Hon. Mr. Morgan:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 112, *The Justices of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — The Minister of Justice has moved first reading of Bill No. 112, *The Justices of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

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

**The Speaker:** — When shall the Bill be considered a second time? I recognize the Minister of Justice.

**Hon. Mr. Morgan:** — Next sitting of the House.

**The Speaker:** — Next sitting.

**Bill No. 113 — *The Justices of the Peace Consequential Amendments Act, 2009***

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

**Hon. Mr. Morgan:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 113, *The Justices of the Peace Consequential Amendments Act, 2009*

be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — The Minister of Justice has moved first reading of Bill 113, *The Justices of the Peace Consequential Amendments Act, 2009*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

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

**The Speaker:** — When shall the Bill be considered a second time? I recognize the Minister of Justice.

**Hon. Mr. Morgan:** — Next sitting of the House, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — Next sitting.

**Bill No. 114 — *The Small Claims Amendment Act, 2009/Loi de 2009 modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur les petites créances***

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

**Hon. Mr. Morgan:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 114, *The Small Claims Amendment Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — The Minister of Justice has moved first reading of Bill No. 114, *The Small Claims Amendment Act, 2009*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

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

**The Speaker:** — When shall the Bill be considered a second time? I recognize the Minister of Justice.

**Hon. Mr. Morgan:** — The next sitting of the House.

**Bill No. 115 — *The Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)/Loi n° 2 de 2009 modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Cour du Banc de la Reine***

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

**Hon. Mr. Morgan:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 115, *The Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — The Minister of Justice has moved first reading of Bill No. 115, *The Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

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

**The Speaker:** — When shall the Bill be considered a second time? I recognize the Minister of Justice.

**Hon. Mr. Morgan:** — Next sitting of the House, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — Next sitting.

**Bill No. 116 — *The Traffic Safety (Drivers' Licences and Hand-held Electronic Communications Equipment) Amendment Act, 2009***

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Crown Investments Corp.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 116, the traffic safety (drivers' licences and hand-held communication equipment) amendment Act, 2009 now be introduced and read the first time.

**The Speaker:** — The Minister Responsible for Crown Investments Corporation has moved first reading of Bill 116, *The Traffic Safety (Drivers' Licences and Hand-held Electronic Communications Equipment) Amendment Act, 2009* be now read the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

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

**The Speaker:** — When shall the Bill be considered in committee? I recognize the minister.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Next sitting of the House.

**The Speaker:** — Next sitting.

**Bill No. 609 — *The Whistleblower Protection Act***

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

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 609, *The Whistleblower Protection Act* be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — The member from Saskatoon Fairview has moved that Bill No. 609, *The Whistleblower Protection Act* can be now read the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Agreed.

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

**The Speaker:** — When shall the Bill be read a second time? I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — At the next sitting of the House.

**The Speaker:** — Next sitting.

**ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**WRITTEN QUESTIONS**

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Government Whip.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the answers to questions 281 through 309.

**The Speaker:** — Questions 281 to 309 tabled.

**SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE**

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

**Autism Spectrum Disorder Strategy**

**Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the end of my remarks, I'll be moving the following motion:

That the province of Saskatchewan shall establish a comprehensive, provincial Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) strategy that is based on proven, best practice, evidence-based research treatments, programming; and

That all stakeholders, including individuals with ASD, be consulted on the components that will be included in the strategy, including but not limited to treatment, research, surveillance, awareness campaigns, community initiatives, education, and respite care of families; and

That this strategy shall include child, adolescent, and adult treatments and support; and

That given the complexity of the disorder and its treatments, the individualized funding concept be adapted for parents and guardians of autistic individuals.

Mr. Speaker, families in Saskatchewan with autistic children are facing a crisis. When a child is diagnosed with autism and therapy is prescribed by a health professional, publicly funded health care only pays a small portion of the cost of the prescribed therapy. Families must often pay out of their own pocket and for a large portion of the expensive prescribed treatment, and these costs may reach as much as \$60,000 a year.

Autism is a complex, life-long developmental disability which is three to four times more prevalent among boys than girls and is on the rise with 6 out of 1,000 children being diagnosed autistic each year. Autism can result in severe problems in social interaction, communication, and behaviour. And, Mr. Speaker, autistic children and autistic individuals need autism therapy services and support in order to participate to their fullest extent in society.

Mr. Speaker, comprehensive autism spectrum disorder strategy will in the long run save families, individuals, and governments money as autistic individuals reach their full potential. Mr. Speaker, there is, as the minister has said, been developed an autism strategy. And it's interesting to look at the strategy and the guiding principles. And I'm just going to read a few.

The first one is that "Services and support are individualized to meet the unique and specific biological, emotional, developmental, and social needs of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders." And the guiding principles, for the most part, are things that I think everyone believes in. It's unfortunate that when I continue reading them, nothing, none of them, actually are done nor even are they addressed adequately in the strategy. And I think that is what speaks to the frustration of the parents and families and therapists who have come today to this legislature to listen to this debate.

"The intensity of the services are supposed to match the individual needs." Well we have basically a system that, as both ministers spoke, that has certain policies in place that no one seems to be aware that could be changed, and in fact not aware that they have the authority to do that.

And we're talking about issues like the income testing for the cognitive . . . income support. And that if it's not working, why would we think that we have to keep it? In whose best interests is it to keep it? And for the ministers to stand up and defend it when it's indefensible is odd to say the least. The authority rests with them to make it work. And the parents of children and the families of people who have autism need to know that what's in place and that money is being spent on will actually meet their needs and their children and their family's needs. And that isn't so.

And another guiding principle is that the "Services and supports are available to reduce the impairment and improve the functioning . . ." Well none of that will happen unless you have timely diagnosis and adequate continuing interventions, so that families with children with autism have access to the treatments that they need and that they choose because there's a fairly wide variety of treatment options available, and what works for one child will not necessarily work for another.

And families need to be included in the planning of what works for their children, and included in this planning is a fair amount of personal cost.

And the personal cost is not only measured in dollars. I've had families come to my office that have both had to quit their jobs because they both have to be at home to look after their child.

I've had families come and say they're divorcing. And the divorce rate is very high. This is a very stressful, stressful circumstance for families to be in, and a lot of marriages just don't work; they don't last. And this is something that again is a cost to society, not to mention the cost to the individuals and the children, to split up the family. We don't do enough to support people so that they as families can survive.

And when we look at what people are asking for, they want somebody who knows how to help them. And parents of these children are really well educated on this disorder, mainly

because they're interested but also because they're smart. And people have access to information that has . . . We've never seen such an access to information.

And now parents have the information, but they should not be asked to be the person who orientates the therapist. And when the minister talked about the individuals that are being hired across the province, that is one of the main concerns is that the people that are being hired do not have adequate orientation to work with these children. And it is not the job of the parents — who have enough to do at home to keep the family together, to keep the child safe and happy — to actually now start orientating the therapists.

It's all well and good to pay the therapists whatever we're going to pay them and hire them. But if they aren't able to come and work with the families and be the navigator, be the person who pulls the services together for that individual child and that family, then it's a waste of money. It is better spent to give that money to the family who then can find their own best resource.

And as the minister said, many of us have experience in our own families with children with autism. I too have a nephew that has autism. He is not diagnosed yet, so I understand the waiting. I understand the purchase of services, and I understand the frustration of the parents who are watching this child not get what is needed at this crucial point of his development. He's three years old. The longer you wait to intervene, the less likely the child will have to reach his or her full potential. And that's what the parents are saying.

This isn't an exercise in pointing fingers, as the minister just couldn't resist at the end of his last question. He couldn't resist pointing fingers. If the minister would take the political rhetoric out of his answers, we'd be faced with dead silence. He simply can't answer the question that would meet the parents' needs. It has to be a political spin. And that doesn't matter to the parents.

We as government didn't do enough. Absolutely we did not. But now we need to see something better than saying what you did or didn't do. That isn't going to help any child or any family. It simply is not enough. And it isn't an answer that parents are coming to this legislature to get. They came to ask for help, and they get platitudes and political rhetoric. How sad. How sad. That's all we have to offer. Well we do not.

From our point of view, we think the income testing should be removed from the cognitive . . . the funding that's needed and we also think individualized funding needs to be adapted to have the parents access their own therapies that best meet the needs of their child and their family.

And individualized funding is something that the member from Nutana and I were very instrumental in bringing into the health system when we were in the Ministry of Health. We understand how it is supposed to work. Unfortunately it isn't serving people well yet either and so for the Minister of Social Services to say that a policy that was established under our government, when we were government, will stay forever — if it doesn't work, we can't keep it.

I'm having people from the disabilities community say to me, we have to fix that. We have to fix individualized funding. It



was meant for a certain purpose to have people be more independent and it isn't working, so we need to fix it. And this is another thing that we need to look at when we adapt the individualized funding, which I hope that we will do since it's the answer to these parents who need help now.

[11:15]

If we adapt the individualized funding, we have to take the bureaucracy out of it. The people that are accessing individualized funding through the disabilities community are finding it really frustrating. In fact I had a person tell me that she has two degrees and she was helping her brother try to get this individualized funding. With two degrees, she couldn't figure out the forms.

The forms are put there, from my view, to discourage people from using it. That isn't what the government is meant to do. We are meant to serve the people, make it easier. When someone calls us and says, I need help, our first answer should not be no. It should be, how can we help you? How can we help you? And if we have a policy that doesn't work, then we say we need to look at this and we need to fix it so it can help you.

And to say that we are entrenched in our policies is a pretty lame excuse for doing nothing. And I think that the people that have come today and the families who are watching, that couldn't come because they simply can't — they can't get respite care; they can't bring their children; they have other things that they need to do — they all could not come but believe me, Mr. Speaker, they're all watching. And they want to hear an answer and they don't want to hear, well this is how it's always been done and this is how it has to be done forever. That isn't good enough.

And they don't want to talk about a strategy that has all the good words in it. All the good words are here when I read it. The words are good and the guiding principles are good, and the vision statement is great. But it's been sitting on the minister's desk for a year. Do we have any hope or confidence that this will actually be implemented so families can actually benefit and children who are waiting — number 138 on the waiting list to wait for three hours of therapy a week — do we have any hope that these children and these families will be served by this strategy? I have not seen it. I cannot say I have that hope, and I think families that are here today have come because they don't see the hope either.

They need to see, frankly, the money. They need to see some money so that they can actually survive. When people have to quit work because they have to look after their child, then they can't afford to buy any more therapy. So it's a vicious circle of, how do you survive? How does a family survive with that kind of stress?

And I've talked about the marital breakups, but the rest of the family too. I mean you have a child that has autism. You have other children too. And how does that whole family work together to survive as a family and still do the best for everyone in the family? And I don't see it.

And I don't see the minister having any idea. He talked about all the people who have come to him and spoke these words and

showed him evidence of what this means. And he still has those answers to this House, that it is a finger-pointing political rhetoric and exercise. Shame on him. Shame on him. Children should not be used this way, should not be disadvantaged this way.

We do have an obligation to the children that you should not have to go and income test, be income tested to receive funding under a program that is meant to do this. And we don't have to have income testing if you fall and break your hip and come to emergency. They don't ask you what your income is before you get your hip replaced or your X-ray done or anything. Why would we do this to these families of children with autism disorder? Why would we do that to them?

This isn't the same as all the other income testing things that we do that the minister rattled off as a defence. It isn't a defence. And when we see this many families come today and talk about what is needed, you have to say, this isn't me bringing this up for some political gain. This isn't the Opposition Leader bringing it up for political gain. This is families who have come and talked to us and talked to the minister and talked to many other MLAs and told them — told all of us that — we need help. We are in crisis. We need help now.

And there is a way to do this. If we give the families individualized funding, access to that, even in an interim basis so that the families have some ability to access the proper therapies for their children right now and in the amount that those children need to actually progress to their full potential, then we will all benefit. And if we need to do it as an interim while we wait for a strategy somehow to be introduced and developed and staffed up and orientated up, then at least while we're doing that — while we're doing our bureaucratic dancing — we can have real help to families so that they can actually deal with what they have to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

And, Mr. Speaker, the therapists that came today to . . . There's therapists in the audience as well, in the galleries, and they came to give their support. They know what work has to be done. They know intimately what work has to be done. We need to have everybody's input into what is needed for this. But as a consensus, the message I've got is that individualized funding, the concept of individualized funding would be extremely beneficial to families so they could actually move to help their children.

And as I said, Mr. Speaker, I do have a motion ready to read, so I don't want to go too far before I actually have to say the motion. So I think I'm going to actually read it now and leave some room for my colleagues to speak because everybody does have a lot to say — and a major support from the opposition for this motion. And the motion reads:

That the province of Saskatchewan shall establish a comprehensive provincial autism spectrum disorder strategy that is based on proven, best practice, evidence-based research treatments and programming; and

That all stakeholders, including individuals with ASD, be consulted on the components that will be included in the strategy including, but not limited to, treatment, research,

surveillance, awareness campaigns, community initiatives, education, and respite care of families; and

That this strategy shall include child, adolescent, and adult treatments and support; and

That given the complexity of the disorder and its treatments, the individualized funding concept be adapted for parents and guardians of autistic individuals.

I so move.

**The Speaker:** — The member from Saskatoon Eastview has moved:

That the province of Saskatchewan shall establish a comprehensive provincial autism spectrum disorder strategy that is based on proven, best practice, evidence-based research treatments and programming; and

That all stakeholders, including individuals with ASD, be consulted on the components that will be included in the strategy including, but not limited to, treatment, research, surveillance, awareness campaigns, community initiatives, education, and respite care of families; and

That this strategy shall include child, adolescent, and adult treatments and support; and

That given the complexity of the disorder and its treatments, the individualized funding concept be adapted for parents and guardians of autistic individuals.

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member from Saskatoon Sutherland.

**Ms. Schriemer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to get up in the House today and speak to this motion. Autism, I think, is a word that we hear very often, but I don't think we really do know how the disease processes and the impact to both the patient and to the family.

I researched autism last night, Mr. Speaker, and there were quite a few videos available for viewing. And these little children, cute as a button, are doing behaviours that I saw in my kids as well. And it's a group of these behaviours that leads to the diagnosis, and as a result of that sometimes the diagnosis is put off or missed.

Autism spectrum disorder is a neurological disorder which causes developmental disability. Autism affects the way the brain functions, resulting in difficulties with communication and skill interaction, unusual patterns of behaviours, activities, and interests.

The term spectrum refers to a continuum of severity and developmental impairment. Not every child who is afflicted with autism behaves in the same way or has the same disability. Children and adults with ASD, autism spectrum disorder, usually have particular communication and social, behavioural characteristics in common. But the conditions cover a wide spectrum with individual differences in the number and kind of

symptoms, severity, age of onset, challenges with social interactions.

There are five autism spectrum disorders, and they're described under the category of pervasive development disorder. The most common is autistic disorder; PDD-NOS, which is pervasive developmental disorder — not otherwise specified; and Asperger's disorder, also called Asperger's syndrome.

What this is telling us, Mr. Speaker, that the diagnosis process is not very simple. It's a complicated process that takes well-trained experts, and it's not a matter of having an ECG [electrocardiogram] or a blood test. This kind of affliction needs to be diagnosed through monitoring and behavioural assessment.

Autistic disorder usually appears during the first three years of life and is four times more common in boys than in girls. Asperger's Syndrome is often diagnosed later, once a child reaches school age. So what we do know is that it's estimated that one in every 165 children is born with an ASD, and there are approximately 200,000 Canadians living with an ASD. This figure does not account for the numerous family members and caregivers whose lives are affected by autism.

Autism is not related to race, ethnicity, family income, lifestyle, or parenting. There is no standard type or typical person with an autistic developmental disorder.

What are some of the characteristics of this disorder? As I said, it has largely got to do with social skills and communication. That's why the diagnosis area is done through monitoring and behaviour. So basically, Mr. Speaker, the family recognizes or suspects a behaviour that seems a little different in their child. And it's very disturbing when you're a parent to know or to wonder if your child's sick. I mean, we're all parents. The worst thing that could happen to us is for our child to be sick, especially a debilitating, chronic disease such as this.

So the parents . . . And part of it is education. I mean, I don't think any of the members in the House, save for the member from Eastview, you know, would have that much knowledge about this disease unless they had it in their family. And it's a complicated thing to learn about. So suffice it to say that parents need a place to go. They need to be able to ask the questions about the child's behaviour and get a diagnosis. We do have a team in Saskatoon at the Kinsmen Children's Centre who do the diagnoses.

And the characteristics of ASDs are difficulty with social skills. Some autistic people show no interest in other people. They don't know how to talk, communicate in a conversation. Children have trouble playing or relating to another child, problems with communications and especially non-verbal communication — facial gestures and facial cues that we take for granted when looking at someone. The autistic person cannot connect those dots from a facial cue or an emotional gesture into real communications.

They also have repeated behaviours and restricted interests. One of the common things in young children is spinning around. And I think everybody here has had a niece or nephew, if you don't have children of your own, stand and turn around and

around and around. It's a game. This is something that's a common characteristic behaviour in autistic children. And, you know, alone that wouldn't be significant, but coupled with staring and finger flapping and repeated rocking . . .

The unfortunate thing, Mr. Speaker, is when ASD affects a child, the child will develop normally. So you feel very comfortable your child's coming along and developing quite normally, and sometimes in a matter of a day they cease to connect with people visually or by sound. So it's very difficult on parents.

[11:30]

ASD also has behaviours like unusual responses to sensations. So we've all seen *Rain Man*. When the actor doesn't get his way or he's put off of a routine, he begins to tantrum and hit himself. And that's one of the behaviours significant to autism, and of course that's in varied degrees of severity. However, managing that type of behaviour, one can only imagine the stress in that.

So the diagnosis, as I said, is done through observation of the child by professionals. There's a series of treatments. Because every case is different, every treatment schedule is different. However, you do need to have a specialist do the treatment. Fly-by-night or snake oil salesmen, so to speak, can do more damage than good. So there's applied behaviour analysis, speech therapy, occupational therapy, social skills therapy, physical therapy, play therapy, behaviour therapy, and developmental therapies, as well as visually based therapies. Biomedical is also used. Some pharmaceuticals are helpful, but they respond most to behavioural therapies.

Mr. Speaker, the previous government put in \$500,000 earmarked for autism. Our government in its first year bumped that up to 3 million and is continuing to fund it yearly. We are in the process of getting specialists and creating a framework where we can help these children and these families.

The cognitive disabilities fund and the means testing, Mr. Speaker, that whole fund was put in place by that government across the way when they were in power. And now, they're tearing it apart. We know we need more treatment. We know we need to go farther, and we're doing that, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — The member's time has elapsed. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

**Mr. Quennell:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with some humility I enter into this debate. And I will not pretend to lecture other members of the House — some of whom have been Health ministers, and one of whom of course currently is a Health minister, Mr. Speaker — or members of the public about autism spectrum disorder.

It is our place here to argue public policy and debate whether what has been done up to today for the families afflicted by this spectrum disorder is sufficient and appropriate or not. And it is the position of the opposition, as expressed in this motion, that it is not sufficient and it is not appropriate and much more needs to be done.

I'm not sure what is the position of the government members yet, Mr. Speaker. I don't think we've heard that yet. But it seems to be by implication that enough has been done by this government, and that we cannot expect to see very much more from this government in respect to a strategy, in respect to greater funding for those afflicted by autism spectrum disorder.

I am fond, perhaps overly fond, of a Russian proverb, Mr. Speaker: "The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second best time is today." And what that proverb speaks to is the inadequacies of regret and recriminations about the past to address problems for the future, Mr. Speaker.

And that's what we see so often from this government. And members who've only served in government, on the government benches, Mr. Speaker, are fond of rising and saying, that government, to this opposition, Mr. Speaker. As if they are in opposition, as if they were elected to opposition, when they were elected to government.

Too often members of this government get up and say, for the past 16 years. And two years into this government, members will get up and say, as they have this week, over the past 16 years nothing was done. Well I would say through you, Mr. Speaker, to those members: of those past 16 years, two years are theirs. Two years are theirs for them to answer to, Mr. Speaker. What has been done in the past 16 years? But what has been done in the last two years of those 16 years, Mr. Speaker?

The Minister of Health, in answers to questions today, and the member from Saskatoon Sutherland who just spoke, both said that this government has increased funding for autism spectrum disorder from \$500,000 to \$3 million. Mr. Speaker, I would like to read from the budget address — the Minister of Finance, the NDP government — made on March 22, 2007. Mr. Speaker:

. . . I'm very pleased also to announce today that we will provide \$3 million in this budget to develop an intensive autism treatment program for children moderately to severely affected by autism.

Mr. Speaker, that is the *Hansard* record. That was the budget of 2007. If that's correct, Mr. Speaker, then this is not a sixfold increase we have seen from this government, Mr. Speaker. It is a freeze of funding, Mr. Speaker. A freeze of funding, and as a matter of fact, a decrease of funding by inflationary pressures.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when the NDP government — and I'm not saying we planted the tree 20 years ago when we should've — but when the NDP government made this first step in 2007, we did not imagine that any future government would see it as the last step, Mr. Speaker. And so we are calling on this government to take the next step and not point out that they are not sitting under the shade of a tree planted 20 years ago, but to plant the trees that are necessary.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you know, in some ways my favourite proverb is a little slight for the circumstances. Children are not trees. And the importance of intervening early in a child's life, early in a child's development, cannot be overemphasized, Mr. Speaker. We knew that. We knew in government that we had to do what we could when we could do it.

Immediately prior to announcing the spending on autism, the Finance Minister announced restoration of the dental sealant program or at least the first step to return to the dental sealant program. I only raise that, Mr. Speaker, because one of the first programs this government cut — they may have only frozen spending on autism — they cut the dental sealant program. When it is time to cost-cut on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party government is penny-wise and pound foolish.

And I appreciate all governments go from one budget to the next to a certain extent, and they go from one four-year term to the next four-year term to a certain extent, Mr. Speaker. But this is a government that sees its current political situation as so much more important than the future of families that may not see the full entire benefits of individualized funding, the full entire benefits of a strategy of early intervention, years after the men and women sitting on the government benches have left public life, Mr. Speaker. But there has to be some concern about the future. Our concern can't always be for the political present, Mr. Speaker.

Now members opposite, particularly the Minister of Health but also the member from Saskatoon Sutherland, said, well we can't move away from income testing because we've had income testing. And it does seem to be a government that is frozen in many ways by the past. And ironically frozen by not their own past, not their own policies, not their own practices, but we can't possibly move away from the policies of the previous government, which we want to attack but also say, these are the policies that are in place. These are the precedents, and implicitly we have to continue to follow them.

In the list of income testing that the minister set out in his answers to questions, he included income testing for the seniors' drug plan, Mr. Speaker. Well that was not the policy of the previous government, Mr. Speaker. When the NDP government brought in the seniors' drug plan . . . And members opposite, I think, will have done their very best to forget their original reaction: it was unsustainable. The members opposite did not support it. They did not believe it should have been done. They said it was unsustainable. The province could not afford it.

Well as on many issues, Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party can change their convictions and principles from one week to the next. And when they realized the program was popular, all of a sudden it was sustainable, and to save face, to save face, Mr. Speaker, they brought in income testing. And it has never been established by this government — and this opposition has asked on numerous occasions — it has never been established by this government that the administrative cost of the income testing actually is less than the savings by not providing the program to all senior citizens. Mr. Speaker, the programming actually costs more because of the income testing.

I'm not suggesting that would be the case with individualized funding for people on autism, Mr. Speaker. But to rise in this House and oppose an end to income testing for families afflicted by autism on the grounds that we inflict income testing as a political face-saving measure on the senior citizens of this province for the seniors' drug plan, is to add insult, Mr. Speaker, to injury.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the opposition calls on the government to unfreeze the funding directed at families afflicted by autism, to stop blaming the past for refusing to build a future, and to look at what can be done for the early intervention in the lives of these . . .

**The Speaker:** — The member's time has elapsed. I recognize the member from Prince Albert Carlton.

**Mr. Hickie:** — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I too join in the debate today but also humbled by the fact that I have two lovely daughters who are teenagers now, and I as a parent and my wife, Charlene, have never had to worry about a condition like this.

And my wife's a teacher, and she tells me stories about children in grade 1 that she teaches who are for the most part diagnosed or probably will be diagnosed with autism in the future. And I hear lots of stories when she comes home from school about the supports that are required. And I understand the love of a parent, and thank you for coming here today to take part in this and listen to us. And to have the opportunity to speak on this is humbling and I'm very touched, so thank you for this.

The member from Saskatoon Meewasin touched on a couple of interesting points. The latter point I want to bring up first is that he talks about policies that were in place, Mr. Speaker, under the previous NDP government. And that our government, when we came into power by the electorate two years ago, understood that we had policies that were going to be different. They voted for those policy changes. In fact by the standards of statistics, it would look like the people of Saskatchewan ran to our policies. They believe in us. That there was problems with the previous administration on how they ran the government and how they ran the province for families, for individuals.

And we talk about various things in this Legislative Assembly, about nurse retention. We talk about housing for social service recipients. We talk about other programs as well. I'm not going to get into those today. I want to focus on this specific issue.

And I think the issue here that the member from Saskatoon Meewasin . . . And one of the first points he talked about was the funding. True, and on his facts, there was \$500,000 a year that the previous government for 16 years gave to this particular account. And in 2007, yes, there was an injection of 2.5 million additional dollars — one-time funding, Mr. Speaker, one-time.

[11:45]

So prior to that, when you do the math, Mr. Speaker, it averages out, over 16 years of NDP government, to \$32,000 per year — small, small amount. Sadly to say it was a small amount by the previous administration, and one-time funding, with no commitment to future funding, was disheartening.

So our government, Mr. Speaker, listened to the stakeholders, and over the last two years we've put in \$6 million, Mr. Speaker. And we have a commitment to maintain that funding every year — not a one-time injection during an election year. So that's disheartening the member from Saskatoon Meewasin wanted to go there this morning with a gallery full of mothers and fathers of children who are suffering from that autism

disease.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, as awareness of autism spectrum disorder increases, we are seeing early diagnosis, resulting in a need for intensive supports for family of children with autism.

Our government announced last March that children with autism in the communities of North Battleford, Regina, Saskatoon will benefit from \$322,300 in new funding. This investment includes \$150,000 in ongoing funding to early childhood intervention programs for increasing services for children and their families. Also one-time grant of \$172,300 will be provided to the Saskatoon region early childhood intervention program to develop, coordinate, and deliver two professional learning conferences on autism for the pre-K to 12 [pre-kindergarten to grade 12] and early learning and child care sectors.

The new funding, Mr. Speaker, will allow the early childhood intervention programs in North Battleford, Regina, and Saskatoon to provide intensive, home-based support to five to seven families in each early childhood intervention program region. Through this funding, an autism early childhood consultant will work with children from birth to age five who are diagnosed with autism or who are awaiting diagnosis. This work will help both the child and family meet goals such as increasing communication skills, improving cognitive skills, and improving fine and gross motor skills.

Mr. Speaker, on top of this, the Minister of Health announced the framework and action plan for autism spectrum disorder services so children with autism can have access to enhanced services and supports. This framework is designed to address growing gaps in autism care and focus the approach to services and support to those with autism.

Under the plan, 15 consultants will be located throughout the province, acting as first points of contact for families seeking services. The consultants will individualize intervention programs for children and act as case managers. An additional 18 consultants will support workers and provide direct supports to children with autism.

Mr. Speaker, this new plan does two things. First, it makes the most efficient use possible of the available funding dollars. And second and even more important, it recognizes that each child with autism is unique and needs individualized programming and evidence-supported intervention options. Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to ensure those with autism are receiving the care needed.

Mr. Speaker, our government has two global funds to support those with autism. First there is the early childhood intervention program, as I spoke about earlier, which received \$3.6 million. And an additional \$990 million is provided to the boards of education around the province. This money is used to improve the quality of education and assist in the delivery of appropriate programs and services. Mr. Speaker, we also have the provincial autism advisory committee which created a plan to guide the development of autism treatment and support across the province with \$2.99 million.

Mr. Speaker, our government is addressing immediate needs of

those with autism. At the same time, we are providing a long-term vision to guide us as we move forward. Talking to stakeholders and groups that have been involved with the autism spectrum disorder for a number of years have given us counsel, moving us forward. And this government believes in taking that counsel ongoing as well. Because for sure, and to be sure, Mr. Speaker, things in the past weren't good.

Things right now are moving forward and we look forward to the stakeholders involved in this particular disorder to advise us. And the parents will in turn be able to talk to those groups who in turn can advise us as well. And that's what this government is committed to, Mr. Speaker.

The income program for people with long-term disabilities is another issue our government took into hand two years ago. And, Mr. Speaker, our government brought in the largest ever investment in programming for people with intellectual disabilities, as well as the introduction of a new income plan for people with disabilities. We put \$76.9 million over four years to help those with intellectual disabilities to live safe, secure, and meaningful lives in their communities.

This investment will eliminate the current 440-person wait-list for residential, day, and specialized programs for people with intellectual disabilities. It also includes 27.8 million in funding for capital projects. It will also introduce programming standards that will ensure the appropriate levels of support are provided, and it will provide improved supports to approved private sector home providers.

Over the next four years, we will be able to help more than 400 people who are currently on a waiting list for new or expanded services. Mr. Speaker, this means for the first time in our province's history, people with long-term disabilities have their own separate income program. For years people with disabilities and their organizations have been telling government that they needed a new, dignified, less intrusive income support program. The new program began in October 2009, when 3,000 people with disabilities enrolled and began to receive benefits.

Over time, enrolment in the new program is expected to reach between 8,000 and 10,000 people. This historic income replacement program is a turning point for people with disabilities in Saskatchewan. It is giving people a greater opportunity to contribute to their well-being as an important factor in helping them build self-reliance.

Mr. Speaker, more than 3,000 people who are eligible for the new program have been invited to enrol, by the Ministry of Social Services, as part of the program's implementation, with the first benefits to be paid for the month of December. So far more than 2,000 people have already enrolled in the new program. The SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] program is designed in collaboration with members of the disability community and will provide an income for people with significant long-term disabilities that are separate from the Saskatchewan assistance program, referred to as SAP.

Support for people with disabilities is a priority for this government. We are committed to ensuring that everyone in Saskatchewan benefits from our province's growth. Mr.

Speaker, as a government we are committed to doing our part to ensure people with disabilities participate fully in our society.

Mr. Speaker, those with intellectual disabilities in the Saskatoon area are going to have access to residential and other programs with funding to build a new home near Aberdeen. This home will include a 15-space day program for people with intellectual disabilities, and it will also have a day program.

We have committed to providing more than \$750,000 in annual operational funding once the new home and day program are in operation. The new 4,500-square-foot home will be constructed on an acreage and will be operated by Farm in the Dell, who is also planning to build the 2,000-square-foot building for the delivery of day programs as part of this project.

And I see my time's coming in, Mr. Speaker. So autism is a serious issue for this government. We as legislators shouldn't play politics with such an issue. We need to work and help those with autism.

**The Speaker:** — Order. Order. The member's time has elapsed. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

**Ms. Atkinson:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to enter into this public policy discussion in terms of how we need to move forward when it comes to autism-related supports and services.

Mr. Speaker, the previous member just indicated to the House — and I want to correct the previous member — that, in the last year in office, the NDP government allocated \$2.5 million in one-time funding to autism supports and that there was no ability to include the \$3 million in ongoing supports. And I just wanted to put it on the public record. Some of us sat on the Treasury Board prior to our defeat in November of 2007, and some of us have briefing notes that were available in the fall of 2007 and the spring of 2007.

I just wanted to put this on the record. It's a briefing note regarding enhancements to autism-related supports and services dated September 18th, 2007. And I need to correct the government because what this briefing note indicates is that the 2007-08 budget for autism included \$500,000 in ongoing funding for treatment and support and \$2.5 million in one-time funding for bursary and training opportunities for people who work with autism and related conditions.

Saskatchewan Health recognizes the need to provide high quality services to our province's children and has decided to allocate ongoing funding for autism interventions in the amount of \$3 million annually, beginning in 2008-09.

Now what this briefing note also indicates is that:

During 2007-08, the one-time funding will be used for capacity building and training. Funds have been allocated to provide introductory hands-on autism therapy training workshops to front-line professionals [so that would be teachers, educational assistants, child care workers, therapists, consultants] to provide bursaries to students in selected health professionals to enhance the summer programming for children with autism and to commence

providing intense therapy to children with autism.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this briefing note also says departmental officials will be meeting with our partners in the near future to discuss the options for how these funds should be used in 2008-09 and beyond. It also says that very soon a letter will be going to health regions, community resources, Learning, and CBOs to invite them to participate on an autism advisory committee to plan for the allocation of the \$3 million budget for 2008-09. So, Mr. Speaker, the previous government did make arrangements to have ongoing supports of 3 million for autism services in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, all of us have had people from our constituencies come to our offices indicating that the individualized funding is not working for them. And, Mr. Speaker, I recently had a young family that have recently purchased a home. They work. They don't make a lot of money, but they earn money beyond the ability to receive any individualized funding because of their income.

Mr. Speaker, their little boy is two and a half years old. He's a beautiful little boy. He's been recently diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, and he is not yet speaking. And, Mr. Speaker, they believe that with some intense speech and language therapy that their little boy could be in a position when he starts school to have some speech and language.

Mr. Speaker, these are people who are middle-income people. Both the man and the woman are both working, and they have one child. But they have a pretty significant mortgage payment because they have gotten into the housing market in Saskatoon, and we all know that the cost of housing has escalated dramatically in the province of Saskatchewan. Most of the people that are coming to my office, Mr. Speaker, are young working families with young children and they have a diagnosis and they're looking for supports.

Now the minister earlier indicated to us that he had this advisory committee put in place and that they had put forward a program or a framework and an action plan last year. And I think all of us can agree with the guiding principles. I think the principles are important. The principles are that:

Services and supports are [to be] individualized to meet the unique and specific biological, emotional development and social needs of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

The intensity of services and supports [need to] match the level of individual needs.

Services and supports are available to reduce the impairment and improve the functioning of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Early intervention . . .

And my colleague, the member from Meewasin, spoke about this.

Early intervention is critical in [terms of] reducing impairment and improving the function of individuals

with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Intervention, treatment and support services are evidence-supported, and on-going research and evaluation informs decision-making by policy-makers, service providers and community members.

And I want to support my colleague from Eastview when she said that the real experts on autism disorder are the parents that have spent a lot of time researching the subject, getting to know the research. They know exactly what may work and may not work given the individual circumstance. And I really do think that we need to have professionals pay more attention to what parents are saying to them, because oftentimes the parent is the expert. Most times the parent is the expert when it comes to the types of strategies and programs that may or may not work with their child.

[12:00]

Mr. Speaker, the guiding principles go on and I think all of us, as members of this Assembly, can agree with the guiding principles. Now what we need to do is to get the right policies in place to support the guiding principles, and we need to get the right support in place to support parents and their children.

Mr. Speaker, individualized funding is not working for the vast majority of parents in the province because it's income tested. And I do believe that, given that we know early intervention is critical, that we need to remove that impediment in order that young children can have access to the appropriate services for their particular disability, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely key that we have trained individuals and educated individuals in autism. Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely key. And we know where the education and training is located. We need to get people into those programs so that they are in Saskatchewan providing the latest information and the best therapies to children and youth that are living with autism spectrum disorder.

Mr. Speaker, we've known in the past that, particularly in the whole area of treating people who've been sexually abused, you can't just have anybody treat them. You need to have people who have the skills and knowledge and the pedagogy when it comes to treatment and supports. And so I say to the members opposite, let's get the right people who have the right training to provide those services to the young people that have this disorder, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing that we need to do, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to get those services on the ground in communities, and that is going to take money beyond the \$3 million. And so as we're training and educating those young people or the supports, we then need to make sure that there is a position available for people in the community to have access to the right therapies, Mr. Speaker.

And so I would say to the government that I know that they're putting 18 people across the province in place. I hope that they have the education and training and knowledge base, because that is key if we're going to have the right supports with the right programs in place to support families who have children

with autism spectrum disorder, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that we need to do is get rid of the barrier. If intervention is critical to supporting people with autism spectrum disorder, we can't have a barrier of income. Mr. Speaker, we need to treat this disorder as we do . . .

**The Speaker:** — The member's time has elapsed. I recognize the member from Saskatchewan Rivers.

**Ms. Wilson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to be able to stand in the House today and speak on this important issue faced today. We submit to this House that it's irresponsible to suggest that our government has done nothing regarding the needs of students with autism spectrum disorder. Our government has not, nor will it ever, ignore the needs of children living with autism spectrum disorder.

Consider the following: the Ministry of Education provides 3.7 million annually to the early childhood intervention program. This program then directs funds to students with autism spectrum disorder. Furthermore, the ministry also provides 67 million annually to school boards for intensive needs support services, which include services for students with autism spectrum disorder. In addition to the Ministry of Education funding towards the needs of students with autism spectrum disorder, our Saskatchewan Party government through the Ministry of Health allocated 2.9 million to the provincial autism advisory committee.

Mr. Speaker, with nearly 7 million funding dollars committed to addressing the needs of students with autism spectrum disorder, how can the NDP claim that we have ignored the needs of these students?

Mr. Speaker, the NDP also contends that the Saskatchewan Party government isn't doing anything to support families of children with autism. This is untrue. In 2008 our government provided 3 million of funding for autism services. We consulted with all stakeholder groups, including families and health care professionals, to best determine the needs of families with children with autism.

I myself, I'm in a program called Adopt an MLA and I work with a family raising a child with autism. Bryan is a bright young man and I think he really enjoys our visits together. Well I'm the parent of four adult children. I understand the challenges of raising a child with autism. By working and supporting with these families, I truly believe we can help them.

Again, our government also created the provincial autism advisory committee which provides parents and other stakeholders with a feedback mechanism. Parents can now provide valuable input which will then guide treatment for children with autism. Mr. Speaker, under the previous NDP government the families of children with autism had no such voice.

Our government also created 33 new positions throughout the province that will enhance autism spectrum disorder services. Now these new positions will also support numerous intervention programs, as well as providing training opportunities for Saskatchewan parents, service providers,

professionals, and paraprofessionals.

As well, Mr. Speaker, our government has implemented funding for three autism positions through the early childhood intervention program. Now these autism positions will be absolutely critical for children with autism, as they are the first stage in helping these children acquire a functional communicational system. Once professionals have intervened at an early stage, these workers can begin to work with the children in cultivating a communication system in order that their learning can expand. Now these critical positions will be located in Regina, Saskatoon, and the Battlefords. So, Mr. Speaker, we can see that our government is committed to providing funding and resources to these families of children with autism.

Mr. Speaker, the numbers speak for themselves. And contrary to what the opposition says, our government is doing a lot to support these families. Through three separate ministries, our government provides direct funding. The Ministry of Education does so through two global funds. The early childhood intervention program is provided with 3.6 million, and this money can be directed to intensive interventions for children with autism spectrum disorder. Now these programs include supports and services such as assessment, speech/language services, occupational and physical therapy, counselling, and inter-agency collaboration for students with intensive needs including autism spectrum disorder.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Social Services authored a report entitled *Communities Working Together: Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Citizens With Cognitive Disabilities*. The Ministry of Social Services provides flexible funding, and this funding is directed towards people who meet criteria which then supplements or exceeds existing programs, programs that support individuals and their families throughout the province of Saskatchewan. These services include respite care, parent aids, independent living support. And all of these services are provided through the Minister of Social Services' flexible funding pool. Now for 2009-10, the funding pool budget for the cognitive disability strategy is 1.9 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is two separate ministries tasked with addressing the needs of children with autism spectrum disorder. But there's also a third ministry responsible for addressing the needs of these children. The Ministry of Health provides global funding to all Saskatchewan health regions, and these health regions are then responsible for allocating funds towards programs and services based on their respective priorities as they relate to children living with autism spectrum disorder. Now these services are made available to all Saskatchewan residents of all ages. These services can be provided in out-patients, community and home environments, and include assessment, education, and ongoing intervention.

So this is the plan that our government has. I think it's a result of a very comprehensive review of existing provincial autism spectrum disorder services. And this program is currently being implemented throughout the province. In fact Lisa Simmermon is quoted in a October 31st, 2008 edition of *The StarPhoenix* as saying:

It's positive to see that ... [the Saskatchewan Party

government is] actually going to try to put in place some people who are targeted specifically for providing some of the treatment services that are needed for autism.

So thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see my time is up. But I truly believe this is a very important issue, and as parents and leaders of the community, I think we're trying to address autism. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** — According to the rules, the 65-minute debate period has elapsed. We will now enter a 10-minute question period. I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

**Mr. Trew:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What an interesting time this has been. First we hear that the government, the Sask Party, crowing that they've increased the autism spending to \$3 million. And then my colleague points out that we left it at \$3 million, so in fact it's a freeze. So the ground just keeps on shifting for the Sask Party.

We hear excuses that New Democrats did and didn't do this and that and the other thing while we were office. Well that was two years ago, Mr. Speaker. We hear the Sask Party also saying, well what do you want us to do? We're spending the same amount of money.

Mr. Speaker, one of the many steps that parents have to jump, one of the hoops they have to jump through to get the appropriate help for their autistic children is to have an ability, a cognitive ability test. Will the government, will the Sask Party remove the income test for that cognitive ability test, that very unfair income test ... [inaudible interjection] ... Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I knew who I was asking it to. It's to the member for P.A. [Prince Albert] Carlton.

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

**Mr. Hickie:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. And again to the member opposite, I want to thank them for the questions. They always seem to bring up these points where they want to start talking about crowing, disrespectful today with the fact that we have parents of children in the gallery that will have to listen to this kind of talk. It's not what we should be looking at today.

The idea, Mr. Speaker, is that this government has talked to stakeholders. We've moved forward on the actions and recommendations given to the Minister of Health. We've also worked on the situation that was left for us — which was \$36,000 per year average spending for children with autism spectrum disorder — Mr. Speaker, in two years, \$6 million. And other ministries, as we've heard, are also supporting these programs. So, Mr. Speaker, I want to say right now that this government listens to the stakeholders, doesn't put money in at election time, Mr. Speaker, to try to win votes. Thank you very much.

[Interjections]

**The Speaker:** — Order. Order. Before we move forward, I just want to remind members of the rules that have been implemented by the members, that they're not to bring the visitors in the galleries into the debate. I recognize the member



from Saskatchewan Rivers.

**Ms. Wilson:** — Autism spectrum disorder is not well understood, and this disorder first appears during infancy or childhood.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the opposition members if they would stop playing politics with this issue so that we can address the needs of families dealing with autism through commitment and co-operation between the two of us. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — Which member? Which member?

**Ms. Wilson:** — To the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

**Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm assuming the member listened to question period when I said — and I also said in my speech — that if the minister would take the politics out of his answers, we'd be having dead silence. And I certainly see that still. We're talking about who did what and finger pointing, and as I said before, no one is interested in that.

What they're interested in is the two solutions that we have proposed. One is to take the income testing away from the cognitive disabilities fund, and the other one is to adapt the individualized funding program to meet the needs of parents with children with autism. That is what we have said, and there's nothing political about it. It is an actual strategy with recommendations.

What I've heard up to this point has been nothing but political rhetoric of all the litany of things that the Sask Party supposedly did, even with incorrect numbers. So the politics is certainly not on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

[12:15]

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Dewdney.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question will be to the member from Saskatchewan Rivers, Mr. Speaker, so she has the opportunity to pay careful attention.

Mr. Speaker, the people of the province of Saskatchewan and the families of those with autism aren't concerned about the past. The past and the mistakes that have been made are just that — it's the past. Their concern is about the future.

I've had the opportunity to spend considerable time with a family in my constituency with a young son with autism and talk to them about the many challenges they have gone through and are continuing to go through in trying to get treatment for Aden. In fact this family spent tens of thousands of dollars going to Los Angeles to a program there to learn about dealing with Aden and his particular needs.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my question to the member is this, the member for Saskatchewan Rivers: will they commit today to

quit talking about things, just talking about it, and make a commitment to remove income testing from individualized funding to provide for the families in this province?

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

**Ms. Wilson:** — I thank the member opposite for that very valuable and important question. But I believe our government is making strides to improve things. And the committees have met and listened. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hickie:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well again we hear that we shouldn't politicize this process, and both sides have a certain stance they want to bring forward today. I think it's interesting that we talked about funding, previous funding from the previous administration, funding that we're doing from our standpoint. You know, and the government of the day, 16 years ago, had some initiatives for sure. Absolutely. For \$500,000 a year, I'm sure that it was something.

Today they criticize what our government's doing. And you know, some families in SaskFEAT have said and advocated for individual funding per child. It's about 45,000 to 60,000 per child, Mr. Speaker.

To the member from Saskatoon Nutana, she stood today and showed us a document that indicated what they were doing for the citizens of the province. Can she tell us if she agrees with the amount that some of the SaskFEAT parents have said that they wish for? Does she criticize that amount? What would they do, Mr. Speaker?

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

**Ms. Atkinson:** — Mr. Speaker, what I can say to the member opposite is that as the result of the \$3 million that was put into the budget in 2007-08, there was a committee, an advisory committee that was put into effect which gave a strategy to the province. I think none of us will disagree with the guiding principles of that strategy.

And I think what parents want is they want to have access to services and programs. And they want those services and programs provided by people who have the training and education when it comes to autism spectrum disorder.

I also think what parents want — and this is certainly loud and clear in my constituency office — is that with the escalated cost of living, escalating cost of getting into a home . . . just to buy a home in the province of Saskatchewan and have a mortgage, even at low interest rates, that mortgage is high. And so they want to see the elimination of income testing when it comes to accessing individualized funding. And we agree with that.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Dewdney.

**Mr. Yates:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My

question is for the member from Saskatoon Sutherland. A few minutes ago, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to ask a member whether or not they would agree to supporting today, their government supporting today, the removal of the limitations in income testing on individualized funding. Mr. Speaker, those limitations today and that income testing eliminates many, many families from those needed supports for their children.

So my question to the member from Saskatoon Sutherland is, will she stand today and tell this House that she supports removing the income testing from individualized funding?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Sutherland.

**Ms. Schriemer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been a lot of work done in the autism area. We had increased funding. One of the biggest issues around autism is research. We still don't know what causes it, how it can be prevented. Those are important things, Mr. Speaker. Some of the various suspected causes, you know, included everything from heredity to environment. So we don't know what causes it, and prevention would of course be the best action.

However what we do know is that the treatment has to be very specialized. The member from Eastview had stated so, as well as the member from Meewasin, that specialized treatment is very, very important. And so I think that what should be best done is what we're doing, and that is to create teams of professionals . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order. The 75-minute private members' motions time has elapsed.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

### PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

#### SECOND READINGS

##### **Bill No. 606 — *The Protection of the Wild Ponies of the Bronson Forest Act***

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Lloydminster.

**Mr. McMillan:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to tell the members of the Legislative Assembly about the wild ponies of the Bronson Forest and to explain a little bit further the Act that was introduced in the House a week ago.

Mr. Speaker, I'll start off by saying this is a motion that recognizes the effort made by the Government of Saskatchewan to protect the wild ponies of the Bronson Forest. Before I delve into that, there's a couple people I should thank that have been very involved in this process up to this point.

Mr. Speaker, a gentleman, a 86-year-old rancher who's been ranching up in that area for his entire life, Mr. Speaker, his name's Bob Hougham. He's the first person who brought this to my attention. He had photos of some horses that had been shot and killed. He also had pictures of horses that were running

wild that were just as free and as iconic as you can possibly imagine. And he thought that we needed to do something to either protect them or we were going to lose them, Mr. Speaker.

Another gentleman that shares his passion, his name is Ken McLeod. He grew up just miles away from there, Mr. Speaker. He's been involved with these horses on a couple different sides of the issue in his life, but he is a major advocate for them. He in fact petitioned this legislature some time ago to try and get some support for them then and was turned down. But I appreciate Ken's support of what we're doing now, and I think he deserves some appreciation.

Ray Sproull, another, Mr. Speaker, who's supplied some fantastic footage. David Krughoff, who wrote a fantastic article in *Prairies North* this spring with again some fantastic photos of these magnificent animals.

One person I think deserves some credit here, Mr. Speaker, is Milt Wakefield. He held my seat in this legislature up until the last election. When in opposition, Mr. Speaker, he also had brought this to the attention of the legislature. He petitioned the then government that they could do something to protect these ponies. And I know he was very frustrated by the response that he got from the then government. He felt like his concerns were somewhat being ignored, Mr. Speaker. And I wasn't there at the time, but I know that he had tried to champion this and did champion this. It was just deaf ears, I think, that was the problem.

I would also like to thank the local support. Many people when I was talking about this a year ago, that this was something I thought needed to be done, said absolutely. This herd of horses or multiple herds of horses have been part of our community for their entire lives, going back almost 100 years. And they've been very supportive.

Since the Bill was introduced just a week ago, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a flood of emails have come in — people that are very supportive from across Saskatchewan but really across the country. A lot of people can really relate to wild ponies. They are an iconic symbol that, I think, they represent Western values. They represent freedom. And they're a little bit in the imagination of everyone in Canada, especially, I think . . . I've got a couple of young girls, Mr. Speaker, and they think that this is about the most important work a government could do, Mr. Speaker.

Another example. We opened up a Facebook page two days ago, Mr. Speaker, that was a Facebook page for people that were supportive of this, or that weren't and wanted to express that. It has been overwhelming. The number of people is, over 100 people in two short days have signed up as supporters of the Bronson Forest horses. And you know the comments in there are just fantastic. People that can really relate to this.

Now to get into some of the more technical information — just where they are, what they are, kind of how we got to this point. The Bronson Forest, Mr. Speaker, lies north of Lloydminster and west of Meadow Lake. It almost butts up to the Alberta border. Its southern border of the forest is 25 kilometres north of Paradise Hill, and its northern border stretches all the way up to Ministikwan Lake. In the forest there's countless beautiful

lakes. There's Bronson Lake, there's Peck Lake, Little Fishing Lake, Moonshine, Round, North, and a major recreation area there, especially around Little Fishing and Peck — big cabin communities, a provincial park.

And many of those people go through the effort needed to get all the way over to the Bronson Forest to try and catch a glimpse of these elusive animals. Many, many people come back after a weekend quadding up there with just fantastic stories of what they've seen, and the interaction they were able to have.

Also living up there, fantastic wildlife. It is a mecca for hunting white-tailed deer. There's a lot of black bear. There's wolves. Outfitters are very prevalent in this area, and I think have very successful businesses. It's a tourist area. My wife and some of the ladies from Red Cross in the local area had gone on a horse packing trip up there in the spring. They packed up their horses and tents and just headed out into the wilderness, right in amongst the wild horses' territory, set up tents. And you can swim in the lakes and there's no one for miles and miles around, and campfires at night, and trying to catch a glimpse of these horses again, Mr. Speaker.

Now the horses themselves, I think I'll talk about them for a second, Mr. Speaker. They're one of Saskatchewan's best-kept secrets. That's a theme that has really come through from a lot of people that have contacted me is, you know, who knew we had wild horses in Saskatchewan? You heard about the Sable Island horses. You hear about horses in Alberta. But Saskatchewan? We don't have wild horses. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I think it has been a great secret, but no longer. I think that what we're doing here in this legislature is partly spreading the word. And they're going to be something that many people can take pride in and hopefully come and take a look at, Mr. Speaker.

In 2005 it is estimated there was roughly 125 of these horses running free. They have been a wild herd for almost 100 years. And it's a rather harsh climate, Mr. Speaker. We live in northern Saskatchewan. As I said earlier, there's black bear. There's wolves. And they are prey to these animals. And I know that the balance of nature is something that probably keeps these animals at about that level — 125.

I've heard, you know, over the years it's got slightly higher and slightly lower. But the troubling thing, Mr. Speaker, is that recently, and not because of the balance of nature, it is more the balance of unwanted human interaction — people shooting them, Mr. Speaker — that has forced their numbers down to about 37.

That was a number, probably the best estimate by David Krughoff in *Prairies North* who had spent a substantial amount of time out there and is, I don't want to call him an expert, but I think he probably is. He knows about the herds. He calls them bands.

He says that there's three bands of horses. Two of the bands have 14 in it, and then there's one smaller band of four. There's an additional five stallions that roam the forest, I'm presuming that in hopes that someday they will be the top stallion in one of those bands. They roam singularly or in pairs. There's 21

females in the three bands. And during the 2008 season, there were five colts that survived the trials of birth, Mr. Speaker. And that's no small feat, so five new colts joining the herd this year.

Mr. Krughoff had told me that watching these horses, very often there's wolves just in the long grass continually shadowing the herds. And if they get a shot, and I think they would probably take a colt if they got the opportunity.

[12:30]

The five new colts, that represents a 24 per cent success rate of mares bringing colts. It's not a great success rate. I know that there's some concern that overpopulation in different environments, in different parts of the world where there are wild horses, that can be a concern. This particular area, Mr. Speaker, the balance I think has been well established, and historically it has been around that 125 number.

The ponies of the Bronson Forest, they provide both a living and historical tourist attraction for the people of Saskatchewan. The ponies are an iconic symbol of freedom and the western way of life. Like the wild animals, they've learned how to survive on their own.

And, Mr. Speaker, many of the traits that they embody are the same traits of the ancestors that 100 years ago were homesteading that area. Those people, they came up into the North. They didn't know ... They probably came from southern Saskatchewan or the US [United States] to forge a life in bush and hills and forest and try and eke out a life farming or ranching. And the self-sufficiency they had is very much reflected in the horses they brought and the horses that roam wild there today.

Self-reliance of these animals, Mr. Speaker. There was lean years back then, when due to nature or mistake or fire, that those ranchers and frontiersmen went without. And same with these horses, Mr. Speaker. They've lived relatively untouched ever since, and it's a tribute that they have been so successful. And I think it's kind of special for everyone else just to see that that way of life may have passed, but this link to it, being the horses, still survives today.

Mr. Speaker, if the ponies do become extinct, Mr. Speaker, and if we're down under 40 and things don't change, if high-powered rifle versus horse is still legal in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, I am afraid that we will see them go extinct. And that would be a real shame. And I think we would have no one to blame but ourselves.

We have the power here as legislators to make good decisions, not to run blindly at a fad. But this is something that Milt Wakefield brought forward and educated the Assembly on years ago. It's something that I think is the right thing to do, and I have a lot of confidence that members will do the right thing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak about the community that has been around and a part of these horses. And these horses have been a part of the community. It's a tightly knit community. It's mainly ranchers, getting more recreation now.

But one story that really stands out, and it's the story I've known for a long time and is really special to me, before I even knew there was a problem with these horses getting shot. And it is back in the late '70s or early '80s, entrepreneur got a contract, or I don't know if he got a contract, but got approval to trap a bunch of these horses in fences. He trapped them, and he hauled a load of them down to the stockyards in Lloydminster and was going to sell them at the stockyards to make a little money. He did that, and they went to auction. And the auctioneer sold them off, probably going for meat or for dog food, Mr. Speaker. And what had happened is the local ranchers up there got wind of this. They went down to the stockyards. They bought them all. They hauled their horse trailers down there. They loaded them up and hauled them back 150 km north and turned them loose.

Now if that isn't a testament to, number one, a fantastic community — I think, you know, I think every community should aspire to that sort of behaviour — but to the love of the horses and thinking of them, not as family, but as part of a tightly knit community, Mr. Speaker.

And these very ranchers then and now are still some of the strongest advocates for these horses. They're the ones that have brought it to my attention. These ranchers graze their cattle on the Bronson Forest lands. All summer long, they're out there riding their horses, moving their cattle from field to field.

And what it is, Mr. Speaker, it's very wooded. It opens up into unbelievable, beautiful grasslands and lakes, and it's just a treat. Me and my family were up there this past weekend. It's a harrowing experience to get there. It's one of the roughest, toughest roads I've been on in a long time. I think that's a tribute to our Minister of Highways that the other roads in Saskatchewan have come so far, but this particular road . . . And it isn't a highway, it's a bush road, it's about six miles off the closest main road. And to get in there is a test. But it's well worth it when you get in to see the beauty of the Bronson Forest.

In summer months, like I said, these horses graze in amongst and around the cattle. In fall it's one of the most vibrant wilderness areas, and hunting is a big part of that community. People come from all over Saskatchewan to hunt white-tailed deer. The outfitters hunt in there. And these horses survive and thrive in and amongst all that. And I think it's a bit of a treat when people come up from the States to go outfitting, and they're hunting moose or white-tailed deer and out of the corner of the pasture comes a herd of wild horses. That's just a little bit of Saskatchewan that you can't put a value on, Mr. Speaker.

It's a major quadding area around the lakes recreation area. Many people for an afternoon will pack a lunch and come out quadding and share that with any guest that they might have. Logging takes place in here, Mr. Speaker. And I'm giving all these examples because this is a vibrant area. It, on one hand, is stark wilderness. And on the other, it's vibrant in commercial cattle, in commercial logging, in commercial outfitting. And these horses live within all that and are embraced by almost everyone who works within them.

I'd just like to talk a little bit about other jurisdictions and how they've taken this seriously, Mr. Speaker. Most people in Saskatchewan didn't know we had wild horses. I think that's

mistake number one. But looking across Canada, I think the best example is in 1961. And I believe it was John Diefenbaker, the prime minister who hailed from Saskatchewan, and I believe it was John Diefenbaker who passed into law the Nova Scotia *Sable Island Regulations of Canada Shipping Act* of 1961. And that granted national recognition and protection for the Sable Island horses, and I think that is kind of a cornerstone really in North America.

In 1970s the Americans had a national Act that protected the wild horses of the United States. Other provinces — Alberta has some protection for their wild horses, and British Columbia, I believe, has some protection for theirs as well. Alberta's horses are down around Suffield. British Columbia has about 400 in the Chilcotin range, Mr. Speaker. The Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker, have had a long history of working together to get accomplishments. I think that that is a spirit that we should try and embrace in this Assembly, and especially on an issue like this, Mr. Speaker.

I hope that we can lend a hand to assist the people trying to save the horses of Bronson Forest, and do our part as legislators. These local people believe that these ponies represent a part of our heritage, and if we lose these ponies to extinction we will lose that link to our past. That is a sentiment that has been shared to me by many, many people.

I'm going to pass the floor on to the opposition, Mr. Speaker. I know they'd like to make some comments. But before I do, I would just like to share with the Assembly that this is something that has been brought forward to members of the Assembly in times past through my predecessor, Milt Wakefield. It's something that has been written about in magazines here in our province. It's been written about across Canada. It's one of those few times that I think there is no real political side to it. Everyone can and should come together to work for it. And today, Mr. Speaker, we have that opportunity.

We know that private members' Bills often get bogged down by process. Very few of them see the light of day. They often are introduced and die on the order paper, and that is something I don't want to see happen here. And today, Mr. Speaker, we have the opportunity to, by leave, pass this through all stages. If the opposition will co-operate, the Saskatchewan Party is certainly willing to do that. By the end of session today, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite with their co-operation can ensure that there is protection for these horses.

I think that if there is concerns and somebody would like to speak to it, there's that opportunity. We can debate a lot of different things, but when there's something about a community that has come together, a community that has said to the legislature, look at this issue and let's work our way through it, because we think it's the right thing to do, I'm asking, Mr. Speaker, my counterparts on both sides of this legislature to work today to get this done. I don't want to see this die on the order paper. I don't want to see a good piece of legislation, something that's a link to our past, opportunity for the future for the tourism, for the people that live in that community, that have been raised in and around them . . .

And I would like to maybe expound on that a little more. We get lost here in Regina and Saskatoon and Lloydminster and

Lashburn and Maidstone with, you know, day to day. In Lloydminster it's a lot of oil field. In Regina, the world I live in, it's a lot of legislature. This area, Mr. Speaker, it's ranchers. These are men and women that were raised in the saddle, to use a euphemism.

I am a cattle rancher myself, Mr. Speaker, and I ride horses and we round up our cows and we use horses very regularly. But maybe we're modern ranchers, because we have a chute. If we're branding, we bring them in and we put them in a squeeze and we brand them in the squeeze. This area, Mr. Speaker, they have embraced the past. They continue to, they rope calves off their horses. They drag them in by a fire and they brand them what I would call the old-fashioned way.

They don't do it because it's old fashioned, Mr. Speaker. They do it because that's the most efficient, fastest way to brand a herd of calves. The reason I don't do it, Mr. Speaker — and I don't disagree with them — is I don't have that skill. I love horses. I'd spend all day roping my first calf, Mr. Speaker. I don't think that . . . It would take me about six months to brand my entire herd if I was the man on the horse with the rope.

But I think that we have to look at it through their eyes. These people that are raised on horses, that live the life of ranchers are cattlemen. They ranch this very land in and around these horses. Many of them, their fathers ranched in and around these horses. So it just has come to me and I know it came to my predecessor, Mr. Wakefield, that this needs to be done. And probably now pressing now than ever, when we can drop from 125 horses to less than 40.

**An Hon. Member:** — Something has to be done.

**Mr. McMillan:** — Yes, something has to be done, Mr. Speaker, because when you put a high-powered rifle against a horse, the high-powered rifle will win every time. I think that it is, you know, I never want to get in the position where an animal that's living in the wild that has learned all the skills . . . You know, there will be times that nature, that wolves, that the balance will be found. But I don't think the balance will ever be found when it is pitting rifle against horse.

And that's where there's a role for the people in this building to do the right thing. And I guess I would just like to again say, we can do this today, Mr. Speaker. Very often private members' Bills get lost on the order paper. It's not that they get voted down; it's just that they get put off. They get talked out. And at the end of session they get prorogued, and that means that they would need to be reintroduced a year from now.

We have the power today and I really hope we have the support for these wild ponies, Mr. Speaker, that by leave today . . . There'll be time for members to speak to this as well. But we will have time to go through the other stages — Committee of the Whole — and potentially by the end of today, Mr. Speaker, there can be support, there can be protection for the wild ponies of the Bronson Forest.

Now with that said, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that Bill No. 606, *The Protection of the Wild Ponies of the Bronson Forest Act* be now read a second time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — The member from Lloydminster has moved second reading of Bill 606, *The Protection of the Wild Ponies of the Bronson Forest Act*. Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

**Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know you, as well as everyone else in the Assembly, is probably surprised to see me standing to talk about wild horses. And I have to say I have to thank a constituent of mine — her name is Gladys Wolf, and I spoke to her this morning — saying that this was coming forward. Gladys was the one who actually brought this to my attention in the summer. And I had sent a letter to the Minister of Environment asking her to do something about this. She then referred it to the Minister of Agriculture. And thank you to the member from Lloydminster for telling me that this was coming. And I did, like I said, talk to Gladys and she would be happy to have me mention her name.

[12:45]

I think probably what caught my imagination was that I had not spent a great deal of time thinking of horses in my life, but my niece, when she was 19, she went to Toronto and became a jockey at Woodbine, the major racetrack in Canada, and she was very successful. She was a very successful jockey. And because she was there, we spent many trips going to Toronto to see her race, got introduced to beautiful, beautiful horses, got taken through the barns, got pictures of her with her winning horses, and basically started me on quite an interest in horses and issues around horses.

When I was first running in the by-election in Eastview, I was met on the lawn of some home by a man who said, what are you going to do about thoroughbred racing? And I said, I have no idea about thoroughbred racing. But now I do. Now I do know about thoroughbred racing. I do know what happens at Marquis Downs and I do know about horses.

I think the Bill itself is very interesting because I think the article that I read from *Prairies North* was very good, but there's another article that I had sent to me and it's from *Canadian Cowboy Country* magazine. And it's an extremely poetic discussion and view of the horses in the Bronson Forest and it is talking about who owns the horses, which is probably one of the questions that has no answer to this point. And this article was actually written in '05, in March of '05, but it still, I think, supports what is still out there now as a conflicting view of some people between mythology and science. And I thought it was very poetic when the author said:

Wild horses represent the relief we seek from our daily routines. We're tired of being bridled, saddled and worked hard. We'd like to abandon our obligations, clear the corral fence at full speed and gallop into eternity. The wild horse is our dream of freedom.

Then on the other side, the scientists are talking about, is this truly a feral horse? Is it reintroduced into the ecosystem? And talk about choosing moose over horses and the damage that horses are doing to the environment.

So it went on to talk about . . . And beautiful pictures of the horses. I agree with the member from Lloydminster. These are

lovely horses. They're smaller, to adapt to the environment so they can live in the wild. And they look like various ancestry because there are various colourings in the horses.

And it is interesting that the member, he wants to have this Bill passed right now, but there's many questions that still would need to be answered. My curious question that came to mind is, why a private member's Bill when they are government? If this is an issue, it should come through environment or agricultural legislation, not be left to the vagaries of, as the member described, a private member's Bill which most, futures of those die on the order paper. So it would be interesting to see why that is.

To support something without having any consultation with people who are impacted by this . . . And the article says there is a division of thought on this. Who owns them is still not answered; the question's not answered. And the consultation — we always talk about the consultation because different Bills impact many people and we don't often look at or take into account the ripple effect in that.

And as I've found out, the forest is located on traditional First Nations land, Treaty 6 area. And since the First Nations are the traditional owners and protectors of the land and animals, what do they say about this particular Bill? We have no answer to that. This is what happens when a Bill goes to committee. The committee has the opportunity to ask the questions about the impact of the Bill and what various stakeholders feel about the Bill.

We also need to consider the police. Local police are saying, we don't know if they're saying that this is necessarily needed or is something that could be captured in some other law by changing some regulation. And the police do have abilities now already with poaching.

And I find it interesting also that the Bill does not address actually movement of the horses. It does talk about capturing, but it doesn't talk at all about transporting. So when it says that "No person shall in any way willfully molest, interfere with, hurt, capture or kill any of the wild ponies in the Bronson Forest," it doesn't talk about the penalties or the barring of transporting these horses anywhere else.

And I know that other provinces have legislation or have protections in place for their ponies, their different herds, because obviously other provinces have also got herds. It is I think the most . . . And I can't say that this would be something that we would not support. What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that given the controversy of and the differences of opinions and the question about who owns the horses, we need to do our due diligence. And as legislators, that is our job.

So to come to this Assembly expecting a Bill to go through without that due diligence or oversight, I think, is fairly naive. And I think that if we want to see good, strong legislation, then we take it through the process, and I think if we want to talk about our jobs, what we need to do, our dedication to issues, real issues that people bring forward . . .

And like I said, this came through to me from a constituent and I did send it to the Minister of the Environment. I took it

seriously. The minister responded, sent it on to the Minister of Agriculture. And now we have a private member's Bill, which I do still find a little odd. If it was necessary legislation, there are certainly mechanisms and processes available to the government to bring legislation forward in Acts that pertain to animals and wild animals and penalties for damaging animals.

So I really do think that the article in the *Cowboy Country* magazine really demonstrates the differences of opinion. Some scientists say that the horses will damage the environment. Others see the benefit to tourism in the area. And that is something I can certainly see. If you ride and see a herd of wild horses, it would be something beautiful to see and not what everybody would have the opportunity to see.

So I do think though that with many of the questions that are still unanswered in the way the Bill is being presented, it would be very difficult to say that we would, as an opposition, support this. I think everyone expects the job of the opposition is to be the eyes and the ears of the people, to look at, to watchdog things. And I think we need to take that job seriously. And I do think that this Bill has merit. It has a lot of merit. And I'm sure there's people watching who really want to see it passed, but there is a process in this House that allows for these things to happen, and that is the process that we will follow.

I do think that it's going to be interesting to consult with the various places and people who are impacted by this, not just Lloydminster and the forest area but, as I said before, the First Nations whose . . . These horses reside on their land. And that is a different consultation entirely to talk about. And I have no idea, the presentation of the Bill gives us no indication of what the First Nations people feel about this or any suggestions they have or anything that they have to add to the debate. And I also think it's interesting again to see what the police would have to say about how this would impact on poaching and their enforcement abilities in the area.

I do think that everybody agrees that wild horses are a beautiful addition to the province. I think anybody who has an opportunity to go to the Bronson Forest and see the wild horses and have an opportunity to see what they add to the area and the benefit in tourism would agree that this is something that we want to see. We want to see the horses protected. We don't want to see the herd depleted past the point where it can actually regenerate or keep itself going.

And I think those things are laudable. The goals are laudable to have and to do. But again as I said, Mr. Speaker, as an opposition, we have an obligation to the people and all the people that these Bills and any other Bill would impact that we must have our due diligence and ask the questions that need to be asked.

So I think that the member can take some comfort in the fact that we all do agree that this is a really serious issue and that we do have support for this sort of a protection for the horses. But I think it is also only fair to say that the Bill needs to go through the process that a Bill needs to go through and that we have to talk to people who this may affect. So I don't think that there's any point in thinking that by some sort of bullying or heckling that this should actually go through today. I think that, as I said before, it would be naive to expect that of a legislature. We do

have to do due diligence and there is due process. And I think that that is our obligation, and that is what we will be doing.

I'll find it interesting to continue this conversation with the people that it affects, including people in my riding who have an interest in this and people who have taken the opportunity to write the articles that draw the attention to the issues, and who have done so eloquently, that we do find all of us actually have an opinion on this. I would never have thought that this would be something that would generate such a strong feeling, but it is definitely something that I think has merit because it has generated a fair amount of support.

Some of my colleagues wanted to speak rather than me. There was an interest in having a conversation about this, in speaking to this Bill. And I had to actually, you know, push myself forward. And I know when I started my remarks to say that it would be me that would be speaking on wild ponies would be kind of an interesting bit of a change for things that I traditionally speak on.

But I have to say that going with my niece and seeing the absolute wonderful horsemanship, the wonderful relationship that she has with horses which she continues to this day . . . She no longer is a jockey in Woodbine. She's back home in Saskatchewan taking her education, but has that history for such a young person to have developed such a bond with horses that she passed it on to all of us. That we were actually known in the horse circles because we would go and do . . . looking at betting on some of the races. So we were known in some of the places where we could do that in Saskatoon because we always couldn't get to Toronto to watch her. But she did have a wonderful experience that engendered in all of us, as her family, an interest and a concern for horses and their livelihood.

And she has even almost brought a horse back to Saskatchewan that was labelled and set to be destroyed because it had reached the end of its life in thoroughbred racing. And she was looking for . . . We almost as a family were going to buy this horse because it was such a beautiful horse and had done such wonderful things over its life. But basically at some point these things end and the value of that horse is no longer for the owners and that horse is out to pasture.

But I think the horses that we're talking about today, Mr. Speaker, will definitely be protected by people who are interested in their future, and I think this Bill will certainly raise the awareness of that. It will also cause us to have the discussion which has been languishing in the background for many years. As I said, this article I quoted from was from '05, so it's an issue that has been around that Bronson Forest area for quite a while and certainly deserves attention and it deserves to have the scrutiny because, when we put a Bill in place, I would hope that we have the co-operation of the people in the area. And I think without that, it's very hard to protect the horses if you don't have the consent and the co-operation of the people who are actually living with the horses and see them from obviously a different view.

When I talked about the mythology versus the science, that there are people who don't want them anymore. They don't want them there. They consider the grasslands . . . The cattle need the grass; the horses do not. So there still is some dissent

in opinion.

So I think when we put a Bill through, we want to make sure that everybody who is impacted by this supports it. So our goal is to protect the horses. We don't actually end up with having more dissent and more and more unrest or unhappiness in that area because we didn't have proper consultation and we didn't do our due diligence and we didn't do what people want us to do. So I think that when we do that, we obviously do need to have the best way to protect the animals.

And is this the best? Like I already see, as pointed out to me, there's nothing in the Bill that talks about travelling, moving them out of the province, removing them. Capturing and killing them, all that stuff is captured, but not about transporting them. This is something that's missing from the Bill, so obviously there's something quite quickly that has been pointed. It's missing.

And what is also missing is any idea of what other stakeholders would have had to say about the Bill and how they see it impacting their communities, in particular the First Nations, when this forest is on their land. So it's not responsible to expect a Bill like this to go through in this fashion.

Like I said, I would have liked to have seen it as a regular Bill coming through a department and through the processes that that happens, because it does have more force and effect, as the member from Lloydminster said. A private member's Bill tends to be lost and doesn't tend to be followed through, so it's unfortunate that this way . . .

**The Speaker:** — Being the hour of adjournment, this Assembly stands adjourned until Monday afternoon at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 13:00.]

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

|                  |      |
|------------------|------|
| The Speaker..... | 3543 |
|------------------|------|

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

|                    |      |
|--------------------|------|
| McMorris.....      | 3543 |
| Lingenfelter ..... | 3543 |
| Draude .....       | 3543 |
| Junor .....        | 3543 |
| Michelson.....     | 3544 |
| Harrison.....      | 3544 |
| Cheveldayoff.....  | 3544 |

#### PRESENTING PETITIONS

|                   |      |
|-------------------|------|
| Harper .....      | 3544 |
| Higgins .....     | 3544 |
| Forbes .....      | 3544 |
| Vermette .....    | 3544 |
| Broten .....      | 3545 |
| Iwanchuk.....     | 3545 |
| Wotherspoon ..... | 3545 |

#### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

##### Olympic Torch Relay in La Ronge

|                |      |
|----------------|------|
| Vermette ..... | 3545 |
|----------------|------|

##### Share Similarities and Celebrate Differences

|              |      |
|--------------|------|
| Wilson ..... | 3545 |
|--------------|------|

##### Saskatoon Lions Support Coronary Artery Rehabilitation Group

|             |      |
|-------------|------|
| Junor ..... | 3546 |
|-------------|------|

##### World Diabetes Day

|              |      |
|--------------|------|
| Elhard ..... | 3546 |
|--------------|------|

##### Visual Art Program Engages Participants

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| Atkinson..... | 3546 |
|---------------|------|

##### Saskatoon Curler Inducted in Sports Hall of Fame

|                 |      |
|-----------------|------|
| Schriemer ..... | 3547 |
|-----------------|------|

##### Take Our Deputy Ministers to Work Day

|              |      |
|--------------|------|
| Furber ..... | 3547 |
|--------------|------|

#### QUESTION PERIOD

##### Autism Spectrum Disorder Issues

|                    |      |
|--------------------|------|
| Lingenfelter ..... | 3547 |
|--------------------|------|

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| McMorris..... | 3548 |
|---------------|------|

|             |      |
|-------------|------|
| Junor ..... | 3549 |
|-------------|------|

|                |      |
|----------------|------|
| Harpauer ..... | 3549 |
|----------------|------|

##### Availability of Government Vehicles

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| Higgins ..... | 3550 |
|---------------|------|

|            |      |
|------------|------|
| Tell ..... | 3550 |
|------------|------|

##### Management of Provincial Economy

|                   |      |
|-------------------|------|
| Wotherspoon ..... | 3550 |
|-------------------|------|

|                |      |
|----------------|------|
| Gantfoer ..... | 3551 |
|----------------|------|

|           |      |
|-----------|------|
| Wall..... | 3552 |
|-----------|------|

#### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

##### Addictions Advisory Committee

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| McMorris..... | 3552 |
|---------------|------|

|             |      |
|-------------|------|
| Junor ..... | 3553 |
|-------------|------|

#### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

##### Bill No. 108 — *The Cities Amendment Act, 2009*

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| Harrison..... | 3553 |
|---------------|------|

##### Bill No. 109 — *The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2009*

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| Harrison..... | 3553 |
|---------------|------|

##### Bill No. 110 — *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2009*

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| Harrison..... | 3553 |
|---------------|------|

##### Bill No. 111 — *The Northern Municipalities Consequential Amendments Act, 2009*

##### *Loi de 2009 portant modifications corrélatives à la loi intitulée The Northern Municipalities Act, 2009*

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| Harrison..... | 3554 |
|---------------|------|



|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Bill No. 112 — <i>The Justices of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009</i></b><br><b><i>Loi de 2009 modifiant la Loi de 1988 sur les juges de paix</i></b>                |            |
| Morgan .....  | 3554       |
| <b>Bill No. 113 — <i>The Justices of the Peace Consequential Amendments Act, 2009</i></b><br><b><i>Loi de 2009 modifiant la Loi de 1988 sur les juges de paix</i></b> |            |
| Morgan .....  | 3554       |
| <b>Bill No. 114 — <i>The Small Claims Amendment Act, 2009</i></b><br><b><i>Loi de 2009 modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur les petites créances</i></b>                      |            |
| Morgan .....  | 3554       |
| <b>Bill No. 115 — <i>The Queen’s Bench Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)</i></b><br><b><i>Loi n° 2 de 2009 modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Cour du Banc de la Reine</i></b> |            |
| Morgan .....  | 3554       |
| <b>Bill No. 116 — <i>The Traffic Safety (Drivers’ Licences and Hand-held Electronic Communications Equipment) Amendment Act, 2009</i></b>                             |            |
| Draude .....  | 3555       |
| <b>Bill No. 609 — <i>The Whistleblower Protection Act</i></b><br>Iwanchuk .....   | 3555       |
| <b>ORDERS OF THE DAY</b>  |            |
| <b>WRITTEN QUESTIONS</b>  |            |
| Weekes .....  | 3555       |
| <b>SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE</b>   |            |
| <b>Autism Spectrum Disorder Strategy</b>  |            |
| Junor .....   | 3555, 3565 |
| Schriemer .....   | 3558, 3566 |
| Quennell .....  | 3559       |
| Hickie .....  | 3560, 3564 |
| Atkinson .....  | 3562, 3565 |
| Wilson .....  | 3563, 3565 |
| Trew .....  | 3564       |
| Yates .....   | 3565       |
| <b>PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS</b>   |            |
| <b>PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BILLS</b>  |            |
| <b>SECOND READINGS</b>  |            |
| <b>Bill No. 606 — <i>The Protection of the Wild Ponies of the Bronson Forest Act</i></b>  |            |
| McMillan .....  | 3566       |
| Junor .....   | 3569       |

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Gaming Corporation

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Transportation Company

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