



THIRD SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

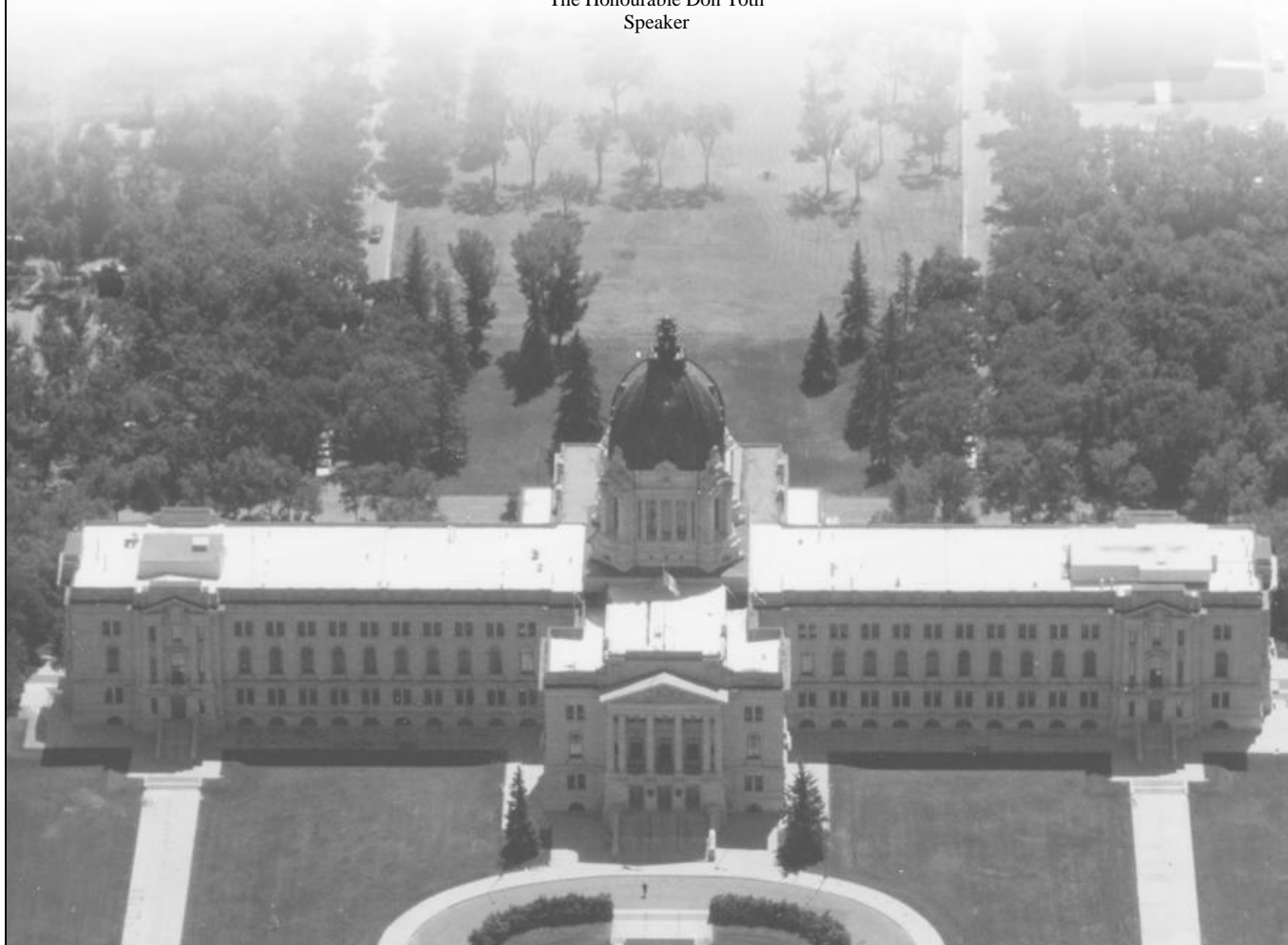
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Don Toth
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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

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

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

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

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly a number of guests who are here to support the introduction of Bills that will establish a results-based environmental regulatory framework in Saskatchewan. And I will ask them to give us a wave when I announce them.

From the Saskatchewan region of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Dennis Sherratt; from Nature Saskatchewan, Lorne Scott; from the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, Holly Hetherington, Martin Klinger, and Kristen McKee; from Saskatchewan Environmental Industry Managers Association, Lloyd Saul; from the Communities of Tomorrow, J.P. Martin; from the Centre for Sustainable Infrastructure Research, Dr. David Hubble.

Mr. Speaker, the results-based reform will provide a framework which will enhance environmental protection while promoting the use of innovative technologies in our province and best practices. And I would like to thank the visitors that are joining us today for all of their help and support and advice and input on this file. And I look forward to working with them as we continue to implement the results-based regulatory framework, Mr. Speaker. And I ask all members of the Assembly to welcome these people to their Assembly.

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

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join the minister in welcoming the delegation to the legislature here today. Each one of them serves a very integral part to the environment component of our province in very special ways, and we're very grateful that they do the work they do.

I'd like to make special mention, of course, of one individual. That'd be Lorne Scott who we recognized in the legislature just about a week and a half ago with respect to having been awarded the Saskatchewan Order of Merit. So welcome to the legislature and again thank you for the work that you do on behalf of the province. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Weyburn, the Minister Responsible for Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a guest seated in your gallery. Mr. Speaker, joining us today is Ms. Linda McIntyre. If she could

give a wave or stand.

Ms. McIntyre's recently been appointed the Provincial Archivist by the Saskatchewan Archives Board. Ms. McIntyre holds a master's degree in history from the University of Western Ontario and a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in Canadian Studies from Trent University. Mr. Speaker, she has been with the Saskatchewan Archives for 22 years. In fact I believe tomorrow marks her 22nd year on the job, most recently as the chief archivist for records processing.

And I would ask all members to join with me in welcoming her and congratulating her on being appointed as our Provincial Archivist. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce a old friend of mine in the east gallery, none other than Gunnar Passmore. And it's a kind of a red-letter day for Gunnar and I as we see his former MLA Lorne Scott being introduced. And of course I want to welcome Lorne.

But Gunnar Passmore is with the building trades and in the Government Relations area right now. I've known Gunnar and his wife, Dee, for a great many years and count them as good friends. Please join me in welcoming Gunnar Passmore to the legislature.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport in welcoming Ms. Linda McIntyre, our new Provincial Archivist to the legislature. Welcome.

Hon. Mr. Toth: — And before we move on, I'd like to introduce a gentleman who's come in from the community of Kipling, my home community — Wayne Mogk, who's been involved with SARCAN over the years and was in for an interview with the Red Cross. So help me welcome Wayne Mogk to the Assembly.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proud to stand today and present a petition on behalf of concerned Saskatchewan citizens who are concerned about the condition of Highway 310. The petition indicates that the highway is deteriorated. And the condition of the highway is now a potential safety hazard for the residents who have to drive on this highway, and it is in much need of an upgrade.

And, Mr. Speaker, I will read to you the prayer.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the Sask

Party government to commit to providing the repairs to Highway 310 that the people of Saskatchewan so need.

And in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good folks from Ituna, Regina, Melville, and Foam Lake, Saskatchewan. I so submit.

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

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan residents that speaks to the unreasonable increases that renters across this province are feeling. Mr. Speaker, with many of the vacancy rates in this province below 1 per cent and some below 2 per cent in the larger cities, many renters have seen their rents double or proposals or notices that it will double within the next six months, and that a majority of Canadians now live in provinces where there are rent-control guidelines. And the prayer reads, Mr. Speaker:

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 the view to protecting Saskatchewan renters from unreasonable increases in rents.

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

Mr. Speaker, I so present on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens.

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

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's estimated that 1 in 98 children has autism spectrum disorder and that parents and guardians now must become educators, advocates, caregivers, and financiers, and that the majority of Canadians now live in provinces with adequate autism spectrum disorder strategies and funding. Therefore the petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the Sask Party government to commit to providing a comprehensive provincial autism spectrum strategy that is based on proven best practice, evidence-based research, treatments, and programming, and given the complexity of the disorder and its treatments, the individualized funding concept be adapted for parents and guardians of autistic individuals.

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

There are today 349 signatures, and they are from Regina, Moosomin, Qu'Appelle, Davidson, White City, and Saskatoon. I so present.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise

today to present a petition in support of wage equity for CBO [community-based organization] workers. And we know that workers in the community-based organizations, the CBOs in Saskatchewan have traditionally been underpaid and many continue to earn poverty level wages. And in fact that low wages paid to CBO workers result in a high staff turnover and a subsequent lack of caregiver continuity has a negative impact on the quality of care clients receive. I'd like to read their prayer, Mr. Speaker:

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 is in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, these folks come from the cities of Saskatoon and 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. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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. And 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 city of Saskatoon. I so present.

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

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present yet another petition on behalf of rural residents of Saskatchewan who question why the Sask Party government is leaving them behind with respect to providing safe and

affordable water and who have not yet had any commitment of assistance from the Sask Party government. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And, Mr. Speaker, these petitions are signed by the good residents of Duck Lake. I so present.

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

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I stand and present a petition today in support of withdrawal of Bill 80. Mr. Speaker, the existing construction industry labour relations Act, 1992 has provided a stable environment for labour relations in the construction industry. And, Mr. Speaker, we all understand that stable labour relations provide for quality of work and safe construction sites. Mr. Speaker, also the trades contracts support an apprenticeship system of training which results in a highly skilled work force. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to withdraw its ill-conceived Bill 80, *The Construction Industry Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2009* which dismantles the proud history of the building trades in this province, creates instability in the labour market, and impacts the quality of training required for workers before entering the workforce.

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

Mr. Speaker, the petitions are signed by people from Regina, Weyburn, Earl Grey, Foam Lake, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert. I so present.

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition in support of affordable rents and housing for The Battlefords. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to call upon the Government of Saskatchewan to develop an affordable housing program that will result in a greater number of quality and affordable rental units to be made available to a greater number of people throughout The Battlefords and that will implement a process of rent review or rent control to better protect tenants in a non-competitive housing environment.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by residents of the city of North Battleford. 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 from across Saskatchewan as it relates to the unprecedented mismanagement of their finances by the Saskatchewan 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 are signed by good folks and concerned citizens from Carievale, Arcola, and Redvers, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Grey Cup 2009

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well there are some in the province today who may be making the statement, you know, yesterday, that was really just a game. And when you consider what some people are going through today in their daily lives, and we think particularly of a family in Esterhazy, I can understand the sentiment of that.

But truly yesterday was not just a game; it was the Grey Cup. And the Riders were in the Grey Cup and the Riders played an amazing game. The Riders exceeded everybody's expectations. The pundits said they'd lose. The quarterback for the Stampeders said they'd lose by three scores. And they played a great game. It ended of course in a painful way though for the Rider nation, but truly it was not just a game.

There might be others that would say, well this is just a football team. Well, Mr. Speaker, there are members of the Rider nation all around the world who would disagree. There are 10 kids who are fighting cancer and their family members who were at that game who understand that this is not just a football team.

[13:45]

There are a number of dads — some of them I heard on the radio this morning, some I know personally — were talking about how it was cool for their teenage kids, their teenage daughters even, to spend four hours with them watching the Rider game. That kind of brought them together in a special way. So they'd say it's not just a football team.

So we're all hurting a little bit this morning, and that's okay. It was a painful end to the game. But here's the good news, Mr. Speaker. This is a new era in Rider football.

Thanks to Jim Hopson. Thanks to the coaches and the staff and the players. This team strives for excellence, Mr. Speaker. One play doesn't change that. One game doesn't change that. And on behalf of the province, we thank the Riders for a great season.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

A Proud Generation Calendar

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Tuesday night I had the pleasure of attending the launch for the 2010 edition of the A Proud Generation calendar.

The Proud Generation calendar was founded in 2003 by Tracy George Heese and the first calendar came out in 2004. The vision was to feature:

Inuit, Métis, and First Nations youth who have dedicated themselves to living a healthy, responsible and productive lifestyle . . . A Proud Generation represents the dream of seeing young people thrive.

A Proud Generation is certainly helping to realize that dream, Mr. Speaker.

The 2010 launch featured the Métis fiddle of Brian Sklar, the powerful hand drums of the Young Scouts, and the amazing hoop dancing of Reba Littlelent. Elder Isador Pelletier got things started in a good way with a prayer. Honorary committee members Mike Laliberte and Marty Klyne had some wise words for this year's role models. And emcees Nelson Bird and Claudia Jones kept the show on the road.

Thanks to them and to the sponsors and to the Proud Generation committee — which is itself a really impressive group with members like Tom Benjoe, Jennifer Matts, Jada Yee, and Kristin Francis — for a job very well done. Ēkosi, ēkosi, Mr. Speaker.

The 2010 calendar features role models like Cadmus Delorme, Rebecca Sangwais, Jacob Pratt, Katelyn Taypotat, and Creeson Agecoutay. They demonstrate the strengths of a generation that truly has a lot to be proud of, Mr. Speaker. And I ask that all members join me in congratulating them and all of those who have joined together to help showcase a proud generation.

[The hon. member spoke for a time in Cree.]

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

Moose Jaw Health Foundation Festival of Trees

Mr. Michelson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the festive season certainly brings out the spirit of charity in Saskatchewan people. This spirit of charity was certainly evident at what is considered the social event of the year in Moose Jaw, as the Moose Jaw Health Foundation held its festival of trees on November 14th.

The festival of trees is the largest fundraising event in support

of the Moose Jaw Health Foundation. The festival of trees had a French theme of fine wine, great food, elegant desserts, and a French ambiance of decorative excellence. The sellout crowd made up a festive audience of over 500 people who took part in this gala event of dining and dancing and a live and silent auction Saturday night followed by a Sunday brunch with a Christmas choir along with a message of inspiration.

Over \$200,000 was raised in support of the hospital. The funds will go toward the purchase of state-of-the-art surgical lighting and a new anesthetic machine. The success of the Festival of Trees demonstrates the community's commitment to the Moose Jaw hospital.

Congratulations to the Moose Jaw Health Foundation Festival of Trees committee for the organization of this outstanding event, and grateful appreciation to the businesses and the citizens who support the cause so generously. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

New Saskatchewan Hospital Requested

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of the Sask Party's mismanagement of Saskatchewan's finances, Saskatchewan people are seeing the financing of health projects being set aside. While this is happening, the Minister of Health needs to keep a few important things in mind.

A couple of weeks ago I reported to the Legislative Assembly that a rally was held in North Battleford, a rally that was called Shovels Here, New Beginnings, a rally that brought together community leaders, mental health advocates and families, and ordinary people who wanted to raise awareness about the need to get construction started on a new Saskatchewan hospital.

I've now received petitions and letters signed by hundreds of residents of the province of Saskatchewan that I would like to deliver to the Minister of Health and the Saskatchewan Party Government of Saskatchewan. The petitions are not in the proper legislative format but state that the petitioners believe that mental health matters, that a new mental health facility is a critical component in the continuum of provincial mental health services. And the petitioners believe that the government of Saskatchewan should proceed with building a new Saskatchewan hospital in North Battleford.

Mr. Speaker, today I will be turning these petitions and letters over to the Minister of Health so that he and his colleagues in government can see that people right across this great province want him to act — want him to act quickly — to get started on this promised and much-needed project. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Biggar.

St. Gabriel the Archangel Parish Celebrates 100th Anniversary

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On August 1st and 2nd, St. Gabriel the Archangel Parish in Biggar celebrated 100 years as a parish. On the Saturday, more than 240 parishioners

that came from near and far were treated to a number of activities during the day, culminating with a wonderful banquet and silent auction.

On Sunday the Most Reverend Albert LeGatt, former Bishop of Saskatoon, presided Mass with celebrating priests Father Dario Bebillo, Father Raymond Senger, and Father John Malazdrewich.

Mr. Speaker, it is hard to describe the spirit and excitement that was in the church as some of the most senior parishioners to some of the youngest, along with representatives from the Knights of Columbus, Catholic Women's League, Pastoral Council, St. Gabriel School, and the provincial and federal governments took part in the opening procession, dedication of the building, and celebration of the mass.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank and congratulate all those that organized, prepared for, and worked to make the 100th celebration a success, an event that those who were fortunate enough to attend will remember for years to come. A job well done. I would also like to thank all those who made the mass special through their ministries. It was a worthy celebration of 100 years of worship in St. Gabriel the Archangel Parish. Thank you.

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

Time Travel

Mr. Furber: — Return with me now, Mr. Speaker, to last Tuesday when the member from Saskatoon Sutherland criticized the NDP's [New Democratic Party] adoption of Allan Blakeney's model of policy renewal. Blakeney's *New Deal for People* was too retro, too old school for the member opposite, so she criticized the NDP for time travel back to a model that won 45 seats and improved social programs — programs like a children's dental program, prescription drugs, subsidized housing, home care, and help for the elderly poor.

But last week's events, Mr. Speaker, have revealed the Saskatchewan Party to be the true masters of time travel. First the Premier wished a time machine would return him to before he made his broken promise to balance the budget. Well, Mr. Speaker, Marty and Doc must have twisted the wrong dial on their flux capacitor because they've taken the province backwards, not backwards to the Premier's March of '09, let alone Blakeney's 1971, but the Devine days of billion-dollar-plus deficits.

That's right, Mr. Speaker, they haven't taken the province back to an NDP era *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* says "... delivered an unbroken string of budget surpluses despite an activist government agenda." Instead they've taken the province back to a Devine era where they hid their massive deficits behind a string of political gimmicks. Sound familiar, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the government plan for time travel, I know Saskatchewan people would far rather go back to an NDP future of balanced budgets and solid social programs than to a Saskatchewan Party future of deficits and Grant

Devine. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Greenwing Conservation Award

Mr. Chisholm: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the honour to stand in this Assembly to pay tribute to Gregg Sheppard. Gregg, a former NHL [National Hockey League] player, has been honoured for all the work he's done off the ice. On November 25th he was named the 2009 recipient of the Lieutenant Governor's Greenwing Conservation Award.

This award is sponsored annually by Ducks Unlimited Canada and recognizes those who have taken leadership roles in contributing to public awareness regarding the need to conserve Saskatchewan's wetlands and marshes. Gregg was recognized for more than 25 years of volunteer service to wetland conservation.

In 2003 when Gregg served as the Ducks Unlimited North Battleford zone Chair, he and others brainstormed about ways to raise funds. This led to the Original Six jersey program. This program features signed replica jerseys from key players from each of the NHL's original six teams. Gregg knew that Bobby Orr, a former teammate, friend, and fellow outdoors enthusiast, had done conservation work before, so they hooked up one more time on this project.

Mr. Speaker, the program has raised \$2.5 million since it began and is still going strong. On behalf of the government, I would like to congratulate Gregg Sheppard on being the recipient for the 2009 Lieutenant Governor's Greenwing Conservation Award. Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Proposed Amendments to *The Financial Administration Act*

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this government has introduced changes to *The Financial Administration Act* which will, and I quote, "... allow new or unforeseen expenditures ... by the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure ... to be deducted from the calculation of eligible highways spending ..."

So, Mr. Speaker, *The Fuel Tax Accountability Act* has been in place since the spring of 2007 and the Saskatchewan Party loved it so much, this existing legislation, that they included it as a promise in their 2007 election platform. But they now seem to be having a change of heart as they are proposing changes as to how the fuel tax revenue is to be used. Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why is this government breaking their campaign promise and funnelling dedicated fuel tax revenue to projects other than highways?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr.

Speaker, what this piece of legislation is designed to do is to bring clarity to the calculation of fuel tax as opposed to the situation as it is now. In the situation as it exists currently, dollars that are spent, for example on the global transportation hub, are not dedicated, are coming out of the Highways ministry, but are not dedicated specifically to highway work.

And so what we wanted to do in putting this piece of legislation forward is to ensure that there is clarity in terms of the calculation of the amount of tax that goes to highways so that it will be absolutely clear for the people of Saskatchewan to understand how the calculation is made.

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

Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Speaker, clarity hasn't been a big plus for this government in its first two years. And the people of Saskatchewan know that this government is in serious financial trouble. They have gone from \$2.3 billion in the bank to a \$1 billion deficit in two very short years. This government has also, at every turn, tried to avoid accountability for the budget cuts that have resulted from this \$1 billion deficit.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of *The Fuel Tax Accountability Act* is to ensure that the government keeps its promise to spend all of the fuel tax revenue on provincial roads. It's about accountability. Mr. Speaker, why is the minister decreasing the amount of money actually that will be spent on highways and decreasing the accountability to Saskatchewan taxpayers?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, the intent of this legislation is to ensure that the calculations are clear and transparent to the people of Saskatchewan and that funding that goes to situations like the global transportation hub are not part of the calculation because that was not the intent of the original legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the member says as well that we have mismanaged and the money has gone. Well I'll tell you where the money has gone, Mr. Speaker. The money's gone to the largest income tax cut in the history of this province. That's where the money has gone. The money has gone to an increased highways budget to make sure that the infrastructure is properly allocated. Mr. Speaker, we're fixing roads and bridges. We're funding Avastin, a colorectal drug.

All of these things are important for the people of Saskatchewan. And I don't understand why the members opposite wouldn't want more clarity and transparency in the way this is calculated.

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

Status of Domestic Abuse Outreach Workers

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Domestic abuse outreach workers provide an important service for survivors of family violence and their families. They operate support groups, provide crisis and short-term counselling, help

women fleeing violence come up with a personal safety plan, and where necessary refer them to other services. Often they accompany clients to court or to the police station.

Now a Saskatoon client of this valuable service has told me that as of December 31, these domestic abuse outreach worker positions are being eliminated. To the minister: why has the Sask Party cut funding to this program? Are women fleeing domestic violence the latest victims of this government's financial mismanagement?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, we appreciate very much the importance of transition houses and having domestic violence workers and people that can provide comfort to some of the people in our province that need it the very most. Our government has increased funding by \$1.1 million to transition houses. In addition to the \$1.1 million that we have increased funding to, we have given annual increases of 2.3 per cent and 3 per cent, as well as the additional 7 per cent that went to all CBOs.

Mr. Speaker, there is no intention to cut or eliminate or change programs. I'm not aware of any such cuts. And, Mr. Speaker, if there's a rumour that's going around that's incorrect, I will find out what that rumour is and will attempt to have it . . . [inaudible] . . . And I will talk to the member afterwards to try and find out what's taking place with that, Mr. Speaker.

[14:00]

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

Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the cabinet's a little confused over there. This is a program that the Ministry of Social Services offer, and it sounds like they're a little confused. We're not talking about the shelters. We're talking about the workers today, and these workers have a stabilizing force in the lives of many of their clients.

The woman who contacted my office has been dealing with the same outreach worker for more than three years. In fact she told my office, and I quote, "Without their support, I would have never got out." When she was reassaulted by her former husband last year, this worker accompanied her to the police station. This month the worker will be accompanying her to court. Unfortunately if the matter is held over, the woman will likely have to finish the process without the benefits of someone who has provided her with the support throughout her ordeal.

To the minister: why is the Saskatchewan Party depriving survivors of domestic violence of a stabilizing force in their lives?

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

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the member opposite is aware that we're just in a transition period of moving different areas of domestic violence and abuse to the

Ministry of Justice. So I am unaware of any position being cut at this point in time and I will definitely look into it and see if that indeed is the case or if there's just some confusion in the transition.

But as the Justice minister said, this is an important issue and area for our government. We immediately, upon the election, increased the funding year over year — 1.1 million to sexual assault agencies and transition houses as well as a 12.3 per cent increase which was across the board to all CBOs. That's substantial increases to these agencies that assist women that are in a domestic violence situation.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, we know that there are other services in Saskatoon but many of those services charge a fee and many women fleeing violence simply can't afford it. And my constituent is also concerned that she won't be able to find someone who's willing to attend court or the police station with her.

Mr. Speaker, we do know that many community-based organizations are working with survivors of domestic violence in Saskatoon and right across this province, and they are doing very good work. But it is far from certain that the work done by these domestic abuse outreach workers can be easily replaced.

To the minister: why are survivors of domestic violence being forced to replace the service, and what other programs for vulnerable people are being cut that this government is not telling us about?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite may not be aware that during the last year responsibility for transition houses has been transferred from the Ministry of Social Services to the Ministry of Justice. It is my hope that nothing was lost in the transfer or the consolidation of these programs but, Mr. Speaker, I can advise the member opposite there has been no cut to the program, nothing else that should have eliminated any services that were there, whether the services come from victim services, whether they come to the transition houses.

Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do is have the opportunity to meet with the member opposite, try and find out particulars from who that particular individual is. It's not appropriate or fair to that individual, somebody who is probably going through one of the worst crises of their life, to be used as a political football in the legislature when there was absolutely no intention or no plan to cut or eliminate services in any way.

Mr. Speaker, it is the intention of this government to ensure that the people among our society that are the most needy have good, adequate, and proper services whether it's to go to court, counselling, or a place to live as they transition, Mr. Speaker.

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

Education and Health Capital Spending

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government sent \$122 million to the health authorities last budget year for capital spending on nursing homes. They called it a fiscal stimulus. This year, with the deficit out of control, the government decided to cut operating grants to those same health authorities, then told them to use the \$122 million sent to them last year for capital spending to cover the difference. It's the old bait and switch, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education: can the minister confirm that he plans to use the same budget trick in his ministry?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, first of all we have to realize that it is a deferral of capital projects, Mr. Speaker, in 13 communities. Those 13 communities know that, Mr. Speaker. They realize that there is much more planning that needs to be done as they go forward on scoping out the projects. There also a 35 per cent share that they need to raise. All that work is being done, Mr. Speaker. When those projects are . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I'd ask the members who placed the question to give the minister the opportunity to respond. I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, as communities do their work and the capital, their 35 per cent share, is brought together and the scoping is done, Mr. Speaker, our government will be there with our share to make sure that those facilities move forward, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is simply a deferral, Mr. Speaker, not a cancellation as that member implied.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, the question was to the Education minister and we heard from the Minister of Health about his cut after cut after cut, but the question was to the Education minister.

Here's how the government's version of the bait and switch works. Last year when it was rolling in the dough, it announced massive capital spending in departments like Health and Education. This year they have a billion dollar deficit. So what are they doing? They're cancelling — or deferring capital projects as they claim — then cutting operating budgets to hide the full extent of their deficit and backfilling the operating cuts with deferred capital funds.

They get to play hero by announcing capital projects, hoping people forget that they cancelled them later, Mr. Speaker, and they get to hide the true size of their deficit by pretending to cut operating budgets.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister confirm that he plans to employ the same budget trick in the Ministry of Education?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, as we look at investments that we have put into all of our infrastructure, whether it's highways, whether it's hospitals, whether it's education, it is unprecedented in this province, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there has been more done through our school system and capital projects through the education system, Mr. Speaker, in the last two . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. The minister was asked to respond to a question. It seems like there's too many others want to have an answer as well, but it's the Minister of Health that's been asked to respond. I invite the Minister of Health to finish.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have unprecedented investment in our infrastructure, not only on highways, not only in health care, but also in education, Mr. Speaker. We'd put up our first two years of investment into infrastructure, especially education, compared to two years, any two years, that former government would like to pick.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, forgive the people of Saskatchewan for not having any trust in that government and particularly that minister responsible for IOU [I owe you] after IOU and cut after cut, Mr. Speaker.

Last budget year when the money was rolling in, the government committed \$259 million to education capital. The minister confirmed, in answers to written questions, that barely \$20 million of that has been spent to complete school projects. I suspect that as he cuts capital spending this year, we'll see examples of where the Education minister has instructed school divisions to redirect deferred capital funds to cover cuts to their operating budgets.

Can the minister guarantee the people of Saskatchewan that he will not be playing the same bait and switch game that his colleague, the Minister of Health, has done with the regional health authorities?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Education, I would like to say that the capital investment in this province in education facilities, repairs to roofs, has never been seen before, Mr. Speaker, in the 16 years of NDP government. Facility on top of facility . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. I'd like to ask the members to at least allow the minister to respond to the question that they've asked of him to respond to. The Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, category 1, health and safety issues in education regarding facilities, there has been more invested in the first two years of our Sask Party government than ever in the history of

this province.

Mr. Speaker, and they'll start, they want to start comparing numbers of what they invested and . . . Or else I'll go back to Health for example. In the 2005-2006, 2006-2007 budget, the NDP, when they were in government, invested \$140 million into capital. In our first two years, Mr. Speaker, we put in 267 million, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. It seems the member from Athabasca wants to have an ongoing dialogue. The opportunity will come in adjourned debates. The Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, that \$264 million represents almost a doubling of capital investment in health care, Mr. Speaker, not including the 122 that we have deferred for long-term care, Mr. Speaker. If we would've put that in, it would be three times the amount that the NDP invested in their last two years.

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

Western Agreement

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know this government can't be trusted when it comes to being open and transparent. We also know that they can't manage an economy or a budget. They were handed a boom, and we now have a recession and a deficit.

The Premier has committed the Government of Saskatchewan to conclude a western economic partnership agreement with British Columbia and Alberta before January the 1st. But he won't tell us what's in the deal. He even refused a freedom of information request to make the document public.

So, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: why should we trust the government on trade deals when they have demonstrated that they can't be trusted to manage the province?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to correct the record here. The minister has offered up some conclusions that are inaccurate and they're not based on fact, especially as it relates to the economy of the province. And we know that his leader, the Leader of the Opposition, has over and over again referred — and it's a part of the public record — to the economy in the province as a bust, if you can believe it. This . . .

An Hon. Member: — Hear, hear.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Well he just said, hear, hear, from his seat. He thinks the Saskatchewan economy is in a bust — the economy that now has posted the highest average weekly earnings in the history of the province of Saskatchewan. The same province, the same province that Dale Orr, a long-time economist, has said, Mr. Speaker, has moved into second place in the wealthiest provinces in the country ahead of Ontario. The same province that all the economic forecasters are saying will continue to lead the nation in economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, we can build on that success, but only if we continue to remove barriers to investment, only if we continue to reach out as we will through the western economic partnership. We'll do so while keeping the promises we made while in opposition and during the campaign, Mr. Speaker. And we'll have those details come forward in the fullness of time.

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're in the last week of the session. We will not get back together again until March 2010, two months after the WEPA [western economic partnership agreement], by the Premier's signature, is to be put into place.

We have just completed five weeks of a legislative session where the government is expected to be open, accountable, and transparent. Mr. Speaker, we've waited patiently for five weeks, waited patiently for the Premier to bring forward details of WEPA — a deal that he signed with no input from the public or the Assembly — waited patiently for the Premier to tell us what he has signed. He has not done so, Mr. Speaker.

If the Premier is really open, transparent, and accountable, why will he not hold public hearings on this deal like he supported with the previously discussed Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement? And why will he not make this agreement public during this, the last week of the legislative sitting?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, members opposite will know the history of this issue in the province, Mr. Speaker, and members on this side will know it as well. When the notion of TILMA [Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement] was first proposed for the province, the then government, the NDP government held hearings around the province. And we participated in those meetings enthusiastically.

Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of those meetings the opposition said at the time that, were we the government of Saskatchewan, we couldn't simply sign on to TILMA as it is because we had concerns with respect to the autonomy of municipalities to do things like new growth tax incentives. We had concerns about the impact on Crown corporations. We wanted to preserve whole the opportunity for government to own and operate Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker.

We know that governments right across the country are lowering barriers to growth in terms of procurement. The Government of Saskatchewan, under the previous government, was trying to get an agreement on internal trade, on labour mobility. That's now been achieved. It's happened since the election, so that's there as well. That was a big part of the TILMA agreement, Mr. Speaker.

We'll not go forward with any agreement that doesn't keep the promises we've made prior to the election. We've kept 112 so far, and we'll keep this one too.

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The

Premier has refused to answer a freedom of information request on this matter. Mr. Speaker, the Premier has refused to bring forward information on this matter to the Legislative Assembly or the public.

He has already admitted there are concerns about Saskatchewan's Crowns, about our environment, and about our municipalities. So, Mr. Speaker, are we supposed to take the Premier's word that this stuff is taken care of, or will he prove it to us, put it on the table, and let us see it before we leave this place in just four days time?

[14:15]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, we made promises with respect to internal trade agreements when we were in opposition. We intend to keep those promises.

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we can't take the Premier's word on this file, just like we couldn't take the Minister of Finance's word on budget day that potash revenues would bring in \$1.9 billion. This government won't make the document public and they won't tell the people of Saskatchewan what's in it. The Premier signed the paperwork, and now he wants us to trust him that everything will work out.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier is known to be unabashedly supportive of TILMA-style free trade. A very simple question to the Premier: he may remember an organization called the Alliance for the Future of Young Canadians. What role did the Premier play in the alliance?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, in about, on or around about 1988, I was the western Co-Chair for the Alliance for the Future of Young Canadians. Yes, I was. And you know what that organization promoted, Mr. Speaker? It supported the Canada-US [United States] Free Trade Agreement.

Mr. Speaker, there were those in this province, all sitting over there including the current Leader of the Opposition, who opposed that agreement notwithstanding the fact that it has meant wealth creation for the province of Saskatchewan, notwithstanding the fact that that Free Trade Agreement has created thousands of jobs for Canadians, has created trade surpluses for places like the province of Saskatchewan. You bet this side of the House supports free trade, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the Premier has acknowledged his co-chairing of the alliance, a group he was also a founding member of, Mr. Speaker. The group was financed by large multinational corporations, such as Alcan. And its main role, Mr. Speaker, the main role of the alliance was in the 1988 federal election campaign, and it was designed to disrupt political events of John Turner, the then

Liberal leader, who opposed the Mulroney government's Free Trade Agreement.

My question is again very simple to the Premier, who apparently helped to organize what the press have reported have been violent protests in support of the Mulroney free trade deal. My simple question: why does the Premier seem to think that selling out the Crowns, the environment, and the independence of our economy is advantageous to the residents of Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I wasn't personally organizing any violent protest. I was involved in one particular . . . Even after I had returned to the province, I was involved in one particular event with the alliance that got some national attention. We had a high-profile hockey player come and speak out in favour of free trade. It was Glenn Anderson from the Edmonton Oilers. And I don't know how you could characterize that one as violent. I don't think Glenn Anderson would even go in the corners. He left that up to Messier, Semenko, and the others.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, that's the kind of rhetoric, Mr. Speaker, that we heard in this country during the free trade debate when that member, the current Leader of the Opposition — that oil baron from Alberta, Mr. Speaker — used to rail against the notion of free trade, Mr. Speaker, even though we know today that it has created thousands of jobs in this province, that it has created economic wealth for Saskatchewan, that it's done the same thing for the country. The debate about free trade with other countries is over, Mr. Speaker, except perhaps in the cobwebbed caucus rooms of the NDP.

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that this Premier has a strong, ideological, almost fanatical commitment to free trade, regardless of its cost.

We also know that the government has taken us from boom to bust in just two years. We know that he had five weeks to bring details to the public through this legislature, and he has chosen not to do so.

We also know that the Premier, earlier this year, sat down behind closed doors and rewrote a deal that put Saskatchewan's economy on the line. And he's done this with perhaps two of Canada's most unpopular premiers.

Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't give my chequebook to any of these three to balance. So why, Mr. Speaker, is our Premier willing to give Gordon Campbell and Ed Stelmach a greater say over the future of Saskatchewan's economy than the people of Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we're simply not going to do that. We're going to enter into an agreement where we can explore ways to perhaps co-operate on delivering health care. We've talked about jointly purchasing pharmaceuticals,

Mr. Speaker.

It's interesting to note that a big part of the trade agreement that Alberta and BC [British Columbia] signed is about, is labour mobility, Mr. Speaker. Which premier in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, in our history was a leader in terms of getting that labour mobility agreement — now the same agreement that they're casting these scare tactics about? Do you know who that premier was, Mr. Speaker? It was former Premier Lorne Calvert, Mr. Speaker.

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — The member from Regina Walsh Acres will come to order. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the other national leader that has been an advocate for labour mobility, which is a big part of a western economic partnership or even TILMA as it existed between those two provinces, perhaps the strongest voice for it was Gary Doer. Gary Doer, the former NDP premier of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the new West is going to be stronger if we're working together as one large economic region. We know the rest of the country has taken note of that. We know North America is taking note of the powerhouse in the West. Part of it's because of Alberta, but a big part of that powerhouse is right here in the province of Saskatchewan.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 121 — *The Environmental Management and Protection Act, 2009*

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

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 121, *The Environmental Management and Protection Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of the Environment has moved that Bill No. 121, *The Environmental Management and Protection 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?

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Next sitting of the House.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

Bill No. 122 — *The Environmental Assessment Amendment Act, 2009*

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

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 122, *The Environmental Assessment Amendment Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of the Environment has moved first reading of Bill No. 122, *The Environmental Assessment 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 the Environment.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Next sitting of the House.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

Bill No. 123 — *The Forest Resources Management Amendment Act, 2009*

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

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 123, *The Forest Resources Management Amendment Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of the Environment has moved that Bill No. 123, *The Forest Resources Management 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 a second time? I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Next sitting of the House.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

Bill No. 124 — *The Legal Profession Amendment Act, 2009*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 124, *The Legal Profession Amendment Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Justice has moved first reading of Bill No. 124, *The Legal Profession 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 the second time? I recognize the Minister of Justice.

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

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

Bill No. 125 — *The Crown Minerals Amendment Act, 2009*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Energy and Resources.

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 125, *The Crown Minerals Amendment Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister Responsible for Energy and Resources has moved that Bill No. 125, *The Crown Minerals . . . Order*. The Minister of Energy and Resources has moved that Bill No. 125, *The Crown Minerals 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 a second time? I recognize the Minister Responsible for Energy and Resources.

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — Next sitting of the House.

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Bill No. 610 — *The Seniors' Bill of Rights Act*

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

Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 610, *An Act Respecting Seniors' Rights* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The member from Saskatoon Eastview has moved that Bill No. 610, *The Seniors' Bill of Rights Act* be now read the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. 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 member from Saskatoon Eastview.

Ms. Junor: — Next sitting of the House.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before the orders of the day, I lay on the Table the report of the Saskatchewan Legislative Library.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 108

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Harrison that **Bill No. 108** — *The Cities Amendment Act, 2009* be now read a second time.]

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

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Bill before us to amend *The Cities Act* has actually got quite a lot of content in it and it reduces the government's role in approving many things. But to go through it, I have the explanatory notes and I think the explanatory notes are probably the most . . . they're actually quite clear on how things will change in the new Act, and in fact many of them not only do *The Cities Act*, but do *The Northern Municipalities* and *The Rural Municipalities Act* as well.

So the first one I want to talk about is that trailers and mobile homes are subject to property tax. And the change of the definition of building, and in conjunction with the definition of improvements:

A new definition is added to ensure that travel trailers for vacation/recreation use are not defined as buildings and therefore not subject to property taxes under the Act. And

this is similar to a definition that's used in Alberta's *Municipal Government Act*.

And there's also a clarification of the definition for business day to clarify that time references within the Act include different days than just the weekdays.

The second provision that I want to talk about, and this one will be changed as well in *The Municipalities Act* and the new northern municipalities Act. They also are talking about the guide to interpreting power to pass bylaws:

This provision is proposed for the new *Northern Municipalities Act*, which retains more specific provisions than *The Cities Act* and *The Municipalities Act*. Although the general principles of statutory interpretation already apply, it is intended to clarify general powers are not limited by specific powers. This amendment is proposed again for both *The Municipalities Act* and *The Cities Act* for consistency.

The next provision that is changed is the jurisdiction to pass bylaws. And the Department of Justice identified that a change to section 338 of *The Cities Act* was necessary to clarify penalties for officers or directors of corporations, and in particular so that these:

. . . referring in the same manner, so these sections were consistent within *The Cities Act*.

The proposed provisions are consistent also with 62 other Saskatchewan Acts.

As the sections currently exist, it could be interpreted to mean that any officer or director would be subject to a fine and imprisonment, even if they did not participate in the commission of a crime.

The recommended change would not eliminate the possibility of imprisonment for an officer or a director who may be involved in the commission of an offence. The officer or director would be subject to penalties . . . [of not more than one year, as set out in the legislation.]

And it's also again recommended as a change for *The Municipalities Act* and the new northern municipalities.

One of the interesting ones is about the street closures. This Act changes that city councils or city municipalities have the ability to approve street closures, except in the case of a provincial highway that travels through a city, and there are some specific provisions that we need to look at carefully. The idea does appear to be reasonable in principle.

However one of the things that is in this section, it says that this clause — this is referring to clause 3(a) — is reworded as per stakeholder request, doesn't identify who actually the stakeholder was. So that would be a question we would be interested in answering or have answered.

[14:30]

And some of these sections are amended to remove, of course,

that the city has to obtain provincial consent. So it's taking away the government's role basically in when a street can close, other than one that connects to a provincial highway. It also focuses on the city's obligations — not exactly the process that the cities have to meet the obligations. And the city is responsible for maintaining the records of streets within its boundaries.

The section that talks about the closures, of the method of providing a public utility:

This change is proposed to give councils more flexibility to enter into longer term utility agreements by extending the timeframe for agreements by 10 years. [And again] The same change is proposed for *The Municipalities Act* and the new *Northern Municipalities Act*.

The change to section 43 is the Saskatchewan Municipal Board, which is SMB, has:

... requested a change to streamline the application process for boundary alterations, amalgamations, or restructuring for the convenience of municipalities. It suggested the *Cities Act* could provide greater flexibility in the format of these applications.

The application form that's presently used has to go through regulations and changes to it must be made through the regulatory review process. The proposed wording that is here is going to be consistent with *The Municipalities Act* which allows the form to exist as a minister's order and would not require this regulatory review process.

This would provide the flexibility for the ministry and the Municipal Board to develop a common form for annexation application that could be modified in a timely way as the need arises. The forms in both *The Cities Act* and *The Municipalities Act* would need to be repealed.

The next one that I want to comment on is the number of councillors. And several of these changes, the explanation is that the section is revised so that council ... It's noted that council does not operationally give notice, but the staff does on a council's behalf. And again it's the same amendment proposed for *The Municipalities Act* and the new northern municipalities Act.

There is a new provision, provision 63.1, and this is part of *The Northern Municipalities Act* review:

... northern municipal stakeholders strongly supported introducing criminal record checks for northern municipal councillors. Councils will be given the option, not required, to pass a bylaw that requires a criminal record check as part of the municipal election nomination process. Similar authority for the southern councils is included in *The Municipalities Act* and *The Cities Act*. Consequential amendments are also required to *The Local Government Election Act* which are included in *The Municipalities Act* of 2009.

A subsection qualifies that:

... the bylaw must be made in advance of the election in which the requirement is to take effect, so that candidates will have time to obtain the criminal check. Ninety days is consistent with other time related requirements, such as appointing the returning officer.

The next section I just want to mention is changing how we, clarifying that we have mention in the Act to regular mail, and there are amendments that define how regular mail is ... how mail is delivered, which clearly we don't just have regular mail any more. And again there's several more that clarify about council not actually doing the work, but staff doing it on behalf of the work. So those seem to be just basically housekeeping.

The next one is public disclosure, and that council members who fail to update their public disclosure statement pursuant to the existing subsection are subject to disqualification:

There is a concern disqualification is an excessively harsh penalty where the council member honestly forgot to advise the clerk of the change after 30 days.

[This section] ... is amended to require each councillor to annually submit a statement that:

there have been no material changes to his or her public disclosure statement; or

details material changes to his or her public disclosure statement.

This is similar to requirements for MLAs under *The Members' Conflict of Interest Act*.

These amendments are again proposed for both *The Municipalities Act* and the new *Northern Municipalities Act*.

Under the provision dealing with appeals "... council members receive "remuneration"; they are not paid salary. This amendment is intended to provide clarification and consistency ..." and again both into *The Municipalities Act* and the new *Northern Municipalities Act*.

The next provision is on reimbursement and the change to this section is consistent with another section where it is an elector who may apply to the courts regarding enforcement of a council member's disqualification.

The next section has a definition of capital property. And the explanation is that this section:

... requires a city prepare its annual financial statements in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles ...

The proposed amendment is to ensure the definition is consistent with the CICA Public Sector Accounting Board terminology.

And this change is also in *The Municipalities Act* and *The Northern Municipalities Act* — the new one.

The next provision is the city to pay interest on uncollected

amounts:

This section was added to the municipal acts in the spring 2007 . . . in response to actions rural municipalities took regarding education property tax.

[The phrase] “That has been collected” should be added to clarify this applies if the city has collected the money, but has not passed it on to the other taxing authority. This is consistent with the intent in the original amendment from 2007 and is proposed for all three municipal Acts.

There are several more sections that we would be talking about, and the next one is on distress and seizure of goods. The explanation for this one is that:

Existing property tax enforcement tools are revised for house trailers and mobile homes.

The owner of a house trailer or mobile home is responsible for the property tax but *The Tax Enforcement Act* is not available because there is no separate title. The enforcement needs to be focused on the house trailer or mobile home and its owner.

And new subsections will address taxes owing after the due date and will allow the city to seize the house trailer or immobilize it. And another section clarifies that it’s an offence to tamper with an immobilization device, and these amendments again are proposed across the board into *The Municipalities Act* and to the new *Northern Municipalities Act*.

The next provision is goods affected by a distress warrant, and this amendment relates to the others respecting tax enforcement on house trailers and mobile homes:

It authorizes any expenses incurred in taking tax enforcement action on a house trailer and mobile home may be added to the tax roll. The same amendment is again going into *The Municipalities Act* and the new *Northern Municipalities Act*.

The next one is demolition or removal of certain improvements that are prohibited. And Justice again identified these descriptions, and we’ll be looking at that to see if this amendment is talking about improvement to the ability to demolish or remove that the city may have.

There’s also another provision dealing with limitation of action. And it clarifies how a one-year limitation period applies when the city is a third party to a suit, and it includes a deemed date of discovery for contribution in indemnity acts and actions as done in *The Limitations Act*.

The warrant authorizing entry to a property, this amendment is to provide consistency with the preamble and it refers to section 20 which authorizes that work is to be done, not just a plain inspection, and again put into the other Acts.

The next one is about the city remedying contraventions. And this amendment apparently clarifies, “a city may use reasonable force to remove occupants from buildings scheduled for demolition, not only for insufficient sanitary conditions.”

There are some changes made to general offences and penalties. Justice identified that changes were necessary to clarify that penalties for officers or directors of corporations would be necessary, and we’ll be looking to see what Justice had to say about that in more depth.

The service of documents, moving along. “There are a number of places throughout the Act where documents may be served by ordinary mail.” And there is no provision that indicates how you can say that they’ve actually been delivered, so that’s clarified as well.

There’s a provision apparently changed on explanation, and the municipality board is doing some of the work that . . . They can be appointed by the minister to undertake an audit or conduct an inquiry into the affairs of a city since they have the knowledge and expertise to carry those out.

Then there’s a provision on *The Land Surveys Act*, and some of these amendments will be done because there’s certain things that is being changed from highways into something more consistent in the cities and municipalities Act. There are quite a few actual changes proposed in the Bill, and it does change the way the cities can act and where the provincial government’s role is.

It gives them, the municipalities, a fair amount of power over mobile homes in particular where property taxes have gone unpaid. And this doesn’t seem an unreasonable change. But we need to have time to consider this proposal, and we need to ensure that it’s applied fairly and does not result in inequitable treatment for mobile home owners compared with other residential property owners.

There’s a number of the cities and their neighbouring RMs [rural municipality] have found the process of altering municipal boundaries, annexing land, and determining appropriate compensation to be unnecessarily cumbersome. It’s not clear whether the government’s proposed changes to these provisions are an adequate solution to the problem. We’ll be asking to see that as well.

The legislation also gives municipalities the authorities to request criminal record checks for candidates seeking public office. The government says that voters deserve to have all of the information they need to make an informed decision. We support this principle, however the specific changes the government has chosen to make give rise to a whole other set of questions.

The government has chosen to make this potential requirement for candidates seeking municipal office, but not for those seeking provincial office. It seems more than a little bit contradictory to require this of others without requiring it of people elected to this legislature. And of course we run the risk of being accused of a double standard if we do not make a similar change to the provincial elections Act.

And the government has chosen to limit the disclosure to criminal convictions. And they have not, for example, chosen to require disclosure where someone may have been charged with a serious criminal offence, but the charges have yet to proceed to court. And obviously people are entitled to a presumption of

innocence until proven guilty.

We do need to look at that kind of information that could have an effect on the decision of voters about a candidate's suitability for public office and should be taken into consideration. It's difficult in situations like this to know where to draw the line, but the matter certainly deserves more consideration before we simply adopt the government's proposal. With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — The member from Saskatoon Eastview has moved adjournment of debate on Bill No. 108. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. Carried.

Bill No. 109

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Harrison that **Bill No. 109 — *The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2009*** be now read a second time.]

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

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a few comments on the Bill 109, *The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2009* or An Act to amend *The Municipalities Act* and to make related amendments to *The Local Government Election Act*.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill outlines a number of issues and, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan municipalities have had the responsibility for maintaining roads, increase in truck traffic that has resulted from branch line abandonment over the years, among other pressures. It means that municipalities are often forced to absorb increased costs for which they don't really have the resources.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen larger truck traffic on our roads, larger vehicles, and we've seen what has occurred as a result of that, Mr. Speaker. The branch line abandonment which occurred over a number of years, Mr. Speaker, some decisions that were perhaps made around that issue did not take fully into effect what would happen to our roads, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the changes in agriculture. The changes in tandem trucks being placed on our roads, and the following damage that was done to those roads which were never built, Mr. Speaker, for that kind of heavy traffic. And, Mr. Speaker, these increased costs fell on our municipalities. They had to absorb these costs and find ways to deal with them.

Mr. Speaker, there was also a time when the thin membranes were put on a number of these roads which were also not in anticipation of the heavy truck traffic that would be done. So what we have, Mr. Speaker, is starting out with the abandonment, branch line abandonment which took place over a number of years and the ensuing damage to our roads leading to ensuing costs for our municipalities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this legislation gives municipalities a mechanism also for resolving disputes with private contractors whose activities, Mr. Speaker, whose activities have had a big impact on municipal roads. And, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we support this principle. But we need to look more closely at the mechanism in the Act before we decide to support the amendments, Mr. Speaker.

[14:45]

Mr. Speaker, the amendments for that in having to deal with the mechanisms to . . . Mr. Speaker, it is important that municipalities have this because the costs of repairing the roads, the cost, the abandonment that has occurred does not, Mr. Speaker, lead . . . it leads to problems for the municipalities. And, Mr. Speaker, in terms of resolving these issues, in terms of resolving these problems, we do need something in the Act and that is necessary, Mr. Speaker.

How this mechanism will work and that, we need some consultation, Mr. Speaker, on that. And we don't know, we don't see any place here, or have we received anything as to what consultations have been done on the mechanism. And we have to, Mr. Speaker, be careful before allowing this to pass that we fully understand the consequences of this, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in a number of places where the sections deal with the, for example, Mr. Speaker, section, road maintenance, section dealing with 22.1:

'agreement' means an agreement for the maintenance of any municipal road entered into pursuant to section 22 and includes a proposed agreement in the case where a municipality has caused notice to be served on . . . [the purpose] that an agreement . . . [has been] pursuant to . . .

Mr. Speaker, the mechanism that I spoke of is the thing that we have some concerns of on this side of the House, things that we will have to look at, things that we will have to discuss with the stakeholders to make sure that this is, in fact, going to work for them, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, road building — the issues that were . . . Municipalities run into difficulties with private contractors' disputes. Mr. Speaker, these need to be addressed. We have a number of roads that need fixing, Mr. Speaker. We have a number of roads which, well ever increasing, Mr. Speaker, that need attention and in order . . . We need to be building these roads, Mr. Speaker, and not spending time in arguments or court. We need a mechanism, Mr. Speaker, to resolve these disputes. And, Mr. Speaker, we see this as a positive. This issue needs to be addressed, Mr. Speaker. The concern however though is with the actual mechanism that we need to be dealing with here.

Mr. Speaker, before I leave that, just the branch line abandonment, I think there isn't a part of our province that wasn't touched with this abandonment, Mr. Speaker. There wasn't a part of our province that hasn't been touched with the truck traffic. And, Mr. Speaker, new routes have been established. New routes, new ways and to deliver the goods to — whether that be grain, Mr. Speaker, or goods — to the rural or other municipalities, larger municipalities, and, Mr. Speaker,

there was never any anticipation in some of those, or planning, that some of the roads would get the heavy traffic that they did.

And so, Mr. Speaker, in order to do that you have to . . . you will be building roads and, Mr. Speaker, wherever that is and, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the contracts, we need to, Mr. Speaker, we need to have mechanisms for doing that. Now, Mr. Speaker, the various . . . As I mentioned before, section 22, the road maintenance section on here dealing with that, we need to address these and have a careful look at this and, Mr. Speaker, look at perhaps whether the necessary consultations have been done around this Act.

Mr. Speaker, before I go into . . . There are also changes to the requirements for public disclosure of conflict of interest. Now, Mr. Speaker, they appear to bring municipal legislation more in line with the requirements for MLAs which, Mr. Speaker, does seem reasonable, but we need to consult with municipal leaders around this issue, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of conflicts and this . . . perhaps we are more aware as MLAs that we have to complete. But, Mr. Speaker, the municipalities, we wonder whether, you know, what consultation was done with the municipal leaders and will they understand, as we bring this legislation forward to deal with that and what impact will this, Mr. Speaker, what impact will this have on them, Mr. Speaker. It seems all in all that if we were to bring this in, in line with what we are all familiar with, it seems fine. But a number of questions, Mr. Speaker, as to . . . need to be answered, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this Act, *The Act to amend The Municipalities Act* and to make related amendments to *The Local Government Election Act*, Mr. Speaker, also deals with changes to allow for population figures to be calculated differently depending on the purpose again, Mr. Speaker, for which the information is used.

Mr. Speaker, we need more information about these changes and how they will work, Mr. Speaker. How will the population counts be done, Mr. Speaker? Who will do them, Mr. Speaker? The issues around who will be counted and, Mr. Speaker, how they'll be used, Mr. Speaker, I guess much more importantly and for what purpose will they be. If, Mr. Speaker, it's for clarity then, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we would be, again in principle, supportive of that, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the population counts, I guess the question, some of the questions maybe would be as to how often they would be done, Mr. Speaker. Who would be doing them? What would they be used for? Who actually would be counted? Those sorts of questions, Mr. Speaker, as we look at this Act, that would need to be asked.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation also gives municipalities the authority to request criminal record checks for candidates seeking public office. The government says that voters deserve to have all the information they need to make an informed decision. And again, Mr. Speaker, we support that principle, as previously mentioned on the other two points.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that the voters deserve all the information is fine, but however the specific changes the government has chosen to make give rise to a whole other set of questions, Mr.

Speaker — a whole other set of questions. Firstly, the government has chosen to make this a potential requirement for candidates seeking municipal office but not those for provincial office. Now, Mr. Speaker, the obvious question is, why not?

Now, Mr. Speaker, section 89.1, criminal record checks, is:

The following section is added after section 89:

“ . . . A council may, by bylaw, require that every candidate submit a criminal record check in the form required by the minister in addition to the nomination paper submitted pursuant to section 46 of *The Local Government Election Act*.

And subsection (2):

Any bylaw made pursuant to subsection (1) must be made:

[And again] in the case of a municipality other than a rural . . . at least 90 days before the day of a general election; and

in the case of a rural municipality, before August 1 of the year in which it is to take effect”.

Mr. Speaker, that is where we would be doing this. But, Mr. Speaker, it does, on looking at this, seem a bit contradictory if we require this of others without requiring it of people elected to this legislature, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are important questions surrounding that for me and, Mr. Speaker, as I talk to my constituents or people about this, the issue comes forward as to what, Mr. Speaker, what was the thinking around this to exempt those seeking provincial office, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is fairly . . . These are, Mr. Speaker, not fairly, these are important changes to legislation, adding this requirement for those seeking municipal office. I have not to date, Mr. Speaker, heard anyone say that they would be opposed to this but, Mr. Speaker, the issue of the provincial office, people seeking provincial office, has definitely come up in my discussions. And I guess, Mr. Speaker, the obvious is, what are they trying to hide, Mr. Speaker, or why would you not do it across the piece?

As most people are fair-minded people in our province, they would be asking, why do we not make it fair for everyone, Mr. Speaker? If it's good enough for the municipalities, is it good enough . . . It should be good enough for everyone in here. So, Mr. Speaker, this is a bothersome thing about this section, and I'm not certain as to what the minister had in mind regarding this.

Mr. Speaker, I've attempted to look at the minister's statements in his opening remarks on here and, Mr. Speaker, I do not see if anything about this. So, Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat disconcerting to a timely . . . or not a timely but an important issue such as this and perhaps timely, Mr. Speaker, that we look at this and see that in the minister's own introduction of the Act, we do not see mention of the Criminal Code checks, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, the minister does say . . . However it does say

this. He says, “The next issue I’d like to discuss relates to the proposal for optional criminal . . . checks in municipal elections.”

And he says:

As I described in my second reading of remarks for both the new *Northern Municipalities Act* and *The Cities Amendment Act*, municipalities will be able to decide locally if they want to require a higher level of public transparency in the election process. The purpose of allowing such checks is not to disqualify someone from running for office, but to inform electors.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if the concern here is to inform the electors, then I think the concern should go across the piece and include those in provincial office, Mr. Speaker. I’m not certain what the thinking here is. We were not given any explanation as to why it would not go further, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I can only stand and wonder what was happening.

Now again the minister went on:

I expect some municipalities may choose to implement these checks and some may not. It is the municipalities who are in the best position to decide if these checks are something that would benefit their communities. [And, Mr. Speaker] It’s important to remember that municipalities will have the authority to make this choice at the local level. The province is not forcing any particular municipality to undertake this.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wonder what was happening or what the thinking was when you put the criminal checks in and who had requested this, Mr. Speaker. It would be interesting to know what consultations went on and who was requesting this, and in fact then, I guess, who was not requesting this — who would not want criminal checks done, Mr. Speaker, to inform the voters of this province, of the municipalities, of the province as a whole as to what we were doing.

So, Mr. Speaker, I’m not certain what to make of that if the minister was simply catering to two municipalities. Were there three? Was it a large number of municipalities in the province that were requesting this? If you do this, it does lead to a checkerboard kind of approach across the piece.

And, Mr. Speaker, does it not raise then people saying, well what are you hiding? What would you be hiding in this particular municipality that didn’t pass that? What would the thinking be? What would they go and say . . . A certain municipality would be saying, we’re not passing that. And if the voters next door would say, well the councillors in our municipality, they’re posted. All the criminal checks are posted and here they are. And so why are your councillors not posting them?

[15:00]

Mr. Speaker, it would be interesting if the minister had gone on a bit more and explained, explained to us other than what he said, just simply allowing the municipalities to put up or require the optional criminal record checks, if he would have perhaps

had a discussion or showed us the consultations that showed us who. Is it 98 per cent of the municipalities that are covered by this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or is it only one that is requesting this? And who is the one that is requesting this and why are they doing that?

Now I guess for thinking about why are they doing that, that might seem obvious, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as to why they might be doing that. I think as the voters would . . . A very obvious concern or obvious thing to be thinking about is to know who we are voting for so that it allows for a degree of transparency. Again here we see this government that talks about transparency and openness is allowing, under criminal record checks, allowing each municipality to do that.

Now what would be the reasons? I would be interested in hearing the reasons of all municipalities not doing that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I’d like to know the reasons of all of us not putting our criminal checks in, perhaps even charges, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that we could all know what is happening. We all come here. We are on the public stage. We’re under the public’s eyes, under public scrutiny to say, here we are. These are our records. We run on those records and let the voters decide in each municipality and, Mr. Speaker, I would say in each constituency.

So the questions about transparency here are again, it’s a bit of a shell game as to what is going on. Why was this legislation proposed? If we would know who was requesting it . . . Because obviously on this reading, I can assume that not everybody would want this. And why then? What were the arguments of not wanting that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I would like to hear those arguments as about why we would not want criminal checks. Perhaps we should expand it to criminal charges. I don’t know.

But, you know, let’s have that discussion to say to everyone . . . I’m sure if the voters knew about this, and we will be talking to more people about this, if they would ask the questions on this issue, most people, if I may guess on this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would say, sure, let’s do criminal checks. Criminal checks are sort of a common day occurrence now. A number of employers require them for their jobs. Yet here we are, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this legislature, or in municipal government, and we are saying, let’s do a checkerboard approach to this, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So what was the thinking, what were the consultations, are the important questions here to have this type of changes like the criminal record checks, 89.1, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

“ . . . A council may, by bylaw, [to their own bylaws] require that every candidate submit a criminal record check in the form required by the minister . . . ”

Now it’s not clear as to when these would be passed. Perhaps that’ll become clearer in the Act under regulations. But the issue for us, the issue for me is, why not? Who was consulted? Who said that they would not like to do this? Who instigated this? Was this the minister’s own? Was this the minister without consultation?

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this has occurred with this

government already, and we can name the Acts where there's been no consultation and have simply tried to ram something through. Is this Act like that? Is this just simply the minister trying to propose something and then saying to people, well you can do it if you want to do it? You can do it if . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me say it to you this way: if it's the right thing to do, then we should do it. And if it isn't, then we shouldn't do it.

I'm not sure why the minister wants to have a debate within the Act. Why does the minister want to have a debate in the Act? If it's important to have criminal record checks, then in the Act there should be criminal record checks. I can think of a number of occupations where it's important to have criminal record checks. And that's said in the various Acts — you should have a criminal record check.

Yet here we are as representatives of people who we say that we should be transparent, that we should be accountable to people. We are saying that we will give a choice, a choice to municipalities to do that. And I'm uncertain now as to whether the municipalities were consulted or whether some municipalities brought this forward, whether there is agreement. Or what are the arguments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, against criminal record checks? What are the arguments?

And I guess it leads the electorate . . . and this is where we perhaps, the pessimism in terms of voters comes in, where people think, why are they not being forthright about anything as important as criminal record checks? Criminal record checks, Mr. Speaker, are simply . . . have been decided upon in other areas. You either do the criminal record checks or you don't. And here we are raising an issue of criminal record checks with elected officials, and we seem uncertain whether it's the right thing to do because instead of taking a role in this, we're saying to the municipalities, you decide that, to do that.

So either there was a concern raised by municipalities — which number, who were they? — that this was an issue brought forward to the minister or there was not, and the minister is simply throwing something out.

These are the types of things that lead us to look at and say, what consultation has been done? What consultation led the minister to fashion an Act of this kind, *The Municipalities Act*, and to want to amend and to add sections, new sections around criminal checks? What were the discussions? What are the background papers on this, to do this, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let alone having said all those, made those comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about whether we want this, who wants it? The minister has now raised the question in the electorate's mind of why not make the same changes to the provincial elections Act. So why are we not? We have now the voters perhaps asking more questions. So if it is good enough for the municipalities, what about the provincial legislators in our province? And why would you want to create that sort of concern? Why would you want to create those sorts of problems, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

We would want to deal with the Bill and deal with it in an entire fashion. You would talk about what are the impacts of this Bill on other governments. And those we do not see here. And this does not seem to be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I've mentioned

earlier . . . Has this been thought out and thought through? Has this been really thought out and thought through on this issue?

This is an important issue. It's not an issue simply . . . I guess all issues are important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, without getting into trying to prioritize issues, but I mean this issue obviously is important to all of us. And yet we are treating it in a fashion that sort of says well if you want to, you can and you don't have to; and in fact we'll do it for the municipal but we won't do it for the provincial. This is a very haphazard approach to legislation.

You might want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's not well thought through, taking this approach. We don't, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again what . . . I personally was not contacted. You know, as a legislator, I might have been asked in some fashion as to whether or not . . . what I thought about making the provincial level politicians subject to criminal checks? I don't know if the member from Regina Northeast was asked about this either, as to whether or not . . . what he thought on this. I mean, I would think that we have obviously the opportunity to debate this Bill in the legislature and then ask our questions. But to the minister, it is definitely an approach which has me puzzled as to what . . . It is unique to the point of being somewhat irrelevant, the legislation.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what does this do for our election process in this province when you split the different levels into municipal and provincial and offer different things, especially on something like criminal checks which goes right across the piece? We all live under the same laws, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we all have the opportunity to, as we make our decisions . . . we are charged or not charged, I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But this definitely, this double standard . . . And I think double standard is the thing that people would be saying about this, is that why? And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't want people coming up to me and saying, why have you passed this Bill for municipal politicians and you won't pass it for provincial ones? I mean, why would I want to have to meet that on the doorstep when I go door knocking and have to explain. Are people saying, well why don't you tell us about your criminal record checks? I would just as soon just have that posted. And if we're going to do it, let's do it, and this business about who would decide.

And perhaps since they are the government, the minister could not get agreement on the provincial record checks. Maybe he couldn't get agreement. And having the majority over there, he knew that he needed that agreement. Otherwise he wouldn't put it in because this way, he went to the municipalities and he said, well you do it yourself so that if the municipality had the majority in there, they would do that. But he couldn't get — perhaps, Mr. Speaker, what this leads to is that — he couldn't get agreement from his own caucus or from cabinet to have criminal record checks. Is that, Mr. Speaker, what's happened here?

Is there a problem over there that the Saskatchewan Party government are opposed to provincial criminal record checks of the politicians? And is that why it's not in here and setting what some would call a double standard so that we would have, municipalities would have the choice, those that would want to.

They would do it. But at the provincial level, we would not.

Now for our side I again, as I said, neither I nor — I understand — the member from Regina Northeast have been contacted on this issue to discuss it. So from our side in terms of whether we would want provincial government credit . . . not credit, criminal checks before . . . well when we run for office, so that our constituents, those people that can vote for us, know that about us, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So again I have concerns. It seems a somewhat scattered approach on this Act. It raises questions about whether the government itself is opposed to provincial criminal checks. Are they opposed to themselves as criminal . . . What were the discussions? Who would have said to this minister that, put this legislation in for us but, you know, don't put it in for our neighbouring municipality. Very unclear.

And again just on this, my second point on this, over and above the municipal provincial, is the government has chosen to limit disclosure of criminal convictions. They have not for example chosen to require disclosure where someone may have been charged with a serious criminal offence, but the charges have yet to proceed to court.

[15:15]

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's obviously, one of the obvious things is, I guess, people are entitled to presumption of innocence until proven guilty. But again here, as I ask my other question, is that the Sask Party government that is trying to, opposing provincial criminal credit checks, the question here would be, if people have the right to know whether their candidate has been convicted, do they also have the right to know whether a candidate has been charged and what . . . That kind of information could have an effect on the decision voters make about a candidate's suitability for public office, and should that be taken into consideration.

So we have some very serious issues here, and it's quite, I guess, disheartening in some ways that they are being dealt with in this manner. So issues of whether the Sask Party government is opposed to criminal checks because . . . obviously we could just have a scheme here that would say we should have criminal checks for everyone; those should be posted. Or we allow people to have a choice. But choice doesn't even exist for the provincial members seeking office at this legislature, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's obviously when we enter into charges and which charges should be brought forward and that. Those are difficult questions. But again we are not elected to make easy decisions. Decisions are not easy. We are called upon to make, to tackle difficult problems and that is why we are here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So when it comes to issues like this, we are, Mr. Deputy Speaker, concerned how this works.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I leave this discussion, this debate with a lot of questions, questions about the intent and the doubts that this creates — this haphazard approach creates — in the mind of the voters of this province over these very important changes that are here.

So why the issue surrounding why only municipal? Why voluntary? And why not provincial? And then the questions of why they might not want provincial criminal checks. That is just scratching the surface, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there are many other issues around . . . Again as I said, how much disclosure should there be? How much disclosure should there be?

Should everybody see the criminal records, the criminal convictions? Is that not fair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to have those posted so that the public can decide. Let the public decide and let the voters decide because they are the ones that put us here. They are the ones that vote for us. They should know who we are. Who are they electing to this legislature to represent them? Or in fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it might be looked on as being somewhat disingenuous to run under some false assumptions and put yourself forward that way. I think I would rather be running and being upfront with the people who vote for me in saying, this is who I am and these are the policies that I stand for.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, most people on the doorstep are reasonable people, and they understand when you go there and you speak with them, whether on a daily basis or election time. When you speak to the people, they ask you the questions. We tell them about what we stand for, what our policies are. We might sit down, invite us into their homes. And we tell them who we are, how we're connected to our constituencies, what our connection is to the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And those are important things to know.

And part of that is our character and what we are like. And one of the ways that society judges, one of the ways that society judges us is criminal records and the criminal records that we have attained through whatever. There are reasons, but those are important to the voters and the electors.

And then we see this Act coming in. And the Act talks about municipal candidates seeking municipal office will have to do criminal record checks providing, however, if the bylaws are passed at the local level to allow them to do that. So it is a very odd approach that is being taken here.

But I think the basic question that has to be driving this is why the Sask Party government, what are they trying to hide in not having provincial politicians disclose our doing criminal record checks. That's, at the end of the day when you read the Act, and anybody who has sat down and gone over it, that becomes the question. What are they trying to hide? And people have said to me, what are they trying to hide? What are they trying to hide? So why not do it? If the issue is a good issue and we have certain professions, certain jobs that require this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why not do it? If it's right, it's right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we should just do it. Instead the minister has taken an approach that is somewhat disconcerting, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's a lot of what the discussion is, about hiding. Why are they are not transparent? Why are they always . . . Why are they not answering questions? Why do they introduce laws and then not consult? Why do they not . . . Why are they not upfront? They talk about being upfront and here's who we are, but they hide, they hide who they are, Mr. Deputy

Speaker.

They hide who they are, and that is shown in the lack of questions that are posed on a daily basis here, and now the lack of transparency that they go into a Bill such as this, a Bill that's . . . And who in some quarters people say, this is very important. Criminal record checks, this is very important, and those should be posted where all people can read so that they can make their own decisions and come to their own conclusions about whether the candidates that they want to vote for have that. And who would not want that?

And so I want to know, when you propose something like this, what the discussions were, what potentially the consultations were that led to this sort of approach — the approach of where you split off municipal and provincial — and then the question of why you would want to not have provincial politicians have criminal record checks.

The obvious thing again is . . . And I hope I don't have to get into a lot of discussions on the doorstep around this, trying to defend why we do not have to have criminal record checks, in my riding because I have better things, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to talk about than criminal record checks.

But again not perhaps criminal record checks, but why is the Sask Party government hiding behind not having criminal record checks and posting them? If the minister felt so strongly about this, perhaps he should have gone out or she should have held back on the Bill until he got agreement from his Sask Party members to go for it and say, we want provincial.

Or let's hear the arguments why they do not want it. I think that's more important. What I would like to hear from that side over there is why they don't, but the minister did not say anything about that. He did not say why are they hiding from having the Sask Party get criminal record checks, but in fact all he said was that:

The next issue I'd like to discuss relates to the proposal for optional criminal record checks in municipal elections. As I described in my second reading of remarks for both the new *Northern Municipalities Act* and *The Cities Amendment Act* . . . [they] will be able to decide locally if they want to require a higher level of public transparency in the election process.

Now he agrees that it's a higher level of public transparency, but yet it is not . . . That's sort of good for in one place but not another. And then, "The purpose of allowing such checks is not to disqualify someone from running from office, but to inform electors."

Now we agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What is that? It is just in words here in terms of introducing the Act, but it doesn't come out in the legislation. So if he agrees that he wants transparency and he wants to inform the electors, then why would he not want to take this step and just do it. Like why not do it? What is he afraid of? What is he hiding? Or again, why are they trying to do a cover-up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and what are they covering over there? What is it that lurks over there that the electors should know?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister then goes on, and here's quite a breakthrough: "I expect some municipalities may choose to implement these checks and some may not." Now how about that. We have the minister saying he wants to allow for a higher level of public transparency in the election process, and the purpose of allowing checks is not to disqualify somebody, but to inform electors. So we have transparency.

And then he says, I expect some municipalities to implement these checks. If I was a municipality and I read that this is a higher public transparency, and then . . . So I would feel like I'm not transparent because that's the opposite of being transparent. So if he's allowing for a higher level of public transparency and then he says, I expect some municipalities to do this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how do you read those two things together?

The minister is saying to people of this province, I think that this provides a higher level of public transparency. And then he says, I expect some municipalities. What message does that send to them? That some of them are not transparent.

And so therefore then I asked the question of him. I asked the question of him: so why is the Sask Party government not transparent? What are they trying to hide? And why are they not being transparent on that side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because the minister has already agreed that we require a higher level of transparency in an election process. And why does he say that? The purpose of allowing such checks is not to disqualify someone from running, but to inform the electors. And we all agree that the electors should be informed.

But then he goes on, and immediately the next sentence . . . And I'm not certain who wrote this for him or whether he did that himself. He says, I expect municipalities may choose to implement these, and "It is the municipalities who are in the best position to decide if these checks are something that would benefit their communities." So the minister thinks that this is a higher level of public transparency. He believes in a higher level of public transparency, that minister does. But the municipalities might not. There's some municipalities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this province that might not believe in a higher level of transparency.

Now that would be an interesting one in terms of an election being held, when the next elections are held and people running in one municipality next door to the other one saying, it looks like your folks over there running in your municipality are not being transparent. They're not being transparent in accordance to what the minister has said because he says this is a higher level of transparency if you do this, but this municipality's determined that they won't do this.

And it would be interesting to know why they wouldn't want to do that, as I'm interested here, no doubt, and wondering why the Sask Party government, what they're trying to hide, and why they're not being transparent on this issue as well. What are they trying to hide? But again it's not surprising. It's not surprising for what we've heard from these folks opposite, that they are anything but transparent.

And he ends off:

It's important to remember that municipalities . . . have the authority to make this choice at a local level. The province is not forcing any particular municipality to undertake this."

This gets more interesting the more you read it because it starts out with a higher level of public transparency — this is great for the electors — but the province is not forcing anybody. Where's the push back coming from on this? Where's the push back coming from this?

An Hon. Member: — What's going on?

Mr. Iwanchuk: — What is going on over there that now, but we're not forcing you to do that? Why does he feel he has to force them to do this? I mean, where was the discussion that you have to get into this type of language if you consulted and you had agreement? You either had agreement or not. Or maybe you didn't consult, and this was just something you dreamed up and just brought it in here, and now we have to try and sort our way through this. And it's not something very easy to get through because you have conflicting messages. Conflicting messages.

[15:30]

So if he didn't consult, and now he has to find a way out. And so he says, "The province is not forcing any particular municipality to undertake this." What does that mean? What does that mean?

So it's a higher level of responsibility or a higher level of transparency. It's sort of a these are the things to do. And then, we don't want to force you to do this, but we're not doing it ourselves. Now talk about a mixed message, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you're sitting here as a municipality or you're sitting there . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well on this side it's a mixed message, and it has me quite confused as to what is happening.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope . . . I would say the clarity, there's no clarity here in terms of what direction. This is almost . . . It is haphazard, and it's almost a hodgepodge of ideas thrown together and sort of this is good. You don't have to do it, but if you want to do it, you can do it. What direction? This is no direction. This is no direction. And again it's not surprising from that side the lack of direction, the lack of vision, the lack in an issue.

And this issue is just a smaller kernel of what we see in the larger picture, the lack of vision here, in terms of saying, this is either a good idea, we're behind it. This is the kind of leadership we want to provide on this file, and we move forward. Instead we have, it's a good idea. You can do it if you want to do it, and we're not trying to force you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to do it.

Think about it. You know, as a voter, as a legislator in this legislature how that message resonates with the people not only in this building but outside. So I guess the thing I say to people on the doorstep is, what I have to say is, well, they're really not forcing the municipalities to do it. But they think it's a good idea, and they can do it if they want to.

So I think at that point in time, probably the elector would be saying, well what is it they're saying? What are they saying? Well what about them? And I'll say, well what are they trying to hide? What are they trying to hide? So instead of discussing policy issues on the doorstep, I'm going to have to be spending my time saying, well they're not transparent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They're not transparent here because they think it's a good idea, but they don't want to do it. And then they don't want to . . . we're not forcing anybody.

Now this is what we have to take to the doorstep and talk about and try and convince voters here, that the Sask Party government, well, has some vision in this area or has . . . they're taking a leadership role in something that's so important as voting and to the electors.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that in a Bill that spans from increased truck traffic and branch line abandonment, as I started out making my initial points, and the pressures the municipalities are feeling . . . And so they have to deal with issues like this because municipalities, some say that they are closer to electors, immediate. And so the kinds of pressures that they feel and the costs for dealing with these things, not only do they have to deal with these, but they now are forced to deal with whether or not we think credit checks are good. And it's almost a Bill that's driven by guilt because if you don't do it . . . This is a good idea. The minister thinks it's a good idea. But it's your choice whether you do it or not, but we won't force you to do it.

This is almost laughable, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the approach this minister has taken on this Bill — almost laughable of the approach. So in between trying to deal with, dealing with the disputes of contractors on roads and dealing with the costs, the pressures that they're feeling, on top of all this, we want to put on these municipalities the idea that you can have criminal checks. It's a really good thing to do. We think it's an excellent thing to do. The minister in fact thinks it brings forward a higher transparency, and it's good for the electors. Let's not forget that that's what he also says. He thinks this is good for the electors of this province, and it informs the electors, he says. He says that.

And so now the municipalities have to also struggle with this. Do we believe the minister? And do we do what he says because he's proposing a higher level; he's proposing a holier-than-thou kind of position? You should do criminal checks because I think it's a higher level of public transparency in the election process. He agrees with that. Right on — a higher level of an election process. And then he says, but we're not going to force you to do it, and you can decide to do it. So now there's a debate that has to take place.

And why did that debate not take place before this Bill was put in, before this Bill was put in so that people would deal with the real issues out there, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The real issues of fixing roads. The real issue of what rail-line abandonment has had on the roads. And big time, big time, big time costs caused by rail-line abandonment because we never anticipated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the anticipation of the number of heavy, heavy trucks that would go on the roads and the roads that they would use. Those roads, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were not meant for the kind of traffic, designed for the kind of traffic that came after

rail-line abandonment.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are also changes to the requirements for public disclosure of conflicts of interest. And again here the minister brings this in with requirements for MLAs. And here we see the minister is quite clear — there will be conflict of interest, and you're going to do what the MLAs do on this issue. If what I've been saying up to this point in time . . . We could say that the minister here has shown some leadership on this issue because he has said, this is what we're going to do. On this issue of conflict of interest, which is an important issue as well — that the electors know what the conflict of interest that members would have — he says, you will be like the MLAs. And it's clear. He just simply says it and it's done. It's done, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There are no . . . you can choose to have conflict of interest. I think it's good, but we're not going to force you to do it. Very unclear, if you compare this part, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the part about criminal checks. And it really makes me wonder why you can have conflict of interest and you can say that you'd be like the MLAs, but you put in criminal record checks and all of a sudden we don't want to do that. What are they hiding? What is the Sask Party government hiding, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they don't want criminal checks?

So it's okay to do conflict of interest disclosure in line with MLAs. That's very clear; I will take a leadership role in saying that. But when it comes to criminal record checks, we're going to duck and run. We're going to duck and run on this one. And we're also going to say you can have a choice, but we think it's a good idea, but again we're not going to force you to do it.

Now there's a message, two messages: one on conflict of interest and one on criminal record checks. So my question remains, after going over this Act, is what is the Sask Party government hiding? Why are they hiding this? Why would they not go ahead with this, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mentioned the population figures, and again there are questions that we will need to do more work on there. I talked about the roads, the increase in traffic, and I've talked about the mechanisms in the Act. Now we support, again, the principle of having the mechanism to resolve disputes between contractors, but we need to know more closely what that mechanism will work like. Again, here there are obviously well-founded suspicions of whether or not the minister talked or spoke with municipalities, spoke with the municipalities about this.

So we would like to be doing some more consultations in that area. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that I would move to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Saskatoon Fairview has moved to adjourn debate on Bill No. 109, *The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2009*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried.

Bill No. 110

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Harrison that **Bill No. 110 — *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2009*** be now read a second time.]

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to basically look at Bill 110 and to offer some of the opinions and certainly some of the challenges with Bill 110. And after I'm done my discussion, I want to move that we adjourn the debate.

Mr. Speaker, the people in northern Saskatchewan have the right to real democratic input into the decisions that affect their lives. And I look at some of the parts of this Act and the legislation proposed is to give northern municipalities more autonomy and more authority in line with the provisions already in place for southern communities. And while we support that principle, I certainly want to add a bit more what some of the challenges are when it comes to operating northern municipalities in Saskatchewan.

One of the things that people ought to know, that legislation, as we draft up rules and regulations and processes here in Regina, that we must always take into account the reality of life in northern communities. Being a former mayor in Ile-a-la-Crosse, I know some of the challenges that local leaders face when they try and provide leadership to the small northern communities. And many of these northern communities, while their ambitions are great and their hopes are great, there is certainly challenges that they face in reality — something that we need to always incorporate when it comes to realizing what the northern communities face when we do up laws and rules and regulations here in southern Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, the municipal leaders in northern Saskatchewan play a vital, vital role. It's not to diminish nor is it meant to demean the role of our southern counterparts, but many times in these northern communities the role of the mayor and certainly the councillor is really, really highlighted in the fact that many municipal elections you'll often see people voting and turning out — 85 to 90 per cent of the people come and vote for their mayor and for their councillors, and the role of mayor in northern Saskatchewan is one of high esteem.

And if you look at some of the challenges that the people place on their leadership, I want to make sure that when we look at some of the provisions in this municipal Act and some of the changes, that people ought to know from day one is that northern municipalities face an incredible, incredible challenge. And the leadership, this all rests on the shoulders of the councillors and the mayors, and they have a lot of work to do.

And of course as MLAs we often travel to southern Saskatchewan, roughly 800 kilometres from my home. And one of the things that's, I think, really important is that we are sometimes removed from the communities and we're all over the place and we spend some time here. The mayors and the councillors are in their communities pretty steady. And since they're there on a regular basis, they see every day some of the

challenges of living in northern communities.

And that's what I want. One of the messages I want as a result of Bill 110 is to make sure that some of the provisions and the changes that are being proposed is that people ought to know, and particularly the Sask Party and the minister ought to know and should understand, the complexity of operating these northern communities and certainly the challenges, and at the same time that we don't leave the municipal leaders to fend for themselves.

Obviously they are very proud, the mayors and the councillors are, of their role and they cherish their responsibility given to them. But we must never forget the incredible different and unique challenges that northern municipalities face when it comes to operating their communities.

[15:45]

So we look at this government's financial mismanagement and we begin to see some of the cuts to the important programs that are offered in the North. And we tend to become more and more worried that, again, you look at some of the rising costs of operating a community in southern Saskatchewan, you can almost compound those rising costs to double of that that a southern community will pay when it comes to northern communities.

In terms of access to services, it is an incredible problem as well in northern Saskatchewan. And basically the list goes on and on. And when you have some of the unemployment rates and some of the resulting social challenges and the issues, there is no question in my mind that northern municipal leaders certainly need to be heard and they need to be respected.

And as I look at some of the issues on this Bill, there is some things that we support in principle. But it's one thing to support in principle some of the changes that are being proposed within the Bill, but it's certainly another thing to say, well here is the resulting financial support; here's the resulting service support so you're able to do your job more effectively.

What this Bill talks about, Mr. Speaker, is a request for criminal record check for candidates seeking public office. And I noticed from the minister's comments, he spoke to a few people in New North. I would like for the record, Mr. Speaker, is to see what kind of requests that particular issue was asked for by a number of northern communities. If the municipal office is required to do that, those seeking provincial office should do so as well.

Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult in these situations of criminal record check versus non-criminal record check to see where we draw the line. And I think it's important that we look at this and provide more consideration and more thought as opposed to simply adopting this government's proposal.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one of the things, the glaring omissions of Bill 110, it makes reference to trying to bring the northern communities more in line with the provisions already in place for southern municipalities. And while we said we support those principles, I'm going to ask the question . . . There was a great success and great support, I personally support the notion that Meadow Lake and Martensville were declared cities.

I congratulate and commend the mayor and the council of both those communities, in particular the mayor of Meadow Lake who's a very fine mayor. And we certainly, you know, recognize and we applaud that particular effort because Meadow Lake is a growing community, and it certainly is a community that should receive city status.

And yes, there's people out there that may be concerned about the cost of fire protection services, and will this increase our taxes in later years and so on and so forth. And while they have a right to express those concerns, I'm quite positive that the mayor and council of the city of Meadow Lake would certainly look at trying to find some answers and to alleviate some of those concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to challenge the Minister in relation to *The Northern Municipalities Act* when he mentioned the fact that he'd like to see, he would like to see similar options exist for northern communities as they would for southern communities. And the line, for those that may not be aware, there is a northern administration district which is basically considered the northern line of the NAD [northern administration district] line. And all the communities north of Meadow Lake, north of Creighton, and north of Prince Albert are considered within the northern administration district. And *The Northern Municipalities Act*, Bill 110 of course has implication on that particular Act.

And one of the things that I think is important is, you look at the community of La Ronge as an example. It's got a combined population of Air Ronge, La Ronge, and of course the Indian band. You're looking at roughly between 6 and 7,000 people, and that's just the census. And while I applaud the effort of the minister to look and declare Martensville and Meadow Lake a city, if you want to be fair and consistent with your legislation, perhaps it'd be wise to also look at trying to declare La Ronge a city because La Ronge I think would fit the criteria that Meadow Lake fit.

And as a result of that, you want to be consistent, then perhaps it's time we look at declaring La Ronge a city. Is that a possibility? And the answer is, well if the rules are consistent with that of southern Saskatchewan, then I think La Ronge ought to be declared a city and therefore receive city status. And while I can't specifically speak for the Cumberland MLA, I'm sure he'll have a lot of thoughts on that because I'm just kind of unloading this on him as we speak.

But in terms of *The Northern Municipalities Act*, is there a provision in that Act that would allow the minister to declare La Ronge a city? I think it's something that we ought to look at and we ought to research. And again going back to the points I raised earlier, if it is meant to give the northern municipalities more autonomy and more authority in line with our southern counterparts, then perhaps a designation of a northern city would be appropriate.

So, Mr. Speaker, I look at some of these Bills and I have a lot of concerns. And I'm not going to elaborate on the concerns more today; I'll have some as we continue to look at the Act. And so therefore I will ask my colleague to also add some of his opinions as well. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to have the privilege to enter into this debate, the debate on this particular Bill, the Bill that is I think quite important to northerners. And it's the Act respecting the local government in northern Saskatchewan and making consequential amendment Act, changes to other Acts.

And I say it gives me a great deal of pleasure, Mr. Speaker, because it certainly does. I had the privilege — and I consider it a privilege — of travelling through northern Saskatchewan a few summers ago as part of my responsibilities that was handed to me by the then premier, Mr. Calvert, that asked me to do a review of the northern overtime exemptions Act. And in order to do that, I felt it was necessary to get out and talk to the folks who are, quite frankly, impacted by this.

The northern overtime exemption Act was a unique Act. I think Saskatchewan was the only province in all of Canada where an area of the province was designated as to be exempt from employers having to pay overtime to employees. And the line was not as it was quite . . . As I travelled throughout northern Saskatchewan and we held public meetings in many, many communities . . . I wouldn't say in every community; I think there was three communities we didn't get into. But outside of that, we were in every community and we held public meetings in all these various communities. And most people referred to the dividing line between north and south as NAD line. And that of course was not the line that was used for the northern overtime exemptions. The line there was the township line of township 62.

But it was really a eye-opener for me personally, having had the opportunity to travel in northern Saskatchewan and spend some time in each one of these communities and talk to and visit with many of the residents of these communities. Boy, was it ever an eye-opener. The uniqueness or the differences between northern Saskatchewan and southern Saskatchewan is almost as different as night and day.

And I think all members should take the opportunity to travel the North and spend some time up there. And I don't mean just during the prime tourist season of July and August. And I don't mean just for the purpose of fishing, of some of the great fishing that's up in that area or, later on in the season, for some of the great hunting that's up in there. But I would encourage them to travel northern Saskatchewan and take time to meet the people, because they are certainly very friendly and hospitable people.

But there's a uniqueness about northern Saskatchewan, for me at least, having been born and raised in the southern part of the province here. The uniqueness is, I suppose, it's so community-based. Each community is very, very, very much community-based. And it's isolated in as far as being long distances between communities, great distance between communities.

And a lot of these communities are self-reliant. They provide much of the services that they need. They provide it themselves. They find ways and means to be able to have those services

locally, because they quite simply can't travel to the next community to get them because of the distance involved.

And you can understand, Mr. Speaker, that that is one of the areas that — in my critic area as the critic for Highways and Infrastructure — is of concern to me and my northern colleagues. Is that in these communities, unlike the rest of us in southern Saskatchewan who enjoy in our communities usually four all-weather roads into our community, one going in each direction — so you can come in from one direction and go out another — and usually they're done if not on a paved surface, at least on an all-weather road. Well that's not the same in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Most of these communities in northern Saskatchewan have one road, have one road in and one road out. They simply don't have the luxury of having a choice of two or three different roads.

So you can understand why having quality infrastructure, quality roads, is so very important to the North and to having the ability to be able to move back and forth with, well basically I say, with ease, with the ability to do so whenever they so wish despite climatic conditions.

And I can recall one time, we were on . . . We went from La Ronge to Pinehouse; we had a meeting in Pinehouse. And it's quite a long distance so we left fairly early in the morning. I like to do this as much as possible, get into the communities as early as possible so that we could have some time to travel around the community and go into some of the stores and get to, you know, just a brief meeting with the mayor and the council and some of the store owners.

And I remember doing this in Pinehouse and it was very interesting. We had lunch, actually had supper in Pinehouse before our public meeting. And we had a good turnout. I believe if my memory serves me correctly, it had something like 40 to 50 people at the meeting. It was a good discussion, very knowledgeable people. Many had experienced working and not having been paid overtime and all the rest of those very nuances to that particular Bill.

And that, while the meeting was going on, we experienced one of those — this was in the month of August, I believe it was — and we experienced one of those summer rain storms that come up sort of out of the blue. It just had poured. It rained pretty heavily. And of course, when the meeting was over with, at about 10:30 at night, we had to still make our way back to La Ronge.

And it was a most interesting drive because it was only one highway. There was only the one road. And it was in not in the best of shape. And it certainly required more attention. And I remember driving out and I remember saying to those who were with me that I was quite pleased that we had a four-wheel drive vehicle because after that rain we were driving in about three to four inches of just a really slushy, mushy surface on that road. And it was certainly something that certainly needed a four-wheel drive in order to have a bit of a good chance of making it out of there without any difficulty.

But, Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill, *The Northern Municipalities Act*, something that I could probably relate to having had the opportunity of spending 10 years of my life, I

was municipal councillor in a southern municipality. So I have some idea of what some of the issues might be and how they may be looked at through the eyes of somebody in northern Saskatchewan and somebody who is serving on municipal council in northern Saskatchewan.

There certainly is, as I have already stated, a uniqueness about northern Saskatchewan, and that is why it is so very important that when we make these changes, when we make these changes to the governance of the municipalities of northern Saskatchewan, it is absolutely essential that we carry out those discussions with those people in the North who are going to be affected because they best know what changes need to take place. They best know what changes will affect them and improve their life and it'll improve the lot of their community.

And it is important that we have that opportunity and take that opportunity to speak to these people who have these concerns, because unless you have lived it, unless you have experienced it, unless you've spent a lot of time in the North, there is a uniqueness there that's not comprehensible by somebody from the South just coming in on a flyby or just a brief pass through as I did and be able to understand it all, because that's certainly not the case.

This is why it's so important that before the government makes any significant amendments to the northern municipal Act or the other Acts that are related, that there is that consultation, that discussion does take place. And I have yet, Mr. Speaker, to see any evidence that that is the case here. I'm hoping I'm wrong but I have yet to see that evidence. But if you travel in northern Saskatchewan, you quickly identify that the issues that are facing northerners in a lot of ways are similar to that facing southerners, to that facing the people in southern Saskatchewan, but there's also a uniqueness there.

[16:00]

And I remember that when I was travelling through and having my public meetings in regards to the northern overtime exemption, we used as a prop or to give the good folks there an idea of the area we were talking about, we used a map of the top half of Saskatchewan. The map started just below township 62 and went up and it showed the entire area of the province that was affected by the then legislation that exempted employers from paying overtime to northern workers.

And it didn't fail, Mr. Speaker, it didn't fail that there was a comment at a public meeting by someone there saying, boy it's nice to see a map that shows northern Saskatchewan and not just the South. Because what they had become used to when you're looking at maps of Saskatchewan, there's a lot of cases that just shows southern Saskatchewan. It doesn't show the North because it's not a highly populated area. It shows southern Saskatchewan and, quite frankly, those folks who lived in northern Saskatchewan would be a bit disturbed by the fact that they were left out. They were ignored. They were overlooked and that, Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping is not the case as far as this legislation is concerned.

I'm hoping that the government has done its homework and has done consulting and has talked to the people who live in northern Saskatchewan because they are unique in a lot of the

ways, and a lot of ways they're similar. A lot of the issues that they face are similar. I mean issues of health care are similar to those in the North. The issues of education — similar to those in the South. The issues of transportation, of infrastructure, of roads — it's similar to those in the South.

The difference is, as I already indicated as far as roads is concerned, in the South, we in the communities in southern Saskatchewan here enjoy usually a good quality road leading out of our community in any one of the four directions, and all four directions. Whereas in northern Saskatchewan the uniqueness is that they have one road, and they need to keep that road up and keep that road in the best of possible shape because that's the only road they have. It's the road that they come in on; it's the road that they go out on. It's the road that their services come in on; it's the road that their services go out on. So it's very important that we have that.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is truly necessary for the government to have carried out meaningful consultations with the communities of northern Saskatchewan to ensure that they have had that ability to discuss and identify those issues that are of importance to those communities. And we need to look at providing those opportunities to those communities to be able to develop the services that they require and be able to develop ways, through co-operation — through co-operation with the provincial government, with other communities in the North — to have access to those services that their people so desperately require on an ongoing basis, but actually should be their right.

A lot of these services that we enjoy in southern Saskatchewan here, we take for granted. Why? They're handy. They're close by. If we don't have it in our particular community here, we can drive to the next one close by and enjoy those services. That, Mr. Speaker, is not the case in northern Saskatchewan.

So it is important that we have those systems in place so that northerners can enjoy an improved quality of life. And I think that's what we all, as legislators here, are looking for. We're looking for the ability to improve the lives of Saskatchewan people.

And I think we should be paying special attention to northern Saskatchewan because it has the uniqueness there. Particular uniqueness of distances is very important. And we need to, you know, keep that in mind as we enter into any time, any time we enter into a debate over making certain changes to regulations and legislation as to what effect that may have on northern people.

But more importantly, we need to have that discussion with them because they're the people on the front lines. They're the people born and raised there. They're the ones that know what needs to be done. They're the ones that know what works and what doesn't work. They're the ones that know the changes that would improve their lot, improve the life of the people in northern Saskatchewan and improve those communities. That should be the goal of all of us, Mr. Speaker.

At the same time, we need to ensure, we need to ensure that the legislation and the municipal legislation, northern municipal legislation, it needs to reflect the reality of the life in northern Saskatchewan. That's the difference. It needs to reflect the

reality of life in northern Saskatchewan.

You know, there's all kinds of opportunity for us to think, this would be good for them. There's all kinds of opportunity for us to say, well this is better than what they had. But there's a reality that the life in northern Saskatchewan is different than that in the South. And we need to carry those consultations out with those communities so that the legislation, when the changes do take place, those changes are meaningful and those changes do reflect the reality of life in northern Saskatchewan.

And many northern leaders . . . Now during my time as travelling in northern Saskatchewan I had the opportunity to meet with, on many occasions, mayors from the communities, the various communities that I was in, and the town council. And they had an organization there called New North, which was an umbrella organization of all the municipalities in northern Saskatchewan. And the membership was made up of the mayors of each community. And it was, I think, a wonderful step forward because it allowed them in northern Saskatchewan to speak with one voice on those issues that affected them all right across the piece.

And many issues are, like I said earlier, many of the issues in northern Saskatchewan are very similar to those in southern Saskatchewan. Many issues affect one community the same way they affect another community, although one community may be on the east side of the province and the other one on the west side of the province, but the issues are the same.

So the organization of the New North, as it was constituted of the leadership of each community — the mayors of each community — was certainly a valuable tool, I think, to northern Saskatchewan. It allows them to speak with one voice on the issues that face their communities. And it allowed them to carry out meaningful discussions with governments of both levels — federal government and provincial government — and they did so with one voice. And they did so with outlining the concerns that affected all of their communities. And I found that a very great organization.

I met with the organization officially in Prince Albert at one of their meetings. But I had the opportunity also to meet with many of the mayors in their own communities, and you kind of get to know, in a very broad way, some of the issues that they were facing. And it certainly struck me as different, unique in the fact that the biggest issue, biggest hurdle that they had to deal with was the distances between communities. To travel from one community to the other was not something that was done lightly. A lot of times, the travel was planned to be as beneficial as possible so that there was no wasted time and no wasted dollars and cents because, quite frankly, it was expensive to travel long distances. You can understand the stress involved in doing that.

But these community leaders face many issues, many challenges because of the services that they require on, quite frankly, a small population and the vast distances in between. So they have to find ways and means to make these services affordable and yet in a climate that is very expensive. And the climate is very expensive because of the distances involved and, in a lot of cases, small communities, small populations requiring the same service and the same level of service as if it

was a larger community.

And therefore it increases the burden of costs and increases the burden of the municipal leaders finding out and identifying ways and means that they could provide these services to their ratepayers, to the folks that they represent, in a way that's affordable and in a way that's meaningful and in a way that meets the needs of northern people — the people who live in these small communities.

And the issues are, as I said, Mr. Speaker, a lot of cases are similar to that of southern Saskatchewan, but in other ways they're a little different. The social challenges I think is perhaps one of the issues that local government faces up north there, the fact that they have high unemployment which is not a good thing. And certainly governments in the past have worked on this issue, and I hope this government here would work on it too. I don't see any evidence of that though, Mr. Speaker.

What I do see evidence of, I see evidence of this government simply ignoring northern Saskatchewan. That's most obvious in the most recent deliberation by this government of about a year, year and a half ago when they announced that they came up a five-year rolling plan for their highways in this province. And that five-year rolling plan did not include northern Saskatchewan. I was very disappointed when I'd seen that because they once again simply ignored northern Saskatchewan. They left northern Saskatchewan out of the loop.

And that's disappointing, Mr. Speaker, because I think northerners want to be included in Saskatchewan. They want to be felt as a part of this province. They don't want to be isolated. They don't want to be separated. They don't want to be looked upon as different. They want to be part of this province. Do they have unique issues? Yes, they do. As we all have unique issues, they have unique issues too. But they also want to be included in this province, in part of this province.

I will, for the life of me, never understand why this government couldn't see fit to have included northern Saskatchewan in their five-year plan. Oh yes, now that it's been brought to their attention that they've ignored northern Saskatchewan, now they announce that they have a northern Saskatchewan five-year plan.

But they're working on it. They haven't got the plan yet. They're still working on it. It's still under study. Well, Mr. Speaker . . .

An Hon. Member: — It sounds like an afterthought to me.

Mr. Harper: — Exactly right. It sounds like an afterthought to me, and that's exactly what it is, Mr. Speaker. They ignored northern Saskatchewan. They ignored northern Saskatchewan originally. When the heat came on them, when heat came on them, by my colleagues particularly from the North, then they decide — whoa — well we'll have to address this. We'll have to address this by introducing a northern-only five-year strategy plan, but we'll have to talk about it. It'll probably take them five years to talk about it before they . . . [inaudible] . . . So they were ignored, Mr. Speaker.

And now that's rather sad, rather hurtful, I would say, to be a

part of Saskatchewan and to be considered a Saskatchewan citizen, to be obligated to the responsibilities of a Saskatchewan citizen and then to be ignored, ignored, but particularly on that issue. It's an issue with a . . . very, very important because roads and transportation in northern Saskatchewan is very, very important to northerners.

Why? Because as I've already said, Mr. Speaker, most of these communities have one road. They don't have four all-weather roads like we enjoy in southern Saskatchewan that leads out from our communities in each direction. What they have is one road. One road in, one road out. They need to maintain that road in the best possible condition so that they can have access to going in or going out as they need, but so that commerce can flow in and out also, so services can come in and out, so goods can come in and out. And that is very important in northern Saskatchewan because that's the only road. That's the only road.

And in many cases, Mr. Speaker, we note that those roads in northern Saskatchewan have been ignored by this government. But they have also been perhaps put down on the list because they didn't even make the five-year list that the government first announced, the five-year rolling plan that the government first announced. They didn't even make that one. They were ignored.

Then the minister acted, I think after a fair amount of heat both in the House here and certainly in committee, decided that well we have to put this particular issue to bed. The best way to do that, we'll strike another committee to do a review of the situation in northern Saskatchewan and bring in a five-year rolling plan for the highways of northern Saskatchewan. And that, Mr. Speaker, I think we're still waiting for. And we're still looking for that.

And I think New North, if you talk to them, that would be probably the first thing on their list of needs attention, would be the roads. If you've travelled those roads — and I have in the summertime when it's dry — you're driving in a cloud of dust, an absolute cloud of dust. And after a stretch of dry weather, the dust will be two to three inches thick on that road. And I have driven on many of those roads, Mr. Speaker, and I drove in an absolute cloud of dust. And I've got to admit it is very, very dangerous because you can't see the traffic coming at you.

And I'm also reminded of my experience driving from Pelican Narrows to Sandy Bay, and boy, is there ever a road you don't want to drive on when it's dusty and driving in a cloud of dust. That's one of them because it is a very treacherous road — very sharp curves, very sharp hills, very difficult to see. And I did have the experience of following a large truck basically from Pelican Narrows all the way to Sandy Bay in a cloud of dust, and it was not fun. It was not fun. There was times I certainly had my heart in my mouth because you just simply couldn't see, and you didn't know what was coming over the edge of the hill because it was just thick dust, Mr. Speaker.

And that's something, Mr. Speaker, that those folks drive on every day. I mean, it's something I'd experienced once. I went in once and out once. And like I said, going in, in a cloud of dust, I had my heart in my mouth. Well you can imagine those folks driving in that road all the time. Dust in the summer, snow

in the winter, ice in the winter. Those are treacherous conditions, and yet northern Saskatchewan was left out of the government's five-year rolling plan.

[16:15]

And when you talk to the municipal leaders up there, they just simply shake their head and they wonder why. Why are they being treated so differently than the rest of Saskatchewan? Why is it, when the government unveiled its five-year rolling plan, it didn't mention northern Saskatchewan in any of their plans?

In fact, Mr. Speaker, what it did do was took funds that were already designated by the previous government for road repair and road improvement in northern Saskatchewan. They took those funds away. They took those funds away. They said, oh it's been, it's been rescheduled, or we'll come back to it at another time in the future here, but first we want to do a study. We simply forgot to do northern Saskatchewan when we did our original study. We implemented a new committee here to study northern Saskatchewan and to identify what needs to be done in those roads, and eventually maybe we'll even find some money to start doing it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, time is going on, and we are not seeing any action. What we are seeing, though, from the members, from my colleagues from the North, there are a number of petitions coming in about the highways and the condition of those highways because they are dangerous, treacherous. And some of the locals . . . in fact on one of the highways there — I think it was 123 — was one the locals have termed an area there as suicide curve. And those are the local people, Mr. Speaker. Those are the people who drive on that road every day. Those are the people who know that country. I mean, that's their country. And those are the areas that were designated to be repaired by the former government. That's what the money was set aside for that. This government comes along. They pull that money out of there. And, Mr. Speaker, and they do that to . . . and the northern leaders are saying why. Why did this happen? You know, why would this government do that? I mean we need it. We're Saskatchewan citizens. We need some services on our roads too.

But what happened? This government decided to yank that money out. And, Mr. Speaker, that was done when the government had money. That was done before the fiscal mismanagement of this government became apparent now. So if they didn't fix those northern roads when they had money, the northern leaders are saying, what's going to happen now that the provincial government has driven the finances of this province into the ditch? What's going to happen to our northern roads? Are we going to even be on a five-year wait-list? Are we even going to make their five-year wait-list? That's the question, Mr. Speaker, that northerners, northern leaders are asking today.

Mr. Speaker, the concern here, that many northerners have, is that the government may come up with a five-year list, then each year they'll defer it. They'll defer it. They'll say, well next year. Last year this government was saying, well this is this year country and we're doing it now. And a year later, or just shortly less than a year later, they've put the finances of this province into the ditch, and now they're saying, well we'll defer

things. We'll just defer it. We'll defer it for another year. We'll defer it for another couple of years.

And, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the concern that northern Saskatchewan people have and northern leaders in northern Saskatchewan have is if the government is in bad financial shape now, then what is going to make it better next year? What is going to make it better next year? Or are they just going to once again borrow against the assets of the Crowns or borrow against the assets of the province to defer, defer a deficit budget? But meanwhile, start driving up the debt, cutting back services. And the first place that they sense we'll cut back is northern Saskatchewan where they've already been cut back by this government, been ignored by this government, were promised that they would come up a five-year wait-list for the highway construction, the highway improvement in northern Saskatchewan, but that has now been deferred, deferred. They're going to continue to defer work in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And it's sad because, Mr. Speaker, northern Saskatchewan has so much to offer. There's so much in northern Saskatchewan. Not only in the richness of the minerals and the tremendous tourism that it has, but there's just so much it offers in the way of genuine people, genuine people. When you get out there, Mr. Speaker, and meet them, they're just genuine, wonderful people. All they want is to be able to have a reasonable quality of life.

They want to be able to do it in their home area which is northern Saskatchewan. They want to be able to enjoy some of the things that we take for granted in southern Saskatchewan. That's a relatively quality health care. They want to be able to have access to decent education, and they would like some reasonable jobs. They would like to have a job, a reasonable job, that they can rely on and they're able to earn money, be able to . . . and support their families, and a reasonable lifestyle.

And they have a government, a provincial government, that simply ignores them. It simply ignores them. And, Mr. Speaker, this is not helpful. This is not helpful to the people in northern Saskatchewan, and it certainly doesn't build a strong relationship for the entire province.

But, Mr. Speaker, the vehicles there to deliver those services are there through northern Saskatchewan, through the communities of northern Saskatchewan and through the — New North is one of them — through the municipalities that are set up in northern Saskatchewan. They simply need the tools and the ability to deliver a lot of these services. And those services who could be delivered through these, through these municipal bodies, Mr. Speaker . . . if they would receive some co-operation from this government and if they would be able to enhance their position, and this government would be — rather than ignoring them — this government would be working co-operatively with them to help develop an atmosphere which northerners would enjoy the improvement and quality of life, but also their communities would enjoy the opportunity to enhance themselves perhaps through economic development that would create some jobs for local people, so they could be employed right in their own communities.

And those opportunities are there, Mr. Speaker. It's like one

fellow said; the only thing holding us back is our lack of imagination. And I think that's what we have here. We certainly have the abilities up there. We certainly have the resources up there, but simply have to have the imagination and the desire to put them together to make them work in a meaningful way for northerners.

And, Mr. Speaker, we certainly don't want to see changes to *The Northern Municipalities Act* that is going to further isolate those municipalities, that's going to further leave those municipal leaders on their own to fend for themselves. Like I said, they united under the umbrella organization of New North which I think is a wonderful organization.

It certainly reflects the needs of northerners. It certainly reflects the needs of northern communities, and it gives them the ability to negotiate with parent governments, whether it be provincial government or federal government, and it does so, allows them to be able to talk with one voice, a united front with the various government agencies and departments to identify what changes need to take place in order to further improve the lots of northern Saskatchewan. And I encourage certainly the northerners to continue down that road because I think it's a meaningful dialogue that needs to take place.

A concern I think that we all share, certainly northerners share, is the fact that this government's financial mismanagement is starting to result in cuts right across the face of government, but certainly looking at cuts within the programming in northern Saskatchewan. Because, I suppose, two reasons: (a) smaller population in northern Saskatchewan and less affected by those cuts; and (b) most programming in northern Saskatchewan, because of the distances involved and the delivery systems involved, are probably a little more expensive than that might be such in southern Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker . . .

An Hon. Member: — It doesn't make them any less needed, though.

Mr. Harper: — But it certainly . . . My seatmate says it doesn't make it any less needed. Certainly not any less needed or any less deserved. These people are Saskatchewan people and they deserve to be treated the same as anybody else in Saskatchewan.

And that was why the government of the past took the initiative to remove what I thought was a very bad piece of legislation and that was the northern overtime exemption policy. It was a policy, it was the government for a number of years here in this government — the only province, by the way, the only province in Canada to have such a policy — and that was removed by our government. So it provided the opportunity for employees to enjoy the benefits of their labour when that labour required them to work overtime or more than 40 hours out of the week or 80 hours out of two weeks. They were able to enjoy the benefits of that labour, the same as somebody in the South.

And that's only fair. There's no reason why anybody in northern Saskatchewan just simply because of their geographical location should be treated any different than anybody else in this province . . . [inaudible interjection] . . .

Yes, well that's the way it was. That ain't the way it is now.

Mr. Speaker, my question is on this particular amendments that the government is proposing in *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2009*, is a number of questions come into mind is, was there consultations carried out? Was there consultations carried out in regards to these changes? If there was, and I assume there was, but if there was, who did they consult with? When I say they, I mean the government and the government's officials — who did they talk to? Who did they talk to?

And what method was used? Was there a travelling committee? Was there a committee that travelled around northern Saskatchewan and met with the leadership in the North, had public meetings with the residents of the communities? Did they talk to those folks out there? Did they carry out these consultations?

Or, Mr. Speaker, is this something that was dreamed up by bureaucrats sitting in southern Saskatchewan, on the 16th floor of a ivory tower here, and at the direction of their masters, their political masters over here and said, let's make some of these changes? We want you to bring forward these changes, and here's the parameters of what we want you to make those changes in. And that would certainly limit the bureaucrats' ability then to think outside the box or do the consultation with people in northern Saskatchewan who are the front-line people, the people who face these issues each and every day.

Now this is a very important Act to northern people because, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the organizations that represent northern Saskatchewan or deliver the services to northern Saskatchewan are primarily done through the municipalities. It's done through the communities. It's done through the municipalities. The municipalities in each community in northern Saskatchewan is a very, very important organization — very important organization — because it provides . . . It's the centrepiece. It provides all the systems that northerners enjoy.

And that is why it's so very, very important that when any changes are made to the northern municipal Act, that these changes have to be done very carefully, done very thoughtfully, and be done with a degree of determination to ensure that these changes don't have a negative effect, but rather, Mr. Speaker, have a very positive effect on people in northern Saskatchewan. Because that should be the role, that should be the role of any changes being made by any government is to ensure that the changes have a positive effect on those communities, have a positive effect upon the people in those communities.

And, Mr. Speaker, I have yet to have any assurance from this government that any of these changes that are being sought in this Bill here is that of meaningful thought, meaningful discussion, careful planning, a lot of consultations to ensure that these do not have negative effects on northern people, but rather just the opposite results — have a very positive effect on the people of northern Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when these consultations took place — if they took place — what form, what form did they take? Like I said, was it a travelling committee that travelled around northern Saskatchewan and held meetings and talked to

northerners? If there was, I'd like to have a schedule of it. I'd like to know what communities they met in. What time frame in which the consultations took place? Who did they meet with? What was the nature of the discussions? What was the discussions and the issues raised in each one of these communities?

I'm sure they weren't all the same because my experience in having travelled northern Saskatchewan, having held public meetings in various communities up there, that certainly you didn't have exactly the same debate. Yes, the principle of the issue was the same, but you didn't have the same debate. Why? It's because the people there, each one had their own unique experience that would be reflected within their comments on the particular issue at hand. In my case, it was a northern overtime exemption issue. And they had all had different experiences with that particular issue.

And I'm sure that, Mr. Speaker, when you talk to northerners, particular northern municipal leaders, about the changes to *The Northern Municipalities Act*, then they would probably have, each one would have, in principle, the same point of view, but a unique approach to it because of their own personal experiences and their own opinions on what needed to be done to improve things for not only northerners but for Saskatchewan as a whole.

Because, Mr. Speaker, it's my belief that when you improve the life of some individual or improve the life, the situation with people within a community, we all benefit from that. One way or the other, we'll all benefit from it. It's sort of the trickle-down theory. But when you improve a life for somebody, we'll all benefit from it. And I think you can see that in northern Saskatchewan. When there's opportunity at meaningful employment, that community prospers.

[16:30]

And we need to be looking at . . . One of the things I believe we should be looking at through *The Northern Municipalities Act* here is we should be looking at ways and means that we can incorporate economic development into our communities here because a lot of these communities are facing high unemployment. And the folks there certainly have the ability. Many of them have the skills. They just simply need the opportunity. And that is something that I think is responsibility of government.

This government should be working with northern leaders, working with those people in northern Saskatchewan and the municipalities in northern Saskatchewan to identify ways and means that they can improve the lots of those communities through further economic development.

And I don't mean just depending on the big jobs. Whether it be in the uranium mining sector or logging or whatever it may be, I don't mean just the big jobs. I mean there has to be the opportunity for the smaller operators. There has to be those opportunities and they should be supported by government to identify ways and means that smaller operations can flourish, can prosper, can cause for employment.

And I think it's no secret, Mr. Speaker. I believe that if you

looked at the stats in Canada, you would see that 72 per cent of all jobs created in this great country of ours are created in small shops, in shops of 25 or 50 employees or less. And I think that's a rule of thumb that should certainly be applied to northern Saskatchewan, is that yes, we need the big jobs. We need the uranium mining jobs. We need the development in uranium industry. We need those types of economic activities to take place.

But we also need to have smaller operations that can perhaps provide services to the larger ones, or provide some type of benefit to larger companies up there that would create jobs of 25, 30, or 40 jobs in these communities. And these would go a long way, a long way to addressing some of the unemployment issues, but also go a long way to addressing some of the social issues that are faced by northern communities throughout our great North.

Mr. Speaker, getting back to the consultations, if they took place. Like I said, I would like to know what form those consultations were held in. Were they public meetings, as I said, or were they just simply private meetings or were they meetings with perhaps just the leadership of the North? Or did they take place at all? Was there any type of consultations at all?

And if there was . . . And I would think it'd be difficult to make amendments or changes to a municipal Act that has direct effect on northern communities without at least talking to those communities, at least talking to the leadership, the municipal leadership of those communities.

Personally I think it should go further. I think it should have gone further into allowing the residents of those communities to have their say. To have the opportunity to voice their opinions, not just through their leadership but directly to a committee that's doing the review or doing the consultations for this particular changes to the municipal Act. And, Mr. Speaker, if these consultations were carried out, I would hope the government would be willing to provide to the opposition members a list of the communities in which these consultations took place.

First I'd like a list of those who made up the committee that did the consultation on behalf of the government. I'd like to know who was all involved in that. What was their background? What qualified them to sit on this committee and what report did they produce that indicated that these changes here that are outlined in Bill 110? What changes, what report indicated that these changes would be beneficial to the northern people, would be beneficial to the northern communities? And how would these changes simply improve the quality of life for people in northern Saskatchewan?

How would it improve the ability for the northern communities to deliver the services that they look for? Most of the services in northern communities are delivered through their municipality. So how would this improve the municipality's ability to deliver these services, make it more efficient, more effective, perhaps even less costly?

Where is that report? What led the government to believe that these changes are the correct changes? I mean it's fine to make a change. But I would hope that our intention is to make

changes that would benefit people, benefit the people of Saskatchewan. Particularly in this case, it's going to benefit people in northern Saskatchewan through changes to *The Northern Municipalities Act* because the northern municipality is a very important organization that delivers the services, delivers the services to the fine folks in northern Saskatchewan in each one of their communities.

So how was these consultations carried out? Were they done on a community level? Were they done simply by meeting perhaps with New North? Was that it? Or did New North simply report back that this is what they thought should be done? Was there a report given? If there was a report, would the government table that report so that the opposition members would have the ability to compare the report with the changes that they're proposing within the legislation? I think that's only fair.

I would hope that the government is making changes based on good recommendations that would come from people in northern Saskatchewan. There's a real need, I think, to have people to make these recommendations, to make the suggestions for recommendations, a real need to have this coming from people in northern Saskatchewan. Because those people in northern Saskatchewan experience a uniqueness that, quite frankly, I don't think many of us in southern Saskatchewan realize. And that's a uniqueness of having to deal with a lot of issues that you and I take for granted.

The issues of communications. Quite frankly, the issue of communications that we take for granted here, it's a lot more difficult in northern Saskatchewan. Part of the problem is the distances involved. And if you had travelled at all in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and I know in your case, you have — you will quickly recognize that there's large, large distances between communities. There's large distance.

And a lot of those roads are . . . Well I think it's being quite generous to call them a road. And I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have had the experience of driving over some of them yourself and I think you would agree that, in northern Saskatchewan, not all the roads but certainly many of them certainly need attention. And it is important because the isolation of these communities, the distance between these communities, calls for good communications but also calls for good roads.

And the ability to travel between these communities is so very important because not every community in northern Saskatchewan has a hospital. So those communities who do, certainly it is imperative that the road between those communities are reasonable. Reasonable so that if an ambulance is required, an ambulance can travel with a reasonable speed, but most importantly with great safety to be able to deliver a patient to a hospital who may need some emergency services. And I've seen some of that when I was up there in northern Saskatchewan. Ile-a-la-Crosse comes to mind where an innovative facility was under construction, and it was the only community in the area that had a health care centre, had a hospital, and it certainly required work on the road.

Now I realize that because of the construction going on in Ile-a-la-Crosse that all the construction material came across that one road. They only had one road, Mr. Speaker. I said

earlier it's the uniqueness in northern Saskatchewan that us in south quickly lose sight of is, that we enjoy good quality roads, good quality, all-weather roads usually leading out of our community in all four directions. And if we don't want to go north, we can go south. We don't want to go south, we can go east or west, but usually on an all-weather road.

That's not the case in northern Saskatchewan, particularly in Ile-a-la-Crosse where it was one road. There's one road in, the same road out. All the building material came across that road. And quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it was simply a thin membraned paved surface that was meant to be nothing more than just dust-free, but with all that heavy weight coming across there, it was pounding the road out and pounding the road out quite severely. At the same time that was the only road in, the only road out. And that was the road an ambulance would have to use if it had an emergency situation where it was bringing somebody, say from Buffalo Narrows into Ile-a-la-Crosse to receive medical attention. The ambulance would have to travel across that road.

Mr. Speaker, not only was it a rough road with holes in it, and some serious holes in it too, that would create some real hazard to the mechanical operation of the ambulance, it would also be very hard on the patient. And the back of that ambulance would be bouncing over that road and bouncing through those holes. But it also created a safety problem, a safety problem for anybody trained to move with any haste. And certainly an ambulance would be, in the case of an emergency, would be trying to move with as much haste as possible, would create a really a serious, serious safety problem where an ambulance itself could be involved in a rollover, or an accident with a patient in the back would just compound the problem.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is essential that this government carries out some meaningful discussions with these communities to ensure that their priorities are met. And I don't know that those discussions took place. I don't know that this Bill as it's outlined here certainly recognizes what those priorities are. There's no indication from government as to what method of consulting was used by the government to come up with these recommendations or these proposed changes to the municipal Act.

Which, Mr. Speaker, I suppose is rather unfortunate because I would think that governments making changes to an Act, period, but particularly in this case a municipal Act, particularly in northern Saskatchewan where the municipality is such a very important organization to those communities — it's the organization or the system of delivery of services to these communities — and when you make changes to that Act, the government would want to be on, I would think, solid ground to make these changes to ensure that these changes were beneficial to the municipality and beneficial to the people there.

And they would want to be able to say, well we're doing this because of the recommendations from a committee. And a committee was put together, and the committee either travelled northern Saskatchewan or they consulted with people right across the piece, northern Saskatchewan, and came back with these recommendations. And they compiled these recommendations into a report. They gave the report to government. The government then took that report and applied

it to the northern municipal Act, made recommendations so changes in that Act based on the recommendations in the report.

Well if that's the case, Mr. Speaker, then I would ask the government, table the report. Table the report so that we in opposition can look at that report and compare it then to the proposed changes to see that the government is correct, that the government is reflecting in these changes the recommendations by those in northern Saskatchewan who put together the report.

And I would hope that that report was put together by people in northern Saskatchewan because they are, the folks in northern Saskatchewan are the front-line troops. They're the ones that live in northern Saskatchewan day in and day out, all year long. They're the ones that quickly recognize what changes have to be made — what changes should be made, I should say — to improve the lot of northern Saskatchewan, to improve the lot of people in northern Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to have some assurances. I would like to have some assurances from government that the recent — and I don't know how recent this is — but certainly the recent disclosure of the fiscal mismanagement of this government isn't going to start to jeopardize the lot or the situation as faced by people in northern Saskatchewan.

We know that this government has overspent itself by \$1 billion. We know that this government is trying to balance its budget by shifting that billion dollar debt over onto the Crowns and by cutting other programs that the government had on its to-do list. They're cutting that. They're deferring others, which is just another term of cutting, Mr. Speaker. And they're shifting some of their promises of tax breaks and so on and so forth to a deferred debt is really what it is, Mr. Speaker, that we'll be facing in the future.

But I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that when the government is looking at ways and means of cutting back on its spending, that they don't look at northern Saskatchewan as a place where they can really cut. I know it's tempting. From a political point of view, it's likely tempting because the number of people in northern Saskatchewan that would be affected, as far as number of votes is concerned, is probably a small amount.

And many of the programs that are delivered into northern Saskatchewan are probably a little more expensive than that in southern Saskatchewan because (a) because of the distance between communities and the fact that many of these are smaller population communities, and that these are areas where it's so attractive to get in there and cut.

But, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that that's not the case because there's certainly a uniqueness about northern Saskatchewan that should demand our attention, that people there deserve to have the same benefits as anybody else in Saskatchewan. They should have the same benefits and enjoy the same privileges as anyone else in this great province of ours, Mr. Speaker.

[16:45]

So, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the government doesn't go down that road, now that they have identified themselves into a financial crunch here. And that isn't going to go away overnight

— I can assure you that, Mr. Speaker. They're going to certainly be dealing with it again next year.

And my fear here, Mr. Speaker, is that they have sort of, like, a tiger by the tail here, that this thing may escalate well beyond their ability to begin to control it. And in their attempts to control it, they will continue to drive the finances of the province into the ditch by increasing the debt on the Crowns, by increasing the debt on the province, but also by cutting services — and in this case, cutting services probably to some of the most vulnerable people. And that's the people in northern Saskatchewan. They're the ones that's going to be cut. And that's my fear, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when these consultations took place or when this committee travelled to northern Saskatchewan, if that is what has happened — I mean, I'm not sure exactly how they came about with the recommendations for these changes, but if they travelled throughout northern Saskatchewan, did they go to all the communities? Did they hold meetings in all the communities? Was there consultations carried out in all the communities? And if so, was it by just the community leadership? In this case, it'd be the municipal leadership. Or was it public meetings held? Did every person in northern Saskatchewan get the opportunity to have their say, have their input? After all, it's their lives that are being affected.

These changes will be affecting their lives, affecting the lives of their families. So did they have the opportunity to have that input? Was that type of consultation carried out? Did they have the opportunity to talk to the committee that was making the recommendations and explain to them what it was that they thought should change, what effect it would have on their communities, what effect it would have on their families, what effect it would have on their ability to continue to be a part of northern Saskatchewan, be able to continue to make a living and continue to live in northern Saskatchewan? Was that the type of consultation that took place, Mr. Speaker?

And another question I would have is, was there a good cross-section of representation from the communities at these meetings? Was there a good cross-section of the communities consulted, whether they be at the meetings or whether it be in some other forum that the consultation took place? Was there a good cross-section, was there a good cross-section of the community that was asked for their opinion and given the opportunity to express their opinion?

I would hope it wasn't just narrowed down just to the leadership of the community, it wasn't just narrowed down to the municipal leadership because I think it's very important to have that type of consultation widespread. Because it's the people that are on the front lines each and every day that live in northern Saskatchewan, that experience northern Saskatchewan, recognizes the challenges that northern Saskatchewan offers and it also recognizes the many positive things that northern Saskatchewan offer, that can make the recommendations as to how to change, what changes need to take place in the municipal Act so that northern Saskatchewan will benefit, will benefit.

And there's a uniqueness. And I remember when I was up in the North travelling on my consultation tours of . . . And I'm just

trying to remember which community it was in. I remember one of the leadership said to me, he said, I'm glad. I'm glad that we got a southerner doing the consultation on the overtime exemption.

And I said, well I'm glad I'm doing it too, but what makes you so glad that we have a southerner doing this consultation? And he said, well, he said, if you travel northern Saskatchewan at all and are at all open-minded and at all look around, you will begin to understand what it is that our colleagues from the North have been trying to explain to the southerners for many years, is that there's a uniqueness here.

There's something special about the North that needs to be treated, not special, but that needed to be treated in their own unique way. And I think that's all that northerners ever asked for, Mr. Speaker, was the opportunity to be treated fairly, justly, and equally. And that is something that I'm hoping, I'm hoping that this government would continue to work in that direction.

But, Mr. Speaker, as you can tell, I'm not holding my breath on that front because I'm not sure that this government has the ability to be able to look at northern Saskatchewan in a way that would ensure that they are going to be able to benefit from the prosperity, benefit from the improved economy in this province in the same way as everybody else in Saskatchewan.

And that becomes fairly evident, Mr. Speaker, when you just take a look at what has happened in the last couple of years. And one of probably the first places it shows up is again in the highway system, when you look at the highways in northern Saskatchewan, how they have been neglected by this government. This government has simply neglected the highways. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this government, in its own arrogance, didn't even include northern Saskatchewan in its five-year rolling plan.

More likely, Mr. Speaker, it should be really called a five-year wait-list because anybody on that list is going to have to wait five years, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, because of this government's fiscal mismanagement of this province in the last year driving the finances of this province into the ditch, that list now being deferred, deferred, deferred. So some of the good folks that are on that list five years from now will still be on that list, still waiting for something to happen, I'm afraid, five years from now, and ten years from that, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, to understand why the people of northern Saskatchewan who were ignored by this government in its five-year rolling plan when it proposed its five-year wait-list for highways . . . what it did do, what it did do is it ignored northern Saskatchewan. And because of the heat that was put on the minister by question period here and also by estimates, but also by the good folks in northern Saskatchewan who came out in droves, droves to continue to drive home that point, the government decided well maybe at the last minute we need to do something to look like we really care about northern Saskatchewan. So they came up with a committee that's going to review the highways in northern Saskatchewan, that's going to have its own five-year wait list for northern Saskatchewan.

Well the good folks up there are saying, you know, what's the difference? If we're waiting three years or five years, we keep

getting deferred and we don't see any action, and we don't see any improvement to our roads. What we did see, we did see was a commitment by the former government to put money into it. The money was there and the commitments were being carried out. The government changes and the new government pulls that fund back, reaches in and pulls that money back.

Then they say to the people in northern Saskatchewan well we're not going to do it as you were promised. We're not going to do that road work now. We're going to defer it. We're going to defer it until after the study. Then once the study takes place, we'll have a five-year wait list then and then we'll be able to defer that. We'll defer that simply because we don't have the money any longer to do what should have been done in the first place.

But, Mr. Speaker, it saddens me that that's the case because northerners, if you travel up there at all, you'll find that they don't expect a lot. They don't have high expectations. They don't demand a lot. They're not in the same high expectation and demand levels of, certainly, those in the southern part of the province. All they want is the ability to be able to have, seek out a reasonable quality of life. They want to have access to some of the services that we take in the south, take for granted — say health care services and dental services and educational services. Those are the kinds of things that they want to have reasonable access to.

They want to have the opportunity to travel on a decent, all-weather road. And they're not asking for it to be paved, Mr. Speaker. They're just wanting to have it in good condition so — whether it be spring or fall, summer or winter — when they have to use that road, the road is there and fit, in condition for them to use. But most importantly, Mr. Speaker, it is so that it is in a safe condition for them to use.

And if you've been following the news at all, Mr. Speaker — and I'm sure you have — you noted that there has been a number of accidents, of fatal accidents in northern Saskatchewan. And one highway, and I believe it's 123 highway, where the area, that highway had been nicknamed by the local residents there as, and I quote, suicide curve. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because of the number of accidents that happened on that particular stretch of highway.

It's been brought to the attention of this government, but there has been absolutely no action on that particular stretch of road. And that, Mr. Speaker, is disappointing because I think that we all have the right to ensure that the people of Saskatchewan, regardless of where they live, regardless of where they live — whether it be in the South, the East, the West, or the North — they have access to reasonable quality of services, those services of course being health care, being education, but also being highways. They need to have access to a reasonable, safe highway.

And I will say that, Mr. Speaker, because . . . And I want to correct myself, Mr. Speaker. I guess the highway I was referring to was the wrong highway; 915 is the highway that has, 915 has the highway that's been designated . . . a portion of that highway has been designated by the locals as suicide curve. And, Mr. Speaker, I apologize to those for my misquote. I was just working from memory. And obviously at my age, my

memory's starting to fail me. But it was 915 that has a section of that highway that the locals have designated as suicide curve.

And I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that a part of the changes that this government would be looking at to *The Municipalities Act* would be to ensure, ensure that all municipalities, all those communities there would have a good quality, all-weather access road. And that is not the case today, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately that doesn't seem to be a high priority of this government because it doesn't seem to be moving in that direction, or at least I don't see any signs of it. And I say that because there is certainly been nothing introduced. There've been no . . . On press releases, there've been nothing coming out of the Ministry of Highways that would suggest that they're paying any attention at all to northern Saskatchewan. And that's quite unfortunate because northern Saskatchewan has so much to offer, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I see that the time allotted for my remarks is quickly drawing to a close. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that it has truly been a pleasure for me to be able to take part in this debate, and it's brought back some good memories. It's memories of . . . that I spent in northern Saskatchewan a couple of summers ago. And I can tell you I wanted to encourage all the members in this House, if they have the opportunity to spend some time, to travel northern Saskatchewan, spend some time up there, please do it. You'll come back with a greater understanding of the issues that are facing northern Saskatchewan. But I think each and every one of us will come back a little bit of a changed person because of that experience. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'll move adjournment of debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Elhard): — It's been moved by the member from Regina Northeast that the debate be adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Elhard): — Agreed. I recognize the member from Humboldt.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Considering the closeness of the hour, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Elhard): — It's been moved by the member from Humboldt that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt that motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Elhard): — Agreed. Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 16:57.]

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