



FOURTH SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

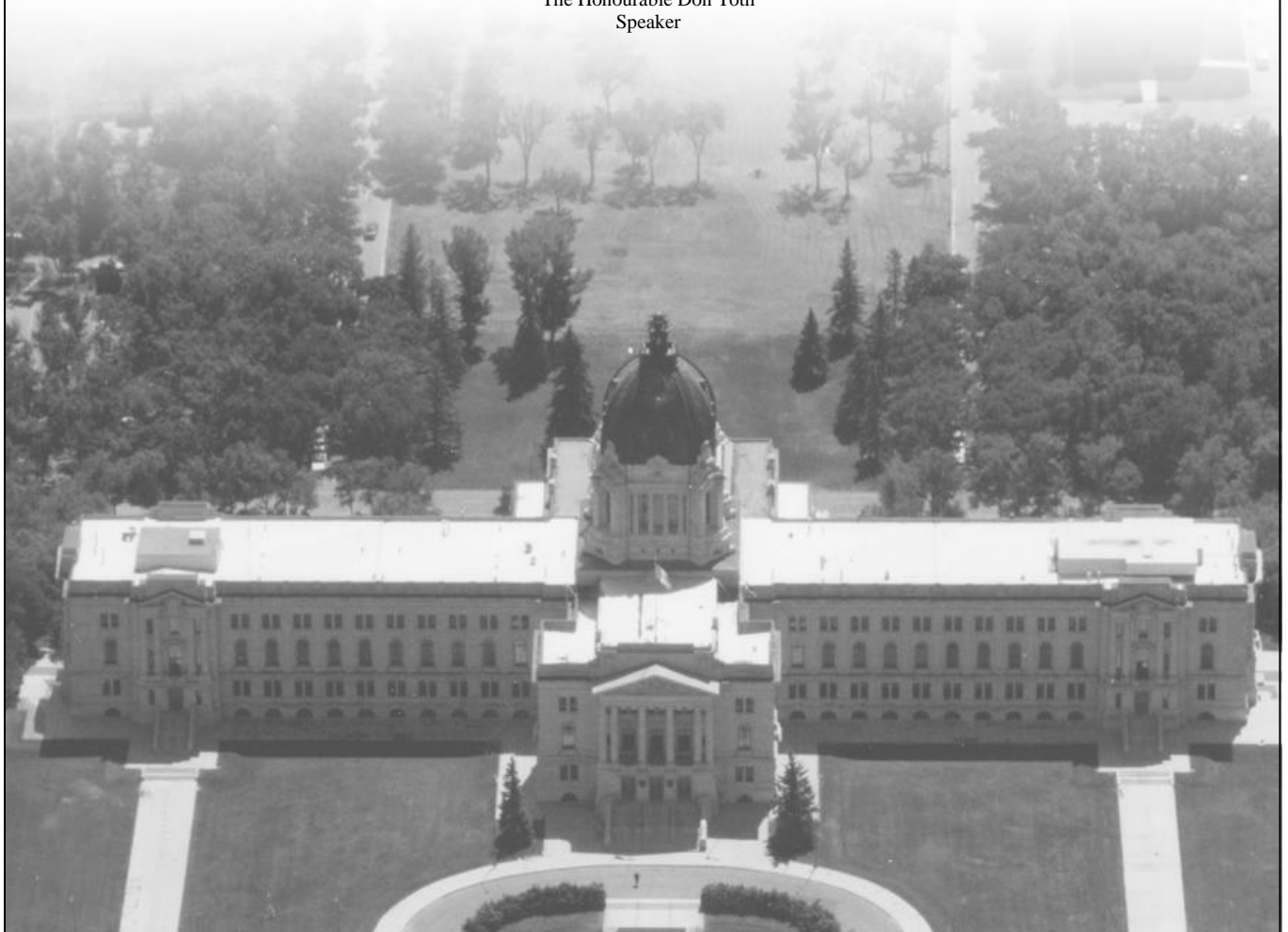
of the

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

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

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

[The Assembly met at 10:00.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

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

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you a group seated in the eastern gallery from the Regina adult campus of the public school board. They are accompanied by teacher Stacey Young, and they are 10 good-looking students from the English as an additional language group there. They're youth aged 18 to 21.

It's really good to see them here at their Legislative Assembly, and I look forward to meeting with them very soon. I know that the member from Rosemont is going to join me. He had been very involved in the set-up of that campus. So we look forward to meeting with the students. And please join me in welcoming these students to their Legislative Assembly.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today again to present petitions on behalf of people who are supporting the maintaining of quality health care services:

The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Saskatchewan humbly showeth: that the Government of Saskatchewan ought to recognize the need for timely access to comprehensive and quality health care services for all communities within the province, including Wakaw and surrounding areas, and that the disruption of emergency services and in-patient services at Wakaw Hospital will not serve the needs of the residents in this community and surrounding areas, and that the cuts in access to timely and accurate diagnostic and laboratory tests within the community of Wakaw and surrounding areas will not serve the needs of the residents, and that the petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to commit to maintain quality health care services through the commitment of necessary funding to address critical retention and recruitment issues.

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

And the petitions that are signed today are from people from Wakaw, Domremy, Bellevue, Osler, and Rosthern. 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 calling for protection for tenants

from unreasonable rent increases. And we know, in the past four years too many Saskatchewan tenants have faced surging rent increases that are simply making a living in Saskatchewan unaffordable and that, since 2007, far too many tenants have suffered monthly rent increases of hundreds of dollars, with average rent increases of over 35 per cent in Saskatoon and Regina, meaning tenants in many cases are paying well over \$3,000 more each year. We also know the majority of Canadians now live in provinces with rent control guidelines, including Manitoba, BC [British Columbia], Ontario, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island. I'd like to read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: cause the government to immediately enact rent control legislation that protects Saskatchewan tenants from unreasonable rent increases.

I do so present. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to present a petition on behalf of my constituents who live in the neighbourhood of Hampton Village. And it's about the need for a new school for their children:

We, the undersigned residents of the province of Saskatchewan, wish to bring to your attention the following: that Hampton Village is a rapidly growing community in Saskatoon with many young families; that Hampton Village residents pay a significant amount of taxes, including education property taxes; that children in Hampton Village deserve to be able to attend school in their own community instead of travelling to neighbouring communities to attend schools that are typically already reaching capacity.

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan cause the provincial government to devote the necessary resources for the construction of an elementary school in Hampton Village so that children in this rapidly growing neighbourhood in Saskatoon can attend school in their own community.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the individuals who signed this petition are residents of Hampton Village. I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from P.A. [Prince Albert] Northcote.

Mr. Furber: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition in support of potash royalty review because the people of Saskatchewan are owners of a 1,000-year strategic supply of potash, but the owners of this resource deserve the maximum benefit for the resource; and that there is, as described by a CEO [chief executive officer] of one of the potash companies in Saskatchewan, a new norm for potash in today's market. The prayer reads:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: cause the government to begin a comprehensive, transparent, and public review of Saskatchewan's potash royalty system with a view to maximizing the return from this strategic resource for its owners, the people of Saskatchewan, who wish to use these additional potash royalty revenues for needed investments in health care, child care, education, affordable housing, infrastructure, and other social programs, as well as public initiatives such as debt repayment.

Mr. Speaker, today's petition is signed by good folks from Saskatoon, Grenfell, Regina, and White City. I so present.

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

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise again yet today to present a petition to restore funding equity to Regina Catholic schools. Regina Catholic schools currently receive \$275 less per pupil than Regina public schools, amounting to a funding inequity of \$2.7 million in total. That funding inequity places program delivery and staffing levels at risk, Mr. Speaker. The Government of Saskatchewan has also denied Catholic school boards in the province representation on the government-appointed committee mandated to develop a long-term formula for Saskatchewan school boards. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to address the funding inequity between Regina Catholic schools and Regina public schools that provides \$275 less per pupil funding for Regina Catholic school students, totalling \$2.7 million, and make known that the continuation for another school year of funding inequity places program delivery and staffing levels at risk in Regina Catholic schools; and in so doing, immediately restore funding equity to ensure that every student in Saskatchewan, whether enrolled in a Catholic or public school, receives equitable resources to ensure every student in Saskatchewan has access to a quality education.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And these petitions are signed by the residents of Saskatoon and Regina. I so present.

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

Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I once again rise to present a petition signed by citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about detrimental effects that Bill 160 will have on human rights law if enacted. And the prayer reads as follows:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan withdraw Bill 160 from consideration by the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan and hold extensive public

consultations informed by a public policy paper before any amendments to the Human Rights Code, the law that supersedes all others in our province, are even considered.

Today the petition is signed by residents of Saskatoon, Cabri, Regina, and Moose Jaw, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the Assembly once again today to present petitions on behalf of concerned residents from across Saskatchewan as it relates to the mismanagement of our finances by the Sask Party. They allude specifically to a record that includes the running of deficits and increasing of debt at times of prosperity in Saskatchewan at times of record highs in revenues, a record that includes increasing our debt by \$1.3 billion over three years, and this year alone, Mr. Speaker, increasing our debt by \$548 million, Mr. Speaker. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly condemn the Sask Party government for its damaging financial mismanagement since taking office, a reckless fiscal record that is denying Saskatchewan people, organizations, municipalities, institutions, taxpayers, and businesses the responsible and trustworthy fiscal management that they so deserve.

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

These petitions today are signed by concerned residents of Radville, Weyburn, and Arcola. I so submit.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

World Health Day: Fighting Superbugs

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UN [United Nations] World Health Organization has declared April 7th to be World Health Day. This year's theme is Combat Antimicrobial Drug Resistance: No action today, No cure tomorrow.

Antimicrobial drugs are medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria, fungi, parasites, and viruses. Antimicrobial resistance or drug resistance occurs when micro-organisms change in ways that renders the medications used to fight them ineffective. Substandard doses, not finishing a prescribed course of treatment, low-quality medicines, inappropriate prescriptions, and poor infection control all encourage the spread of drug resistance. And drug resistant infections can kill, spread to others, and impose huge costs on individuals and society. Unfortunately, we recognize acronyms like MRSA [methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus] and VRE [vancomycin resistant enterococci], and the R in both of those is "resistant." Superbugs are what we call them now.

We live in a world where we are completely dependent on antibiotics and other antimicrobial medicines. Antimicrobial resistance is not a new problem but it's one that's becoming more dangerous. Urgent and consolidated efforts are needed to avoid going back to the pre-antibiotic era.

According to the World Health Organization, lack of government commitment to address these issues is a major hindrance in controlling the spread of drug resistance. For World Health Day 2011, I urge all members of the Legislative Assembly to join the World Health Organization's call on government and stakeholders the world over, including here in Saskatchewan, to implement the policies and practices needed to prevent and counter the emergence of highly drug resistant micro-organisms. Our health and the health of future generations depends on it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Month

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to inform this House that April is officially designated as Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Month in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, more than 4,000 Canadians are waiting for an organ transplant to save their lives. In 2009, 1,803 transplants were performed, with many patients remaining on waiting lists. Unfortunately 195 Canadians died while waiting for an organ transplant. Three-quarters of the patients on the list today are waiting for a kidney transplant.

Now the purpose of Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Month is to draw attention to the real need of increasing organ and tissue donation capacities. Another function of this campaign is to dispel myths surrounding organ and tissue donation.

According to recent statistics, Canadians face unique challenges when attempting to enhance our organ and tissue donation system. For example, Canada's low rate of organ donation in comparison to other countries is not because of a lack of generosity or altruism but because of better health practices. Furthermore Canadians' access to excellent health care delays the probability of early death, which lessens the pool of suitable organ and tissue donations.

Campaigns such as Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Month are important because they identify challenges faced when trying to improve on the status quo. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Saskatchewan Cadets Excel

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today in honour of a northern Saskatchewan athlete, Natasha Boyes, a 17-year old attending Churchill Community High School in La Ronge. Natasha recently won the Myriam Bédard Award as a top female senior at the Cadet National Biathlon Championship held in Quebec during the week of March 6th to the 11th of this year.

The cadet championships involves the air, army, and sea divisions of the cadets in a week-long event with four races, as well as training days and a day off. Natasha won both of her individual races. Natasha, a flight sergeant in her air cadet squadron in La Ronge, was competing in her fourth cadet nationals. She is the first person ever to win the cadet title for all three age groups. Natasha also competed as part of Saskatchewan female relay team and patrol group team, which although they did not win medals, did Saskatchewan proud.

Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, a Saskatchewan male team with members from Oxbow, Nipawin, Langham won a silver medal in the patrol race, which was a remarkable accomplishment against the powerhouses from Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta. And finally, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan was named the recipient of the Sports Etiquette Award based on nominations by other teams and support staff. This is an honour for our province in that it really reflects the spirit of friendly competition.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to please join me in congratulating Natasha Boyes on her accomplishments.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier, the member from Swift Current.

Saskatchewan Country Music Awards

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend, Swift Current was proud to host the 22nd annual Saskatchewan Country Music Awards. The SCMA's featured seminars and songwriters' workshops, a gospel showcase on Sunday morning, Mr. Speaker, the president's banquet and the Saturday night, of course, were the awards ceremony at the Living Sky Casino.

Mr. Speaker, the big winner was Codie Prevost. He picked up six awards for Entertainer of the Year, male vocalist, Single of the Year for "Rollin' Back to You," Album of the Year — *Get Loud*, Video of the Year, Song of the Year, and backup band. His band also won that.

Some of the other winners included Blake Berglund, very much a rising star in the province, and he won that award. Donny Parenteau was the Aboriginal Artist and All-Star Band-Specialty. Aven Grace won Country Gospel Album of the Year. And Shaunavon's own Catherine Lewans was the Female Vocalist of the Year.

Mr. Speaker, one other award winner that I'd like to highlight is Glenna Switzer. She's from Swift Current. It was Glenna's vision that Swift Current would host these awards one day. It didn't have a chapter of the SCMA [Saskatchewan Country Music Association] in Swift Current or the Southwest until Glenna came along. Now it's the largest chapter in terms of membership in the SCMA. And because of Glenna's hard work and the work of her volunteers, one of the most successful SCMA awards weekends was held in Swift Current, Mr. Speaker. All of the events were sold out and enjoyed by all. Saskatchewan country music is in a good place, Mr. Speaker, because of the SCMA. We congratulate them on a great weekend and we wish them well in the future, Mr. Speaker.

[10:15]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Saskatchewaner Competition

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's billed as the best summer job in Saskatchewan, travelling the province's highways and byways. The Saskatchewaner is to spend the summer months telling Saskatchewan's story. With blog entries and video updates, this young person will market our province to Canada and to the world with an Internet campaign.

But the Internet landscape can be as unforgiving as Saskatchewan is intriguing, Mr. Speaker, and now this government has disqualified the most popular applicant after an old video briefly surfaced, showing him using inappropriate language to cheer on the Riders during a showdown with the Eskimos. Sounds like a double standard coming from a government led by someone with an embarrassing video past of his own, Mr. Speaker.

We're not taking sides in the Saskatchewaner competition. We're sure any of the finalists would make an excellent representative of our province. But being on the side of fairness, we do expect this government won't hold a young person who wants the best summer job to a higher standard than the man holding the top job had to make when an embarrassing video surfaced of him joining in inappropriate comments about our former lieutenant governor and mocking Ukrainian Canadians.

We hope, Mr. Speaker, this isn't a new standard in the new Saskatchewan: one set of rules for politicians with a video past and another set of rules for young people who get a little too enthusiastic in cheering on the Riders. But if that's the Premier's new Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, we'd prefer to wander back to the old Saskatchewan of 2008 when he expected that you apologize for a mistake; you don't lose your job.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Thunder Creek.

Facebook Posting

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, once again the NDP [New Democratic Party] leader's actions don't match his words. Last week his NDP candidate for Thunder Creek posted the following on his NDP Facebook page, and I quote, "Mr. Wall is now advertising for escorts on government websites. It's truly a Sask-first policy." When asked about this, the NDP leader told reporters that this was inappropriate and he would be speaking with his candidate about it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, either that didn't happen or his candidate didn't listen to him because that comment is still posted on Ryan McDonald's NDP Facebook page. Once again the NDP leader says one thing and does another. The NDP leader admitted this was an inappropriate message. Why is it still up on his candidate's Facebook?

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

Rent Relief

Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, on April 4th, the Premier was brought back to reality with an issue that thousands of Saskatchewan renters are facing. The Leader of the Opposition asked about renters of an apartment building facing increases as high as 100 per cent in the rent.

Seniors and students often live on fixed incomes and with modest means. These are people who do not receive earning increases, but rather rent increases every six months.

The Leader of the Opposition asked the Premier what he thought about this issue facing tenants of this apartment building and thousands of other Saskatchewan renters: "Can the Premier tell us, not what he's planning to do in terms of meetings, but what is he doing to put in a form of cap or rent control to protect these tens of thousands of families?"

The Premier's response, Mr. Speaker? Well on the face of it, the people of Saskatchewan got a straightforward answer. The Premier said, and I quote, "Mr. Speaker, these rent increases facing these folks in the gallery are unacceptable." But with the greatest respect, it appears the Premier doesn't know what the word unacceptable means. If the Premier believes these types of rent increases are unacceptable, he leads a government with the power to do something about it.

In the face of these type of rent increases, the people affected can only throw up their hands in despair. The Premier has the power to deliver relief. If it's unacceptable, he can do something about it. And it's past time that he did so.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Rent Controls

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, Monday of this week we had a number of renters from a Regina rental apartment come to the building because they were upset that their rents are going to be going up 60 per cent, 70 per cent, and as much as 100 per cent between now and August 1st. And at that time, the Premier indicated that this was a situation that should be rectified.

My question to the Premier is, after three days of thoughtful reflection on this unacceptable situation, can he inform the Assembly, and more importantly the families in Saskatchewan who are being gouged, what is his resolve to protect families in Saskatchewan from these kind of rent increases?

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

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, in the House on Monday, and when we received the information last week, we know that their landlord that we're talking about is actually a rogue landlord and is an anomaly. Most of the landlords in this province really are looking at making sure that they . . .

[Interjections]

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

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This situation is not the type of situation that's going on right across the province. The average rent increase in Regina at this time is 6.3 per cent.

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. I think the minister should be given the same response and courtesy to respond as the member placing the question. I recognize the Minister Responsible for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rent issue and the vacancy increase in this province has actually improved under our government. It went from 1.2 per cent to 2.5 per cent. We know there's more work to be done. The information that we had on this increase is going to be taken to the summit on April 19th to the 21st. There'll be an opportunity for people who are involved in the housing area to discuss it, and I'm looking forward to their discussion at the summit.

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

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, this will be small comfort to the families facing a 100 per cent increase, that it's going to be discussed at a summit, this summit occurring only months before the end of the four-year term of the government where they've done nothing to protect renters, families renting in the province.

On Monday the Premier said that these kind of rate increases were unacceptable. And they are unacceptable; on that we can agree. But what isn't acceptable is the Premier not taking a decision that would protect the families, a decision that would be a cap on rent through rent control at 2 per cent or the rate of inflation.

The minister now says that this was a rogue owner of the apartment increasing rents 100 per cent. I wonder if the Premier could define for us what is the definition of a rogue owner of an apartment? Is it a 20 per cent increase, defined as 15 per cent, 100 per cent? At what level do you call the owners of apartments taking advantage of families, at what level of increase? And why can't we just move to protect families by putting in rent control immediately so families are protected?

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

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, it would appear that the member across the way needs a little history lesson. In 1992 there was rent control, and you know who eliminated? The members across the floor decided rent control should not be in place. And they had the opportunity right up to 2007, when the rent increases in Saskatoon in 2007 was 21 per cent. And you know what the members opposite did? They did not have rent control and said they decided to bring forward a consultation proposal to us when our members went across the province

asking what we should do. There was no thoughts about rent control, not at all. They did not indicate they would be doing it.

What they thought we should do is have consultations and discussions. That is exactly what we're doing, Mr. Speaker. We know that rent control is not going to solve the problem. What we need is to have more homes and have people with more money in their pockets to buy the homes.

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

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, the minister tries to explain this situation away where families in the province are seeing rent increases that they simply can't afford. And what they're telling us is they see that the government of this province has a lot of money, that CEOs and people who run companies, many of them who live out of the province, have a lot of money. But when asked whether or not these people who came to the legislature have enough to pay the rent, the answer comes back pretty resounding that most families, many families in the province, are having a more difficult time making ends meet even though there's an abundance of wealth in this province. And that isn't right.

The question to the Premier again: can he not make up his mind, move to rent control to protect families in this province in the same way that 80 per cent of Canadians in this great country have rent control and protection from gouging that occurs when rents increase 20 per cent, 60 per cent, and 100 per cent. Why can't we have a Premier that will move in that direction and do it immediately?

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

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, between April of 2000 and April of 2008, there was a 21 per cent increase in rents in Saskatoon. And who was in government at that time? The members opposite. They had the opportunity, once they had cancelled rent control, to bring it back in. Did they decide to do it? No, they did not, Mr. Speaker. In fact right after that, the member from Saskatoon Centre made a submission to the task force on housing affordability. And he didn't even mention rent controls because even at that time, the members opposite knew what the issue was, was the supply, the number of units that we have on the market . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. It's even becoming difficult for the Speaker to hear the response. I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, in areas that the members talk about, like Winnipeg where they say that there is more units going up, rental units, those are the areas where it's not covered by rent control. There are loopholes in agreements where we actually do see new places where they . . . and otherwise there . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. There's a half-dozen

members on the opposition benches that are not allowing the minister to respond. I ask the minister to finalize her comments.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — There is an increase in rental units in Winnipeg, is where there's a loophole where they are not covered under rent control. Mr. Speaker, what happens are, the apartments that have rent control, people aren't spending more money on them. They're not fixed up.

And we have to have an ability to have more homes for people in this province. That's what our housing plan is doing. We have five points in our plan. It's an opportunity to make sure that people not only have homes that they can rent but affordable homes for them to move into. That is the goal of our government.

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

Arrangements for Office Space

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, this government and this Premier raised the standard for transparency and accountability when in 2007 this Premier committed to be the most transparent and accountable Government of Saskatchewan ever, Mr. Speaker. But now we see that his minister is locking Saskatchewan taxpayers into a 20-year lease of some of the most expensive property in downtown Regina. She's refusing to tell taxpayers not only what we're going to be on the hook for, but she won't tell us why the additional space is needed.

To the minister: where is the planning, and why is she giving . . . saddling taxpayers with a 20-year commitment when she hasn't a plan in place?

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

Hon. Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government has a number of leases that are coming due, and we need more office space anyways. We were able to put together a transaction that not only provides good office space at a competitive rate, it attracts new building, a new . . .

[Interjections]

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

Hon. Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It attracts a new building, a new head office, and new head office jobs to Regina. Now contrast that with the NDP government who actually passed a law so that the leader of the NDP could move Nexen's head . . .

[Interjections]

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

Hon. Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now that the leader of the NDP could move the head office, Nexen's head office and his job, out of Regina. Now we bring head

offices back to Regina. The NDP, they rip head offices out of Regina. Under the NDP, people packed up, moved away. Under the new Saskatchewan, people are moving back home. Thank you very much.

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

[10:30]

Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister should sit down for a few hours and read her briefing book. And she should maybe look into the issues with Viterra that is leaving this city, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people have seen deals like this before. And they were hung with the price of paying 1.2 to \$1.4 million a year for over 23 years to lease Parkridge nursing home in Saskatoon. Then the government paid \$8 million for the facility that is reported to need over \$19 million in repairs. So, Mr. Speaker, get out your calculator and add it up. It's over \$50 million that taxpayers have paid in this long-term lease for a building that's worth \$5 million. To the minister: is this what Saskatchewan taxpayers are heading for — another Parkridge — with this 20-year long-term lease you're committing taxpayers to?

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

Hon. Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, once again the NDP say one thing, but then they do another. Yesterday, the minister opposite told the NDP . . . stated that the NDP never denied access to the cost of government leases. She said, and I quote, "I don't ever recall denying anyone access to square footage of a building and what the costs were." Mr. Speaker, we have found 10 examples of the NDP government refusing to give out lease costs when they were asked in committee meetings with a freedom of information request. In fact on June the 2nd, 2004, the member opposite was asked the lease cost of Crop Insurance offices. She refused to answer the question, saying that financial information is confidential. Mr. Speaker, this information is confidential for commercial reasons. We are following the long-standing policy of government. And the NDP? It's following its long standing of saying one thing and doing another.

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

Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell this minister one thing I never did. And I have to remind her: she's the minister; I'm not. Mr. Speaker, I never committed, Mr. Speaker, I never committed to a 20-year lease . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. I'd now ask the members to allow the member to place her question. I recognize the member.

Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I never committed to a

20-year lease when I had no idea of costs and it was still in negotiations. And, Mr. Speaker, I never signed a lease for space that I couldn't justify the need for, Mr. Speaker, and that's what we're seeing here.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a very poor track record when it comes to transparency and accountability. All we have to do is look at the loan guarantee for Amicus, the Minister of Advanced Ed's failed merger of St. Pete's and Carlton Trail, the failed carbon sequestration deal that the Premier sat on and never told anyone that it was failed till after a year, Mr. Speaker. And then now we have the history of Parkridge that is starting to rise when we see deals like this being put forward.

To the Premier: why would anyone believe anything this government has to say when this Premier has failed on his most important commitment to Saskatchewan taxpayers and avoided transparency and accountability?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, here we have a deal with respect to this particular building where the government identified a number of leases that are coming due for office space in the capital city and need to identify space for the future. We needed to identify space that was available on a competitive basis. We've done that, Mr. Speaker. And in the bargain, we are attracting a brand new head office to the city of Regina, head office for Mosaic, Mr. Speaker.

Now the hon. member's question was about disclosure. I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker. There's a reason why the people of this province support the party in government today. The reason is because, first of all, better government than they got over there. Mr. Speaker, they also support this side over that side because they remember — well I have to be careful about parliamentary language — they remember SPUDCO [Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company], Mr. Speaker, where that government didn't divulge the truth to the people of this province for five years. They remember Murdoch Carriere. They remember a record of a government where they ran from their record and let down the people of this province, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, I spent some time last evening and this morning going through the various press clippings from when the announcement was made. And, Mr. Speaker, here we have a government that is leasing and committed to leasing for 20 years 50 to 60,000 square feet of this office. But nowhere in any of the releases and even when the Premier was at the sod-turning did he say, well government is going to be a major partner in this building, a major tenant in that building. Never said nothing in the public, Mr. Speaker.

This government is so weak on transparency and accountability. But, Mr. Speaker, he is so quick to talk about commitment to public investment, and he crows about this being a public investment or private investment in the city of Regina. Taxpayers are giving it a property abatement in the city of Regina. The Government of Saskatchewan has given them tax

breaks when it comes to moving employees there, and the Government of Saskatchewan is leasing a third of the building.

Mr. Speaker, when is this Premier going to walk his own actual talk and expect the private sector to step up instead of backstopping with taxpayers money?

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

Hon. Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now the . . .

[Interjections]

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

Hon. Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now the member opposite said, you know, this minister should look at her briefing books and look at her information. Well I'd like to remind her about her ministerial information. From 1998 to 2007, government policy of the day stated, this is the NDP minister's briefing notes:

Saskatchewan government has a 25-year tradition of honouring the real estate industry's request that rental rates for individual leased buildings be kept strictly confidential. Release of partial information could indicate and result in market conditions that are not correct.

I hope this jogs the member's memory, but I also have some wonderful information that I would like to table. This is all the freedom of information and also *Hansard* that the member seems to have forgotten, so I would be more than happy. Because you know what? I don't know, are the NDP against having new head offices, new jobs coming to Regina? As an MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Regina, I'm more than pleased to have new jobs, new offices, new development. Thank you very much.

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

College Merger

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, on March 28th, the Minister of Advanced Education pledged to keep this Assembly and Saskatchewan people informed on the investigation into the mess of his failed merger. The minister said, "Day by day we'll report on every dollar for taxpayers."

To the minister: it's been 10 days of silence. Where's the update?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'll begin as we do by putting all of these questions in context. And that is, the *Canadian University Guide* says this: there's never been a better time to consider Saskatchewan as the place to attain a great post-secondary education, Mr.

Speaker. That's important.

Mr. Speaker, what we have is the Provincial Auditor, this is quoted from *The StarPhoenix*: "The Provincial Auditor has signed off on the government's plans for looking into potential irregularities raised in connection with the now-dead merger." And so, Mr. Speaker, we have the Provincial Auditor signing off.

Mr. Speaker, what we have, Mr. Speaker, on St. Peter's, and certainly there are questions about St. Peter's, we now have KPMG that has been engaged, Mr. Speaker, and next week they'll be beginning their work at St. Peter's College. Mr. Speaker, what we're committed to is ensuring that taxpayers are guaranteed that every cent's going to be accounted for, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, we do that with full co-operation with the appropriate authorities. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, I know the minister is about a year behind on reading his emails, but I can tell him that I'm still receiving calls and emails on this issue. People are concerned. They don't trust the minister who created the mess to actually get to the bottom of it.

Now we know that this minister funnelled millions of dollars to St. Peter's for capital projects. One of the concerns that's been raised with me several times is that a chunk of this capital funding has been used for operating expenses, and some of it is simply unaccounted for.

To the minister: has he been made aware of any public funds that have been misused or are missing?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what we see is that last June there was a proposal, Mr. Speaker. We then hired an independent third party. That third party, Mr. Speaker, then went out and made a recommendation that we have since made public, and that is no, this merger should not go forward.

In the midst of their work, Mr. Speaker, they raised, and I'll repeat for everyone, a series of questions and concerns. Mr. Speaker, in co-operation with the Provincial Auditor and with a number of independent audit firms, we are tracking, Mr. Speaker, and ensuring that every public dollar's going to be accounted for, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, as far as the questions that continue, there are processes in place so that the taxpayers of Saskatchewan will be ensured that these dollars can be accounted for, Mr. Speaker. That process is under way. It's ongoing and, Mr. Speaker, it has the full support of the ministry.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, if I'm hearing about the misuse of

capital dollars for operating, surely the minister has heard the same news. This minister, Mr. Speaker, promised that day by day he would release details as things are being discovered. Instead he refers to a process and some end date along the road that no one knows about. He's dragging his heels, and the people of Saskatchewan deserve better from this minister and from this government. Mr. Speaker, again, I know the minister has challenges keeping track of what comes into his office, but I'm still receiving information. And I fully expect he is too.

Another concern I keep hearing over and over again is that the minister did absolutely no due diligence before putting a man with a criminal history of defrauding the firefighters burn fund in charge of this merger. In fact I've been told by several different people, what I've been told by several different people is that the fired CEO doesn't even have a pardon, but the minister just believed him when he said he did.

To the minister: what due diligence did the ministry actually undertake before putting this individual in charge of millions of dollars of taxpayers' funding?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, importantly, and I'll reiterate, we've said it before that if the member opposite or members opposite have any information, Mr. Speaker, they can be forwarded to the Ministry of Justice. And, Mr. Speaker, that certainly continues here.

Mr. Speaker, importantly, importantly what we've done is responded to an independent process. That independent process said no, the colleges are not ready to merge, Mr. Speaker. That was the decision that we then followed. This was done independently. There were a series of questions, and again I'll reiterate, Mr. Speaker, a series of questions and concerns. Mr. Speaker, we're working with Justice. We're working with the Provincial Auditor and a number of independent firms. We're going to account, we're going to account for taxpayers' dollars because we want to make sure that these dollars are being spent on our post-secondary students. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Broten: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister asks us to forward concerns. We've been doing this for over a year, forwarding concerns, as have Saskatchewan people. What does he do? He claims he doesn't receive the email. He shrugs them off, saying that it's just ideological concerns. Well, Mr. Minister, it's not. There are problems, and you need to come clean.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear there are so many questions and concerns and rumours about that minister's failed merger mess, and how can people trust the minister to get to the bottom of it? That's the minister who put a man with a criminal record of fraud in charge of his pet merger project and funnelled millions of taxpayers' dollars to that project. Now word is leaking out that some of those public funds were misused and some is unaccounted for. But the minister expects us just to trust him.

Well the people who are still calling me definitely do not trust him.

To the minister: will he commit to tabling a weekly update on the investigation's findings, and will he table the final report as soon as it's completed?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, I'll just review this. Mr. Speaker, these discussions regarding this partnership and merger began while the members opposite were actually in power, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what we did was set up a process to ensure that an independent third party, that an independent third party, Mr. Speaker, would actually undertake that work. Mr. Speaker, based on the recommendations, we made a decision. Mr. Speaker, the decision was no to the proposed merger.

Mr. Speaker, what we then saw as well was a number of questions and concerns that came forward, Mr. Speaker. And so, importantly, what we have done is we've pledged to work full-fledged with the Ministry of Justice, with the Provincial Auditor, and with independent accounting firms.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to provide regular updates, Mr. Speaker, as information comes forward. Mr. Speaker, we support the independence of the work that's under way because we're going to make sure that we can account for all these dollars, Mr. Speaker, that are, and I repeat, Mr. Speaker, they are in question because, Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are directed towards post-secondary students within the province.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order.

[10:45]

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 623 — *The School Bus Drivers (Saskatchewan) Appreciation Day Act*

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

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 623, *The School Bus Drivers (Saskatchewan) Appreciation Day Act* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The member from Athabasca has moved first reading of Bill 623 . . . Order. The member from Athabasca has moved first reading of Bill 623, *The School Bus Drivers (Saskatchewan) Appreciation Day Act* be 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 member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Next sitting of the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

I recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By leave of the Assembly, I would like to move a motion for allowing a member to be absent.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader has asked for leave to move a motion regarding absence of a member. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

MOTIONS

Leave of Absence

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker:

That leave of absence be granted to the member of Saskatchewan Rivers for Thursday, April 14th, 2011 to Tuesday, April 19th, 2011 inclusive to attend the Fifth Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Outreach Program in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island on behalf of this Assembly.

I so move.

The Speaker: — Order. The Government House Leader has moved that:

By leave of this Assembly:

Absence be granted to the member for Saskatchewan Rivers . . .

Order. Order. I'd ask members to come to order so the Speaker can read the motion. Order. The motion by the member from Cannington:

By leave of the Assembly:

That leave of the Assembly be granted to the member for Saskatchewan Rivers for Thursday, April 14th, 2011 to Tuesday, April 19th, 2011 inclusive to attend the Fifth Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Outreach Program in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island on behalf of this Assembly.

Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried. I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, leave to move a motion.

The Speaker: — The Opposition House Leader has asked for leave to move a motion regarding leave. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave's been granted. I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you. I would move:

By leave of the Assembly:

That leave of absence be granted to the member for Walsh Acres for Thursday, April 14th, 2011, to Tuesday, April 19th, 2011 inclusive to attend the Fifth Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Outreach Program in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island on behalf of this Assembly.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Are members ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — The question before the Assembly is the motion by the Opposition House Leader that:

By leave of the Assembly:

That absence be granted to the member for Regina Walsh Acres for Thursday, April 14th, 2011 to Tuesday, April 19th, 2011 inclusive to attend the Fifth Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Outreach Program in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island on behalf of this Assembly.

Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the answers to questions 972 to 1,009.

The Speaker: — Questions 972 through 1,009 are tabled.

PRIVATE BILLS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 906 — *The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2011*

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Martensville.

Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to be able to sponsor a Bill on behalf of Bethany College in Hepburn, which is in my constituency.

Bethany College has a rich history in our province. They were first established as a school in 1927. Bethany is an accredited institution that has offered Christian education for thousands of students throughout their history. They contribute to the community. The village of Hepburn's population grows exponentially whenever classes are in session, and Bethany also allows their facilities to be used for community functions.

Mr. Speaker, the point of this Bill is to clarify language within the existing Act that governs Bethany College. The college has not paid education property tax. However, the Bill that currently governs them is ambiguous on the issue of education property tax, so this new legislation, the wording has been changed to clarify the language surrounding that. And because, Mr. Speaker, they have not paid education property tax in the past, there is no financial implications for the local school division.

I want to thank Bethany's new president, Howie Wall, for his dedication to Bethany and to its students and for his leadership and help to make sure that this Bill has become a reality, Mr. Speaker. And with that, I move that Bill No. 906, *The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2011* be now read a second time.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member from Martensville that Bill No. 906, *The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2011* be now read a second time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

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

The Speaker: — Pursuant to rule 100, this Bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

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

Rent Controls

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At the end of my comments I will be moving the motion:

That the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan urges the Saskatchewan government to immediately implement rent controls to protect people from uncontrolled rent increases that have in some cases been up to 100 per cent.

And, Mr. Speaker, over this session I've stood many days and presented petitions on behalf of Saskatchewan residents that are seeking some type of security and stability in the housing market by seeing this government apply rent controls, some form of rent controls, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, you know, some will wonder, why? Well I want to give you a couple of examples of people I've heard from in Moose Jaw that are very concerned and how this lack of affordable housing has impacted families and individuals in my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I received a letter, and I believe this one was also sent as a letter to the editor, and I'm quoting the letter:

Some of my clients live in the buildings that have been sold and are facing outrageous rental increases. The reason? To bring Moose Jaw's "rents up to market value."

That's fine, but two of these buildings in particular are not up to par with the standards of most modern apartment buildings. They are old and shabby, and one has a history of bedbugs.

But they house a sector of our society that NEEDS affordable housing. So to purchase these buildings and then increase rents by over 67% brings the term 'slumlord' to mind.

The new owners 'generously' offered to 'help' by offering to assist tenants with applying for the Sask Rental Housing Supplement [Mr. Speaker]. Most are already on it. Even with the rental supplement, which was created to give them some relief from their EXISTING rates, they still cannot meet the new rent increases.

And I guess the question was posed to me, Mr. Speaker:

How can a person with a monthly income of \$688.00 plus \$175.00 [and that's] (the rental supplement) [portion], go from paying \$460.00 a month to \$725.00? It leaves them [all in] \$138.00 . . .

For all of their other expenses — for food, for clothing, for anything they might need. And, Mr. Speaker, I have case after case.

A woman who came to my office who had her low-rental apartment increased by \$250, which brought her rent to over 600. She only receives a little over \$700 from social assistance with all her expenses, including personal needs, food, rent, telephone, clothes. So, Mr. Speaker, it's a difficulty. How do these people live? And it just goes . . . There's numerous cases, Mr. Speaker.

Another case that I received, this person's rent went from \$385 a month to 625 in one jump, Mr. Speaker, and it forced many people out of the building. And the new landlord's made a number of changes. The front door is locked all the time — no keys. No one that they could find in the city had access keys for EMS [emergency medical services] or the police. The building manager lived here in Regina. And there was a number of other issues. Nothing had been done to the building; no improvements had been made. But these people's rent went from 385 to 625.

So, Mr. Speaker, do we just stand back and say, well that's the market and that's the way it goes? There is opportunity for this

Premier to do something. And there is opportunity for this government to do something once they actually sit back and listen to people and realize the impact and the instability that this creates right across the market when people can't find a home.

And, Mr. Speaker, it spreads to all kinds of areas. It isn't just the immediate instability, but it's also long-term outcomes for children who are in unsettled situations. And we know that can have an impact in school, can have an impact on health of not only the children but the adults. Mr. Speaker, the issues go on and on.

Mr. Speaker, I also . . . This in Moose Jaw has spread to the issue of high rents at a trailer court where a new landlord immediately doubled the lot rent. So, Mr. Speaker, this doesn't include people that have already paid the mortgage on their trailer or their mobile home. But now they're seeing the rental pad increase, the increase of the rental pad go up substantially and causing stress. In fact one couple said they had put their trailer up for sale and were moving to Medicine Hat.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's not what we want. We don't want people chased out of the province by issues with lack of affordable housing and no initiative on behalf of this government to implement rent controls.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the members opposite have heard these issues in their constituencies also. I would bet that they aren't just in New Democratic member MLAs' constituencies. I would assume these members have heard it. So I would ask them, go back, talk to their constituency assistants, see what phone calls they have received, and then sit down and have a look at the options for the government and what can be done.

Mr. Speaker, rent control is just part of the solution to this issue, and it's only one aspect of the policy that we have been discussing that will address this housing crisis. It is a crisis in affordability as much as it's a crisis in housing . . . affordability as much as housing availability, Mr. Speaker.

And we often talk about next-generation rent controls which are needed to protect people in the province against unreasonable and unjustified rent increases. And, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about next-generation, we often get the same response from people that, well this just kills off anyone willing to build rental accommodation in the province.

And, Mr. Speaker, when you look at a report that was done, it was *An Analysis of Manitoba's Rent Regulation Program and the Impact on the Rental Housing Market*, and it was done by Hugh Grant of the department of economics, Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Winnipeg in January of this year. And it did an assessment of the Manitoba circumstance and what has happened. And I want to quote from this report, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. Grant did. And is says that:

Many of the criticisms of rent regulations are ill-founded on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Well-worn myths about rent regulations — that they reduce the quantity and quality of rental accommodation — derive from a simple textbook model of "rent controls" applied to first-generation programs that existed in the 1950s.

So, Mr. Speaker, instead of people automatically reverting to, well this doesn't work, because they've heard it somewhere, they really need to have a look at the new options that are out there, the other rent control initiatives that have been put in place in provinces right across Canada and have been very successful.

And, Mr. Speaker, I was talking to a sister of mine that lives in Vancouver, and we were talking about some of the increases in housing costs in the city of Moose Jaw and the lack of affordability and rental accommodation which is causing problems. And she just said to me, well don't you guys have rent controls? And so then we ended up going into a long discussion on what rent controls were in British Columbia, how they work, and that everyone assumes they are there, protect renters, and to make sure that there is stability in the market.

[11:00]

And, Mr. Speaker, when we see the people that came to the gallery the other day and talked about 100 per cent increase in their rental accommodation here in the city of Regina, it brings to mind a comment that Mr. Grant makes in his assessment of the Manitoba rent regulation program. And he talks about economic eviction.

And, Mr. Speaker, what is economic eviction? And it's that rents and costs have increased that a person cannot stay there. And by the sheer cost of the accommodation that they're currently living in, they are evicted from that property because they cannot sustain their lifestyle in that property. So they have to downsize.

And, Mr. Speaker, we've heard this across the province. People have downsized. We've heard of families that have moved into one-bedroom apartments so they could better accommodate rental increases and be able to afford the other necessities of life. We have heard of families that are making choices, not only if they will stay in an apartment or rental unit of some type, but also, how do you decide what to do with your limited disposable income? Is it food? You know, Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't consider spending income, an income dedicated to food and the necessities of life as disposable, and I don't think anyone else would. But these people are down to the point where they are trying to best manage their life as they can and provide for their families. And, Mr. Speaker, they're getting no support from this government, and this government in fact has kind of scoffed at the whole idea.

It was interesting. Mr. Speaker, I know the members opposite will stand up, and they will talk about their housing plan and how wonderful it is, and affordable housing. Well, Mr. Speaker, I spent some time looking at the issue of the Headstart program that was announced by this minister. And the fact of the matter is that there are some grants, and it can be up to \$5,000 a door.

But, Mr. Speaker, this family, whomever the party is or the family is that's interested in purchasing one of these homes, still has to go to a financial institution and apply for a mortgage just like you or I would or anyone else. So then you are open to the terms and conditions that will apply for qualifying for a mortgage through a financial institution. And, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty staggering.

And you can go on to any number of real estate websites in the province, and they have calculators for mortgages. So I went on and did a variety. Okay, if I was looking at a \$180,000 house — that's the price range for this government's Headstart program, 180,000 to a \$300,000 home — it depends on how much you're putting down on that house.

And, Mr. Speaker, that's also questionable as to how much a down payment . . . If a family is struggling, how on earth do you justify setting money aside when you're making difficult decisions as to what necessities you will purchase that week, that month, and which you will set aside till next month or next week? Mr. Speaker, it's pretty difficult to save yourself a down payment for a home.

So it could go anywhere from 5 per cent up to 20 per cent was what I did when I looked at these mortgages and just to see what the payments would be. Well, Mr. Speaker, the payments are anywhere from 800 to well over 1,000. And that does not include — and I want to say to people — that does not include interest or taxes. Quite often we will see home payments calculated on P-I-T [principal, interest, and taxes], and these were just calculated on the principal.

And, Mr. Speaker, I was just using some ballpark numbers. And that's still pretty staggering for many people across the province. It's out of reach for many families across the province. And, Mr. Speaker, I truly believe that this government needs to be serious, look at the next generation of rent controls that are out there, the options that are out there. And the Minister of Justice stood up the other day, and even though his Minimum Wage Board recommended an increase indexing minimum wage, the minister made the comment, well we don't want to get out in front of everybody; we want to make sure that we are, you know, in the same range as other provinces and not stepping out there and causing problems.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we're behind other provinces in this. Other provinces have had rent controls in a variety of forms that have worked well, have provided stability in the market. They haven't stifled rental Bills and construction in those provinces. And, Mr. Speaker, all of the documentation is there.

This government needs to set aside its ideology and look at rent controls because it is the thing that's going to help people in the immediate term while we are waiting for this government to put forward a more long-term housing strategy. And we sure hope that they come forward with that soon, because the kind of hodgepodge of announcements that's been made over the last six months . . . I think Headstart actually was announced a year ago, and reannounced again just lately after the budget.

Mr. Speaker, while that's another fairly lengthy debate about the shortfall of the government programs that they have announced and many concerns that are being expressed by people in the community, I would urge the government to sit down and truly look at next-generation options that are out there, get their minds out of the '50s and really look at the new options that are there. So, Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan urges the Saskatchewan government to immediately implement rent controls to protect people from uncontrolled rent

increases that have in some cases been up to 100 per cent.

I so move.

The Speaker: — The member from Moose Jaw Wakamow has moved:

That the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan urges the Saskatchewan government to immediately implement rent controls to protect people from uncontrolled rent increases that have in some cases been up to 100 per cent.

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

Mr. Wyant: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today. It's a pleasure to stand today to speak to this motion. It'll come as no surprise that I won't be supporting it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I was first elected to Saskatoon City Council in 2003 and by 2005, we saw property values in Saskatoon increasing dramatically. We had lots of condominium conversions that were taking place, Mr. Speaker. Rents were rising dramatically. Our occupancy rate was less than 1 per cent. The government of the day then, Mr. Speaker, came to us to speak to a moratorium on condominium conversions, but the one thing that they didn't speak to us about was rent controls. They were ready to implement some kind of moratorium with respect to those conversions, but they weren't ready to even consider rent controls at a time of unprecedented rent increases, Mr. Speaker, and an unprecedented vacancy rate in the city.

Mr. Speaker, they didn't do anything about it at that time. They were happy to criticize our city council, Mr. Speaker, at the time about conversions, but they weren't ready to do anything with respect to rents despite the demands that were being made upon them. And it was in their power to intervene at the time, Mr. Speaker. And now they criticize our government for not doing something that they weren't prepared to do when they had the power, Mr. Speaker.

And what are the effects, Mr. Speaker? In terms of rent increases, that limits the owner's ability to improve his property and it restricts his return on investment. And it's only with return on investment, Mr. Speaker, that property owners can reinvest in their property to improve them for the benefit of their tenants. And quality deteriorates, Mr. Speaker. We've already had too much property in the city of Saskatoon where people live in substandard conditions, Mr. Speaker, and rent controls will only add to that issue; controls will add to that problem as well. There won't be any further investment in existing stock, and property owners won't build any new properties.

Mr. Speaker, owners have a right to a return on investment, and members opposite that own rental property won't deny that. And that's what you get when you have no return on investment. You have people that won't invest in their properties, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, don't take my word for it. There's many

people that have quoted, many people that have been quoted on this topic in the past. And I'll want to read a few into the record. "I think rent controls have proven that they never work in the end. They sound wonderful at the front end, but the problem is that you have no one who will invest money into apartments into the future." And that's a quote from Mayor Don Atchison. "Is rent control going to allow developers to build more apartments to fill the need? That's not the answer." And that's from Mayor Pat Fiacco who goes on to say that rent control does not allow new apartments to be built. So I think the approach has to be looked at very carefully.

And in the *Leader-Post*, under an article entitled, "Opposition to rent control," this was said by Jason Hall, who speaks for the Regina and Partners Landlord Association, of "the impact of rent control 'is far more negative than positive.'" And in the same article, he goes on to say that "Losing the ability to adjust rents would lead to fewer rental units on the market."

Mr. Speaker, what do the NDP have to say about rent control, and what have they done in the past? Well in 1992, Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats and their Leader of the Opposition, when in cabinet, went to abolish rent controls.

In 2000, a *StarPhoenix* article entitled "Government's refused to cap rising rents" had this to say about the NDP:

Justice Minister Chris Axworthy said he hasn't heard any such request to bring in rent control, but he said the government isn't interested following a sour experience during a previous round of imposed caps and reviews.

And what was that experience, Mr. Speaker? Decreased supply, lack of investment in new stock, and property deterioration. And that's clear from the record, Mr. Speaker.

And more recently, Mr. Speaker, on the eve of the last election, the New Democrats decide there's no need for rent control. And we have this from *The StarPhoenix* of August 30th, 2007:

Junor told reporters recent consultations with the housing industry and representatives of community-based organizations who work with the poor showed no real appetite exists for establishing rent controls.

And in another article on the same issue, the member from Saskatoon Eastview is quoted as saying, and I quote:

Junor said she will be looking at rent controls as a possible solution to prevent evictions but pointed out that, in a booming market, there are always people that want to get in and make money.

And she goes on to say:

"And that's how the marketplace works. You can't fault people for that," she said. "They have that ability. It's a free society. It's a democracy."

Now that comes right from the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the consultation summary of the NDP's

own housing in Saskatchewan document had this to say:

Although there was a mixed response regarding rent controls, the general conclusion was that rent controls create uncertainty and will lead to a decline in housing availability. The quality of rent as rent controlled would be a disincentive for investment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the New Democrats' record on poverty and cost of living. Now I know they don't like to talk about the 16 years that they were over there, Mr. Speaker. We hear it all the time. But I think that they need to be reminded, and I think that the people of Saskatchewan need to be reminded, of their record.

Mr. Speaker, under the NDP, they failed to increase the seniors' income plan for 16 years. And 13 of their 16 years, they failed to increase shelter rates. And on poverty, in 2006, poverty reached its highest point in nearly a decade. Children living in low-income, single-parent families doubled between 1998 and 2006.

Mr. Speaker, food bank usage peaked in 2006. In 2004 food bank usage increased by 37 per cent in one year. Food bank usage rose 54 per cent between 2002 and 2007, Mr. Speaker. Food bank use has decreased by 9 per cent since 2007 since this government was elected, Mr. Speaker, and that's something we're proud of; 14 per cent decrease in children served since 2007. I hear some chirping from across the way. The facts don't lie, Mr. Speaker. They're clear as black and white.

Our action on the cost of living, Mr. Speaker, we've removed 110,000 low-income people from the tax roll since taking government: low-income single parents, single couples, single seniors, and low-income families of four. Utility costs have decreased 7 per cent in the average residential customer's energy bill, the third decrease in two years.

We've doubled the low-income tax credit, Mr. Speaker, nearly doubled the number of seniors eligible for benefits under the seniors' income plan from approximately 9,000 to approximately 17,000, Mr. Speaker, more than doubled the amount available to low-income seniors through the seniors' income plan from 90 to \$190 for single seniors and from \$72 to \$155 for couples. We've increased the rental supplements and shelter rates five times and indexed both to the cost of living, Mr. Speaker, increased the income threshold to help seniors qualify for social housing by up to 48 per cent in urban areas and it's 78 per cent in rural communities, Mr. Speaker. We've doubled the caregiver tax credit, infirm dependent tax credit, and supplement to the disability tax credit, Mr. Speaker, and we've increased the disability tax credit.

[11:15]

Introduced the low-income seniors' and prescription drug plans. Increased the minimum wage five times, three times since January 2008, to \$9.25. We've increased funding to CBOs [community-based organization] by 13.3 per cent, and we increased the amount paid for utilities for transition employment allowance, Mr. Speaker.

We've increased the amount paid to low-income families for

the Saskatchewan employment supplement and increased the threshold for those who can qualify. And we've created programs like ACE [accelerating connections to employment] to help connect those on social assistance to employment opportunities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what's clear is this government, since taking office, is taking action on affordability. We've increased the number of units that are available for rent. With rent controls, Mr. Speaker, all that's going to do is dry up supply. It's going to ensure that people don't invest. And we know from looking at the economists, and most economists will tell us this, Mr. Speaker, that rent controls don't work. They prevent an increase in the number of units, Mr. Speaker. People won't invest. And what's worst of all, the properties that people will live in will continue to deteriorate until a point in time, and then what do you do, Mr. Speaker? I mean people deserve to live in good quality housing, and rent controls will do nothing for that, Mr. Speaker.

What's required, Mr. Speaker, is broad-based consultation between government, industry, and stakeholders. And, Mr. Speaker, that's precisely what this government is going to do. Rent controls won't work, but broad-based consultation with industry is what's needed to help us through this issue, Mr. Speaker. And with that, Mr. Speaker, I won't be supporting the motion. Thank you.

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to speak in favour of this motion raised by the New Democratic Party opposition today, Mr. Speaker. This motion is a very simple motion that deals with matters pertinent to the current day that we're all living in in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. The motion reads simply as follows:

That the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan urges the Saskatchewan government to immediately implement rent controls to protect people from uncontrolled rent increases that have in some cases been up to 100 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very simple motion to support because, Mr. Speaker, it's all about protecting vulnerable people who have fallen victims to the growing economy that we're facing, Mr. Speaker.

I think the members opposite will acknowledge that in 2007, when the Sask Party inherited government in the province of Saskatchewan, they also inherited a growing economy. And with that growing economy have come challenges, Mr. Speaker. But has the Saskatchewan Party managed the growing economy to the benefit of all Saskatchewan people or have they simply cheered that growth, Mr. Speaker, and left everyone else to fend for themselves?

Well, Mr. Speaker, as far as affordable housing goes, Mr. Speaker, this government has let the people of Saskatchewan down a tremendous amount, Mr. Speaker. They have left the hard work on managing a growing economy behind, and they have left a large number of people behind. The important thing

for the government to do in the future is to manage that growing economy for the benefit of all Saskatchewan people.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's time to discuss and debate the benefits of new generation rent controls, rent controls that protect individuals but are also part of a larger housing strategy that ensures that there are new units built, there are more units available, Mr. Speaker, and at the same time the most vulnerable in our society are protected from the growth that's taking place around them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, to begin my specific comments, I want to read from a letter that I received just two weeks ago in my constituency office from a constituent of mine, Mr. Speaker. I will read the email. It's in two parts:

Hello Mr. Taylor [the email starts]. My name is Kevin Mathison, and I live here in the city of North Battleford, and the price of rent in the city has went through the roof. I have no clue where to turn. I'm a disabled person and I live on very little money each month, so I have to take up residence with my mother who is on old age security. We currently rent a house that is in my opinion, is worth condemning. The roof leaks, there's no insulation and the furnace is older than the house itself and I fear fire at some point. So I have decided to look elsewhere for a better house to live in, but to my surprise I can't rent anything in North Battleford under 1200 dollars a month. Going to welfare does me no good because the amount they give you for rents is far below any rent amount in the city plus, since I'm on disability, my CPP gets deducted from the amount they will give me. The way I see it, me and people like me will soon be sitting on the curb. I need [your] help.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I contacted Mr. Mathison. We discussed a number of things and, Mr. Speaker, he sent me a follow-up email after some discussions that he had with individuals in government. And here's a quote from the second email that Mr. Mathison has provided to me. And I quote:

I think what needs to be addressed is the fact that if I need to leave my current residence and move into a 1200 dollar or more house very soon, where will I get the help to do this? Because all that really is available to rent in my price range is a one bedroom apartment, and with apartments there are stairs and not enough room to accommodate two people, which also leaves the extra cost of storage for stuff that I could not put into the apartment. I think that Social Services needs to be able to pay the full amount of rent until the province can get their act together and provide either rent control or better accommodations for people with disabilities and seniors. When I first moved to North Battleford from Prince Albert about six years ago the rent in this town was manageable, but over the past two years the amount of rent has in some cases tripled and even quadrupled. It's a sad state of affairs when people such as myself who can't work and have no way of making extra . . . [money] are being forced out on the street.

Mr. Speaker, Kevin Mathison is living proof that this government is leaving people behind in our communities. And

one of the solutions, Mr. Speaker, is rent control. Members opposite will know that I have been talking about this for some time. At least three years ago, Mr. Speaker, I brought to the attention of the Assembly here rent increases in the city of North Battleford as high as 40 per cent. I tabled petitions every day in the Chamber, Mr. Speaker, for an entire session from individuals living in North Battleford who were asking for rent controls three years ago.

Now, Mr. Speaker, just this week we have seen people in the city of Regina face rent increases of 100 per cent, bringing those complaints into the Chamber. Mr. Speaker, the Premier, the Minister of Justice, both indicated that rent increases to that extent, Mr. Speaker, were unacceptable. That was the argument that was made, unacceptable.

So, Mr. Speaker, if there are landlords in the province of Saskatchewan who are raising rents to an unacceptable level . . . In North Battleford my constituents would say 40 per cent is unacceptable. In the city of Regina the Premier, the Minister of Justice have indicated there's an unacceptable level of rent increase, Mr. Speaker. In this case it was 65 and 100 per cent. Mr. Speaker, at what level does a rent increase become unacceptable? At what level, Mr. Speaker, does the province say we have to do something to protect individuals like Mr. Mathison who's written a very difficult letter from the city of North Battleford.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that this is the case in most cities around the province, perhaps not so visible, Mr. Speaker. News accounts in the city of Estevan indicate that housing is one of the most important issues to the people living in the city of Estevan, Mr. Speaker. In the city of Humboldt, Mr. Speaker, the local newspaper is writing stories about people who are living in their cars because they can't afford properties that are available, if they can find a place, Mr. Speaker, that's available.

We in this province have to recognize that there comes a time when we need to manage this growing economy and not just cheerlead it as it rolls its wave through the province. Because, Mr. Speaker, vulnerable people like Mr. Mathison and his mother are relying on their government to help them to find shelter — safe, secure shelter, Mr. Speaker — to be able to live the quality of life that they expect to live in a province as prosperous and as bright as the one that we are all living in.

Rent control needs to be a part of a growing housing strategy, Mr. Speaker. I've met with representatives of the city of North Battleford, I've met with developers who are interested in developing in the city of North Battleford. The concern, Mr. Speaker, has not been rent controls. The concern has been the cost of construction of new properties, Mr. Speaker, to increase the number of units that are available. And until governments can find a way to help developers reduce the costs and help municipalities reduce the costs significantly, Mr. Speaker, new units aren't going to be made available, and landlords in properties that exist are going to continue to increase the rents to meet their interpretation of what a growing economy should pay them.

So, Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure that we aren't just protecting landlords, but we're protecting individuals who live in our communities, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for the time to

add my voice to this important issue in the province of Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak to this topic. I think it's a very important discussion we need to have about the real negative effects rent control would have on our housing availability and our economy.

It's interesting to note that wherever rent controls have been put in place, it has had the exactly the opposite effect on housing availability that this motion would like to address. Ultimately supply and demand determines the vacancy rates. And in my presentation I will outline and give statistics to prove that point that how detrimental rent controls are to the construction of new rental units.

But there is a place for the government to have a role in this whole housing issue, and I would like to point out a number of things that our government has done to address housing. On March 28th the Social Services minister announced details of a five-point action plan to add at least 4,600 new housing units over the next five years.

And it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, our government is never afraid of setting goals, unlike the NDP government. You can take the example of attracting nurses to this province. The NDP would never have a goal, and the reason they never had a goal: because what if they didn't meet that goal? Well we met our goal as far as attracting nurses to this province. And we will meet this goal over the next five years of having at least 4,600 new housing units in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it makes it easier for Saskatchewan people with modest incomes to purchase new homes. The total investment in housing from these five initiatives over the next five years will be more than \$252 million. The five housing initiatives outlined in the Saskatchewan advantage housing plan include: number one, Headstart on a Home; number two, the affordable home ownership program; three, rental construction incentive; number four, \$34 million investment in rental housing; and number five, Habitat for Humanity partnerships. These initiatives will add up to more than 4,600 new housing units over the next five years in entry-level and rental housing. These new measures will add to our housing supply and make it possible for all Saskatchewan citizens to build a better future.

Number one of our five-point plan is Headstart on a Home. Headstart on a Home and the affordable home ownership program are designed to stimulate the construction of new, affordable homes and support municipal efforts to assist new buyers to purchase a home. Increasing these opportunities for moderate-income homebuyers will also help relieve pressure on the rental market by moving people out of existing rental units and into new homes.

[11:30]

Headstart on a Home will support the creation of a minimum of 1,000 new entry-level homes over the next five years through the creation of a new capital funding pool. Almost \$200 million over five years will be available to make these low-interest

loans. The capital pool will provide construction project financing and incentives to municipality-approved builders and developers to stimulate the construction of moderately priced, entry-level homes.

This program does two things: it moves people from rental into ownership position in new homes and also shows how well our government works with municipalities to work hand in hand to address these issues in Saskatchewan.

The second plan that we have in the five-point plan is the affordable home ownership program. Building on successful municipal initiatives such as the city of Saskatoon's mortgage flexibility program, the affordable home ownership program will see the provincial government match municipal tax incentives with a grant equal to a five-year reduction property tax incentive on municipally designated new homes. Municipalities can then use the provincial grant, combined with their own tax incentives or similar assistance, to provide the new homeowner with down payment assistance on the property. This program is expected to stimulate the development of 600 new homes over the next five years. Through the affordable home ownership program we can double the impact of municipal initiatives in this area. This program leverages the expertise of our municipalities and provides real assistance to the new home buyer in assessing a new home. Again, co-operating with municipalities, moving people from a rental situation into a homeowner situation, very good initiatives.

Number three on our five-point plan is the rental construction incentive. Through the rental construction incentive, the provincial government will partner with municipalities to increase the supply of new rental housing construction. The program will provide a grant equal to the education property tax of up to \$5,000 per new door of rental housing. Combined with existing projects, this incentive will deliver 300 units in 2011 and '12 and 650 new rental units in each of the next five years.

Number four point, Mr. Speaker, is the \$35 million investment in rental housing. Nearly \$34 million in new funding has been set aside for two purposes. One, to develop more affordable rental housing in communities with long-term housing needs, and to rejuvenate the government-funded housing across Saskatchewan, rehabilitating homes and rental units that would be lost to the housing market without major work. More than 100 communities across the province are expected to benefit from this funding.

This is a fundamental part of a five-point plan as well, Mr. Speaker, because we fix up some of the older more dilapidated housing units so it increases the affordability and improves the living area for people in those rental situations.

Number five on our five-point plan is the Habitat for Humanity partnership. Our government will continue to partner with Habitat for Humanity Saskatchewan to provide home ownership opportunities for lower income families. In 2011 the province will provide 1.5 million to construct up to 30 homes in select communities across the province. The funding will help to increase the supply of affordable housing for low-income families at a cost of \$50,000 per home. This builds on the province's commitment of \$1 million to Habitat for Humanity in both 2009 and '10.

Maintaining existing housing stock, increasing our inventory, and improving access would help to address the housing needs of a growing province. The initiatives in this action plan, and those that will be identified in our housing strategy, will make a real difference for Saskatchewan people in the long term as the province moves forward.

Now the opposition likes to talk about Manitoba and the rent control that has been in Manitoba since 1976. The rent increase guideline is set each year by the province. It takes effect from January 1st, 2011. The rent increase was set at 2.1 per cent. Landlords can submit a fee and an application to residential tenancies branch for a larger cost increase if they demonstrate that the guideline will not cover their cost increases. Landlords must give the tenant three months notice of an increase.

Mr. Speaker, this is just more bureaucracy and, at the end of the day, doesn't do anything to increase vacancy rates. And I would like to state some statistics obtained from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2010 Market Report. Vacancy rate for Manitoba, as a province, in 2009 were 1.1. Vacancy rate in 2010 went down to point nine per cent. Winnipeg went from 1.1 per cent to point eight per cent. Compared to Saskatchewan, vacancy rates in 2009 went from 1.9 per cent up to 2.5 per cent without any rent control. Regina went from point six per cent to 1 per cent; Saskatoon, 1.9 per cent to 2.6 per cent.

This shows that the marketplace is working. There's more rental units in Saskatchewan under no rental controls versus Manitoba where there is rental controls. And it's also important to note that the NDP's record on rent control, they cancelled rent control in 1992 and continued to reject it for 16 years. The NDP stakeholder consultation as of 2007 cited serious concerns about rent controls from key housing organizations. And just in the last few seconds, I just have to quote from one economist, Paul Krugman, "That the great sacred cow — Rent Control — is a textbook case of economic stupidity." I think that pretty well lays it out, Mr. Speaker, and I will not be supporting this motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from . . . Order. Order. Before I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre, a number of members had some good-natured kibitzing across the floor. However, it made it difficult to hear the member speaking, so I'd ask members to go behind the bar if they want to have that discussion. I recognize the member from Saskatoon . . . Order. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get into this very important debate about rent controls and what they mean for the people of Saskatchewan. Too many families are getting the message that this government is out of touch. They don't know what's going on around kitchen tables and too many apartments, that people, people's homes, when they await every six months that letter that says their rent can go up whatever they want. And this really, really shows how this government has dropped the ball, dropped the ball.

And it was interesting this morning that I thought the minister actually might've come around a little bit when she was talking about rogue landlords, rogue landlords. And I thought, well this'll be very interesting to hear what she has to say about

rogue landlords. But yet again, yet again, the government drops the ball. So what are you going to do about rogue landlords? And what is a rogue landlord? Is it 20 per cent, when they increase the rents 20 per cent? Is it 30 per cent? Is it 10 per cent? What is it? Nothing.

So what we hear is a bunch of rhetoric from the other side. The list of programs that they've done, and some have worked and some haven't worked. I know, for example, this minister takes a lot of pride in her recent announcement of increases to the rent supplement and to the shelter allowance. And, Mr. Speaker, it's as low as a dollar a month. The increase is as low as a dollar a month. I couldn't believe she even had the nerve to announce that she was increasing the allowance by as low or as little as a dollar a month. I don't know what she thinks people think when they get a dollar more a month. Now some of it was \$18 a month, \$18 a month. But what we've seen over the course of the last four years, three, four years, where rents have gone up thousands of dollars each year, each year. And it really is a shame.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we're really talking about here today and what our side of the House is talking about is next generation rent controls, second generation rent controls, which really includes two parts, includes two parts. We're talking about a cap, a reasonable cap on what a rent can go up each month — 1 per cent, 2 per cent — you know, we'll work on that detail. We'll consult and make sure we have the right number. But the other part that's very, very important is the exemptions. They go hand in glove together. They work together. They work together to fix what we see today in Saskatchewan where we have a market failure in the rental marketplace.

And so this is very important that we think of them together and not separate them out. The minister sometimes likes to refer to them as loopholes, but they're not loopholes. They're part of it. They're an integral part of it. You can't have one without the other. And so when the minister tries to portray that as something that, oh it's an afterthought, no it's not an afterthought. It's an important part of, how do we rebuild the housing stock, the rental stock that's been lost? And also how do we rebuild the public stock as well? And that's very, very important because as we know . . . And some of the stats have been quite shocking in terms of what we see here. And even in the Premier's own riding, we see the waiting lists go up for public housing. And they're going up because people are going to it because it's a little bit more predictable than the private housing rental stock.

We see in social housing where in January 2008 . . . And these are the facts. These are the facts of what's happening in Saskatchewan despite all the programs that these folks like to talk about. But these are the facts. Social housing, where it's rental housing for people with low incomes or people who are the victims of abuse and the rent is based on the tenant's income, January 2008, it was 396. February 2011, it's grown to 879. And this is under this government's management. That's a 122 per cent increase, and they don't really want to talk about that.

But even in the Premier's own riding, the Premier's own riding, it's a 15-month waiting list in Swift Current, 15 months in Swift Current. Affordable housing has grown from 205 on the

waiting list to 408. In Estevan it's 19 months on the waiting list, 19 months on the waiting list. Swift Current is 13 months, and Saskatoon is 11 months.

But what about the seniors? What about the seniors? We see a situation where it's grown from 521 to 774, a 50 per cent increase, and again Swift Current takes the longest time with 15 months on the waiting list. So this is critical.

And we see right across the province, people are writing. And the folks over there, we know they get the letters. We get the letters. It's right across the province. Whether it's Yorkton, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, Estevan, Swift Current and Saskatoon and Regina, we've had letters over the four years, Mr. Speaker, of people who have written.

And I would want to quote and if I had more time . . . But I do want to say, here was a letter addressed to the Premier of Saskatchewan at the time, December 25, Christmas Day 2007. Here's somebody writing about Marquis Towers in Saskatoon where the rent's gone up by 40 per cent in six months. But he's particularly concerned about the seniors. And what are the elderly going to do? And he came from Manitoba. And so why can't we just do what they've done in Manitoba? What they've done in Manitoba works well, is predictable, adds stability to the marketplace, and we need to really consider that. And here from October 31st, again another letter:

When I moved in in March '97, my rent was \$477 a month. Then it goes up. According to the notice I've just received this week, my monthly rent will be 960, which is a \$270 or 39 per cent increase from what it is today. And you think from what it was just eleven years prior, it's almost doubled.

I had to chuckle when the minister today talked about the rent increases in Saskatoon from 2000 to 2008, a 21 per cent increase. And if you do the math, that's 2.5 per cent. And if it's compounded, that's barely just above the cost of living, I would think. And she was thinking that was a shocking stat. But the fact of the matter is this is what's happening now, and we have to respond now, Mr. Speaker.

I could go on with the letters, and I could talk about the van that we had last year with people coming down from Saskatoon talking about the rent increases they're facing. And it's right across the board, Mr. Speaker. It's not just low income, but it's right across the board because people worry about when they're going to get that letter. Six months have come and gone. Is it time for another rent increase, and will it be reasonable?

[11:45]

And I think in many ways, and I would encourage the members opposite . . . And I don't know if they do much reading. They do read their speeches, and some read them very well and some not so well. But I would encourage them to take some time and do some research. We've been talking a lot about the University of Calgary, released a paper, Mr. Speaker. There's a couple of papers these people should be taking a look at, and one is the University of Calgary, a public policy paper from last fall. Very important, talks about the kind of incentives that we can have in the marketplace.

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

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

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Yorkton.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the west gallery are three friends of mine. I know members of the Assembly might question me having any friends. But these truly are a few people that I know from Yorkton that are considered close friends.

On the far right is Stefan Bymak. He's very involved in a youth program in Yorkton, a community program that exercises its opportunities to engage at-risk youth, vulnerable youth, in bettering their lives in the community through different programs, one of which is a clean up, community program and a recycling program.

Next to him in the centre is Michael Sarafincian, another close friend. Very engaged in community, he's a family pastor at Prairie Harvest Christian Life Centre, as well as engaged in the program in Yorkton as well.

And on the far left is Mr. Jeff Langan, a man who has an awesome story. He's an awesome leader in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, Mr. Speaker, as well as exercising the opportunity and the impact that he has in the community in pastoring at Yorkton Christian Fellowship, Mr. Speaker. So I'd ask all members to welcome these men to their Assembly.

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

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Rent Controls (continued)

Mr. Forbes: — As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the members opposite to do some research on rent controls, especially second generation rent controls. There's two good papers, one from the University of Winnipeg from January this year and one from the University of Calgary from September. But I just want to quote from the University of Winnipeg paper, because these folks often talk about the myths and really simply they are myths. And I will quote from the paper:

Many of the criticisms about rent regulations are ill-founded both on the theoretical and empirical grounds. Well-worn myths about rent regulations — that they reduce the quantity and quality of rental accommodations

— derive from a simple textbook model of “rent controls” applied to first-generation programs that existed in the 1950s. More sophisticated analysis of second-generation programs — such as that which exists in Manitoba — indicate that well-designed rent regulations can improve the economic security of tenants and, at the same time, have a beneficial effect on market’s efficiency. An assessment of the rent regulations must, therefore, proceed on a case-by-case basis.

So here you have an economist. Now I think the minister thinks that . . . I know she loves to argue with auditors. She loves to argue with anybody who knows something about what’s in their field. All of a sudden she’s an expert on the economics of housing. Here’s a person who does this as a living saying, you know, you really should give second-generation rent control a look.

Eighty per cent of Canadians live with rent controls. Eighty per cent of Canadians live with rent controls whether it’s BC — that’s just come through the Olympics — Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island. I think it’s time that we take a look at second-generation rent control here in Saskatchewan. It’s high time we do it for people who are at risk here in Saskatchewan. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Wascana Plains.

Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unprecedented population growth and unparalleled economic momentum must be supported by increased housing supply. That is why, Mr. Speaker, we announced a total new investment over \$255 million to develop over 4,600 new homeowner and rental units.

I’m not going to go through, Mr. Speaker, what the member from Biggar already went through with respect to the five initiatives in the housing spectrum. But I do know, Mr. Speaker, included in that is working with municipalities and giving them the final say on the builders, developers, and prospective homeowners. The increased supply of housing overall and the expanded opportunities for moderate-income renters to move into homeownership will help relieve pressure on the low-income rental market.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the members opposite referring to second generation rent control and by my view, Mr. Speaker, and of the members on this side of the House, rent control by any other name is still rent control, Mr. Speaker.

Two hundred fifty-two million total investment to create over 46 new homeowner and rental units over the next five years. This increase includes 34 million recently announced to rejuvenate and rehabilitate affordable housing across Saskatchewan. Completed was 860 new affordable rental units since November 2007, an \$80 million investment. Over 1,100 new units currently in development helped nearly 400 households achieve homeownership, increase the income threshold to help seniors qualify for social housing, help fund 40 Habitat homes over the last two years. One point five million dollars has been set aside for 30 more Habitat units.

Mr. Speaker, according to the RBC [Royal Bank of Canada],

Saskatchewan hit the sweet spot in 2010 — a strong yet affordable housing market. Home ownership costs in Saskatchewan remained below the national average. Housing affordability improved for the second quarter . . . second consecutive time in the last quarter of 2010.

Vacancy rates of course are up across the province: province-wide from 1.2 per cent to 2.5 since the NDP left office; province-wide from 1.9 to 2.5 in the last year; Saskatoon, 1.9 to 2.6 in the last year; Regina from 0.6 to 1 per cent in the last year. Vacancy rates are up in seven out of nine of Saskatchewan’s largest cities in the last year.

Mr. Speaker, we are not considering rent controls because quite frankly they don’t work. An article in *The StarPhoenix* on March 10th quotes a survey that 93 per cent of professional economists — now, Mr. Speaker, this is professional economists — agreed with the statement: a ceiling on rents reduces the quantity and quality of housing available. What works is putting more money back into people’s pockets. And that’s what we have done, Mr. Speaker. There’s more work to be done for sure.

One hundred and fourteen thousand people off the tax rolls, index rental supplements and shelter rates to the cost of living, doubled the low-income tax credit, and we have the highest personal income tax exemption in the country, Mr. Speaker.

What works is creating more housing supply overall — 860 new rental units, 1,100 more in development. Rental starts tripled from 2009 to 2010. Housing starts were up 115 per cent in February 2011. Multiple units increased by 231 per cent in February 2011. Our vacancy rates in Saskatchewan have gone from 1.2 per cent under the NDP to 2.5 per cent today.

You know, Mr. Speaker, just the other day I had a number of phone calls from constituents who are very, very interested in putting together developments for affordable housing for the people in and around Regina. However, Mr. Speaker, the thing that they mentioned to me was any talk, any talk whatsoever with respect to rent control is absolutely going to stymie and stifle this particular industry. It is not going to help, Mr. Speaker. And these words, not just mine, Mr. Speaker; they were the words of the people, the developers, the builders in and around the Regina area.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that we still have challenges. That’s why we continue to hold consultations — and builders will be involved, municipalities will be involved, government will be involved — to put together a comprehensive, long-term housing strategy. What we have done has helped the market to date, and we are continue to address those issues, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP, Mr. Speaker, cancelled rent control in 1992 and continued to reject it for 16 years. Now they’re talking about some second generation rent control . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, exactly. The member from . . . My colleague beside me here is talking about because it seems to be politically . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. It’s becoming difficult to catch the member from Regina Wascana Plains’

comments. I recognize . . . Order. I recognize the member from Regina Wascana Plains.

Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We talk about . . . It seems to be on the other side of the House, now that they're not sitting on the government side, that all of a sudden rent control becomes a major issue. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. It smacks of political overtones, no question about it. And that's exactly the reason why they're doing it. They're not doing it, Mr. Speaker, because it doesn't work. They didn't do it, Mr. Speaker, because it doesn't work.

The NDP stakeholder consultations in 2007 cited serious concerns about rent control. You're kidding, Mr. Speaker. Of course there's serious concerns about rent control because it doesn't work. Some of the stakeholders include the city of Saskatoon, Saskatoon Home Builders', the Saskatchewan Rental Housing Industry Association.

You know, Mr. Speaker, what's really interesting too is that the NDP made a submission to the 2008 housing task force. Of course that's when they were in government, and of course that's when Saskatchewan was moving in a backwards direction. Between April 2007 and April 2008, there was a 21 per cent increase in rents in Saskatoon because of NDP inaction with respect to housing for 16 years. There has been no average increase as large since. Average rent increases have steadily declined under our government.

Right after the increases in 2007-2008, the member from Saskatoon Centre made a submission to the task force on housing affordability, and there was absolutely no mention of rent controls. NDP record, only opened 58 units in their last full year of government. Bob Pringle on affordable housing under the NDP, the issue wasn't addressed. Funny thing about it not being addressed, Mr. Speaker, and how it's so important that it be addressed now when they're sitting on the other side of the House. NDP failed to increase shelter rates for 13 of their 16 years. NDP failed to increase the seniors' income plan for 16 years.

The member from Saskatoon Centre said the former government couldn't predict Saskatchewan's sudden prosperity. That's because they didn't know, they didn't anticipate, they didn't plan for any growth in this province. "It was a perfect storm. We didn't see it coming."

The member from Saskatoon Centre cited a report from the University of Winnipeg that he claims favours rent control. And of course, Mr. Speaker, and of course, Mr. Speaker, he didn't quite quote it all. He didn't tell the whole line with respect to the report that he was quoting on.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think our issue is clear. We will not support the amendment. We do not support rent controls. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: — Time has elapsed on the 65 minutes. We'll now go to the 10-minute question. The member from Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have today a debate about the fundamental rights of Saskatchewan

people, Mr. Speaker. And we have people today who can't afford to pay their rent. We have people today who can't afford to live in our province, Mr. Speaker. And we have a Premier that says that situation is unacceptable. When we had individuals in this legislature, he said it was unacceptable for people to be facing 100 per cent wage increases, 60 per cent wage increases, Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Pardon me, rent increases, Mr. Speaker. I made a slip of the tongue, Mr. Speaker. Rent increases. But they think it's funny, Mr. Speaker, that people cannot afford the rent increases, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my question is for the member from Saskatoon Northwest. About 20 per cent of the residents that live in his riding are renters. Many of them are having difficulty paying their rent as well, Mr. Speaker. Does he believe that those people shouldn't have any form of rent control?

[12:00]

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

Mr. Wyant: — Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thanks . . . And that's a good question, Mr. Speaker. But I've got to tell you, we made it clear in the speeches that have come from this side of the House that we don't support rent control.

What we do support, Mr. Speaker, what we do support is broad-based consultation on the issue between industry and stakeholders, and that includes tenants, Mr. Speaker. And so just simply to impose a regime, a draconian regime of rent controls upon the people of this province is not the way to go. We need to consult, and we need to talk to the people that it affects, Mr. Speaker. And we're doing that, and that's how we're going to deal with the issue.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cannington.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are continuously misinterpreting the facts. But the member from Saskatoon Centre definitely did not do so in 2008, and I quote:

. . . the former government couldn't predict Saskatchewan's sudden prosperity that has led to the housing crisis.

"It was a perfect storm. We didn't quite see it coming."

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the member from Saskatoon Centre. The opposition has openly admitted they did not see this housing crisis coming thus admitting they did nothing to prevent the housing shortage, Mr. Speaker. In fact the NDP's vision was to see a reduction in population to 750,000, not an increase. How can they come to this Assembly every day demanding housing faster when they couldn't even see it coming, Mr. Speaker?

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

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, I am indeed very proud of our

record in housing in Saskatchewan. In 2004 we launched a five-year \$200 million program called HomeFirst, and it was a very good program. Then we put more money in 2007, which included Station 20 West.

An Hon. Member: — How much?

Mr. Forbes: — \$100 million, \$100 million.

Sixty million dollars around the province. Some went to North Battleford, which some really interesting things happen up there, and up to P.A.. And that also included Mount Royal Collegiate which saw a skills development centre which is a pride of Saskatoon, the pride of Saskatoon, a very good thing. But it also included the funding to Station 20 West which they killed, they killed, and people are still suffering because of that.

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

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the member from Regina Wascana Plains. Mr. Speaker, the member on his feet just made the comments that . . . He made the assumption — God, I'm losing my voice; sorry, Mr. Speaker — that we hadn't done anything when we were in government. And the member from Saskatoon Centre clearly laid out, the member clearly laid out the dollars that we put towards housing: \$100 million in 2007.

But, Mr. Speaker, I have to say to the member, he stood and said . . . Well he made accusations against us. But I have to say to this member: how does she explain seeing the crisis, seeing the issues that Saskatchewan families are doing and are living in, and actually ignoring it and not doing anything about it?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Wascana Plains.

Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would agree with the member opposite — and I won't agree with her very often — but I agree they did almost absolutely nothing when they were in government.

But, Mr. Speaker, they did cancel rent control in 1992 and continued to reject it for 16 years. So you know, maybe I was being a bit too harsh with that, that they did do something.

So what works, Mr. Speaker? It isn't ignoring an issue. But what works? And all economists, most economists in this country agree that rent controls don't work, Mr. Speaker. What works is putting more money back in people's pockets — 114,000 people off the tax rolls, indexed rental supplements and shelter rates, double the low-income tax credit. And, Mr. Speaker, the most important is that we have the highest personal income tax exemption in the country. That's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Michelson: — Mr. Speaker, the member from Saskatoon Centre, the member from Saskatoon Centre said they're proud of their record. Their last year was 58 units. That's all they

produced.

Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no evidence that rent controls benefit low-income people. In fact the long-term effects of rent controls discourages investment and lower income residential construction, which actually harms low-income people. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan needs more housing, not discouragement of the construction industry by imposing rent controls. The members opposite alluded to Manitoba and BC. However Saskatchewan is unique with the economic and population growth that we need to encourage low-income housing rather than implement policies that discourage it.

To the member from The Battlefords: with all the facts that show rent controls are wrong, why does your party continue to pursue the policy that is detrimental to low-income people?

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We heard a number of interesting things in question period over the last few days. The Premier of this province, Mr. Speaker, has called rent increases in Saskatchewan unacceptable. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting that when poor people, when vulnerable people in Saskatchewan see their rents increase, the Premier can call them unacceptable but does nothing about it.

But at the same time, just behind him, he has a minister that has just signed an agreement that guarantees a rent for 20 years for a developer in the city of Regina, Mr. Speaker. Rent controls for the business community, Mr. Speaker, but none for the vulnerable people in Saskatchewan. I stand with the vulnerable people in Saskatchewan. If the new Saskatchewan is support for developers, I support our Saskatchewan which takes into account real people in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We hear a lot from the other side, quoting 1950s research from economics 101 as if that's going to be the answer to all the concerns, and they don't cite any other sources. We heard the member previous talk about evidence but didn't cite it. So I'd be curious to know some of their sources.

But my question is for the member from Biggar. If rent controls, second generation controls are such a bad idea, such a bad idea, why didn't they take them out in BC? They'd just come through the Vancouver Olympics, a great time. Why did they not remove them? Gordon Campbell, one of the most right wing premiers, left it in place. Manitoba, the Conservatives there, are they taking it out? My question is, why aren't they talking about taking them out in those provinces?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to outline what our government is doing concerning housing in this province, and it's right here, the Saskatchewan advantage housing plan. And that includes a five-point plan: the Headstart on a Home, the affordable home ownership program, rental construction incentives, \$34 million investment in rental

housing, and Habitat for Humanity partnership.

The members across the way would like to cite a study done by the University of Calgary, but they forget to list some of the reasons that they cited that rent control does not work. and I quote from the University of Calgary: "Economists are almost universally opposed to . . . rent control." I'd like to go on. Other items: "The major disadvantage of any kind of rent control is its . . . negative effect on investors' willingness to invest in multi-unit rental housing." "That factor outweighs, in the view of one of the authors, any possible favourable effects of any sort . . ."

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

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, according to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, vacancies throughout the province have risen from 1.2 per cent to 2.5 per cent since the NDP left office, and vacancy rates are up in seven . . .

The Speaker: — Time. Sorry, time has elapsed in the 75-minute debate. Order. Order.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Yorkton.

Motion No. 5 — Minimizing Potential Flood Damage

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the conclusion of my statements this afternoon, I'll move the following motion:

That this Assembly acknowledge the proactive efforts of the public safety employees who, through their efforts, are ensuring our government will be better prepared to handle flooding issues in this province this spring.

I think the key of this motion, Mr. Speaker, is the employees, the people that actually helped to mitigate some of the damage, helped to get through some of the issues and the flooding this spring, and are helping us to better plan for what we'll be seeing coming this next spring, Mr. Speaker.

Before I move on, I'm going to go back and kind of revisit why we have to do this. Why is this necessary? Well we just have to think back to June, what happened in Maple Creek; in July, what happened in my home town of Yorkton; what happened in Kawacatoose, Hudson Bay, Regina, Saskatoon, Carlyle. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on. Significant events like this, this province has rarely seen before. And addressing these issues is something that's important to do currently and to prepare for in the future.

If we look back to the events of this past late spring and early summer, Mr. Speaker, we needed to react quickly. Communities needed to react quickly. The government needed to react quickly. And then once some of the initial issues were addressed, we needed to then respond. And there's quite a difference, I believe, between reacting and responding. Reacting is something that needs quick attention and quick action. Then in the response, we can better step back and plan,

look at where we need to address more attention and move forward.

So if we look at reacting and responding, I think we did that as a government. The employees of this province, the municipalities, private sector employees, and citizens alike, they reacted fairly quickly, addressing some of the short-term concerns. And if we look at the significant events, we saw no loss of life. Significant damage for sure, but no loss of life.

So once we got through that point, we have to adapt and change and improve for the current situation. I think we've done that through our PDAP [provincial disaster assistance program] changes which I'll outline in depth shortly, Mr. Speaker, and then get into some of the mitigation that we're going to be looking at doing this coming spring to alleviate some of the concerns and the damage that may be coming in this next spring.

And then what we have to do, one step further, Mr. Speaker, is plan for the future. And that's another point I'm going to be touching on towards the end of my remarks is, what are we doing to plan for the future? What are we doing as a government? What are employees and municipalities and government service people, people within the public sector of our government, what are they doing to help mitigate some of these issues and help plan for the future? And those would include employees of the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, that would include some of the protective services workers through our municipalities and RMs [rural municipality], Mr. Speaker, as well as some private citizens that are taking it upon themselves to also do the best they can to minimize the damage that might be coming in this spring.

Reflecting as well back on my own experience in this past summer, I've got to give a lot of credit to the people that I know doing the job that they did, was city employees, Corrections and public employees through that ministry, Mr. Speaker, as well. The work they did in my community — I know Maple Creek, two of the more significantly hit areas — but the work that they did across the province, from provincial representation to the communities and again through, down the line into the public employees and the protective services workers in those communities.

I can speak first-hand, Mr. Speaker, of a lot of the preparedness and a lot of the strategic centre meetings that we had in Yorkton at the newly created fire hall. And in that respect, Mr. Speaker, I think city council in Yorkton and the fire department in Yorkton had some strategic foresight in creating of that fire hall, which became a very effective centre for developing a strategy in Yorkton and, I believe, something that is quite recognized across the province and to be adapted and changed for certain areas that, should those instances happen again in the future, we'll be better prepared.

So again going back to the statement I made earlier, we respond and we learn from what happened, and we adapt for the current situation. And part of that, recognizing what was successful and what isn't, what wasn't, to plan for the future of situations that may arise in the coming years but firstly this spring, Mr. Speaker.

And again we have to remember, it's about the people. It's about protecting the people at home. It's about protecting the citizens of Saskatchewan, but it's also about those important people, whether they are government employees, municipal employees or private people that are helping to mitigate those issues, Mr. Speaker.

And in speaking about the public employees, I'm mentioning Corrections and Public Safety but also those very important people that are working on programming right now, Mr. Speaker, that are an employee of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, developing a program I'll touch on again towards the end of my comments, a \$22-million program to mitigate the damage that would be possible, would possibly happen this spring.

[12:15]

And in looking at that program, Mr. Speaker, and in speaking to the Minister of Environment — been working very hard on this program through his ministry and through Saskatchewan Watershed — \$22 million, a significant chunk of money, Mr. Speaker. But we have to compare that to what other jurisdictions are doing. We only have to look to our neighbours to the west, Mr. Speaker. The province of Alberta, what are they spending this year? What's their program for the upcoming spring for mitigating the flood damage that may happen? \$1.2 million, Mr. Speaker. So we see a significant investment in preparedness in this province. And I'll touch again on a lot of the details of that program towards the end of my remarks.

So again I want to review where we have been, where we came from, and some of the situations that we saw, Mr. Speaker. When we came to office in 2007, what did the PDAP program look like? Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess if we went back 30 or 40 years, it might have been sufficient at that point but really hadn't been changed in many, many years. The only time the former administration actually I believe used the program in the recent past was in, I believe it was Vanscoy. They had significant damage from flooding.

An Hon. Member: — Vanguard.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Vanguard, I'm sorry. I'm corrected by the Minister of Corrections. He's very up on his file. Thank you for that, Mr. Minister. Significant damage there. But what was the program like at that point, Mr. Speaker? Well, capped at \$100,000, which even at that time, I would argue it'd be probably quite insufficient.

And then we look at the timelines and we look at the resources that were available. Well PDAP at that point had . . . Well right now I believe there's over 20 employees in PDAP. And I'll talk about the addition to those employees, a significant increase to those employees to again be more prepared for the future and to deal with some of the claims that are currently outstanding, Mr. Speaker.

One person in the PDAP department at that point. And then the members across, they saw it, you know, after that significant flooding in that area, that after a significant amount of months that there was claims that are outstanding. A lot of the paperwork wasn't being done. A lot of upset people in that area.

They decided to add a second one after I think it was about 12 months. And we saw payments in that area, not within the week or two that we saw from the leadership of this government — \$3,000 to most PDAP claimants within a week to 10 days; significantly quick in the Maple Creek area; and very quick in the Yorkton area as well, shortly after the flooding, Mr. Speaker — but in that area, we saw claims outstanding for up to two years and some of them even further. And I've heard from people in that area that many, many restoration of properties never did happen because the significant damage that was in place and wasn't addressed quickly enough. And we had an area totally devastated by that.

So in reviewing that PDAP program, what are we looking at? Well initially we found and we heard it from the people in the front lines, the people that were impacted by the flooding, that deductibles of 20 per cent were just undoable. Some of these people, even with the payments that were coming up with 20 per cent upfront was just hard to come up with, Mr. Speaker. So, quick action by the Minister of Corrections and the Premier. Looking at some of the shortcomings, that deductible's lowered to 5 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Then we looked at the caps on claims. Again I touched on private residences and businesses capped at \$100,000, which we know at this time in Saskatchewan, particularly anywhere in the world, \$100,000 isn't enough to do very much. So quickly that was addressed, Mr. Speaker. Private residences, more reflective of the economy, of \$240,000 cap and businesses at \$500,000.

Now that in itself is significant, Mr. Speaker, but we have to look at one more part of this program, is in the relocation expense. Under the New Democratic government, the relocation expense was taken out of your initial claim. So if you had a claim of \$100,000, you had a relocation expense of \$30,000 that effectively lowered your claim ability to \$70,000. When you tie it into the deductibles and the depreciations that were in effect . . . You know, I've heard complaints about our system as well, Mr. Speaker, and we take those to heart. We try and do the best we can.

But we look at that old program. Once you tie all that into place, it minimized those claims down to almost nothing. What the minister saw fit to do is break that relocation expense out of the actual claim on the property and have it as a separate item. So if we look at a private residence of \$240,000 claim, the ability to break that out, an additional \$30,000 if it's so needed for relocation effectively makes that \$270,000, which is a far cry from the \$100,000 under the old administration.

Talking about depreciation on items, we look at something like furnaces, for example: the old program, 60 per cent depreciation on furnaces. When we're looking at the replacement of those items, it gets very expensive. What was seen fit to do through this administration, through our administration, was the maximum depreciation of 35 per cent on those items, so again making it a lot more affordable when tied in to the deductible differences. And again with the caps, it made the system a lot better.

Again I touched on the cheques that went out. The initial \$3,000 payments went out, some of them within 24 hours. And

we now see the time has been brought down to three to six months prior to the last summer's flooding.

I talked about the staffing. And again we had about 22 people on staff working through these claims after the events of this summer, this spring and summer. And just recently, in the last number of weeks, cabinet approved further funding for 30 staff to be recruited to improve on these wait times and again to start preparing for what we may be seeing in the future. Hopefully we don't need to keep those people going, running off their feet as we've had to keep the current staff running.

And again I've got to give a lot of credit to those staff through PDAP that . . . I know certain MLAs here may have gotten a bit short with them at times, and I've apologized to them myself if I ever have gotten short. Everybody's under stress in a situation like this. But again, great appreciation of those people from PDAP and a lot of appreciation to the people from Saskatchewan Watershed Authority that are currently working on the system that we're going to be needing or possibly needing this coming spring.

Again touching on that Vanguard flood of 2000, we had people waiting for years, one person working on claims, and seeing fit to add another person quite a while, 14 months I believe, after.

And again we looked at who qualified for these PDAP programs, Mr. Speaker. Well, if we look at the residency requirements of the old program and the residency requirements of businesses in the old program, we saw that nobody out of province was allowed to apply which . . . You know, you want to look after your own people first, but we have to look at who was claiming for these properties. Out-of-province residencies that own rental property in the province, I would argue they need to be covered. The reason why we look in Yorkton — I know we have a lot of out-of-province landlords that own property — if they're not covered and they don't get to rebuild that property or replace that property, we effectively lose one rental property door in our city. So again, out-of-province ownership but an in-province, in-city resident, that I believe is a really good move to cover those to make sure we keep those doors where we need them, and especially in light of seeing the request and the need for housing in our province today.

Businesses as well, Mr. Speaker, yes, they're out-of-province investment. They're having businesses in our cities and our province, but again they employ people. I know of a number of businesses in Yorkton where they employ 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 15 people in our city. If they are not covered, do they close up shop and move out of the province? Do they close up their business in a province and in our cities, and do we lose employment? They employ our local residents. Again a great move, I think, on the part of the minister and our government to cover those out-of-province investors in our province.

Regional parks. Prior to the changes, regional parks were not eligible. Now regional parks are eligible as is any municipal entity.

So again to recap. The \$100,000 cap increased, no out-of-province was covered, and no secondary income was covered. And now we see on that respect as well, Mr. Speaker, secondary income business people are covered as well, which

we look at rental property and businesses. Quite often they are secondary income for individuals and by not covering them, we effectively eliminate rental doors; we effectively eliminate jobs in our towns. So we have to keep that in mind.

We listened to the flood victims, and again that's where the front-line information came from, and that's the changes that were made. So, Mr. Speaker, we didn't stop there. In September and October of 2010, the government announced further changes to help our flood victims. And a lot of those I did outline, but again I'll recap some of those. The depreciation reduction on things like water heaters and furnaces which got bumped up to the front of the list, Mr. Speaker. With the oncoming cold weather, it was felt that those situations needed to be addressed fairly quickly, so to get hot water and furnaces back into those homes was paramount.

As well as deductibles on things like drywall, concrete, that should depreciate at a lot lower level, those were addressed. They were in the prior program under the old administration. Depreciation was quite high on those, and those depreciation rates were reduced.

We hired additional structural engineering firms. I know in Yorkton it was an issue with the amount of homes that were impacted. Seventy per cent of the homes in one way, shape, or form touched by the flooding — some very significantly, some less so. But again having those extra engineering firms on hand to address the concerns and get the claims in as quickly as possible was important as well as those independent adjusters that were brought in as well, Mr. Speaker, to make sure those homes were looked at as quickly as possible and as efficiently as possible to make sure that those claims went in and were addressed fairly quickly. We saw 20 per cent increase in the advance payments for some of these claimants. Once they had their reports in, the reports were approved.

The old program, you're eligible for 40 per cent pre-payment, initial payment; the new program, 60 per cent, which puts more money in people's pockets quickly that they can start addressing their concerns, predominantly structural and otherwise, that would need to be addressed fairly quickly. All our claims again involving furnaces and hot water heaters were put on a priority and were addressed as quickly as possible.

Most recently, Mr. Speaker, in March of this year, we made further refinements to the program to both help victims and municipalities hit by flooding. Some of those key changes were, municipalities saw their deductibles lowered to point one per cent of their taxable assessment, which fixes . . . They have a solid idea of where their deductible is going to be sitting for damages that they may incur in the municipalities. This reduces the continued burden of excessive cost that may be found by municipalities as their deductibles formerly increased.

And again we will be supporting mitigation processes and projects by allowing a maximum payment of 15 per cent of the estimated cost of damage in the existing disaster assistance claim to be used under flood prevention measures — again being more proactive, getting some of that money out to be more proactive and minimize some of the damages that may be incurred by future flooding.

Another change was the small-business category that will be established to meet the unique needs of groups like Hutterites. The current standards did not allow the Hutterite community access to this program. So again another unfortunate situation that inaccessibility was there, but again opening up the program that we could address more of our residents in the province.

And one thing I know I dealt with personally on a few cases with PDAP and the minister, and I was very glad to see this change, was the quality criteria for minimum revenue for a business. Now formerly it was \$6,000, and we saw a lot of cases at home where there might have been a \$200 gap between \$5,800 and \$6,000 and a \$5,800 claim may not be recognized. Again seeing that as a bit of a ridiculous stepping point or a sticking point for some of these claims, the minister and the ministry saw it right to reduce that to \$4,000.

So a lot of these people, cases I saw . . . Mr. Speaker, an example of the \$4,000 limit would be rental properties where some of the landlords were keeping their properties quite low in recognition of the costs of living, and because they weren't charging the \$500 a month rent, they were charging a lower amount, were being denied PDAP claims. Again I think, proactive thought and corrective work, not only by the minister and the government, but again by the important people that are exercising these programs, helping us develop these programs, the people in the public service, the front-line people like municipalities and citizens who see these shortcomings, bring them to our attention, either MLAs . . . I know the member from Cypress worked a lot of long hours on these claims and working directly with PDAP and the officials and the minister and his staff in addressing these claims. And at looking at a lot of the changes that have happened, I know that those issues were heard and were acted upon.

I've had some concerns by local residents as well with some of the timelines. They're still thinking it's taking a bit long and I mean we'd want to address it as quickly as we possibly can. Again looking at the past history — two years on some claims before anything being dealt with, no money flowing out the door. And that's on a small scale. We're looking at a large scale. The last numbers I saw were 5,900 to 6,000 claims across the province, a lot of them quite significant. And to have those claims dealt with as quickly as some of them have been, again concerning at times . . . You can feel for the people, but looking at the expedited process that has happened and being willing to back up on some of these claims, to look at what might have been missed, to address those as well, I think, goes a lot. It has a lot to be said for not only the political people involved, but again, the front-line people, the people within the programs, the municipalities, working on these issues to try and get these issues touched on and addressed.

[12:30]

Looking at some of the . . . You know, you look at that amount of claims — 5,900 and 6,000 claims — without any revisionary work on these claims, we're talking at least three hours per claim minimum. So when you start adding up those hours, that amount of hours, man-hours, between 22 people, it gets a bit onerous and things do take time. But in order to get these claims dealt with properly, we have to spend that time. The employees spend that time and then when backing up on some

of these claims to readdress these concerns, instead of just forging ahead and leaving the concerns to lie . . . You know, backing up on those claims does take a lot of extra time. So I'm happy to see that we are adding those extra people. And as I touched on earlier, 30 extra employees that are going into the PDAP program to help address some of those backlogs is very, very encouraging.

One thing I realize, I was quite surprised, Mr. Speaker, that there was no real solid information that was really easily accessible by people that are impacted by some of these situations for information, for what are the next steps. Ministry people were out, I know, in Maple Creek, they were out in Yorkton, some of these other areas that were hit by flooding, to give them the proper process. Information shared through municipal entities like city halls and RM offices was very effective. But I was very encouraged that the ministry, the public service employees took it upon themselves to get out there and really put a comprehensive brochure together. And if I have time towards the end of my remarks, I might even go through that document as well, Mr. Speaker, outlining what's claimable, what isn't, what's the best process, what's the chronological process to go through to get your claim done, and how to go about getting all your processes done and your claims in in timely manner.

I'm going to start touching on the \$22 million program that was just announced just lately, Mr. Speaker, significant steps to help communities and their residents prepare for potential flooding this spring. Corrections' main role is to assist municipalities with preparing their own community plans. And we know communities know the best. They know what their needs are. They know what their strengths are. They know what their abilities are. So working in tandem with them to develop that plan and support them where possible is the key focus of Corrections and Public Safety and their employees as well as the Minister of Environment's people and those under the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.

There's been accumulation of necessary supplies that Corrections and Public Safety has been working on in order to help these communities fight their flood issues that may be arising — sandbags, equipment. I know the minister was sharing some information a couple of days ago about a diking system or a mobile diking system that actually fills with flood water in order to hold flood water back. Very significant piece of equipment that can be moved around the province to mitigate flooding and damages where it would be needed. And there's millions, I think \$1.5 million, being spent on that initiative.

Municipal officials and community residents are taking very preventative steps, there being a lot of forethought, and there's some foresight happening there, Mr. Speaker, communication with the ministries and communication with the employees to those ministries. And we have to again give them a lot of credit for the work that they're doing, as rundown, as tired as they must be by this point, Mr. Speaker, and still working diligently on addressing issues that may be coming and listening to the municipalities to find their needs and help where possible through expertise or financial assistance.

And although the flood mitigation program has no direct bearing on PDAP, the \$22 million again through Sask

Watershed, through the Minister of Environment's office, you can only imagine that by taking these preventative steps now that there may be in fact a far less impact on the PDAP program, a far less need for that PDAP program this coming spring.

I'll outline a few points here about emergency flood damage reduction program. The emergency flood damage reduction program is to implement emergency flood damage reduction and prevention measures for this spring. It will assist communities, cities, towns, villages and resort villages, municipalities, and individual farms and country residences in mitigating flood damage and preventing flood damage. The program will provide technical and financial assistance to protect homes and permanent structures.

And there's a few key points that I really want to drill down on some of the issues or some of the technical numbers here, Mr. Speaker. Under the program, communities and resort villages are eligible for 100 per cent for technical assistance including engineering advice, 75 per cent for the cost of construction of flood protection works such as berms, channels and channel improvements. For rural yard sites and country residences, they are also eligible for 100 per cent of the technical assistance, but 85 per cent of the cost for berm construction to protect property, farmsteads, and our country residences. When it comes to water protection, Mr. Speaker, costs to test private potable water supplies impacted by flood will also be covered under the program, but by 100 per cent.

Short-term actions such as sandbagging, clearing channels and frozen culverts are eligible for 50 per cent of assistance. And I know Maple Creek has been approved for a lot of this work. They're working diligently to mitigate some of those . . . minimize some of those issues that will be coming. And I know the city of Yorkton has been working very diligently in opening up channels, ditches.

And one thing of interest I found out here recently, Mr. Speaker, they are using some of these funds to actually look at some of the drainage sewer system in the city and, through that funding, have found that some of those sewers have actually got a buildup of sediment that wasn't expected to be there, so through some of this support in funding, through their hard work eliminating the sediment buildup in those sewers which will help address some of the flow this coming spring. And I've actually noticed that locally that where I've seen the snow diminish in my hometown of Yorkton and not a lot of water sitting around on the streets and in potholes, so we know that is working.

Just to point out some of the inconsistencies or some of the shortcomings previously, and where we are — again I'll probably be reaffirming some of these points I just made — but to see where we were, and where we've come. We've heard time and time again from across the floor that our government is not doing enough to help flood victims and communities.

Well let's look at that. As part of this year's flood mitigation preparation, Corrections officials were in attendance at the 2011 SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] convention to deliver a workshop on municipal preparedness and responsibilities for emergency management according to

provincial legislation. The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority was directed to set aside that \$22 million to help flood mitigation initiatives as part of the flood damage reduction program. Corrections is now working with Watershed Authority in tandem and other ministries to help communities to better prepare for flooding this spring. And that again includes construction of temporary and permanent flood protection, farmstead protection, short-term engineering, technical and other staffing to complete the work, cost sharing emergency measures. The municipalities are also included, as well as \$3.5 million of that flood protection equipment I had previously spoke about, necessary for Corrections to effectively assist municipalities with mitigation efforts and to help to better respond to those efforts.

Again there's the acquisition of flood mitigation equipment. Estimated cost of \$2 million is being spent on sandbags, generators, and other equipment geared to reduce potential flood damage. And again those sandbags relate to the equipment . . . Related to the equipment, it's estimated the initiative will cost the province 1.5 million intended to support some of these programs.

At the end of February 28, 2011, we had 70 communities, 7 rural municipalities, and 20 individual farmsteads receiving assistance from the program. But, Mr. Speaker, we have some updated numbers on some of the uptake of this program just recently released and I wouldn't want to be incorrect in some of my numbers. So what we see here is, to date, we have over 509 individuals and authorities that have requested help. Those numbers include 156 communities, 65 RMs, 283 farmyard sites, and four that would be classified as other.

And again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, individuals do have that responsibility to apply, to minimize the damage as best as they possibly can, and to prepare for what may be coming. So I would encourage them to go to the website, www.saskflood.ca, to look for information to apply for that program.

We had some more positive feedback. I know Corman Park has been looking at some flooding issues and just heard today that the reeve of Corman Park had a lot of positives to say about this money coming out, the \$22 million program, to help them put safeguards in place and to mitigate some of those damages.

Just looking around the province, some initial . . . There's, I know, more announcements that have come out recently. In the Deputy Premier's riding, we have the town of Canora that has been approved; the RM of Buchanan; villages of Rhein and Buchanan; hamlets of Armit and Erwood have been approved for \$100,000 in funding. And all of them, any indications I've gotten, are very happy with that.

Around the province, we have another nine that I can talk about. The towns of Aberdeen, Bruno, and Colonsay; municipalities of Colonsay, Humboldt, and Wolverine; villages of Muenster and Viscount; and the hamlet of Carmel, will all share in funding from the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority to more than \$300,000. And again, many thanks to the good work of those people and the Saskatchewan Watershed, Corrections and Public Safety for working on that program — all the hard work they've done diligently over the past number of months to get that through — as well as the municipalities,

municipal partners that have been doing the work, having the feet on the ground, the employees on the ground, carrying that work out.

Again looking at some of the history, the funding for this flood mitigation is unprecedented in Saskatchewan. I touched on, you know, a lot of the numbers, but we looked at some of the past history. The NDP promised for the people of Fishing Lake and Waldsea Lake money in June 2007 for flood protection planning but never did budget for the amount. The NDP did consult with Fishing Lake First Nation resulting in the stoppage of work on building a drainage ditch which wasted more than \$1 million. Then on June 13th of 2007, the media release by the NDP announced a 50/50 cost-sharing program for affected communities but did not budget money for the program or announce parameters to receive the funding. So again to announce something, say we're going to be there, to announce something and then not carry through, well I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the best indication of future behaviour would be past behaviour, and there's a lot of documentation on that regard.

Here we'll talk about another NDP claim. The public have been complaining about extremely long wait times for PDAP and having their claims processed. What is your government doing about it? Well again some of these issues take time, with three hours per case plus. With 5,900 or 6,000 cases, we know it's going to take time. Addressing them as quickly as we can, but what do we do? We reduced that wait time under the NDP from 12 to 18 months, and in some cases two years, to initial funds flowing out, some within hours, predominately within a week to 10 days that people were receiving some funds to get their feet back on the ground.

We see an increase in staffing, initially from one or two to 22 at a certain point, and now an additional 30 employees that have been hired on for that program. We see a very hard-working group from Saskatchewan Watershed Authority that are working hard on that program and getting that money rolled out, approving those claims for municipalities and farmers to mitigate a lot of those issues. As well as we see right after the flooding, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the additional personal people, private people brought on to help us to shorten those wait times on engineering, shorten those wait times on claims, and to shorten those wait times for getting their claims in.

In August of 2010, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government announced the following changes, again focusing again on those reductions in deductibles: increasing those maximum allowable benefits, increasing the amount of money available for businesses, getting rid of the out-of-province stipulation on those, taking the \$30,000 relocation expense out of the program, effectively close to tripling the program for private residences, and then continuing on with the depreciation reduction with the increase in advance payments and a lot of that happening again so quickly because of the added staff.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about this new road, where we're going with the program. Again, you know, we talked about, I talked about the PDAP staff who work very diligently on this program to reduce those wait times for claimants. During the 2009-10 fiscal year and prior to the summer's flooding, the average wait time again was lengthy. Those were reduced.

To respond to the unprecedented weather conditions this summer . . . And we saw the gamut. We saw everything from hailstorms to tornados at Kawacatoose to significant flooding events in places like Maple Creek who had water-holding structures overflow and flood that area.

[12:45]

Or we saw instances like at Yorkton, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where you know, I got calls from people around, actually around the world, saying what in the world is happening in Yorkton? You're flooding; you have no rivers. You have no significant bodies of water.

Well effectively, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you get official claims of four to five inches but unofficial claims . . . Some seniors in the area I know that are very diligent in keeping water records with their rain gauges saying in a matter of actually half an hour to 45 minutes receiving seven inches. A bit of a sprinkle ahead of time, but then a sprinkle after the fact. But the actual event of the storm, up to seven inches in a 45-minute time frame, which basically even the highest streets in the city became flowing rivers which overflowed from the sewer system, from the drain sewer system, the storm sewer system into the actual septic sewer system in the city and then backing up into homes.

So again, significant levels of water falling that had to be dealt with. And again, witnessing the damage was quite impacting. And I mean people are still dealing with it to this day, but I think we're getting ahead of it now, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, in talking about the people that were involved, and again I really want to focus on those front-line people, the employees of Corrections and Public Safety, the employees of Saskatchewan Watershed. Also I want to talk about some significant help I saw come through the Ministry of Environment. But by firefighters from the North, when it was found — I know at home in Yorkton, I know they helped around the province — when it was found that we were short of people to try and go door to door to try and find senior citizens that might be in need of help, we saw some of the northern firefighters come down. I think there was a dozen or so that came down and worked very tirelessly, day in and day out, to help not only citizens get out of their homes, you know, maybe move some significant items that they needed moved out, but to help wherever possible there. So again, more provincial employees that we have to really thank for their input, their help, and their selfless acts of kindness and selfless acts of work that did help the people of our province and our cities.

Some other people I really want to credit and thank is some of our political members that — to name one, our Premier; to name another, our Minister of Corrections — who showed up time and time again. The Agriculture minister from Melville showed up time and time again to speak to people on the ground first-hand to see where their concerns are, to see where we could best help. And I know that was very much appreciated, showing true concern for the people of Yorkton and our province in hearing their concerns.

The one person I wasn't . . . Not that I wasn't happy about him coming to the city, because I mean the job of the opposition is

to find out where the needs are to make sure those needs are addressed and to point out where improvements could be made. But I know one visit the Leader of the Opposition made to Yorkton with some of his colleagues did nothing but really upset a lot of the local residents by telling a lot of mistruths. And misconceptions were permeated, and what really upset me about that was in a time of struggle, you know, to play politics with certain things. This is part of the job I suppose. I don't really like that part of what tends to happen. But to prey on the fears and the stress of the local people who are displaced from their homes and going through a tough time, and to feed ideas and to feed misconceptions to work them up for your own political gain, I find that is troubling.

And I know my own experience would be, if I was to exercise that type of behaviour in my hometown and my Premier was to find out about it, I would probably be sitting maybe a little farther over there or maybe even over there for a little bit, just as sort of a repercussion for that kind of action. And I know the leadership on this side of the House, again we're led by example. And the example set by our Premier I am very happy to follow, and it's an example that I know all members on this side of the House are happy to follow and very positive leadership indeed.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk about, go back to some of my personal experiences with the flood and the people that we dealt with. I know the council and the leadership around Maple Creek. I know a lot of the hard work they did and the work that was done by the member from Cypress Hills to bring those, again, those issues to light and to help mitigate what was happening there.

But first-hand I saw a lot of what was happening in Yorkton. I was going to a lot of the stakeholder meetings, the preparedness meetings, the organizational meetings held at the fire hall, at the emergency centre there. And to see the work that was done by our council, you know, they did what they needed to do, but they stayed out of the way politically. Our mayor is still being heralded and thanked for the work, the leadership that he showed in that situation.

Some of the ones I really want to focus on though, the city workers, the city of Yorkton workers that helped. And I know by singling them out I don't mean to diminish the work that was done by any other city workers in any other town. My comments, I'm going to try and keep them broad to recognize all those that I would describe from the city of Yorkton and that area and the damage I found, to give thanks to the same, their counterparts in the other jurisdictions, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The city of Yorkton employees worked tirelessly whether it was by canoe, by wheel loader, as odd as that it sounds in a flat place like Yorkton, that was actually needed to get people out of their homes. We had seniors that were being evacuated from their homes by wheel loader, water well over the tires of a 6-foot tire of a wheel loader to get those people out.

Private people, RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] officers, and firefighters in canoes and boats going door to door and helping the people out of the hardest hit areas in the core of Yorkton. The city workers again, getting, you know, getting in as deep as they needed to get to clear drainage ditches and

drainage grates to make sure the water was flowing and to keep all that work going.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the RCMP and the work that they did to minimize traffic. We saw a lot of damage that actually happened to homes from the wakes of vehicles. And again it sounds strange but I know my own experience in front of my house, we had the wake, the water was lapping at the foundation of the house and when you'd have a vehicle drive by, the force of that water hitting the basement windows quite often would break the windows and then increase the flood damage to those homes. The RCMP were very diligent in getting out and kind of minimizing, I guess, the impact of that by getting some of the people that were causing that damage and maybe just out having fun in the deep water, getting them to realize the damage they were doing and again bringing that into check.

The firefighters in Yorkton, Mr. Speaker . . . And again the firefighters, I know the emergency workers all around the province, doing a great job. I'm going to start from the top down. The firefighters themselves did a great job, but again the leadership I saw from the firefighters, from the fire chief himself, Mr. Dean Clark, was second to none.

In a meeting like that where you have coordinated efforts organizing, the Salvation Army to some of the community-based organizations in the city, to police, to the Crown corporations — SaskPower, SaskTel, SaskEnergy — all those different entities, city employees, even the MLA, keeping him corralled in some of those meetings, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Chief Clark, being very respectful, but keeping the meetings on track to a minimal time that was needed to be had for effective information.

People that wanted to visit and talk about their personal stories at any point were welcome to do that after the effective and initial part of the meeting. Once the plan was done for the day, to go out and exercise those plans and coordinate those efforts, then everybody was welcome to go out or to lay back and to talk about some of the concerns that might be coming.

Working, I know, in conjunction with myself, ideas that actually came from the Premier when he was visiting at one point, going to the Kinsmen Arena which was used as a central point for people to come in to file their claims, we had again disaster assistance people from Corrections and Public Safety there, local community people helping go through some of these claims to get the information in as quickly as possible. And on one visit the Premier had come, and I believe, yes, the minister was there as well.

And it came to light that some of these people were being displaced in areas other than hotels. The hotels were full because of the exhibition and a lot of these rooms were spoken for, and we had to find room for these people. And some of these people were displaced — families in some of the school gyms.

And again in conversation with some of the workers, once this came to light, the conversation among a few of us said, you know, this just isn't quite right. And it brought to my mind a very important group in Yorkton, the Society for the

Involvement of Good Neighbours, who actually runs their operations out of an old hotel. And in that hotel through some of the programs they run, they had rooms available. So by bringing those people out of those schools, not able to get into hotel rooms, bringing them into that type of an environment was very effective. They had food services there that they could get fed. There was all kinds of support services in the building because it is an umbrella agency for community-based organizations.

We saw a huge amount of support in the community, a lot of funding going to that organization to help support that, as well all the hard work that was done by those people to keep them under one roof — the most part under one roof — giving them food services, supportive services whether it'd it be counselling, mental health, victim services that they might want to access. Those services, they're all there and delivered very effectively in that manner, as well as the caring, the caring nature in which it was carried out.

Also in that building, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a church called the Victory Church, and they are very, very adept in operating the kitchen most hours that it needed to be operated, as well as giving some spiritual support for those that were going through a tough, tough and trying time.

So when we're talking about those people that have to be recognized as in the motion, "That this Assembly acknowledge the proactive efforts of the Public Safety employees who, through their efforts, are ensuring our government will be better prepared to handle flooding issues in the province this spring," we can't forget those. We talk about public safety employees, but I would argue public safety employees are those employees, whether they're support workers through the umbrella organizations like Society for Involvement of Good Neighbours and other community-based organizations, whether they're city employees working for municipalities, whether we're looking at employees and volunteers from any church organization that were out there.

I know the Mennonite groups out of Manitoba came. We had the Salvation Army in full force. We had the Red Cross in full force. I would argue these are all public safety employees that, although not employed directly by government, are employed in one way, shape, or form within the province to help out in a situation. And for them to come to our province from many areas around the country and other provinces to help out in areas like Maple Creek and Yorkton and Hudson Bay and Saskatoon and Regina was very appreciated. And again this motion in my mind also reflects on the hard work done by them.

And again moving up the ladder through people that would be actually considered public employees or Public Safety employees or Corrections people, whether they're policing or any of the other entities that came out and helped, EMS, we also have the fire and protective services that really helped out a lot. We have even leadership within the cities. But again as this motion states, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we really have to keep in mind those very important people that did so much with so little, through Corrections and Public Safety and the PDAP program and the Sask Watershed Authority as well.

That's a lot of talking, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm getting kind of dry.

So again, I know my time is coming to a close. I've got less than 40 seconds before we wrap up here for today, but again, I'm sure the members opposite would support this. But I know, on this side of the House, we are very appreciative of all those public people, those . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — According to rule 15(5), I would ask the member to move his motion before time of adjournment.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So that I would move:

That this Assembly acknowledge the proactive efforts of the Public Safety employees who, through their efforts, are ensuring our government will be better prepared to handle flooding issues in the province this spring.

I so move.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Yorkton has moved a motion:

That this Assembly acknowledge the proactive efforts of the Public Safety employees who, through their efforts, are ensuring our government will be better prepared to handle flooding issues in the province this spring.

The time of adjournment having been reached, this House now stands adjourned until 1:30 Monday afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 13:00.]

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