



THIRD SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

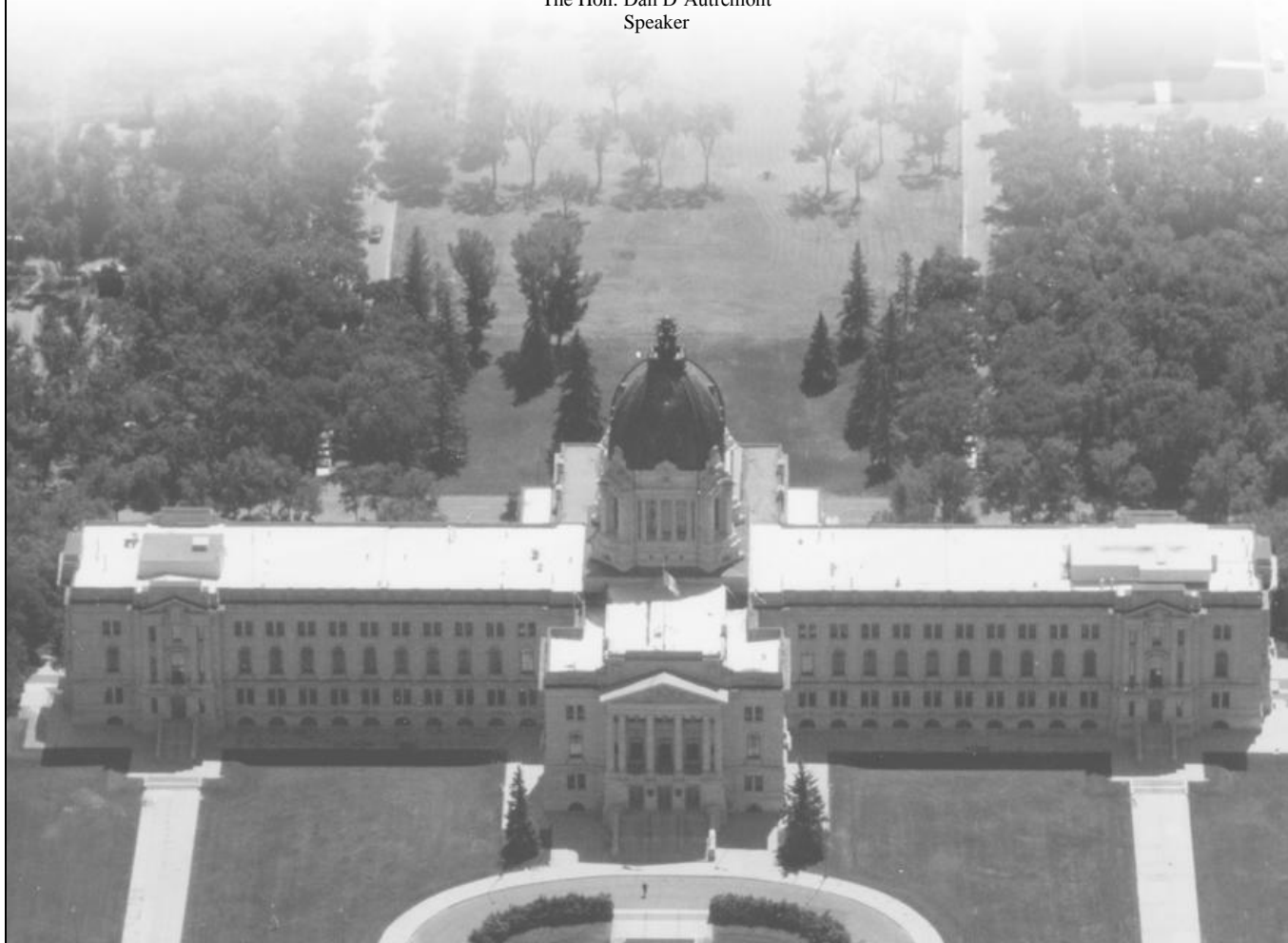
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of
The Hon. Dan D'Autremont
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Speaker — Hon. Dan D'Autremont
 Premier — Hon. Brad Wall
 Leader of the Opposition — Cam Broten

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Boyd, Hon. Bill	SP	Kindersley
Bradshaw, Fred	SP	Carrot River Valley
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
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Campeau, Jennifer	SP	Saskatoon Fairview
Chartier, Danielle	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
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Moe, Scott	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
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Stewart, Hon. Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
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Toth, Don	SP	Moosomin
Vermette, Doyle	NDP	Cumberland
Wall, Hon. Brad	SP	Swift Current
Weekes, Hon. Randy	SP	Biggar
Wilson, Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Wotherspoon, Trent	NDP	Regina Rosemont
Wyant, Hon. Gordon	SP	Saskatoon Northwest

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Two introductions today of guests that we have in your gallery. First, Mr. Speaker, it's a real pleasure to be able to welcome one of Canada's premiers to the Legislative Assembly today. Bob McLeod is the Premier of the Northwest Territories.

And, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you this: Premier McLeod is a clarion voice for the importance of sustainable development in Canada, especially around the energy piece. He's led, frankly, the country here and also been a force for good in the United States in terms of the whole pipeline discussion and debate we've had in terms of his support for things like Keystone. But, Mr. Speaker, he's always focused on the sustainability of energy development and also the involvement and the engagement of Canada's First Nations and Aboriginal peoples in those economic activities.

And he's become a good friend, Mr. Speaker. He was here for the Grey Cup. Came, I think in on Friday and leaves later today. And I just want to welcome him here to Saskatchewan, thank him for coming to Grey Cup but also to thank him for his leadership at the table of Canada's premiers.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, very quickly, we had other, many, many guests of course this weekend. We can't introduce them all. But in your gallery as well, joining us from Ontario but formerly of the city of Regina are the Evers: father, John and daughter, Stephanie. Stephanie is associate producer of *Power Play*, the political . . . The show we political nerds might watch in the afternoon on CTV Newsnet. And later today, we'll see Don Martin in a Rider jersey because he made the mistake I think of betting with Stephanie about the outcome of the game.

They lived here from '77 to '88. She told me when we were recently in Ottawa and doing an appearance on or guesting on the show, and she said she'd be coming with her dad if they made it to the Grey Cup. They are huge Rider fans and, Mr. Speaker, she was able to be here with her father for a quick tour. And I just want to welcome her and introduce these guests to this Legislative Assembly as well today.

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

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the official opposition I'd like to join with the Premier in welcoming Premier McLeod to the Assembly. I'm sure he had a great time over the last few days here in our capital city, but I also hope that he's had some good meetings and interactions over the course of the time as well. Of course we do share a lot of common interests and concerns between Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories. So thank you so much for being here today, and I'd also like to welcome you to the Assembly.

And, Mr. Speaker, also to welcome Stephanie and the Evers family to the Assembly. I'm sure you've had a wonderful trip and have a safe return. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much. I hope everybody enjoyed their environment, Mr. Speaker, over the last couple of days. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of the legislature, I want to introduce a guest that's in your gallery today, a good friend of mine, Orlanda Drebit. Orlanda if you want to stand and give us a wave.

Orlanda is a former resident of Saskatchewan. Her career took her to Charlottetown, PEI [Prince Edward Island] where she works for Veterans Affairs Canada. She's a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan. I know she's a political, I don't know if I'd say nerd like the Premier said earlier, but yes, sure she is. The Premier and Orlanda and I were involved in youth politics quite some time ago.

But it's a pleasure to have her back in her home province. I understand she attended the Grey Cup. I see her wearing the Tourism Saskatchewan scarf. I know that that will be a popular item when she goes back to Prince Edward Island. So, Orlanda, thank you for coming to the legislature today, and I ask all members to help me welcome her here today.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition in support of anti-bullying. And we know that bullying causes serious harm, and the consequences of bullying include depression, self-harm, addictions, and suicide. And we know that bullying can occur within schools but also through social media, cellphones, or through the Internet, also known as cyberbullying. 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:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly call on the government to take immediate and meaningful action to protect Saskatchewan's children from bullying because the lives of young people are at stake and this government must do more to protect our youth.

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

I do so present. Thank you.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present petitions on behalf of very concerned residents in southern Saskatchewan as it relates to the unacceptable closure of the Pasqua Hospital's emergency room. The petition reads as follows:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: to cause the provincial government to ensure our capital city has two 24-hour emergency rooms.

And your petitioners humbly pray.

And these petitions are signed by concerned residents from Regina, Strasbourg, Wolseley, and Dilke. I so submit.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition Whip.

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition. Many northern residents benefited from the rental purchase option program also known as RPO. These families are very proud homeowners in their communities.

And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly cause the Sask Party government to restore the RPO rent-to-own option for responsible renters in northern Saskatchewan, allowing them the dignity of owning their own homes and building community in our province's beautiful North.

It is signed by many northern residents. I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition in support of replacing the gym at Sacred Heart Community School. The petitioners point out that the gym at Sacred Heart Community School in north central Regina is currently closed, having been closed for safety reasons last spring. The petitioners are aware that there is a temporary solution been provided with refurbishing the old sanctuary at the old Sacred Heart Church, but they're calling for a permanent solution, Mr. Speaker.

They're pointing out that any school needs a gym as a place for the school and the community to gather together to engage in cultural and educational activities and to promote physical activity, which we know is good for the mind, body, and spirit of all children. They point out that Sacred Heart Community School is the largest school in North Central Regina with 450-plus students, 75 per cent of whom are First Nations and Métis. They point out that enrolment has increased by 100-plus students over the past four years and that attendance and learning outcomes are steadily improving. And they point out that, as a matter of basic fairness and common sense, Sacred Heart Community School needs a gym. In the prayer that reads as follows:

The petitioners respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: to cause this government to immediately replace the gymnasium of Sacred Heart Community School.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by citizens from Regina, Saskatoon, and Estevan. I so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Deputy Government House Leader.

Riders Bring Home the Grey Cup

Mr. Makowsky: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a historic night in Saskatchewan last night. Our beloved green and white brought home the Grey Cup, brought it home by crushing the Hamilton Tiger-Cats 45 to 23. The sellout crowd of 44,710 would have qualified as the third-largest city in Saskatchewan, I think collectively the loudest last night.

Mr. Speaker, we know this was Grey Cup 101. And it was fitting as the Riders gave the Ticats a few lessons in football 101, I think. Kory Sheets earned MVP [most valuable player] honours after running 20 times for a Grey Cup record 197 yards and two touchdowns. Regina's Chris Getzlaf, playing at home, was the top Canadian after having three receptions for 78 yards. I think it's important to know, Mr. Speaker, there were 10 Saskatchewan players on the roster yesterday, and they'll have their names engraved on the Grey Cup trophy, Mr. Speaker.

A key to the team's success was its play on second down, converting 9 of 14 opportunities, compared to just 2 of 11 for Hamilton. The Riders 31 to 6 lead at halftime was the second largest in Grey Cup history, again underscoring their dominant performance.

Players and coaches worked hard obviously for last night's win, and they should be proud of how they've represented our province. They will join the other championship teams from '66, '89, '07, in the long and proud history of the Roughriders football.

The devoted fans who filled Mosaic Stadium and the Green Mile afterwards also certainly deserve this win.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate all the players, coaches, management, and the staff of the Roughriders but of course, most of all, the loyal fans of the Roughrider nation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, a little history was made yesterday in our province on Taylor Field at Mosaic Stadium with a huge home turf Grey Cup victory by our team, the Saskatchewan Roughriders. It was a dominant 45-23 win over the Hamilton Ticats before a sea of green of more than 44,000 fans. Names like Durant, Chamblin, Sheets, Dressler, Getzlaf, and Heenan and many more will go down in history as legends and heroes in Rider nation. This was a game for the ages as the elated and proud Rider nation was able to win the first Grey Cup on home soil.

Kory Sheets was named MVP as he was unstoppable on the ground and broke the Grey Cup rushing yardage record. Regina's own Chris Getzlaf was the game's top Canadian, and Saskatchewan's defence was a powerful force. In fact in the first half, the Riders held Hamilton to just three yards rushing and five first downs.

I was pleased to attend the game along with the Leader of the Opposition and many other members of our caucus. It's fair to say that the atmosphere was electric, and there was no question that the fans played their part. And so did the weather, which I know was embraced by the fans at the game and those that celebrated into the night as they marched the Green Mile.

I ask all in this Assembly to join with me in celebrating the Grey Cup in Rider nation and recognizing the coaches, players, directors, management, as well as the legions of volunteers and fans that made for a historic victory and an exceptional festival week. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Thanks to Grey Cup Organizing Committee

Mr. Steinley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's only one thing left to do after the events of the past week and weekend, and that's thank the 2013 Grey Cup organizing committee. While it was the job of the Riders to ensure the weekend ended perfectly, the committee started work long before last week. The event was over two years in the making and went off without a hitch, thanks to the countless hours donated by the over 2,400 volunteers and the whole organizing committee.

We are quite confident, Mr. Speaker, that last night will go down in Grey Cup history as a huge success. The whole organizing team did a fantastic job of showcasing Regina's legendary hospitality. Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to be able to take part in Grey Cup 101 and see first-hand all of the hard work done by each and every committee member. From the parade down to downtown festival, from the Atlantic Schooner house to Riderville, you saw smiling volunteers everywhere.

It was a huge challenge to follow up the 100th Grey Cup in Toronto, but the Celebration in Rider nation will be remembered for a long, long time. As always, Mr. Speaker, the volunteers across Saskatchewan answered the call and showcased our province to the country.

Grey Cup is a tradition that attracts fans from across the country for one amazing week every year, culminating in a world-class sporting event. Thanks to the organizing committee who worked hard and guaranteed our friends from across Canada saw the spirit of Saskatchewan on full display. I ask all members to join me in recognizing the entire Grey Cup 2013 organizing committee for working so hard to ensure this year's event was a huge success. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

Mr. McCall: — Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in recognizing the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. In December 1999 the United Nations General Assembly declared a symbolic day to raise public awareness of the reality that violence against women is still a global pandemic.

Up to 70 per cent of women experience violence in their lifetime that includes physical, sexual, economic, and psychological abuse. These forms of violence are interrelated and affect women of all ages across the globe. It's a horrifying picture, Mr. Speaker. Almost 50 per cent of the sexual assaults worldwide are committed against girls under 16; 603 million women live in countries where domestic violence isn't a crime. As many as one in four women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence during pregnancy. Eighty per cent of people trafficked across national borders are women, and 79 per cent of these are trafficked for sexual exploitation. And a full 7 out of 10 women worldwide experience physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lifetime. It's simply unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

This year the United Nations Unite campaign is identifying 16 days of activism against gender-based violence starting today through to Human Rights Day on December 10th. Mr. Speaker, women, their families, communities, and nations are impoverished as a result of this violence. I ask all members to join me in working to eradicate these unfortunate realities and the discrimination against women that perpetuates this vicious cycle.

[13:45]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Melfort.

Lawyer Honoured by Canadian Football League

Mr. Phillips: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to recognize prominent Melfort lawyer and a good friend, Bill Selnes. Bill is a dedicated member of the Melfort community. He is involved in many organizations, including the Rotary and the library board and several others. He has also written a column for the *Melfort Journal* for the last 35 years centred on football. His popular column brings great depth and insight into what we all know as Rider nation.

Yesterday morning, Bill was awarded an honour that no weekly community newspaper columnist has never ever had in the 101-year history of the CFL [Canadian Football League]. Bill was inducted into the Football Reporters of Canada wing of the CFL Hall of Fame prior to one of the greatest moments in Roughrider history, hosting and winning the 2013 Grey Cup. He was honoured for his . . . 101st Grey Cup in 2013.

He was honoured for his work covering the Riders over 35 years, but he was also honoured for his contributions in other ways, including helping the league draft their first media policy a few years ago.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join me in recognizing and congratulating Bill Selnes on this great achievement and for his long-time contributions to the Canadian Football League. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Headstart on a Home Program in Watrous

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in

the House today to talk about the opening of a new housing development in Watrous under our government's Headstart on a Home program, Manitou Lodge's new condominium project that will allow 24 individuals and families to have a home to call their own, some for the very first time.

Our government provided 2.6 million in financing assistance to the developer, Riverwood Development Corporation, to move this project forward. This partnership underlines our government's resolve to meet the current and future housing needs of Saskatchewan people and address the challenges of growth.

And there's a strong demand for this program. Headstart was expected to create 1,000 new housing units in five years. To the end of October, Headstart has financed 912 new housing units, either completed or under construction, in less than three years. We are proud of this success, but most importantly we are proud to help more individuals and families to achieve their dream of home ownership.

We believe that safe, quality housing is a key part of ensuring that Saskatchewan continues to be the best place to live, work, and raise a family, and Headstart is a means to help make that happen.

I also want to ask the members to help to congratulate Watrous for looking forward and moving this project, having the initiative to move this project forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Saskatchewan Manufacturing Week

Mr. Cox: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise today to recognize that November 25th to 29th is Saskatchewan Manufacturing Week. This week showcases the province's high-tech, globally competitive manufacturing sector that is contributing, along with agriculture and resource production, to making Saskatchewan's economy one of the growth leaders in Canada.

The sector is responsible for thousands of jobs, billions of dollars in exports, and establishing the made-in-Saskatchewan brand as a mark of quality around the world, and it will be profiled this week with events around the province. Some events include New Holland Saskatoon school tour, Dumur Industries school tour, and speakers in Saskatoon and Regina.

Manufacturing Week is a partnership among the Ministry of the Economy, the Regina Regional Opportunities Commission, the Saskatoon Industry Education Council, the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, and participating corporate sponsors.

Mr. Speaker, this sector employs more than 27,000 people in highly skilled jobs throughout Saskatchewan and generated approximately \$14.2 billion in shipments in 2012.

September was a record-breaking month for Saskatchewan's manufacturing sales numbers, with a 9 per cent increase over August of 2013, totalling \$1.3 billion. These were the strongest figures yet for 2013, Mr. Speaker, and put Saskatchewan in second place among all of the provinces.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in recognizing Manufacturing Week and this sector's vital contributions to our province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Emergency Medical Services in Regina

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Roughly 230,000 people live in Regina and the surrounding area. As of this Thursday, Mr. Speaker, between the hours of 7:30 in the evening and 8 in the morning, those 230,000 people will have just one place to go for emergency medical care. My question to the Premier: how on earth is this acceptable?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious situation that we're facing here in the capital city. Mr. Speaker, it's why we have made this particular issue a top priority of the government, not just currently but since we were first elected, Mr. Speaker, beginning with actually putting a priority on training more emergency room doctors here and providing more residency positions for those emergency room doctors, Mr. Speaker.

And I would also note that the member's not quite right in terms of his preamble. Certainly this is a serious situation and a rationalizing of an important service. However, Mr. Speaker, the Meadow Primary Health Care Centre, located in the inner city here in Regina right across from the Pasqua, is open seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., Mr. Speaker. And we want the residents of Regina to be aware of that fact as well.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, emergencies can certainly happen after 9 p.m., Mr. Speaker. Many of those individuals would be accustomed and used to going to the Pasqua ER [emergency room] for medical services. If someone, Mr. Speaker, shows symptoms of a heart attack or a stroke and they show up at the Pasqua ER in the evening after 7:30 p.m. to 8 in the morning, Mr. Speaker, an ambulance will be called. Just one 24-hour emergency room for about 230,000 people. And if you show up at the Pasqua ER after 7:30 in the evening, Mr. Speaker, with a life-threatening condition, they'll call an ambulance for you.

Despite a strong economy, Mr. Speaker, this is the state of health care in our capital city under this government. My question to the Premier: how is it that his government has allowed the crisis to reach this point?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again we need to correct the record. This is a very . . . This is a serious time in the city of Regina for those who are going to need emergency care, Mr. Speaker. And more on what's happening currently and what we're doing in the short, mid, and the long term on this issue. I've been working on it for a very long time.

Mr. Speaker, EMTs [emergency medical technician] will be at the facility. They will be there if anyone presents with any of the symptoms the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting to immediately take them to the care that they're going to need, Mr. Speaker. That's an important distinction, and what we . . . These are fair questions and ones the government should have to answer. But what we're not helped by is the NDP [New Democratic Party] torquing, frankly, the question. So let's make sure we're dealing with the facts, acknowledging that the facts are serious enough. There will be EMT people there in the emergency room to provide people care, Mr. Speaker.

In 2008-09 we approved four seats, four training seats for emergency residents, for emergency doc residents. That's a doubling of the number under the previous government. Then we went to six in '09-10. Then we went to eight in '10-11. Mr. Speaker, 2010 we'll begin training two Royal College residents, you know, the five-year program for emergency docs, Mr. Speaker. That's what we're doing with the dividends of growth, acknowledging more work needs to be done, Mr. Speaker.

There's also current activity under way in terms of sectional meetings with the doctors in question, Mr. Speaker. And we will continue to make this situation, not just for today but for the long term, a top priority of the Government of Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, if someone shows up at the Pasqua ER with symptoms of a heart attack, yes, they might need an EMT, Mr. Speaker. They also need an ER doc. They also need a fully operating emergency room, Mr. Speaker. They don't need an ambulance to ride over to the Regina General Hospital.

Just a few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, we heard that front-line nurses are afraid for patient safety. Tracy Zambory, the president of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, says that the pressure in our major hospitals is already immense. And she had this to say: "What nurses are telling us about the pressure is that they are very fearful for patient safety. They are very fearful that there is going to be a tragic event happening."

So now with this decision, Mr. Speaker, the pressure is going to be even greater at the General Hospital. My question to the Premier: can he guarantee that the General Hospital ER can cope with the situation, and can the Premier guarantee that patient safety will not be compromised?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we know the shortage of emergency doctors is a national problem that we're facing. It's a North American problem as well. Mr. Speaker, that's why we have focused on training more emergency docs here through the residency positions that I've already highlighted. It's also why we have a Physician Recruitment Agency in place that is working on issues like retention so that now three out of four of those doctors being trained in residency programs are choosing to stay here, which is a vast improvement over where we were at.

Mr. Speaker, the health region has a plan for this particular time we're facing, this serious time we're facing. That plan includes to provide the best possible care, Mr. Speaker, for people who are presenting with an emergency, Mr. Speaker.

I would also point this out. We do need to make this a top priority, not just in terms of action by the health region and by the government, but certainly a priority for debate. But the context is this, Mr. Speaker. The context is a health care system in our capital city, in the city of Regina, that has never fully recovered to its full potential after members opposite closed the Plains hospital, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, talking about medical training, it's under this government, Mr. Speaker, that we see the College of Medicine put on probation, Mr. Speaker. We talk about, Mr. Speaker . . . All we used to hear from this government, Mr. Speaker, was talk about being ready for growth. But once again, Mr. Speaker, we see this government being ready for excuses, Mr. Speaker.

We know that the closure of the Pasqua ER will not only affect the roughly 230,000 people that live in Regina and area, but we also know, Mr. Speaker, that this will have a significant effect on patients throughout southern Saskatchewan. The health region has said that it will refine the process for transfers to Regina hospitals, but we don't know what that means. My question to the Premier: how will the closure of the Pasqua ER affect rural patients, especially those throughout southern Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, every time I get up after that member takes to his feet, you have to fact check. The very first occasion for the College of Medicine to go on probation was when members opposite were the government of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. The very first time that rural patients in southern Saskatchewan faced a huge challenge because of a decision taken in terms of Regina health care is when members opposite closed the Plains hospital in this city, Mr. Speaker.

There are plans in place to deal with this emergency situation, as there should be. Not only that, Mr. Speaker, but the health region and the government are making a priority of the issue so that it can be resolved as quickly as possible. There are sectional meetings happening, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the doctors, in terms of the process under way with the contract.

And in the meantime, provisions have been made in terms of those who will present at Pasqua in terms of EMTs on site. We also have the medical clinic there operating seven days a week from 9 to 9 p.m. with emergency capacity. Mr. Speaker, we do take this issue very, very seriously, and we're continuing to make it a top priority for the Government of Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, once upon a time this Premier talked about being ready for growth. Now, Mr. Speaker, this Premier talks about being ready for excuses, Mr. Speaker.

It doesn't make sense. Our economy is strong, Mr. Speaker. Regina continues to grow. Yet here in our capital city, Mr. Speaker, just one 24-hour emergency room available for Regina patients. And that's in the immediate area, Mr. Speaker. That's not taking into consideration rural patients throughout southern Saskatchewan that are transferred to the city.

The editorial in the *Leader-Post*, Mr. Speaker, echoed what many people are thinking, and it said this, "All in all, this is a very unsatisfactory, not to say worrisome, state of affairs in a fast growing city like ours." To the Premier: when the economy is strong, when government revenues are up significantly, when the city of Regina continues to grow, why should our capital city have only one 24-hour emergency room?

[14:00]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition asked about southern Saskatchewan health care in his previous question. I have a quote here from the CEO [chief executive officer] of the Sun Country Health Region, headquartered of course in Weyburn. She says:

It likely won't have any change in our practices. We do already have an interfacility process that's in place between Regina Qu'Appelle and Sun Country. Basically, the connections are all made by telephone first — and then the specialist would direct us to where the patient needs to be sent.

She added Sun Country patients needing to go to a Regina ER can be sent to the Regina General, and the direct admissions are continuing right into the Pasqua. Mr. Speaker, this would be similar for other health care regions in the South.

And to the member's current question, let me just say this. What have we been doing with the dividends of growth in this province, unprecedented growth? Well we've doubled the number of residency positions that we had under the NDP. Under the NDP, we were training two emergency doc residencies per year, funding two positions — two. I wonder how we got into this situation, Mr. Speaker. We doubled it in '08, Mr. Speaker. We doubled it again the next year. We've doubled it again the next year. We've also added now the five-year program, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to that, there are 70 per cent more doctors practising than there were under the NDP, 1,000 more nurses, \$70 million almost each and every year for the surgical wait times initiative to improve health care in the province. That's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker, with the dividends of growth. That's how we're improving health care, Mr. Speaker, and we will deal with the current situation with respect to emergency docs as well.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, not only is the Premier, Mr. Speaker, involved now simply blaming as opposed to taking responsibility. But earlier on, Mr. Speaker, he said about what

services would be available at the Pasqua after hours. A quote from the *Leader-Post* from November 22nd, 2013 on A1:

No doctors or other health-care professionals will be at the Pasqua's emergency department between 7:30 p.m. and 8 a.m. A person other than a health-care professional will direct patients who show up at the Pasqua's ER during the night to the General's emergency room.

"If there is any difficulty in terms of that individual, a paramedic will be summoned," McCutcheon said.

Seriously ill patients who arrive at the Pasqua when the emergency room is closed will be transported to the General Hospital by EMS at no cost to the patient.

My question to the Premier: how is it acceptable if someone shows up at the Pasqua ER after hours with a life-threatening condition, Mr. Speaker, that they're simply transferred over to the Regina General?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Health minister's just confirmed for me that Dr. McCutcheon has confirmed that there will be paramedic coverage at the Pasqua after the hour. There will be EMTs on site.

So let's have this debate. The questions are absolutely fair and on point, given what's going on in the province. To ask them is fair. But let's stay on point, Mr. Speaker, so people tuning in to the debate, the discussion, will have the facts and will know the truth and will know exactly what they can expect when they go to the emergency room, Mr. Speaker. They can do that there at Pasqua, Mr. Speaker, and they can also receive until 9 o'clock every night emergency medical condition as well at the Meadow Primary Care Centre and of course at the Regina General.

And in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, the questions about what's happening in southern Saskatchewan in terms of emergent care, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there is a government in recent history that has made a bigger priority out of emergency care for rural Saskatchewan, for southern Saskatchewan, and . . .

[Interjections]

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Well, and the impact . . . And there is a great impact on Regina. It was his, Mr. Speaker, it was their question about the connection between Regina and rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we've seen investments in rural health care. We see now in the province STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society] getting to people in a timely way when they need it, Mr. Speaker. Emergency care is important there. It's absolutely important in the capital city, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we're making it the priority that it is for the government.

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

Health Care Conditions

Ms. Chartier: — Mr. Speaker, blocked emergency rooms are a symptom that the entire health care system is not working properly. The Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians says, “. . . the root cause of overcrowding in most regions is the lack of availability of acute care beds on hospital wards and in Intensive Care Units.”

And Drew McDonald knows this all too well. Drew recently had a brain biopsy at Royal University Hospital and he had a horrible experience, in part because of overcrowding. Drew says, “The hospital is over capacity. If it was a restaurant or a bar, the fire marshal would be closing it down due to fire safety.”

To the Health minister: when will this government actually address the overcrowding crisis that is plaguing our hospitals?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this government has worked extremely hard to dig our way out of a health care deficit left by the previous government, Mr. Speaker.

In six years of government, Mr. Speaker, we have added \$1 billion to the health regions budget. Mr. Speaker, that has allowed the health regions to do a number of things, including, Mr. Speaker, in the city of Regina, for example, the number of acute care beds in the city of Regina is up 19 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, from where we came from though, six years ago when the members opposite were the government of the day, the number of acute care beds dropped in this province by 15 per cent, Mr. Speaker. So we've had to fill out, we've had to fill for that, backfill those reduced number of beds, 15 per cent reduction, and increase to take the place of population growth, Mr. Speaker. So there is more work to be done, but we have increased the number of acute care beds in our major cities.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Mr. Speaker, Drew McDonald requested a private room because he was having brain surgery and he has seizures. Noise and lights are often unbearable to him. But despite desperately needing it, Drew never got a private room. Instead he was put in a semi-private room which had a third bed crammed into it because of the overcrowding crisis. In order to properly rest, Drew had to get himself to the library in the Academic Health Sciences Building next to the Royal University Hospital.

To the minister: does he think it's acceptable that brain surgery patients have to take refuge in the library in another building in order to properly rest?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, within our acute care facilities, I know our health regions and our health support workers, Mr. Speaker, do what

they can to accommodate all of our patients, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, one of the challenges that we know that we're facing within Saskatchewan are bed blockers, those people that are taking up beds, Mr. Speaker, waiting for either long-term care placement or being discharged back home, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, over the last two years the number of individuals who are tying up beds is down 21 per cent in the Saskatoon Health Region, within Saskatoon hospitals. Mr. Speaker, that has been as a result, in a large part, Mr. Speaker, of the tremendous financial support from this government to our health regions, Mr. Speaker, where for instance Saskatoon Health Region has seen a 50 per cent increase in their budget in just six years, Mr. Speaker, that has allowed them to open additional beds, to move individuals to other beds, to pay for, Mr. Speaker, additional long-term care beds, and to hire the appropriate level of staff, Mr. Speaker. More work to be done, but we've come a long way from the time of the NDP.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Mr. Speaker, Drew says:

I am still waiting for any info on my test results and the future of my life. Yet I have already received a bill for a semi-private room that I was in for half the time in RUH, and for the most part had three beds in it, with the poor third guy with the head of his bed 4 feet or less across from the bathroom door in this room.

So the government was quick to send Drew a bill for a semi-private room, even though that room had an extra bed crammed into it. He had to go to the library to be able to properly rest, and he is still waiting for his test results. To the Health minister: when will this government ensure that the rest of this health care system is as efficient as the billing department is?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't know the specifics of this case, but my office would be happy to look into this matter, Mr. Speaker, work with the quality of care coordinator from Saskatoon Health Region and determine what we may be able to do to help alleviate the situation, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, our health regions are using additional dollars, record levels of funding from the Government of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, to make improvements, knowing that we have more work to be done, Mr. Speaker.

But for instance in our emergency rooms in Saskatoon, a 58 per cent reduction in ER wait times for cardiac patients presenting at RUH [Royal University Hospital], a 50 per cent reduction in wait time at RUH for patients with mental health and/or addictions, Mr. Speaker, and a 90 per cent reduction in the amount of time that ambulance drivers spend waiting for the handover to ER personnel, Mr. Speaker.

I know these are some examples, just a few examples of some

of the work that we're doing to make the system more efficient, Mr. Speaker, and to improve the experience of patients. But I would be pleased to look into the specific case of the member.

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

Public-Private Partnerships and Provision of Schools

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, strangely the Highways minister keeps pointing to Alberta as some sort of great example of how P3 schools work. Yet we know that every single opposition party in Alberta opposes the Alberta government's P3 scheme. That's every single opposition party — Democrats, Liberals, even the Wildrose party.

One of the big problems with the Alberta P3 school scheme is that the province has received just one bidder, and yet they're forging ahead. To the Education minister: with so much opposition to the Alberta P3 school scheme, why does his government keep holding it up as some sort of shining example?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways and Infrastructure.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've reviewed this file a number of times in previous questions, Mr. Speaker. The facts haven't changed.

Alberta started with one bundle. They saw great savings. Because of that, they went to a bundle no. 2. They went to a bundle no. 3. They're on their fourth bundle, Mr. Speaker. We're aware that only one bidder bid on the fourth bundle, Mr. Speaker, but they have saved millions of dollars, Mr. Speaker. Not only have they saved millions of dollars but they've got the infrastructure in place for a growing province in Alberta.

The members opposite would never understand that, Mr. Speaker, because under their watch, all they saw was decline in population of the province's population and of the education population, Mr. Speaker. We have challenges, Mr. Speaker. We've got to get these schools built because they're needed now, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we're moving ahead with P3s.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, it's not just the three opposition parties, school board members, and community groups that oppose the Alberta government's P3 school scheme. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation opposes the scheme also. Here's what Derek Fildebrandt of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation says:

These children are going to be paying for these schools long after they've graduated and are in the workforce.

We should not be putting this on the credit card. The province has the revenue capacity to build schools. They just don't have the willpower to prioritize building them.

To the Education minister: how can he stand by a short-sighted scheme that so many are opposed to and with so many

problems?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways and Infrastructure.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I always find it interesting what comes from the other side. Probably not a lot of times that the opposition has been quoting the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Mr. Speaker. I certainly think they're much more aligned with CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees], and we know that's where this line of questioning keeps coming from.

We saw the debates here in Regina with the P3 waste water treatment plant. It was very evident that the people of Regina wanted to move forward with the infrastructure right now, Mr. Speaker, as do the people of the province want to see us move forward with education infrastructure, whether it's long-term care infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, whether it's the provincial hospital in North Battleford, Mr. Speaker. Those are also possible P3s, as well as the east Regina bypass. It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that in all these questions, they haven't asked a word about those P3s, Mr. Speaker.

They're worried about schools and education. So are we. That's why we're building them.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — You know, the minister arrogantly brushes off concerns and does so in a way that really rejects what we're hearing from a broad stakeholder group. Who's concerned about P3 schools in Alberta and across Canada? He suggests one group that has some concern. How about the school boards? How about the community members? How about the construction industry that I know have spoken with that member, and certainly the Canadian Taxpayers Federation as well? And we know parents, students, and teachers have concerns as well. When will that minister stop arrogantly brushing off the real concerns of Saskatchewan and Canadian residents?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways and Infrastructure.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I have met with the Saskatchewan Construction Association. I have met with a number of different private companies, Mr. Speaker, and they want to make sure they get a piece of the pie. And, Mr. Speaker, they will, Mr. Speaker, because the pie is getting bigger every day in this province, unlike the NDP, Mr. Speaker, when it got smaller and smaller and smaller. In fact what many of them do say, Mr. Speaker, is we survived through the dark days of the NDP, Mr. Speaker. We like the way it's going now. We want to see you continue to build.

Mr. Speaker, I heard those concerns. We take those into consideration as we move forward. But I can tell the people, Mr. Speaker, whether it's in the construction business or anywhere else, that if it was in same old NDP, those schools would not be built. In fact we'd be closing schools under the NDP.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, more nonsense from the Highways minister on an area that people deserve answers from the Education minister.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation is concerned that the Alberta government is putting schools on the credit card, and that's exactly what that government is doing. Just like in Alberta, students here will be paying for these schools long after they've graduated and are in the workforce.

We know Alberta school board members and community groups are opposed, and you would think it would give this government just a bit of pause that even the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is offside with the P3 school schemes. Yet it just keeps plowing ahead. So my question to the Education minister: if that government is so confident in its P3 schools scheme, then why won't they support the NDP bill, put some daylight on their plan, and provide Saskatchewan people with the upfront, independent accountability and transparency that they deserve?

[14:15]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways and Infrastructure.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, there is a process for moving forward with P3s. That's what our government is doing, whether it's value-for-money qualifications, Mr. Speaker, whether it's a fairness officer. All these lessons have been learned by other provinces that entered into P3s many years ago. Since 2004 they have been very, very effective across the country. We see both municipal and we see provincial governments moving forward, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it would only be the Opposition Leader that would call for a new school 54 times — he read petitions, Mr. Speaker, 54 times — and we're building it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — And now we will have . . . Order. We will now have the opportunities for debate, for members to stand up rather than just hollering from their chairs. Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — To request leave, Mr. Speaker, to introduce guests.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seated in the east gallery, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you someone that entered in just before the debate started here today, and certainly a good friend of mine and constituent, and that would be Dave Coleman, former teacher, retired teacher, and someone that's highly involved in the sporting community

of this province as well, and all sorts of Masters competition. He's a pretty good hockey player to this day, and it's a pleasure to have him join the Assembly here today. Certainly him and his wife Jean are important within our community. Their daughter Glenda is a successful young person who I always enjoy connecting with.

And I also understand he's joined by someone I believe from Charlottetown here today who is here to take in the Grey Cup here yesterday. I believe he's a retired teacher, and it's a pleasure to welcome him to his Assembly as well. So I ask all members of this Assembly to join with me in welcoming Dave Coleman and our guest to the Saskatchewan Assembly. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 116 — *The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2013 (No. 2)*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Government Relations.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of Bill No. 116, the municipalities amendment Act, 2013. This Act provides a legislative framework through which Saskatchewan's towns, villages, resort villages, and rural municipalities exercise their powers and provide services to the residents of their respective communities.

Communities and local governments are an important part of Saskatchewan's plan for growth and are on the front lines of the growth Saskatchewan is experiencing, growth that has made Saskatchewan the second fastest growing province in Canada and that has seen our province's population surpass the 1.1 million mark for the first time ever. And it is in this context that these amendments to *The Municipalities Act* are being proposed.

The purpose of those amendments in this bill is to strengthen the legislation of five key areas. First, they will provide better criteria on which to determine whether unincorporated communities and areas have sufficient capacity for local governance and municipal status. Second, they will provide objective criteria for action when municipalities are no longer able to function and meet their statutory requirements as local governments. Third, they will provide more flexibility and choice for interested urban and rural municipalities to voluntarily restructure to form a new type of municipality known as a municipal district. Fourth, they will provide a new means for citizens with concerns about the financial or operational management of their municipality to have these concerns addressed locally. And fifth, they will enhance property owners' and the minister's ability to ensure municipal compliance with legislation and regulations and constrain the potential misuse of local property tax tools and tax abatements.

In addition, the proposed amendments include changes to definitions and other provisions to ensure consistency with

recent changes made to regulations in other statutes.

I will expand briefly on the amendments in each of these areas. First the amendments related to incorporation criteria propose two things. One, they will introduce criteria for the establishment of an unincorporated community as an organized hamlet. Currently there is no criteria for the Minister of Government Relations to base his or her decision on whether a community has sufficient capacity to meet the legislative requirements of an organized hamlet.

In some cases, an organized hamlet can be essentially a training ground for an unincorporated community to demonstrate it can meet legislative requirements prior to becoming a village or resort village. This includes holding meetings, preparing annual financial statements and budgets, and reporting on its activities to the public and the municipality in which it's situated. Having a minimum population will be one criteria and is generally accepted as one measure of whether an unincorporated community can fulfill the legislative requirements of a municipal government. Others include minimum dwellings or business premises and minimum taxable assessment to ensure the available tax base is sufficient to support service delivery. The specific criteria will be set out in regulation after further consultation with the municipal sector.

The second thing this group of amendments will do is provide for the criteria to incorporate new villages and resort villages to be set in regulation. This is to ensure sufficient capacity for governance and for meeting the challenges and opportunities associated with growth. The current criteria for villages and resort village incorporation: 100 persons, 50 separate dwelling or business premises, and a minimum taxable assessment of 15 million. It's been in place for a long time without change, at least since 1930.

Increasingly my ministry finds smaller communities, particularly those under 300 population, struggle to operate independently and generate sufficient own source revenue to deliver services, fund infrastructure, and retain qualified administration. They have difficulty meeting financial, reporting, and other statutory requirements. Updating this criteria to better reflect the capacity and growth occurring in our smaller urban communities throughout the province is long overdue.

And as with the proposed organized hamlet criteria I just mentioned, the increased criteria for villages and resort villages will be set out in regulation after further consultation with the municipal sector. I want to point out here that the changes to incorporation criteria will not affect existing organized hamlets or existing villages and resort villages. They will apply to new municipal entities going forward to help ensure their future success as local governments in providing the services, facilities, infrastructure, and administration desired by their residents and ratepayers.

The next area of amendments is also intended to ensure our province's municipalities have sufficient capacity for governance. We recognize that growth does not occur evenly and that some communities struggle with declining population and meeting their legislative obligations. These amendments propose to require a council to act and potentially dissolve its

municipality if it's non-compliant with specified statutory requirements for two or more consecutive years and if it no longer meets a minimum population for two consecutive censuses.

I want to be clear that both conditions must be in place before that provision comes into effect. The municipality must be in non-compliance and be below the minimum population that will be set out in regulation after more consultation with the municipal sector. Municipalities under the minimum population that demonstrate compliance with legislative responsibilities and requirements would not be affected. Rural municipalities that demonstrate compliance with legislative responsibilities and requirements would also not be affected. Both are clearly still functioning as local governments and can continue to meet their residents' needs.

The specific statutory requirements, minimum population, and applicable census periods would be set in regulations after further consultation with the municipal sector. These amendments are intended to place the onus on councils as the leaders of their communities to initiate and lead change processes if their local governments cannot meet legislated requirements.

My ministry currently notifies these municipalities and their elected and appointed officials of compliance and capacity issues and identifies potential solutions to these issues. It will continue to do so. The amendments will strengthen these processes. Every opportunity will be given to councils to become compliant with their statutory requirements or prepare for and lead change for their communities. If a council doesn't act, the amendments will provide clear authority for the minister to initiate a dissolution if compliance issues are not addressed within a specified period of time.

I want to note here that the vast majority of municipalities do comply with their legislative requirements. But when that isn't the case, councils need to act to address the issue, or if the municipality is no longer able to meet its statutory obligations, councils are in the best position to make decisions in the interests of their community and its residents.

I acknowledge these may be difficult decisions, but the ministry will be more than willing to work with municipalities in these situations to identify and help implement solutions. These solutions may include partnering with other municipalities, using existing mechanisms and legislation. This may achieve economies of scale and administration and the delivery of services through joint administration and shared-services agreements, additional service areas, or voluntary restructuring.

The third area of proposed amendments may very well represent another solution. They will provide for urban and rural municipalities to voluntarily agree to join to form a new type of municipality called the municipal district, recognizing it is both urban and rural in nature. These provisions will better enable councils to agree on how representation, elections, administration, and services will be undertaken in the new municipality, drawing on both urban and rural municipal approaches.

The amendments will ensure that in instances where legislation

may apply differently to the areas of the former municipalities, such as the application of *The Municipal Hail Insurance Act*, the legislation will continue to apply in the same manner in the same areas as it did before. The amendments proposed do not give municipal districts any new or additional powers than any other type of municipality under *The Municipalities Act*. Municipal districts will have the same bylaw-making and corporate powers, the same accountability requirements, and no new taxing powers or authority.

Nor are the proposed amendments about forced amalgamation. I want to be clear that a municipal district will only be established based upon the agreement of the municipalities involved and resolutions from each council. The municipal district amendments simply provide flexibility and choice for interested urban and rural municipalities to join together for the benefit of their residents. They respond to a request for legislative amendments to enable this type of entity from the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association.

The fourth area of amendments will provide citizens with the ability to petition their council to conduct and make public the results of a financial or management audit. This will provide a means for citizens to address their concerns locally. Currently the legislation provides for annual audits of a municipality's financial statements, the main objective being to confirm whether these are prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

My ministry and my office receives letters and other requests from citizens for provincial intervention, including a request for a financial or management audit and other investigations related to municipal administration in council or municipal operations. The proposed amendments will provide these citizens with the means to have their concerns addressed if they are widespread locally and shared by a sufficient number of other local residents. After consultation with the municipal sector, it has been agreed to set this efficiency at the number of voters equal to one-third of the municipality's population. This is equivalent to the average voter turnout in urban and rural municipalities in recent local elections. These amendments are in the interest of ensuring councils remain transparent and accountable to their residents and ratepayers.

The fifth area of proposed amendments and change is intended to ensure municipal compliance with legislation and regulations and to constrain the potential misuse of local property tax tools and tax abatements if it occurs. Specifically these amendments will do the following: they will provide the authority to prescribe limits if necessary on minimum taxes and base taxes, and restrict by ministerial order the use of tax tools by an individual municipality. This is to give the government more ability to constrain misuse and misapplication of local tax tools if it occurs.

These amendments will also add the ability for an owner or occupant of property in a municipality and the minister to apply to a court to quash an illegal bylaw or resolution. Currently this ability is limited only to voters of the municipality.

[14:30]

The amendments will add clarification that an individual

dismissed from a council for failing to comply with a minister's direction is disqualified from running in the election to replace the dismissed council or council member.

And this group of amendments will clarify the situations where a municipality may abate taxes, including education property taxes. This again is to constrain potential municipal misuse of this authority such as abating the taxes of an entire class of property, instead of instances of hardship or circumstances for which abatements are intended. The amendments will make this link explicit while continuing a council's direction to determine when abatement is appropriate to specific individuals, situations, or types of property.

I want to repeat here that the vast majority of municipalities are very responsible, but there have been cases of misuse of local tax tool authority such as mill rate factors and abatements. This is a small minority only. However we have done too much hard work as a provincial government to create a business-friendly environment to let the actions of a few damage that climate. And that's why the legislation is being made clearer, so that local governments clearly know the rules of the game, so to speak.

Finally there are a number of other more minor changes in this bill that follow up or clarify changes put in place during the last session regarding municipal borrowing approval and treatment of municipal electrical utility arrears. As well, definitions of mineral, mineral resource, and taxable assessment have been added to some provisions to mirror recent changes made to *The Education Regulations* and *The Municipalities Regulations*.

This bill also contains some consequential amendments to add references to municipal district to several statutes that refer to specific types of municipalities. This will ensure that these statutes continue to apply in the municipal district in the same way as they did to the former municipalities that merged to become a municipal district. These have been worked out in consultation with the Ministry of Justice and the various ministries responsible for the respective statutes.

In terms of consultations, the ministry has consulted extensively on these amendments with both the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities and the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, and through them also with municipal administrator associations. These consultations began in April 2013 and concluded this past September. They involved meetings, presentations, and sharing drafts side-by-sides of the amendments for review and comment.

I believe the sector understands the needs for these amendments, and I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those individuals who took the time to provide input, advice, and feedback in the development of this legislation.

In conclusion, municipalities play a huge role in creating the climate for economic growth and improving quality of life for residents. These amendments to *The Municipalities Act* will better position new municipal governments to deal with opportunities and challenges; give existing municipalities more flexibility and options to respond to growth, development, and change; provide councils in the ministry with stronger legislation regarding non-compliance in capacity issues; and

ensure citizens are afforded more ability to have their concerns addressed locally.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 116, *The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2013 (No. 2)*. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The minister has moved second reading of Bill No. 116, *The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2013 (No. 2)*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion? I recognize the member for Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased on behalf of the official opposition to enter the debate in reference to Bill 116, in which we're talking a lot about how the municipal structure operates in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And it should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that the minister's absolutely correct in the sense that many of the municipal bodies in our province, whether they be urban or rural or northern, they do play a very important and integral part in developing our province not only from the economic perspective, Mr. Speaker, but also socially as well. And certainly it adds to the fabric in the province of Saskatchewan overall.

So it's very, very important that we pay attention to bills of this nature, Mr. Speaker, bills that are talking about the future of the municipal structure in the province of Saskatchewan.

And many people in the province ought to know that there are many leaders, whether they are Reeves and their councils or mayors and their councils, that really pay attention to the policies of the province and really pay attention to what's happening in their area and their region and of course the province as a whole. So they are indeed partners in growth, and they certainly are a very, very important part of local engagement, local knowledge, and certainly local participation when we talk about the economic building that is required for the province of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that I certainly respect and recognize their role. I think that every member of the opposition does as well.

And over the years we've had some involvement with SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities]. Many of our members are aware how SARM operates. Over the years we've had some involvement with SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association]. And, Mr. Speaker, there's no question that those two organizations are key organizations as well as the administrators of both these associations that work in their particular community. These people are invaluable advisors as to how to do things properly in their area and thus the whole province overall.

So I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, that when we hear the words extensive consultation with SUMA and with SARM, Mr. Speaker, and the fact that the minister indicated that they began these consultations in April, and here it is seven or eight months later and we still haven't really had some good collaborative and qualifying statements from both SARM and SUMA as to whether these consultations constituted agreement.

And I pointed out earlier on a number of bills, Mr. Speaker, that there is a significant difference when the government stands up

in the Assembly and says we consulted group A versus we've consulted with group A and group A agrees with the recommendations we're putting forward. And I want to point that out to the public of Saskatchewan. Both the SUMA and the SARM and all the administrators, they know fair well that there is a significant difference between the word consulted and certainly consultation followed by their agreement. Those are the two phrases that I want to focus on, Mr. Speaker.

Because you look at some of the terminology in this bill and some of the language and some of the insinuation in the bill. Mr. Speaker, at the outset this reeks of amalgamation overall. When you look at the language, Mr. Speaker, and I want to key on some of the points that was raised, that the minister brought the language forward in some of these bills, things like mill rate infractions, Mr. Speaker, minimal population. When he talked about statutory obligations for operating a municipal government, when he talked about the widespread concern over some of the local issues, when they talk about . . . When they make reference to management of that RM [rural municipality] or town or village or city, it's all in a negative context, Mr. Speaker.

And I can tell the people of Saskatchewan that whenever you wish to try and do something by stealth, obviously what you want to do, first of all do, is to try and look and try and make the group that you're dealing with look inadequate. And many . . . All the languages here, Mr. Speaker, that we talk about, that the minister made reference to in this bill, really tries to make our municipal partners look inadequate, Mr. Speaker.

There's no question that we are all for being positive and certainly being responsible and being transparent and being accountable in operating some of the local governments in the province. But, Mr. Speaker, you look at the bill itself, it just reeks of amalgamation, time and time again.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to serve as the mayor of my own community. And, Mr. Speaker, I also got involved with SUMA. And we've learned a lot from our southern neighbours and our southern partners of how they operate within their particular community. And I can tell you, my experience in SUMA was certainly . . . It taught me a lot, and it made me appreciate some of the southern challenges. And it also gave me the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to share some of the northern perspectives.

And as you look at some of the challenges that SUMA had, Mr. Speaker, and continue to have, there are some significant differences between how SUMA operates and how SARM operates, Mr. Speaker, because obviously they have two different constituents. One of course is the rural communities, and the other of course is the cities, towns, and villages.

Now, Mr. Speaker, during my tenure as the mayor of my home community, again we talk about how the communities need to be proactive, of how the communities need to work together in a specific region to be an effective voice and to be an effective builder of any particular plan for that area. So whether it's a business investment or whether it's a business opportunity or whether it's a tourism strategy, the list goes on as to why it's important that you work collaboratively with your neighbouring community, Mr. Speaker. We understood that. Certainly SUMA

understands that and SARM understands that as well.

The second thing I think is really important, Mr. Speaker, is that when you look at the efforts of some of these communities — and I drive to some of these communities on a continual basis and you see some of the advertisement — that these communities are trying to attract not only residents to come and live and work in their communities but also businesses when they offer them say, as an example, no property taxes for the first three years. These are some of the things that I think these communities are trying to do to get more and more people to move to their community and certainly have the businesses also move to their particular community. So I think these are some of the innovative things that many municipalities across the province try and do.

And they obviously have other issues, Mr. Speaker. They also have infrastructure challenges that they will bring forward to the government. And nothing in this bill talks about meeting some of those challenges, Mr. Speaker. They also have the labour force development that is required in these communities in order for them to effectively attract new residents, to effectively attract investment into their community, into their region. And these are some of the challenges that we need to talk about when we talk about the municipal sector in particular, when we talk about SARM and SUMA's role in developing our economy overall, Mr. Speaker.

So what we don't need to do, what we don't need to do, Mr. Speaker, is bring forward bills that highlight the negative aspects of operating a municipal entity in our province of Saskatchewan. And all I hear, Mr. Speaker, from this particular bill, are things that talk about amalgamation, things that mention about minimal population or census information. What's going to happen here? What is going to happen?

And what is really important is that this particular government is now embarking on a strategy to bring in amalgamation by stealth. That's exactly what is being planned here, Mr. Speaker. It is amalgamation by stealth, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly what this is, and we see it as clear as day on this side, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the Assembly we see it. There's no question in our minds they're going to start picking off the small hamlets and the small villages and those that are struggling. And like anything, they'll pick on those that are having difficulty. But this totally reeks of amalgamation. That is clearly their plan, Mr. Speaker.

And why don't they just have the courage to stand up today and say exactly what they want to do? They want to get rid of some of the small villages and the hamlets and those people that pester the Saskatchewan Party government by hanging around and trying to build their region and their community because, for the Sask Party, some of these villages and towns are simply on the way, and they have to bulldoze their way through and get rid of some of these small villages and hamlets that refuse to go away. But because the Saskatchewan Party wants them gone, Mr. Speaker, this bill will accomplish that.

Now one of the important things that people in Saskatchewan ought to know is that when you sit down with the chamber of commerce and you sit down with CAPP, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, they are at odds when it

comes to the whole notion of the number of municipalities operating in the province.

The Association of Petroleum Producers, CAPP, and probably more than likely the chamber of commerce, from the economic perspective, will tell this government, we need less red tape and we need less municipal interference, municipal licensing rules, and all these different processes that we have to go through. So we want to invest in Saskatchewan. We want to invest in Saskatchewan, but those pesky municipalities are in the way, they might tell the Sask Party.

So they come along, and the Sask Party knows that if they mention amalgamation to anyone, including some of the RMs that are supportive of this particular government, then they know that they're in deep trouble. So what is this government to do, Mr. Speaker? They have CAPP and the chamber on one side, and they have the municipalities on the other side. So what do they do, Mr. Speaker? They simply don't want to do anything that people are going to realize and recognize as an effort to amalgamate some of the municipalities in our province. And so what they'll do is they'll do it by stealth.

First of all they'll say, we had these hearings. We had these consultations, and the consultations lasted a whole seven months, Mr. Speaker. They lasted a whole seven months. So right now the consultation process is under way. It's been completed. We've heard some great comments, according to the minister, great comments from SUMA and SARM. We've heard some great comments from some of the administrators, Mr. Speaker. But, Mr. Speaker, comments — and again I go back to my earlier point — comments and consultation does not constitute agreement, Mr. Speaker.

[14:45]

Now I wouldn't mind seeing, Mr. Speaker, how some of the consultations did occur in some of these regions. Did they have one meeting and invite all the communities around them to come to that meeting? How was the attendance at these consultation meetings? Who was there? Was there any concerns expressed, Mr. Speaker? And exactly my point is, were some of the municipalities not there? Were some of them not advised?

So what happens, Mr. Speaker, under this particular bill, Bill 116, is we think that the strategy behind this particular bill is amalgamation by stealth. They don't want to put this out there for people to pay attention to. And this is why it's important that we invite SUMA and we invite SARM and we also ask the question from CAPP. We also ask the question from CAPP is, what did the government promise CAPP to reduce the bureaucracy, according to CAPP, to reduce the bureaucracy attached to many of the municipalities in the areas that they want to invest in? What did the government promise CAPP to ensure that they had minimal municipal interference? That's the question, Mr. Speaker. Because CAPP wants to invest, and we're all for proper investment, making sure it benefits Saskatchewan and it benefits us for many, many years, as many years as possible, Mr. Speaker. But we have to do it in concert with our municipal partners. That's what the minister spoke about earlier.

So what happens now is you have industry and you have the

chamber of commerce on one side of the argument, and you have the municipalities and some of their support base within SARM, so how do you do this? How does the government do this, Mr. Speaker? Well first of all they make promises to CAPP, and they make promises to industry that they will minimize any kind of interference by the municipal structure in the province to encourage investment of their particular industry into the province.

Now we on this side of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, we believe that investment's crucial. We understand that investment into any particular industry is fleeting, that Saskatchewan has to make sure that they're well positioned to try and attract as much of the capital investment as possible. We understand that, Mr. Speaker.

But the same time, you can't throw out the baby with the bathwater. You've got to engage in municipal partners. You've got to be fair. You've got to be upfront. You've got to be honest with them in saying, look this is what our challenge is. This is what our challenge is. We want the investment, but according to some of our investment potential partners, they're saying you guys are interfering with the process of rules and regulations and all these different issues that some of the small towns and villages and hamlets have. The government looks at that as interference. So how are they going to address it, Mr. Speaker? They're simply going to address it by getting rid of those that are too small to defend themselves and getting rid of those that had put years and years of effort into strengthening not only their community or their RM but their region as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, you look at this particular bill and it really, really, from our perspective, really smacks and certainly reeks of amalgamation, something that they would never ever mention when they were in opposition, Mr. Speaker. Every single day they'd get up and accuse the NDP government of trying to force amalgamation on the municipalities, and they'd make some arguments about how some of these RMs are doing so well on their own. Why are you getting rid of these RMs that are operating so well? These are some of the arguments that they used to make when they were in opposition, Mr. Speaker.

But now the challenge and the weight of being government is they have to make certain choices. They've got to make certain decisions, Mr. Speaker. When they're caught in the middle of industry investment versus municipal amalgamation, what are they going to do? What are they going to do, Mr. Speaker? What they're going to do, Mr. Speaker, is they're going to throw municipal governments under the bus. You see that with this particular bill. Bill 116 is clearly, from my perspective, is talking about amalgamation because every section that the minister made reference to in some of the bills clearly are talking about the negative aspects of operating municipalities with minimum population. He's talking about mill rate infractions, Mr. Speaker. He's talking about statutory obligations. He's talking about some of the complaints that somebody might have when it comes to local accountability, of how you challenge that. All the language, all the language to the opposition suggests that this government is on the mandate of amalgamation by stealth.

And Mr. Speaker, how could they do that to their partners, partners that have long believed that that government over there

would be a true partner, and you're finding out through some of these bills that this is not the case. They are betraying that trust once again, once again, Mr. Speaker. They've made a decision between CAPP and industry investment versus municipal involvement in designing the economy of Saskatchewan overall, and their choice is to go to CAPP and to go with what the chamber of commerce says is important that we do for the province overall.

Now from our perspective, Mr. Speaker, it's very important that we point this out, that the chamber of commerce gives us some very good advice, very good advice. And so does CAPP. There's no question that CAPP gives us good advice as well. It's important as a government to listen to the advice, but you do not take one particular set of advice from one group and not respect the other group's take on that particular issue, Mr. Speaker. So you have to go back to the municipalities and say, look, this is what we're facing. Now from our perspective as an opposition, we think we should have true engagement, true engagement with the municipal sector and ask them all the questions that is asked of us as a government from the various players out there.

Now, Mr. Speaker, CAPP and the chamber of commerce have a lot of important issues. They know that there are some impediments to attract all kinds of investment into our province. They know how to do business well, Mr. Speaker. They've been at it for a number of years. And government should actually be paying very close attention to what these players are saying to the government overall when it comes to attracting investment and building a strong, long-lasting economy, Mr. Speaker. They should listen to that advice.

But, Mr. Speaker, you don't need to create enemies within the municipal sector to be able to accomplish what CAPP and some of the members of the chamber of commerce want. You don't have to do that. You don't have to compromise our municipal partners, whether they're in SARM or SUMA, that there are ways that we can properly engage them. And there's a lot of work to do to do that, but there are ways to accomplish that, Mr. Speaker. And that's exactly what we talk about on this side of the Assembly when we talk about smart growth, that you do not have to compromise one group over another to ensure that there's benefits for Saskatchewan people. You've got to do it simultaneously with respect to both parties.

And this bill simply does not do it in the sense of trying to build that partnership, Mr. Speaker. Because as I mentioned at the outset, there's a lot of negative language in this bill. And the intent, as clear as we can see it from here, is to amalgamate some of the villages and towns and RMs, and some of the smaller ones at the outset, Mr. Speaker, some of the smaller ones at the outset because they're in this Sask Party government's way. They're in the way, so guess what? You're going to be amalgamated.

Now, Mr. Speaker, some of the other issues that was mentioned in this particular bill, the municipal district part of the bill, where they're encouraging some of the partners in development, so to speak, whether it be an RM or whether it be a town or whether it be a city or a combination of three, that they're saying that perhaps it might be a good idea to have these three entities voluntarily begin to form a municipal district, Mr.

Speaker.

Now from our perspective, that needs a lot of study. That needs a lot of study because we need to know, where are the potential municipal district opportunities? Is there one close to the city here? Is there one north? Is there one in the East? We need to find examples of what they would suggest actually become a municipal district opportunity. We need to know where these opportunities exist and what happens to the partners' dollars because obviously a town might have some savings, the RM might have some savings, the city obviously has money. So you look at three of these groups and you start talking about, how would you divvy up some of their savings? How would you address some of their concerns? How would you build an economic office for all three organizations? There are tons and tons of questions that we have.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what we also need to know is, from the partners that are out there like SUMA, how many municipal bodies out there actually have dollars in which they're able to contribute to the process of building a global economy overall, not only for their communities but their region and the province as well? The RMs, how much have they got in savings, Mr. Speaker? As a collective, I'm assuming they have hundreds of millions of dollars within each of the areas, between the bigger cities, the towns and villages and the RMs. Now they do have those resources available to them. What would happen to their savings? Would they be able to have a say as to how this money is to be utilized properly? These are some of the things that we ought to find out before we come along and support some of these bills. We need to know that information. We need to know the hard data. We need to have these numbers. We need to have collaboration from SUMA and SARM.

And, Mr. Speaker, we should also engage the administrators because, in my career as a mayor, the administrative team that was in place in Ile-a-la-Crosse were invaluable. They taught me so much and gave me such great advice that had it not been for that team, Mr. Speaker, I would have made many, many more mistakes than I made. But certainly, from my perspective, you could learn a lot from the administrators of any RM or village or town or city.

So that being said, Mr. Speaker, I think it's really important that this government be very, very careful when they do this amalgamation by stealth. There are people within SUMA that are watching. There are people within SARM that are watching. The administrators that work for each of these partners are very, very sharp. They are very, very knowledgeable. They've seen some of the activity happening in the past that they'd become concerned about. But on the flip side, you see the chamber of commerce, you see the organizations like CAPP, they also have a vested interest in making sure this works.

So my argument is, why would you want to ignore one particular partner over another? And if you chose to be respectful, you would never try and do some of these activities, some of these activities by stealth. And that is our argument from our point when you have an initial look at this bill and we see what they're presenting. There's no question, Mr. Speaker, that we have a lot of concerns. And I'm sure there's going to be a lot more issues coming forward on this bill.

So I would tell people out there again, the plan is very simple. During the fall sitting, which wraps up next week, the government gets to introduce their bills and the intent behind these bills. And over the next several months, the opposition and the different groups that are going to be impacted by this bill, they'll have an opportunity to look at the legislation, to see what the government is trying to do, to see if there's any hidden messages in these bills, and to bring forward their concerns.

So I would encourage people that are out there that have any questions, any questions on this government's amalgamation plan attached to Bill 116, that they contact the opposition or come to this great hall of democracy and express their opinion, and express their opinion freely and clearly to this government that any effort and any plan to force municipalities to get together, Mr. Speaker, is going to be met by resistance.

And the only way you can make Saskatchewan a great place to invest and make it an even greater place to invest is if you engage the municipal sector, that know that they can add to the process and add in the most valuable way, and to engage the private sector, whether it's the chamber of commerce or CAPP. You've got to bring the two entities together, the two strengths of both organizations together to build that bold, brave new Saskatchewan. But I fear, Mr. Speaker, this bill along with some of the activities and the shortcomings of the Sask Party government is doing more harm to the future of Saskatchewan than ever before.

But my colleagues will have a lot more to say on this bill as we learn more and as we hear more. So I would encourage the people of Saskatchewan to participate in this bill, give us your advice, give us your information, and we will use it to make sure that the Saskatchewan Party doesn't do amalgamation by stealth, that they're actually exposed for what their plan is. And I'm sure many municipalities and RMs would be very upset once they find out, Mr. Speaker.

So on that note, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 116. And, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, my colleagues will have a lot more to say on this particular bill, so I so move.

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate of Bill No. 116, *The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2013 (No. 2)*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

[15:00]

Bill No. 117 — *The Municipalities Consequential Amendment Act, 2013/Loi de 2013 portant modification corrélative à la loi intitulée The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2013 (No. 2)*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Government Relations.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill No. 117, *The Municipalities Consequential Amendment Act, 2013*. This Act makes an

amendment to one bilingual Act, *The Non-profit Corporations Act, 1995* as a result of the introduction of the municipalities amendment Act, 2013.

The change to *The Non-profit Corporations Act, 1995* is required to add a reference to municipal district to the definition of municipality. This will ensure that this statute applies to municipal districts in the same way as it did to the former municipalities that merge to become a municipal district.

As I noted previously, the municipal district amendments provide flexibility and choice for interested urban and rural municipalities to voluntarily join together to form a new type of municipality for the benefit of their residents. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 117, *The Municipalities Consequential Amendment Act, 2013*. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The minister has moved second reading of Bill No. 117, *The Municipalities Consequential Amendment Act, 2013*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion? I recognize the member for Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I'm very pleased to rise on behalf of the opposition to talk about this particular bill and to point out to the folks that are paying attention to it, because I know that there are many organizations that really pay attention to some of the bills that this government is preparing for the spring sitting, and, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage those organizations to certainly pay very close attention to what is happening and what is being proposed in some of these bills because obviously this is going to have a lot of impact and it's certainly going to have a lot of concern addressed to it if a proper consultation is not undertaken.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Bill 117, Bill 117 is actually a consequential part of the process attached to the previous bill, Bill 116. And what's important, Mr. Speaker . . . Again, when we talked about Bill 116 and this particular Bill 117, what this is is a veiled effort on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party to look at amalgamation. We call it amalgamation by stealth. But, Mr. Speaker, quite obviously there is a lot of language in there that would suggest, that will suggest that that's the government's plan.

And, Mr. Speaker, they ought to have the courage to go forward to SARM and to go forward to SUMA and say very clearly, do you guys believe in the plan that we have in place, and do you guys think that we're going to get your agreement? And, Mr. Speaker, they've had consultation. They've had consultation according to the minister, but that's a whole seven months of consultation.

Now again, when we look at the language attached to Bill 117, it's all about making sure the definitions are there. And I understood that, from the previous bill, that the minister spoke about having these regional districts or these districts that would look at the voluntary basis where they would be able to work in concert and certainly collaborate their regional activities overall. So these municipal districts, what I believe the consequential Act is, Bill 117, is to define what the municipal district would be named. What would it be called?

And I'm sure as they go down the row of definition, that there'd also be a discussion of powers, a discussion of sharing of some of the powers that obviously are needed. And I'm sure that there'll be some discussion along the way, when we look at the consequential Act, of how do we . . . what contributions do we make? The RMs obviously want to make contributions. The villages and towns will make contributions. And in the case that a city or a larger centre wants to be part of the process, that they'll make consultation as well.

Who's going to help with some of the effort that is required to make sure all the partners are in full co-operation with the effort, that they have full knowledge? That's what's really important, Mr. Speaker, on anything that the government does, that people ought to have extensive access to information, exactly what the government's plan is, what their strategy is. And the minister keeps talking about definition of these powers will be determined by regulation, he said. And people ought to know that regulations are a lot different . . . follow a lot different process than a bill would. And I'll give you some of the examples, Mr. Speaker.

The example I would use is that if the government wants to propose a certain bill, they will propose a bill that explains what the bill is all about. And then if they want to sneak something through, they'll say, they'll use the phrase, we will determine those rules by regulations. That's the phrase that they often use.

Now what happens . . . Who controls the design of those regulations, Mr. Speaker? It's not the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker. It is not the partners that are out there. It is the government. They can design these regulations at their own free will when they please to do so, Mr. Speaker. And that's what's really important, is that groups and organizations that are out there, that if they say they want to define the rules and regulations at a later date, be very wary and be very cautious. Because what that does, it turns the power back to the government to determine through regulations what their original agenda is. And so we have this nice bill with the proper wording, but then, Mr. Speaker, who controls the rules controls the outcome.

So I go back to my earlier statement. You've got to have agreement by some of the partners, not simply use the phrase, we've consulted with SUMA. We've consulted with SARM, Mr. Speaker, does not constitute agreement with either of those organizations. And if I was a member of SUMA or a member of SARM, the first question I would ask is, what regulations are up for discussion? What regulations are you planning on putting forward, and do we expect any surprises from those regulations? And if there are surprises, we need to know how we combat those surprises that we're not aware of.

And, Mr. Speaker, that's what I would do if I was SUMA, because obviously this government has to make a decision. They've got to make a choice between the investment community and the municipalities that, from the investment community's perspective, are too onerous on the process of investing into a certain sector or into a certain area, and they need them out of the way. And they needn't take that attitude, Mr. Speaker, because people of Saskatchewan want to participate, as I mentioned earlier.

So again we need to find out the definition of this bill can be certainly clear on paper. But when you talk about regulations to be designed later or to be implemented later, what are those regulations? And who controls the imposition of those regulations? Who designs those regulations? Whose interests will be met by those regulations? Well, Mr. Speaker, it is not the partners that the Sask Party has so-called consulted with. It is the Government of Saskatchewan. It is the Sask Party government that will determine those rules and regulations on their own, with no consultation, period. And that's what is really important when we look at these bills.

So any time they talk about consultation, remember it is consultation on their part. It does not, it does not constitute agreement. And they can mention 20 organizations saying, we consulted with this group, that group, this group, that group, and do a list 20 organizations long. And, Mr. Speaker, it sounds impressive to the average layperson, but on the Assembly floor and to the opposition, it doesn't mean anything that they've consulted with these groups unless they get agreement from that group, Mr. Speaker. That's what's really important.

Unless they get agreement from that group, they should not use the word consultation attached to that group. It's got to come with the word agreement with that group. And you'll notice, Mr. Speaker, they never do. It's always consultation they talk about. They never talk about agreement.

And the final point I will make, Mr. Speaker, on this bill is where you begin the process of determining the outcome of any bill is how you design your rules and regulations. The rules and regulations are actually . . . if anything in the bill could be the framework, the rules and regulation is actually doing all the inside work, adding serious meat to the bones so to speak. That's kind of where all the action begins, Mr. Speaker. When the government says, here's a bill, it looks good, we've consulted and we'll do all the regulations later on — that's when people should begin to worry, Mr. Speaker. And that's when they should begin to pay very close attention.

So on this particular bill, Bill 117 where the minister's talked about determining rules and regulations at a later date, I would encourage people to pay very, very close attention. Because when we talk about defining regional districts, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of challenge and a lot of issues that people have to be aware of. And we need to take the time to discuss these bills and to make sure that as an opposition we tell the partners that are out there, pay very close attention and advise us if there's issues of concern. Because we will raise them in the Assembly. That's our job. That's our effort here as the official opposition, and we'll certainly raise the concerns from the partners out there that wish to express it.

So on that note, Mr. Speaker, it's a consequential Act, and there's a lot of rules attached to it. We need to pay attention. And so therefore I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 117.

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate on Bill No. 117, *The Municipalities Consequential Amendment Act, 2013*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Bill No. 118 — *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Great. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to rise to move second reading of *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act*, Bill 118. This new Act marks a milestone in the history of the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology or SIAST as it is more commonly known. SIAST is our province's largest public institution for post-secondary technical education and skills training. It is also a key player in helping to meet the labour market needs of Saskatchewan's growing economy, an economy today that, Mr. Speaker, offers more than 12,000 jobs on the saskjobs.ca website.

This legislation supports SIAST as it evolves formally into a polytechnical institution. Polytechnics tend to be degree granting and help to foster economic growth by helping to, first, foster smooth transitions between learning and earning for students and, second, by helping to fuel regional and provincial growth through applied research and innovation, research that connects directly to small- and medium-sized businesses right across the province and therefore really helps to focus on regional economic development across the province.

Another notable feature in this legislation is to change SIAST's legal name to Saskatchewan Polytechnic. This better reflects the emerging status of SIAST as a polytechnic as reflected across the country. *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act* also clarifies SIAST's ability to fundraise for property. This is increasingly important. In fact just last week, we saw that SIAST was able to attract very significant dollars from Husky. When combined with the province's Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunities Scholarship, Mr. Speaker, that meant \$1.5 million for SIAST and SIAST students.

Mr. Speaker, it also helps to ensure that other educational institutions can not use the term polytechnic in any way without approval from the Government of Saskatchewan. The legislation will also clarify the mandate of SIAST to reflect membership in Polytechnics Canada. For example, it outlines that SIAST may conduct applied research and scholarly activity and indicates that SIAST may grant degrees in accordance with *The Degree Authorization Act*.

Mr. Speaker, these changes and others which are what could be termed relatively routine in nature will not substantively alter the solid relationship between SIAST and the Government of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, SIAST is the newest member of Polytechnics Canada and joins other prestigious organizations, including the British Columbia Institute of Technology, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology Polytechnic, and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, as well as Red River College.

There are many benefits through SIAST's membership in the association. Students earning credits at one institution will have them recognized by its peers. As well there are enhanced

promotional activities from both Canadian and international students. Furthermore, SIAST's ability to advocate for research and development, especially in Ottawa and with industry partners, will be enhanced significantly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that with the proclamation of *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act*, the existing Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology Act which is currently the guiding framework that operates . . . that allows the institution to operate, will be repealed.

The Ministry of Advanced Education has had extensive discussions with SIAST in developing *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act*, and in fact this action that we're taking today, this second reading is inspired and helped to be guided by SIAST itself.

[15:15]

We have consulted widely with our partners in the post-secondary sector, including those at the University of Regina, the University of Saskatchewan, our regional colleges, the Dumont Technical Institute, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, and the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission.

SIAST has also consulted with its student association, SIAST Faculty Association, and SGEU [Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union] Professional Services. That's the bargaining unit.

Over the years, SIAST has earned a reputation for the delivery of quality education for both students and for industry employer partners. This legislation further supports the mandate of SIAST as it continues to evolve to best meet the needs of the new Saskatchewan, especially our students and our employers. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move second reading of *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act*. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — The question before the Assembly is the motion by the Minister of Advanced Education that Bill No. 118, *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act* be now read the second time. It is the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion? I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I'm very pleased on behalf of the official opposition to give the initial comments that we have and some of the concerns we have in reference to Bill 118. And, Mr. Speaker, from our perspective, we look at the government and we try and figure out what exactly their plans are when they talk about trying to meet the demand for skilled workers, when we talk about the fact that there are many families that are struggling with high debt load when it comes to education. We look at some of the challenges with the K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] system, Mr. Speaker, some of the Aboriginal communities' perspectives. All these issues are really important to the opposition, Mr. Speaker.

And every day when we sit down and talk to the government about some of these issues, Mr. Speaker, you know, the high tuition costs — I think we're the second-highest tuition costs in the country, Mr. Speaker, and that's not something we should

be proud of as a province overall — I think we need to begin to address that.

And when the government comes along with great fanfare and says, well we've got a bill, and Bill 118 is going to be talking about SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology], we on this side of the Assembly, we think, okay great. Maybe they're going to address some of the challenges in collaboration with the Minister of Education on the K to 12 system. Maybe there's going to be some good collaborative efforts there. Maybe they're going to address some of the challenges within the Aboriginal community. Or maybe they're going to address some of the high tuition costs that many of our families and young students struggle with.

So as we sit here and we listen to the particular bill, Mr. Speaker, Bill 118, you know, Bill 118, which I think is the cornerstone of that government's post-secondary agenda. Mr. Speaker, all they're doing today under this bill — again they've announced it with a great fanfare — all they've done is they're going to change the name. They're not going to change policy. They're not going to change direction. They're not going to radically implement some new way of doing business. All they're simply going to do is their agenda, their agenda in this bill, and to address all the issues that we've raised in the opposition. All they're going to do is change SIAST to the name Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

That's what the bill is all about, Mr. Speaker, pure and simple. They have decided that their agenda for the next number of years when it comes to post-secondary education is, again with great fanfare they announce, we're going to change the name of SIAST. That's what this government is saying. We're going to change the name of SIAST.

And we're sitting here on this side of the opposition and wondering, well what's all that about? We've been talking about tuition costs. We've been talking about K to 12 challenges. We've been talking about child care to help with some of the young families trying to take training. We've been talking about the Aboriginal education gaps. We've been talking about the opportunities to engage many First Nations and Métis people in the economy overall. And what does the Sask Party government bring forward as their agenda to address all that? Well they're changing the name of SIAST to Saskatchewan Polytechnic. That's the agenda of the Sask Party when it comes to post-secondary strategies, Mr. Speaker.

We were all excited on this side because we heard that the Government of Saskatchewan was going to make an announcement around SIAST, so we all wanted to hear what the announcement was. And again all my colleagues here were really debating what it might be. And, Mr. Speaker, what disappointment today when all that they have for post-secondary in terms of their announcement, with so many resources, with so many resources, they're going to change the name of SIAST and that's it. They're changing SIAST to a polytechnic, Mr. Speaker.

And it's a shame to see that kind of response to some of the issues that we've been talking about over and over and over in this Assembly. We've asked this government to deal with the high tuition costs that many of our families are suffering from.

We've asked the government to deal with the Aboriginal education gap which they have not addressed, Mr. Speaker. We've asked the Government of Saskatchewan to start talking about the challenges within the kindergarten to grade 12 issues, Mr. Speaker. We've talked about educational assistants. We've talked about the disregard for teachers. The fact that they have not moved on meeting some of the demands of this economy, Mr. Speaker.

All they have done with this bill, with great fanfare of highlighting what their agenda is for a post-secondary, is they're going to change the name from SIAST to Saskatchewan Polytechnic. And that's it, Mr. Speaker. What a disappointing response to the challenges that were brought up by this opposition, Mr. Speaker, to the challenge of trying to meet some of the needs and the demands that we've all identified time and time again when it comes to post-secondary.

So today I'm telling the people of Saskatchewan, Bill 118, which we waited for, we wanted to see what was in the bill. We were actually hoping, Mr. Speaker, the opposition was hoping that there'd be something substantial, something innovative, something exciting, something groundbreaking, something that we can all talk about. And maybe even if it's something that was so innovative and exciting and so dynamic and so important and would meet some of the needs that we've been speaking about, maybe even then the opposition would be excited about it.

But what they have done, Mr. Speaker, is great fanfare. And the only thing missing, Mr. Speaker, are lights. The only thing missing, Mr. Speaker, is the parade.

But what they're doing today to address the issues is they're going to change the name of SIAST to Saskatchewan Polytechnic. So we're saying, okay. There's got to be more to this bill than that. There's got to be more to this bill than that. And we keep looking for it, Mr. Speaker. It's a one-pager. It's a one-pager.

And so the big deal, the big agenda in 2013, despite this government inheriting billions of dollars in the bank, a booming economy, a growing population, and all the hard work that was done previously, instead of inheriting all those resources, all those resources, all that opportunity, Mr. Speaker, all that money, despite getting everything gift-wrapped and handed to them, Mr. Speaker, gift-wrapped and handed to them, Mr. Speaker, all they could do to address some of the issues that we've been talking about — and again with great fanfare — is they're going to change the name of SIAST to Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the minister spoke about regional and provincial growth. And we talk about, well how about P.A. [Prince Albert] north? Are they part of the process? How about Moose Jaw? Are they part of the process, Mr. Speaker? How about some of the areas of the province that this government has forgotten about, Mr. Speaker? Are they important? Is P.A. and northern Saskatchewan important to this government as I mentioned earlier? And the obvious answer is no because they have not addressed the challenges attached to that particular city, Mr. Speaker. They've allowed a great opportunity to bypass the city because the Assembly would not deal with the

infrastructure needs that the city clearly identified, Mr. Speaker.

And now I can hear some of these guys, some of these guys chirping from their seats, Mr. Speaker. Let's look at P.A. bridge as an example. Let's look at P.A. bridge, Mr. Speaker, now that the member from Melfort is chirping from his seat. Your colleagues that ran for the Saskatchewan Party said that they would build a second bridge for P.A. if they were elected. The phrase that they used was, it was inevitable. It was going to happen, Mr. Speaker. It was going to happen. They promised the business community of P.A. and Melfort's area that they were going to build a second bridge. They were going to build a second bridge. And what happened, Mr. Speaker? The election was on. They got elected. And I always say, I always say that the Saskatchewan Party romanced P.A. and area and all they ended up with was a bad hickey, Mr. Speaker. That's all they ended up with was a bad hickey.

And that's why, Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the members want to talk about regional growth, as the minister mentioned in this bill. You want to talk about regional growth. You better get serious about regional growth, and you should follow up on the campaign promises that you make. When you say you're going to build a bridge for P.A., well you bloody well better build a bridge for P.A. or the people of P.A. are going to come back and send you a message. They're going to send you a message very, very, clear. And they might even send, the business community might even send a message to the people around Prince Albert. So absolutely, absolutely, Batoche is going to be impacted. Shellbrook is going to be impacted and for sure Melfort's going to be impacted as well.

Because you shouldn't be making promises to people and then turn around and you stifle the economic opportunity around Prince Albert by simply doing one thing that the P.A. people did not want you to do, and that was to break your commitment and promise for a second bridge. And that's exactly what the Saskatchewan Party have done. They betrayed that trust. They turned their backs on the business community and the many citizens that are doing their part to build this economy. You have turned your backs on them. And I say come 2015 or whenever the Premier calls an election, P.A. will have the opportunity to turn their backs on the Saskatchewan Party and say, enough of that. Enough of that.

If you're talking about regional growth attached to your bill, attached to your bill, then you should back it up. You should back it up and do your part. Otherwise stop talking about the second bridge and simply admit that you failed to bring forward that particular issue and you failed as an MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly]. And the whole region ought to know this, that the whole regional part of Prince Albert — that includes Melfort; that includes Batoche; that includes Saskatchewan Rivers; that includes Shellbrook — you have all failed as a collective group of MLAs to deliver on the one crucial piece that was important to the economy of that whole area, and that was a second bridge for Prince Albert.

Dangerous goods travel on that bridge, Mr. Speaker, the current bridge. And there's also hundreds of opportunities in tourism. Businesses use that bridge, Mr. Speaker, and it's a bottleneck. You're choking and you're stifling the opportunity in that region. Why? Because the current MLAs in that whole area

failed to deliver. That's the bottom line. They've failed to deliver. That's the bottom line, Mr. Speaker.

So when the minister brings up any kind of reference to regional and provincial growth, which he'd done on this bill — the minister talked about regional and provincial growth — he forgot, he forgot about one little, small thing. Oh, the P.A. bridge. Didn't we run on that? Didn't we campaign on that? Didn't we campaign on that? Absolutely they campaigned on that. They promised every, every person in that community they were going to build that bridge. And when they had the opportunity and they had the resources and they had the power for seven years, did they deliver? They told the people of Prince Albert north a flat no. You do not deserve a bridge because this is no way that we're going to . . . They weren't going to help Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker.

And that's why when the minister talks about regional and provincial growth, we talk to him and say to him right today that P.A. and the northern part of Saskatchewan and Moose Jaw and many other areas are really beginning to feel the effects that this government is ignoring those areas. And, Mr. Speaker, they ought not to do that.

The other thing that the minister made reference to is the 12,000 opportunities on saskjobs.ca. He mentioned that. Now, Mr. Speaker, that 12,000 figure's been up there for a while. So our argument again when you talk about post-secondary, shouldn't that number actually start going down with people filling these jobs that have the adequate training? Shouldn't those numbers actually, instead of going up it's . . . Obviously they're not training enough people to fill those jobs. Otherwise those jobs would start going down. I'm beginning to believe, Mr. Speaker, that the 12,000 jobs that they brag about every single day that are on saskjobs.ca, I'm thinking that they're keeping those people there so they can brag about those numbers, but those people don't want to have . . . They want to fill those jobs. And in order to fill those jobs they need adequate training.

And that's exactly what we thought as the opposition — hey, you know, they're going to be talking about post-secondary today. They're bringing a bill, Bill 118. It's talking about post-secondary. And we thought, oh my goodness, this might be it. As an opposition we thought they might finally take our advice, that they might finally learn something of the same group of people along with the people of Saskatchewan that actually gift-wrapped the economy for them. Maybe they're going to listen to some of the advice we have on how to build a stronger economy, a longer lasting economy, a smart growth economy, Mr. Speaker.

But no. What they're doing today, Mr. Speaker, with great fanfare, and the only thing missing are the bells and the whistles, and the only thing missing is the parade, because today we saw and we heard from the minister that Bill 118 — again Bill 118 on the future of Saskatchewan's post-secondary opportunities in 2013 — the Saskatchewan Party today unveiled they're changing the name from SIAST to Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

[15:30]

So we're sitting here on this side kind of saying, well what is

that about? Well, that's their great vision? That's their great plan, Mr. Speaker? And the people of Saskatchewan are severely disappointed. Because quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, there's a bunch of people that were upset and angry that they did not deal with the crucial issues and the issues that matter to many families, that they have been stubbornly dismissive of recognizing that they have the second highest tuition rate. They have ignored the issue of P.A. and north economy by talking about the bridge issue. They talk about these 12,000 jobs on saskjobs.ca. Why aren't they training those people to fill those jobs so those numbers go down, so people are working, paying taxes, and building themselves a bright future, Mr. Speaker?

We think on this side of the Assembly that there's a lot more work to do on post-secondary. Given all the resources that they inherited, given all the money and all the dollars and all the opportunities and all the work that was done, all the things that was gift-wrapped to them, Mr. Speaker, I think the people of Saskatchewan ought to deserve a better response on the future design of post-secondary simply by talking about changing the name of SIAST to Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the Assembly once again, we tell the people of Saskatchewan, the Sask government, the Sask Party government has failed you. The Sask Party government, despite the dollars that was handed to them, they have failed to deliver. Despite that the Sask Party government has been bragging left, right, and centre of all the money they have, they have failed to deliver on many fronts. And, Mr. Speaker, after all that failure and after the shortcomings . . . And again, they do a lot of back-patting on that side, Mr. Speaker, and they try to hoodwink the province, Mr. Speaker. A lot of PR [public relations]. A lot of spin, Mr. Speaker.

And after all this activity, the nine of us in the opposition — and many others are joining our quarters now — are starting to say, this government's not a very good government. This government is confused. They don't know what exactly they're doing, Mr. Speaker. Despite all the great opportunity, all the great opportunity that they inherited — don't forget, they didn't work for this; they simply inherited this, Mr. Speaker — about all they have to offer today when it comes to post-secondary was to change the name of SIAST to Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that's severely disappointing to us in the sense of not the message or not the name change. Name change, what's in a name? It's important that the people of Saskatchewan know what's in a name. And if we wanted to modernize the name, fine. We can live with that. But they ought to modernize their approach when it comes to meeting some of the needs that Saskatchewan people have long indicated are challenges when it comes to tuition, when it comes to K to 12 issues, and when it comes to engaging First Nations and Métis people overall with, you know, with the economy.

So, Mr. Speaker, again with great fanfare, flash, and the only thing missing here is the parade, only thing missing here is the parade, about all this government is doing when it comes to recognizing the issues attached to post-secondary is changing SIAST to Saskatchewan Polytechnic. Mr. Speaker, a name change can happen, but I think you've got to change the government and change the strategy. Because quite frankly all

the information's before us. All the evidence is before us. This government doesn't have a clue how to govern. They're bungling from one issue to another and, Mr. Speaker, it's time to get rid of them. So on that note, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 118.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — The member from Athabasca has moved to adjourn debate on Bill No. 119. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . 118. Sorry. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — Carried.

Bill No. 119 — *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Consequential Amendments Act, 2013/Loi de 2013 portant modifications corrélatives à la loi intitulée The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — I recognize the minister in charge of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Consequential Amendments Act, 2013*, Bill 119. This legislation arises as a result of *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act*, which received second reading earlier today and of which we've just heard some curious comments about from the members opposite.

While these consequential amendments are required in various pieces of provincial legislation and regulations to change the name from the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology to Saskatchewan Polytechnic, they are informed by the support that SIAST receives from the Government of Saskatchewan.

This support manifests itself in many ways. For example, Mr. Speaker, in this year's budget there's a 3.1 per cent increase in its operating budget. Mr. Speaker, we've seen those budgets increase from 2007-08 as we had the privilege of forming government at \$119 million to now over \$147 million in the current budget, Mr. Speaker. And we know there's more to do.

Mr. Speaker, this stands in stark contrast to the NDP, despite the rhetoric of the member opposite, where tuition increased at SIAST by more than 336 per cent, by more than 336 per cent between 1991 and 2007.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a little bit surprised to hear the member opposite offer his negative opinions here recently because just last week, Mr. Speaker, on November 21st in this House, the member for Regina Elphinstone said this about the polytechnic Act. He said, ". . . which looks to be a good piece of legislation and a signal to the good work that is done by SIAST," Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we wanted to make sure that we had that on the record, Mr. Speaker, because apparently the members opposite are not singing in unison or from the same song sheet when it comes to this matter, Mr. Speaker. There are obviously legitimate questions, Mr. Speaker, and we look forward to helping to address those.

Mr. Speaker, specifically these consequential amendments apply to two bilingual enactments: *The Education Act, 1995* and *The Teacher Certification and Classification Regulations, 2002*. Importantly these amendments are strictly technical in nature.

Mr. Speaker, the Act will come into force on the day of which section 1 of *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act* is proclaimed, which is expected to be in the spring of 2014.

Mr. Speaker, I so move second reading of *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Consequential Amendments Act, 2013*. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — The question before the Assembly is a motion by the Minister of Advanced Education that Bill No. 119 be now read a second time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion? I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I'm quite pleased on behalf of the official opposition to stand up and talk about Bill 119, the consequential Act as it relates to the name change that's being proposed by the Saskatchewan Party government.

And, Mr. Speaker, I've been in the Assembly a long time, and this is the first time I've ever heard a minister in his introduction of his bill begin to debate statements made by the opposition. That's highly unusual, Mr. Speaker, because obviously the point of introducing your bill is to make sure that you read out the bill and you read out the intention of the bill. And, Mr. Speaker, when you start beginning to spur debate, when you start getting debate in the introduction of their bills, you begin to wonder, what is this government up to?

Now, Mr. Speaker, again we point out that we have to make sure, we have to make sure that when you look at some of these bills, that people out there ought to know that we need their engagement. Now, Mr. Speaker, we have to understand that in Saskatchewan, in Saskatchewan there's a lot of great opportunities. And we think that those great opportunities should be afforded to as many families as possible, to be afforded to as many families as possible in all sectors, in all areas. And, Mr. Speaker, those areas include P.A. north, and they include in around the Moose Jaw area. They include the Melfort area. They include everyone, Mr. Speaker, because our provincial motto is "from many peoples, strength." And what we see happening, Mr. Speaker, is only certain sectors and only certain people being engaged by the Saskatchewan Party government.

Now Bill 119, the consequential amendment Act, in terms of changing . . . allowing the government to change the name from SIAST to polytechnic, Mr. Speaker, I think what's important is that we, from our perspective, we're not being critical of the name, Mr. Speaker. We're not being critical of the name — very important to point out. What we're critical of, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that there are many shortcomings to this particular government in recognizing the name. That's what's important. They're just simply changing the name when we're asking them to change their gears. Stop coming forward with excuses and stop doing the spin and stop doing the . . . giving the people of Saskatchewan the runaround with some of the

issues. That was my point, Mr. Speaker. And it's highly unusual to get a minister who's introducing an amendment to his particular Act to begin to debate the bill prior to the bill being introduced.

So I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that when you're changing the name from SIAST to Saskatchewan Polytechnic, my argument is go ahead and change the name. I don't think the name change is something that we're concerned about, as my colleague certainly made reference to.

What we're concerned about is your lack of action to that institution. That's what we're concerned about. Your lack of action to some of the challenges on the K to 12 system, Mr. Speaker, your lack of action when it comes to having some of these students having the second highest tuition cost, that's what we're concerned about. The fact that there's a disconnect between the Aboriginal community's desire to be part of the process of higher learning, which many people have taken advantage of already but many others want to. We are concerned about the challenges with child care when it comes to some of the families, young families or single-parent families that want to take advantage of some of the educational opportunities and thus the economic opportunities. That's what our issue is.

So when my colleague makes references saying yes, changing the name is a great idea, we're not arguing about the name change. We're saying that you ought to change the channel when it comes to trying to make sure that the people that we've made reference to, that their issues are finally being addressed. They're finally being . . . Change your focus. That was the point, Mr. Speaker.

So again the reason why we have 12,000 jobs under the website of saskjobs.ca is we're proud of that. As the province, we're proud of that. We want to see the economy continue moving forward. Nobody in this Assembly wants to see Saskatchewan suffer. We want to see that economy continue moving forward to build and to strengthen for years and years to come. But in order to be able to achieve that, Mr. Speaker, what's important is that you have to have a government that encourages that, that fosters that attitude, and that builds on that, that plans for it, that prepares for it, Mr. Speaker. And about all we've seen from this particular government when it comes to the issues that we've addressed as an opposition is they're going to change the name from SIAST to Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

So we say again, and I echo the sentiments of my colleague, we say again, change the name. We certainly don't see no problem with that. But you ought to change your attitude in dealing with post-secondary to meet some of the issues that we've debated on this floor, time and time again. So on that note, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 119.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — The member from Athabasca has moved a motion to adjourn debate on Bill No. 119. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — Carried.

Bill No. 120 — *The Lobbyists Act*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — I recognize the Attorney General.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of *The Lobbyists Act*. Mr. Speaker, on December 7, 2011, this Legislative Assembly passed a motion to refer the issue of lobbyist legislation to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice for review and to report back to the legislature. The standing committee was tasked with making recommendations on a legislative model for the new legislation, for new legislation in Saskatchewan that will ensure that the public is informed and aware of who is lobbying public office-holders in Saskatchewan while ensuring that free and open access to government decision makers is not unduly impeded.

Mr. Speaker, on May 16, 2012, the standing committee tabled a majority report with a minority objection. While there was considerable consensus around preparing an Act based largely on the Alberta and British Columbia legislation, further consultation with stakeholders were considered desirable prior to introducing a government bill. Mr. Speaker, this bill is based on the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs, as well as further consultation with stakeholders conducted with respect to this proposal.

[15:45]

Mr. Speaker, this bill will do a number of things. It will establish types of lobbyists. It will create registration requirements for lobbyists. It will establish reporting requirements, including filing deadlines for lobbyists. It will appoint a registrar as an independent officer of the Assembly to oversee the Act and investigate complaints and offences. It will authorize administrative penalties by the registrar. It will restrict lobbying by former public office-holders. It will create a public registry. It will create exemptions from the operation of the Act and create offence provisions for failure to comply with the Act.

The additional consultations have resulted in changes from the committee's report that would exempt local authorities including universities, SARM, SUMA, and the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] from the operations of the Act; provide in the regulations that in calculating whether the 100-hour threshold for lobbyist registration has been met, travel time and preparation time as well as time spent communicating will be included; making recommendations to the post-employment restrictions for cabinet members to continue the restrictions already in place in *The Members' Conflict of Interest Act*; and restrict employees in the ministry of Executive Council or the Office of the Premier from lobbying any ministry or government rather than just the ministry they were formerly employed with.

Mr. Speaker, this bill reflects a focus on private sector and paid lobbyist activities. That is where the risk of influence is most acute and where there is limited public disclosure.

Mr. Speaker, when this matter was first referenced to the committee it was noted, free and open access to government decision makers is an important matter of public interest.

Lobbying public office-holders is a legitimate activity when it is conducted appropriately.

I would like to thank the committee for the excellent work that they have done in completing their report. I believe this bill strikes the appropriate careful balance between allowing continued access to public office-holders while ensuring that such paid lobbying activities is routinely disclosed to the public to ensure transparency and accountability. And with that, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to moved second reading of *The Lobbyists Act*. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — The question before the Assembly is a motion by the Justice and Attorney General that Bill No. 120, *The Lobbyists Act* be now read a second time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion? I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very again pleased to be able to participate when we look at this particular bill, Bill 120. I think one of the important things, Mr. Speaker, is the people of Saskatchewan ought to know that *The Lobbyists Act* is something that we're going to be paying very close attention to.

And people that might not know, what the Act entails is that obviously as you travel, and many people approach, not just MLAs, but in particular they approach the cabinet and they also approach the Premier, that they always provide the opportunity for them to sell their goods or present their case on a number of issues.

And I noted that some of the points that were raised at the outset when the minister was introducing this bill is I think that the lobbyist industry in general is also in the public's interest. There's no question that as you get advice, as you get advice from an industry leader or you get advice from a particular company, that advice is invaluable.

Certainly as cabinet and certainly as the Premier, I think you would certainly be better suited to understand what their industry is all about, and therefore overall the public interest is certainly maintained. And something that I think from the perspective of being able to hear from lobbyists, I don't think you're going to get a lot of opposition from that.

But as the minister spoke about making sure that it's done properly and fairly and that there isn't any undue influence that's being placed in some activity that's not proper, that's what's really important, Mr. Speaker.

We have a lot of information on this bill, and I know that my colleagues, that there's two members of the opposition that were part of the process when the committee was looking at this bill, that they participated as well. And both of my colleagues, I believe, issued a different perspective on some of the hearings that they attended and some of the information that they got, that they presented their own perspective.

Perhaps that perspective, Mr. Speaker, it's something that people ought to appreciate in the sense that, as the opposition, we have different takes on how the government should approach certain things, and we have different values. So I

know that my colleagues that participated in the committee to discuss this bill, that they also issued a separate report saying, the government is doing this. We propose that they add these issues on to make sure that this lobbyist Act, to make sure it's done properly, is open, it's transparent, that it's accountable, and that it is effective.

So I think that certainly from the two committee members from the opposition that participated on, they will have a lot more information to share and a lot more to say on this particular bill. And I know the people of Saskatchewan and those that are paying close attention to this file, that they'll have the opportunity to hear their perspective, based on some of the hearings that they attended as a committee member.

So, Mr. Speaker, Bill 120 . . . And again I point out that if lobbyists are doing this job correctly and fairly and open and transparent, then I think the ability for industry or a business or a group of people to approach somebody from cabinet or to even approach the Premier or even approach an MLA, that this information should be presented or the opportunity to present that information on behalf of their company or a group of people, that that opportunity exists. However, as was indicated, you've got to make sure it's done fairly, proper. And you've got to make sure it's done legally because we get subjected to so many opportunities and so much information that you've got to be careful that you don't do this thing improperly.

So the principle, the principle behind allowing lobbyists access to the Premier or somebody in cabinet and even MLAs, I think is a fair principle as long as it's done in the public interest and, we believe, the public interest that it be done transparently, within the rules, and within the guidelines.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you've got to be very careful on this front because obviously, you know, as you travel and you go to meet the different organizations, especially if you're in cabinet, you get subjected to a lot of information. You get subjected to a lot of proposals, and you've got to make sure that you do this properly. And I hope that as you look at this lobbyist Act itself that there are processes, that there's policies and procedures that are hammered home with members of cabinet that this is what you do when you bump into somebody that is lobbying you for a certain particular benefit. We hope that there is a manual that many of these folks would be able to access to make sure that they can't come along and say, oh we didn't know about that rule or we didn't know about that procedure.

So (a) I don't think the opposition's arguing with the ability of the people to lobby their government, which I think is important; but (b) that we be very specific on the rules and the process and the procedure when you do have somebody lobbying you as a member of cabinet or even the Premier. I think if you're very transparent and fair with that process, then people can't be critical of it. However if they don't understand the process to make sure you document that a lobbyist has spoken to you, then I think that the Saskatchewan government has to make sure that that process is clearly understood by every single member of cabinet. Because if it's not understood, then they can simply say, well we didn't know. And that's not good enough, Mr. Speaker, because this particular activity with lobbyists is rife with problems if it's not done properly.

So I think there's going to be a lot of information being shared with folks out there. And to those that are paying an interest — the lobby sector, people that are actually paid to lobby government, to educate government, and to work with government — we think that activity is important and certainly in the public interest as the opposition. We believe that that role should be protected and that that opportunity should be protected as well. But we've got to make sure we do it fairly, that we do it transparently, and that we do it within really solid guidelines.

And about the only thing that we see right now, Mr. Speaker, that would prevent, that would prevent this particular bill from being effective is if we see the Sask Party play around with rules or not follow the proper procedure when dealing with the lobbyists. And, Mr. Speaker, we hope that they don't do that. We hope that they don't do any injustice to this bill because we think that sitting and talking to lobbyists is a critical part of building a strong, new economy. And if we do it right, Mr. Speaker, I think the people of Saskatchewan would accept that.

So we have a lot of information that we want to share with different groups and organizations out there. We were concerned at one time that it took the Premier almost two years from the day that he mentioned he was going to bring this Act forward. And the public has waited two years. We still have problems with it. We still need more consultation, and we want to get some collaboration from some of the industry players. And once we do, Mr. Speaker, we'll be able to give a better perspective on what this lobbyist bill is all about. So I think we have some other avenues and certainly some other venues to bring forward more information.

I'm quite excited that two of my colleagues are going to be presenting their own perspective and their own take on the committee hearings that they participated in when it comes to dealing with lobbyists. I think there's some very good information that they will present. And the information that they're going to present will strengthen this bill. It won't hurt it. And we just hope that there isn't any kind of kickback or a certain . . . I shouldn't use the word kickback, but if there's any kind of an argument from the Sask Party to strengthen *The Lobbyists Act*, I think, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan, public interest would be better served and well served if you'd take both perspectives — the opposition perspective and the government perspective — to meld it into a really solid lobbyist Act for many other jurisdictions to follow and to try and emulate. So I think it's important that we undertake that kind of attitude.

So on that notion, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 120, *The Lobbyists Act*.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — The member from Athabasca has moved to adjourn debate on Bill No. 120, *The Lobbyists Act*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — Carried.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 112

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Krawetz that **Bill No. 112** — *The Accounting Profession Act* be now read a second time.]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to join in the debate on Bill 112, *The Accounting Profession Act*. Looking at the minister's second reading speech and some of the information he shared with and some of the discussions I guess about the process . . . And we have three bodies that are coming together to form an organization, I said to work together, and it sounded like take some of the best practices that they have, work out. But I want to talk a little bit about that.

And clearly, you know, CAs [chartered accountant], CMAs [certified management accountant], CGAs [certified general accountant], the three bodies will be coming together. I think they represent about 4,400 professions and about 970 students he refers to. And it sounds like through the process, through the I guess comments the minister made about the conversations, maybe the consultation, listening to what the industry, the profession, the professional industry had to say about merging the three into one organization is a good thing. And it sounds like they've done the work that was needed to do.

And if that's the case, that they've truly gone out, consulted with the industry, the professions, the students, and are saying, yes this is what we think. We agree with the industry, the professions, and we're going to support . . . And I think some of the comments we made earlier, yes if it makes sense, common sense to support that on this side as well, it is. You want to make sure we have a profession that does . . .

And many, you know, whether it's entrepreneurs, large, small businesses, you know, they use these accounting firms, and the accountants to do the work that they need to do. And whether they're private or, like, small, it's done that way. And they take care of that. And the public wants to be protected. And they want to make sure that the accountants that are using it, so there's some provisions. And we know further down, as they come together, and before . . . And I know you want to get into that part of it. First I want to make sure I'm clear about the process, to make sure that the industry supports this. And it's fine to say that. We have to make sure.

And on our side, some of our colleagues have had meetings and probably opportunity to talk to some of the accounting firms that are out there. There's some of them large, small, and, you know, have that. Some of them might be a smaller, a family business. But at the end of the day, still I think, all firms and anyone in the profession that's being merged has that opportunity to voice their concern. Or if they want to improve things, they should have that ability. And it's good, and I think it's good when you have legislation coming forward where you consult, you make sure you've talked to the people that would

be impacted. That's a good thing. And I commend any legislation that comes before this House. If it's used that practice, it's good that you have.

And I just want to talk about some of the legislation. This government, the Sask Party government, the government, current government, let's be very clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, did not go through the process properly to consult. And I think about some of the First Nations . . . And I know La Ronge Indian Band has voiced its concern when it came to, you know, the provincial park. It had concerns. It voiced that concern about, it wasn't consulted, but here's legislation that makes a new provincial park. But you have a group that's saying, it's our traditional territory. It's our land. Here's our letter. We're concerned about this. So it goes into making sure that people are consulted before you pass legislation.

[16:00]

So I want to make it very clear. When you have groups coming forward — whether they're individuals from our province or an organization or a First Nations, a Métis community, a municipality, whether it's professions — and they have concerns about legislation that this government's going to pass, you have to make sure that you've done the due diligence. And you can't just push it your way and, you know, push away at it and continue to say, well we're going to go ahead with it because it's what we want. It's what we promised in our campaigns. We said we're going to do this. Doesn't matter who doesn't like it. We're going to push ahead because that's what we are going to do. You know, it doesn't matter how big of a majority of government we have, we're going to push ahead because we can. The people have spoken. We're just going to ram it.

So I caution the government, when you're introducing legislation, and if you're doing that and you're meeting, you know, if you're meeting organizations or a First Nations group, Métis, that are opposed to this, citizens that are opposed, to bring them and changes to legislation.

So I want to make it very clear. In this process it sounds like — from what I'm hearing from the minister, and I have to take it for what he's saying that he shared with us — that the process has gone through the three. They've talked to the 4,400 members. They've talked to the 970 students. They've made sure that those, the three bodies, are in agreement and they're coming together in a positive way. If it's what they want, then yes, that makes sense.

But again, I go back to saying, the process. Making sure that the process is done right, that individuals that have concerns are heard. The government needs to listen when individuals raise concerns, whether it's a traditional territory, or you're impacting their business, you're impacting their property, you're impacting their quality of life in Saskatchewan by passing legislation in this, a House, and let's make it very clear, in the Assembly.

So when I say that, we want to make sure. Now these changes coming in, there's different areas they're talking about making some of . . . and it's supposed to improve. And they talk about making sure that the customer at the end of the day is

comfortable and satisfied with certain protections that will be put into, I guess the regulations, bylaws, that will be developed.

And the government wants to make sure that the body that's incorporated, that's coming forward, from what I can see, you know, and it's going to be changed. CPA [chartered professional accountant] Saskatchewan will be an incorporated body. We'll come in with regulatory bylaws and we'll give them . . . and they're going to develop those. And it sounds like the industry's going to bring those forward as their recommendations to make sure government's aware. And if that's the case, to protect Saskatchewan residents and our business people, that's a good thing. Nobody's opposed to that. That makes sense. It's a good process.

But having said that, government's also said before it proclaims this bill, it will make sure that those provisions are there, the regulatory bylaws are there in place to protect the people of our province, whether they're business, whether it's a private . . . I guess you have individuals who would do their private income tax. You have accounting firms that do that. You have accountants who do that, so this group would be doing that. It's to making sure that citizens, residents are protected. And that's a good thing. We want to make sure.

And when I talk about, we're going to make sure they're protected, but also I know we'll be talking to accountants out there and asking them if this is something that they support and, if it is, great. The process . . . And I know, you know, the member from Athabasca talked about when it's good legislation and it makes sense, and our leader has said that when it makes good common sense to work together with government, the opposition will support legislation that moves in a positive way, that's requested by professions, by industry, and it makes sense and the argument's there, you know, we support that.

And I want to make it very clear. I think our party as opposition . . . But we make sure that if there's people out there that are concerned of those 4,400 members, the 970 students, if there are issues, you can contact, you know, the opposition. You can get hold of the members, you know, and that's clear. We're here to hear their concerns. But you also can let the government know that you have concerns. And there's nothing wrong with telling government, we're concerned about the legislation here and the bill you're bringing in, so we're going to cc [carbon copy] the opposition. There's nothing wrong with doing that. It kind of gives them . . . know that there's a set on eyes on that, and that's important sometimes. Sometimes that's very important when legislation comes before here.

So we see this . . . Overall we're hearing it's being supported by the three bodies, and that's good. And if that's the case, that's great. We'll see where we go. But again there's going to be regulatory by-laws that will come into place or effect before it's proclaimed as legislation, and that's good. That gives some protections, we know, as well.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this point I think it's clear that, you know, this piece of legislation as it's presented, it sounds like yes. When you look at it, it sounds like it's a good piece of legislation that will take three bodies to one, will create protection for Saskatchewan people. We're hearing that the industry was consulted, and I hope so, that they were done the

way it was presented. So at the end of the day, you know, there's some provisions in here to make sure the by-laws are in place before it comes into law.

And you know, so having said that, and I want to just kind of go back just quickly covering the process, I've seen other pieces of legislation that did not get the due diligence that I think this government owed Saskatchewan people, owed the industry and those that were going to be impacted. This government, whether it's traditional territory, did not get the respect that they needed and did not get government saying, whoa, we have a problem. Let's sit down. Let's work through this with the Saskatchewan people before we push ahead with this legislation. And there has been, you know, since the time I've been here, bills, and quite a few of them, that this government has not listened to the people and just pushed ahead with what they want. They come up with their version and that's it, like it or don't like.

But I guess when, you know, they say it themselves, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you have such a large majority, you get to do what you want. Well one day the people may say, enough of that and we'll send a message.

So having said that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, having said that . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh you want to hear that again? Okay. I'm going to make sure for the member that didn't hear it, you know, with that large majority you keep telling us you have, patting yourselves on the back, all the time patting yourselves for all the great work you're doing, you need to make sure that you listen to Saskatchewan people that are impacted by legislation that's being introduced in this House to make sure those individuals being impacted are listened to, that their concerns are heard before you come ahead and ram legislation down that does not meet the needs of Saskatchewan people. So they can deal with that for a while, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So at this point I'm prepared to adjourn debate on this bill, and I know my colleagues, you know, will have more to say about this bill. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — The member from Cumberland has moved to adjourn debate on Bill No. 112. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — Carried.

Bill No. 99

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Krawetz that **Bill No. 99 — *The Public Employees Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2013*** be now read a second time.]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair of Committees. I'm glad to join the debate today on Bill No. 99, *The Public Employees Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2013*. Again, Mr. Speaker, it's always good to stand in this House and

good to join the proceedings upon the heels of that excellent speech on the part of my colleague from Cumberland, very passionate, very committed representative from Cumberland.

And I note that the member from Moose Jaw North is now chiming in from his seat. And I don't know if he didn't get enough sleep last night or if he, you know, went to bed past his bedtime or something, Mr. Chair of Committees, but you know, he's a member that's known for not much in this House other than yelling from his place. So I guess if you've got a talent in this Chamber, Mr. Chair of Committees, you know, fair enough, follow your passion. But if that's the sum total of that member's contribution to this Chamber, Mr. Chair of Committees, that the member from Moose Jaw North that is known for yelling from his chair, but little more, you know, I guess that's sad, but on it goes. Anyway . . .

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — I'd like to remind the Opposition House Leader to keep his comments and overall direction focused on the bill at hand.

Mr. McCall: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair of Committees. We'll do our best to stay on task here. But again with the repeated yelling from his chair, the member from Moose Jaw North, you know, certainly makes an impact on the debate that we seek to promulgate in this House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I'll do my best. But again if . . . I understand the member's got a passion for yelling from his chair. I understand he's got a passion for interrupting people's contributions in this place. And I understand that he thinks that's a great thing and I hear him going on . . .

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tochor): — I'd like to remind the member, the Opposition House Leader, once again to keep your comments focused on the bill at hand, and I would remind members on both sides to please give complete attention to the speaker on this important bill.

An Hon. Member: — That's speaker with a small S.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much. Speaker with a small S, as I've been reminded by my colleague from Cypress Hills across the way.

But returning to the subject at hand, Mr. Chair of Committees, Bill No. 99, *The Public Employees Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2013*, certainly pensions are of huge importance in the way that people keep households together, people keep bread on the table, and people plan for their retirement. And certainly to state right off the top, Mr. Chair of Committees, I'm a member of the public employees pension plan and certainly follow the proceedings with what happens with PEPP [public employees pension plan] with great interest, Mr. Chair of Committees. And again PEPP being the acronym and the way that it's commonly referred to throughout the Assembly.

So it's certainly something that bears a lot of focus in terms of the importance of income security for a lot of different folks. But as regards to the public employees of this province, Mr. Speaker, and again all 58 of us that are members of the Legislative Assembly being members of this pension plan, it's certainly an important part of our daily income situation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Referring to the minister's second reading speech introducing the Act of November 12th, 2013, referencing the fact that as of March 31st, 2013, there are close to 53,000 plan holders of PEPP with \$5.6 billion in assets and including 79 different employers, again by the numbers, Mr. Speaker — and good to see you in your chair, Mr. Speaker — certainly by the numbers demonstrating the importance of PEPP to the province and the great sort of reach and scope that it has in the pension situation for many different individuals and those 79 different employers across this province. Again where the minister in his second reading speech referred to member and employer contributions being calculated as a percentage of the member's total gross regular earnings; unless otherwise specified in an agreement, the contribution percentage being 5 per cent by the member; and member contributions being made by payroll deduction, that's certainly the experience for I and my colleagues as we are members of the public employees pension plan.

And carrying on, folks, here on the minister's second reading remarks:

Contributions to PEPP are tax deductible up to a maximum set by the *Income Tax Act* of Canada. Members do not pay taxes on contributions or the accumulated investment income until they withdraw an amount from the plan. Contributions are forwarded to the plan and are used to purchase units in the PEPP investment option of the member's choice.

... PEPP offers members the choice of six asset allocation funds ... accelerated growth fund, growth fund, balanced fund, moderate fund, conservative fund, [and the] PEPP steps fund. [And] members ... [being able to] invest in the short-term bond fund either in addition to or instead of investing in one of the six asset allocation funds.

Again, Mr. Speaker, just a little bit about the mechanics of the fund itself. Nothing particularly earth-shattering there but, as with any such pensionable endeavour, or pension endeavour or a fund such as this, Mr. Speaker, it's important that the fund itself keep up with the times.

[16:15]

And certainly I'm not old enough to have been subject to this, but I do know folks that were subject to the old plan versus the new plan. Then again, Mr. Speaker, the shift that was made from defined benefits to a defined contribution. And certainly there's a fair amount of commentary that exists around the sustainability and the relatively thoughtful path that was plotted forward with this approach to public employee pensions.

And again, Mr. Speaker, I'm coming from Regina Elphinstone-Centre. One of the individuals that had some of the vision and the foresight in terms of introducing this particular approach to pensions was then premier of the province, Allan Blakeney, in the late '70s, and certainly the work around one of the former members from Nutana, the then minister of Finance, Wes Robbins, and the foresight that they had to again go forth with this then relatively new approach to pensions. And again I think over the long haul it has proven to be a fairly durable and reliable pension fund for the public employees of this province and again, as represented by the 53,000 plan holders referenced

by the minister, the 5.6 billion in assets, and the 79 different employers involved.

As regards the specific measures being proposed in the amendment Act itself, the minister references that they seek to:

... clarify that a simple majority of board members is required for all decisions made by the board; allow the board to undertake short-term borrowings for the purposes of the administration of *The Public Employees Pension Plan Act*; allow the Lieutenant Governor, by order in council, to designate the default fund into which all member contributions shall be deposited unless otherwise directed by the member; provide that the Lieutenant Governor may order that members who have never chosen a fund for their PEPP funds [may] be moved into the default fund; and authorize the Lieutenant Governor by regulation to permit the plan to receive members and funds from a registered pension plan wanting to become part of the PEPP and to state which specialty funds members transferring into PEPP are eligible for.

Again, Mr. Speaker, fine proposals as regards maintaining the best practices for the fund, making sure that what had previously been unforeseen eventualities be addressed as is appropriate, and the continual examination of, are you doing the best thing around your fund? Are you addressing problems that arise as they arise? These would seem to be, on the face of it, sensible steps. And again, given the importance of the public employees pension plan, not just to we members of this legislature but to the 53,000 plan holders and the 79 employers involved in the \$5.6 billion of holdings, it's good to see those steps being taken to safeguard the appropriate governance of that fund.

And again, Mr. Speaker, it would seem in some regards to be largely housekeeping legislation, not exactly earth-shattering stuff. And again, it's not that everything has to be a legislative rocket ride, Mr. Speaker. But this definitely would seem to fall under the heading of housekeeping and again, while it's important that you keep up with the housekeeping, I think demonstrates a legislative agenda that's perhaps a bit more on the lighter side than on the substantial side. Again not to say that you shouldn't be doing housekeeping, Mr. Speaker. Don't get me wrong in that regard, but not exactly stopping the world spinning on its axis.

As regards the pension situation generally and how PEPP works or is situated within that broader context of retirement income and questions and the different sort of debates that are being had right now around the health and the viability of the Canada Pension Plan or around the Saskatchewan Pension Plan — again of which I am also a member, Mr. Speaker — again it's important to keep the health and the progressive nature of PEPP moving forward and keeping it well secured.

But it's interesting to see this debate taking place against a backdrop where there's a fair amount of back and forth right now between the provinces and the federal government around the Canada Pension Plan, and the way that different sort of coalitions seem to be coming together or falling apart around the Canada Pension Plan, and the great interest with which we in the opposition benches are trying to follow where the

provincial government is going and what voice they're bringing to that discussion federally, nationally, Mr. Speaker, in terms of making sure that CPP . . . again one of the great sort of innovations of the time, lifted a great number of seniors out of poverty and provided for a secure, stable, decent standard of living for many, many seniors in this country when it was brought forward, also something where the federal government and the provincial governments were able to come to some measure of agreement.

We watch with great interest what's happening right now around that debate and what happens to the different sort of proposals coming forward from the provinces and how those are being received by the federal government. But where that all winds up and the different permutations that the provincial position out of Saskatchewan seems to have gone through, we follow that with great interest as well.

Returning to the question of PEPP itself, in terms of the actual legislation, again moving through Bill No. 99 and the new section 4.1 where it states the provisions around majority and restriction on liability, again to quote from the Act itself, new section 4.1:

“Majority and restriction on liability

4.1(1) Subject to subsection (2), a decision or any other action taken at a meeting of the board constitutes a decision or action of the board if it is voted for or approved by a majority of the members of the board present at the meeting.

You know, if I might add parenthetically, Mr. Speaker, pretty straightforward. Carrying on to section 2:

(2) No member of the board is liable with respect to a decision or an action taken at a meeting of the board if:

(a) in the case of a member who was present at the meeting, the member:

(i) did not vote for or otherwise approve the decision or action taken at the meeting; and

(ii) requests that his or her dissent be entered into the minutes of the meeting; or

(b) the member was not present at the meeting at which the decision was approved or the action taken”.

Again, Mr. Speaker, considering what's brought forward here in Bill No. 99 as regards the majority and restrictions on liability provisions in the Act and the proper conduct of the board, again this would seem to be a measure aimed at keeping up with best practice around board governances, particularly as it relates to boards of pension plans. So we'd be interested to know if that is in fact the case. And if the minister can confirm that for us and how this relates to the experience of relevant pension plans around the country or as regards, for example, the conduct at the board of the Canada Pension Plan itself.

Again considering the legislation, Mr. Speaker:

Section 5 amended

4 The following clause is added after . . . 5(g):

“(g.1) borrow money for the purposes of the plan, if:

(i) the borrowing is for a term not exceeding 90 days;

(ii) the borrowing is not part of a series of loans or other transactions and repayments; and

(iii) no asset of the plan is used as security for the borrowed money except where the borrowing is necessary to avoid a distressed sale of assets to provide for the current payments of benefits”.

Again, Mr. Speaker, a fairly straightforward set of recommendations and would seem to make good sense and would seem to keep up with what may have previously been understood to be the case in terms of proper decisions being made by the board, but often is not, Mr. Speaker. These things need to be refined and perhaps more closely defined in the black and white of the legislation. Again going through the legislation, Mr. Speaker:

Section 9 amended

5(1) Subsection 9(1) is repealed and the following substituted:

“(1) Subject to the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the board may:

(a) establish one or more speciality funds by allocating part of the assets of the fund to the amounts standing to the credit of members who elect to participate in a speciality fund; and

(b) designate one of the specialty funds as the default fund in which members who have not made an election with respect to participation in a specialty fund shall participate”.

(2) Clause 9(2)(a) is amended by striking out “elect to”.

Again, Mr. Speaker, seems to be pretty straightforward and in keeping with making sure that the governance of the board and the decision-making authority of the board as regards allocating various funds and the circumstances by which those funds might be allocated are properly delineated.

Section 10 amended

6 The following subsection is added after subsection 10(4):

“(5) If an employer is designated as a participating employer pursuant to subsection (1) and that employer is an employer that participates in a pension plan that contains a defined contribution provision within the meaning of *The Pension Benefits Act, 1992*, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may, by regulation:

(a) terminate the membership with respect to the defined contribution provision of:

- (i) employees who become members of the plan pursuant to subsection (1); and
 - (ii) other prescribed members of the pension plan whose employment has terminated;
- (b) transfer the amount with respect to the defined contribution provision standing to the credit of each person mentioned in clause (a) to the fund; and
- (c) if the defined contribution provision from which an amount is transferred pursuant to clause (b) permitted members to make an election with respect to the investment of the amount that is transferred, provide for the manner in which that election applies to the participation of the member in the plan”.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we’ll have some questions in committee I imagine as regards the different classes of people currently within the 50,000-plus plan holders to which this might apply. Our suspicion is that it wouldn’t be a terribly great number, but just how that impacts the membership as it’s currently construed, Mr. Speaker, we’ll be looking for greater clarity on that in committee.

Section 26 amended

7 The following clause is added after clause 26(1)(i):

“(i.01) for the purposes of subsection 10(5):

- (i) respecting the manner in which the membership with respect to the defined contribution provision of a pension plan is to be terminated;
- (ii) prescribing, from among members of the pension plan whose employment has terminated, those whose membership with respect to the defined benefit contribution provision of a pension plan is to be terminated;
- (iii) prescribing the manner of transfer to the fund of amounts standing to the credit of members;
- (iv) prescribing the manner in which a member’s election with respect to the investment of amounts transferred is applied to the participation of the member in the plan”.

Again, Mr. Speaker, all of which would seem to be fairly, I would presume, commonplace kind of powers to be delineated for a pension plan and its proper functioning, Mr. Speaker. And again while not earth shattering in nature, would seem to be more along the lines of housekeeping legislation or addressing problems that have arisen in the plan itself as it has been practised to these many years.

[16:30]

That’s about it for my thoughts today on Bill No. 99, Mr. Speaker. I know that others of my colleagues are very interested in participating in the debate. Certainly not the least for which

the fact that we’re all members of this plan, but also the impact that it has on the lives of the 53,000-odd plan holders and the 79 employers referenced in the minister’s second reading speech. But obviously it’s a fairly significant pension fund in the province of Saskatchewan and has a definite impact on the livelihood of many.

And with that, Mr. Speaker, I’d move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 99, *An Act to amend the Public Employees Pension Plan Act*.

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate on Bill No. 99, *The Public Employees Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2013*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Bill No. 98

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Morgan that **Bill No. 98 — *The Child Care Act, 2013/Loi de 2013 sur les garderies d’enfants*** be now read a second time.]

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

Ms. Sproule: — Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président. Je vais parler à un loi maintenant qui a été traduit en français, mais je vous assure que je ne vais pas poser tous mes commentaires en français.

[Translation: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will now speak to a law that has been translated into French, but I assure you that I will not make all my comments in French.]

So I’ll switch to English now, but certainly it’s good to see the . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I’m sorry, Mr. Speaker, it’s difficult to speak when there’s shouting that’s going on across the way. So I’ll try and get a word in edgewise here.

This is a law that the Minister of Education rose recently to introduce and indicated that it’s one that needed to be translated into French, and there are some very important reasons for that, Mr. Speaker. And certainly it’s appropriate that this has been done at this point in time. And in the comments, he indicated that the Conseil des écoles francsaskoises and the l’Association des parents francsaskois have asked for this to be available in French to ensure that the French children that are being put into daycare, and the operators of daycares in French — les garderies, I think is the word in French — have also access to legislation in French to ensure that the provisions are being followed and that the children are being protected under the auspices of this child care Act.

So certainly, Mr. Speaker, I think it’s important that these types of translations take place and certainly to provide protection to those children and for the parents and for the operators of the daycares as well, that they have opportunity to read the law and understand the law in their first language or the official

language of their choice, which is something that is available here in Saskatchewan, as we're part of the Dominion of Canada, Mr. Speaker, with two official languages.

Certainly daycare is something that's I think fundamental to . . . or child care is fundamental to modern society. And as a mother of two sons, it was certainly something that was very important to me as I was working on my profession and being a parent, and with both the parent of my sons and myself being working, then it was important that we had access to quality child care. We were very, very fortunate, Mr. Speaker, to start off when the boys were little in a private care home. And one was a good neighbour across the street and another was one that was recommended by my cousin. But it's always a bit of a concern as a new parent to know that where you're going and where you're going to be entrusting your children is a place that is one where they'll be cared for, that they'll be loved, and that they'll be treated well, Mr. Speaker. And that's something that I think many, many parents struggle with.

So first of all, it's ensuring your children are well cared for. Secondly, and one of the biggest barriers I think for many, many people, is the cost of daycare or child care. And it's actually prohibitive for many people to enter the workforce because of the high cost of child care that is required. So we have a lot of barriers to adequate child care here in Saskatchewan. And certainly, you know, we're looking to this government to ensure that parents of children are given more supports when it comes to entering the workforce. We know there's a lot of demand for workers in the workforce. And in order for parents to be able to adequately engage in the workforce, they need affordable child care and they need access to quality child care.

So when you see this government introduce a bill which is called *An Act to Promote the Growth and Development of Children and to Support the Provision of Child Care Services*, you're looking for those kinds of provisions, Mr. Speaker, that there's going to be more supports for parents, perhaps assurances that people who choose a career in child care are adequately remunerated. And we know that most child care workers in Saskatchewan are not making a living wage. Basically it's a labour of love. And there's certainly a lot of writing that I've been reading lately that indicates that this kind of work, it's considered soft work and that it's considered secondary work, and that because people love the kids that they're happy to work for less.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's certainly not respecting the work that these workers are doing, and it's certainly not providing a safe and secure milieu for families to look as they're entering into the world of child care. So it's somewhat alarming and concerning when we see things like, in the Throne Speech, the addition of 500 additional child care seats. But we know that several thousand of them aren't filled right now simply because there's not enough incentive for child care agencies and private people to enter into the world of child care.

There has to be a real labour of love in order for people to make the commitment to developing child care services here in this province. We need more licensed daycare spaces, but we also need the spaces that have been created by this government to actually exist. Right now they're just spaces on paper, and

that's something I think that, you know, you might want to look for in legislation introduced by this government when it deals with child care. You were hoping that maybe some of these provisions would be there.

We know that in the Speech from the Throne the government indicated that they're going to develop 500 new child care spaces, but we know that that's just a re-announcement of something that they've already done. So that's concerning. And then secondly, this government is saying that there are 13,700 spaces in Saskatchewan when we know that's not right. We know many of those spaces are not developed, about 3,000 of them. So it's fine to re-announce things over and over again and indicate that there's progress being made, but we know, Mr. Speaker, there just simply isn't enough spaces available.

And I think in terms of the French community, the francophone community here in Saskatchewan, there certainly aren't enough francophone spaces for them to put their children in. And that's something that I think is . . . You know, you would look to this government for leadership, and as we heard over and over again today, the lack of leadership is concerning. And there simply isn't any kind of legislative leadership in this fall session, as far as I can see.

So although we have a nice, new bill here that's been translated into French, of course that's the result of the work of the good people over in the public service, where we know that our friends over in the ministry are carefully doing the translation that's required. They've also done a number of what you would call, I guess, renewal of the language in a number of the clauses. But really, Mr. Speaker, there's nothing new in this bill . . .

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

Mr. Forbes: — With leave to introduce a guest, please.

The Speaker: — The member from Saskatoon Centre has asked for leave to introduce a guest. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House, Donna Birkmaier who's in the Speaker's gallery. And I believe she's probably here for the SIAST reception this afternoon. And of course she's been a real leader in Saskatoon, particularly at the municipal level and her leadership on city council. And I've got to know her husband quite well as well, and actually was able to spend Remembrance Day . . . We had a luncheon out at the commissionaires, where she's been very active in the commissionaires' world as well. So I'd like to ask all members of the House to welcome Donna to her legislature. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To

ask for leave for introductions.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join the member opposite in welcoming Donna Birkmaier to her Assembly. As the member said, she has made significant contributions in the realm of municipal government and good governance at large. She is doing very, very solid and appreciated work on the SIAST board. She's helped with the modernization of this institution and played a very, very vital role in the selection of the CEO, Dr. Larry Rosia, who we had the opportunity of introducing here last week.

And so, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, I'd ask for all our colleagues to join in welcoming Donna Birkmaier to her Assembly and thanks for her good work.

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

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 98 — *The Child Care Act, 2013/Loi de 2013 sur les garderies d'enfants* (continued)

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And as I was discussing, we know there's been a number of, not consequential amendments but housekeeping-type of amendments made to this bill. And certainly that is appropriate, and again we want to applaud the good work of the folks over at the Ministry of Justice for taking care and making sure that our legislation, the various laws in the province are updated from time to time using appropriate language and reflecting current standards in legislative drafting.

You know, as I looked at the legislative agenda this fall, this seems to be a lot of what we're getting from this government is just housekeeping and updating and reflecting modern language in a lot of bills. Some very, sort of, mundane if I can say, Mr. Speaker, types of legislation, and certainly not the type of leadership that we'd be looking for in the government at this stage of its term. And so I would call it legislation lite in many ways, Mr. Speaker. This is the type of legislation that is expected every government would deal with. But when we look for actual leadership in areas such as child care, we're simply not seeing it at a legislative level coming from this government.

We know that there's a real need for adequate child care spaces and, as I indicated, affordable child care spaces, and also a lot more opportunity for parents for example to put their children in French daycare or child care if that's what their choice is in terms of language. So it may be a helpful change, this particular

bill, *The Child Care Act, 2013*. It really is the old Act almost intact except for the French addition, and it's now been translated.

But the only other substantive change, if you can even call it that, is that there's some changes to the investigations portion. So you'll find that in clause 21 of the new bill, and in the old bill it was clause 18(4). And the biggest, biggest change in this bill from the previous bill that's been in place for a number of years is to expand the ability of a judge to issue a warrant for an investigation into also a vehicle — not just a building or premises, but the bill has been expanded to allow a search of a vehicle named in the warrant.

So I think it's an important change, but it certainly isn't earth shattering or changing the whole child care provisions. And it most certainly isn't the kind of supports I think that we see in other provinces for child care and to assist parents, as I say, who have many financial barriers to accessing child care, and certainly availability of child care spaces in rural areas and in urban areas as well, and in the language of choice as well, Mr. Speaker.

So at this point, you know, again I think we applaud the translation into French. That's appropriate and necessary and helps meet some of the needs of the French community here in Saskatchewan. We have the addition of a vehicle . . . now being able to stop and search a vehicle if it's named in a warrant in relation to an offence under the Act, and then of course the modernization of language and plain language attempts by the good people over at the Ministry of Justice to ensure that the language is kept current with modern usage.

So I think at that point other of my colleagues will want to be able to speak to this bill and provide their commentary as well, and so on that basis I would like to adjourn the debate on Bill No. 98, *The Child Care Act, 2013*.

[16:45]

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate on Bill No. 98, *The Child Care Act, 2013*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Mr. Nilson: — I would like to ask leave to introduce guests.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Lakeview.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the east gallery we have royalty with us this afternoon, and so we're in a position where we need to make sure that we introduce them appropriately. So I'm very pleased that we have part of the cast

for the *Sleeping Beauty* play that, Mr. Speaker — I'll include you in my remarks — that we saw the other night at Globe Theatre along with the member from Cypress Hills and the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood and the member for Regina Coronation Park.

So in the gallery we have some of the key members of *Sleeping Beauty*. And so I'd like to introduce Queen Adela is Lauren Holfeuer from Saskatoon. And we have King Freddie, Aaron Hursh; he's also from Saskatoon. And then we have Princess Rosetta, that's Agnes Tong from Vancouver, Studio 58 graduate. And we have the villain of the whole operation, which is Malefia, is Emma Slipp. She's also royalty as well, but the children warn everybody about her, obviously.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that they could be here today. I encourage every member to buy tickets to go and see this show, plus all of the people who are watching on television this afternoon. The *Sleeping Beauty* production is a very special one, both for adults and for children. Thank you.

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

Mr. Docherty: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to add a welcome to the cast from *Sleeping Beauty*. I had the honour to attend, and it was fabulous. And I would certainly ask that everybody else have an opportunity to take in the show. It was very entertaining, and you guys are very talented. Thanks for a great night. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 100

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Reiter that **Bill No. 100 — *The Assessment Management Agency Amendment Act, 2013*** be now read a second time.]

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to enter into the debate on Bill No. 100, an Act to amend the Saskatchewan . . . or *The Assessment Management Agency Act*. And it is an important piece of legislation. It does provide the vehicle for how municipalities and part of our education system is funded. And so it's something that we really need to take some time to reflect on and think about.

And I know one of our audience members in the gallery knows an awful lot about assessment because of her role in municipal affairs. The folks from the theatre world may find this a rather tedious discussion, but I'm afraid that that's our duty here. And it's close to the end of the day, but we pick it up after 7 if you're interested, but it may be the same type of speech.

But I do want to say how important this is and what this really means to a lot of families and people in Saskatchewan. You know, as you're buying your first property or you're a senior and you're worried about the cost of living and how things, how

property taxes are eating into your disposable income, this kind of topic really matters an awful lot.

Unfortunately though for so many people, and sometimes I find myself in this, I don't really grasp or many people don't totally grasp the significance or the language because it gets very, very technical. And tax assessment can be that way. And I think one of the things we often hear, I know — I think I can speak for many people in the House — that if there was a way that we could use plain language in this, it would go a long way for people understanding what their tax bills, their property tax bills really, really mean because it's critically important. How do we pay for our schools? How do we pay for the streets that we drive on? How do we pay for the fire fighters? How do we pay for our police protection? That's critical, hugely important. But do we understand the system of how we arrive at that?

And we know other provinces do a much better, much better job than we do. But we seem to be stuck in that technical language, and it is very hard, very hard for people to get excited about it. In fact actually I know many people, their eyes will glaze over once you bring up assessment, and they give up. They give up on trying to understand this.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will make a few comments right away, but I think I do want to speak a fair bit about this because I think this is this is an important, an important topic. And right off the bat I want to say, I want to ask the minister of Municipal Affairs, when he brings this forward in committee it will be an interesting discussion because I will want to know who did he consult with. He did make a point that he consulted with SUMA and SARM. And those really are the two primary stakeholders in this discussion because this is how they derive so much of their income.

But I think we're forgetting about the other side of the equation, those people who are paying the taxes. And was there consultation with those folks? I think that's critically important as we see growth in our province and people coming in and people who are here who are buying properties and saying, this is a good time. This is part of the good times that are here. We're buying new homes and buying new cottages. Farm land is being sold. But what is the method of which we do our assessment? And is it as efficient or as effective as it can be?

And I think people have a lot of questions about that, and I would have a question. And when we were in government, I know when we went through some of the taxation issues, there were groups who were very interested in this kind of work. And I think particularly chamber of commerce, chamber of commerce is one group that raised this issue because when they're talking about how do we tax, how do we arrive at property taxes, they would have opinions about that. And of course they're looking across the country and saying, how do we do it the best way? How do we do it the best way?

And I know this is an issue that the city of Saskatoon is wrestling with right now. And it's an issue of cost of living. When rents are high and the cost of mortgages are high because of the value of the houses that are becoming more and more the norm in Saskatchewan, people want to make sure that they can afford their properties, but they live in the neighbourhoods that they thought they were going to be living in. And of course

we're having a big debate in the House, in the legislature right now about P3s. And P3s anyways go to the heart of this issue because what we're trying to do and what they've seen in other provinces where they've tried to put the debt or the costs somewhere else because . . .

An Hon. Member: — At a higher cost.

Mr. Forbes: — At a higher cost at the end of the day.

And as we heard today earlier, there were questions from the taxpayers federation about saying, are we delaying costs for our kids further down the road? So we want to make sure the taxes are fair and reasonable but they meet the needs that we expect from our communities. And that's both schooling and also our communities. And whether that be the most basic things, about streets being paved, sidewalks being built, fire protection, police protection, our libraries, you name it, it's a wide range of services that we expect, that we expect. But we cannot delay, we cannot delay the payment of it. And it should be in a fair and a reasonable way, but it should be in a manner that we can, that we can understand.

And so I'm pleased to get into this discussion. And I want to take a moment to review the minister's comments from November 12th, 2013, when he introduced this bill. And he recognized the fact that of course that we raised about \$1.52 billion in 2012. That was the amount that the annual property taxes were generated from the assessment system — a very, very important amount of money. Nine hundred, over \$900 million went to the municipalities, and about 600 million went to the education system. So you can see that this is a very, very important process, and it's critically important, critically important that we get it right.

It talks about the consultations with both, with SARM and SUMA, the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association and the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, and it goes without saying it's key that they be included. But I would think that the net should've been cast much farther and broader because I know there are groups out there, particularly in cottage country, particularly in maybe the small acreages, that I think would have an opinion about some of these things, about what's really important with SAMA [Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency], and how do we make it the best assessment agency that it can be, that it can be?

So they said there were no objections. My question would be, did they offer any other comments? Were those comments acted on or were they dismissed? Because we see often with this government that suggestions that make a lot of common sense are dismissed. And it doesn't matter from which side it can be, whether — and I go back to the discussion around P3s — whether it's the construction association, whether it's the taxpayers federation, whether it's school boards, whether it's parents.

We see in Alberta, comments are coming from all different directions, but this government is saying no. We think we've got it right, and they're dismissing those comments. So I'm hoping that's not the case in this, in this legislation where they're narrowly focused on the items they put forward in this bill because again, as I said, this is a hugely, hugely important

issue.

So it talks about greater flexibility that the SAMA will be given because of the legislation making it more administratively efficient for government to make its financial payment to SAMA, that type of thing. It will also make miscellaneous amendments of a non-financial nature, reflecting the agency's present roles, responsibilities, and practices and respond to the change in responsibilities of the ministries of Government Relations and Education respecting the education funding system.

So that sends up some flags for me, Mr. Speaker, because are they saying that we're going to see more changes in the education funding system? What's going to be happening with that? Are we going to be seeing more changes with the Government Relations? What's happening with that? Those kind of things should be laid out. I mean it's a bit of a flag. It's a bit of a worry when they're saying they're changing responsibilities. Usually you think the responsibilities of the government and their ministries are pretty fixed. They don't change an awful lot. So this is kind of an omen, and I'm worried about what that might mean, you know.

He goes on and he talks a little bit about the school divisions and municipalities. Both may end up forgoing increased property taxes because I think this is in relation to the formula. He talks about in 2012 property tax revenues were split with 61 per cent going to municipalities, 39 per cent to education. They're going to change this. The amendments relate to fair balances of financial responsibility for assessment services to the municipalities and to the province.

So we're not sure what the impact will be when it comes to the municipalities and education. I know that particularly . . . Well I think for both of them, they're very sensitive to any kind of change at all, and we've seen that just recently. My colleague, the critic for Municipal Affairs, raised the issue around the change in the funding formula that the cities had been looking for, the municipalities had been looking for. And they've found that apparently, according to the government, there's been an error in the process, the formula, and so the different municipalities will not be getting as much as they had been planning on and . . .

The Speaker: — It now being after the hour of 5 o'clock, this House stands recessed to 7 p.m.

[The Assembly recessed from 17:00 until 19:00.]

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Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

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Minister Responsible for The Global
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Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
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