



FOURTH SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

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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

Name of Member	Political Affiliation	Constituency
Belanger, Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
Boyd, Hon. Bill	SP	Kindersley
Bradshaw, Fred	SP	Carrot River Valley
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
Broten, Cam	NDP	Saskatoon Massey Place
Campeau, Hon. Jennifer	SP	Saskatoon Fairview
Chartier, Danielle	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
Cheveldayoff, Hon. Ken	SP	Saskatoon Silver Springs
Cox, Hon. Herb	SP	The Battlefords
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Doherty, Hon. Kevin	SP	Regina Northeast
Doke, Larry	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
Draude, June	SP	Kelvington-Wadena
Duncan, Hon. Dustin	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
Eagles, Doreen	SP	Estevan
Elhard, Wayne	SP	Cypress Hills
Forbes, David	NDP	Saskatoon Centre
Harpauer, Hon. Donna	SP	Humboldt
Harrison, Hon. Jeremy	SP	Meadow Lake
Hart, Glen	SP	Last Mountain-Touchwood
Heppner, Hon. Nancy	SP	Martensville
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Jurgens, Victoria	SP	Prince Albert Northcote
Kirsch, Delbert	SP	Batoche
Krawetz, Ken	SP	Canora-Pelly
Lawrence, Greg	SP	Moose Jaw Wakamow
Makowsky, Gene	SP	Regina Dewdney
Marchuk, Russ	SP	Regina Douglas Park
McCall, Warren	NDP	Regina Elphinstone-Centre
McMorris, Hon. Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Merriman, Paul	SP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Michelson, Warren	SP	Moose Jaw North
Moe, Hon. Scott	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Morgan, Hon. Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Nilson, John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Norris, Rob	SP	Saskatoon Greystone
Ottenbreit, Hon. Greg	SP	Yorkton
Parent, Roger	SP	Saskatoon Meewasin
Phillips, Kevin	SP	Melfort
Reiter, Hon. Jim	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
Ross, Laura	SP	Regina Qu'Appelle Valley
Sproule, Cathy	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Steinley, Warren	SP	Regina Walsh Acres
Stewart, Hon. Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
Tell, Hon. Christine	SP	Regina Wascana Plains
Tochor, Corey	SP	Saskatoon Eastview
Toth, Don	SP	Moosomin
Vermette, Doyle	NDP	Cumberland
Wall, Hon. Brad	SP	Swift Current
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Wilson, Hon. Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Wotherspoon, Trent	NDP	Regina Rosemont
Wyant, Hon. Gordon	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
Young, Colleen	SP	Lloydminster
Vacant		Prince Albert Carlton

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I could have leave for an extended introduction.

The Speaker: — The minister has requested leave for an extended introduction. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried. The minister may proceed.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my great pleasure to welcome several individuals who are with us today in your gallery from some of Saskatchewan's largest industry associations. They're here today to celebrate the introduction of legislation that will help transform the way governments and Crowns procure services to ensure a level playing field for Saskatchewan businesses.

Best value-based procurement is a national and international best practice, and our government is very pleased to be moving forward with another important step to ensure procurement is leading edge in Saskatchewan.

With us today, Mr. Speaker, in your gallery, we have Shantel Lipp, the president of the Saskatchewan Heavy Construction Association — please give us a wave — thanks, Shantel; Carmen Duncan, Chair of the board of the Saskatchewan Heavy Construction Association; as well as Sean Wilson, also from the SHCA [Saskatchewan Heavy Construction Association].

We have Beverly MacLeod, executive director of the Association of Consulting Engineering Companies of Saskatchewan; Mark Cooper, president of the Saskatchewan Construction Association; Keith Moen, executive director of the North Saskatoon Business Association; and Carol Morsky from Merit Contractors Association; as well as Melissa Fiacco from the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters.

Mr. Speaker, we also have in your gallery today, Greg Lusk and Colleen Huber from Priority Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to take the opportunity to thank these individuals for their commitment and their support in moving our procurement transformation plan forward. We couldn't do this work without them, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, to my colleagues in the legislature, we welcome these guests to their legislature.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join

with the minister opposite and welcome these leaders in industry, these leaders in our economy to their Assembly here today. Certainly I'd want to thank them for their leadership within our province every day on behalf of industry groups and very key players and employers in this province, a very important role that you fulfill. And I also want to thank you for the input you'll have provided to this bill, and I guess we'll see what the bill looks like here today.

Certainly it's critically important that we receive best value for taxpayers, and we certainly need to make sure we have a level playing field for Saskatchewan companies to participate in those very important projects. So I am pleased to join with the minister and welcome these leaders here today. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the Minister Responsible for SaskBuilds and Priority Saskatchewan, welcoming these guests here today, particularly — and I don't want to point anybody out in particular, but I will — to Shantel and Carmen who joined me this morning at a construction wrap-up event to celebrate a fabulous construction season in the province of Saskatchewan.

And I want to thank all the road builders, consulting engineers, and Highways staff for their great work, and a special thank you to Sean Wilson. Against his better judgment, he let me operate one of his paving machines earlier this summer. So I cannot guarantee the quality of work in the Blaine Lake area; I think I did an okay job.

But I just want to ask all of my colleagues to welcome them here today and to thank them for all of their very hard work.

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

Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, 25 grade 7 and 8 students from Lakeview Elementary School in Regina Lakeview. They're sitting in the east gallery. They're accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Rochelle Anderson, as well as teacher interns Janay Welburne and Mike Foraie. I ask all members to welcome them here to the legislature.

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 GSAs [gender and sexuality alliance] in Saskatchewan schools. We know that this government is not doing enough to create safe spaces in our schools for sexually diverse students or students bullied because of their sexual identity or sexual orientation, and that gender- and sexually diverse students are four times more likely than their heterosexual peers to attempt suicide, and that gender and sexual alliances offer opportunities for gender- and sexually diverse students to assert their needs and have their voices heard. And we know that these alliances offer opportunities to improve attendance, retention rates, generate meaningful relationships at schools, and reduce homophobic and

transphobic bullying. I'd like to read the prayer, Mr. Speaker:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on this government to take immediate and meaningful action to pass *The Respect for Diversity — Student Bill of Rights Act* and enshrine in legislation the right of Saskatchewan students to form GSAs within their schools in order to foster caring, accepting, inclusive environments and deliver equal opportunities for all students to reach their full potential.

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

Mr. Speaker, the people signing this petition today come from the city of Moose Jaw. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud once again to present petitions to improve cell service for northern Saskatchewan. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

To cause the provincial government to improve cell service coverage for northern communities like St. George's Hill, Dillon, Michel Village, Dore Lake, Michel Point, and Sled Lake and to provide similar quality of cell coverage as southern communities. This would provide support to our northern industries as well as mitigate safety concerns associated with living in the remote North.

And the people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from all throughout Saskatchewan. And on this particular page, there are people that signed from Corman Park, Lloydminster, and Saskatoon. And I so present.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to present a petition in support of better seniors' care. And, Mr. Speaker, the petitioners point out that many seniors are having to wait in hospital beds due to the lack of spaces in care facilities. They point out that we all are hearing a number of increasing stories about adverse effects of chronic understaffing in seniors' care facilities, including unanswered calls for help, seniors being left unattended on toilets for hours, and seniors not receiving baths for weeks at a time. I'd like to read the prayer, Mr. Speaker:

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 immediately undertake meaningful steps to improve the quality of seniors' care in our province, including creating more spaces and more choices for seniors; ensuring higher standards of care in public facilities, private facilities, and home care; ensuring appropriate staff levels in seniors' care facilities; and providing more support to help seniors remain independent in their homes, in their own homes, for as long as they desire.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by citizens of Regina. I so submit.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition from citizens concerned with the high cost of post-secondary education in the province of Saskatchewan. They point out that as recently as 2014, there's a report by Statistics Canada indicating Saskatchewan is the province with the highest increase in tuition, having increased that year by 4 per cent in the province for undergraduate students and over 5 per cent for graduate students.

They also point out that the average Canadian student in 2014 graduated with debt of over \$27,000, not including credit card and other private debt. Mr. Speaker, in the prayer that reads as follows:

These petitioners respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: to cause the provincial government to immediately increase the funding for post-secondary education in this province, with a legislative provision that this increase in funding be used to lower tuition fees.

Mr. Speaker, this particular petition is signed by individuals from Vanguard, Regina, and Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Opening of the Dr. F.H. Wigmore Regional Hospital

Mr. Lawrence: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday we announced that the Dr. F.H. Wigmore Regional Hospital in Moose Jaw began their move to our new facility. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that the move-in will be completed today and all services are transitioning at the new hospital. I'm sure that staff and health care providers will be familiarizing themselves to their new surroundings, but are very excited about the innovative layout and design as well as the ability to treat a patient directly in their room.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to providing the best care for the people of Saskatchewan. This \$99.5 million facility is an example of innovation and design, not only in this province but across the country. It's going to house southern Saskatchewan's first MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] in a regional hospital as well as provide hyperbaric oxygen therapy.

Mr. Speaker, I'm counting down the days to November 6th when many will attend the grand opening and thank the Wigmore family for their personal contribution in honour of Dr. Frederick H. Wigmore. This has been an extraordinary local support for this project. There has been extraordinary local support for this project, and it will be wonderful to celebrate everyone's hard work together in just 17 short days. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Saskatchewan Library Week

Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to announce to the members of the Assembly that it is Saskatchewan Library Week. The theme this year is Dare to Know, and libraries across the province are holding numerous events highlighting this theme.

Library Week provides opportunities to acknowledge local authors and artists. To highlight a few from this year, in Nipawin, author Janice Howden will speak about her book, *Badge #124*, that reveals the details of her role as an animal protection officer in Saskatchewan. At the Glenavon Branch Library, Anne Lazurko will offer a reading from her book, *Dollybird*. And at the Spalding Library, author Janice Dick will offer a writing workshop.

Mr. Speaker, libraries are extremely valuable public institutions and they contribute to our communities in so many ways. Libraries not only house immense amounts of information, they also offer opportunities for social engagement, access to community supports, and a place for Saskatchewan residents to feel connected to those around them.

This year's theme of Dare to Know encourages and motivates Saskatchewan residents to foster their interests and passions to gain greater knowledge, to think critically, and to strive for thoughtful analysis and reflection of the world around them.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of us in Saskatchewan to accept the challenge put forward that we should dare to know. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Women's History Month

Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last night I attended an event to celebrate Women's History Month, along with the member for Regina Wascana Plains and the member for Regina Coronation Park. I was honoured to bring greetings on behalf of the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

The event was organized by the Women's History Month committee of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Saskatchewan, better known as APEGS. Mr. Speaker, this event was a night to celebrate women's contributions and achievements, not only in Saskatchewan but beyond our borders.

It is very fitting that this event was organized by APEGS, coincided with Women's History Month which takes place in October. This year Saskatchewan's theme is Breaking Conventional Molds: Saskatchewan Women in Education. Mr. Speaker, this theme recognizes the innovative models that women in the education field are creating to ensure our future leaders have the skills and the training they need to be successful. Women's History Month gives us a chance to celebrate the women who have demonstrated determination and focus and conviction in their quest for equal opportunity.

Because of these women, we all benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in celebrating the women who change society through their passion, leadership, and the innovative ways they have helped to create and inspire all of our lives. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

North Central Community Bison Feast

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the past two years, the All Nations Hope Network, headquartered in lovely North Central, Regina, has been hosting a bison feast, paskwâwimostos wîhkotowin, to honour the ceremonies of the ancestors to bring community together and to revitalize traditional culture of Indigenous people on Treaty 4 territory.

[13:45]

It was my pleasure and privilege to attend this year's event, and I want to begin by acknowledging George Gordon First Nation who provided two bison for the feast. I also want to acknowledge the elders who helped with the feast every step of the way: MC [master of ceremonies] extraordinaire, Creeson Agecoutay; and Margaret Poitras and everyone with All Nations Hope Network who made this event happen, complete with lunch for 600.

I want to say thank you to the All Nations Hope Network for the work they do to fulfill their mandate of bringing health and healing to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people and working with a variety of partners here in the city and across the province. A cornerstone of the bison feast was the recognition of those partners, Mr. Speaker, and representatives of partnering organizations were presented with a commemorative photo taken in the 1920s of a gathering of Treaty 4 chiefs.

I want to acknowledge all the artists and performers who shared their energy and talent with us throughout the day as well as the motivational speakers who shared their stories of struggle, coming through the trauma of colonialism, overcoming adversity, and the healing journey they are now on.

Thanks again to All Nations Hope for the paskwâwimostos wîhkotowin. Hay-hay, ēkosi.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Highway 22 Construction Completed

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Ministry of Highways issued a news release in which they outlined some of the work that was done in this year's construction season as a result of a record \$842 million budget. Mr. Speaker, the ministry tells us that some 370 kilometres of highways were repaved or received major upgrades. An additional 435 kilometres received significant work.

But, Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do is talk about one highway in the constituency of Last Mountain-Touchwood, and that being Highway 22, that portion of Highway 22 from

Southey to Earl Grey. Mr. Speaker, that portion of highway in the past was a thin membrane surface that received significant damage these last number of years due to increased heavy truck traffic and of course the extensive moisture and runoff that our area has received.

Work began on it last year, Mr. Speaker, with the intention of completing the project, but last year at this time, the first 5 kilometres were completed. But the remaining portion provided significant challenges, Mr. Speaker, so the designs were sent back to the engineers to deal with flooding. But I'm happy to report, Mr. Speaker, that it has been completed, and the people are driving on a new dust-free highway. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Fundraiser For Leader Health Facility

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday evening I joined approximately 200 people gathered in the Leader Community Hall in support of an ambitious fundraising effort to benefit their new integrated health facility. The event was the brainchild of Tim Geiger, reeve of the RM [rural municipality] of Happyland.

At \$1,000 a plate, the event had to be good. But, Mr. Speaker, the event wasn't just good. It was great. The evening was special in so many ways as the beautiful decor and formal dinner settings wowed each guest as they walked through the door. There were wonderful flower arrangements, exquisite wines, and individual table service. John Gormley participated in the evening as the special speaker, providing an historical overview of Saskatchewan's economic development and growth, laced with many humorous anecdotes. A comic actor and a local band, The Hudecs, provided additional entertainment.

Mr. Speaker, the highlight of the night was the realization that from that single event the community was able to raise \$200,000 to help equip the soon-to-be-constructed Leader integrated health facility.

Congratulations go to each person who helped to make that event a success. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to attending the sod-turning for this new facility on November 13th. With a commitment of nearly \$10 million from the Saskatchewan Party government and the support of the local community, I know it's going to be a wonderful day to celebrate. Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Canora-Pelly.

Institute of Public Administration of Canada Awards

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on October 14th it was my privilege, along with the Minister of Finance and the member from Kelvington-Wadena, to attend the Institute of Public Administration of Canada Lieutenant Governor's Gold Medal Award ceremony for the Saskatchewan region. This Gold Medal Award recognizes a person or work team who has demonstrated distinctive leadership and exceptional achievement in public administration.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Clare Isman, deputy minister of the Ministry of Finance, as the recipient of the 2015 Gold Medal Award. Throughout her 36 years as a professional, Clare has served the people of Saskatchewan at both the provincial and municipal level in various capacities. In addition to Clare's public service, she has been a tireless volunteer, serving on various community boards and associations. Clare is very deserving of this award, and I am pleased that she received this recognition.

At the same event, the Promising New Professional Award in Public Administration was presented to three individuals: Shelby Enevoldsen, Jennifer Huber, and Hillary Prodahl. As well, Olena Schell received the IPAC [Institute of Public Administration of Canada] Doug Stevens Public Policy Graduate Student Scholarship and Kendra Gellner received the IPAC Academic Award.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of this Assembly to join me in thanking all public servants for their service to Saskatchewan and in particular congratulating the recipients of this year's IPAC awards. Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Funding for Seniors' Care

Mr. Broten: — For the last three years we've heard tons of concerns from family members who have loved ones in seniors' care facilities. And we've heard from front-line workers who have been run off their feet. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, this government has mostly shrugged off most of that. Well today, Mr. Speaker, it's time for the Premier to hear directly from residents.

Jim Lawrence lives in the Ross Payant nursing home in Assiniboia. He says the staff are wonderful, but the Sask Party made cuts on May 17th, just four days after the Ombudsman released her damning report on the state of seniors' care and just a few days after, Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the minister claimed, they claimed to take this issue seriously.

How can the Premier possibly justify cuts to seniors' care homes just days after he stood in this House and said his government was finally going to work hard to address the seniors' care crisis?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. And I thank the Minister of Health for confirming just before I rose to answer that there were no such cuts in this particular case, Mr. Speaker. We've actually been increasing the investment in resources for long-term care here in Saskatchewan over the life of our government.

There are nursing, long-term care beds being opened up frankly across this province, new ones. That stands in great contrast to long-term care bed closures that were occurring under the members opposite. We've added resources in terms of care aids, in terms of nurses of every designation — now over 3,000 —

and of doctors. And in this particular budget, as the minister has highlighted for members of the House, there's 10 million additional dollars in the budget with respect to seniors' care, long-term care. We're piloting home care to a greater degree than we have in this province's history, Mr. Speaker.

And we recognize that there will always be more work to do with respect to seniors' care, long-term care specifically. Mr. Speaker, I say again that the best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour. Our past, our record is one of investment, is one of care, is one of providing more front-line resources for our seniors and for those in long-term care, and that's exactly what we're going to continue to work towards in the future.

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

Mr. Brotен: — Now, Mr. Speaker, with this Premier, with this government, it's always about the self-congratulatory spin. I talked about shrugging off the concerns, and we see it again. You know, Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . The member from Moose Jaw, this is a serious matter and should not be heckling on the issue when we're talking about seniors' care in the province.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier, Mr. Speaker, needs to know that the health region admits that there have been cuts here. Here's what happened. Margaret Warholm died prematurely because of neglect in seniors' care. The Ombudsman investigated it and she came forward with a damning report about the state of seniors' care in our province. The Premier claimed, he claimed that he took that report seriously but just days later he presided over more cuts to seniors' care homes.

Do you know what makes this even more outrageous, Mr. Speaker? In May of 2014, the year prior, the Premier was informed that there were serious concerns about short-staffing at this particular facility. But a year later, after Margaret Warholm's tragic death, after that came to light, after the Ombudsman's damning report, what happened in this care home? The government made more cuts and there are even less staff on each shift to help residents. Mr. Speaker, I think that's utterly disgusting. What word would the Premier use to describe it?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to again re-emphasize that, with respect to the first question the member asked, there are no budget reductions in terms of this particular facility. Moreover, right across the system we see budget increases. We see more personnel working in front-line care. These are the facts, Mr. Speaker.

We know that there are increasing demands in long-term care, certainly. We know there is more work to be done. But I just want to caution my hon. friend from characterizing the government's action as cuts because, Mr. Speaker, when you look across the system you see 3,000 more nurses of every designation. You see, I think, over 700 people involved in front-line care, new front-line care personnel in long-term care. You see the opening of new long-term care beds.

We can have a debate and we should have a debate about

whether or not we're providing exactly the care we would like to be. I think there, both sides would agree that more work needs to be done. But let's be fair with the facts, and let's be clear about the government's record and its intent. There has been a great increase in resources provided very specifically to long-term care in many of the facilities referenced specifically by the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, and system wide.

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

Mr. Brotен: — Mr. Speaker, here's what 85-year-old Jim Lawrence says about what he's seen and what he's experienced. If the Premier wants to call him a liar, he can, Mr. Speaker, but these are Jim's words:

The staff here are wonderful. But they went and shorted us here in May of this year, shorted our staff. And when they shorted the staff, that's why they had to open the north doors where the dementia people are. That's their home.

So the government, Mr. Speaker, they cut the staff, and that means that the specialized dementia unit isn't used anymore because there aren't enough workers. So now those with dementia, Mr. Speaker, that need special attention, special support and supervision, are largely left to their own to wander around the entire facility. And seniors in this facility, Mr. Speaker, are now experiencing incidents of what they describe as abuse. Does the Premier think that this is acceptable?

The Speaker: — I would like to caution members to be careful with their language not to cause disorder in the Chamber. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, may I say respectfully that I think the hon. member does a disrespect to himself, frankly, because he has been an articulate voice on behalf of those in long-term care in the province. But I think he disrespects himself and his side of the House and this Chamber when he would suggest that we think that anyone with a concern in health care, including this gentleman, is a liar. It's just not acceptable, I don't think. I think the hon. member would agree that in fairness, that's not the case. He obviously disagrees with the approach of the government, is holding the government accountable, as he should. But I think what we just saw there was perhaps, frankly, a bit disrespectful, even to the people on whose behalf he speaks.

Mr. Speaker, at this particular facility there have been some changes made. I would point out though that since 2007, the resources, the budget for this facility has increased 30 per cent. There are some organizational challenges with respect to the dementia wing, with respect to the needs of patients there. The region is working hard to find the right balance so that those needs are being met, Mr. Speaker. I know the minister has met with families in question here. I think both ministers have. The region is aware of it.

We're working on this particular issue. We're working on it, Mr. Speaker, with the intent and the priority of providing the best possible care for Saskatchewan seniors, for those in long-term care right across this province. That's why we have increased resources here at this facility and province wide. That's why we recognize that more work is needed to be done,

Mr. Speaker. And based on the record to date, though imperfect, I think that's an indicator that we will continue that work.

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

Mr. Broten: — Jim says:

I told the head lady here one day, I said, I didn't come here to be abused or pushed around. I said, I've never allowed anybody to push me around my whole life. And I said no, I don't want to start now, not at my age. I'm 85 years old. I don't know how much longer I've got, but I want to live in peace. We're paying good money. It's our money that's keeping the place going. But it's the shortage of money that they say is causing the whole problem.

[14:00]

Mr. Speaker, I think this quote from Jim is heartbreakng. This 85-year-old man just wants to live in peace, just wants to be safe, just wants to have his basic needs taken care of. But that's not happening because of the Sask Party's cuts. What does the Premier have to say to Jim?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I'll assume that the Leader of the Opposition has provided the House with a consent form to be able to speak on behalf of this individual.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to this one facility, the budget of this facility has increased by 30 per cent since the time that the NDP [New Democratic Party] sat on this side of the House. I can say that there have been improvements made to this facility; for example, recreational program will increase to seven days a week and two nights every three weeks. This is an increase from five days a week, Mr. Speaker. We know that ensuring . . . that boredom and loneliness for our residents doesn't end on the weekends. And this facility is doing a great amount of work to ensure that there is programming seven days a week.

And I have to say, Mr. Speaker, as well, for those residents that do have some form of dementia, this is their home as well, Mr. Speaker. And so we want to ensure that there is the ability for these residents as well to have the full experience of living in this facility rather than be segregated and locked into one specific wing of the facility, Mr. Speaker. Of course that will mean that there will be challenges as we ensure that those residents are able to interact properly. But, Mr. Speaker, but this facility, this region thinks that this is the right care for all of the residents.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier clearly needs to hear more of what Jim has to say.

It's all because there aren't enough staff. One of the ladies from Five Hills was over and I said, why can't you take them back to the north side like they were before? We were quite happy then, and they were too. And she said, we

can't because of money. I said, what do you mean by that? She said, well we can't afford to have any more staff.

After a decade of unprecedented prosperity, Mr. Speaker, this is really where Saskatchewan is at, where an 85-year-old man in a government care home is describing the situation there as bedlam, and he's left begging to be able to live in peace and in safety. Will the Premier at least agree with me that this is both deeply disturbing and hugely alarming?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Again thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll give the benefit of the doubt to the Leader of the Opposition that he has in fact provided a consent form to the House.

Mr. Speaker, without speaking to the specifics of the individual who has been referenced in question period, I will say this. That in almost every single long-term care facility in this province, we have a situation where residents of all different levels of care have the opportunity to live in the facility, to wander in the facility, to mingle with other residents, Mr. Speaker.

Is it the position of the Leader of the Opposition that we are now going to make secure wards in every single long-term care facility in this province? And, Mr. Speaker, I find that . . . If that is his position, he should say that.

As well, Mr. Speaker, this government, as we have said, indicated over and over again, we know that there is a lot of work to be done in long-term care, Mr. Speaker, particularly with what was left by the NDP government. This government has a record of hiring more staff, of adding more investment in capital and equipment. We'd like to see the plan from the members opposite.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, specialized dementia units are a good thing. We need more of them and we should be using the ones that we actually have, Mr. Speaker.

It's not just Jim Lawrence that's speaking out about seniors' care today. A 32-year navy veteran named Don Reid is also speaking out. He says, "Now they've got such a small staff on at night that it's hard to get any help if you need it." Such a small staff that it's hard to get any help if you need it. Don Reid is a decorated veteran. He served our country with distinction and now this government is letting him down. Don says, "I find it hard to sit back and watch it because with my background I'm used to if you have a problem, then you go in and fix it."

That's not this government's approach, Mr. Speaker. They've known about this problem for years. They've shrugged it off. And at least in one case in this particular nursing home, they've recently made the situation much worse. My question to the Premier: what does he have to say to this former navy diver?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Mr. Speaker, what I would say to any person in this province is the fact that this government has hired over nearly 800 more full-time equivalents in long-term care

since the members opposite were the government, with nearly the same number of residents in our care, Mr. Speaker. So what I would say is that the number of people working day to day in long-term care today is higher today than it was at any time under the NDP, Mr. Speaker.

That is also, Mr. Speaker, the fact that 1,200 long-term care beds were closed under the NDP at a time when our population was aging. Facilities all across this province were closing. Today they're opening in this province, Mr. Speaker. Resources have been put in each and every budget under this government, including \$10 million into seniors' and long-term care. That is the record on this side of the House. Mr. Speaker, that is the record in terms of this government's commitment to ensuring that we have personnel in long-term care.

Is there more to be done? Absolutely, but this is the record on this side of the House. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition — we're only months away from that hour of choosing for the people of this province — what is his plan? More, Mr. Speaker, is not a number. What is his number of how many long-term care workers we need?

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

Mr. Brotен: — Mabel Wasalenko lives in this nursing home as well. Here's what she has to say:

The nurses can't be everywhere. And at the same time, they are decreasing the number of staff. [She says] now with all these changes, it has disturbed by rest, my peace, my joy. [She says] there are not many here that can express their concerns, so I am worried what will happen to us.

Again, Mr. Speaker, just like with Jim and Don, Mabel's words are heartbreaking and they are alarming. Mabel just wants to be able to rest, to have some peace, to have some joy. She deserves that. What does the Premier have to say to Mabel?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that we need to provide a high quality of care in our long-term care facilities. We also need to be attendant to the matters, in terms of our seniors, that they face in long-term care. Among them are issues around loneliness, boredom. We know that we're doing some work when it comes to mental health improvements in long-term care.

That is why this facility has decided to increase their staffing when it comes to their recreational programming, to ensure that there is recreational programming in the evening hours on a couple of days a week, every couple of weeks, as well as providing recreational programming seven days a week now in this facility instead of just Monday to Friday, because we know that activities for our seniors, for our elders, don't just end on Friday afternoon, that they need to be challenged and engaged seven days a week.

But we know that there is a lot to do within long-term care. And that's why this government has invested record dollars into, not

just long-term care, but providing support for seniors, whether they live in care or don't live in care.

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

Mr. Brotен: — Mr. Speaker, Mabel, Jim, Don — they're talking about being afraid. They're talking about not being safe, Mr. Speaker. You know what this government's excuse was for cutting the staff? They actually said that other care homes were worse off in terms of front-line workers so they wanted to be consistent. So they chopped the number of care workers at this home to match the other care homes.

Mr. Speaker, talk about a Sask Party race to the bottom when it comes to caring for seniors here in the province. That's where it comes . . . That's what we see in their approach to seniors' care, consistently bad across the board and consistently letting vulnerable seniors down throughout our entire province.

Mr. Speaker, when there are problems in seniors' care, the government should work to fix those problems and should work to improve care in all homes. But the Sask Party looked around for care homes that were just a little bit better than the others, Mr. Speaker, and actually cut their resources in an attempt to ensure that care homes were consistently awful. It doesn't make sense.

My question to the Premier: does he stand by this decision, or will he admit that it was a mistake?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Mr. Speaker, what utter nonsense from the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, in this facility the average care hours per resident per day will still be higher than any other long-term care facility in this region. On top of that, as I've said on a number of occasions, these residents will now have recreational programming seven days a week instead of five days a week. They'll now have recreational programming two nights every three weeks. They will now as well enjoy a facility that has seen a 30 per cent increase in its budget in just the last eight years, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there is much work to be done in long-term care, but what the residents of this facility and any other facility can rest assured of is that this is a government of action. This is a government of ensuring that we're putting the proper supports in place including the fact that there are nearly 800 additional full-time equivalents for the same number of residents from when the NDP were the government.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there's work to be done but the record shows that this government is committed to this. What's the plan from the members opposite?

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

Mr. Brotен: — Mr. Speaker, if the staffing levels were a bit better at this care facility and that was the cause for having them reduced, imagine what the conditions are like in the other facilities with even lower standards when these are the statements that we're getting from residents here.

After, Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party cut the staff in this home to match the dismal staffing levels in other homes, seniors like Jim, like Don and Mabel, are calling the situation bedlam and they are begging for peace and for safety. They're talking about being afraid. They're talking about, as Mabel did, about how this government has stolen their joy.

Why won't the Premier, Mr. Speaker, stand up, apologize to these seniors for cutting the staff, and fix this mess so that these seniors can live in safety, live with peace, and once again have a bit of joy? Why won't the Premier do that?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Again, Mr. Speaker, with the changes with respect to the residents with dementia at this one particular facility, the average care hours per resident per day is still higher than other facilities in this one health region, Mr. Speaker. As well I'll indicate the additional work that's been done to deal with some of our challenges within long-term care around boredom and loneliness for our residents, recreational programming in this facility is up.

I can say as well, Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to get into a debate about staffing levels in long-term care, I would just remind the people of this province: 1,200 beds were closed under the NDP. Over a dozen facilities across this province were closed by the NDP. There was no subsidy for seniors of low income living in personal care homes. There is today under this government.

This government has hired nearly 800 full-time equivalent positions for the same number of residents, which means that there are more front-line staff for the residents today than there ever were under the NDP. And I would say again to the Leader of the Opposition, if he believes that more staff need to be hired in long-term care, what's the number? What is his plan? We're only a couple months away from the election. What's his plan for this?

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

Construction and Maintenance Agreements in Public-Private Partnerships

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Highways minister admitted that government-owned snowplows, sand and salt trucks, and ditch mowers will not be allowed to do any work on the Regina bypass.

[Interjections]

Lots of giggles from the government with their \$2 billion and growing boondoggle of taxpayers' money, Mr. Speaker.

She said the corporation from Paris, France is going to take care of it for the next 30 years. And the Sask Party says that accounts for most of the massive \$680 million bump in the costs of the bypass.

To the minister: just exactly how much is the Sask Party government paying to have this Paris-based company plow snow, spread salt and sand, mow the ditches while

government-owned plows, trucks, and mowers drive right past?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I went back yesterday and re-watched question period and I had to chuckle at the fact that the member opposite called them Paris snowplows, giving the implication that somehow they're going to be loaded up on great big transport planes and dropped off at the Regina airport, to have Paris snowplows going back and forth on the bypass, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, project co. will be subcontracting. Project co. . . .

[14:15]

The Speaker: — The member's asked a question; I would think they would want to hear the response. If the member from Saskatoon Centre wants to get up and ask the last question, he may do so. I recognize the minister.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, the project co. will be subcontracting to a company out of Alberta for the maintenance of the bypass, Mr. Speaker, and that particular company will be setting up maintenance shops and offices in Regina and hiring Saskatchewan staff. So there are no Paris people shovelling snow off of our bypass, Mr. Speaker. It'll be people from Canada and specifically from Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, the minister can be as snarky as she pleases, but it doesn't cover up the fact that the profits and the dollars of hard-earned tax dollars of Saskatchewan people are flowing all the way back to Paris, France, Mr. Speaker, with a contract worth \$680 million. What a complete lack of common sense.

You know, it's not just the maintenance costs on this P3 [public-private partnership] rent-a-road scheme that are a problem. When you look at the rent-a-hospital P3 that the government's entering into as well, we see that construction costs are \$222 million, but they're actually paying \$185 million to a corporation from the United Kingdom to maintain the hospital. Now that amount, on an annual basis, is more than the entire health region currently pays for maintenance.

So to the minister: what on earth will this maintenance company be doing that could possibly be justifying giving them \$185 million to a UK [United Kingdom] company?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Mr. Speaker, we've commented before in this House about the transparency with respect to these P3 projects. I can tell the member, Mr. Speaker, that the opportunities that are available for Saskatchewan companies are many, and I'll give him an example: with the Swift Current long-term care facility, Mr. Speaker, we know almost 75 per

cent of the work and the contractors that are doing work on that project are from Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And I'd put that up, I'd compare that to any traditional project that's ever been built in this province, Mr. Speaker.

The same thing will happen with respect to the Swift Current . . . with Swift Current long-term care facility, will happen in North Battleford, will happen with the bypass, Mr. Speaker, and will happen with the schools, Mr. Speaker.

He only has to look at the list of Saskatchewan companies that are participating in all of these projects to know what opportunities are available for Saskatchewan companies, Mr. Speaker, some of them located in their very constituencies that they represent, Mr. Speaker. So they can talk to the companies that live in their constituencies, that work in their constituencies, and explain to them why they shouldn't be participating in these contracts.

The Speaker: — I would like to again caution members on both sides to choose their words carefully, that their words are not providing personal insult or causing disorder.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 188 — *The Best Value in Procurement Act, 2015*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to move that Bill 188, *The Best Value in Procurement Act, 2015* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Justice and Attorney General has moved first reading of Bill No. 188, *The Best Value in Procurement Act, 2015*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

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

The Speaker: — When shall this bill be read a second time? I recognize the minister.

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

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Merriman: — Mr. Speaker, I wish to order the answer to question 970.

The Speaker: — The Government Whip has ordered response

to question 970. I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Merriman: — Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the answers to questions 971 through 974.

The Speaker: — The Government Whip has tabled responses to question 971 and 974.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 186 — *The Municipal Conflict of Interest Amendment Act, 2015*

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

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of Bill No. 186, *The Municipal Conflict of Interest Amendment Act*. Mr. Speaker, on December 30th, 2014, Justice Ron Barclay issued his final report detailing examples of inappropriate actions and conflict of interest of the former reeve of the rural municipality of Sherwood No. 159 with regard to a proposed development in that RM.

The Barclay report recommended a number of specific legislative changes and identified other areas where procedures can be strengthened to better address and prevent conflict of interest situations. Government has taken these recommendations very seriously. As a result, through a single bill we have introduced amendments to *The Cities Act*, *The Municipalities Act*, and *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2010* to strengthen municipal conflict of interest provisions. Consequential amendments will also be made to *The Planning and Development Act, 2007* and *The Ombudsman Act, 2012*.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments balance local municipal autonomy with the need to reassure the public that government has been proactive and responsible in strengthening municipal conflict of interest legislation in a way that is effective and practical. Since potential conflicts of interest are faced by council members in all municipalities regardless of type, amendments are proposed to all three municipal Acts to ensure consistent rules and requirements for elected municipal officials across the province.

The amendments in this bill achieve three main purposes. First, they implement specific recommendations and respond to observations in the Barclay report with legislative changes, in effect raising the bar for municipal officials. Second, they will improve the ability for government, through the minister and cabinet, to address situations of municipal conflict of interest that may arise in the future. And finally, they will expand the Provincial Ombudsman's mandate to review and investigate municipal matters, including conflict of interest and code of ethics matters.

I will expand briefly on the proposed amendments in each of these areas. As mentioned, the Barclay report recommended specific legislative changes and identified other areas where procedures can be strengthened and provisions added to better address and prevent conflict of interest situations. These

amendments include, first, requiring council members to give a more detailed declaration of the nature of his or her pecuniary interest when it's disclosed. This will move beyond the bare declaration currently provided for in legislation and require council members to disclose the general nature of a conflict of interest and any details that could reasonably be seen to materially affect that member's impartiality in the exercise of his or her office. This will also clarify that a declaration must be made when any conflict of interest exists, which is defined to encompass a wider range of situations beyond financial interest.

Second, requiring the mandatory filing and regular updating of public disclosure statements by council members. The amendments propose to extend the mandatory public disclosure statement requirements currently in *The Cities Act* to the other two municipal Acts. The statements will continue to require updates annually and whenever there is a material change or declaration of a conflict of interest made.

Third, requiring municipalities to adopt a code of ethics that includes a model code and specific ethical standards of the municipality. The model code of ethics will be prescribed in regulations once it's developed in collaboration with the municipal sector associations over the next few months. Once implemented they will be adopted by municipal councils as their minimum standard which they can enhance.

The Barclay report also identified that legislation should be more aligned with common law respecting conflict of interest and its expectation that elected officials act in the entire interest of their communities. Through consultation with the municipal sector, amendments are proposed to clarify what constitutes conflict of interest, private interest, and inappropriate use of office. These are modelled on similar provisions already in place for MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly].

Other amendments will address issues raised indirectly in the report and improve upon current practices regarding transparency, declaration, and disclosure of interests. These include requiring council procedure bylaws to have clear and transparent rules regarding matters such as delegations and submissions to council; clarifying a council member must withdraw from all meetings on which he or she serves as a councillor where a matter of interest may be discussed or decided; committees of council, subcommittees, appeal boards, planning boards, and other municipal entities; ensuring rules regarding declaring and disclosing conflict of interest for municipal employees are in place.

Councils will have the flexibility to determine these rules and consequential amendments to *The Planning And Development Act, 2007* to ensure councils consider the impacts and cost benefits that proposed development, particularly high-density development, will have on servicing and infrastructure in addition to or as part of its official community plan where appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to touch on proposed amendments that allow the minister and cabinet to address or prevent situations of council conflict of interest should they arise in the future. This will be accomplished by strengthening and improving the authorities in the Acts related to inquiry, inspection, and disqualification for the minister, for cabinet, and for those

conducting inquiries or inspections. An example is ensuring authority for the minister to suspend or limit the powers of a council member during the course of an inquiry or investigation until the results are known. This ability is not present in the current legislation.

Another example is broadening the authority to remove council members from office, presently just for RMs, to apply to all of the municipal sector. Mr. Speaker, this is not a step that any government wants to make, but ultimately the government must be in a position to deal with situations, such as the one which arose in the RM of Sherwood, no matter what municipalities such situations arise in.

I also want to point out that the proposed amendments will standardize the disqualification period in all three municipal Acts. Any person disqualified as per the requirements under legislation, which will now include being removed from office by cabinet, will be disqualified from running in a local election for 12 years, equivalent to three general elections. Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that these measures will only be used as a last resort by government in circumstances where public interest warrants it.

The third and final area of proposed amendments will expand the mandate of the Provincial Ombudsman to include municipal conflict of interest and other municipal matters. Mr. Speaker, discussions with the Provincial Ombudsman and the municipal associations have resulted in agreement regarding consequential amendments to *The Ombudsman Act, 2012* to add municipal entities, and specifically municipal conflict of interest and code of ethics, to the jurisdiction of the Provincial Ombudsman.

With the expanded mandate, any member of the public or the minister could submit an issue or complaint to the Ombudsman regarding a municipality, including administrative or procedural matters and alleged conflict of interest or code of ethics breaches. The Ombudsman may investigate if warranted and issue a report with recommendations, upon which the minister could then act or issue a directive. This will provide government and stakeholders an efficient, impartial, and timely mechanism for concerns about municipal governments to be raised and reviewed.

The Provincial Ombudsman indicated that expanding her jurisdiction to include municipal entities is very much in keeping with the role of the Ombudsman. It will assure the people of Saskatchewan of a credible, independent, and impartial office that they can take their concerns to and know that their issues will be taken seriously. At the same time, the municipal associations have been assured the Ombudsman has well-established policies and procedures for screening out frivolous or vexatious complaints. The investigative processes are not adversarial and are conducted confidentially and in private, with the complainant and all other appropriate persons being interviewed if a case proceeds.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of consultations, the ministry has consulted extensively on these amendments with the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, New North, and through them the municipal administrator associations. These consultations began in April 2015 and concluded this

past September. They involved meetings, presentations, and sharing draft side-by-sides of the amendments for review and comment.

I've also met with the presidents and executives of both SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] to discuss the amendment package and can report that they are appreciative of the collaborative approach taken with respect to the amendments. Many of their suggestions for changes have been incorporated into the package where possible. My ministry will continue to work closely with these groups to develop regulations related to the amendments, specifically a model code of ethics and other provisions that might further broaden the scope of the conflict of interest provisions in the context of common law, as was suggested by Justice Barclay.

[14:30]

I would also like to report that the two associations have met with the Provincial Ombudsman and are supportive of including municipal conflict of interest and other municipal matters in that office's mandate. I'd like to take the opportunity to specifically thank SUMA and SARM for working closely with government officials in order to develop this legislation, as well as those individuals who took the time to provide input, advice, and feedback throughout the process.

Mr. Speaker, as a former municipal administrator, I understand that these amendments involve sensitive issues. Nevertheless I believe elected officials, municipally and provincially, favour clear conflict of interest rules. We have the general support of the municipal sector for stronger conflict of interest legislation that provides more guidance to municipal councils. More important than this, these changes respond to the public interest in transparency and accountability.

In conclusion, I believe the bill shows government's commitment to taking action to address the report's findings regarding shortcomings in legislation, consulting with the municipal sector and accommodating their requests to ensure the changes are practical, and better positioning municipalities and municipal officials to deal with the challenges of growth by providing more guidance and direction, consistent with MLAs in this area. And so, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 186, *The Municipal Conflict of Interest Amendment Act*. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The minister has moved second reading of Bill No. 186, *The Municipal Conflict of Interest Amendment Act, 2015*. Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member for Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And it was with great interest that I listened to the minister's presentation on Bill 186. And, Mr. Speaker, this is certainly a bill that deserves a lot of attention and certainly a lot of thought as well, Mr. Speaker.

As the minister may know, I also had the pleasure of serving as the mayor of my home community for about eight years. And some would say they were good years; others would say they were bad years. But, Mr. Speaker, what we learned over that

time is the fact that this is a very serious matter, and mayors and councillors of course should be held to a higher standard. And I think everybody in the province of Saskatchewan understands that and they certainly accept that.

And Bill 186 touches a bit on the important aspect of working together, collaborating on trying to ensure that this kind of activity doesn't occur and that we put all the safeguards and necessary measures in place to engage as many people as you can.

And, Mr. Speaker, as the minister alluded to . . . Those that may be listening may be missing a few of his points. I think, as a result of the Barclay report that looked at the issues around conflict of interest for a particular RM, Mr. Speaker, what has happened here is the minister has brought in a lot of the issues that resulted from Barclay's recommendation to include all the municipalities, the northern municipalities, the cities, and of course the RMs as well.

But, Mr. Speaker, there were some specific recommendations that the minister made reference to as it relates to raising the bar to ensure that conflict of interest rules and regulations are certainly strengthened, and that accountability and transparency . . . And to ensure that this bar that was raised is wide-sweeping in the sense of making sure that all the members of council, mayor or reeve and council members and committee members as well, Mr. Speaker, that they are also included and they're also subjected to the new way of ensuring that the conflict of interest issues that may present themselves to a council member from time to time, that there are standards, there are high standards. And certainly having consultation with SUMA, SARM, and New North are very, very helpful, Mr. Speaker.

I guess one of the things that's really important when the government, or the three points that are raised by the minister as trying to resolve this issue, number one, as I mentioned, was the specific recommendations to raise the bar to ensure that conflict of interest isn't swept under the table.

Secondly, to improve the government's ability to act in the event that there is compelling evidence and compelling arguments that this kind of activity is continuing on with any municipality, Mr. Speaker. That certainly I think they want to position themselves to be able to do this.

And the third component, of course, of the bill which really identifies the different players, is to expand and engage the Provincial Ombudsman to involve his or her involvement in terms of being able to investigate some of the claims that are out there, Mr. Speaker.

I think some of the measures that would require council members to make more concise and clear declarations if there is a potential conflict of interest, there are tons of questions around this, Mr. Speaker, as we all know. Many communities and many RMs out there . . . There's landowners. Some of them are involved with businesses. Some of them are providing services and supplies. It really, really is important to note that this is an issue that has to be investigated and certainly has to be thoroughly vetted and discussed, Mr. Speaker, before some of these measures are put in place that could really hamper people from either doing things, continuing to provide service to a

municipality. If they do have that service available yet, would this preclude them from being on the council?

Mr. Speaker, if there is more concise and clear declaration of a conflict of interest, and good rules are followed and council and the reeve or the mayor has the ability to remove that person from any discussions and follows the regulations as they should be followed, Mr. Speaker, I think we've got to make sure that we have those discussions and see where this goes.

I think also what's really important, Mr. Speaker, is requiring mandatory updates each year for some of the council members that may be involved with the council, and having the public viewing certainly things like legislation to reflect common law, to devolve some of the aspects of the common law Act, Mr. Speaker, to improve transparency in declaration of conflict of interest. These are some of the measures that the minister alluded to and some of the changes under this particular Act, Bill 186. And, Mr. Speaker, the minister went on to identify that if there are issues of concern, if there is a pattern of behaviour, there's a continual challenge to the process of properly declaring your conflict of interest matters, then of course the minister has also reserved the right to have the ability and power to suspend or limit council members, Mr. Speaker.

This is something that's certainly a brand new era in terms of being able to do that. To remove a member from council is an incredible challenge that must be very well thought out. And, Mr. Speaker, since this involves all the three municipal Acts, whether it's the RM Act or whether it's the SUMA or *The Cities Act* or *The Northern Municipalities Act*, Mr. Speaker, overall this power to suspend a member of council is wide ranging.

And, Mr. Speaker, as the minister alluded to, he does not want to go down this path. As a last resort that's something that will obviously be available to him. And that's something that has to merit a lot of discussion and thought, Mr. Speaker, because obviously this is a whole new ball game.

And the challenge that we have to balance off here, Mr. Speaker, is that we know, in our elected lives, and we're finding more and more evidence of that, that there are less and less people willing to become active with their local council or local ... as a reeve or a mayor or as a member of the city council. A lot of the issues and the challenges they have to face as potential council members, it is a fairly tough business to get into, Mr. Speaker.

And as you begin to do the expansion, whether it's a police record check or whether it is a conflict of interest declaration or whether it's an application to be a member of a party, Mr. Speaker, and all the hoops and challenges that you have to go through, is really coming of age now within the municipal entities throughout the province, whether it's an RM or whether it's a city council or whether it's a community council, that we're finding that a lot of people may not want to get engaged with the councils any more.

And to a certain extent, Mr. Speaker, these are some of the reasons that I'm hearing that a lot of people don't want to come forward because it's just a huge pile of forms that you have to fill out. It's a fairly tough process to get involved. So generally

a lot of people, a lot of people, Mr. Speaker, will not put their name forward, will not join some of the councils simply because they have all these forms to fill out and all these declarations to undertake. And this will add to that particular challenge, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not saying that it's not necessary, Mr. Speaker. I'm just pointing out that the balance that you have to look at is, quite frankly it is going to be a ... This is going to be another daunting matter in which we're trying to get more people engaged with putting their name forward, whether they want to become an MLA or a mayor or a reeve or a council member. And this is what, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that we have to discuss and we have to think of as we look at Bill 186 and how it's going to impact the amount of people coming forward and the amount of people willing to have their name stand for some of these various positions.

Now the third part of the Act, Mr. Speaker, that the minister alluded to, was the fact that he was planning on bringing in the Ombudsman to expand some of the mandate of the Ombudsman's office, and making consequential amendments to *The Ombudsman Act*, Mr. Speaker, and the fact that the minister can order a directive. And all the municipal entities are involved. So the Ombudsman would be also engaged, which is the third part of the Act, Mr. Speaker. And I'm a bit curious. Yes, the Ombudsman's really important but to be engaged in the municipal mandate, so to speak, I'm just a bit confused as to why the Ombudsman as opposed to, you know, to the minister being able to do some of these things.

Is it the fact that the Ombudsman has the ability and the staff to be able to do this? This is the question that you have to ask, Mr. Speaker, is that, okay, the Ombudsman's an important person, supposed to be impartial to any particular issue and is there to advocate and support as many of the people out there that don't appear to be given some of these services, Mr. Speaker.

So the real question is that ... I see a third component involving the Ombudsman, Mr. Speaker. It may be part of Justice Barclay's decision, Mr. Speaker. But quite frankly, we need to find out from whether it's SUMA or SARM, exactly who made the decision and what was the logic behind involving the Ombudsman. I think we need to ask those questions. We're not saying it's a bad idea or a good idea, Mr. Speaker. We just want to know the logic or the fact that you've had in this municipalities Act, this Bill 186, you identified the ability to remove, remove a council member that's guilty of a serious conflict of interest.

And in the third component, you say the Ombudsman should be engaged as well to expand his or her mandate. And, Mr. Speaker, while it points out that the Ombudsman could vet any kind of frivolous claims, this was in concert and consultation with SUMA, SARM, and New North. And the question that one has to ask, and I'm going to ask it here, is that what exactly was the basis of the decision to involve the Ombudsman as opposed to the Ministry of Justice, as an example I would use? What was the logic behind that particular part of the Act?

This is where we need to ask the questions of the Ombudsman. This is where we need to ask questions of the minister in trying to get to the bottom line of this particular Act, which is to

ensure that we have a greater bar or a greater standard of making sure that municipal officials throughout the province of Saskatchewan don't become too comfortable when it comes to conflict of interest and that there are amendments made and that there are penalties identified and that there are actions undertaken to limit that particular problem.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have to, under the declaration that was pointed out to the minister when he talked about requiring council members to make more concise and clear declarations and to update their declarations on an annual basis, Mr. Speaker, or in a more timely manner if the declarations are to be made in mid-year, as an example, I think what's important there, Mr. Speaker, is that if you're a councillor that is going to be engaged in a conflict of interest and you've identified it, the bottom line is, who would have the determining factors to determine or the determining ability to say whether that's a serious enough matter to warrant the removal of that council member? And this is kind of what some of the questions that we need to ask to make sure that we have the right information as it results to dealing with this conflict of interest bill.

And, Mr. Speaker, Bill 186 has a lot of work that needs to be done in front of it just to answer the questions that we have as the official opposition.

[14:45]

Now when you look at the council member itself having to make clear and concise declarations, Mr. Speaker, how wide ranging would that net be of responsibility? When I'm talking about a net of responsibility, Mr. Speaker, if one particular council member has a serious conflict of interest and doesn't really disclose it or doesn't really identify it to the extent that he or she should, and then other council members are aware that there's a conflict of interest and they don't say nothing, does this engage them, does this implicate them in any way, Mr. Speaker, as a result of some of the processes that might be undertaken from here on in?

Now we all know that in many of these smaller communities, and many of these smaller committees of the city councils, that a lot of people are, a lot of people know each other very well, Mr. Speaker. We see that happening all throughout Saskatchewan. And we obviously want to be able to work together as a team. The municipalities have always done this. They have done some wonderful, tremendous work over time to really build the Saskatchewan cities, villages, hamlets, and communities throughout the province.

And it's that particular train of thought that I had, Mr. Speaker, is that, how do you empower them without shackling them with a lot of rules and regulations that (a) discourage people from running for office, Mr. Speaker? That's always a balancing issue that we have to incorporate in our thinking as it relates to Bill 186.

The second item, Mr. Speaker, is that if there is a serious allegation that there is a perceived conflict of interest and if the particular member doesn't come forward on his or her own accord, how does that implicate and complicate matters with the rest of the council if they are aware of this conflict of interest and they don't simply react or respond to it? Are they

implicated in any way? And that further complicates, I guess, the whole notion that I talked about earlier, is how do we engage people in community councils and the RM councils and the city councils as well?

So there's a lot of issues to talk about here, Mr. Speaker. Again as I mentioned, some of the points that the minister raised as a result of the Barclay report that came forward that had some specific recommendations, I don't think anybody in the opposition is going to be argumentative in any way, shape, or form when we talk about more concise and clear declarations of conflicts of interest, when we require or look at the option of providing more updates on an annual basis of statements of conflict of interest, when we see that municipalities required a greater and updated code of ethics conduct, Mr. Speaker.

And as I mentioned at the outset, improving transparency in declaration of a conflict of interest, these are all statements that I think the people of Saskatchewan will overall support, Mr. Speaker. But it's important that, as an opposition, that we sit down and we ask the questions of the people that are engaged with the sector. The municipal councils out there need to be forthcoming with us in saying, what part of the Act is worrisome for you? What part of the Act creates some challenges for you? And what part of the Act do you like? So we're able as an opposition to voice those concerns and bring the issues forward.

But one of the things that's really . . . something that's concerning to me, Mr. Speaker, is that, how far is the net of responsibility going to be cast in the event that there is some conflict of interest or a blatant disregard for the rules and regulations occur? And other members of the council or other members of a subcommittee or the mayor, as it were: of that particular conflict of interest, how much of the responsibility do they bear when faced with this particular issue if it came to the council's attention?

So as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we know each other a lot in these communities, and it's very, very troubling and it's a very tough issue to address when we're such a small community and these issues come forward. And then you have the challenge of trying to rebuild relationships locally and continue to lead. And, Mr. Speaker, these are some of the issues that we have to apprise ourselves of as official opposition.

It's a very interesting bill, Mr. Speaker. We see the objectives identified, and that's to create a higher standard or raise the bar in terms of declaring a conflict of interest. But there are many, many issues that we've got to speak about, many issues that we've got to talk about. And again as I mentioned, how do we balance some of the necessary rules that we have to put in place versus encouraging many other people to run for council, for reeve, or for mayor? This is the trade-off that you have to incorporate as we think this thing through.

So, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot more questions on this particular bill that we have. We want to hear from the people of Saskatchewan what they think these changes are going to do and how do we resolve the matter that it may discourage other people from coming forward to put their name in for reeve, mayor, or council.

So, Mr. Speaker, a lot more questions. We want to consult more. So thereby I move that we adjourn debate on Bill No. 186.

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate on Bill No. 186, *The Municipal Conflict of Interest Amendment Act, 2015*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Bill No. 187 — *The Saskatchewan Farm Security Amendment Act, 2015*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the end of my remarks I will move second reading of Bill No. 187, *The Saskatchewan Farm Security Amendment Act, 2015*.

I'm pleased to speak to the amendments to *The Saskatchewan Farm Security Act*. This legislation will clarify who can own farm land in Saskatchewan and will provide the Farm Land Security Board with the necessary authority to enforce the Act. Our priority is to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of Saskatchewan's agriculture industry and economy. We believe that these amendments will help us achieve this. The changes will ensure that farm land in Saskatchewan remains accessible to our farmers and ranchers.

Rules around who can own Saskatchewan farm land have been in place for about 40 years, with the last significant change to the legislation occurring in 2002. Under those rules, only Canadian residents and 100 per cent Canadian-owned entities could own more than 10 acres of farm land in Saskatchewan.

However over the past number of years, it has become apparent that the existing rules on farm land ownership require a clarification. Increasingly more and more people are viewing farm land as an attractive investment option. There is increased interest from Canadian pension plans and other investors in holding Saskatchewan farm land as an investment in their portfolio. Concerns have been raised regarding Canadians owning farm land on behalf of non-Canadians through loans, mortgages, or other more complicated agreements.

This increased interest from institutional out-of-province and potential out-of-country investors results in unease among the farming community. During our consultation, we heard that it was becoming difficult for farmers and ranchers to compete with these investors and that large tracts of land were being bought by people who had no interest in farming it themselves or in being part of the local community.

The number of instances where the effectiveness of the Act has been questioned is increasing. Also increasing is the number of instances where compliance with the Act is being questioned.

Farmers are beginning to worry about the long-term success of their operations and their ability to expand and remain competitive. They express fear that young farmers and new

entrants into the industry are losing the ability to own land and fully benefit from farm land ownership. Furthermore there are fears that the connection to the land . . . The foundation of Saskatchewan as a province, farm land, is being sold to those whose livelihoods do not depend upon it. There's also concern that the Farm Land Security Board did not have the necessary tools to monitor and enforce the rules. It became clear that something had to be done.

Today I am pleased to speak to the changes that will keep our farm land in the hands of our farmers and ranchers while still allowing for a continued economic growth. Exemptions will continue to be granted for economic development initiatives. We welcome investment in our province, and our government will continue to ensure that we maintain a positive investment climate.

The changes being introduced are what the people of Saskatchewan want. We know this because we asked. We needed to make sure that our government is on the right path and making the right decisions regarding farm land ownership. So through a consultation process, we asked who should or should not be allowed to own farm land in the province. We asked specifically about pension plans, investment trusts, pension plan administrators, and foreign investors. Over the summer of 2015, more than 3,200 people shared their views, and the results were clear: the vast majority of respondents do not support pension plans or foreign investors purchasing farm land in Saskatchewan. They do support our government in taking a stronger role in enforcing farm land ownership rules.

In fact 75 per cent of respondents opposed allowing institutional investors such as Canadian pension funds to purchase farm land in Saskatchewan. Eighty-seven per cent of respondents do not support foreign ownership of farm land, and 69 per cent do not support foreign financing. Eighty-five per cent of respondents support giving the Farm Land Security Board a greater role in enforcing compliance of farm land ownership rules.

The people of Saskatchewan told us what they thought regarding farm land ownership, and we listened. We are making changes that will keep farm land accessible to Saskatchewan's farmers and ranchers. The legislative amendments to *The Saskatchewan Farm Security Act* will strengthen the regulations introduced in April as law, including designating pension funds, administrators of pension fund assets and trusts as ineligible to purchase farm land; defining having an interest in farm land to include any type of interest or benefit, for example capital appreciation, either directly or indirectly that is normally associated with the ownership of the land; and when financing a purchase of farm land, all financing must be through a financial institution registered to do business in Canada or through a Canadian resident. This legislation removes ambiguity around who can own farm land in Saskatchewan. It also provides the Farm Land Security Board with more tools to enforce the Act.

The Farm Land Security Board will receive new and expanded authority to enforce the legislation including: at the discretion of the Farm Land Security Board, any person purchasing farm land must complete a statutory declaration; increasing fines for being in contravention of the legislation from 10,000 to \$50,000 for individuals and from 100,000 to \$500,000 for corporations; authorizing the Farm Land Security Board to impose

administrative penalties to a maximum of \$10,000; and perhaps most importantly, the purchaser of the land must prove to the satisfaction of the Farm Land Security Board that they are in compliance with the legislation.

Our government understands that to many citizens in the province, farm land is not just an asset. It's a connection to our history, and who we are as people. There's a strong connection between ownership and stewardship of the land. I'm pleased that our government is strengthening the rules around farm land ownership in the province. Our government asked the people of Saskatchewan, who should be able to own farm land in Saskatchewan, and the response was clear.

The legislation that is being introduced reflects what the people of Saskatchewan asked for. Saskatchewan's farmers and ranchers are the best people to care for this land and ensure its sustainability for the future growth of the province. Changes to *The Saskatchewan Farm Security Act* will only have positive effects, positive effects on the agricultural community in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I propose that the amendments to this Act be passed in the best interests of the people of Saskatchewan. The alternative of not making these changes increases the risk of farm land being removed from the hands of Saskatchewan's farmers and ranchers over time and placed into the hands of investors such as foreign interests and institutions. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 187, *The Saskatchewan Farm Security Amendment Act, 2015* be read a second time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Agriculture has moved second reading of Bill No. 187, *The Saskatchewan Farm Security Amendment Act, 2015*. Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member for Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated on numerous occasions, I have the great opportunity of responding to the bills that the government have introduced as to how they plan to proceed with the fall session in terms of what their priorities are. And, Mr. Speaker, this is a really interesting bill overall.

And I want to explain to the people that may be listening one of the things that's really important to us as a caucus, and we've received this on a continual basis from our leader, is that he wants to make sure that every single member of his caucus are aware of some of the issues that Saskatchewan faces overall.

[15:00]

So this is how an MLA from northern Saskatchewan gets the opportunity to talk about something that's really important, such as farm land ownership, Mr. Speaker. It is something that has an affect, an impact on all of us.

And people right across the province, whether you're living in Pinehouse or whether you're living in Saskatoon or whether you're living in Esterhazy, the bottom line is we need to know more about Saskatchewan. And as directed by our leader, he wants us to be acutely aware of what all the challenges are throughout all of the province of Saskatchewan, not just in our

home constituencies, Mr. Speaker. And this is the manner in which our leader wants us to conduct ourselves. So it's important for us to point that out, that we participate and we often learn a lot about what Saskatchewan's all about. And agriculture from my perspective, there's something that is quite important to the province overall.

And as a northern MLA, we've had some involvement and some experiments, so to speak, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to agriculture overall, as I mentioned earlier in some of my comments, several years ago as it relates to the Cumberland House farm, Mr. Speaker, the Ile-a-la-Crosse farm, and of course the Silver Lake, Green Lake farm, Mr. Speaker. Those were experiments in agriculture. At the time, the Liberal government wanted to see if the northern communities could make a go of the agricultural economy that was benefiting the rest of the province. And as a result of that, we saw the establishment of three northern farms, Mr. Speaker. As a result of the Devine government, they of course shut down those farms because quite frankly while there was people working in that particular industry, they really had no confidence that agriculture could make it in the North, and they made the arbitrary decision to shut down those farms.

And, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that there's still a lot of great work being done in Cumberland House, a lot of great work being done in Ile-a-la-Crosse, and of course a lot of great work, and the leader in the whole pack, done around the Green Lake area. There's such a tremendous opportunity in agriculture. And the three experiments in northern Saskatchewan did not fail when it came to looking at the opportunity to raise cattle, Mr. Speaker, to grow the feed for that cattle, and to really begin to make an effort to get the communities involved with agriculture, Mr. Speaker.

So while it's on limited basis, Mr. Speaker, the northern part of the province, and certainly myself as a former mayor of Ile-a-la-Crosse, we were engaged quite frankly with a lot of the agricultural activity associated with some of those northern farms. And we did learn a lot.

Mr. Speaker, I can recall and remember some of the comments made by another friend of mine, the former mayor of Green Lake, Fred McCallum. Fred was an avid farmer. He worked very, very hard, and he was one of the salt-of-the-earth kind of guys. And, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately we lost Mr. McCallum several years ago. And he had a really good operation; he worked very hard. And he was one of the people that certainly from my perspective I considered one of the agricultural leaders in northern Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, he showed us exactly how you work the land properly; you look after your cattle well and you apply yourself, and you can really make a go of the agricultural opportunities such as raising cattle.

And, Mr. Speaker, I have an uncle also involved, an uncle and an aunt, that do have a cow-calf operation. They do lease a piece of land in Ile-a-la-Crosse in which they graze their cattle. And most recently they had to move them, go further south, Mr. Speaker, because of the predator problem. The wolves got a couple of head. And, Mr. Speaker, we spend a lot of time in and around their small operation. And my uncle's name of course is Gordon Aramenko and, Mr. Speaker, he transplanted from the P.A. [Prince Albert] area and brought a lot of different skill sets

a number of years ago.

And, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the school does, and I'm quite proud of that, is they actually take school kids out to his operation. And the kids get to see the horses and get to see the cattle and of course the chickens as well. And they get to see how to run a farm. That's really, really interesting, and it gives the young kids a very good perspective of what the agricultural sector has to offer.

And it really, I think, as our leader wants to do with all of us, it really begins to give you a different insight, as students and as learners, if you take the opportunity to discuss and learn as much of Saskatchewan as you can. And I think that's the basis of why our leader wants to make sure that we participate in all the bills, and especially from a northern MLA perspective, that we understand agriculture a heck of a lot more as each year passes.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important I explain that perspective of why we're in the discussion around the farm land security Act, Mr. Speaker. It's important that we participate in these discussions. And as you probably are aware, Mr. Speaker, we get to travel throughout the province on numerous occasions. There are many times I was east of Yorkton, Mr. Speaker, and south of Morse, travelling and looking at some of the farm land and some of the issues and the challenges, whether it's flooding or whether it's a lack of habitat for some of the wildlife, Mr. Speaker. These are some of the things we've learned over the years.

And as we've watched some of the activity in our province, the farmers and ranchers of the province do really want to teach a lot of people their particular industry. And, Mr. Speaker, it's been a benefit to me, and certainly it's made me a better MLA overall to understand the agricultural sector as much and as constantly as I can, Mr. Speaker. But like I said, there's a lot of work that needs to be done. We continue struggling, being a landlocked province, in terms of getting our crop to market, Mr. Speaker.

What I say when I was talking about agricultural overall, I hear the former Finance minister chirping from his chair, but I can tell you, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that's really important, Mr. Speaker, is that a number of years ago we had the agricultural transportation crisis in which we couldn't get our product to market. And, Mr. Speaker, we didn't hear a peep from the Saskatchewan Party MLAs because this happened under their watch. I don't know how many billions of dollars the producers lost, but they couldn't get their grain to market because the grain was quite frankly stuck in the elevators.

There was no leadership at all from, at the time, the Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, or the Premier, Mr. Speaker, or the members of the Saskatchewan Party caucus. They're very mute. And, Mr. Speaker, from my perspective as a northern MLA, I'm saying, well these guys should be really working hard to find solutions. And, Mr. Speaker, not a peep. There was not one single word from the Saskatchewan Party MLAs on how we deal with this crisis.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would characterize that as a big, fat F in

terms of grading their ability to respond to the agricultural transportation crisis of several years ago. And how many producers actually paid the price for the ineptness of the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker? The number was staggering, and I think the effects are being felt even today.

So to say, Mr. Speaker, what's important, from a person that has limited background in agriculture, when I saw that lack of leadership by the Saskatchewan Party in dealing with that crisis, Mr. Speaker, there's two things that prompted a lot of thought in my mind, Mr. Speaker. Number one is they're taking this community for granted, and number two is they just couldn't figure out how to deal with that problem, Mr. Speaker. That's the bottom line. And many farm families were affected by that, Mr. Speaker, and certainly it's something that we saw from our perspective as a total lack of leadership.

So one of the things that's really important, my point in all of this discussion, is that the member from Saskatoon Nutana who was raised on a family farm, Mr. Speaker, who was raised on a family farm, has more knowledge, more compassion, and more ability to understand what the agricultural sector is going through than any member of the supposed Saskatchewan Party that's supposed to represent producers and farm families across the province a lot better than they have been, Mr. Speaker, a lot better than they have been.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the farm security Act is another issue that kind of confuses me from the northern perspective, Mr. Speaker. I'm sitting here wondering, okay, was it not a number of years ago when the NDP were in power, when the Saskatchewan Party was screaming at the top of their lungs, open up the land sales to foreign ownership? Open up land sales so people will buy land in the province. I can remember the current Minister of the Economy who was yelling across on a continual basis saying, open up the farm land rules. Let our farm land be sold, is what the Minister of the Economy was yelling across. And, Mr. Speaker, he was pretty consistent in that message. And when the NDP finally did open up the farm land ownership rules, Mr. Speaker, he was very, very happy.

And now you fast-forward to 2015, and now we're back to square one where the Saskatchewan Party is saying, well hold it here; we may not want to do that. So my point being is what happened at the time, Mr. Speaker, is their philosophy was driving their argument here. It wasn't common sense, Mr. Speaker. Their philosophy, the Saskatchewan Party philosophy: let's have a wall-to-wall sale of anything in the province that's for sale, Mr. Speaker. Let's bring in the free market. Let's do anything we want. Everything's for sale.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we see a lot of their aspirations being tempered by resistance from rural Saskatchewan on some of their philosophies, Mr. Speaker. And that's why I was kind of smiling, Mr. Speaker, when I hear the minister saying . . . The phrase he used was, we know this because we asked, Mr. Speaker. Well you know this because you should actually believe in it, Mr. Speaker. And they didn't believe in it a short 10 years ago until the producers finally telling them, well you guys better relook at this farm land security Act because we've got a problem here. And it was almost like the light bulb came on over there, Mr. Speaker.

And again from a guy from northern Saskatchewan, a guy from northern Saskatchewan giving the Sask Party agricultural advice, saying that you should not have embraced the idea of anything in Saskatchewan is for sale including our farm land. That's exactly what you preached 10 years ago, Mr. Speaker. They were yelling at the top of their lungs when they were in opposition: open the door; let the opportunity for buyers of our farm land from all throughout the world.

And now, Mr. Speaker, 10 years later, what are they saying? Hold it. Hold it. Hold it. We made a mistake here; 3,200 people responded to this issue. So as a northern MLA, my argument is you guys should check your facts before you start screaming at the top of your lungs based on your philosophy, that maybe the people of Saskatchewan didn't want their farm land sold to foreign ownership. And as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, we see that here today.

So the NDP were right to limit foreign ownership of our farm land in the province of Saskatchewan. So the NDP were on the right track, Mr. Speaker. The NDP knew very well that in order to secure farm land and defend the family farm, Mr. Speaker, that at the very least they had to own the land.

At the very least, the NDP were going to protect the family farm, the family farm attitude, Mr. Speaker, because a lot of families in this province wanted to own the farm land. And, Mr. Speaker, as we sat here, the Saskatchewan Party, the Saskatchewan Party came along and they said no, we're going to sell everything. We're going to have a wall-to-wall sale of our Crown corporations, a wall-to-wall sale of our farm lands. Anybody who wants to buy land, come to Saskatchewan; we'll sell it to you.

And all of a sudden, Mr. Speaker, all of a sudden we have this survey. And now we have the Minister of Agriculture eating crow in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, because he was wrong from day one. He was wrong from day one. And this is a big, glaring mistake, Mr. Speaker.

He failed on the grain transportation crisis, Mr. Speaker; a big fat F for our mark for him. And now, Mr. Speaker, he's failed when it comes to the farm land security and protecting the family farm and the right for Saskatchewan people to own farm land in this province. So from my perspective, Mr. Speaker, he ought to be fired, Mr. Speaker, or culled from that herd, Mr. Speaker.

The bottom line is that on both those fronts, on both pivotal moments, on pivotal moments, Mr. Speaker, that Minister of Agriculture failed terribly, Mr. Speaker. He failed terribly. And this is an example of how philosophically off the conservatives are — sorry, the Saskatchewan Party members are — when it comes to protecting agricultural practices and agriculture in general in the year 2015.

So that's why, Mr. Speaker, when we have an agricultural discussion, I would rather take the member from Saskatoon Nutana's advice any day of the week as opposed to that minister who has a warped sense of what's the priorities for agricultural Saskatchewan overall, Mr. Speaker.

And here's evidence. Here is evidence today. Here is evidence

today as he makes these changes on Bill 187. As he makes these changes on Bill 187, what are they doing, Mr. Speaker, the right wing Saskatchewan Party? They're limiting farm land sales to non-Saskatchewan residents. That's right. You heard it here first, Mr. Speaker. As a free enterprise, right wing Saskatchewan Party, they're going back to the NDP practice of limiting foreign or out-of-Saskatchewan ownership of land in the province.

Now is that going against their philosophy, Mr. Speaker, that they go around and spout off so much, Mr. Speaker? They go around spouting off that they're a free market, free enterprise party, Mr. Speaker. Well hold it. Hold it. Bill 187 is limiting, limiting people from buying farm land in the province of Saskatchewan. So what is it? Are you guys New Democrats or are you free enterprisers?

[15:15]

You've got to make up your mind. You guys can't morph into something overnight. Because if you're willing to morph into something overnight, then obviously you're not sticking to your beliefs and that's not much of a leadership quality that I think from my perspective . . . If you're sitting on this side of the Assembly you see . . . Well hold it here. Maybe polling does dictate how that government reacts to certain situations, Mr. Speaker. And we're going to find out that polling sometimes, Mr. Speaker, shouldn't be the basis of how you make your decisions. You should lead and govern according to what you believe in.

And, Mr. Speaker, there are many times you're going to have to say no. And the Saskatchewan Party so far has almost broke the province financially because they don't know how to manage the province well.

And this is another example of how on the agricultural front, from a northern perspective, as I sit here and I observe how they've failed this particular sector terribly, and the minister has failed terribly on the grain transportation strike or the grain transportation issue, failed miserably, Mr. Speaker. He was going to fix the railway companies and nothing happened.

Now, Mr. Speaker, he almost sounds like a New Democrat over there saying, we're not going to sell. We're not going to sell farm land to non-Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker. That's their right wing government over there. They're willing to sell the Crowns. But farm land? Oh, hold it, maybe the Saskatchewan Party made a mistake here.

So what is it, Mr. Speaker? Are they free enterprisers or market champions, Mr. Speaker? Or are they protectionists, Mr. Speaker? So how's this going to affect the people that gave them money to say, look we want to come and invest in Saskatchewan so the Saskatchewan Party, we'll give them money. But they want to buy everything up in sight.

Well now, Mr. Speaker, now they've got a problem. They've got a problem, Mr. Speaker. They've got a problem. They've got a real issue on their hands. What do they do now? What do they do now? (a) Do they go back and say, well we let our philosophical beliefs muddle our thought so that's why we're changing our mind? Well they can't admit that, Mr. Speaker.

We know that on this side of the Assembly.

But then all of a sudden they're saying, well how do we attract investment? Well we're not going to do that by limiting who can own farm land in the province of Saskatchewan, but they've done it anyway, Mr. Speaker, because polling says they should. And, Mr. Speaker, that's why we are in financial ruin today because of a lack of leadership on that side. You cannot govern by poll results, Mr. Speaker. You've got to govern according to what your finances can afford you, Mr. Speaker, and based on common sense, not on philosophies, Mr. Speaker.

So you look at some of the examples that I talk about, Mr. Speaker. *The Farm Land Security Act*, Mr. Speaker. We know, we know. We sit here and we say, oh my goodness, the Saskatchewan Party, right wing Saskatchewan conservative party, Mr. Speaker, they are now limiting who can buy farm land in the province of Saskatchewan. Does that not curtail investment in the oil and gas sector? Does that not curtail opportunities to attract families? Isn't that contrary to their philosophy, Mr. Speaker? Like what are these guys doing?

And the big, massive argument on this side of the House, we're saying, well we know they don't know what they're doing. We know that. But the question is, you guys got to figure out, what are you guys? Are you guys NDPers hiding in conservative clothing or do you really believe in your philosophies? What are you? And that's the whole argument.

We know they're not liberals. The liberals have been eaten up alive over there. There's no more liberals left there, Mr. Speaker. But the question is, what are you guys? Do you guys believe in the free enterprise system, yes or no? Do you guys believe that investing into farm land opportunities from across the globe is important? Do you think attracting companies from around the world is important? Well I think if you . . . [inaudible] . . . this particular aspect, Mr. Speaker, what they're doing today, it really lends itself to our argument, is that they don't have a clue what they're doing. That's the bottom line, Mr. Speaker.

Now an observation from a northern MLA telling them, you guys have got to make up your mind what you're going to be, agricultural champions or chumps. And our biggest argument is I see you guys being agricultural chumps because you don't know how to handle situations like the grain transportation crisis, and you certainly don't know what you're doing on farm land ownership.

Now this is where I go back to the minister's comment, Mr. Speaker, when he said, we know this because we asked, Mr. Speaker. But why didn't you ask when you first got in if people appreciated this notion, Mr. Speaker? And this is one part of the bill that I see, Bill 187, where they can't go retroactively back to all those organizations outside of our province's borders to kill some of these farm land purchases. What's done is done, Mr. Speaker. It's identified in the bill. So what happens, you have . . . I'll use the analogy. If you've got 100 head of cattle in the corral and then you open up the gates and all of a sudden 90 of those cattle are gone, you've got 10, it's oh, maybe it's time to close the gate now. Well, Mr. Speaker, 90 per cent of the issue or 90 per cent of your herd's gone. Now how are you going to get them back, Mr. Speaker?

And now the member from Wood River . . . not Wood River, from Thunder Creek, the current Minister of Agriculture, I would say to him, my goodness, do you know what you're doing? That's the fundamental question I would ask from the northern perspective. Does that Minister of Agriculture really know what he's doing, Mr. Speaker, when he flip-flops, when he sits on his hands? When he had the greatest transportation crisis in the history of Saskatchewan, he sat on his hands, didn't push the agenda with the then-prime minister, Stephen Harper. And today, now, Mr. Speaker, he's capitulating, he's changing his mind on opening up Saskatchewan for investment. He's saying, no, no, no, we're not going to let our farm land be sold outside of our borders.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the question, the question I would ask him is, you've got to make up your mind what you are. Are you a free enterprise, right wing kind of guy? Or are you an NDP, protecting Saskatchewan families' interests, supporting, supporting the family farm structure, Mr. Speaker, supporting rural Saskatchewan to the extent it should have been supported? And, Mr. Speaker, all we've seen from this minister, Mr. Speaker, is failure upon failure upon failure.

And, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you today, the member from Saskatoon Nutana knows more about agriculture — raised on a family farm — than the current Minister of Agriculture. And, Mr. Speaker, the advice we get from her is sound. Mr. Speaker, it is from the philosophy of ensuring that we protect family farms. And, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that there won't be any confusion on our side of the Assembly that we have seen and witnessed from that particular minister and that particular party, Mr. Speaker.

So the question we ask, the question I ask is, what are they, Mr. Speaker? Are they going to be a party that's going to attract investment to Saskatchewan? Or are they going to be a party that's going to say, we're open for business like Grant Devine done in the 1980s? But then hold it, all the investors outside of Saskatchewan in the oil and gas sector, the tourism industry, Mr. Speaker, the manufacturing industry, they're saying, oh but the Saskatchewan Party's saying no, we're not going to let any farm land go for sale.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what is it? What is it? Are you going to allow investment in or are you not going to allow investment in? And if you are not going to allow investment in to begin with, why did you open the gates when you became government? Why didn't you applaud the effort that we had to attract more investment into the agriculture sector? Why didn't you applaud that? Because, Mr. Speaker, they are driven by their philosophy. They weren't driven by common sense. And we in northern Saskatchewan see that every day in this Assembly. We see this every single day, massive confusion on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

Now I look at this whole notion, Mr. Speaker, and you wonder why the former minister of Finance is heading out of Dodge, Mr. Speaker. Because things are going to get a little tougher around here, getting a little tougher around here, Mr. Speaker, because there are choices that will have to be made on that side of the Assembly. And I don't think the Saskatchewan Party have the courage to share that information with the people of Saskatchewan.

That's why we're not going to have a budget, Mr. Speaker, before the next election. We're not having a budget because I think the people of Saskatchewan are going to quickly learn that these guys, what we told them not to do, they messed things up. They messed things up because, Mr. Speaker, their long-term plans don't include investing in Saskatchewan and making Saskatchewan a better place. They're going to, like the former Finance minister, head out of Dodge as soon as things get tough.

And, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you right now that the NDP are going to work very hard to regain the trust of the people of Saskatchewan and to tell them that Bill 187, Bill 187 is a capitulation at its worst from the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Speaker, because he's the one that championed the open-for-sale argument for years and years. And now he's saying, no, we're putting up walls and we're not going to allow the sale of non-Saskatchewan ... ownership, non-Saskatchewan ownership of farm land, Mr. Speaker.

Now one of the things I think we looked at ... And a lot of people would know this that generally follow the management and finances of our province. People know this as well. Now, Mr. Speaker, we know that on the education portion of the property taxes that many farm families pay, Mr. Speaker, we know that a large portion of that is actually paid by the Saskatchewan taxpayers, the property tax, and rightfully so, Mr. Speaker. We know that a lot of farmers have a very difficult time making ends meet at times. But we recognize, Mr. Speaker, that the whole notion of the property tax matter, which so many farmers pay on their farm lands, that the current government — and certainly we did a lot of the work, some of the work as well — that some of the taxes are being subsidized by the government, Mr. Speaker.

Now the question I would ask today, Mr. Speaker, the question I would ask today, of those taxes being paid on the education portion, on the education portion on farm land, Mr. Speaker, the question I would ask the people of Saskatchewan is this: number one is, do you think it's right that those subsidies for the education portion on farm land, that the payment of taxes should go outside of our borders to people that own land outside of our borders? That's the fundamental question that I ask today.

And I'm going to ask the Minister of Finance: how many acres are owned outside of Saskatchewan? And do you think that subsidizing non-Saskatchewan owners on the property tax part of the education portion is actually ... Do you agree it should be sent out of province? That's the fundamental question I ask for the Minister of Agriculture.

But today, Mr. Speaker, he won't answer that question, Mr. Speaker, because the bottom line is driven by his philosophy. He allowed many more sales of land to occur, many more sales of land to occur, acres of land to occur, and now the subsidy that we give to the hard-working farmers of our province is now also being sent out beyond our provincial borders. Now is that fair? Does that make common sense that we're sending Saskatchewan taxpayers' money that should be here to help our farmers and family farms here in Saskatchewan ... That's where the concentration of support should go, and it's going outside of our borders. And there's many investors outside of

our borders saying, thank you, Saskatchewan, for the support. Does the minister think that that is the correct thing to do? Does he believe that, Mr. Speaker?

And that's why this bill is so important to this debate and to this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. It is so very important because we see that the Saskatchewan Party are massively confused. They don't know what they stand for, and they're going back and forth. They're blaming everyone, and they're not taking the responsibility themselves for their mistakes, Mr. Speaker. And that's costing the Saskatchewan taxpayers a whole whack of money, Mr. Speaker. And this is yet another example that you can pile on to the lean program, Mr. Speaker, another example you can pile on to the smart meter fiasco, another layer of debt that you can add on, Mr. Speaker, is all the money leaving our province.

Does the minister think that's a good idea when our intent is to help the Saskatchewan-based people, the Saskatchewan-based farm families, Mr. Speaker, as opposed to investors outside of our borders or owners outside of our borders getting the benefit of our taxpayers' dollars, Mr. Speaker, without lifting a hand, without even touching a cow, Mr. Speaker? They get those benefits. Does that make any sense, Mr. Speaker? That's the question I would ask the minister.

So today the bill would beg the question: how much land in the province of Saskatchewan is actually owned by non-Saskatchewan residents? Is it 800,000 acres? Is it 1.2 million hectares? What is the exact amount? And of that amount, how much is actually being shipped out of our province? Does the minister believe that's the right thing to do with Saskatchewan taxpayers' money? Does he believe that, Mr. Speaker? These are the questions we have around Bill 187.

And based on the past practice of that minister ... And I can tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you one thing is that if there was a major transportation issue facing any one of my constituents, I'd be the first one in the front row hollering for action, Mr. Speaker. But when it happened to Saskatchewan, the Minister of Agriculture sat on his hands and said, it wasn't me; it was the railway company.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not leadership. That's not leadership. And as a result of that, I don't know how many billions of dollars it cost the producers of the province of Saskatchewan, based on the ineptness and non-response by the current minister that's now saying, we're going to put up trade walls and trade barriers to farm land ownership because — not because he doesn't believe in it — because he was told that's what he has to do to retain support in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

[15:30]

So philosophical beliefs on that side, Mr. Speaker, are out the window when it comes to common sense. People of rural Saskatchewan said you'd better start using common sense. Otherwise the Saskatchewan Party will be out the window, Mr. Speaker. And that's what's really important, Mr. Speaker.

As a result of this particular Bill 187, it gives me great pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to stand in this Assembly to see the Saskatchewan Party change their philosophy on farm land ownership, Mr.

Speaker. All this time the NDP were right, Mr. Speaker. The NDP were right by limiting foreign ownership of lands in Saskatchewan. The NDP were right not sending out benefits out beyond our borders. And, Mr. Speaker, they meekly come in here and present Bill 187 as it's a triumph. It's a triumph for us. It's a failure for their philosophy, Mr. Speaker. That's the bottom line on this particular bill.

And I know my colleagues are going to have a lot more to say about this bill. But it's a great day, it's a great day to be a New Democrat in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, a great day. Why is it a great day? It wasn't a great day for us when they had the agricultural transportation crisis because we knew farm families were suffering. We knew that. We knew that there was a lot of hurt in rural Saskatchewan as a result of their ineptness, Mr. Speaker. So it was not a great day then. We knew there was a lot of suffering.

But it's a great day for us today when we see the current Minister of Agriculture who is supposedly rural Saskatchewan's representative from wherever he is . . . Thunder Creek, Mr. Speaker. And today we find out that he's standing up in the Assembly and he's saying, the NDP were right. That's what he's saying today. He's saying, the NDP were right to limit foreign ownership of farm land in the province. That's what he's saying today, Mr. Speaker.

He's saying that today, and it gives us great pleasure to hear that from probably one of the most right wing Saskatchewan Party members, Mr. Speaker. Because the bottom line is when we were in government, they were yelling every day to loosen up those sales, Mr. Speaker. They were decrying protectionists and they were decrying all these adjectives to describe the NDP, Mr. Speaker. And today now in 2015, he just admit as a result of this bill that the NDP were right.

The NDP were right. And 2,300 people in the farm community responded, and a vast majority of them said, Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people are saying to this government, our farm land should stay in Saskatchewan farm families' hands. And if there's any benefits going to support the agricultural sector, it should not go out of our borders. It should stay here to protect our communities. It should stay here to protect our interests. It should stay here to protect this vital industry.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's no question in my mind that as we sit here and learn, as directed by our leader and as coached by the member from Saskatoon Nutana, that agriculture is one of the strongest pillars of our economy in the province of Saskatchewan. We understand that, Mr. Speaker. We understand that. As the economy of agriculture goes, so does the fortunes of our province go.

So we understand that even in remote northern Saskatchewan. We understand that and we appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. But we also know, Mr. Speaker, that the bottom line is we see the face of family farms changing into a lot more corporate ownership. Larger farms, Mr. Speaker. At one time there may have been 50, 60,000 farm families. It may be down to 20 or 30. I'm just taking a guess here, Mr. Speaker.

But we're seeing that the family farm so to speak, Mr. Speaker, is fading under the Saskatchewan Party watch. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because it didn't respond to the transportation crisis. That's one reason. And number two, Mr. Speaker, is that they have allowed the farm family to be cordoned off and sold off because their philosophy dictated that, Mr. Speaker. And number three, the amount of money dedicated and should be focused on supporting the family farm in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker — that money's going out of our borders.

So just on those three fronts, Mr. Speaker, it's amazing to me why the rural people of Saskatchewan entertain supporting a Sask Party candidate in the future, Mr. Speaker, because quite frankly, quite frankly there is a lot of dissention, Mr. Speaker.

And I would point out that in due time, in due time, Mr. Speaker, in due time the finances of the province are going to dictate some really tough choices, really tough choices in the future, Mr. Speaker. We know that on this side of the Assembly. There's going to be some tough choices coming down the pipe. And that's why today, Mr. Speaker, that's why today the quandary that the current Minister of Agriculture finds himself in, and the entire caucus of the Saskatchewan Party is that they . . . We know, and they won't admit it, but we know that they're broke, Mr. Speaker, that they are flat broke.

And as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, they are going to have to figure something out here fairly quickly. So if they're in that bad and dire financial strait, Mr. Speaker, and now all of a sudden they put up these measures to limit investment into farm land, purchasing farm land at the same time they're shipping our money out of the province that's designed to go to farm families, Mr. Speaker, one can only speculate what choices that they will make, Mr. Speaker, in the future. And that's why it's important to the people of Saskatchewan that we stop them now, that we stop them now, Mr. Speaker, because quite frankly they do not know what they do.

And as a member of this NDP caucus, I'm not going to forgive them, Mr. Speaker, because they ought to have known what to do, Mr. Speaker, from day one. And the fact of the matter is they didn't know. And as is traditional, Mr. Speaker, one would say, forgive them, for they do not know what they do. But, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to forgive them. They put the people of Saskatchewan at risk financially, and they hurt our family farms to the extent that they have hurt them by their inaction.

And now, Mr. Speaker, they're trying to protect farm families' interest in the province of Saskatchewan. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? Again it gives me great pride to stand in this Assembly to say, you were wrong on farm land ownership. The NDP were right, and this bill proves my point. On that notion, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 187.

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate on Bill No. 187, *The Saskatchewan Farm Security Amendment Act, 2015*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

ADJOURNED DEBATES**SECOND READINGS****Bill No. 179**

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Duncan that **Bill No. 179 — The MRI Facilities Licensing Act** be now read a second time.]

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

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to enter into the debate on Bill No. 179, the MRI bill, Mr. Speaker. A few things that I'd like to cover today, I'd like to talk a little bit about why we're actually having this debate at this particular time. I'll talk a little bit about why in fact this is an important debate to have in light of the fact that the bill is before us, and I think it's a very important discussion to have. And I will also talk a little bit about some of the problems with private MRIs and where the evidence actually falls, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I would like to start, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with why we are having this debate. So as you'll know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have no Throne Speech this fall. This is highly unusual in my time as an MLA; it's been six years, Mr. Speaker. And we have no Throne Speech. The government hasn't presented us with a vision of where they'd like to go, which is an odd and interesting thing. Only two terms in, Mr. Speaker, and heading into an election, you'd think that this government would have a plan and a vision to present to Saskatchewan about where they'd like to go.

Instead we have a very light legislative agenda fixing things that this government has failed to do properly. We've got the essential services legislation before us. We've got some changes to farm land sales. Not that those aren't important things, but normally at this time, two weeks into the legislature, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we'd be talking about the Throne Speech. Members on both sides of the House would have an opportunity to weigh in, and we just don't have that opportunity. And I think it's sad and disappointing that this government is so lacking in vision that they wouldn't be able to produce a Throne Speech at this particular time.

I think it's also an interesting thing to look at the timing of this MRI bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Late or mid-fall — I think it was in October — the Premier actually, via social media, floated a tweet about private MRIs and wondering if it was time to do this. And then we came into the legislative session and there was no legislation before us. He had floated the idea, and we came into the legislature and not . . . The time when bills are usually presented, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is in the fall where we all have an opportunity to see the bills before us, debate them, and then between the fall and spring session we have the opportunity to reach out to stakeholders and see what people think about those bills, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's usually how it's worked. It's worked for the last six years. I don't know why the government has chosen to take a different path this particular time.

But I think it's an interesting thing when you are introducing

public policy. You'd think that . . . You've got two things going on here. So you either have a government who truly believes that this MRI policy is good public policy . . . And I want to give them the benefit of the doubt but, as I said, the Premier himself floated the idea about private MRIs last October and then in the dying days of what should have, what should have been the dying days of the legislative session at the end of May or mid-May, introduced the bill.

So the bill is before us now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we will have a fulsome debate both now and in committee. But I find it passing strange. And I will give the government the benefit of the doubt that they think that this is an effective approach, although I will argue that the evidence throughout Canada and other jurisdictions shows quite the opposite. So I'm concerned that this is a political motivation, that the government felt like this should be the issue going into the election. Private MRIs? When we look at health care in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, introducing a bill on private MRIs is this government's highest priority, when in fact we know we have a seniors' care crisis in the province?

The Ombudsman's report of late last spring, we have a myriad of people who have come forward describing their stories, and not easy stories to tell. We all hear from health care workers. I know what I hear in my office and I have no doubt that members opposite hear those same issues too around the provision of long-term care services and services for seniors, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We can talk about other . . . This is what this government has chosen as their high priority, private MRIs, when we have specialist waits going up, despite the Premier's commitment to specialists. In 2012 our Premier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, made a seven-day pledge that citizens in Saskatchewan would wait no longer than seven days to see a specialist. And in fact in 2014 there were waits for specialists for 50 per cent longer than 2013. And on average, people here in Saskatchewan wait about seven months in our two largest health regions to see a specialist. That is far longer than the seven-day pledge that the Premier made 2012.

So I think priorities, private MRIs . . . And I will not discount the need for improved, not just capacity, but I think handling of wait-lists actually is another issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But the MRI issue is the one that this government has chosen to tackle in this legislative session.

We can talk about ER wait times. I know anecdotally too. I think the numbers show it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We heard some numbers yesterday that almost 1 in 10 patients in Prince Albert, in that particular health region, leave the ER without seeing a doctor. So that totals about 2,700 people in that city alone leaving the ER before they've been served. And those aren't people who are just walking away with a child who's got an ear infection. There have been several months over the last year in which over 15 per cent of the people needing urgent care end up leaving, and 10 per cent of those needing emergent care end up leaving. And that 10 per cent are those people who are supposed to see a doctor in 15 minutes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So this government has chosen to put the issue of private MRIs, which . . . There is no evidence in Canada showing that this

particular plan will work. They prioritized this over fixing the ER issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They've prioritized it over the seniors' care crisis. They have prioritized it over wait times for specialists. This is what this government's agenda is, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We can talk about infrastructure issues. This government, at last count — and it's been a year and a half so undoubtedly this number has gone up — but this government has a \$2.2 billion infrastructure deficit in health care, Mr. Speaker, that has grown under their watch. That number has grown.

The Saskatoon Health Region a couple of years ago under the former CEO [chief executive officer], Maura Davies, had said in the budget that she would need five times the amount she got just to do basic maintenance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In this last budget this spring, I believe the number was about 29 million allocated for maintenance for all of the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a \$2.2 billion infrastructure deficit, which was a conservative estimate at that time and has undoubtedly gone up since the report was done a couple of years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So again this government has chosen to prioritize private MRIs over some incredibly pressing issues, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[15:45]

Again I have to go back to long-term care. That's been an issue over the last two and a half years where the stories keep getting more and more difficult to hear. I had three cases in my office in a period of about six weeks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of people — three individuals — in their 90s. And we're not talking about the incredibly spry 90-year-old that is running half marathons and doing all kinds of things like this. These are people who were suffering some dementia issues, were having falls, multiple cancers, all kinds of issues, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These were people who desperately needed long-term care, and they were all assessed as not needing long-term care.

After some advocacy, one of them was able to get into Sherbrooke, but the demand is great. And not just for long-term care. Adding long-term care spaces is absolutely imperative, but on the flip side of that, how do you keep people from needing long-term care? And that's all about making sure that those supports are full on the front end when it comes to things like home care. And I'm not just talking about medical needs, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm talking about all those things that keep people who start to experience some challenges.

I think about my own parents, who I talk about an awful lot here in this Assembly. They live two blocks away. They've been really healthy. They're both in their early 80s, and we had a bit of a crisis here this summer, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Both of them at the same time were ill. And there are seven kids in my family, so we have a big family, but it happened to be the August long weekend and five of us live in the city and four of us were out of town. So there were multiple trips, three trips to the emergency room, medications. My mother was not doing very well. My dad wasn't doing very well. In and out of the hospital over the period of a couple of weeks. And I saw, for the first time in my life, parents who are still incredibly active and doing lots of things, but the first signs of aging really were setting in.

And I think about the things that they need to stay in their house. They have a huge yard, a huge garden. My dad has taken over the whole boulevard for growing food. It used to be grass when I was little, and I've talked I think about mowing that grass, but it's all used for food production now. So I think about those kinds of needs, and I think about home care. And I think about what we need on that front end, and not just the medical needs of coming and having bandages changed and those kinds of things which are really important, but we need to make sure that our seniors have good meals and help with tree trimming or snow shovelling or cutting the grass, all those kind of things, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So when we talk about priorities, we have an MRI, a private MRI bill before us which is questionable whether or not . . . It's more than questionable. I think it's important to have that debate, because I believe the evidence shows that it is not going to be an effective approach. But we have the government choosing to do that rather than focusing on the things that are important to the people of Saskatchewan like ER [emergency room] wait times, like specialist wait times, like making sure our most vulnerable citizens, including our elders, have the care and dignity that they need. This is this government's priority, Mr. Speaker, and I think that that is completely backwards.

I'd like to talk a little bit about, since we are having this debate, since we are having this debate, some of the principles around health care, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I think as Canadians in a universal health care system that we all cherish and value. And I'd like to quote on Mr. Romanow's, former Premier Romanow's report that he did for the Government of Canada, his *Building on Values: The Future of Health Care in Canada* from 2002. And one of the things he talks about, this is from page 8, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

Medicare rests on the principle that an individual's financial resources should not determine access to services. In the Commission's view, governments have a responsibility to guarantee that the public system has sufficient resources to ensure appropriate access to advanced technology. Increased investment within the public system for new diagnostic technology can remove the temptation to "game" the system by individuals and health care providers through the private purchase of diagnostic tests that could allow them to jump the queue.

And that's on page 8. I think two pieces of the discussion that are interesting here, and I'd like to quote from page 139 of the same, of the Romanow Commission here too. I'll quote here:

The current debate appears to be polarized between two extreme and incompatible positions:

Those who look at the way wait lists are managed across the country and conclude either that it is impossible to say whether there is a problem or that the problem is more perception than reality; and

Those who use incomplete information to conclude that the problems are so severe that the only solution is to allow parallel private facilities in which individuals can use their own funds to purchase some services and, in their view, "take some pressure off the public system."

Mr. Romanow rejected both of these positions and put forward some good arguments. I actually reject those as well. I know as the Health critic, I have had people who've come into my office and I think by virtue of being Health critic, this is what happens: people come into my office stressed about MRI wait times. I would not dismiss the need for improving access to MRIs here in Saskatchewan, but this government is providing a so-called solution and not addressing the real problems, which are both capacity and organizational structure of wait-lists, and that is ultimately the problem. So I would not diminish that when people get sick and need some diagnostic testing that there's huge stress and huge pressure and anxiety when you find out that you have to wait for a test.

I can't even imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know I have colleagues who've been in the position of family members waiting for MRIs, and it's an incredibly stressful thing. I can't imagine as a mom, if one of my two kids, or both of them for that matter, were having medical issues and had to wait. Waiting is an incredibly difficult thing when you're unwell and uncertain about what the problem is. I understand that pressing need to have that resolved, so I don't diminish people's concerns about the need for improving MRIs, access to MRIs. But again it's about capacity and organizational structure.

The second piece that Mr. Romanow talks about:

Those who use incomplete information to conclude that the problems are so severe that the only solution is to allow parallel private facilities in which individuals can use their own funds to purchase some services and, in their view, "take some pressure off the public system."

This is exactly what this government is doing, and it hasn't been shown to be effective anywhere in Canada, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think what people in Saskatchewan deserve . . . And I'd like to draw your attention to page 149 of this same review, and this is important to keep in mind, that the system does need to be repaired.

And what should people in Saskatchewan deserve? Mr. Romanow goes on to say:

Taken together, the recommended actions to manage wait [time] lists should achieve three broad goals — fairness, appropriateness, and certainty. Fairness means that wait times are set on objective criteria based on patients' needs rather than by individual providers or hospitals. Appropriateness means that the time people wait is appropriate for their condition. And certainty means that people will have a clear understanding of how long they can expect to wait and why. In future, it should be possible to set benchmarks and track progress in meeting those benchmarks on an ongoing basis.

I would agree that those things can be resolved, and I don't think that they can be resolved in the manner that this government is proposing resolving them.

I'd like to talk a little bit about some of the problems. I'd like to talk . . . I'm not quite sure why the member from Carrot River is heckling when we're having a debate about some really important ideas, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I'm going to move on

to some of the problems with private MRIs.

But I actually think I need to . . . I missed one particular thing that I think it's important to mention about a government who is willing to backtrack. In 2009 the Premier actually said in the media that offering medical services such as MRI for a fee "seems to be outside the Canada Health Act" and is an area where the government doesn't want to tread. So that was the Premier himself saying that. He also had used the line, "to use a bulging wallet to jump the queue." He used that very argument that people who have more money shouldn't be able to jump the queue.

This isn't just about individuals getting access to service more quickly. This is about the rest of us who don't buy those services getting . . . our services diminishing because of the ability to queue jump. So I think it's important to add into the context that this is a Premier and a government who said they were not going to do this, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And here we have this on the eve of the election, when we should be having a Throne Speech and should be talking about big, broad ideas, instead we're talking about private MRIs and not the pressing concerns of people like ER wait times, like specialist wait times, like the seniors' care crisis, like the growing infrastructure deficit that this government continues to add to, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So some of the problems with private MRIs, where does the evidence point to, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Where does the evidence point to, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Well I'd like to draw the members opposite attention to a report that was done in Alberta in 2013, the *Health Services Preferential Access Inquiry Alberta* by, in fact, the government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Hon. John Vertes was the commissioner and it was a report into preferential access which grew, I understand, in part out of private MRIs. And there were many issues that led to this particular inquiry, but part of it was the perception and the possibility that people were getting preferential treatment or able to access public services because of private MRIs.

So I just want to take you to the executive summary of this particular report, the *Health Services Preferential Access Inquiry Alberta*, page 4:

Private diagnostic imaging: A person who pays for diagnostic imaging at a private facility, instead of waiting for the same service through publicly funded channels, can receive a prompter diagnosis. If the diagnosis indicates a need for treatment, that person can immediately step into line for treatment. The person waiting for a diagnosis through the publicly funded system cannot step into that line for treatment, since he or she has not received a diagnosis. By circumventing the long wait for diagnosis, a patient who steps outside the public system for diagnosis obtains preferential access to treatment when he or she rejoins the public system.

The proliferation of private diagnostic services poses a true ethical dilemma in the context of access to health care. It undermines the principles of fairness and equity in access to health care, and provides an advantage to those who can pay for this service. On the other hand, the practice is not

illegal. It is accepted by governments and by physicians' regulating bodies.

And so the reality is actually . . . And I'd like to read a little bit further down.

There is no correct answer, practically or ethically, in the debate over the role that private diagnostic services play in permitting preferential access. It is a question for public discussion to define what is acceptable.

And thus we are having this debate here. But it's funny coming out of a province . . . So this review came out of Alberta where they do in fact have the second-highest per capita number of MRI scanners. They have a proliferation of private MRIs, and in fact we need to look at the numbers there.

The wait times. Let's look at the wait times between Alberta and Saskatchewan. So these were comments that . . . This was in 2013 this particular review happened.

So Alberta versus Saskatchewan, when you look at CIHI [Canadian Institute of Health Information] numbers, 90 per cent of people in Alberta get their MRI in 247 days versus Saskatchewan, 90 per cent in Saskatchewan get their scan in 88 days. I would again argue that 88 days isn't good enough but it is considerably better than Alberta that has a proliferation of private MRIs.

So the typical . . . Just in terms of averages, it's 80 days to get your typical MRI in Alberta and 28 days in Saskatchewan. So looking to a place that's experimented with private MRIs and has found that there is problems, and their own review points to the fact that people do get preferential treatment in a system like this, we need to seriously consider.

I need to point out again, in this same review, just some of the evidence. The issue of inferior access, I think this is quite interesting. On reviewing some of the literature and preparing for this . . . Actually lots of the literature, Mr. Deputy Speaker, points to the fact that even in a public system, people of lower socio-economic status actually receive diagnostic testing in an inequitable fashion. So there is actually a study from . . . This is written from the CMAJ [*Canadian Medical Association Journal*] 2005, November 8, "Socioeconomic status and the utilization of diagnostic imaging in an urban setting." Just in the abstract, "We found a pattern of increased diagnostic imaging utilization in patient groups with a higher socioeconomic status."

[16:00]

So even in a public system, we recognize that there's some inequities when people have lower socio-economic status. There's another study actually that states the same thing. I just will dig this out for you.

So that was from the CMAJ. "Socioeconomic status and the utilization of diagnostic imaging in an urban setting" points to the fact that people with a . . . people even in a public system with a higher socio-economic background receive diagnostic testing. So I think opening this up to people being able to purchase it just is going to create even more inequity, Mr.

Deputy Speaker. And I'm going to find the other study.

Actually I'm just going to point you to page 59 of the review that I was speaking of, the *Health Services Preferential Access Inquiry*.

E. The issue of inferior access

This inquiry is focused on whether people are getting improper preferential access to publicly funded health care. In other words, are people getting access that is superior to the norm? The events leading to the establishment of this inquiry, along with its terms of reference, meant that it did not focus on the other side of the preferential access issue: systemic barriers and discrimination that may result in access that is inferior to the norm. In both cases — preferential access and inferior access — the result detracts from the ideal of equitable access at the core of Canada's approach to publicly funded health care.

And so the Consumers' Association of Alberta, in their submission, they argue,

. . . that barriers to access to publicly funded health services are equal to if not more deserving of examination than preferential access. Several groups can be identified as facing some discrimination or systemic barriers to access in Alberta:

Rural populations;

I think the members opposite would be interested in hearing this piece, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that rural populations have inequitable access to health care, including MRI services, and I'll get into that here in a moment.

Individuals without family doctors, particularly individuals with complex medical issues;

Individuals with addictions and/or mental health issues;

The poor;

The elderly;

Individuals whose first language is not English;

Those with hearing or vision loss or mobility issues; and

First Nations communities.

And generally, I'll quote here from page 60:

Generally, there is a strong correlation between socio-economic status and health outcomes: the lower the status, the poorer the health outcomes. There is also considerable evidence in Canada of the relationship between socio-economic status and health care utilization. The lower the income and education levels of individuals, the more likely they are to use health services at the primary level, while those with higher incomes and education levels tend to make greater use of the specialist services.

They go on to point out that:

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) . . . found that even in public health care systems . . . [like Canada's], there are inequities in access due to socio-economic status. Individuals with higher income and education tend to wait less time for publicly funded hospital care than the less well-off and the less well-educated.

So I think this is something we need to keep in mind here. So the fact is even in a public system, the system that we have right now, there are disparities between those who have lower socio-economic status and those who have higher socio-economic status.

So I think that this is just opening up the door to further grow that disparity, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which I think is a problem. And the reality is when we talk about access to health services, it's interesting. Canadian Doctors For Medicare, when we talk about access in rural Saskatchewan, the fact is every single one of these private clinics in other communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is located outside of, or is not . . . These are all found in large centres where this is a population who will pay for those services. So I think that's an interesting piece, that these centres or these MRI clinics are located in cities like . . . would be in Saskatoon or Regina or again making access for rural people a little bit more difficult.

Some of the things that I'd like to point out is the poaching of staff. So it's interesting in a place like Alberta. So what's the problem? You've got more MRIs per cap, the second-highest number of MRIs per capita, and way higher, way higher wait-lists, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So the reality is what often happens is poaching of the limited number of radiologists and technologists. That is the reality. We can look to different places. We can look actually to . . . I'm just going to find that here.

There was a case in Manitoba actually that when they started using private MRIs there that the hospital MRIs, the wait-list grew because there were a lack of technologists. They moved over to the private system. I do in fact have that here. I'd like to speak to the *Eroding Public Medicare: Lessons and Consequences of For-Profit Health Care Across Canada*. This is from an October 6th, 2008 report, page 34:

Eroding Public Capacity: Poaching Staff from Local Hospitals

The experience of for-profit MRI/CT clinics in Canada yields very clear evidence of damage to the public non-profit hospital system as a consequence of privatization. For-profit clinics in Manitoba and Ontario have demonstrably caused reduction in MRI hours in nearby public non-profit hospitals as a result of recruiting radiologists and technologists out of the public facilities. In Ontario's experiment with eight for-profit MRI/CT clinics in the early 2000s, three clinics were publicly reported to have lured technologists away from non-profit hospitals, forcing the hospitals to reduce their MRI hours. In Manitoba the poaching of radiologists caused a shortage at the nearby public hospital, forcing it to reduce its MRI

hours.

Simon Enoch actually also cites a case of poaching. There were technologists who were at a clinic in Calgary paid \$10,000 signing bonuses, so poaching is a reality. There are only so many radiologists and so many technologists to go around, so just because you open up a private MRI clinic doesn't mean you have a plethora of people who can work there and provide the services, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And so that is a very real issue.

The high costs of private MRIs, I'd just like to read this into the record. Again this is from *Eroding Public Medicare: Lessons and Consequences of For-Profit Care Across Canada*.

High Costs

Most for-profit MRI/CT clinics are located [this is, as I said, from 2008] in British Columbia and Quebec . . . followed by Alberta. Our interviews yield significant variance in the prices charged to patients by these clinics, but in all cases, the prices are out of reach for the average income resident.

So just some recent numbers actually. Alberta MRI rates: routine brain scan, \$895; brain and facial bones, 1,120; brain for tumour, 1,195; brain for stroke, 1,245; spine, 895; body, 895; abdomen, 1,095; whole body, 2,450. It's interesting. Canadian Doctors for Medicare did a little bit of legwork. They did some calling around in 2008 and again last year on costs on MRIs in private clinics, and in fact the costs varied wildly from the lowest price at a private clinic of \$800 in some areas, and some provinces to \$3,000 or more as clinics charge the highest price they can. And the costs are higher than in public hospitals. So they point to a Trillium health study, a 2011 press release, just to get a sense of what a public MRI might cost.

The Ontario Minister of Finance announced a grant of 800,000 for one hospital to buy 3,120 additional MRI scans. So this means an average price per scan in a public hospital of \$250. And that was compared to the Auditor General's report on MRI/CT scans in 2006 that found a public scan was about \$250 from 2002 to 2007. So that cost hasn't changed very much. But that is about \$250 for a public scan, which I would argue is probably close to the same in Saskatchewan. And maybe with inflation it's gone up a little bit to do it in the public system. If we want to be conservative, let's say it's \$350 here in Saskatchewan to do a public scan, still far cheaper than the cheapest scan at \$800, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And one of the problems with that that I need to point out is that in a place like Alberta where they do, they have private clinics, so what happens, this is my understanding that this is what can happen, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I have a referral from a doctor, but I'm on a public wait list. And I'm not happy with the public wait list, so I get a referral to a doctor. I go to the private clinic and I get my scan. And as it turns out, the scan in my case yields something really, really damaging, a tumour or something like that. Then that person is eligible to claim that scan back or have that cost reimbursed. So the private system costs far more than the public system, so the person who is able to, and rightfully so . . . at that point discovers that they've got something really wrong with them, their MRI costs way more than had they got it in the public system.

So this should be about the public system streamlining, building capacity, and dealing with some of the wait-list issues. Because of course, if someone has a medically necessary scan and it shows something, they need to have that addressed. But that's a huge issue, Mr. Speaker.

So we've talked about poaching radiologists and technologists. We've talked about the Alberta system with the higher wait-lists. And I think we've talked about the cost of private MRIs, that I think the two-for-one argument that this government is making is worth having a bit of a discussion here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So actually it's interesting, the former president of the SMA [Saskatchewan Medical Association], Dalibor Slavik — Dr. Slavik, actually, who coincidentally enough used to be my doctor many years ago — one of the things that he said is, "The concern among the radiologists is that it's going to be a two-for-one deal where they have to cover the cost." And he goes on to point out that most people would rather get a cheaper scan in Alberta. So we're setting up a system that we have no idea if it's going to work.

I need to point out that right now the private clinics in Saskatchewan already offer public scans. That's what they do. So the scans they do for the public system are paid from the public purse. We do some contracting and it's paid by the public purse. So the scans that they're doing for the public right now are all paid for publicly. So you start doing a two-for-one, that means that the private system can do one less scan for the public system, the way that works, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As well I think you have a huge bureaucratic mess in terms of when we talk about streamlining wait-lists and figuring this out. How the heck is this going to work in practical terms? I think that the wait-list challenge is already struggling enough, let alone trying to figure out a way that patient X, who is paying for the private scan, and then the patient from the public system who needs their scan paid for, how do you know that they're of equal illness or have the same condition? I think bureaucratically it is an absolute nightmare.

I think the other piece that's interesting is that in order for the private scans to make money for the companies coming in . . . Because that's why companies want to open up MRI clinics here. They're for-profit companies, and nobody begrudges anyone the opportunity to make a profit. But when it comes to health care, the reality is I think that there's not a lot of room there. So you have private MRI companies who are going to have to figure out a way to make a profit. So the private MRIs are quite likely going to be quite expensive, which means people who have more money will pay for those, which means that the access for all of us will diminish again because of that there are limited number of technologists and radiologists.

I think the other point about the two-for-one and paying . . . So let's say a whole body scan is \$2,450. I'm not saying that that's what it's going to be, but let's say that's what the scan is. And you have a sick child and you are not of great means, but you feel like waiting that time for your child to get the scan is not going to be appropriate. And you decide that you are going to try to either, well, put the money on your credit card, try to borrow money. People shouldn't be in a position to have to

access health care by stretching themselves thin. We've seen what happens to people in the United States, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So the reality is there will be people of means who will access these private MRIs, but there will also be people who cannot afford it because of the stress and anxiety, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[16:15]

It's funny. The members opposite are heckling something about the public system and creating more space. I can't exactly hear what they're saying, but the reality is, the evidence shows the opposite, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The evidence shows exactly the opposite, that the public system isn't enhanced at all by private MRIs.

So I remember last year I had a brief conversation, I think actually via text, with the Health minister. And I said, you know, show me some evidence. I'm a big believer in evidence-based policy. Show me some evidence that this will work. And I'm a reasonable person. I think the opposition is reasonable. If it was a reasonable, evidence-based decision, we could get behind it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the reality is the evidence is not there for private MRIs. Quite the opposite, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So we have all kinds of issues around the cost. The cost is part of the problem, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact that people will take on debt when they can't . . . the fact . . . Oh, you know, I haven't talked about queue jumping. That is a very . . . That is the reality, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And when I think about queue jumping, I'm thinking less about the people who are spending their money to get in line and more about how that impacts everybody else who can't spend the money. But our health care system is premised on the notion of equitable access and of good-quality health care, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And the reality is, you might create two lines for MRIs, but there is only one line for surgery and treatment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, only one line for surgery and treatment.

So again going back to the Alberta review, they said it themselves, that yes, this creates disparities. And you get your private MRI; it allows you to get into the publicly funded system more quickly. So why don't we just fix it for everybody, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Why don't we fix this for everybody with evidence-based policy if we . . . Again fixing the wait-list issue, one of the things that Romanow pointed out, Mr. Romanow pointed out. So again it's about capacity and organization of wait-lists. He points out that there's often a lack of coordination. There's few rules about who gets on the list. There's no serious auditing of the list, if people are on the list appropriately or should be taken off.

Let's put our focus, instead of on debating an MRI bill and passing an MRI bill, let's put our focus on fixing those wait-lists and how they're administered, and making sure that people have access and an understanding of when they'll get their diagnostic so they can then get their treatment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's hugely problematic.

I would like to . . . I think a person who says this far more eloquently than I do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is Tom McIntosh. He wrote quite a fabulous Twitter essay regarding private MRIs.

And you know, let's talk about . . . I just would like to put this on the record. He points out that:

#skpoli has approximately 5,000 people waiting for MRIs currently delivered in two sites (soon to be three) in the province.

We know that simply opening up private . . . MRIs doesn't reduce wait times in the public system (Alta has both private MRIs and longer waits).

Gov't proposes that if the individual buys MRI privately and one for person on a public list then the wait [list] will shrink.

But they offer no evidence that this will work. There is no jurisdiction that has tried this, so it is at best an assumption.

And, I think, it is an assumption that is based on a number of faulty premises which I will discuss in turn.

It assumes that the reason for the wait times must be that we're not "buying" enough MRIs in the public system.

Their proposal, in effect, is to have wealthy individuals buy more MRIs for the public system rather than have the gov't do it.

Yet all wait time evidence I've seen (I've done the research on this myself) [he says] shows that "throwing money" at wait times doesn't work.

This indicates that "we're not spending enough" is rarely the cause of waits for diagnostics, surgeries or other services.

Thus, solution to wait times lies in other areas — capacity (both technological and human) and organizational issues in the system.

Nothing the government proposes would solve those issues and might actually make them worse.

Like in Alberta, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He goes on to say:

It isn't evident that there is a surplus of qualified personnel to operate these machines just waiting to move into the system.

Which means they would likely, in the first instance, come from the public system and thus reduce capacity there.

And we did see this in other jurisdictions, in Manitoba and in Ontario, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where there was poaching. He goes on:

Could we train more? Yes. In time. We're training pretty much at capacity now and health care training is not a tap.

You can't just turn it on and off at will. Building increased training capacity takes time and (mostly public) resources.

Could we import more people? Yes we can. Assuming

they're out there and qualified.

But there are also ethical issues raised by such a move. We're asking other jurisdictions (countries) to solve our problem.

And as well, other provincial jurisdictions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which is what Manitoba and Ontario found. Mr. McIntosh goes on:

Western gov'ts have repeatedly been asked to quit the active recruitment of scarce human resources from developing nations.

So at least we have to confront the issue of where the human resources will come from in both the short and longer term.

There are other issues raised by this proposal as well. At the forefront of course is the idea of queue jumping.

While queue jumping already exists in parts of the system . . . this would certainly increase it.

That the system already has a queue jumping problem is not a rationale in my view to make it worse.

The principle of "need not ability to pay" remains key to our commitment to medicare & is a cornerstone of public support for it.

This proposal is now saying that ability to pay (and pay twice) will get you better preferential access to the system.

The claim is that the rich have to take a poor person along with them so it's all for the good — indeed it's altruistic.

But it comes back to the assertion that underlies the proposal, that this is a "not enough money" problem.

But, again, there's no evidence to suggest that the lack of spending on MRIs is what is causing the public waits.

And lots of evidence to suggest that the problem lies elsewhere in how we organize the delivery of services.

Ironically, if lean is supposed to teach us anything it is that how one organizes the system matters.

But for some reason gov't is now not looking at organizational solutions and instead just throwing (private) money at the problem.

It's ill-thought out, lacks an evidence base and, like past money throwing instances, likely to make things worse.

So none of those are good things, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And none of those are the things that we should be talking about, like none. We should not be talking about doing this in health care right now.

We should be talking about the real issues in health care: specialist waits, crowded ERs. The wait at the General in

Regina is 4.5 hours, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you've ever gone to the emergency room with a sick child, you know that that is not an acceptable wait time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Seniors' care — these are all things we should be talking about rather than an ill-conceived idea that came out in a premier's tweet a year ago, and then they fleshed it out. Lord only knows how, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they didn't bring it forward in the fall, and then it was hastily brought forward at the end of the spring session, which is highly unusual, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What we should be talking about is the things that really matter in health care to people. And instead again I will give this government the benefit of the doubt, but I think this is . . . Is this evidence-based policy? I would argue that the evidence isn't there. We can look at other jurisdictions. Or is this purely political in motive? And if it is purely political in motive, that is not the way public policy should be made, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is not the way public policy should be made.

It's interesting. There's a really great article by Dr. Ryan Meili who this government, actually in the government's last Throne Speech, actually listed him and named him in their last Throne Speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when it came to the anti-poverty strategy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Dr. Meili's done great work through Upstream, a think tank that is meant to put forward some really positive ideas. He's worked very hard. He knows in health care that the disparities in health care are about the social determinants of health. He sees that in his practice at the West Side Community Clinic.

But it's ironic because this government was very happy to actually . . . I'd never seen that before, someone actually named in the Throne Speech, like an individual named in the Throne Speech. There were a few in last year's Throne Speech. But they liked what he had to say on anti-poverty work, but don't seem to like what he has to say about MRIs. I think it would be worth maybe, when he's meeting with the Minister of Social Services to talk about his anti-poverty work, maybe he could tag in the Minister of Health to talk about MRIs and where the evidence is.

One of the things that he points out is that, in an op-ed that he wrote on October 28, 2014, he says:

There are ways of improving access to MRIs that don't undermine the principles of or confidence in the public system. Imaging is one of the most overused elements of our health care system. A 2013 study of MRI use in Alberta show that over half of low-back MRI scans in Alberta hospital were not appropriate. Working to promote rational use of technology is one way to make sure it is available for those who need it most. Expanded hours of use, training programs for personnel and the number of machines in the public system is another. Anyone can learn from their own mistakes; a true leader learns from the mistakes of others.

I want to say that last part again because I think that that's something worth quoting again. Dr. Ryan Meili writes, "Anyone can learn from their own mistakes; a true leader learns from the mistakes of others." And there have been many mistakes in other jurisdictions when it comes to private MRIs that have seen increased cost, poaching of services, which

means access for most of us diminishes where a few get improved health access.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's unfortunate that we're having this debate right now. I think that there's many things in health care that we should be discussing that really are front and centre in the minds of individuals. I wouldn't diminish people who are waiting a long time for an MRI, that their needs are important, but I do know that there's other ways of fixing that system. It's about capacity and organizational structure, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Maybe the Health minister, maybe the Health minister should read the Romanow report. I wonder if he's done that. And maybe the Fyke report as well. Those are actually quite good and helpful documents, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

For the record, I don't think this is a debate that we should be having. We should be talking about things that are front and centre in the minds of people. Again benefit of the doubt that they think that the evidence is there, but I have a sneaking suspicion that this might be politically motivated. And that's not how public policy should be made, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But I look forward to the opportunity in committee to try to flesh out some of the . . . I know that I will have many questions, as will my colleague from Regina Lakeview, and others probably as well when we get to committee. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we'll have an opportunity to ask some more detailed questions. I appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on the debate now, and with that I'd like to conclude my remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: — Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Deputy Speaker: — The question before the Assembly is a motion by the Minister of Health that Bill No. 179, *The MRI Facilities Licensing Act* be now read a second time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried.

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

The Deputy Speaker: — To which committee shall this bill be referred? I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I designate that Bill 179, *The MRI Facilities Licensing Act* be referred to the Standing Committee on Human Services.

The Deputy Speaker: — This bill stands referred to the committee of Human Services.

Bill No. 183

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Morgan that **Bill No. 183 — The Saskatchewan Employment (Essential Services) Amendment Act, 2015** be now read a second time.]

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to enter debate here briefly this afternoon on Bill No. 183, the essential services amendment Act, *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, you know, it seems that some level of reason with government has finally prevailed after a long reign of just nonsensical behaviour and waste and malicious actions that attacked workers' rights and wasted a whole bunch of money and was just a really wasteful, ideological process of this government.

I do want to say that I want to thank all members of the committee that worked to bring this bill together and to shape this bill. Certainly we'll be engaged in, you know, broader consultation with this bill and ensuring we understand all detail and all consequences of that bill, intended or unintended. Certainly it seems to be getting to a lot more reasonable place, of course, than it's been.

You know, in many ways this has been an embarrassing debacle for this government and for this Premier who had promised one thing before an election in 2007 and then came out and did something entirely different and was incredibly reckless in his ideological agenda, where he attacked workers' rights, some of their fundamental constitutional rights, Mr. Speaker, and with that reckless approach has wasted a whole lot of taxpayers' money, Mr. Speaker. And we know this Premier has no problem, it seems, unfortunately, wasting taxpayers' money. We see it on front after front. But to do so, to attack the workers of this province and their rights, Mr. Speaker, is shameful.

[16:30]

And you know, it was an embarrassing debacle that stretched out as dollars have been wasted. And now the taxpayers, I understand, are also going to be on the hook, because of the reckless actions of this Premier, to pay dollars back out to labour organizations and unions as well, Mr. Speaker, because a whole bunch of wasted energy and money has been caught up in this process.

I would want to commend some Saskatchewan people and workers who rallied together a small group and said, this is wrong, and who said, this is wrong from a constitutional perspective. And they put together that fight. And despite having a large, stubborn majority in this Assembly who wasn't willing to listen to reason on the floor of this Assembly as the opposition and members of this Assembly fought this unreasonable, unconstitutional bill, Mr. Speaker, they took up the battle and exercised their rights and took on the hard work and did the research and had a hard-fought win for workers here in Saskatchewan and right across the country. And I think it's an example again of that spirit of Saskatchewan: people who are ready to do their part, to roll up their sleeves, and to protect what's right, Mr. Speaker.

So I commend those individuals who came together as they had a right wing government come in and break its promise and bring forward a reckless, unconstitutional bill, Mr. Speaker, and

for those individuals to take on that battle.

You know, I also know . . . I remember those debates well. And I remember the effort of the opposition in working with stakeholders and bringing forward the debate in this Assembly. And you know, I commend those members that were intimately engaged in taking on that debate at the time, that put a lot of, a tremendous amount of energy and care into that bill when that reckless unconstitutional bill was brought forward. And I think of some of those members like Andy Iwanchuk, and Sandra Morin for that matter, Mr. Speaker, who were both fully invested in that process. And I know for them that's a chapter of their life where they worked incredibly hard to challenge an unconstitutional bill.

Of course we've continued to see those efforts by all members of the official opposition, and I'd want to recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre who's continued to push for certainly human rights and workers' rights and has been there every step of the way to ensure that we fix this legislation, ensure that we protect the public of course, but that we protect workers' rights, Mr. Speaker.

You know, it's sad to see that this has sort of become the approach on too many fronts of the current government — ram forward with an ideological agenda, not consult with stakeholders, not think of the consequences, not think of the waste of taxpayers' dollars that they're creating, Mr. Speaker — and you know, an approach that has increasingly on more and more fronts been noted by Saskatchewan people to defy common sense and sort of defy those very Saskatchewan values of working together and making sure that decisions we're making today are in the best interests of families and communities today and well into the future.

And as I say, it's a sad and sorry debacle that this right wing Premier pushed Saskatchewan into in a reckless way. This bill is, you know, certainly his legacy. But the hard-fought win needs to be there directly with the workers and the people and the organizations who took on and challenged, you know, a bill, a law that was brought forward that attacked the rights of working people. And we know that's sort of within the . . . that approach is, you know, sort of deep values within that party, Mr. Speaker.

But I think if you look across Canada, if you look across Saskatchewan, that Saskatchewan people and Canadians are rejecting that old, tired, conservative, right wing approach, Mr. Speaker. I know that you see it, you know, within our country just this last week that Saskatchewan people aren't interested in the reckless, ideological, right wing games of these kind of old, tired, conservative-type parties, Mr. Speaker, as we see with members opposite.

And so I'm heartened on that front, Mr. Speaker, that we know that as we work for a more common sense approach, when we push for an agenda that's going to serve us today and for the future and going to be respectful of the hard-earned dollars of taxpayers and serve the priorities of Saskatchewan people and yes, respect human rights and workers' rights, we know that the majority of Saskatchewan people and Canadians are strongly in support of that agenda, Mr. Speaker.

So at this point in time, I don't have a whole bunch of other comments with this bill. You know, I've certainly spoke often on this bill in this Assembly. Some members of this Assembly have spent hours upon hours upon hours trying to get government to see the light on this, to see how wrong their approach was. It's unfortunate that government wouldn't listen. They wouldn't listen to experts. They wouldn't listen to workers. They wouldn't listen to the opposition, and they rammed forward with this law, Mr. Speaker. And then it took the Supreme Court of Canada to strike down this unconstitutional law, Mr. Speaker.

As I say, you know, it seems that we are at a much more reasonable place with this piece of legislation. Certainly we'll do some more consultation on this front, Mr. Speaker, and you know, certainly I thank all those individuals who came together on the committee of late, Mr. Speaker, to contribute and ensure we got to a reasonable place that protects the public and protects workers' rights.

So at this point in time, Mr. Speaker, I adjourn debate for Bill No. 183. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Regina Rosemont has moved to adjourn debate on Bill No. 183, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Essential Services) Amendment Act, 2015*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried.

Bill No. 184

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. McMorris that **Bill No. 184 — The Automobile Accident Insurance (Motorcycles) Amendment Act, 2015** be now read a second time.]

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Lakeview.

Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill No. 184, *An Act to amend The Automobile Accident Insurance Act*. This bill is somewhat lengthy but I think what I need to do is remind people what we're dealing with here. *The Automobile Accident Insurance Act* is technically an insurance contract that is legislation. And so what happens is, if you buy insurance from another insurance company, you would get a lengthy contract or you would get a reference to something on a website which has hundreds of pages, and there's not much that you can do about it to change any clauses in that contract.

Now one of the advantages we have in Saskatchewan because we own, as citizens we own our own insurance company, is that we have that contract in legislation which gets discussed here in this Chamber. And so, Mr. Speaker, this automobile accident insurance Act is one of the pieces of the type of legislation that deals with particular issues as it relates to motor vehicles and related types of insurance. And so the ability to change some of the clauses within our "insurance contract" in Saskatchewan

includes lobbying the minister, the government, members of the legislature around changes that people want to take place in the legislation.

And so the bill we have today comes as a result of a fairly extensive lobby in response to some changes in the fees that our government insurance company was charging for motorcycles. And basically the response was that the fees that were being charged for people who drove motorcycles were increasing so dramatically that it was making it very difficult for many people who obviously enjoyed riding motorcycles to get them insured.

And so this discussion is interesting because it relates to a specific class, if I can use that term that's in our legislation which is also our contract, of motor vehicle. And SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] is a good insurance company with professionals of many types examining the legislation and examining the policies around how the contract should be implemented, analyzed. And said, in the class of motorcycles, the amount of damages that we're paying both for damage to physical things — so the actual motorcycle itself and maybe things that a motorcycle might hit in an accident, and probably more importantly, the actual damage to people who have been riding motorcycles or riding motorcycles as passengers — were not . . .

Basically the review showed that they were not collecting, or we or SGI was not collecting enough money from the premiums for the people who were buying that kind of insurance to actually pay for the costs of the people that were, as a result of people riding motorcycles. And so when that happens, internally there's a process to increase the fees. And so that came about in a way that surprised many riders of motorcycles.

And it's possible . . . I don't know the whole history. I used to be the minister of SGI many years ago so I understand the process, but I don't know the exact timing over the last few years. But clearly this was not maybe dealt with on an annual basis, but then all of a sudden the gap was between the amount of the policy fees collected and the amount that was being paid out for damages, both physical and also damages to individuals, to people, was much greater than what was being collected in insurance fees. And so a decision was made, well, we're going to have to figure out a way to rebalance those fees or get the fees back into a position where they're actually paying for the costs.

And this, because our insurance contract is a piece of legislation which gets dealt with in the legislature at the instance of one of the ministers of the Crown, it becomes a political issue. So what we saw was a whole number of people who said, well, this isn't fair to us because you're making such big increases in the price that we can't afford to keep riding motorcycles that we bought with our hard-earned money. Sometimes people didn't have a lot of money but they, you know, bought their motorcycles. And so they said, we don't accept this. And so there were some fairly strong protests right across the province.

The result, as the minister says in his second reading speech, which I know it is quite short given the import of this, said that these kinds of things came as a result of the discussion that arose out of the protests. And as a result, the whole area was sent to the review committee or to a committee that was set up

to specifically look at this.

[16:45]

And so one of the options discussed was not, how do we continue with relatively, I think, good coverage for motorcycle drivers, good insurance coverage, and make sure that we actually collect the appropriate amount of fees? The discussion got into a point where okay, how can we have lower insurance fees for motorcycle riders and people that own motorcycles?

And clearly one of the options to change the insurance fees is to reduce the amount of coverage. Now that's not always an advisable thing to do, and I think the minister actually referenced in his second reading speech that one of their members of their injury review panel had . . . I'll quote him directly; this is on page 7384:

One of our injury review committee members had himself been seriously injured in a motorcycle collision, and he had made the point very strongly that people shouldn't make the choice with their wallets. He makes it a very valid argument, Mr. Speaker, and I just want to convey that to the Assembly today.

That's a quote from the minister. I reference that because even within the structure of the injury review group, and in the words of the minister who, as we all know has a long history of dealing with traffic safety issues, both before he became a politician and now subsequently in various roles that he's had, there's a strong recommendation that this type of watered down insurance, which this legislation will introduce, is not really the best option for these motorcycle riders. And it's almost as if the legislation is being brought forward with a bit of a hesitation or, well I don't really want to do this. But if you want some cheaper insurance, we can do it, and we'll bring forward this proposal that we have today.

And so what we have then is insurance that's being brought forward to give more choices in coverage to motorcycle owners, and the choices are less coverage for a lower cost, even though clearly the minister says, I don't recommend that you buy this because you're going to have less coverage.

Now what do we do when that's the type of recommendation that comes forward from the minister? I think we need to look pretty carefully at the underlying policy that is here, because I think we're all proud in Saskatchewan that our motor vehicle insurance coverage is quite comprehensive and it has the ability for people to buy supplementary insurance to add on to the basic package.

But what this insurance appears to be doing is allowing for there to be a reduction in coverage for a very specific class or small group of people within the overall system. And, Mr. Speaker, it may be a short-term fix for people who are in this category that allows them to get some cheaper insurance. It has the, I guess, the political sort of cachet that allows for motorcyclists to have further choice on injury cover at a lower rate. But it begs the question of whether this is a good thing to do.

Now traditionally, our insurance for vehicles in Saskatchewan

has had common coverage at a basic rate with then the ability to add supplemental coverage. My sense of this as I've looked at it is that this is saying, well everybody else has a certain rate of coverage, but if you've got a motorcycle, you can get a little cheaper one that covers less. And that's okay.

Now what happens if another group comes and says, well we all drive, you know, Chev pickup trucks and we think they're pretty tough cars and we don't get as many injuries and so we are paying too much insurance; we should pay a little less? Well all of a sudden you've got another group that says, well give us another package that maybe more accurately reflects our area. What we know internally, in SGI they look at all of the different categories that any insurance company looks at. And they've made — and we have made as legislators over many decades — the choice to say we're going to have common coverage.

The biggest example of where that applies relates to our young people. We know that if you're under 30 years old in Saskatchewan, your car or vehicle insurance rates are going to be probably some of the best in the country. Manitoba might be close, but when we go and compare them to some other areas, they're very good rates. And people then try to retain their Saskatchewan residence so they can have this kind of coverage as they travel around North America.

But we also know that there are other categories of drivers, say the plus 50s or plus 60-year-old people, who pay a little more to cover the cost for those young people. And we have made a decision as a society that that's what we're going to do. That's not the same choice that's made in every jurisdiction in North America, and we need to recognize that.

One of the questions I have is whether this kind of adjusting with the limits, adjusting with the coverage that's happening in this particular piece of legislation, isn't the thin edge of the wedge into a whole number of categories where there will be special considerations. And I think that's something that needs to be thought about and discussed, because we have had a situation where we've had good coverage for people who are injured, for damage that takes place in motor vehicle accidents, and we've been I think well treated in that area. And so anything that somehow messes up that overall principle and that system of providing the coverage for our Saskatchewan people needs to be examined very, very carefully.

It reminds me a bit of the discussion that's happening in the United States right now as it relates to health insurance coverage. And basically there's a recognition that health policies for families, for individuals in the United States, have certain standards that they have to meet, including some form of portability or the ability that you don't lose your insurance because of some catastrophic kind of illness or things like that. But what's happened is that there's been a whole proliferation of insurance policies that are called insurance policies, but they might have huge deductibles. You know, you might not be able to get any coverage for the first \$10,000 or whatever, or more. Or there's other ways that the insurance companies cover how they do that and how they provide the coverage.

And this is the basic tenet of how insurance works — it's been for centuries — is that you assess the risk of the pool of people that you're covering and then you deal with it. What happens is,

as long as that pool is large and covers a whole number of kinds of risk, you can keep your rates relatively straightforward and relatively reasonable. But this bill starts us into a discussion of, okay, well those motorcycle fees are going to be adjusted in a way to recognize that, well, we're not totally covering the costs there. But rather than work out a method of increasing the fees to actually cover the costs so that people have good coverage in case of an accident, what's being done is that the coverage is being reduced.

Now clearly there is a political problem for the minister and for the Premier. And they've come up with a political solution that's couched in lots of words, but I think ultimately it's that principle that we're talking about here of, how do we share the risk? How do we cover the risk for our citizens in the province?

Now another way to do it would be to say, well in Saskatchewan driving a motorcycle is beyond an ordinary person's ability to use it, and we'll charge whatever fees are necessary to cover those kind of costs. And I think that there are some ways of dealing with that, but I think a way that in some way it impacts the overall system of coverage that we have, that kind of a perspective is wrong.

And so when you look at the legislation itself, you know that they've worked hard to limit this kind of a change to the group that's involved. And so it says, motorcycle . . . If we look at page 1 of the bill under the sort of the definitions section, it says in 3(1)(f):

by adding the following clauses after clause (aa):

“(aa.1) ‘motorcycle’ means a motorcycle as defined in the regulations.

Well we don't quite know what that means because we don't have the regulations obviously. It's not as good as the other Act I had the other day where I had draft regulations so I could talk forever. But this one, we don't have those regulations.

But then in the same one, they've added another definition which is under section 3(1)(f)(aa.2). The term:

‘motorcycle election’ means a written election made by a Saskatchewan resident that complies with the requirements of Part II.1”.

And this gets us into this question of how you then make sure that people know that they're making an election, that they're making a choice that actually means they have less coverage. And what any lawyer who is working on this knows is that if a person signs up for this cheap insurance and thinks it's just cheap insurance, they need to be reminded that it's actually cheap insurance because it doesn't provide you the same coverage as you had last year. And that becomes a major issue I think for all of us, because when the coverage isn't totally there, it goes back into our health care system and it's provided through our public health system.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that there are a whole number of choices in this legislation which need to be more fully explained. I had expected to see some of these policy choices being set out by the minister so that we could actually

understand where the choices have been made and why they've been made.

I think that it's showing up this fall because they don't want protests from motorcycle riders in next spring's election. And I think that's the wrong way to do legislation. I think it's legislation that is very important.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to continue talking next week because I think this type of legislation is a sign of trying to do a patchwork on something that's really, really important, and I don't think that's what we should be doing.

The Deputy Speaker: — It now being past the hour of adjournment, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 17:01.]

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