

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
April 24, 1984

The Assembly met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

ORAL QUESTIONS

Separate School Teachers' Strike in Moose Jaw

Mr. Koskie: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to direct a question to the Minister of Education, and it deals with the Moose Jaw separate school dispute which is now entering its fourth week. As all are aware that the minister has refused to use her good offices to attempt to bring the parties together to resolve the impasse; the attempt at mediation has failed. And I ask the minister now: will the minister now do what she should have done two weeks ago and agree to the request of the parents and the teachers to set up an independent inquiry into the operation of the Moose Jaw Separate School Board?

Hon. Mrs. Smith: — Mr. Speaker, the member from Quill Lakes is, with prefacing his remarks by suggesting that I should have done something two weeks ago, is back to his old statement that there be intervention without due process, and the due process was followed. It is true the mediation attempts did fail, and that report came in Friday. Today we are in discussions, the deputy minister and the department officials with the teachers at 1 o'clock this afternoon, and with the school board at 4 o'clock.

Mr. Koskie: — Supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister now at least agree to bring the respective parties together, and to use her good offices in order to attempt to resolve this solution? What you have been, to date, is meeting individually, once with the board, then with the teachers — independently. Have you, and will you, bring the parties together, jointly with yourself, and use your good offices to help resolve the problem?

Hon. Mrs. Smith: — Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member has been following a very unfortunate dispute in the Moose Jaw system, he would realize that the parties are fairly far apart — so far apart that a very skilled mediator, given five, six days to bring them together, was not successful in doing that. What we are attempting to do is talk to the parties. I already said, the teachers at 1 o'clock today; the school board at 4 o'clock. As to whether they will come together at a later time, perhaps early tomorrow morning, that will remain to be seen.

Mr. Koskie: — A further supplemental. As the minister, you should be aware that first of all, that you have rejected a management study initiated and requested by parents and teachers. You're aware that mediation has failed, and now you are rejecting the offer of sitting down with the respective parties jointly together.

I ask you: in view of your decision not to take any effective action, what are your options that you're looking at the present time?

Hon. Mrs. Smith: — As I recall, as the events were laid out, I did not reject a management study as the member from Quill Lakes has stated — not a management study. I do believe that there is a request put forth to the board from one of its own members, and within the system from teachers, for a management study to the board — not to me.

What came forward to me was a request to review the board — the board and its actions; the board and its attitudes. And at that time, Mr. Speaker, I had said no, I cannot do that. Both sides were still going to the bargaining table. Both sides were still sitting down and talking. Perhaps they weren't making progress, but they were still talking. And the member from Quill Lakes

suggests that somebody should just walk in while both sides are still at the negotiating table. It's a sensitive area, and he wants things done that way. Well, I reject that also. I have stated we are discussing some options with the teachers and the board today.

Mr. Koskie: — Question, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Education. You were interviewed by the Moose Jaw *Times Herald*, and it indicates in part what you have said:

She said, "Any decision regarding either putting an end to the strike or undertaking a study of the school system or the act, would have to be made at cabinet level."

In other words, you are abdicating your responsibilities. I ask you then: since you have referred it to cabinet, has cabinet met, and have they made a decision?

Hon. Mrs. Smith: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I take it it's the normal research efforts of the opposition. You know, I can't respond to the research that he does that comes out of the Moose Jaw *Times Herald*.

No, I have not referred this to cabinet today, as he suggests — whatever he's reading out of. That wasn't done today.

Island Falls Water Rights

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, I have a question to the Minister of the Environment, and it concerns the information given to the House last week by his colleague, the minister in charge of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation.

The minister in charge of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation indicated that over the past several months there had been negotiations directed to the sale of the Island Falls power plant to Judson Bay Mining and Smelting Co. Ltd., or a subsidiary thereof.

My question to the Minister of the Environment is this: have you or your officials been carrying on negotiations with respect to the granting of water rights to the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Co. Ltd., or its subsidiaries, with respect to the operation of a power dam on the Churchill River?

Hon. Mr. Hardy: — Well, Mr. Speaker, in answer to the hon. member's question, we always have ongoing negotiations in regards to hydro power in the province and certainly in regards to water rights in the province. As far as I know, to date, there is no changing of hands of Island Falls project to anybody. It remains with the Government of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry I didn't make myself clear. I'm not asking whether or not you are now negotiating, but whether you have been negotiating for the disposition of water rights on the Churchill River, with respect to the Island Falls power plant, to the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Co. Ltd., or Churchill River power, or any subsidiary of Hudson Bay.

Hon. Mr. Hardy: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, we had been discussing with them, prior to the end of the year, some possibilities. My understanding is that there's been no negotiations lately, and there's no requirements of the Department of the Environment to issue any particular permit in regards anything to do with Island Falls.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, a further brief supplementary. You spoke about ongoing negotiations with respect to water rights. Are there any negotiations going on, carried on by your department, with respect to the disposition of water rights for the production of electric power of the water of either the Saskatchewan or Churchill River systems?

Hon. Mr. Hardy: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm, not sure exactly what the hon. member meant. In regards to Saskatchewan or any Churchill water rights, my answer would be that, at the present time, there is no negotiations going on in regards to the Churchill water system. In regards to Island Falls, there is a power generating plant there.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Clearly I, again, didn't make myself clear. You have told me there's no negotiations going on with respect to Island Falls. You earlier referred to ongoing negotiations, but said it wasn't with respect to Island Falls. My question is: are there any negotiations going on with respect to the disposition of water rights for the manufacture of electric power in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Hardy: — Well, Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge, no, there isn't. As far as I know, the only water rights that's been issued is for the Nipawin hydro dam — that's new — and that was certainly issued before or prior to our becoming government. As far as Island Falls, and I'm sure that's what referring to, no, we don't have any disposition of water rights to the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company.

Raymond Contractors Ltd.

Mr. Koskie: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, thank you. I want to address a question to the minister in charge of Sedco. My question deals with the fact that some 16 small Saskatchewan-owned businesses, subcontractors, have been put in a very serious financial bind because of a transplanted B.C. company which was hired to undertake certain renovations at Sedco's Innovation Place. Some \$300,000 is owing to the subcontractors. Last week the minister was ignorant of the serious problem. My question is: have you taken time to contact the small, Saskatchewan-owned subcontractors, and what arrangements have you made to see that these companies will be paid in full for their work?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Mr. Speaker, we're aware of the situation. I hardly call the contractor a transplanted contractor because he's working on six or seven or eight major jobs right now, three or four of which, three or four of which are in jeopardy, and the contractor, the general contractor, was involved in a problem — or is involved in a problem — and we are taking our legal steps to deal with the matter.

Mr. Koskie: — A supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister confirm that the RCMP have been called in to investigate the operations of Raymond Contractors Ltd., and can he please inform the Assembly who asked for the investigation and for what purposes?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Well I don't believe that I can confirm what you asked for just now. We are taking all the legal remedies necessary and if contacting the RCMP is, in fact, part of that remedy that has been done so that . . . And as soon as we can ascertain where our legal position is, then we're going to be able to deal with the problems at hand.

Mr. Koskie: — You're indicating . . . Further supplemental. The minister has indicated that he's looking at all the potential legal remedies. Would the minister indicate whether, in fact, calling in the RCMP to investigate the company, and what other is one of the legal remedies? And what other legal remedies are you looking at?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Well I can't respond that we are calling in the RCMP to investigate the company . . . (inaudible interjection). . . I don't have to ask my officials. I know exactly what's going on. It's a legal matter, and if it involves legal documents that have been signed, and if these documents have not been signed properly or in error, then certainly we will deal with it on a legal basis, and it's just that simple. As far as it relates to dealing with the rest of the matter, we have called in the bonding company to finish the job. As soon as the job is finished, that will, in effect, free up some unpaid moneys that we can deal with on the subtrades.

Mr. Koskie: — Further supplemental, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the minister whether he is aware that, as of today, the Raymond Contractors Ltd., that transplanted B.C. company have, in fact, vacated their Saskatoon office, and that the subcontractors have been unable to reach any of the representatives of this company.

Hon. Mr. Klein: — I'm aware of the fact that this company was in the Saskatoon telephone book over a year ago. I'm aware of the fact that this company is presently working on six or seven other projects. The fact that he isn't answering his telephone probably indicates that he has got a problem. Wouldn't you suggest that? I would.

So that we're dealing with the matter in a normal business-like fashion. We checked out everything. There was a bond put in place. There was nothing abnormal or nothing unusual about giving him the project.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, a question to the Minister of Small Business. I wonder, can you tell me how many other projects this company is involved in, in Saskatchewan? You mentioned this company in fine standing had a number of contracts from your department. Can you tell us now how many contracts it has in the province of Saskatchewan from your department?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — You guys are getting wrong information. Mr. Speaker, I didn't say that we had a number of contracts with that contractor. I said that that contractor had a number of contracts in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Minister, are you saying that this company has no other contracts with your department at the present time?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — To my knowledge, he has no other contracts with us.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, a new question to the minister. I find it interesting that Raymond Contracting Ltd., which has a contract for \$460,000, which is under investigation in the province of British Columbia — the principal share holder, on Henry Mueller, under investigation for having a registered company in the Bahamas for the express purpose of avoiding Canadian labour laws.

I wonder whether or not the minister checked out the background of this company before it brought into Saskatchewan, and if this is not an attempt by your government to bring in anti-union companies from outside the province to avoid the Canadian laws in this matter, and whether or not this isn't an attempt by your department to help out that process of union bashing in the province of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Mr. Speaker, I guess the only way I can answer that kind of a stupid question is to point out the fact that one of his colleagues is presently being sued, according to my research, which is the same as yours, the *Regina Leader-Post*. And with comments like you've just made, you could find yourself in the same situation.

There was a tender placed. There was 10 or 12 bids. Raymond happened to win the tender. As far as his credibility was concerned, he was registered and operating in Saskatchewan. That is borne out by his jobs in the past, as well as the telephone books and everything else, and he provided us with a bond without any particular problem.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Well, Mr. Speaker, a new question to the minister. He may be aware that Raymond Contractors was registered in Saskatchewan only on May 9 of 1983. And I'll ask the question again: in light of the fact of the way contracts have been tendered in this province, how the Minister of Supply and Services has avoided answering very important questions, can you tell me whether or not you checked out the background of this company which is newly

registered in Saskatchewan, and whether or not there weren't companies available in Saskatchewan who were experts at doing this kind of work, and why you would choose a fly-by-night operator from outside the province?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Well, Mr. Speaker, you couldn't have asked that question better. Let me tell you something. There hasn't been any management changes at Sedco since we've taken over in the last two years. The management is still the same . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . All right, I'll admit then, there's been one change. We've got a minister that understands business. That's the most significant change.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Klein: — As far as the awarding of the contract is concerned, it was purely done at management level. It didn't even enter into the board discussions.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the minister in charge of Sedco, the Minister of Small Business, and it concerns the contract that was awarded to Raymond Contractors Ltd. And the question I ask is this: did the corporation, of which you are the responsible minister, require a performance bond which would protect only the owner, that is Sedco, or did it also require a labour and materials bond which would protect subcontractors?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — We just went for the normal practice of getting a performance bond.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, supplementary. Is the minister aware that it is quite common practice for government agencies to require a labour and materials bond, as well as a performance bond, in order that subcontractors may be protected?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted that that question was asked because in the past, in the past, in the prior administrations, labour and material bonds for Sedco were very, very, very seldom used.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister confirm that in March, that is last month, Sedco released a very substantial sum of the order of \$167,000 to this contractor on condition that money be paid to subcontractors, and that subcontractors have not yet been paid?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Mr. Speaker, yes, in the normal course of business, there was a progress payment made.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, will the minister confirm that prior to the time that that progress payment was made, that the Sedco had notice from subcontractors that they were not paid, and accordingly, that Sedco had an obligation to see that those funds went to the subcontractors?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — No, Mr. Speaker, I won't confirm that at all.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary. Will the minister deny it?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — The two progress payments that were made, were made in the normal course of business with the normal precautionary measures taken on behalf of not only Sedco, but the subtrades as well.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister asserting that Sedco did not have notice of unpaid claims at the time they released this payment of approximately \$167,000?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Well, according to all the documentation that was signed and that was delivered to Sedco, I believe it was paid out in the normal course of business, in the acceptable business practices.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, supplementary. I'm not asking the minister for his view of what normal business practice is. I'm asking a very simple question of fact. Does the minister deny that when the corporation paid out approximately \$167,000 on March 2, that it had had prior notice of unpaid claims by subcontractor? Do you deny that?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Mr. Speaker, in the normal course of business, as the Leader of the Opposition should be aware of, and if he isn't maybe he should visit the community a little bit, but none the less there was a statutory declaration signed by the contractor that all the subtrades were, in fact, paid. As a result, if Sedco would not have made the payment, we would have been in breach of contract.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, supplementary. I'll ask that question again. Regardless of what the contractor may sign, my question to you is this: had Sedco received notices from the subtrades, from the subcontractors, that they had not been paid prior to your release of this sum of \$167,000?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — To my knowledge, all the subcontractors had been paid, as was declared in the statutory declaration by the contractor. That is why the payment was made.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, I'll try again. I am not asking what the subcontractor said, and I prefaced my first one with that. I am asking whether Sedco received notice from the subtrades that their accounts were unpaid prior to the release of the \$167,000 on March 2. That's a fairly simple question. Had you had notice from the subtrades?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Well, to my understanding, no. We didn't have that. That's why the payment was made.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the subtrades say that they had advised Sedco in January and February that they had unpaid accounts, that you would say that that statement was not a fact.

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Mr. Speaker, Sedco, through their solicitor and through private solicitors, are looking at the entire legal situation right now. And I think that for me to comment any further than I am would be totally irresponsible for me at this time.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. What steps, other than taking a statutory declaration and then calling in the police, have you taken in order to protect the some 16 or so small businessmen who look to your department for protection when they're entering into contracts of this nature?

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Mr. Speaker, as much as we try to protect all of our small businessmen in Saskatchewan, not the least of which are contractors or subtrades, we can't possibly be at their side 24 hours a day as they enter into negotiations and contracts with various people through their normal business day. I suppose if this contract or this award had originally been done by Sears or Eaton's or some other commercial thing, that would be an accepted normal thing that they got themselves into a little bit of a jackpot with a contractor that apparently is in financial difficulty. Because of the fact that they're dealing with a government agency, it seems that if they holler loud and clear to the media or the opposition, they might get some kind of preferential treatment. I can assure you at this time that Sedco is dealing with this matter in a proper fashion, legally, in a pure business-oriented form, and we will deal with our subtrades as soon as we're in a position to do that.

Economic Policy on Education

Mr. Sveinsson: — Mr. Speaker, I have a question to the Minister of Education. Mr. Devine, in his many travels, has often outlined . . .

An Hon. Member: — The Premier.

Mr. Sveinsson: — The Premier, I'm sorry, in his many travels, has often outlined that one of his four pillars of economic policy in Saskatchewan is education. He has addressed one area very adequately in my mind, and it was basically a hangover from the past government, and that is technical services and job training. I would like to ask of the minister where she ranks the elementary, secondary, and university training in this province? Is it sixth, eighth, tenth, thirteenth? Where do you rank that training?

Hon. Mrs. Smith: — Mr. Speaker, I think when it comes to education — and I'm not too sure but I think maybe the member's question, if it's one of training, it perhaps would be best left with the minister responsible for Advanced Education, which includes the universities. In terms of where I rank, and the government, elementary, secondary, universities, I would suggest that there is no rules to put a priority here and forget about this end of it, that education is a life-long, learning process. And to suggest for a moment that perhaps university students are more important than the kindergarten child, is utterly ridiculous.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MOTIONS FOR RETURNS (Not Debatable)

Return No. 128

Hon. Mr. Andrew: — Mr. Speaker, I move that that motion for return be debatable.

Mr. Speaker: — Motion for return (not debatable), debate.

MOTIONS

Resolution No. 2 — School Bus Safety Review

Mr. Gerich: — Mr. Speaker, I take great pleasure in reading this resolution for the record, and show the people of Saskatchewan how much this government truly cares about the safety of our school children.

That this Assembly gives its total support to the government, in particular, the Minister of Highways and Transportation for having established a School Bus Safety Review Committee, in co-operation with the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, for their extensive review of pupil transportation safety in Saskatchewan; and for their efforts in providing concerned persons with the opportunity to express their thoughts on school bus safety.

As a result of the tragic Strasbourg school accident last spring, in which five-year-old Craig Myers, and 53-year-old Walter Woynarski were killed, it was decided that school bus safety should again be extensively reviewed. The entire question of school bus safety was brought to the forefront as a result of this accident.

School bus safety is a priority issue with the government because of our most precious resource — our children. The establishment of a School Bus Safety Review (the SBSR for short)

Committee, was announced on June 20, 1983. This committee was formed to study all aspects of school bus safety, including vehicle design, seat belts, bus lighting, and operations, as well as the student driver and public education. This committee represents a joint effort between the Government of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, working towards the common goal of better and safer bus transportation in the province.

A new school bus design program was announced last October, and this is part of a two-part program. Input received at SBSR Committee meetings held throughout the province suggested that additional signs would make motorists more aware of the location of school bus stops, and of the need to stop for a school bus displaying flashing red lights.

Part one was the development of a new sign, "Stop for the School Bus When Lights Flashing". These signs are being located on higher-volume roadways to ensure maximum exposure when reminding motorists about the law, and will be totally funded by the Department of Highways and Transportation. These new signs take a graphic approach to attracting motorists attention.

Part two is the provision for additional "School Bus Ahead" warning signs to be erected at various problem locations. The Department of Highways and Transportation and Rural Development, in co-operation with the SSTA, will be implementing a bus signing program for highways and municipal roads. Each school board will be contacted to identify locations of up to eight school bus stops in their division where there are existing or potential hazards. The Department of Highways and Transportation will incur all of the costs for increased signing along the provincial highways. Municipal and grid road signings for school bus stops will be cost-shared by the local municipality and the Department of Rural Development.

The interim report discusses issues and alternatives brought forth to the committee; it does not provide final recommendations. And many of the issues must be researched in more depth into their complexity. A final report is expected to be increased by the committee early in 1984.

The committee will be an ongoing and will continue to review and make recommendations in the area of school bus safety. In an effort to meet with as many people as possible who have concerns in the area of school bus safety, the SBSR Committee held seven public meetings throughout the province.

The committee approached a number of the persons and organizations whose expertise was essential. Research organizations included the Saskatchewan Safety Council, Transport Canada, the Canadian Transport Commission, the RCMP, the chief coroner's office, school bus manufacturers, and many other interested individuals and groups.

The average number of persons in attendance at each meeting was approximately 80, and approximately half of this audience, in each case, were the school bus drivers.

All areas of the school bus safety were investigated by the committee. These areas included the driver, students, and public education, vehicle design, maintenance, signalization, communication, operating procedures, enforcement, and seat belt usage.

We must remember that the report made public recently is only an interim report. And the Minister of Highways and Transportation still wants more input. The interim report is designed to stimulate discussion and further input.

To date the committee has made four recommendations, which shows the committee is serious about taking concrete action to improve school bus safety. The following recommendations are being acted upon as quickly as possible:

1. The Department of Highways and Transportation, Rural Development, in co-operation with the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) are

expanding existing school bus signing programs for the highways and municipal roads.

2. A special school bus driver handbook will be prepared by the Department of Highways and Transportation, in consultation with the SSTA and the school bus drivers and contractors.
3. A pamphlet will be prepared outlining the procedures which school bus drivers should follow when a motorist passes the bus while loading or unloading. The pamphlet will include a check-list of the information needed by the driver, should he or she be called to testify in court.
4. The creation of a separate "S" endorsement card for the school bus drivers' licences. These will provide more accurate information to school boards as to licence validation dates. The "S" endorsement will be valid for a three-year period and will not be dependent upon the driver's birth month for renewal.

The following recommendations are being given serious consideration by the committee. This should not, however, be taken as an indication that other recommendations will not be considered.

1. The establishment of a minimum fine of \$250 for motorists convicted of passing stopped school buses displaying flashing red lights.
2. Request the highway traffic board to implement a policy whereby each licence applicant who takes a written test must correctly answer questions related to stopping for school buses, or they will fail the test.
3. Require the installation of a lighted stop arm on all school buses to be activated when a bus is loading or unloading.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of this House to support the Minister of Highways and Transportation for his quick response to the tragic Strasbourg accident and for his efforts, through the school bus safety review committee, to improve the safety of Saskatchewan's most precious resource, our children.

Motion moved by myself and seconded by the member from Cut Knife-Lloydminster:

That this Assembly gives its total support to the government, in particular, the Minister of Highways and Transportation, for having established a school bus safety review committee in co-operation with the Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association, for their extensive review of the public transportation safety in Saskatchewan, and for their efforts in providing concerned persons with the opportunity to express their thoughts on school bus safety.

Mr. Hopfner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to be able to speak on behalf of this motion here today. I'd just like to say that the truck/school bus accident near Strasbourg, where the two people were killed, was indeed a tragedy in the province of Saskatchewan. The concern for safety of our children travelling in school buses throughout the province is a very important issue, and very dear to my heart.

It's a pleasure that I can say that I sit on the caucus transport committee on behalf of the rest of my colleagues, and that we're all working very hard to try and eliminate some of the problems, and eventually all the problems, out there on our rural roads today.

I'd also like to say, Mr. Speaker, that I'm very surprised at the NDP when this particular accident

occurred. They stood in this House demanding band-aid solutions to this particular issue. I was surprised that they did not agree with the minister that we really had to take a real hard, strong look at this particular issue and come up with some good, strong recommendations to eliminate the possibilities of further accidents across this province.

The members take a one-man recommendation and they stood in the House, condemning the minister, the Hon. Jim Garner, for not taking any action when, in fact, he had the ball rolling already, and was forming a committee to get some recommendations brought forth, so that we could act immediately and strong.

The government undertook this study, and this committee was formed, as I said, and many things had been discussed. The safety of school children in this province is not only the problem within government, but is a problem throughout all of society.

We, as individuals that drive the roads, have to learn that when these buses are carrying these children to and from school, that they have to adhere to these particular signs. So we have to re-educate the people. And by this, the committee has recommended pamphlets and more information; have increased the signs out there in the rural areas to make school bus awareness more apparent to the drivers in the province of Saskatchewan.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, that this definitely is a plus. And I think, probably, that although this accident had occurred and brought this to light in many of the people's minds, that sometimes tragedies such as these go unforgotten. I think today we can put a lot of this aside by saying that we are constantly sending out reminders, reminders that the safety of our children is of an all importance to not only the people in this Assembly, but to the people right throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

Our government, our minister, has made a full commitment to not only put the sight on this particular situation today and forget about it tomorrow, but it will be an ongoing concern. Our minister, the Hon. Jim Garner, has given his word, and I know that through the discussions we have within our caucus transportation committee, that these concerns are surfacing all the time — not that they'd come up last month and have gone forgotten. It's continually being discussed.

I would also like to say that with this committee, Mr. Speaker, they come up with what I call a very well-documented report. I was very surprised at the findings, and I'd particularly like to point out one area of some interest that the committee had found, and that was on the educational aspect. They pointed out on a heading that pupil transportation must be a team effort. Mr. Speaker, when we talk about team effort, it again relates back to what I said previously, that everybody must take this concern and practice this concern.

The competence of the school bus drivers and the uniformity of procedures and practices followed by all other persons, including the total populated vehicle operators in the province of Saskatchewan, must always keep in mind that no matter what obstacle is in their way, whether it's the trees in the rural areas where they're coming to a corner or a crossroad or something like that, that they must slow down, take a second look or a third look. Because a lot of times in the rural areas in the province of Saskatchewan these trees are growing right up to the corners of the roadsides and the municipalities have probably not, in some instances, been able to get to the clearing of these to bring them back to proper footage or something like this.

So people must take this fact that not only school buses, but all other aspects of people driving their children to school, to and from school, where they're not even in the school buses. So it takes an all-out effort and an all-out team effort.

The school bus driver, I do believe, in the province of Saskatchewan are probably a very professional bunch of people. To me I think that probably when they get into their school buses in the morning, going to pick up their passengers, in a lot of cases their own children, are

definitely not operating the buses and to look for the fact that they have to really, really be out there concerned about the individuals that may not have this type of awareness that probably they should have. But I think that when they get into those school buses, they've got one thing in mind, is to pick up their children, make sure that they're seated properly in their school buses, and to get them to the school safely and back home again safely.

Now I think probably with children it's fairly hard to legislate children to be strapped into a seat. But I think probably with the awareness now that the children have throughout their school programs, and where the teachers are beginning to speak on the safety aspect, I think, basically, it's sunk. There's a lot of people, a lot of students, a lot of young children, thinking today that, yes, we have a responsibility not only to ourselves but to the bus driver.

So you see it goes back to that team-work again where the students have been listening to their teachers, and their students have been paying attention to their bus drivers and understanding the awareness of all the problems that could arise. And, therefore, I think that probably we should congratulate the bus service and the students and teachers because, Mr. Speaker, we haven't had another tragic accident like that since it happened.

I think the people are becoming more and more responsible. I think, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the fact of questioning now, today, whether we should, in fact, have seat belts on school buses to tie down people in school buses, there's been a lot more thought been put into the whole issue.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that when you and I analyse the situation and, indeed, all the people of the province analyse the situation, I think you can probably in all reality look at the various problems that it could create by tying people into school buses. For instance, you take the little kindergarten child that may, you know, in putting it in a situation where there may be an upset in a school bus, and where there will have to be an evacuation, for instance.

Well, if the school bus driver is injured, knocked unconscious, and these little kindergarten children are strapped in, they may not be able to release themselves and crawl out a window or an exit that may have opened, or have to have been opened by maybe a larger student, and where that larger student may not probably think on the fact of helping that small kindergarten child out of that.

But what would happen if that school bus would catch on fire? You know, Mr. Speaker, when I look at legislating things, I could feel very deeply hurt and hard to live with myself, knowing that I could have a part of legislation in strapping that, you know, by legislating the fact that strapping that child in the school bus, and maybe that child burned to death because of it.

There's many, many different situations of what could occur in an accident and, as far as I'm concerned, the good Lord is the only one that really knows what's going to really happen in that particular instant.

But I want to say that I think that in all logic that the committee is really hitting upon many issues. And I do believe that, with increasing the signs and making them more available, hand booklets and pamphlets where procedures of school bus drivers will be taking in the fact of evacuations and vehicle laws rules and the public awareness there, I really think that, as the school buses are driving down these highways and byways, that the children are not going to have to really be strapped into these here school buses.

But, again, it reverts back to the band-aid solution. All of a sudden, the members of the opposition thought, without thinking, that we should legislate seat belts in the school buses. But I would like, and I hope some of the members of the opposition would speak on this maybe later, and ask me or tell me what they think about this committee's report. I would think that after them, the opposition, reading this report, must agree with me that this report is fairly thorough

and that it's ongoing, and that new practices can be brought into effect. I think that this is about one of the more responsible reports that I've had an opportunity to read in a long time.

I want to point out a few of these, if I may, about vehicle design and maintenance. Now, I've heard the member from Pelly get up and say: well seat belts, it must be seat belts. But he didn't realize. He didn't realize the vehicle is designed, so we had to explain it to him. If the member would have taken time to understand just exactly how a bus was built and put together by the manufacturers, he could have maybe have understood that a study was really necessary to really get some effective, effective results and effective safety practices implemented in the province of Saskatchewan.

But, Mr. Speaker, it goes back to the fact that if we had anchored seat belts to the floor in these old school buses and, if it would've come to the fact where there would have been an accident, we would've had a bunch of mangled bodies, possibly, in this particular school bus. But the fact that those seat belts wouldn't have helped, it would have just hindered the situation and might have held the child in a crushing sort of circumstance and had his life snuffed out of him.

But, due to the fact that we carried on a study and found out exactly how these school buses were built and what they could withstand, I think now the member opposite has agreed or will agree that it — I see him nodding so I take it that he will agree — that our minister was right in implementing the committee to do such a study.

But you see, there's more to just the fact of having a belt around you. You know, there's other things like the procedures of getting on and off buses. Also, where there was close calls of the traffic not stopping because of the flashing lights. Well, now the bus drivers are taking their time to recognize problem situations. If they see oncoming vehicles they question, they are holding the children. They've got mirrors now that are on these school buses that are just, you know, give them a full view of what's happening around them. And I think that's more important than tying children into a tin can that might collapse around them.

I think, Mr. Speaker, when tragedies such as the ones that happened in Strasbourg happen, you know, I can sympathize with the member when he was trying to do good. But not just by one little thing. You know, like I can't imagine such small thought and the tunnel vision into the fact that that was a cure-all.

But I would like to think that, with these additional signs and with the blinkers going and with the fact that the bus drivers are not going to tolerate the public tearing by school buses when the lights are flashing, they're going to report them. They're going to get the licence plate numbers. They're going to press charges. The fines are going to increase, etc. I think that it's only going to take a couple of times for the do-wrongers, if you will, to get the message. Because we're not, as a government, going to fool around with such a thing. We're going to hit it in a hard-ball fashion. This is what I believe the parents, the public, the children, everyone in the province of Saskatchewan want to see.

There are many alternatives we can take, Mr. Speaker, to what we regard as safety in the province of Saskatchewan. And I think from four of the steps that have already been taken, I think it was very positive. And I think that when the opposition, and even the rest of the members of the Assembly, hear and see what we have to implement in the future, I'm sure they're going to realize that we are handling the situation in an all-out hard-ball manner.

There's many things that occur or probably that have a factor in accidents in the province of Saskatchewan, and school buses are not different. As we're driving down our roads, the glare from the sun off the windshields or the obstructions of mirrors on the sides of these trucks and stuff like the manufacturers are putting out today, I think there should be where we step on also — making sure that the manufacturers, when they're implementing these, building these school buses, that this glass is not glary, so that it's not obscuring the vision of the school bus drivers.

You get in the early morning sun and it's bright. It's hard to see sometimes, and these bus drivers . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I take some of the members don't agree with me from the opposition, and it may be a joke to the opposition. But to me, Mr. Speaker, if the NDP think that I'm standing here and trying to make a joke and a mockery out of what I'm trying to say, they can rest assured that they're absolutely wrong in that if they'd like to stand and mock the situation, I can gladly sit down.

But getting back to manufacturers, Mr. Speaker, I think our good minister is well aware of the fact that we've got to look at the way these manufacturers are putting school buses together. As far as the driver's vision is concerned, you know, instead of having glass that gives a glare off, we can maybe look at the manufacturers putting in this non-glare glass, for instance, which won't obscure the vision of the drivers and, therefore, they can possibly see all things coming from any direction.

And it's a fact, too, Mr. Speaker, that grain trucks and cars, half tons, three-quarter tons, all these kind of vehicles that are driving down our roadways, they have, too, this kind of glass on their vehicles where they don't see the school bus because of the sun glaring in on them and things like that. And it's apparent that some days some people get out of bed in the morning and they're in a rush to get to work or they're in a rush there, and they're not really thinking — not really thinking that their neighbour's child can be driving down the road in the school bus. And therefore, you know, when it comes to these crossroads and intersections, their speed hasn't altered. No, they're used to driving that same road day in and day out. It's almost like a fact where they don't even realize that they're even on the road probably. And this is what causes these accidents, is the lack of awareness that there's other people out there at these particular times of days, getting to their jobs and also getting to their schools.

And I think that, with taking a good look at the way these vehicles are put together, that we can eliminate a lot of the problems that we have when it comes to meeting each other on the roadways in the province of Saskatchewan and, indeed, all of Canada.

I think, too, when it comes to signals, I, too, Mr. Speaker, might be guilty in a lot of times when I'm driving long distances, and I've become more and more aware of it since I've become more involved with transportation problems. About signaling — you know, I can visualize myself many times driving down the roads, and if I happen to make a turn or change lane, you know, and I think after I've done it, "Gee, did I signal?" You know, and it's caught me many times. But I think, you know, since things like this and since I've become involved with the transportation committee, my awareness out on the road has become more and more apparent. And I think, also, Mr. Speaker, that if other people take it to heart, like I've taken it to heart, on the safety of school children, that it would, indeed, make all the travelling in the province of Saskatchewan a very safe place to be.

I think, you know, when you look at the fact of air traffic and versus school bus traffic and bus traffic and hauling our children back and forth and, in fact, all segment of the population, that where there are rules and regulations that are continually updated, like air traffic is, where they hit it head on, I think if we follow that with the bus safety situation, the school bus safety situation in the province of Saskatchewan, I think, Mr. Speaker, that we are going to have a very, very safe school bus record in years to come.

I think, too, you know, for driver qualification, Mr. Speaker, when it comes down into the fact of bringing more and more new people into the school bus driving area, that I think, with the courses that they're having to have to take before they can get into this school bus, and to operate it to haul the children back and forth to their schools, that I think that in all reality through these courses the awareness, and the awareness that the drivers will pick up through these driver courses and to get their qualifications for driving, will become a real credit to the safety.

I think, when you're talking about the qualifications of drivers in the province of Saskatchewan, that when a person takes it upon himself to accept the responsibility or want to accept the responsibility for whatever it be — whether it be extra income, or for the fact of just liking the fact of being able to be involved with the students — that I think it's very unique for an individual to bring himself forth and to put himself into that particular situation.

And I think that, through these courses, these people will be able to educate their friends and neighbours and bring it upon their friends and neighbours just exactly what it takes and what is the heart of being able to justify their position once they obtain these qualifications.

And I think, through these kind of little discussions and through this type of a program, by bringing the programs that they have to observe and have to learn, that through this, it opens a whole wide range of communication amongst all people around them and throughout the school.

And I think, you know, Mr. Speaker, that when it comes to school bus safety, that it's not only bus drivers that we're talking about and courses that they should be taking to qualify for bus driving, but I think, you know, that by these school boards and the teachers, that also it wouldn't hurt for them to understand what is behind to qualify for a school bus driver in the province of Saskatchewan.

I think once they understood — and, in fact, I am going to be looking into it myself more because I don't really know what it takes to become a school bus driver. But I think that, if we can all sit back and in our leisure maybe read something that a school bus driver has to learn and have to be able to write exams on and absorb throughout his years of service, and I think, Mr. Speaker, we can all generate a more — maybe sympathetic — you know, towards the school bus driver in the province of Saskatchewan.

I think when it comes to safety also that, when we're talking about safety in school buses, I sometimes wonder, when these school bus drivers are driving down these roads in rural Saskatchewan where the farms are becoming more spread out, that: are these buses properly equipped with maybe radio equipment, something in the case of an emergency? Because, Mr. Speaker, there's more to bus safety than the fact of a collision from a truck or a car or something like that, but for the fact of the long winters, the long, cold winters we have in the province of Saskatchewan, where the bus could hit a ditch because of icy conditions. And if there's many miles to walk or it's stormy, the wind chill is up there. The wind chill factor is up there. The motor stalls on the school bus. You know, this to me could be a tragedy, because a lot of times students do not dress for the outside weather when they're picked up at their doors in the winter by these school buses.

So I question the fact whether there's proper radio equipment or maybe a mobile phone that could be not installed in these school buses that, in case the bus did stall out, that probably maybe they could just phone down the line and get assistance and not have to rely on the bus operator to try and make everybody comfortable first and then walk many miles and possibly himself not make it, because maybe the weather element is that bad where he could collapse from exposure or something like that, and it may be hours before the students gets help. Well, you know as well as I do that there could be a lot of problems.

Also sometimes the fact is, too, that you don't have all this time. There are such things as large water areas along our roadways. And some of these water areas along our roadways are fairly deep and in muddy conditions. You can talk about the summer element and rainy weather and stuff, and these buses can go into a skid and they could upset into these roadside waterways, and they could be . . . They could only have a matter of a few minutes to even radio out to get help or anything like this.

Now I think there's many of these things that are important and many of these things that must be discussed. Blow-outs are another thing, you know. Anything can happen by the fact of a tire blowing and the bus upsetting. Well, an ambulance might have to be called. Gee, you know, I'm just trying to, Mr. Speaker, bring you to many more awarenesses of what could occur in the rural area. And it takes time for ambulances to be able to reach a scene of an accident — doctors, nurses.

And when we're talking accidents, we're talking a fact that we could be talking up to 40 children. So one ambulance isn't going to do the job. You know, half a dozen ambulances may not do the job. These are things, Mr. Speaker, that we cannot afford to sit back and just take a band-aid approach about and implement seat belts, that the member of the NDP wanted us to do.

I'm trying to bring this awareness to you because, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, the NDP, took me by total surprise when they thought that this was the cure-all. They took me by total surprise by trying to make a political issue out of something that is more important to the people of Saskatchewan than a band-aid belt-up solution.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that the members and the member from Pelly must agree with me today, after ridiculing my minister, the Hon. Jim Garner, for he must agree that the hon. Minister should be complimented. And he would, in fact, probably do himself more good as far as, if he wanted any political mileage from this, by agreeing that this Assembly — and I will give him credit by him standing in this House and agreeing with anything that our Hon. Minister of Highways wants to bring in regards to safety. I will give him, and I know he probably will get all the credit that is deserving to him. And now, Mr. Speaker, I can't get into that. I would like to. But deserving to him, that if he would stand in this House and agree to some good, common, down-to-earth sense for a change.

But I think, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition and I just want to dwell on this for a minute or two, that the opposition didn't really understand — didn't really understand what a study required to bring about all these elements, and I haven't even spoken on half of them.

Some of the elements that I spoke about didn't even take into consideration the amount of time and input that all these other good people out in rural Saskatchewan, from medical to teachers to the laymen, the ordinary folk . . . You know, they just didn't understand how much time and effort it would have to take to put something sensibly together.

I think that the members opposite probably have learnt a real good lesson. But, you know, even the students that I've spoken to — and I speak quite a lot in around the schools in my constituency — and even the students have agreed that when this issue had arose . . . (The members are trying to make a political issue out of it.) But when I spoke in to some of the schools and students had asked me what we were doing . . . You know, they were concerned whether, indeed, there was any safety for school bus, for the school buses and for themselves.

I think, after sitting back, after I've spoken to them, telling them what our good minister was trying to do, that they felt very content. And I just want you to know, Mr. Speaker, and I hope you can understand that from the young people's viewpoint in the province of Saskatchewan, I think you can understand that they are responsible young people. And I think that when we sit back and we discuss things with them, they even have some good input.

You know, I was surprised, you know, like when we talked about it. I can remember this one particular school I was addressing, and we were talking about school bus safety. Well, Mr. Speaker, it was a fact that the students were kind of leery of even bringing it up.

And there was this one student kind of edging on his chair, and I noticed him. I happened to notice him and, in fact, he was the first one that brought up the issue about safety and not only school bus safety, but vehicle safety throughout the province of Saskatchewan. But school bus

safety came from that.

And I asked him. I said, "Why are you hedging? I noticed you hedging. I knew you wanted to ask a question." And I said, "why were you hedging?" Well, he said, you know, he said, "Really, are we allowed to have any input into these things?" Well, I said, "Yes." I says, "You are definitely allowed input because," I said, "without your input, how do I know I'm doing my job?" You know, and I made him feel really at ease, you see. And through that we got a real total discussion going on school busing and vehicle safety — just the whole total picture.

And a good friend of mine is a transportation safety instructor. He was sitting there and, you know, after the meeting was all over, he was probably as satisfied as I was with the input, that he said, you know, he said, nobody . . . the students have really not brought this out in their concerns about school bus and vehicle safety — traffic safety — out to me as I've been instructing them, or anything. And, you know, I think probably throughout the conversation, while it's been quite some time now, that he's even got a more of a better approach and rapport with his students today, because they seem to open up.

And I think, probably, that you could probably find that right throughout all Saskatchewan right now, that if the issue has been touched upon, that I'm sure if you would give the students the opportunity to give some of the information or to allow them to give you information as to what they cite might be a safety precaution, and I'm sure that we would have much, much more better input than what we've had under the past administration.

I think that the member opposite said I must be building up for a climax. I think that probably he's very right. I think that if he keeps making fun of this issue, that the only climax that we're liable to see is that in 1986 the final climax will be no opposition.

I think, too, Mr. Speaker, that when it comes down to legislating safety and legislating . . . Legislation is easy. Legislation can be brought down upon all elements of life. Everything. It doesn't matter what we focus on today, we could legislate something. But, Mr. Speaker, I don't think, in all honesty, that you and I could agree with the members opposite that we could legislate common sense. Common sense, Mr. Speaker, is something that people have to develop. And I think that is something that the member opposite that seems to be hollering across the floor doesn't have a whole lot of. I think that when we come to law enforcements and restrictions, you know, you can legislate till it freezes over. And I don't particularly think that you and I want to take and waste the people of Saskatchewan's time in trying to legislate common sense.

I think right now, if I look at the picture out there in rural Saskatchewan, I think that if you take a look at the way the Minister of Highways and also the Minister of Rural Affairs is concerned in their approach and increasing of fundings towards the development of better roadways, I think you're going to find, too, that we'll have less school bus accidents as well as other accidents.

I think also, when we develop policies as we go on, I think you'll find that this government, Mr. Speaker, that you'll find that we will be very open to any real good common sense approach that the members opposite may bring in to this Assembly. Or even without bringing them to this Assembly, if we happen to be in adjournment over the summer, that if they'd like to drop me a note, being I'm on the transportation committee. And I'm sure that if it's good common sense and they're willing to look at it and approach it in a very — and the school bus problem — in a very, very, common sense way, I will definitely take any, any kind of policy development that they may feel would be a credit to the people of Saskatchewan, to that committee. And I will give them . . . I'll be the first to stand in this House and credit them for that.

I think also that before establishing policy, that not just us as legislators look at the issues. I think that the approach that the Minister of Highways has been taking about getting the feeling of the people — the real people, the guts of the province — that getting that feeling back into Regina

here, back into this legislature, I think that was an all important, an important direction that the Minister of Highways has been taking. I got to hand it to my hon. Minister, the Hon. Jim Garner, when he did not take the members opposite heckling to heart, and to think that he was steering the province of Saskatchewan in the wrong direction.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that when we look at the picture on the whole, that just that direction he's taken by allowing the people, the real people, like I said earlier, have input in the province; that when we get that information back, you know, it's been well digested, well discussed.

I can go out into my constituency, or many other constituencies, . . . In fact, last weekend, over Easter, I visited another constituency member from Birch Hill. And just the way the people are talking out there, you know. . . So I know these kind of issues like school bus safety are being well digested.

When we decide to make policy, to implement policy on this side of the House, I think you will find that it's not because the Hon. Jim Garner wanted it in here . . .

An Hon. Member: — The Hon. Minister of Highways.

Mr. Hopfner: — . . . or, I mean, Hon. Minister of Highways, wanted it in here — or any other hon. Minister. I think, Mr. Speaker, that when we look at the implementation of policy in this House, I think you're going to find that it's the heart of the people talking. I think you're going to find if there's a change in manufacturing of school buses for implementing more safe, whatever, seats — maybe they can cushion the seats up, or something — whatever it is, I think, Mr. Speaker, you're going to find that it's not my idea, or other hon. ministers' ideas, or hon. member ideas, but I think you're going to find that the true picture has been painted by the people of Saskatchewan.

I think, too, that when we look at it and on the safety, that I think that we should tend to take a look at the fact that everybody concerned, coming around that safety of school bus, is going to be able to be assured that when they're called upon for any emergency, that they're going to be able to address it effectively and very efficiently.

I think, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the fact of us implementing the policy, it may be something — the school bus policies — I think it may be something that will be as good or better than policies that could be created through emergency measures, or any other type of particular act or policy, or any type of legislation that comes in here. Because I think when you look at the bottom line, you're going to find that it is just at the meat of the problem, and everything will therefore be approached by everyone, and the input from everyone be there.

I think too that when we're looking at the fact of all sorts and kinds of accidents that could occur through these school bus . . . through the fact of carrying the students to and from school, that we, as people of the legislature, will find, and in this Assembly — members from the opposition, I should add — will find that more people, not only the people that try to bring in the solutions to the problems, but even at the manufacturing level . . . (inaudible) . . . will continually try to upgrade the system and bring about what I would think a very safe and reputable type of bus.

And I think with that, Mr. Speaker, in case that members opposite may want to add anything to this, that I would hope that when they decide to stand up, that we should tend to think that they would speak more positively. And I hope that when this happens, when a member of the opposition does stand up and speak on the school bus issue, that he would recognize some of the quality that is coming out of this Assembly.

I'm not going to stand here and suggest that we are not open to criticism. I for one, think that it's remarkable to keep things going, and to have the fact that if they have good criticism, that it's an ongoing thing, and that we can contribute and talk things out. And I would just hope that, Mr.

Speaker, when we talk about school bus safety, we're not talking about seat belts when the member gets up. I hope that when the member gets up that we're talking about school bus courses, and we're talking about school bus manufacturing, that we're talking about communication.

And when I talk about communication, I want to remind the member opposite that when he does, please remember that it's communication, not only over air waves, through radio, telephone, anything like that — but that it's communication amongst the teachers, the students, the school trustees, the school boards; that it's communication amongst the parents, moms and dads, the grandparents.

I think — and the member opposite may smile when I say that — I'm, I'm sincere. I'm very sincere, because I think this communication aspect, Mr. Speaker, on the school bus issue, is vital. And I think I've got to speak a little longer in regards to that because he doesn't seem to be . . . He seems to be thinking that I'm speaking a little bit in . . . I'm not speaking from heart on this particular issue.

I think, Mr. Speaker, when the members opposite want to talk about communication and come on to the fact that it's not an important issue — I think when we have to remember, we have to remember that in order to have an open line, an open line, and to have the issues sink in and people absorb the particular issues that are at hand, I think that we have to really realize that it takes word of mouth to make things travel and to get things put across.

But with that, Mr. Speaker, I want the member opposite to remember that there's much more to school bus safety than the tunnel vision or seat belts, and when he . . . I'm going to be very, very interested when he stands up in the House and gives his address, because it would be . . . You know, sometimes I wish, Mr. Speaker, that I'd have the opportunity to stand up after he did, because probably I could add a whole lot more to what I've already said today.

But I think that from the written briefs that were submitted to the committee from the Saskatchewan Safety Council and various schools and school divisions and Saskatchewan federation of home and school associations, etc., I think, you know, the member should take this into consideration before he opens his mouth in this Assembly to criticize our hon. minister's direction which he's taken to try to implement the safety of our school children in the province of Saskatchewan.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to say that indeed it's been a pleasure for me to be able to take the time in this House today to speak on such an all-out important issue. And I would suggest that with that, I can only say that it was a total honour, indeed, on behalf of my constituents, to be able to stand here today and second that motion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Lusney: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened for a while to the member opposite, and then it got a little tiring listening to him. I'd have to say, Mr. Speaker, that it's somewhat a change for members opposite, now that they're in government, to be concerned about safety. It's a little different than what they said when they were in opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I think we've been concerned with the safety of our school children and everyone in this province for a long time. We've been concerned on what happens on our roads, in vehicles, in school buses. And we've addressed many of those concerns, Mr. Speaker.

We see the government now, all of a sudden, saying that they have some real concerns about the safety of our school children, and safety of others, I might add. As the member from Kindersley-Lloydminster was saying, that now the Minister of Highways realizes that safety is a real concern. They have gone to the people and finally now they're aware that the people are

concerned about safety.

But if you go back, Mr. Speaker, a couple of years ago, and go back five years prior to that, and listened or looked in *Hansard* to see what the same members were saying then . . . Many of the members that are in government today, that are ministers — the Minister of Highways in particular — at that time was criticizing the use of seat belts, and was saying that people should not be forced to do anything they don't want to do. That same minister today is out there saying that safety is a real concern, that somehow we should be addressing the use of seat belts, and encouraging the use of seat belts, and trying to protect the people on our highways. That's what the Minister of Highways is saying today.

You know, it's surprising, Mr. Speaker, how these people changed their views from one year to the next — how they changed their views. When they were in opposition they said nothing about seat belts. They said it was imposing your will on others. But now they say we need stricter rules, we need heavier fines for anyone that doesn't do as we tell him. That's what they are saying today.

And, Mr. Speaker, we have to say that safety is a real concern. Fortunately, in this province we haven't had too many accidents concerning school buses.

We've had some good drivers, I think, working for many of the school divisions, and they were drivers that were concerned about the safety of the children that they were transporting to the schools. And they made sure that they took every precaution possible to avoid an accident. And it's not because of this government now; it's because of the drivers that have been in place there for many years. They knew the hazards. They knew what safety meant. They knew that their cargo was a precious cargo, and they had to try and protect those children.

And those were the people that kept the accidents down, and kept any fatalities, unnecessary fatalities, down. They are the ones that deserve the credit — not this government today, but the school bus drivers. They are the ones that deserve that credit, not the Minister of Highways at present. As the member for Cut Knife-Lloydminster said, that the Minister of Highways today has real concerns and somehow everything that he does is going to be what the people want, and it's going to save all these lives out there.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that that Minister of Highways could not have said that five years ago, because I think we could have come forward with some better solutions to the safety of passengers in cars, in school buses. But at that time, the Minister of Highways did not believe that safety was a concern. He was just concerned that we were somehow trying to impose our will on others. But I see him singing a different tune today. That same minister is not saying that any more.

What the minister should be doing, if he is really concerned about the safety of our school children, is maybe keeping some of those highways in better shape so that those school bus drivers wouldn't have to be strapped in there — to be able to control that bus so they could drive down the road without all those pot-holes and have better control of that bus. That's what that minister should be doing.

But what's he doing? I think instead of filling the pot-holes, he's making them even bigger. What he'll eventually do is bury most of the people in this province, the way he's building roads. The member for Cut Knife-Lloydminster said that they are concerned about roads, highways in the province, and even rural roads; that they are going to spend more money on seeing that these roads are kept in shape.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if safety is a real concern, they should be spending more money on roads to see that they're safe roads to travel on; that the school buses have adequate roads in the rural municipalities to travel on. Both department, Rural Development and Highways, should be

spending more money. But neither one of them this year saw fit to increase their budgets for road construction in order to maintain the kind of safe driving that we've had in this country, in this province, over the past number of years.

He talks about the study he's done, the reviews that they continuously have. Somehow all of these studies and reviews are going to provide more safety for us — more safety through studies and reviews.

And he says that I talked about seat belts use in buses without having any knowledge or consideration as to whether the bus was capable of having seat belts or not. Well, Mr. Speaker, it is true many of the buses designed today are not designed to accommodate the use of seat belts in them.

But what this government should be doing is not studying the aspects of safety, because we do have the Saskatchewan Safety Council. We've got the communities that have made studies into safety. We've got so many different groups that's made studies on safeties that all we have to do is ask those groups for the results of their studies and ask for their recommendations. And we would not have to spend more of the taxpayers' money through committees from the legislature to study safety even further. The studies have been made. It's just a matter of implementing the results of those studies, and that's what this government is ignoring to do.

They're not going out there and instructing the manufacturers of the buses to design them in a way that will accommodate the use of seat belts. That is what they should be doing. That's what the safety committees are saying — that we have to tell those manufacturers of school buses that if we're concerned about safety and if we're going to buy their buses, then what we should be doing is telling them that you better start manufacturing buses that are going to be able to accommodate the use of seat belts, if that is what the province decides to go with.

But this government just goes for more studies and more reviews and avoid the real issue, and that is providing some direction in how we can give safety to the students on those school buses. But we don't see this government doing that at all. They go on with more studies and more reviews, and why are they having these studies and reviews? Not because they are that concerned about safety, but their real concern is to get out there to the public and say, somehow, "We're going to listen to what you're saying, regardless of all the studies that have been done till now and all the information that's compiled, and all the direction that's been given through those studies."

All those studies are going to do is just give some direction to this government on what is politically popular and what isn't politically popular. And that's the direction they'll go in. If they think something won't be popular politically, regardless of how safe it might be or how beneficial it may be to the public, they won't go with it. That is the only reason that this government goes with studies and reviews continuously, year after year, spending the taxpayers' money, trying to find out what is politically popular and what isn't.

What have they done with many of the safety committees that have been in place? We had one through SGI that would study the aspects of safety on the highways. They cut it out. They won't provide funding. They don't want the different committees studying the safety on our roads. They don't want any committees outside of the government to do these studies and give direction to the government then.

They want to stand every group and every committee in this province that will study any aspect of safety, be it with school bus drivers or school kids, or be it in private vehicles on the highways. This is what they don't do. They get rid of those committees, and for only one reason, as I stated, Mr. Speaker. Because they want to get the political mileage out of it. They want their own members to go out there and say that they are doing the studies, and that somehow they are going to do what the people say.

Most of the time, Mr. Speaker, if they go forward with any program, they could have gone forward with it two years ago simply by going to the safety committees and asking them for the recommendations, or taking the studies that are already in place and using them. And they could have implemented many of those programs a long time ago. And they could have dispensed with all the politics that they're playing with people's lives, with the students' lives, in this province. And with the taxpayers' money on top.

Mr. Speaker, this government has very little concern for what other committees do. You can go not only in safety on highways, you can go to safety in health, you can go to the safety in environment. And there have been studies upon studies made that could give direction to this government — studies made by independent groups that could give some very good direction to this government. And all they have to do is act on those studies, implement them, and we would have some good programs in place. We would have some good policy in place.

But they ignore any previous studies, and again go back to their own political studies and try to appear to be very concerned about the lives of our school children, the lives of the public on our highways, concerned about the health of people, the environment. They all want to look so concerned, so very concerned about it.

But their main purpose is purely for the political mileage they can get out of every one of those studies. Mr. Speaker, I would have to say that if they are very serious about what they are suggesting, then they should go to the safety council, they should look at some of these studies, and they shouldn't waste any more time on any more reviews, on any more studies, but they should take some positive action.

If they have a plan in progress now, get some legislation before this House that will provide for the safety of our people, that will tell the bus manufacturers that they have to change their design of the buses because we are concerned about the safety of our students, and eventually we may want to take some action to either use seat belts in them or whatever may be decided by the safety committees, because they are the ones that did the studies on them, and they know what the recommendations should be, and they know what the people think. But it takes this government then to take action and make sure that everything is in place to accommodate the use of seat belts, if that's where we're going, and to make sure that the buses are manufactured accordingly.

But to stand up and say that the buses will not accommodate seat belts and say that we have to have more studies on safety doesn't do the students any good. It won't do anybody any good. We've got buses that are built every year. Why doesn't the minister say that those buses have to have adequate supports and a floor system to accommodate the seat belts?

But we don't see that coming from this government. All they do is talk about how much good they're doing, how they're going to do everything for the people, and they're going to have more studies. Two years from now, we'll still be looking at studies, Mr. Speaker.

I think it's unfortunate that this government will not take the required action now rather than waiting one or two or three years to keep some of their back-benchers working in studies — that they should take action now, come forward with the legislation that is going to protect the people of this province, and come forward with it now, and not wait two years from now. And if they don't want to do it, well, I suppose what they should do then is say so, and the opposition will be glad to put together some legislation that will get the safety and take into consideration the concerns of the public of this province.

Mr. Speaker, there's a good number of things I'd like to say on it yet, and some of my other colleagues have a few things that they'd like to say on this. So, therefore, Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to adjourn this debate.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Resolution No. 12 — Low Income Earners; Utility Rate Increases; Salary Increases

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, I think I can address my remarks to the House in a fairly short period of time. I'm not sure whether I'll need to canvass all possibilities, but I do want to mention what I think are some very, very serious matters covered by this resolution. The resolution, as members will note from their agenda, the blues;

... regrets that the Government of Saskatchewan has continued to disregard the pressing needs of low income earners, has asked for and obtained very high increases in utility rates for electricity, natural gas, telephones, and auto insurance, and has provided large and unjustified increases in the salary and other remuneration to certain favoured and newly hired political advisers and employees.

You will note that it is basically three-pronged. It says that the government has been derelict in dealing with the problems of low-income earners, has sought for and obtained very high utility rate increases, and has hired a good number of people as advisers and employees who have political connections and who are handsomely remunerated. Let me touch on these one by one.

First, with respect to low-income employees, the government has frozen the minimum wage affecting thousands of Saskatchewan workers. That, I think, cannot be denied. Let me touch on a couple of the aspects of this which are unusual in the history of Saskatchewan.

We have now had a freeze in minimum wages since January 1, 1982. It is now two years and three months, and there is no indication of an increase in minimum wages. We have not had a 24-month gap in minimum wage increases since 1986. It will be 1986 since we've had a two-year freeze and we're already at two years and three months. All during the period of the previous government and for a substantial period of the Liberal government which preceded it, we had increases in minimum wages more rapidly than the government opposite is proposing to increase them. And I think that speaks volumes for the concern of this government for those low wage earners who depend upon the minimum wage.

And when I speak of ones who depend upon the minimum wage, I am not addressing myself only to those who receive the minimum wage, but also who receive wages which are close to the minimum wage and are customarily increased when the minimum wage increases. And there are many, many thousands of those in Saskatchewan. And I want the Minister of Labour to take note of this because he may well say that there are only X thousand who receive the minimum wage. He also has, if he is going to address the problem, to tell me how many thousand receive wages which are sensitive to increases in the minimum wage. And I know there are many thousands. I think of people at institutions like Sears. And I know this from family experience where the wage rate is quoted as minimum wage plus 35 cents an hour. So that if the minimum wage goes up, the wage of that particular employee goes up, even though that employee is not, strictly speaking, on the minimum wage.

Please understand, Mr. Speaker, that the period we'd gone to — this two years — is not a period of low inflation compared with previous historical periods. We have had many periods with inflation rates lower than we now have. And yet minimum wages have been increased annually and they certainly haven't had two-year gaps. And that was true in the late 1960s under the former Liberal government. There was no rapid inflation. Yet they increased the minimum wage.

Now we have a period of significant inflation since 1982. True, it's abetting. But it's a significant inflation, and none of that is being responded to. The government is not increasing the minimum

wage, and as a result, the position of minimum wage-earners is becoming less and less favourable compared with other workers.

In 1982, full-time minimum wage-earners were making about 48 per cent of the average Saskatchewan wage. So a minimum wage-earner got just under half what a person on the average Saskatchewan wage got. By January of 1983, this had fallen to 44 per cent, and it is my understanding now that by the end of this year, or very shortly, the rate will have fallen to below 40 per cent of the average Saskatchewan wage. This is changing the social structure of Saskatchewan by saying that minimum wage-earners shall not be able to maintain their relative position compared with average Saskatchewan wages. In fact, they are dropping from close to 50 per cent to about 40 per cent. And that says that this government has small concern for low wage-earners.

In 1982, the Department of Labour estimated that 25 per cent of the employees were earning the minimum wage or were getting wages which were close to the minimum wage, and accordingly, sensitive to minimum wage increases.

So we're not talking about a small group of employees. We're not talking about "kids out of school," as the saying goes, although some of them may be included in the group. Twenty-five per cent of employees get wages which are at the minimum wage or sensitive to the minimum wage. That's an impressive number — an impressive number to leave behind; an impressive number to say, "Yes, you used to get about half of what the average wage was, but now you'll have to make do with 40 per cent of what the average wage was." That says what this government believes about low-income people, and what it says does not do the government credit.

Now, Mr. Speaker, sometimes it's thought that minimum wages are kept down in order that there may be economic activity. And of course, a case can be made that wages cannot be infinitely high and everybody be well off. We all know that. But certainly the theory that you can depress wages and build prosperity on depressed wages is equally fallacious. You simply can't reduce pay-cheques and expect to have more money spent. You simply can't pay out less money to employees and be surprised when those employees spend less money at the local merchant. And that, of course, is what's happening. Wages are not keeping pace. A great number of people are not getting what they would have got. They are accordingly not spending what they would have spent, and local merchants know this. Local merchants know that their tills are not ringing the way they did three years ago, and one of the reasons is that we're not paying the wages, and we're accordingly not getting the spending.

Now you can say, "Ah, well, the money is going out to higher income people, and they spend." In fact, they do not spend as much as lower income people. Higher income people could put their money into term deposits, or stocks, or bonds, or other ventures which may or may not have any impact in Saskatchewan — may or may not. A great number of the securities purchased do not have any impact at all on Saskatchewan. But a minimum wage-earner, when he spends his money at the local store, most assuredly has an impact on Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan merchants.

And if we're talking about prosperity, and we're talking about paying out a million dollars in wages, certainly the best way to get stimulus for small business people is to pay it out to people who will spend it — spend it on groceries and clothes — and not to pay it out to people who will buy a term deposit, or buy a MURB, or buy a petroleum tax shelter, or as the case may be. Some of that money may find itself into Saskatchewan activity, but certainly not anything like the same percentage as if you gave it to people at the lower end of the scale and say, "Go spend this money." And they surely will.

You ask local merchants just how well they are doing compared with what they were doing two or three years ago, and the great majority of merchants are not doing as well in terms of sales, not

doing as well in terms of units of sales as they did two or three years ago. And that's because there isn't as much money around.

If members opposite find that puzzling it is hardly surprising, since they are the people who act surprised when they say they are going to cut down payrolls but still have more spending. They are going to have lower payments to people in Prince Albert and wonder why merchants in the Gateway North mall are not putting through as much money through their tills. Well you don't have to think very much to know that if everybody in P.A. got an extra dime and hour there would be a lot more money spent at the Gateway North merchants.

I would like to think that the government opposite would begin to think about how they can stimulate small business; by encouraging spending and by encouraging greater payrolls through increases in minimum wages, but also through other stimulus to business, which we are not now getting.

So members opposite are still of the view, of the view that you can have lots of spending and no payrolls. They never explain how this can come about. They never explain how it is possible to have a large amount of spending in a community and a small amount of income in a community; and they never explain it because it can't be explained. No community is going to prosper if its work force is badly paid and can see no prospect of increases.

So I think this government has not moved to assist people at the lower end of the income scale. And I speak not only of their freezing of minimum wage, but also of their many moves which make it tougher for people to hold jobs, tougher for people to have the defence of a trade union, tougher for people to look forward to security in employment.

I look at something like the building trades unions, and I see them, many of them, without employment. Never, certainly in the last 15 years, have we seen more skilled tradesmen without work in this province, and it's not because there aren't jobs to be done. It is rather because the government is not taking any steps to see that those jobs are done. No one is suggesting that this can all be done by government fiat. No one is saying that. But we are saying that a great deal more could be done.

After all, what has changed so much in the last two or three years? What has changed so much? Have we had poorer crops in 1981 and 1982 than we had in the 1970s? Of course not. Is farm income lower — lower than the peak years but not lower than many other years? Is the potash industry operating at a lower level? No. It is not lower — lower than it was in the peak years but not lower than in years during the 1970s when we had lots of employment. How about the oil industry? Is that operating at a low level? Answer, no. It is operating at a good level.

So we have potash production which is right up there with near-records. We have oil production which is high. Oil production is not at record levels, but drilling is approaching record levels. We have grain production, which was at record levels, and we're asked to believe that somehow the province is in a recession and we cannot afford anything.

This is what they're saying, and this is what they're saying, that we cannot afford to build the things which we obviously need and which would employ our trades people. That is certainly what they're saying. This was not true five years ago. It was possible to provide employment for these people to operate the province without deficits and to still have a very substantial amount of economic activity. No one, I think, can deny that. No one can deny that. No one is calling for big government. We're just calling for an atmosphere in which private business will invest. And that's what they're not doing.

This province . . . If private business investment were on an indexed basis at the same level in 1984 as it was in 1980, we would have a measure of prosperity which would provide employment. That's what we're not getting, we're not getting from members opposite, and they

can attempt to slough that off all they like, it's simply not happening. And everybody is suffering including the low income people referred to in this resolution.

I move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to my second point. My second point deals with utility rates. And I don't need to cover this ground again. We have covered it on many occasions. But there is no question that utility rate increases have been sharp. They are 100 per cent the responsibility of the government. They have attempted to slough this off on the Public Utilities Review Commission, but they have freely admitted, when pressed, that the Public Utilities Review Commission deals with request from Crown corporation and that it is within the power of the government to decide whether or not a Crown corporation asks for an increase in rates.

So every increase which has been granted by the Public Utilities Review Commission, is one which has been asked for by the power corporation or your telephone corporation or the insurance corporation — each of those controlled by the government opposite.

And they have been large increases. We do not need to review in detail, but we have electrical rates increased by 15 per cent. We have gas rates increased by 13 per cent. We have Sask Tel rate increases of 19 per cent. And those are averages. Many, many rates increased a great deal more than that. We had a deductible on The Automobile Accident Insurance Act of 43 per cent increase. These are increases asked for and received by the government opposite, and ones which are very tough for people to pay when the government has a firm policy of trying to keep their wages down — a firm policy of trying to keep minimum wages down, a firm policy of trying to keep wages paid by two construction workers down, a firm policy of trying to keep wages paid to public servants down — but not a firm policy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to amounts paid to persons employed by this government in recent years. Not a bit of it, for they have, indeed, not suffered the pangs of recession. The recession hasn't hit them.

Again, I will not review all of the many instances of people hired at 50, 60 and \$70,000 a year.

An Hon. Member: — Ninety-five.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Yes, one member of this House points out to me that one person has been hired at \$95,000. The current chairman of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, which used to be something done by a minister in his spare time, is now being paid \$1,800 a month retainer and \$300 a day for each day that is worked. And if it is turned into a full-time job — and so far as I can see, it has been virtually turned into a full-time job — we're looking at 70 or \$80,000 a year there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to point out that this chairman is not the one that's running the corporation. That's the president. And he's also getting 80 or \$90,000 a year, but he's an electrical engineer who knows something about running a power corporation that's got 25 or 30 years experience at it.

The chairman of the corporation on the other hand, the person who's getting this \$1,800 a month, plus \$300 a day, is — his main qualifications are that he was the president of the Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan and is a well-known Estevan lawyer. That is certainly a great deal of money to pay for a chairman of a corporation where three years ago there was not perceived to be a job needed to be done other than a few hours a week. And at that time, we were not . . . We were not then burdened. We were not burdened, Mr. Speaker, when we had a part-time chairman of a few hours a week with deficits of 19 and \$20 million, as the current minister in charge of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation has had to report to this legislature last week. We weren't burdened with that. And if that's what we're getting for our 80 or \$90,000 a year from that chairman, I think we better go back to the old system where we had a part-time chairman and some pretty handsome returns, and not monumental deficits.

So we look at the long, long list of people who are receiving the largess from this government . . .

(inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, members opposite are suggesting that a reduction in the staff of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation somehow means a saving for the taxpayer. Let me pick up on that argument. Let me pick up on that argument. We can close down a coal mine. We can transfer, without cash compensation, vast assets to Manalta Coal. We can buy the coal from them. We will, indeed, have fewer employees. But anyone who suggest that we will have cheaper coal has got to lay a few facts on the table which have not been laid on the table up to now.

We have no evidence that this massive privatization that's going on, this transfer of, let us say, legal work in the Saskatchewan Government Insurance from in-house lawyers to friends of the Conservative party who were in the private legal world, the suggestion that that is saving money lacks a little credibility — lacks a little credibility.

And on and on it goes. On it goes, Mr. Speaker. The theory that somehow you can privatize, you can give contracts to friends of the Conservative party and thereby bring about savings to the taxpayer is just that — a theory unsubstantiated by any facts. And we are about to find out as we inquire at Crown corporation just why all of these corporations, which are supposedly operating so much more efficiently, are doing so much worse when it comes to the bottom line, when it comes to the P and L statement. And those are again hard facts which won't go away.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we obviously are touching a few nerves because they are busy talking about what happens in Ottawa and what happens in Toronto. I want to talk about what happens in Regina and Saskatoon — about our corporations which are not doing as well. I'd like to talk a little bit about Saskatoon and about how the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan is having something less than a handsome year under the guidance of the new chairman, who is being properly, and no doubt handsomely remunerated, but whose efforts up to now have not produced any improvement in the dire financial circumstances in which that corporation finds itself.

But I want to move, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to another group - another group of people hired by this government. And I invite all hon. members to ask how many, let us say, press officers this government needs to publicize its efforts, compared with what any government in the history of Saskatchewan has ever had. And certainly the numbers are impressive, and the salaries paid are impressive. One needs to watch these salaries with some care because the announced salary doesn't prove to be the real salary.

I have in mind Mr. Shorvoyce, who is an employee of government opposite, who was the subject of an announcement by the Premier, saying that his salary would be frozen. And his salary was indeed frozen — frozen at April 1, 1983. But along about April 1, 1984, he received an increase, and he received that increase retroactive to April 1, 1983. Now, that's the way I'd like to get my salary frozen, so that all I'm suffering is a deferral of one year retroactive pay for a person who is getting \$55,000 or \$60,000 a year.

Now that, indeed, is concern and care for the friends and the publicists of the government opposite, and no concern and no care for people who are at the bottom end of the income scale.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I could speak at length on this. The facts are fairly well known and I suspect my colleagues will wish to put some additional facts before this House as this debate continues. And I, accordingly, will move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by my colleague from Shaunavon . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to call him my colleague. Unlike members opposite, all the members of my caucus are my colleagues. I move, Mr. Speaker:

That this Assembly regrets that the Government of Saskatchewan has continued to disregard the pressing needs of low-income earners; has asked for and obtained huge increases in electricity, natural gas, telephone, and automobile insurance rate; and has provided large and unjustified increases in salary and other remuneration to

certain favoured and newly hired political advisers and employees.

Mr. Speaker, I so move.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Birkbeck: — Mr. Speaker, I did take a moment to look at the member's motion that he's just laid before the Assembly. It speaks of his concern for low-income earners, and it speaks of his concern for the supposed increases in utility rates.

But, Mr. Speaker, not once did he deal with that specifically. Rather, he chose to deal with scandals that he thought to be within the Government of Saskatchewan. He felt that it was necessary to make a political argument that, in fact, there were problems within our party, that there was a problem within our government in terms of paying out high salaries. In fact, what it amounted to was no more than scandalmongering and never once, Mr. Speaker, did he address himself in sincerity to the concerns that he has in his motion in the House.

So, Mr. Speaker, if we could maybe deal with that, and keeping in mind that he never once touched on anything that was, I think, very beneficial in terms of his concerns that are expressed there in his motion like . . . I think we could deal with the amounts of money that have been put into education; the great sums of money that were put into health, all of the variety of programs that the government has announced that has been an assistance to low income earners. And certainly we have addressed the utility rate question.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition fails to realize that he is not facing west in this legislature any longer, that he now faces east. In other words, he has yet to come to grips with the fact that he is not the premier of the province of Saskatchewan any longer. He is the Leader of the Opposition just barely. He says that all of his colleagues are his caucus — the problem being that all of his colleagues are not necessarily following his leadership.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on that very briefly. The Leader of the Opposition has to realize that the very thing that he has done today was the very thing that defeated him, and his party with it, in the April '82 election, and that is that he chose not to discuss the issues at hand not to deal with them effectively and responsibly as the Leader of the Opposition should in this House, and as he, I might say, did at one time when he was the premier, because he was working from a different base then — a different power base. The Leader of the Opposition, now leader of a small number of members in the House, feels insecure, and through that insecurity I suppose, it leads him into these irrelevant argument as it relates to his own motion.

And what they're trying to do is leave a perception out there among the electorate that in some way the PC government of Saskatchewan is not an honourable government, and in some way we're paying exorbitant salaries to a few and we're suppressing the poor. You know, and they're going along again, Mr. Speaker, with these scare tactics.

The hon. member for Pelly gets up today and in one of his discussions in his debates in the House, and you know, he could very well have been on a soap opera in any afternoon on TV. And Mr. Speaker, none of those arguments wash; none of those arguments wash.

And, of course, the member for Regina North West would be doing very well himself if he could even make it to the soap opera, so I wouldn't be talking if I were him.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, I think it's time that the House was offered up a few facts as it relates to the motion. We could, certainly with the member for Regina North West in House, we could spend a lot of time talking about scandals and mongering and all kinds of dirty things, but we're not going to waste the time of the House, Mr. Speaker, with that kind of an argument . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And the more that the member from Regina West talks, North West

talks, the more I'm going to like it. So if you'd just keep your big elephant bellow up. I'll enjoy it all the more. You know I do. So now just tuck up your little red hanky there and get a pair of red boots maybe to match it, and away we go.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Birkbeck: — Now then, Mr. Speaker, here is the truth about the electrical rates. The truth about the electrical rates is that the electrical rates increased by an astounding 98 per cent in seven years under the NDP administration. That's an average, an average of 12.25 per cent every year — 12.25 per cent.

Now there was no increase in 1982 by our government because as soon as we became government, Mr. Speaker, we froze the utility rates. Under the Public Utilities Review Commission, Mr. Speaker, the rate increase granted in 1983 was 15 per cent. That amounts to an average of 7.5 per cent per annum in the two short years we've been in power. So for the members in the NDP opposition, if you could keep that in mind — 7.5 per cent under our administration; 12.5 per cent in seven years under your administration. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we are leading the way in electrical rates.

By no imagination of any member in this House are we anything but number one. We are number one, Mr. Speaker, in utility rates; we are number one in terms of administration; we are number one in terms of the way that we administrate in terms of the efficiency of government. We have, in fact, reduced the size of government by some 3,000 — more recently by 3,001. And I say, Mr. Speaker, that that is good for the Government of Saskatchewan. It's good for the taxpayers of this province.

Now then, I say only this, that the numbers themselves speak for themselves. And I know the member for Cumberland is watching there, and he understands that.

Now let's talk about the truth about gas rate increases — gas rate increases in Saskatchewan. Gas rates increased by 200 per cent now — 200 per cent. For anyone that's watching the television or listening, 200 per cent increase from 1975 to 1982, and that is an average of 25 per cent — 25 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

There was no increase in 1982 again; we had froze those rates when we became government. And under the Public Utilities Review Commission, the rate increase granted in 1983 was 13 per cent. Dividing that by two (even the member from Regina North West can do that), that amounts to 6.5 per cent per year — 6.5 now compared to 25 per cent.

So again we lead the way in not only electrical rates but in gas rates. The motion is talking about, Mr. Speaker . . . The Leader of the Opposition expresses a concern about these astronomical rate increases. He says they're unjustifiable. And, Mr. Speaker, I have just pointed out that, in fact, we are number one as opposed to the previous administration, not only in electrical, but in gas . . . (inaudible interjection). . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. If the member for Regina North West would like to get into the debate, I'd be pleased to give him an opportunity later.

Mr. Birkbeck: — Mr. Speaker, I would facilitate the member too, and maybe pass him over some notes so he'd know what to talk about when he got to his feet. I would also indicate, Mr. Speaker, that that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, I just gave the hon. . .

Mr. Speaker: — I just caution the member that I cautioned you just a moment ago, and you're doing the same thing again, and I would ask you to be a little bit careful.

Mr. Birkbeck: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And if members in this House want to deal with the

facts, I have just given them two very succinct facts as it relates to the electrical and gas rates. And if any member would like to try and prove those facts wrong, then I challenge that member to rise in the House at any occasion to do just that.

Now then, Mr. Speaker . . .

An Hon. Member: — Point of order.

Mr. Speaker: — What's your point of order?

Mr. Sveinson: — I think the member from Moosomin has directed several insults at myself and my constituents in north-west Regina. And, Mr. Speaker, I ask for an apology from the member from Moosomin for those insults.

Hon. Mr. Andrew: — Mr. Speaker, speaking to the point of order. I fail to see what the point of order is.

Mr. Speaker: — Your point of order is not well taken. Proceed.

Mr. Birkbeck: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will attempt to proceed again.

If I could just indicate to the House, Mr. Speaker, some of the things that I had introduced by way of information to my own constituents, by way of a column that I had written for my weekly papers. And I was directing their attention, Mr. Speaker, to the fact that, you know, increases in the rates for basic telephone services within the province will be sharply restrained from now until the end of '86. Sask Tel has been directed not to apply for increases affecting these rates during the rest of '84, and to limit to a maximum of 4 per cent a year any increases applied for in each of '85 and '86.

So, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to centre my remarks on the electrical and gas rates, and to make it very well-known, and to prove the point really quite frankly once and for all, that we have led the way in terms of putting the freeze on right after we became government, introducing the Public Utilities Review Commission which has provided for average rate increases under our administration of far less, far less, than they were under the previous administration.

And not only that, Mr. Speaker, that we've gone on to indicate not only to this legislature but to the people of Saskatchewan that, in fact, we're going to hold the line on the increases for electrical and gas rates. The minister responsible for SGI of course had indicated that there would be no increase in plate insurance rates as well, so we were able to hold the line on SGI. So it's not just Sask Tel and Sask Power, gas, electrical — it's right across the board in terms of utility rates and SGI.

In terms of staffing levels, I think that it's important to note that with regard to Saskatchewan Government Insurance that there's been a significant reduction in staffing levels. Members in the opposition, the Leader of the Opposition in particular, expressed concern about salaries that are being paid, and staffing levels. And I would like to indicate to him that if he were to take a look, in 1975 staffing levels, the Saskatchewan Government Insurance — 820, and in 1983 we're looking at 1,326, so they're rather modest staffing increases, Mr. Speaker.

I could get into a lot of information with regards to what the members, when the previous administration was in government - what their employees were being paid, and the kinds of percentages that were very relevant at that time. And I'm not going to belabour the House with any of that information, Mr. Speaker, because I don't believe that it's very relevant, quite frankly.

What is relevant is that the Leader of the Opposition has introduced a motion indicating that we, in some way, are increasing utility rates at an unjustifiable way, and I have offered up evidence,

Mr. Speaker, to prove that, in fact, his motion is hardly even close to the truth. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I feel it would be incumbent upon me to move an amendment to that motion, and I would do so, seconded by the hon. member for Saskatoon South, Bob Myers, and it would read this way: . . .

An Hon. Member: — You can't mention the name . . .

Mr. Birkbeck: — Oh well, I . . . That's too bad now; just don't get upset Ling., go back to your hairdresser.

Mr. Speaker, I would move:

That all the words after the word "Assembly" be struck out, and the following substituted therefor:

Congratulates the government for the measures it has taken to reduce the cost of living in Saskatchewan, including the removal of education and health tax from power bills, as announced in the budget; and the freeze on Sask Tel increases for '84, '85, and '86; and for the steps taken to control the costs of government such as the freeze on salary adjustments for public service managers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The debate continues concurrent on the motion as amended.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to become involved in this debate on a motion which was moved by my colleague from Elphinstone.

I would like to just take a few moments to talk about some of the so-called winners and the larger group of losers as a result of the election which is now two years in the past. Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that those people who are mentioned by the member from Elphinstone, those people who are at the bottom of the economic ladder, who are suffering the brunt of the huge power rates, the natural gas, telephone, bus rates, Mr. Speaker, are the people that we in the opposition, at least in the New Democratic caucus, intend to defend. Because very simply, that is our job, and I believe it should be the job of the government of the day, as well.

I say to the members opposite that it's one thing to talk about restraining things in our society, about restraint within the economy, but what we're seeing is a restraint which is only half-heartedly being applied in the province of Saskatchewan. And I look at the people who are on the lists of employees of this government — the personal staff, the political people who work in the minister's office. And I have a list here from the Attorney General's office. And I wonder whether the people of the province would think that these people are part of the restraint program.

I mention people like Patrick B. Carey, special assistant, who earns \$73,000 per year, working in the minister's office; Greg Wenzel who is another special assistant, who earns \$48,000. The list goes on and on, Mr. Speaker, to show how some people in this so-called restraint-oriented province are being paid.

We look at Bill Wheatley, another person, special assistant in that minister's office, 55,000. We look at another, Len Exner, a ministerial assistant in the Department of Justice in the minister's office, 43,000. A Bill Armstrong, ministerial assistant in the Department of Justice, 35,000; another ministerial assistant, Arlene Spanier, 26,000; a ministerial assistant by the name of Sandy Little

who earns about \$20,000; and there's another ministerial assistant, Margaret Peterson, minister's MA, who earns \$20,000.

In that group alone we have seven individuals who earn over \$20,000 in an office that used to have two or three when the then minister of justice, the attorney general, had much more responsibility. He was the House Leader, he was in charge of intergovernmental affairs as well as of many other operations that he carried on, including being deputy premier of the province. And I say, Mr. Speaker, that it's a scandal that the public's money — when we're talking about restraint — is being paid for political people in the ministerial offices to try to get the minister re-elected at the time of the next election, and I believe that they have their work cut out for them.

There are other people who are benefiting at the expense of those who are at the bottom end of the scale, and we talked about some of them in question period today and last week — people like Brown's Auction Room who are doing very well under the restraint program of the government. Mr. Speaker, we talked about a group known as Raymond Contractors Ltd. From B.C. who, as we see it, and we pointed out in the House today, got \$300,000 from this government and cut, closed office and ran without paying the subcontractors, the small-business people of Saskatchewan.

You look at the money that is spent on advertising by this government — a government that came to office promising to cut out advertising. Look at the contracts that are being given to Dome Advertising and you will find that that agency certainly isn't bearing any of the brunt of the restraint program.

Dennis Ball, for example, the Saskatchewan labour relations chairman, earning \$95,000 in a part-time job — doing a part-time job and earning more than the vice-president of the United States, and I say when a government takes this kind of an approach on one side, and yet takes bingo money away from people who are on welfare, one has to question, one has to question the seriousness of this government saying that it is a fair and equitable government.

My colleague from Elphinstone talked about minimum wage and the restraint program that those people have found themselves under for the last two years, and he elaborated on how, even for small business, it makes little sense to keep people with no money in their pocket. And he makes a good point because what is the point of having a very, very low minimum wage or a very, very low income if these people cease to purchase in your stores?

And I think it's even more ironic when we look at the type of people who are saving by having a minimum wage frozen in the province of Saskatchewan. Basically, the small-business people in the province are paying more than the minimum wage. Most of them are fair-minded people. I talked about small business in my constituency. Whether it's the implement dealerships or the manufacturers, they all pay more than the minimum wage. So who, in fact, are we saving money for by not raising the minimum wage in the province of Saskatchewan? I think it can be clearly indicated that it's not small Saskatchewan businesses, but it's the McDonald's, the A & W, the chains of Woolco and MacLeods who based their salary on the minimum wage and therefore, Mr. Speaker, their wages and salaries have been frozen for the past two years.

And when this government talks about protecting the small-business people by freezing the minimum wage, they are simply not being honest with themselves or with the small-business people because, basically, small-business people and manufacturers pay much more than the minimum wage and an increase would not bother them one bit.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention another group who are severely impacted by the restraint program, and that is the senior citizens — at a time when their income has been frozen in many areas by the provincial government, at a time when the home repair program has been cancelled, at a time when the home repair program not only had been cancelled, but taken away

completely and now re-implemented as of July 1st or May 1st. Mr. Speaker, I'd say that it's unfortunate that a government would have millions of dollars for large out-of-province multinationals at a time when seniors would have their home repair program frozen. The short-sightedness of this cancellation of the program for a year meant many seniors were forced to move out of their existing homes. Many jobs were lost over the last year, of people who would have been repairing their homes and, Mr. Speaker, it's difficult to know how this government would pay people welfare to stay at home and collect welfare rather than repair seniors' homes during the winter months.

I would say again, Mr. Speaker, that while nurses are not considered by anyone to be low income people, the double standard exists here as well. You have nurses who are asking for 2 per cent and 3 per cent in a two-year contract, and this government will not settle with them. And if the indications are meaningful of what they have been doing in other labour relations in the province, with the dairy workers, and with the teachers in Moose Jaw, you will find that here again, I believe, they are attempting to instigate confrontation between the local boards and the nurses of the province.

Very simply, they could solve that problem by putting 5 per cent into the income of nurses, which I think would be very reasonable, which is the kind of increase the MLAs here voted for themselves. But they are not willing to do it, and I say that it's not only to save money (which they are trying to do), but in order to force confrontation between the nurses of this province and the local boards. And I say that's unfortunate.

Mr. Speaker, I have a great number of other things to say on this topic, and I know that other members of my caucus will want to do it as well. Therefore, I beg leave to adjourn debate so that we'll have an opportunity to look at the amendment and come back and deal with it at a later date.

Debate adjourned.

Hon. Mr. Andrew: — With consent of the Assembly, unanimous consent of the Assembly, I would move:

That we stand all items from . . . starting with item 6, resolution no. 14, all items (if we can do this) over to page 8, starting with motions for returns (debatable).

Motion agreed to.

MOTIONS FOR RETURNS (Debatable)

Return No. 18

Mr. Lusney moved, seconded by Mr. Koskie, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 18 showing:

Regarding the period April 1, 1983 to December 7, 1983: (1) the number of out-of-province trips made by the Minister of Rural Development; (2) in each case his destination, the purpose of the trip, the name of each person who accompanied him at government expense; and (3) in each case the total cost of the trip separated according to costs incurred for each of the following: air fares, hotels, meals, taxis, gifts, gratuities, entertainment, expenses, miscellaneous.

Mr. Lusney: — Mr. Speaker, this is not unlike some of the other resolutions or motions that we had moved the other day. We're asking the same questions. And looking at this one, the Minister of Rural Development, I see no reason why he would anticipate any amendment to this motion. I am certain that the Minister of Rural Development would not have anything to hide in his

expenditures in areas of hotel, meals, taxis, gifts, gratuities, entertainment, expenses and miscellaneous.

I'm certain if he looked at this motion that he would say that it could go forward, and we could continue with the business of this House.

I move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the member for Quill Lakes, my colleague, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 18 showing.

Hon. Mr. Andrew: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I understand that last week the House dealt with a fair number of these. An amendment was advanced by the acting House Leader, the Minister of Justice, several motions, and I suppose we could go through the debate that was advanced before.

I would simply move an amendment to the motion of the hon. member from Pelly:

That the motion for return no. 18 be amended as follows: by deleting all the words after “trip” in subsection (3).

And I so move, seconded by the hon. member of Energy and Mines, the member from Saskatoon Sutherland.

Amendment agreed to on division.

Motion as amended agreed to on division.

The Assembly recessed until 7:00 p.m.