

The Assembly met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government Reorganization Study

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Deputy Premier, but in his absence, to the Premier, and it deals with the massive and expensive government reorganization study that is now being conducted by the Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group. That study was announced by you on January 30 of this year. I wonder if the Premier can tell us how many consultants you have hired to undertake this study; when do you expect the work to be completed; and what do you think that the budget will be for this consulting study?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I don't have all those details. I'll take notice of the question.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. While the Premier is taking notice . . . I am told that the final cost of this massive consulting study is now projected to be about \$3 million, and that's nearly half the budget for the children's dental program. While the Premier is taking notice, perhaps he could provide some justification for spending that kind of money on a consultant's report when, at the same time, your government is raising taxes and cutting public services.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I will take notice of the question. I have no indication at all that the member's figures are accurate, but I will get the appropriate figures when we have the opportunity.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — New question to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. You know that this consulting study is largely a vehicle for your government to dole out patronage to a former cabinet minister, one Tim Embury. And I wonder . . . While you're taking notice, you might tell us how much of this study is being undertaken by this defeated PC cabinet minister or his companies, and how much of that \$3 million is ending up in his pockets?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, those are unfair allegations and, frankly, irresponsible. I have taken notice of the question, and I'll provide the answers when I have the first opportunity.

Sale of Dental Equipment

Ms. Atkinson: — My question is to the Minister of Health. And this is a very sad day for Saskatchewan families, because it marks the official end of the best children's dental plan in North America and a replacement of that plan with the government's privatized inferior version.

Mr. Minister, you are so ashamed of what you're doing that you don't even have the courage to hold a public auction of all of the dental plan's equipment.

Can the minister tell us the estimated value your department has put on the dental plan equipment that you now have up for secret auction? And have you been advised to expect a return of 10 cents on the dollar, 50 cents on the dollar — what's the estimate?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — A couple of things, Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the member's preamble related to the new dental plan which comes into effect as of today. A couple of things that we had said as it relates to that dental plan, and that there would be more dental services provided in rural Saskatchewan in communities where there is not now dental service for the public at large, including children.

Communities like Strasbourg, Radville, St. Walburg, Edam, Paradise Hill, Turtleford, Outlook, Hafford, Cut Knife — all of those communities will now have dental services down on their Main Street that they have not had heretofore. That's already there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — And as it relates to the specifics, Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the specifics of the value of equipment, the minister responsible for the Property Management Corporation and his department is responsible for the disposal of that equipment. We have had . . . The preliminaries are under way in terms of dentists in the province having a look at the equipment and putting in bids for that equipment.

And I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, and to all members of the House and to the public, that's a reasonable approach to take, given that this is highly specialized equipment and it is not something that the public at large will be clamouring for to put into their basement, let's say.

Ms. Atkinson: — Supplementary. Mr. Minister, for your information there used to be 570 locations in this province where people could go and get their children's teeth fixed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — But, Mr. Minister, this reminds me of the highway auction sale that your government undertook a few years ago, except in this case you're holding the auction in secret because you know the public's so outraged by your decision to do in this excellent preventive health program. Can you tell Saskatchewan taxpayers why this sell-off of dental plan equipment is being staged as an exclusive, invitational tenders sale, only for dentists; can you give us that information?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — Mr. Speaker, first of all, I said very clearly that it's the preliminary and the very first step, and that could be a very natural step where any thinking person would think that the dentists would be interested.

And the dentists will be there and they're putting in their bids. After that there will be an opportunity for others in the field, or whoever would like to buy equipment; there's no question about that.

But, Mr. Speaker, the member makes reference as well to the whole philosophy of whether or not certain equipment, or whatever, that it's owned by the government regardless of what field it is in, and the selling of that equipment and how that goes about.

I was very much involved, as you will know, Mr. Speaker, and that member may know, in the sale of the other equipment. She's speaking of highway equipment and I know . . . in what she said. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, some of that equipment was backed into the bush in their former boondoggled DNS (department of northern Saskatchewan) and sat there for as long as two or three years without ever having been used, and we sold it, and they condemned the sale.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Minister, isn't it a fact that you're in a real hurry to sell off this equipment because you want to make it more difficult for the next Government of Saskatchewan to reintroduce a school-based dental program?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — And I can tell the people of Saskatchewan, and I can tell you, that this isn't going to work because our government will reintroduce a school-based program once we're elected.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — But I return to the question of a secret auction of what is in essence public equipment. How do you justify a secret, invitation-only sale of equipment Saskatchewan taxpayers have bought and paid for; and why isn't the sale open equally to all members of the public?

Hon. Mr. McLeod: —, I have outlined the way and the terms of the details of how the sale will be conducted. My colleague, the minister responsible for the property management corporation, can answer those details.

As it relates to the position of the member stating on behalf of the New Democratic Party, she says her government, when and if it's ever re-elected, would reinstate the dental plan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, is that member speaking for this leadership candidate or that leadership candidate, or which faction of the party, because I want you to take note of this fact, which is true. The member for Saskatoon Sutherland one day in this House said: their government, if re-elected, would reinstate the drug plan as it was constituted. I heard him say that. That member from Saskatoon Nutana in the media just one week ago said, when asked the question, would you reinstate the drug plan, no, I don't say that we'd reinstate the drug plan as it once was; I wouldn't say that . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: — Order, order! I think what we see here is a situation where we're getting into debate, not question period. And therefore I would ask members to ask their questions in such a way as to not provoke debate; on the other hand, I would ask ministers to stick to the question being asked.

Commissioned Collection Agents for SPC

Ms. Simard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the minister responsible for SPC, I'll direct my question to the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, September 1 also marks the day on which SPC ends its long-standing arrangement with Saskatchewan drug stores and small businesses by which customers could pay their monthly SPC bills at these small businesses. This was an important convenience for SPC customers, Mr. Speaker, especially for seniors, and an important source of revenue and extra business for Saskatchewan small businesses. What I would like to know is whether the PC government has reconsidered this anti-small-business decision, and whether they will allow Saskatchewan small businesses and drug stores to continue as commissioned collection agents in this regard?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that I can recall that the Deputy Premier and the minister responsible for Sask Power said that the new policy would provide a savings in excess of \$200,000 a year to the potash corporation . . .

An Hon. Member: — Power corporation.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — . . . or the power corporation, which obviously can be applied to the general consuming public across the province. And if you want to manage and provide those savings at a retail basis, then obviously people can pay their bills; they can send them in; they can go to the credit union; they can go to financial institutions, and at the same time Sask Power can save \$200,000 a year. It seems to me that that's the kind of thing that the general public would be interested in.

Ms. Simard: — Supplementary, Mr. Minister. The Premier talks about saving \$200,000. He talks about saving \$200,000, and I remind him once again that that's about equal to the salary of George Hill, the SPC patronage appointment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Simard: — And if restraint is your goal, Mr. Premier, why don't you privatize George Hill or cut his salary in half, which is nearly, I understand, two and a half times that of his predecessor for the same job.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I can just say to the hon. member, once she gets into personalities, and it must give us a little bit of leeway to question the whole line of questioning here in the legislature today.

People across Saskatchewan and certainly across Canada are very interested in the U.S. farm Bill, and international potash interests, and the opposition here is more concerned about the salary of a particular individual than they are in hundreds of thousands of dollars, and tens of thousands of people that are working across the country, and they don't even know it's relevant.

I hope the national media hits them up again on the fact that they're more concerned about raising a couple of names than they are, generally, of the interests of the people of the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Simard: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier is obviously not aware . . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order, please. Order.

Ms. Simard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is obviously not aware of what's been going on in this House in the last few days. Doesn't the Premier understand, Mr. Speaker, doesn't the Premier understand that more than the commission for these small businesses is at stake? But that when 100 or more SPC customers go into a small business, that there's a lot of spin-off business to that small-business person? Doesn't the Premier understand that, Mr. Speaker?

And I want to know why his government refused to consult with these small businesses about the effect it would have on them before they gave notice of the change — something like less than one month's notice — and transferred the business to banks and trust companies? Why didn't your government consult, Mr. Premier?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, to be fair to the hon. member, if she's concerned about small business, she could ask very clearly what would be the consequences of the potash legislation just introduced by the United States and the preliminary hearing closing all the mines in Saskatchewan on 3,600 employees and all the small businesses in all the towns across the province. And she hasn't even got the intelligence to raise the . . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order, please. Order. Order, please. Order, please! Order, please!

Lay-Offs from the Saskatchewan Forest Products Corporation

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. My question is to the minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Forest Products Corporation. Last Friday, Mr. Minister, your government laid off 31 in-scope employees at the wood treating plant in Prince Albert. What you've done, Mr. Minister, is you've thrown 31 people out of work, and 31 more families are looking for pay cheques. My question, Mr. Minister, is: I want to know the reason why you've ordered these people to be

laid off?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member's outlined, there were some lay-off notices given to people at the treatment plant in Prince Albert last Friday, I believe.

As it relates to this, Mr. Speaker, people should remember what that treatment plant does. The treatment plant is there to treat — and has been for a good number of years — and it treats power poles. Okay. The major part of their work has been treating power poles and some outdoor wood. Mr. Speaker, there has been an initiative by this government, which has widespread, excellent benefit for rural Saskatchewan, to bury power lines. And for a good number of years prior to that, telephone lines have been buried in Saskatchewan. That's a fact.

The treatment plant, as a consequence of that, is suffering some problems in terms of the markets, and some of these people will be there. But there's no question that we're concerned about the individual 31 people and if they can be . . . The member will also know — I know he opposed the forest industry development that went on in Prince Albert, the very same location last year, as it relates to the development of a paper mill . . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Order. Some of the answers are getting too long. Some of the heckling in this Chamber is getting out of hand this afternoon, and therefore I would just like to ask for the co-operation of all members so we get through this question period in a reasonable manner.

Mr. Lautermilch: — Supplementary to the same minister. Mr. Minister, I'm not sure if you're familiar about the goings-on and what's really happening with that treating plant up there, because you wouldn't be just talking about power poles. Are you aware, Mr. Minister, that that particular corporation has turned away sales because of lack of stock? And because of your government's inability to perform, the way you treat Crown corporations, there are 31 families out of work. And I want to know, Mr. Minister, if you're aware that they've been turning away business.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Forest Products Corporation, under the administration of this government, in the last several years has made some money. Now that's something that they can't claim for a good long time before, and they even claimed and they even talked about it being a social agency almost, to keep people working for what benefit. What I'm saying to . . . We're concerned about the 31 people, but I will say that the Saskatchewan Forest Products Corporation now, under the jurisdiction of this government, is operating on a profitable basis, and that's the way the people of Saskatchewan expect their corporations to operate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lautermilch: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I heard

an answer, I heard a response, but I never heard an answer to the question that I asked. And I'm asking you again: are you aware that that corporation's been turning away business because of lack of stock? That was the question, Mr. Minister. Answer me that question, would you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that that corporation has been turning away business, Mr. Speaker. I will reiterate again, that corporation is operating on a profitable basis. That's something that that administration when they operated Sask Forest Products did not do — did not do — and that's something that this administration has done and will continue to do.

Mr. Lautermilch: — Final supplementary, Mr. Minister, my question to you is this: is the Saskatchewan Forest Products Corporation up for sale? Are you now in the midst of turning this corporation over to some more of your friends, like you've done with the other privatization of the Crown corporations in this province?

Mr. Minister, I want to know: are these lay offs the first step in giving away that corporation, a valuable asset of the people of this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — I've said on other occasions, Mr. Speaker, that this forum is probably not the appropriate one for negotiation to take place, but would the hon. member like to buy it?

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. Order.

Proposed Government Action in Potash Industry

Mr. Goodale: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Energy and Mines, and has to do with the very serious crisis in our potash industry in Saskatchewan. The government, of course, is proposing to take action very shortly. I wonder if the minister could give us her assurance that in that proposed action she has very clearly in mind the potential impact upon jobs and employment in the province of Saskatchewan, and could she give us her estimate as to what the impact of her proposed action will be in relation to jobs in the potash industry in Saskatchewan for the remainder of this year and through 1988?

Hon. Mrs. Smith: — Mr. Speaker, I can inform the member that first reading of the Bill will be tabled today. The member will have an opportunity to look at the details of it and judge for himself some of the implications that will be within it.

I can tell him that the intent of the legislation, Mr. Speaker, is to in fact save jobs. Without any kind of government action at all, it would be our guess that you would see severe job loss. We've already lost over 1,000 jobs over the last several years, and in fact without any government action, Mr. Speaker, we would be closing down mines and losing our production.

Mr. Goodale: — Mr. Speaker, the job loss situation, both in the short term and in the long term, is a very serious concern for all Saskatchewan people. I wonder if the minister would indicate if she anticipates any job loss in Saskatchewan, not as a consequence of the long-term problem that's been created by the United States, but directly as a consequence of the legislation to be introduced later this day. Would she anticipate jobs directly lost even in the short term as a consequence of that legislation; and if she does, does she or the government have specific plans in . . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order.

Hon. Mrs. Smith: — Mr. Speaker, it would be premature to speculate as to what may happen without the member having a first opportunity to look at the Bill and then debate the Bill.

Mr. Goodale: — Mr. Speaker, a final supplementary on this same matter. In making the proposals that she will make to the House later this afternoon, I wonder if the minister has specific assurances that potash supply from other countries, or from other provinces in Canada, will not replace Saskatchewan potash in United States markets.

Hon. Mrs. Smith: — Mr. Speaker, let me re-emphasize what I said to his first question. The intent of this legislation was in fact to protect the industry and the jobs that come with it.

I'm sorry, the second question . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I can give this House the assurance, and the member from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg, that it is our full intent to exercise a leadership role, given the fact that we are one of the largest, if not the largest potash producer in the free world. For the member's benefit, we are also the world's largest exporter. With this legislation it is not our intent to give up that leadership role nor our market share.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Uninsured Saskatchewan Depositors in Principal Group

Ms. Smart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Consumer Affairs, and I hope she will have the courtesy to answer my question because people continue to be concerned about your government's negligence in the collapse of the Principal Savings and Trust and the two Principal Group investment contract companies. Can the minister finally tell us exactly how many Saskatchewan people had uninsured deposits in Principal Savings and Trust, and the value of those uninsured deposits?

And secondly, can she now tell us how many Saskatchewan people had investment contracts with Associated Investors of Canada and First Investors Corporation, and the value of those investment contracts? You've had many weeks to get these details, and can you give us these figures now?

Hon. Mr. Lane: — Mr. Speaker, we have not yet obtained that information. As I indicated to the hon. member, that when we had it we would advise the Assembly as to that

information. We have not yet been able to obtain it.

Lawyer Representing Province of Saskatchewan

Ms. Smart: — Mr. Speaker, new question. You've had several weeks to get that information. It reflects your negligence, your incompetence, and your indifference which continues to amaze me . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Smart: — . . . I'll ask the Minister of Consumer Affairs this question. A number of weeks ago the government said that it was going to appoint a lawyer to represent the province of Saskatchewan's interests during the investigations in Alberta. Has that lawyer been appointed? If so, who is it, and what are that person's terms of reference?

Hon. Mr. Lane: — Mr. Speaker, as we indicated some time ago, and obviously, I suppose, if there's a negligence it's that the hon. member doesn't bother reading the information that does come out from the government, Mr. Speaker. It would certainly save the hon. member wasting the time of the Assembly, as we've indicated that Mr. Joseph Brumlik from the province of Alberta has some significant securities background, is the lawyer retained by the province of Saskatchewan to monitor proceedings in the province of Alberta and to represent the government in those proceedings as necessary. In other words, counsel has full rein to participate, subject, of course, to the limitations imposed by the courts of the province of Alberta. As I indicated, Mr. Speaker, that announcement was made some time ago. Obviously the hon. member wasn't paying attention.

Ms. Smart: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I want to know if the Minister of Finance will table this lawyer's reports so that Saskatchewan people who lost money in the collapse of the companies will know the full facts and can make use of this information in any legal actions. Will you at least do that much for these people whom you've so badly let down?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: — Mr. Speaker, I can't give the assurance that all information would be forthcoming because, as the hon. member may have forgotten, the province of Saskatchewan Department of Justice did request the commercial crime section of the RCM Police to do an investigation, and historically in this province that information has not been made public.

With regard to the information obtained by counsel in the province of Alberta, obviously we would hope to have full disclosure. It would depend on the circumstances, whether it's privileged information or not, but our hope would be to give as much information to the Saskatchewan depositors and investors as possible to help them, in any case.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 36 – An Act respecting the Potash Resources of Saskatchewan

Hon. Mrs. Smith: — I move first reading of a Bill, The Potash Resources Act, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion agreed to and the Bill ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day, I would seek leave of the Assembly to move a number of motions here, five of them, with respect to some assorted businesses of the various standing committees.

Mr. Romanow: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't think that we would deny leave, but we have not seen these resolutions. Perhaps the minister could explain to us what they purport to do, and then we can decide whether to grant leave or not.

Mr. Speaker: — Okay, that's fair enough. Would the minister please do that.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. These motions simply refer to the various standing committees such as the committee on Crown Corporations, Communications, and Public Accounts, various businesses that were incomplete, that were not finished at the various Crown Corporations meetings; they refer them to the committees.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Referral of Annual Reports and Financial Statements to the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — I move, seconded by the member from Melville, that by leave of the Assembly:

That the annual reports and financial statements of the various Crown corporations and related agencies as were tabled at the Fifth Session of the 20th Legislature, and not reported upon by the Crown Corporations Committee during that session, and the annual reports and financial statements as tabled in the present session, be referred to the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of Report to Standing Committee on Communications

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Melville, that by leave of the Assembly:

That the annual report of the Saskatchewan Legislative Library, tabled this session, be referred to the Standing Committee on Communication.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of Public Accounts to Standing Committee on

Public Accounts

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Melville, that by leave of the Assembly:

That the *Public Accounts* of the province of Saskatchewan, tabled as sessional paper number 41, during the Fifth Session of the 20th Legislative Assembly, and the *Public Accounts* for the fiscal year 1985-86, as tabled this session, be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of Report of Provincial Auditor to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Melville, that by leave of the Assembly:

That the report of the Provincial Auditor, tabled as sessional paper number 20, during the Fifth Session of the 20th Legislative Assembly, and reports tabled this session, be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of Recommendations to the Standing Committee on Communications

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Melville, that by leave of the Assembly:

That the recommendations of the public documents committee, under The Archives Act, respecting the disposal of certain public documents contained in sessional paper number 132 tabled during the fifth session of the 20th Legislative Assembly and any such recommendations tabled this session be referred to the Standing Committee on Communication.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before the orders of the day, I rise to lay on the table the results of a municipal finance survey conducted by the New Democratic Party caucus this year.

I would commend its perusal to the Minister of Urban Affairs for his edification. As I resume my seat, Mr. Speaker, I express the hope that he will be equally forthcoming with information that he has access to.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MOTIONS

Resolution No. 29 – Changes to Children's Dental Care Program

Ms. Simard: — Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of my remarks, I will move the motion which basically is to condemn the Saskatchewan government for the destruction of the Saskatchewan children's dental plan as we have come to know it.

Mr. Speaker, the dental plan arose as a result of a real need for dental services in Saskatchewan. This was demonstrated by a number of different studies that were done . . . surveys, for example, were made in 1968 in Regina and Saskatoon that showed that the dental health in Saskatchewan was poor. Surveys also showed there was a chronic shortage of dentists in rural areas, and this led to the pilot project at Oxbow, Saskatchewan, because Oxbow was in a rural area and there was a chronic shortage of dentists in rural areas, as there is today, Mr. Speaker. The plan was available for children three to 12 years old and the purpose was to provide dental health education, to provide treatment for children, and to provide preventative services. And there's absolutely no question, Mr. Speaker, absolutely no question that the Oxbow project was successful.

So in 1974 the government implemented a province-wide, school-based dental program to provide comprehensive dental care to children between three and 12 years. It was a school-based program, Mr. Speaker. There were dental clinics in the schools, and dental therapists were trained and put into the schools to deal with the children's dental health.

The dental therapists were established under appropriate legislation which set standards and set up a dental therapist profession, and in that way they acquired the necessary skills to perform the responsibilities. And the dental plan evolved into a plan that delivered services to children in a personal, a competent, and a convenient manner, Mr. Speaker — a very personal and convenient manner, as well as a competent manner. And all of this contributed to its great success and popularity in the province of Saskatchewan.

But in the face of that obvious success of the dental plan, in the face of the obvious success, Mr. Speaker, the government proceeded with its bull-headed policy of privatizing the dental care of our children. And like a bull in a china shop, the Minister of Health undermined the dental health plan.

The utilization of the dental health plan in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, was very high, something like 20 per cent higher than in the three other universal dental plans in Canada that were privatized — and I'm referring specifically to Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Quebec. These other programs were fee-for-service programs, Mr. Speaker, and they practised the private delivery model which we will now be using as of September 1 in Saskatchewan. And the utilization in those privatized dental programs was something like 20 per cent less than it was in Saskatchewan; unlike the Prince Edward Island program, which is yet another dental program in Canada, Mr. Speaker, which used salaried dental personnel in school clinics, the utilization of the PEI program, Mr. Speaker, was higher than those privatized programs.

And there were a number of studies done on the dental

health plan. I have one with me here today, Mr. Speaker, that sets out some of the criteria and the successes of the Saskatchewan dental health plan. And I think it's important that we refer to this study. And it was done by D.W. Lewis, in February 1981, on the performance of the Saskatchewan health dental plan, and it reviewed the dental plan from '74 to '80. And on page 3 of that report, Mr. Lewis says that:

A very high proportion of all Saskatchewan children were receiving complete dental care, for example, 73 per cent in 1979 to '80. When those children, partially treated under the Saskatchewan health dental plan, and partially or completely treated in private offices outside the plan are added, the level of dental care utilization by children in Saskatchewan, which speculatively might reach 90 per cent, is probably higher than in any other large geographic area in North America.

On page 4, Mr. Lewis goes on to highlight some of the aspects of the plan. He says:

About one-quarter of all services rendered each year are preventative in nature.

He goes on to say:

The average number of fillings per enrollee has dropped by about one-half over the six years. The average number of pulp treatments and extractions per enrollee has declined each year. And it is especially important to note that about one-third of the extractions were for orthodontic purposes.

On page 5 of the same study, he says:

The most striking finding is that the cost per enrolled child have dropped dramatically from \$163.05 to \$68. Importantly, these economies of scale in per capita costs were not accomplished at the expense of lower quality, as the service utilization and care completion data amply demonstrates.

And then Mr. Lewis says, on page 6:

The cost per enrolled child were compared to those of Canada's four other universal children's denticare plans, operating over the same time period. It was concluded that the Saskatchewan health dental plan appears now to be performing with better, or at least equal, cost. And although the ultimate test of the Saskatchewan health dental plan will be how it influences the oral health status of the people of Saskatchewan in the long run, the performance to date gives early indications of the likely achievement of this long-term goal.

Now that's a very telling study, Mr. Speaker. And I just will summarize the points that Mr. Lewis makes once again. He says there was very high utilization of the plan and, of course, ultimately that leads to better dental health. He said the utilization was higher than privatized

plans in Canada. He said one-quarter of the services were preventative; fillings dropped; extractions dropped. He said the cost per enrolled child dropped by more than 50 per cent, yet the quality of service remained. And he said that the cost was no more – no more than privatized dental health care plans, and probably less.

But the PC government has made a claim to the people of this province that it will save 5 million or \$5.5 million. And I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that that's not accurate; that's not true, unless the PC government and the Minister of Health is counting on lack of accessibility to the plan and the reduction of the utilization of the dental health plan.

And I believe that that's what this government has set out to do. It has set out to remove the dental health clinics, and it has done that, from the schools, which will reduce the utilization of the plan and ultimately affect the dental health of Saskatchewan people. It has also made it very difficult for children in rural areas to receive dental care because now they will have to drive into town, if there even is a dentist in town.

There's also the fact, Mr. Speaker, that many parents don't take the time to take their children to dentists until there's a crisis, until someone has a toothache, or until there's some dental health problem. Then they will take their child to the dentist. That's the case in some families, Mr. Speaker.

So the preventative treatment, the preventative treatment that was there with the school-based dental health plan, will no longer be there. So by attacking the very foundation of the Saskatchewan dental health plan – by attacking the very foundation – the foundation of accessibility in school-based clinics, the government hopes to save money.

(1445)

And it's prepared, therefore, to sacrifice the dental health of farm and city children in the hope of saving some money to pay off its \$3.4 billion deficit that occurred as a result of its mismanagement and incompetence, Mr. Speaker.

But we, the New Democratic MLAs, predict that in the long run they will not save money. In fact it will end up costing us more, with poorer results, poorer dental health in Saskatchewan. It will cost us more per child, and studies can already establish that privatized care in other jurisdictions has cost more per enrolled child.

The government has launched itself on this wrong-headed course already, Mr. Speaker. It has removed the dental clinics from schools. It's reduced accessibility by rural children. And it's selling off the dental equipment in secret auctions – in secret auctions, Mr. Speaker. And I wonder why.

An Hon. Member: — It's giving it away.

Ms. Simard: — It's giving it away, someone said. And I suspect that's why the auctions are secret.

And on September 1, this is a Tory day of celebration, September 1. It's the first day of their new PC privatized denticare for Saskatchewan children. It's a Tory day of celebration, but it's a sad day for the children in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, a sad day for the children because it tolls the death-knell of a first-class dental plan that produced dramatic improvements – dramatic improvements – to the dental health care of our children at a cost less per enrolled child than privatized dental programs across Canada.

The Saskatchewan plan had dedicated, competent dental nurses and therapists. The legislation sets the standards for them. And these men and women worked hard, and they were dedicated, Mr. Speaker. They didn't just treat children for dental problems; they also attempted to instil an attitude in our children of caring for their dental health, an attitude that they would carry with them for the rest of their lives, and ultimately improve the dental health of Saskatchewan adults.

There were some 578 permanent dental clinics in schools in Saskatchewan, and the Minister of Health will refer to seven, or eight, or nine rural communities that he says now have dental care down the main street, but there were 578 permanent clinics in schools across Saskatchewan. That's a far cry, Mr. Speaker, from the ones the Minister of Health refers to. It's a far cry.

Dental clinics were situated in school because there were a number of advantages to doing that – many, many advantages. There was better co-ordination with school activities; there were familiar surroundings for the children. Because when children go to dentists – and you can recall your own personal experience, Mr. Speaker, when you were a child – it's a frightening situation, going to the dentist, particularly for that first or second time. But in the school situation, when the teacher could take them there, or the parents, and they're in a familiar surrounding, it lessened the impact with respect to young children being frightened about going to receiving dental care.

There was a minimal class disruption, Mr. Speaker, minimal class disruption in our schools, and there was minimal working time lost – minimal working time lost by dental teams, because there were fewer missed opportunities . . . missed appointments rather, and because they didn't have to transport the patients down town to receive their dental care, they were right there in the school, so there were fewer missed appointments.

And the dental therapists worked hard to make sure that all children participated. They make sure . . . they worked hard to make sure the children participated, and I wonder whether the dentists of this province will be doing that, Mr. Speaker. And I speak from personal example, because I had the dental therapist phone me personally to ask me if I wish to enrol my child, and that was followed up with a couple phone calls. They took a real personal interest in your child. But dentists who are very, very busy, Mr. Speaker – they're very busy, they've got very busy businesses – will they be taking the time to phone all the children in the schools to make sure that they use and take advantage of the dental health program? Has the Minister of Health written that in, that they have a

responsibility to phone the parents to make sure the children go? I think not, Mr. Speaker. I think not. But the therapists notified parents, they took the medical history of the child, and they gave full clinical examinations.

And a bridging program was established, Mr. Speaker, to encourage . . . you know, for older adolescents, 14 to 17, to encourage them to continue to look after their dental health. But I understand that that bridging program, Mr. Speaker, is not there any longer. There was a real education component – a real education component.

The dental therapists and the dental staff, Mr. Speaker, participated in community and school association meetings. They participated in pre-natal classes; they participated in career days, school open house, shopping mall displays, health fairs, dental health instructions in class-rooms. And I ask you, Mr. Speaker: will our busy dentists be able to participate in all those things? Will our busy dentists be able to do that?

The education and preventive component, Mr. Speaker, is crucial to the effectiveness of the dental health plan – the education and preventive component. And I believe that it's fair to say, Mr. Speaker, that those two components will not always be there in this privatized dental plan.

In 1983, a periodontal survey showed early stages of gum disease in Saskatchewan children, Mr. Speaker – early stages of gum disease in Saskatchewan adolescents, I should say, not in children. And that's very important, Mr. Speaker, because what that says is that it's absolutely imperative for us in Saskatchewan to have an education program and a preventive program, a dental health program, that embodies the education and preventive component. And this new PC privatized program, Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge, does not have that component or those components.

In fact the health minister in the PC government is counting on parents not using the plan. They're hoping that parents will not take their children to dentists and use this plan, in order to save money and meet their \$5.5 million saving that they allege they will save, and that we suggest they will not save.

In effect, Mr. Speaker, the PC government does not have our children at heart. They do not care about children's dental care. One newspaper article said that the plan would save at the most \$500,000 — \$500,000, Mr. Speaker – a far cry from the 5.5 million that the Minister of Health says he will save.

So let's assume it's saving \$500,000, and I believe that that article was fairly accurate in the way it set out what the costs were with the privatized plan and what the cost is in the present dental health plan. So for \$500,000 this government has fired some 400 dental therapists, and it's reduced the effectiveness of a plan that was a first-class plan, the best plan in Canada, and some say the best in North America. So they're prepared for \$500,000 to fire 400 people and reduce dental health in Saskatchewan.

But at the same time, Mr. Speaker, they have lots of money for political appointments – lots of money for

appointments like George Hill, who I understand earns that \$500,000 in two and a half short years. But there's 400 dental therapists out of work and unemployed.

Some say, Mr. Speaker, that the PC government should privatize George Hill instead of our children's dental program. But the firing of 400 dental workers, Mr. Speaker, is a real human tragedy – that's a real human tragedy, Mr. Speaker. Their jobs are lost, and their profession is wiped out, and there is no way that the PC government has demonstrated that they are justified in having put those people on the unemployment rolls and wiped out their profession. The figures just do not justify it, Mr. Speaker.

But it's another example of backward PC thinking – just another example. They privatize a successful program that benefits all children in Saskatchewan. They put some 400 people out of work, and instead they give the work to a group in society that already has plenty of income. They reduce the utilization of the plan so that less children benefit, and they call it progress. Progress for whom, Mr. Speaker? They call this progress, as opposed to what the NDP would do, which is to provide universal good dental health to all children, create employment for some 400 dental workers – hard working dental therapists – all at a cost less per enrolled child than a privatized plan will achieve, than the PC's will ever hope to achieve in their privatized dental program. It's no wonder, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan were shocked and appalled when this announcement was forthcoming.

The PC government campaigned on a pro-medical care platform during the last election, and we've seen ads to that effect in this House during question period in the last two or three months. But as soon as they were elected, they broke their promise. They destroyed the dental health program as we came to know it.

And the Minister of Health says the new system encourages dentists to live in rural areas, but that's not good enough, Mr. Speaker. What about the interim? What about the two or three or six or seven or eight years we spend encouraging dentists to live in rural areas? What are those children going to do in the interim? And besides, I question the argument that they will . . . or I question their ability to get dentists to live in rural areas.

The medical profession has been attempting to get doctors, more and more doctors into rural areas, and with a great deal of difficulty, I might say, Mr. Speaker – with a great deal of difficulty. Now how does this PC government think that it is better than the medical profession, which has been striving diligently to get more doctors into rural areas? How does the PC government feel that they can do a better job and get dentists to live in rural areas? I seriously question their ability to achieve that goal, Mr. Speaker.

So the people of Saskatchewan were shocked and appalled, Mr. Speaker. They were shocked and appalled at this announcement, and that was evidenced by some 15,000 signatures, I believe, that were put to a petition and filed in this House. But that didn't make any difference to the PCs. They continued to arrogantly ignore the 15,000 names of people from more than 200

communities in Saskatchewan who had expressed grave concern over the destruction of the dental health plan and who had requested its reinstatement. They ignored those individuals, Mr. Speaker, even though that message was a strong message.

But the PCs don't care. They don't care about the dental health of all children in Saskatchewan. They don't care whether children don't have accessibility to the dental health program. In fact, they hope that they don't utilize it so they can save costs.

And this government does that, or feels that way, Mr. Speaker, because it is not a government for the people; it has become a government for the PC party and its friends. And it's so bent on privatizing essential, effective government programs in an attempt to justify its existence to right-wing extremists like the Fraser Institute, the puppeteers of the Saskatchewan PC government, that it's prepared to renege on election promises and jeopardize hundreds of people's jobs and the dental health of our children. It's prepared to lead 400 dental workers and our children as sacrificial lambs to the altar of privatization without any believable benefit to the people of Saskatchewan – without any believable benefit to the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And for this reason, I wish to move the following motion.

(1500)

That this Assembly condemn the Government of Saskatchewan for its decision to gut the Saskatchewan children's dental care program, thereby increasing the cost of dental care for Saskatchewan families, and undermining what was commonly agreed to be the best program of its kind in all of Canada.

And this is seconded, Mr. Speaker, by the member from Prince Albert.

Thank you.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to second the motion put forth by my colleague from Regina Lakeview. I want to spend some time just indicating the reasons of why I'm so pleased to second that motion.

Mr. Speaker, this time of year every teacher walks into the classroom, and the first thing he sees are the children. Now what I really liked about the dental plan was when I walked in and saw the children coming into schools was the smiles that I saw. Children were pleased about coming back to school and were not shy, were not shy at all about smiling about it.

At the beginning of the year, you want children to come into schools having a good attitude; you want them to be talkative and friendly and talk with their class-mates and with their teachers. And that was happening. And it was happening. And it was happening, Mr. Chairman, largely because of the school dental program – what should be happening right now, Mr. Speaker, in the Saskatchewan schools.

Last year at this time there were dental therapists who were busy checking their records. They were looking at

the histories of the students and the children whose dental work they had been put in charge of. They were checking to see which students were ready for a check-up, which ones needed work done, which ones needed to have referrals.

These care-givers knew the students by name – they'd worked with them over the last two, three, four years, depending on how long each one was on the job. And the parents felt comfortable that this particular job, the dental care of their children, was taken care of. They knew that sometimes they may be contacted by the therapists and said, well, we advise you to go and take your children to the dentist. And they also knew that they had an option, that if they preferred, they could go directly to a dentist. One of their options has now been removed. They only have one option: now they have to choose a dentist.

It's not only the dental program itself and the care of the teeth and the actual dental work that was done, but the . . . as my colleague mentioned, it was a preventative work.

And you know, one of the things that is very much emphasized in schools now is the working towards an attitude of the students not getting into the habit of smoking. And it's surprising how, to what a great extent, the dental therapists helped in this. They were looked at by the children as authorities in this respect. And they were not only authoritarian, but they also – generally most of them had practised good dental hygiene themselves, and as a result, would not smoke – and they would inculcate into the minds of the children that, you know, if you smoke, your teeth tend not to look quite as good as they do if you get the habit of smoking. And so it served a twofold purpose there: not only the dental health of the student, but their physical health in total.

My colleague, the member from Regina Lakeview, has indicated what a successful program this dental program was, and some of it is borne out by statistics, Mr. Speaker. The enrolment in the dental program in 1974-75 started with 14,000. This was only six-year-olds when they started. But then by '79 and '80, it grew to 142,000, and that included 14- to 13-year-olds.

It grew in stages, and that growth from 14,000 enrolled to 142,000 children enrolled showed the popularity of the program. In fact, the utilization rate, when it was checked in 1980, showed an 83 per cent utilization rate. A higher utilization rate, actually a 20 per cent higher utilization rate, than in Newfoundland or Nova Scotia or in the province of Quebec. When you would add to the school dental program all of the dental programs that were done under the work sponsorships of companies or employers, and add to that the visits to the private dentists, it was suggested, and I would tend to believe, that Saskatchewan has the highest utilization rate of dental programs in total of anywhere in North America.

And the result of that, and again I say largely because of the dental therapist program, the result of that was that the children had good attitudes towards dentists and towards dental care. The attitudes were translated into good hygiene practice and, of course, what I as a teacher definitely enjoyed was the smiles on the faces of the children.

I remember very well as a youth in going to school, a one-room school in the North Battleford school unit – it was called a unit then before they changed the name to districts – and our school had perhaps 15 students at the time, and I was in grade 7. There was a little fellow in about grade 2 – and I will call him Brian; it isn't his name, but I will call him Brian – who would come in. And Brian was always teased by his . . . would often be teased at the school and by his peers other places. Why? He was teased because he had bad teeth, not because Brian was a bad boy, but that was a visible physical feature of Brian.

It wasn't his fault, and actually it was a result of, I think, a combination of maybe some of the diet that Brian . . . some of Brian's dietary habits, and his parents really were unable to take him the 30 miles needed to go to a dentist and pay for the dental care. And it affected Brian's social life for not only the grade 1 and 2 and 3 that he was in, but it affected him for about six or seven years thereafter.

Now, Mr. Chairman, when something like that affects a child's social life for that long, it also affects his ability, or her ability, to profit to the fullest extent from an education. And I think, if you think about it for a minute, there's probably a Brian . . . there probably was a Brian in every one of the classes in the late '50s and early '60s.

And one thing we liked about this plan is that now when you go to a school it is very, very rare that you will find a Brian with bad teeth in grades 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 – very rare. And I'm afraid, Mr. Speaker, that with the abandonment of this plan those gaps are going to start again.

Mr. Speaker, the parents particularly liked the dental program. They liked it because it stopped . . . it helped them in that they didn't have to take time out to travel. They found it very much a convenience. You're saving travelling time, and of course you're saving money, because these students were taken care of right in the schools. They were confident that good work was being done. If they wanted to double check, of course, they always had a double-check by going to a dentist. But they knew that it was going to be done. It wasn't something that they had to feel guilty about, or me as a parent would have to feel guilty about. Gee, next week I'm going to have to remember to take my daughter or my son to the dentist.

And the people who appreciated it the most, Mr. Speaker, were the people in the rural areas of Saskatchewan, because they were the ones that have to travel the farthest, and now will have to travel the farthest. In this case, the dentist came to them. They didn't have to go to the dental therapist. We know very well that our students in our elementary schools already spend enough time travelling on the bus to and from school. Now what's going to happen, they'll have to spend more time out of school and more time travelling.

Let's contrast, then, the scene of what was happening in the schools last year with what is happening, going to be happening today, and over the next years, two years with this new, so-called plan. Right now we have an advertisement. Here's one out of August 26 *Leader Post*.

"The Children's Dental Program Begins September 1st." As if we've got a new revelation all of a sudden. And it talks about the dental plan here where it says:

... children born from 1974 through to and including 1982 will be eligible to register ...

That means five to 14-year olds. It doesn't say that. It doesn't say that the plan is being cut. It's advertising that those from '74 to '82 ... and what was the ages? It says here from five to 14-year olds. We used to have four-year olds in it, and up to 17-year olds. So we've pulled the 15-, the 16-, and the 17-year olds. It furthermore goes on to say that:

Under the new program Saskatchewan dentists will provide comprehensive dental care services ...

Well, Saskatchewan dentists have always provided comprehensive dental care service. I think that would be an insult to a dentist to say that all of a sudden they're going to be providing comprehensive dental care service because the government has authorized them to do so.

What else is happening, Mr. Speaker? There's a sale of dental equipment going on. This dental equipment, and I have a list here, includes things like dental chairs with lights, portable dental chairs with lights, x-ray units, some technical equipment here – chemoclaves and amalgamators, which will make sense to those that are knowledgeable in the field, furniture like stools and carts, air compressors, dental welders, scalers, command lights, trimmers.

This equipment, Mr. Speaker, was first purchased in 1973. Much of it has been updated. The government members have not given us an exact value of what the value of the equipment is. The estimated value, according to a newscast I saw last night, was \$6 million. What is the estimated recovery? Will it be \$1 million, or will it be 10 cents on the dollar? Will it be 10 cents on the dollar like they got for the highway equipment, where the government auctioned \$40 million worth of equipment and get approximately \$3 million for it, less than 10 cents on the dollar?

The problem – when I dealt with earlier, Mr. Speaker, about the problem of travelling – and I want to give you a concrete example about the travelling situation. If you go along the southernmost part of Saskatchewan, and you consider going west, either from Estevan or Weyburn all the way to the Alberta border, go the 400 kilometres. How many dentists will you find in those 400 kilometres? I think you will find a dentist only in two locations. Or if you take the area north and west of Prince Albert in towards Shellbrook, Big River, and Canwood, there are people in the Big River and Canwood areas that will have to travel 50 to 60 miles or more to get to a dentist. And that could take well into half a day.

I had talked very briefly, Mr. Speaker, about the program teaching, and being used as a teaching tool, and teaching attitudes, good attitudes towards dental hygiene. I want to quote what the chairman of the Prince Albert Public School Board has said about the dental program. He

makes the point, and I would like to quote two sentences. He said:

The dental plan deletion is seen to us (that's by the school board) to make poor educational sense in an area where prevention and education naturally and successfully went hand in hand.

Then he goes on to say that:

The recent core curriculum directions endorsed by your government stress meeting the needs of the whole child so that education can successfully proceed. We submit that to cut the dental plan, therefore, makes it difficult to achieve that goal.

(1515)

Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been asking the question of why the government would be making this move. Obviously, a successful program, a program which got top marks in surveys as long as 10 years ago. Here's a survey from the *Star-Phoenix* of July 30, 1987, and the headline says, "Study ten years ago gave top marks to the dental plan." Why would they do it? Is there some reason, or is there something that we're trying to improve?

Well, we've been given two reasons, Mr. Chairman. We've been given two reasons. One reason has been given by the Minister of Health that there's a saving of 5.5 million, and he was corrected later by people knowledgeable in the field that it's perhaps closer to 500,000. The other reason was given by our Premier where he stated that the plan had to be overhauled because parents didn't want dental assistants looking after the children's teeth. But did he do this on the basis of an evaluation, or any kind of a survey? Or what was the reason for the story? I say both of those were concocted because I don't know of one survey and neither does Verne Clemence of the *Star-Phoenix* know of one survey that was done that on which he could base his reasoning.

Now I'm saying the stories were concocted very much like the stories were concocted about Weyerhaeuser losing \$91,000 a day after they found that the program of giving away the ... pardon me, PAPCO (Prince Albert Pulp Company) losing \$91,000 a day after the story of the give-away to Weyerhaeuser proved to be unpopular. Why do I say that, Mr. Speaker?

Well let's talk about the saving for a minute. Under the new plan, parents will have to travel. Now is that going to be a saving? Is the government willing to pay? Are they going to pay for parents to travel from their place of residence to wherever the dentist happens to reside and have his office? What about the time taken away from school. Is that a saving? The child has to be absent for a half a day or a day instead of half an hour or an hour from school. Is the government going to provide a tutor for that student? Will there be a saving in education?

What about the time off work? What about the time that has to be taken off work? Those parents that work nowadays, two members of the family, or both members may be working and have to take off the time off work. Is the government going to provide reimbursement there?

Well of course not, of course not. So what kind of a saving is there going to be? I ask, what kind of a saving?

Now the other reason which was talked about and mentioned by the Premier – I've already dealt with that – is that somehow parents were dissatisfied with this approach, with the approach of the dental therapists . . . makes complete nonsense because the parents had the opportunity if they didn't like to participate in the program to go to any dentist of their choice at any time.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat disappointed, to say the least, that the government would proceed with this, and I can only conclude that the reason for doing it is because they have a sort of a . . . because the government of the day has a very dogmatic view to what they want this province to be. There is not one iota of practicality in cutting this particular plan. It's based on a PC theory that, well, if the NDP originated it, it must be bad, so we must cancel it.

The government was completely uncritical, I think, when it came to this plan – uncritical of their own prejudices and uncritical of their own values. I think the government has forgotten that it should be in the business of governing. It's not in the business of PC politics. It shouldn't be in the business of scuttling NDP programs which have worked. It shouldn't be in the business of destroying. It should be in the business of governing – providing good government, and I'm afraid, Mr. Speaker, that the government has lost all practicality when it comes to that.

So I would like to summarize then, Mr. Speaker, what it was about the program that I liked. And I began, when I started speaking, I said that I liked the smiles on the children because they were symptomatic of a good, healthy program right from the beginning. And I say, Mr. Chairman, that this is a regressive move. It's a regressive move to cut off the four-year-olds; it's a regressive move to cut off the 14- to 17-year-olds; it's a regressive move to reduce accessibility. I say the government has got the wrong objectives in mind when it brings in this so-called new program, by putting the program back to a basis which is dependent more on the profit motive instead of on the service motive.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will support the motion put by the member from Regina Lakeview.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Muller: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as a Progressive Conservative member of the legislature, I'm proud of the record of the government and our Premier when it comes to health care. I'm proud to speak of the excellent accomplishments of this government in building the best health care system in any province in Canada.

The \$1.2 billion budget for health care is the largest in the history of the province of Saskatchewan. It represents 63 per cent increase in health care budgets since this government came into office in 1982. Mr. Speaker, the NDP opposition does not wish to deal with reality when it comes to health care issues. The motion before the

legislature today is a classic example of NDP politics of fear.

I'll just move back to some of the comments of the member from Prince Albert, he just made before he ended his comments. He's tried to scare people by saying there's no dentists available in rural areas. He named Shellbrook, and Canwood, and Big River, and all the towns up to the line where I live. We have one of the best dentists in this province of Saskatchewan in Shellbrook, and he's done a very good job for many years. I can understand why he would want to try and draw people away from small rural communities, scare them into bringing their children into the city of Prince Albert because there's no dentist in the country, but I assure him that there is very good dental facilities in Shellbrook. And I don't know much . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I don't know about Big River, that's not in my constituency.

An Hon. Member: — Well why don't you find out before you cut the program?

Mr. Muller: — Well, the member from Prince Albert should find out what kind of dental facilities we have in Shellbrook before he makes comments in this legislature about what kind of . . . what facilities are in communities, and what facilities aren't in communities.

But anyway, that's the kind of fear tactics that these people across the way like to instil in people. The motion before the legislature today is, like I said, a classic example of politics of fear. And those who deal in the politics of fear have no honour and are without principle.

Mr. Speaker, those who would frighten the poor and underprivileged, those who would use scare tactics on the families of this province, I serve notice to them that there is no room for the politics of fear in our society.

Mr. Speaker, you and I remember all too well the politics of fear that was practised when the members of the opposition went to senior nursing homes and told the seniors: medicare will be dismantled by the Conservatives. Can you imagine the heartache and fear that caused? Well I can assure the members opposite that we have got more nursing homes that they'll be able to campaign in next time. In fact, we're getting another one in Canwood, and we're going to turn the sod this month.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Muller: — We may not have a dentist in Canwood; we have one of them in Shellbrook, but we will certainly have . . .

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. Why is the member from Nutana on her feet?

Ms. Atkinson: — Member from Saskatoon. She's on her feet on a point of order. I would ask that you ask the speaker to say on subject and deal with the dental plan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — All right.

Mr. Muller: — I am dealing with subjects that the member from Prince Albert brought into the debate, and

if all members were in the House to listen to the debate while it was going on, they would know what was brought into the debate by the member from Prince Albert. I'm just doing it in answer to him. He brought into the debate the highway auction, dentists. He was far ranging in his debate, Mr. Speaker, and I believe that I'm relating it to the dental plan and the motion before the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — Continue on.

Mr. Muller: — I was talking about, I was talking, Mr. Speaker, about the nursing homes and, of course, the new Canwood nursing home that is coming in my constituency. The people out there worked very hard, and I give them credit for the work they've done in putting that together, and certainly I'm looking forward to going out there with our new federal member after the next election, who will be John Gormley, and he's going to be attending that sod turning with me. And I'm sure the Minister of Health will also be coming and we'll be looking forward to meeting those people in Canwood.

Yes, those who sit in opposition have past been masters of the politics of fear and now in 1987 they wish to, once again, deal with scare tactics. Let me remind those who sit in the opposition benches, you have no right to use the health care system to blackmail and manipulate the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the commitment of the Progressive Conservative government is to assure the people of Saskatchewan that we will continue to have the best health care system in all of Canada.

I have to stop here, Mr. Speaker, just to make a comment that when the other two members were up speaking on the motion, and the seconder of the motion, that they couldn't get a rise out of us because they weren't making any points, but I can sure see that I'm hitting home because they're all starting to try and upset me, which I assure you they cannot do, but I kind of enjoy it anyway. I kind of enjoy the interruptions.

But this is the commitment of our Premier and the commitment of the Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker. And I'm proud to say that all members of the government side of the legislature are proud of that commitment to keep Saskatchewan's health care system the best in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to discuss the Saskatchewan dental plan. This government has made changes to the dental plan to make it the best in the nation. It takes leadership to build effective and efficient health care programs like the dental program, and it takes leadership to make changes when changes are needed. That is what this government has done.

Mr. Speaker, let us not deal with the rhetoric of opposition. Let us deal, rather, in facts. The fact is that the Saskatchewan dental plan needed some changes. Professional health studies showed that the drug plan had to be revised, and now the dental plan protects those who most need to be protected. We have made changes so we can provide excellent dental care for children from 5 to 13 years of age. I urge all members of the legislature to

listen to those facts.

Mr. Speaker, yes, let us take a good look at the dental program. Health studies indicate the best place for children aged 5 to 13 to get their teeth fixed is at the office of a dentist and, in some cases, in Shellbrook.

Dentists go to university to become professionals in dental care. Many parents of this province were already taking their children to dentists, and they asked this government to pay for that care. And we agreed with the parents. Mr. Speaker, every child in Saskatchewan between the ages of 5 and 13 now has an equal opportunity to go to a dentist.

Mr. Speaker, just the other day I was looking through an issue of a weekly magazine called *U.S. News and World Report*. It was about how poor children in the United States suffer — the hungry — and the lack of proper health and dental care. And that article reminded me of how fortunate we in Saskatchewan are to have such an excellent social fabric that allows us to provide good quality health care for our children.

There's not a better system in all North America. And what we have in Saskatchewan when it comes to providing excellence in health care, Mr. Speaker, surely the opposition will admit that nowhere in the United States would you find such a dental plan for children.

(1530)

Suddenly the opposition will concede, no such dental plan exists in other parts of Canada. Mr. Speaker, the dental program here in Saskatchewan is a model that we can hold up to the rest of the world in pride. And certainly, we've done that in other areas too, but I guess I better not get into agriculture and things like that or I may be called to order.

But, Mr. Speaker, the new Saskatchewan dental plan will cover the same services as the old plan did. Under the plan, 187,521 Saskatchewan children will qualify for the coverage. I should note that through sound management and planning, this government will save the taxpayers \$9.7 million, while at the same time providing a high calibre, first-class dental program.

Mr. Speaker, children in the plan will now receive their dental treatment directly from dentists. This will replace school clinics. Parents will be able to select a dentist of their choice for their children. Saskatchewan families will have access to high quality dental care for their children. That spells out a solid commitment to dental care and a solid commitment to our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, 1987 marks the 25th year of medicare in our province. This government is proud of its record in building the best health care system in Canada. To ensure that our health care system is prepared to meet the challenges of the next decade, this government has shown some real leadership in making positive changes. The changes to the dental plan are examples of building a better health care system, Mr. Speaker.

History has shown that those who deal in the politics of

fear end up in the scrap-heap of history. A certain dictator in Europe in the 1930s played with the politics of fear. Those who valued freedom and cherished truths know what happened to that dictator. History will also show that in a fair and decent society scare tactics by politicians are not tolerated.

Mr. Speaker, I contend the motion before the legislature deals in the politics of fear. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to report to this Assembly that reports of the gutting of the dental plan are not true. That's the kind of fear tactics that the member from Lakeview was trying to project, but they're not true.

The Saskatchewan dental plan is live and well and, I might add, the best in Canada. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to report to the Assembly that health care professionals still agree that the Saskatchewan dental plan is considered to be the best in North America.

As I've said before, we've been leaders in other fields such as agriculture and forestry, and especially forestry. I can mention forestry because the member from Prince Albert talked about that he didn't want the Weyerhaeuser plant, the new paper mill, and the jobs in Shellbrook-Torch River just outside of the city of Prince Albert. He's against the expansion of what's happening . . .

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — Order, please. We could carry this quite a distance so I would ask you from here on in to please stay on the topic.

Mr. Muller: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just making comments on the comments the member from P.A. made.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Kowalsky: — A point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think if the member checks the record he'll find that he's misquoting me. I never, ever at any one time indicated that I didn't want a paper mill in Prince Albert — never!

An Hon. Member: — I'd like to speak to the point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — Please do so.

Mr. Muller: — The member from Prince Albert rose during his remarks, talked about the losses of the Crown corporation in Prince Albert, and how bad this government was to expand on the give-away to Weyerhaeuser. And I say the expansion in Shellbrook-Torch River of the paper mill is one of the greatest things for Prince Albert and the jobs it will create and the other jobs that are created within the city. And I don't agree with his point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — All right, speak.

Mr. Lautermilch: — The member from Shellbrook-Torch River indicated that the member from Prince Albert opposed the paper mill expansion. On a point of order, the only thing that the member from Prince Albert, and the member from Prince Albert-Duck Lake as well, ever opposed was the fact that they gave away \$248 million,

not the expansion. And I would like that on the record, and I would like the member to apologize.

Hon. Mr. Lane: — What we're seeing here is members opposite not understanding the difference between a point of order and debate, and they are persisting in getting up making debating points. People of Saskatchewan all know that the members from Prince Albert oppose the pulp mill, oppose the paper mill, and that's debate, Mr. Speaker, and that's the record, and as a matter of fact, as I say, it's not a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — The point of order is not well taken. Let the debate continue.

Mr. Muller: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to report to the Assembly that health care professionals still agree — I wanted to make this point — that the Saskatchewan dental plan is considered to be the best in North America. The Saskatchewan dental plan is the best because of solid commitment of our Progressive Conservative government. A government is proud that it is the largest health care budget of any government in the history of the province. A government is proud to have removed extra billing from health care, and a government that is proud of consistently meeting health care needs in our province.

Mr. Speaker, in so-called prosperous Ontario where they have no comprehensive drug plan, and in Ontario they have premiums on medicare. Mr. Speaker, all too often we fail to look beyond the borders of our province to determine what an excellent health care system we really do have.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier and the Progressive Conservative government are meeting the challenges in health care for the future, at a time in our history when resource revenues are down and we still are able to give the people of Saskatchewan the finest health care there is, and that includes dental care for our children.

Mr. Speaker, in the strongest words I can use in this legislature, I implore on the opposition to stop tactics of fear in discussing health care. I say, shame on all of you in the NDP benches.

Mr. Speaker, the motion by the member from Regina Lakeview reminds me of a story I once heard told by John Diefenbaker. Diefenbaker said that if the hon. member and the real facts ever met each other, it would be sheer coincidence. I have spelled out the real facts about the dental plan. We are proud of what we are doing in dental care for Saskatchewan children. And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move an amendment to the main motion, seconded by the member from Canora:

That resolution no. 29 be amended by deleting all the words after the words "That this Assembly" and replacing them with:

congratulate the Government of Saskatchewan for its decision to change the Saskatchewan dental plan as to provide excellent and professional dental care for Saskatchewan children from five

years to 13 years old, and thus make it the best dental care program in Canada.

Mr. Kopelchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is with some regret that I join this debate. I say regret because this is a regrettable motion, and I am therefore with confidence going to support the amendment as presented by the hon. member from Shellbrook-Torch River.

This motion, Mr. Speaker, is another example of the opposition's determination to use fear and distortions to gain their ends — fear and untruth, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Instead of helping to explain to the people the substance of, and the need for, changes to the dental program, the NDP has chosen to spread falsehoods such as those contained in this motion from the member from Regina Lakeview.

So while it is regrettable, and it is a shameful waste of the time of the House, and a shameful display for supposed adults to use such tactics, Mr. Speaker, it is necessary for me to join the debate to ensure that some truth is brought forward for the people to see.

What are some of those truths, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The truth of dental care under the Liberal-NDP coalition government of Ontario is that unless you are a child that lives in a remote area, or you are a welfare recipient, or you are a psychiatric patient, unless you fall into one of these categories — one of these narrow categories, I might add — the Liberal-NDP government of Ontario gives you zero dental coverage. Zero, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The truth is that if you live under the NDP government of Manitoba, unless you are a child suffering from a cleft palate or if you live in a very narrowly defined special area, the NDP government provides you with zero coverage. Zilch, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now I want to pause here for a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I know members opposite are saying, don't use comparisons; worry about what is happening in Saskatchewan. And I do worry about what is happening in Saskatchewan, but I just want to diverge for a moment to show how using comparisons, particularly comparisons with NDP Manitoba government, is a practice that is accepted by the NDP and promoted by the NDP, and therefore should be consistently applied by the NDP.

And because I am using the comparison, my remarks are relevant to the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Even the member who moved this motion has proven herself quite willing to accept the validity of comparisons with Manitoba. On July 13 in this House that member expressed concern about the funding for the Human Rights Commission and she said, to bolster her argument: "Manitoba's Human Rights Commission has a staff of 23." And she thought that we should be taken with that comparison.

And the member for Regina Rosemont likes and accepts the use of comparisons with Manitoba as well. On July 21 in this House that member was speaking, and to try to get

his point across, and again I quote:

If you look next door to Manitoba, a have-not province, you see that they have not been forced to do the same.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these people across the way obviously accept the practice of making comparisons. And so I would like to thank them for the renewed credibility their own arguments supply to my point of comparison.

And picking up on the phrase of the member of Regina Rosemont that the NDP in Manitoba have not been forced to do the same, I want to say that when it comes to dental care for children they most certainly have not been forced to do the same. They not only have not come close to our standards of care, they have begun the process of gutting the entire medical services system in Manitoba, and anyone can read the *Winnipeg Free Press* to follow that horrendous process. The NDP do not care, and they do not provide dental care where they now have power.

And another thing that those people over there like to say is, forget about what happened in 1981 and before. It is what is happening now that counts, they say. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a large measure, especially in this debate, I agree with that. So let's not have the NDP stand in this House and say, but we were the ones who way back when started the dental program. Forget about what happened back then. What matters is what the NDP are demonstrating they would do right now.

And all you have to do to find out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to look where they have power — in Ontario and in Manitoba. And in those places right now there is almost zero coverage. There is, in fact, zero coverage except in most special of circumstances.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could take you across the rest of the country. I could compare our program to B.C. or Quebec or anywhere else in North America, and the comparisons always yield the same results. Saskatchewan, under a PC government, has the best dental plan on this continent, Mr. Deputy Speaker — the absolute best.

There have been modifications, and I am not upset about those modifications, and I am more than prepared to defend them. What were those changes, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Well the first change was that now doctors of dentistry, dentists, now provide the service.

(1545)

And while I want to make it clear that I believe that the service provided by the dental therapists and the dental assistants was good quality care and personally dedicated care, it is still a fact that a dentist must go through significantly more rigorous training before he or she gets a licence to practise, than does a therapist. And it is simply not an arguable thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the care provided by a dentist is the best possible dental care available. Again I say that without intending any slight whatsoever to the excellence of the therapists and assistants who provided care under the old program.

What is more, Mr. Deputy Speaker – and I think this bears real consideration – under the new plan, if the parent is not happy with the care his or her child is receiving from the dentist, they have the absolute right to take that child to a different practitioner and still be covered 100 per cent by the plan. That surely is a genuine and worthwhile improvement.

I suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that too often government programs, while designed with the best of intentions, serve to weaken the family and to reduce the ability of parents to make vital decisions such as those affecting their health and dental needs. That is a trend I have always opposed, and will continue to oppose. And it is clear to me that these changes to the dental plan take away from the government the right to decide who operates on my children and gives that right back to me.

But one legitimate concern has come from that particular change, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is the concern that in rural areas like mine, people will be inconvenienced because they may have to take their children to town for a dental visit instead of relying on the school and the government to do it for them. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some members opposite have even suggested that children will not get care because parents will be unwilling to make the arrangements and drive to the dental appointment. I have a few things to say to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

First, it is patently absurd to suggest that rural people are any less caring of their children than urban folks. It is an idea so ridiculous that I won't even comment on it any further.

The second point is that the situation is already the same as it exists for obtaining medical care. Are the NDP suggesting, because there are not government-selected doctors operating in the schools, that rural children are being denied medical attention.

Finally on this point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it should be noted that the government in its consultations with the college of dentists and dental surgeons had every confidence the dentists would begin operations in rural communities as a direct result of these changes. Those expectations were well founded, as is evidenced by the fact that one dental clinic has already opened in Radville, Saskatchewan, and a second is scheduled to open in another community some time this month. The changes have hardly taken effect, and already the dentists are moving into rural areas.

I could add, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my concern about dentist services in my constituency led to me talking to the two dentists in my constituency, and both assured me that they were willing, number one, to expand offices; they were willing to expand office hours. They would do anything possible, that the children's concerns would be their main policy in running their dentist's office. I'd say that this is good for those communities, and it is good for Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There are many more aspects to the dental program that can be examined, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they should

be examined. Unfortunately, my own time is limited, so I would like to make one final comment. Had no changes been made to this program, it would have cost the taxpayers \$15.2 million. With the changes, it will cost \$9.7 million. That is a saving, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of over 30 per cent. Any time you can save over 30 per cent and preserve the best program in North America, I'd say you are to be congratulated.

And so in closing, that is what I'd like to do, congratulate the Minister of Health for an outstanding job. Obviously I will not support this motion, but I will be supporting the amendment as moved by the hon. member from Shellbrook-Torch River.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Since you gave the member from Shellbrook-Torch River such latitude, I will take the same latitude, and I want to talk about the politics of fear that the minister so ineptly talked about in terms of my colleagues on this side of the House.

The politics of fear that we've seen in this province in the last five years goes totally unmatched in the history of this province. I want to talk about an example of that politics of fear. Prior to 1982 I worked for the Office of the Rentalsman in Saskatoon, and there were a variety of political opinions prevalent in that office. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you that in the 1979 federal election there was three women who had three different political views, and we went to see – and our boss knew about it – we went to see Prime Minister Trudeau; we went to see Joe Clark, who was the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party; and we went to see Ed Broadbent. And that was acceptable at the Office of the Rentalsman – totally acceptable.

Now I want to talk about what happened after 1982 when this government was elected. Workers in that office were in fear. They didn't dare talk about politics for fear they'd lose their job. They didn't dare go and see any kind of political event with each other because they might not necessarily support the Conservative Party of Saskatchewan. They didn't dare do any of those things, and that's the politics of fear that this government has put in the hearts and minds of the people of Saskatchewan.

And I want to talk about a women in Prince Albert who thought she should be able to do whatever she wanted to, politically, during the last provincial election. If she wanted to, she could campaign. If she wanted to, she could put up a sign. If she wanted to hand out pamphlets, that was her right. And what happened? What happened? She was told that a directive had come from Regina that no government employees were to be involved in any kind of political activity. And those members opposite are now being sued because it goes against the very charter of rights in this country. And that's politics of fear.

And there are organization after organization in this province that are afraid of you people and will not speak up because they're afraid of what you'll do to them, and that's politics of fear. And the member over there talked about the attitude in the '30s and '40s – the fascist attitude of Germany. And I want you to know that there

are thousands and thousands and thousands of people in this province that think that that's the attitude of your government, and they're afraid of you because of what you'll do to them. There are organizations that don't speak out because they're afraid their funding will be cut. And what do you do when organizations do speak out? You cut their funding. The Voice of the Handicapped spoke out against you . . .

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. I would just like to make the observation that the latitude in this debate is very, very far ranging. I did allow the member from Prince Albert to get a little bit off track — I take part of the blame for that — and of course the member of Shellbrook-Torch River also.

But I think so far I'm listening very carefully to what you've been saying, and I would like to remind the member that we are dealing with the Government of Saskatchewan's role in the dental plan. So I would like you to, at this point, revert back — I did give you that opportunity to . . . with wide latitude — and having done that, I would caution the member that we get back on the topic, please.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I understand your remarks. But what I wanted to finish off by saying was that the AMNIS (Association of Metis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan) association here in Saskatchewan, the group that represents native people, had its funding totally cut because of — because of — Jim Sinclair giving the Premier a good tongue-lashing on . . .

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Martin: — Mr. Speaker, you just talked about latitude, having given some latitude on this subject. You encouraged the member from Nutana to get back on track. We're talking about the dental plan here. She should be talking about the member of Lakeview's proposal that she put forward and talk on that subject, and I'd like to get her back on track where she should be.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — I think that point of order is in good standing, having just said what I did say, and I'm sure that the member is going to get back on track at this point.

Ms. Atkinson: — Just to complete my sentence, because Mr. Sinclair . . .

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — Order, please. Order. Order, please. I would ask the member from Saskatoon Nutana to get on the dental plan, please.

Ms. Atkinson: — I am. I'd like to complete my sentence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — All right.

Ms. Atkinson: — Because Mr. Sinclair gave the Premier of Saskatchewan a serious tongue-lashing . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I'm wrapping it up, Mr. Speaker. AMNIS got their funding cut. And now I'd like to . . .

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Martin: — When you've made at least three rulings on this subject, she persists with exaggerating her dislike for this government, way off track. You've already asked her to go on track — very politely, I might add — and I think she should show some respect for the Chair and listen to what you have to say, instead of showing the disrespect that she is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: — The point of order is well taken. And I would ask the member at this point to get onto the dental plan, please.

Ms. Atkinson: — I was getting onto the dental plan when I was so rudely interrupted on a point of order.

Now on the amendment and on the motion, I just want to read into the record an August 14 article by Bev Spencer, who is a journalist with the Regina *Leader-Post*. And this is how she describes the firings by this government of the 411 dental workers in this province when they decided to do in the dental program, and I quote:

Jacque Oleksinski of Regina heard it in a parking lot. Darren Berg of North Battleford got the news in a motel room.

They had been fired, along with almost 400 others, from the Saskatchewan Dental Plan.

There was shock, there was disbelief, and there were tears. Dental therapists, I want to tell members opposite, are still recovering from the news. And Mr. Speaker, that's how all dental workers in this province were advised that they had lost their job as a result of the government's decision to privatize the dental program.

Now, Mr. Speaker, all dental workers in our province were told in basically the same manner that as of Friday, August 7, 1987, their positions were being abolished. The Conservative government claimed that they had undertaken a review, and I'll quote. I quote from the contents of a letter, sent to all dental workers, that programs and priorities in keeping with the government fiscal restraint program, and as part of that review they decided to change the structure of the children's dental plan, and effective September 1, 1987, children's dental services will be provided by dentists in private practice.

I want to read into the record the letter that was sent to the more than 411 dental workers in this province by the deputy minister of Health. And it goes like this: Dear So and So, and I quote:

Saskatchewan Health has undertaken a review of programs and priorities in keeping with the government's fiscal restraint program. As part of this review a decision has been made to change the delivery structure for the children's dental health program. Effective September 1, 1987, children's dental health services will be provided by dentists in private practice.

I regret to inform you that as a result of this decision your position as a dental therapist, (or a) dental assistant, (or a) dental technical will be abolished effective Friday, August 7, 1987. You

will be authorized leave with pay from July 1 to August 7, 1987, inclusive.

As a permanent employee, you were entitled to the lay-off procedures under Article 132 of the Saskatchewan Government Employees' Union collective bargaining agreement. To expedite the bumping process, the attached lay-off options election form must be completed and returned to the Human Resources branch within five working days upon receipt of this letter in accordance with the Saskatchewan Government Employees' agreement.

Should you wish to discuss the bumping process or your specific options, you're invited to contact Doug Pomfret in the Human Resources branch. (And at the end) I wish to thank you for your contribution to the department, and particularly to the dental program.

That's the letter that 411 dental workers were given telling them that their services were no longer required, that they were being fired. They had put in years and years and years of service, and they were thanked for their contribution to the department, and particularly to the dental program.

An Hon. Member: — And now they live in fear.

Ms. Atkinson: — And now, Mr. Speaker, they live in fear.

I want to ask the members opposite how you bump in the civil service in this province when there's no positions to bump to. Dental therapist positions were highly technical in nature. There are no other jobs available in Saskatchewan as a dental therapist, and there certainly aren't any jobs available in the civil service. And how can that . . . how on earth could they possibly get a job in the civil service in view of the fact that that program is no longer available?

Now the government has predicted that they'll save \$5.5 million, but their own annual report, Mr. Deputy Speaker, states that the saving will be closer to \$500,000. To save \$500,000 they have laid off more than 400 workers, and they've closed 578 clinics in schools throughout Saskatchewan.

(1600)

I want to talk about the dentist in every town, as put forward by the members opposite. That's absolutely ludicrous. And I want to read into the record a letter I received from a woman who lives in rural Saskatchewan, and as she says:

I have grown up in the small town of Ituna. I can remember the few times dentists did set up a satellite practice in our town. It didn't take more than six months before they were gone. Having to persevere the winter weather, use up potential earning time to travel, and bring with them or maintain extra staff, the dentists were soon back in their practices in Yorkton where the conveniences of getting to work in a matter of minutes and

maximizing their profits were of greater importance to them. Each time we were left to phone long distance for appointments, spend our time and money in travelling to Yorkton to see the dentists, and to return at later dates if our check-ups showed there was any extra work to be done. It was all done at our inconvenience and at our expense.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's what we're returning to today. We're returning to a situation where people . . .

An Hon. Member: — Who's it from?

Ms. Atkinson: — It was sent to the Premier of the province, June 23; he can check his correspondence.

Mr. Speaker, we're returning to the very same scenario that we had in the 60's, and the same scenario that I grew up in. I grew up in a rural community, and we had to travel to Saskatoon in order to see a dentist. What that meant was it took valuable time away from the farm. It took us out of school, and it didn't necessarily mean we saw a dentist on a yearly or a six-month basis. We usually saw a dentist when we had some sort of dental problem.

And I predict, Mr. Speaker, that that's exactly what's going to happen again. Because you may say all you want that parents are going to take their children to dentists, but they're not going to unless there's a problem. Some parents will not take their children to a dentist unless there's a problem, and some parents can't afford to travel those huge distances.

I think what's really distressing is that the Government of Saskatchewan has abandoned the very best dental program in the entire world, and that has been demonstrated by numerous studies. They've abandoned as a fundamental principle for health delivery in this province that, regardless of where you lived and regardless of your income, you had access to health services, and that those health services were readily available and accessible.

No longer, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will children receive those services in a familiar environment. Gone will be the introduction of dental care and dentistry with the support of peers and class-mates. The world's best dental plan was specifically designed to make a child's first experience with a dentist's office, or dental care, a positive one. Parents are losers in this situation as well as children. Parents will now have to juggle schedules or take time off from work to take their children to dentists.

I just want to note that this summer, with this new and improved dental plan that we have, that there was absolutely no coverage for children in this province from the end of June until September 1; there was absolutely no coverage, and if children had a particular problem, their parents paid for it.

Now for families in rural Saskatchewan there will be the added expense of greater distances to travel and lost time from school for children. The cost saving, as indicated by the Minister of Health, is highly suspect, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister of Health is banking on the hope

that savings will result from decreased utilization of the service. Cost per child now is approximately \$103 for a dentist and approximately \$92 for a child seeing a dental therapist. With 132,000 elementary school children eligible for dental care by a dentist, and with the government paying about \$103 per child, how can that be a tremendous saving?

My calculation puts the cost at about \$13.5 million. With administrative costs added in, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that adds an additional 1.2 million. We are now looking at a program that could cost us over \$15 million. But that's not what the minister is budgeting for. His budget reflects very clearly his view that there will be many, many children in this province who will not see a dentist.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the number of people, and particularly women who were laid off by this government's decision to do in the dental plan — when you look at the saving of approximately half a million dollars, it makes no sense.

I want to remind the members opposite that many, many, many of those dental workers lived in rural Saskatchewan. They were married to farmers, and that income derived from that job as a dental therapist or a dental assistant or a clerical person helped the family farm survive. That option is no longer available to those farm families, and I think you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a farmer, how important it is for farmers these days to have some form of off-farm income. And that income that was derived from that dental plan is no longer available for those many, many rural women who worked for the plan.

And I've received dozens and dozens of letters from rural communities concerned about the fact that they will no longer have that service available in their community and in their school; that they will have to travel huge distances to get a dentist or see a dentist. They are not banking on a dentist locating in their particular rural community, and they really feel that a valuable service such as the dental plan has been done in to them.

And let's face it, members opposite, rural people do not have all of the services that we in the city take for granted. And that really is too bad. And here was a service that, regardless of where you lived in Saskatchewan, you had access to, and that service is no longer available.

And it's interesting that the members opposite spoke about how parents were dissatisfied with the dental program, and they wanted to have a dentist do the work. And I just want to tell members who may not be familiar with the 1979 survey of attitudes, an attitudinal survey of families enrolled in the Saskatchewan dental plan, that 89 per cent of the respondents were happy with the plan. They were happy with the plan. And some of the people who weren't happy were disappointed because their children didn't get to see a dentist or a dental worker as often as they wanted to, and they thought the plan should be expanded. In fact, there was 40 per cent of the respondents recommended the plan to other people.

Now I think that if you're going to do in a plan or change a plan, as the Premier said — the Premier said that parents

weren't happy with the program — you should either table the survey or the study showing us that people were unhappy, or you should table the thousands and thousands of letters for the over 132,000 individuals who were in the plan from their parents showing the dissatisfaction, because I suspect that that is not true; that people weren't dissatisfied with the program in general, and that this is merely a way to save a little bit of money — \$500,000 — because of their huge \$3.4 billion deficit, a deficit that arose as a result, for the most part, of their own mismanagement and fiscal irresponsibility.

And what we have now is the very best dental plan in the world being done in because these people don't know how to govern and don't know how to run a business. And government is a business. You have to have the revenues available, and you have to watch your expenditures. We have people putting in jaccuzis as a result of their home program — jaccuzis and swimming pools — things that are luxuries. And yet we have a situation here where over \$500 million is apparently going to be saved at the expense of the best children's dental plan in the province, or in the world. I think it's deplorable.

I will not support the amendment. I will support the original motion put forward by my colleague, the member from Regina Lakeview.

And I would now like to move adjournment.

Debate adjourned.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Chairman, with leave I would like to move a motion respecting an absence being granted to a couple of members for a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association trip.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Leave of Absence for Members

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly I'd like to move a motion, seconded by the member from Regina Centre:

That by leave of the Assembly, that leave of absence be granted to the hon. members for Morse and Regina Rosemont from Tuesday, September 8, to Friday, September 11, 1987 to attend the seminar on behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Saskatchewan Branch, in Washington, D.C.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly, I'd like to move:

That we move to government orders, Committee of Finance.

Leave granted.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure
Parks, Recreation and Culture
Ordinary Expenditure – Vote 39

Item 1 (continued)

Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been waiting to get into these estimates for some time, and thank you for this opportunity.

And before we move into the culture and recreation side of estimates – and there will be a goodly number of questions there – it should come as no surprise, perhaps, to the minister that I have a few questions concerning the wild animal park in Moose Jaw, and I hope we can deal with that at some length, perhaps, this afternoon.

(1615)

I might just say to members present that on Sunday afternoon past I enjoyed the afternoon with my family and a good number of friends in the Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park. It was my observation that there were hundreds, if not thousands of us there on Sunday afternoon. It was my observation in visiting around in the park that a goodly number of the people at the park on Sunday were from beyond the city of Moose Jaw, and as I just scanned some of the licence plates in the parking lot, I noticed a fair number from out of province.

It is agreed by those who visit the park that in some ways the Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park is a park second to none – for a park of its size, of its nature – second to none in the nation. And many of us feel that it is that way because from the very beginning it's been a publicly owned and publicly supported facility.

An Hon. Member: — Great tourist attraction.

Mr. Calvert: — And a great tourist attraction for both the city of Moose Jaw and the province of Saskatchewan. And I, for one, am very proud when I visit the Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park to see the wheat sheaf symbol on the sign – the symbol of our province – indicating that this is a park that belongs to we, the people of Saskatchewan, and one that we can be very proud of.

We've been more than aware, over the course of this summer, that it is this government's proposal or plan, first of all, to have the city of Moose Jaw take over the park and bear the total cost and, failing that, then to privatize or to lease it out to a private developer. And, Mr. Minister, that's sort of the area that I would like us to explore this afternoon.

Just so that in our discussions there is no confusion or misunderstanding, I'd like us just to agree on some figures before we start. And I wonder if you can provide for me the number of visitors to the Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park during the 1986 season and a breakdown of those visitors, between those which would be described as local, i.e. from Moose Jaw, and those who will have travelled to visit the park.

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, I do have that information for the hon. member, and hon. member from Moose Jaw South, welcome to the estimates; I've been looking forward to this.

The visitation, Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park, attracts greatest number of visitors of the tourist facilities in Moose Jaw. In 1986, 159,813 people visited the park. Of these, over one-half came from beyond 50 miles, one-third of the total visitors from Regina, and less than one-fifth from Moose Jaw. And if the hon. member would like a copy of this for use, I'd be please to send it over to you.

Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, those are the figures that I have. I do not need the copy; I have those figures. Some other figures that I would like to have: the current value of the land, buildings, and equipment at the Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park. And I would also like to know, if you can provide it for me, the amount of money that has been invested in the park by the province since the province took it over in 1975.

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Mr. Chairman, the total area is 218.5 hectares. The estimated land value is \$218,500. Since 1978 a total of \$2,563,207 has been spent on capital improvements. There are 43 buildings on site. The estimated value of the existing buildings is \$1,045,000.

Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The total again for investments since 1978 – \$2,563,207? Thank you.

Just then one other figure so that we're operating on the same figures – your department's calculation of the operational deficit in 1986.

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Mr. Chairman, lost to March 31, 1985, \$279,934.13; to March 31, 1986 the loss was \$297,923; to March 31, 1987 the loss is \$247,000 . . . 247,446.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chairman, the city of Moose Jaw, in calculating the cost – if the city were to absorb the animal park into its operating budget, the city has calculated somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$450,000. Does the minister accept that figure? That if the city of Moose Jaw were to take the park over that, in fact, it would cost the city of Moose Jaw some \$450,000?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Mr. Chairman, we don't really know how the Moose Jaw council came up with their figure. We weren't privy to any discussions they had on arriving at a figure other than providing them with the information we had at our disposal. It has been suggested that, quite possibly, they're taking into account some numbers that we might not be taking into account to do with staff pension plans, worker compensation costs. But I hardly think that would cover some \$200,000 per year. So we really don't know how they come up with a \$450,000 figure.

Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Minister, my understanding of the city of Moose Jaw's work in this regard included some increase in salary levels that are paid by the city as opposed to those paid by the province. In fact, there would have to be some additional salaries paid for

administration. In the deficit figures that you provide, I understand there is no amount for employee fringe benefits. There would be some insurance costs that the city of Moose Jaw would have to bear, some auditing fees, and there would have to be built into that budget some capital replacement allowance.

I think it's fair to say that if the city of Moose Jaw were to absorb the animal park and its operation into their budget, the deficit would be closer to 450, or a half a million dollars. So that seems to many of us in the city of Moose Jaw an unreasonable request, coming from your government in a year when your government has already cut from revenues in the city of Moose Jaw some \$1.7 million. It seems like a highly . . . a difficult situation for the city of Moose Jaw to have to absorb another \$500,000 of costs.

I'd like to spend some time on how you approached the city of Moose Jaw, and sort of the history of this summer. It's my understanding, and correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Minister, that you first approached the city of Moose Jaw with the proposal concerning the park via a letter dated March 31, and in that letter you demanded an answer from the city of Moose Jaw in something less than three weeks. Many of us in the city felt that to be a very heavy-handed and unreasonable request, that the city should have to look at accepting an expense, maybe of a half million dollars, and to be considering that in a matter of three weeks. Mr. Minister, is my history on that correct?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, I can confirm that the chronology presented by the hon. member is essentially correct. A letter was sent out under the signature of Lyle Lensen, the acting deputy minister at that time, dated March 31, 1987 and we'd asked to hear from them by April 17 of that year. So essentially your figures are correct. I'm sure you already have copies of the letters anyway, so I won't bother reading them into the record.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Minister, then is it your position that that in fact was a reasonable and a fair approach to the city of Moose Jaw, when the city would have to consider so much, to expect an answer in three weeks? Was that a fair and a reasonable kind of approach to make?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Some of our officials did meet, Mr. Chairman, with people in city council. They were at an *in camera* meeting of the Moose Jaw council. The council expressed some concern over the April 17 deadline. They were given an extension to April 30, at their request, and with which they agreed.

Mr. Calvert: — Related to this summer's events, Mr. Minister, can you tell me and the House why in fact the park did not open on the traditional opening date of May 1 this year?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Mr. Chairman, the events unfolded thus: the city informed us that they did not want to meet that particular deadline and they were going to take some extra time. So we went along with that. But we didn't feel that we were going to open the park and then turn it over to the city of Moose Jaw. So when we didn't hear from them we just let the time barrier go by and waited until they communicated back to us that they would not be

interested in taking the park, at which time we decided we'd go ahead, open the park and run it for the summer, which we have done.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Minister, I think I should tell you, in that two-week interval, that the park was not open. I had a fair number of phone calls, concerns expressed to me. Just as a bit of an example of that concern, one parent called me about his son's birthday which was traditionally celebrated in the Moose Jaw animal park. His birthday falls on May 2. There was a great deal of disappointment in that household. I know a variety of people came to Moose Jaw to visit the city and our community, some from out-of-province, expecting the park to be open. It was not open.

I think I hear you saying today that you were providing that time for the city to continue in its thought, to continue the consultation. I want to know why those consultations couldn't have gone on with the park open. I still don't understand why the park couldn't have opened May 1.

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Very simply put, Mr. Chairman, the city of Moose Jaw did not tell us what their intentions were until May 12. I rather assume that by doing so, they had hoped we would open on May 1, and they would not have to respond at all during that summer period, and we would run the park all summer. As it turned out, we opened on May 14, two days after they notified us they weren't interested in operating the park.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Minister, do you have any estimate on revenues lost to the park in that two-week period, both through the gate entry and perhaps through the concession?

(1630)

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — I'm advised that it'd be difficult to have an accurate estimate. But it would certainly be well under \$10,000 and perhaps closer to \$5,000, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Minister, I just want to submit to you that it seems to me if you were sincere in wanting to work closely with the city of Moose Jaw on this issue, that in fact the park could have been opened, and the working together, the consultations, could have gone on in a reasonable fashion.

I submit this keeping the gates closed was just another part of the heavy-handed tactic to attempt to get the city of Moose Jaw to take the park over, which clearly, with a \$500,000 cost to the city and having lost some \$1.7 million in revenue already, was a very difficult proposal for the city to undertake.

Mr. Minister, I would like to . . . I know in your communications with the city, officials of your department suggested that, in fact, it was more advisable that the park be in the city of Moose Jaw's hands. Could you provide for me some of the argumentation that leads you to that conclusion?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Well, Mr. Chairman, to put things fairly simply, I think, we're faced with a situation where

we're operating a park – certainly adjacent to the city of Moose Jaw. I believe some of it, perhaps, right in the city of Moose Jaw – losing a fairly large sum of money every year. And at a time when we were looking at ways to reduce expenditure, we rather wondered if, perhaps, this was to be operated by someone other than the department. They would have an opportunity to run it in, perhaps, a more frugal manner, but certainly in a matter that they might be able to break even.

I don't know if they could manage it. Obviously, they feel they can't because they're looking at a . . . they look at a deficit of \$450,000 a year so we operated it for this year. I don't know what we'd lose on the operation over this summer, but I imagine it would be fairly substantial. And I just question if we should go on with certain operations of government losing money year after year without making some attempt to place it in someone else's hands who may be in a better position to break even.

Mr. Calvert: — So, Mr. Minister, you're saying then that . . . and at one point, I tend to agree that I do feel the city of Moose Jaw can manage things a little more efficiently than your government. When I hear you say then that . . . what you're wanting to do simply is to transfer from provincial taxpayers to the taxpayers of Moose Jaw the total cost of the wild animal park. Is that what you're saying? That you simply want to transfer the cost from the treasury of Saskatchewan to the treasury of the city of Moose Jaw?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — It struck me, Mr. Chairman, the hon. member was hinting that perhaps the city of Moose Jaw is a more efficient organization than the Government of Saskatchewan, and if that is the case, then we'd be pleased to see them take it over and run it.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Minister, this is a park that clearly serves the entire population of our province. I think the number of visitors at 160,000 visitors – and we agreed that one-fifth of those visitors come from the city of Moose Jaw; four-fifths of those visitors come from beyond the city of Moose Jaw – clearly this park is serving the entire population of our province. Clearly it's drawing visitors to our province from out-of-province, and the benefits of this park surely are provincial benefits. Therefore, why then should the city of Moose Jaw, and the taxpayers in Moose Jaw, be asked to bear the entire financial cost of maintaining the animal park?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Mr. Chairman, the beneficiaries may be provincial in nature so far as people from other parts of the province do go to Moose Jaw and visit that park – four-fifths, as the hon. member just said. And what do they do when they go to Moose Jaw? That's the prime tourist attraction and they spend money there. And the major, major beneficiary of this park, I submit, sir, is the city of Moose Jaw.

And we didn't say we wanted to transfer all of the costs to the city of Moose Jaw. We were willing to negotiate with the city and come up with something that, perhaps, we could both have lived with. They chose not to do that.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Minister, then if I follow your line of argument, then what you would say is that facilities

which are local in this province, and yet serve the province should somehow . . . their costs should be borne locally. Therefore, would you argue then that, for instance, the Museum of Natural History in Regina ought to be funded by the city of Regina? Are you saying, for instance, that the Prince Albert National Park should somehow be funded by the city of Prince Albert?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Well, Mr. Chairman, essentially we have no other urban parks. This is the only one. I think it's somewhat spurious and devious to try and take the argument away to the Museum of Natural History which firmly belongs in this department – it's part of a department of government – or to Prince Albert National Park, which has got nothing to do with me. You just said it's a national park. No, we don't say that. What we're saying is, here we have an urban park situated in the city of Moose Jaw benefiting the residents of Moose Jaw and we were not in any way, shape or form forcing this park on to the city of Moose Jaw. We said we'd negotiate; we wanted to discuss. They didn't want to discuss. We may well have come up with a compromise option that would have suited all of us.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Minister, I think it's going to be apparent in our discussions about the animal park that we perhaps differ in our understanding of the purpose of a park and of the many benefits that accrue from a park. Certainly the dollars, the tourist dollars, that remain in Moose Jaw are a benefit to our community. But indeed those people who are travelling to Saskatchewan to visit the Moose Jaw animal park are paying your gas tax and it's going into your treasury. And the Moose Jaw jobs that are supported by the park, I mean, those folks are all paying taxes and they end up in your treasury.

There's a goodly number of benefits that have nothing to do with money. This park provides a place where families can travel together to, can enjoy; it's a park that at least over the last 10 years or so we've built a fine collection of indigenous species. Surely that has some value. It's a park that provides educational opportunities. We have a number of school tours that come from all over southern Saskatchewan. So the benefits are not simply monetary benefits to the city of Moose Jaw. All sorts of benefits accrue both to Moose Jaw and I submit to our whole province.

An Hon. Member: — Including giving to the Saskatchewan children the opportunity to see animals.

Mr. Calvert: — Precisely.

Mr. Minister, your calculation of the deficit figure to the provincial government is somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$250,000, plus or minus some on a given year. Can you share with me studies that perhaps your department has done in ways that as a provincial government, as your department, that deficit might have been addressed?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Mr. Chairman, we took some measures this year to try and increase the efficiencies within the park, to try and make it a more viable operation. We feel that the deficit this year could be in the neighbourhood of \$200,000, which is down

considerably from what we've been losing in other years.

But really to make the thing balance out we'd have to look at big increases in revenue if it's going to balance, and that, I think, would be particularly difficult because of the large number of children, as the hon. member himself has indicated, who visit the park; or we could increase the facilities within the park to make it more attractive. Now that has happened in other areas around the province. I can think of a water slide that went in to Kenosee. It has been immensely popular; it's increased the visitation there considerably.

But given the financial restraint that we're all under in the province, I ask: is it wise use of taxpayers' dollars for this department to be building golf courses, water slides, or other such recreational facilities when there are people in the private sector who may be willing to build those facilities – lease arrangement with the department whereby we get income from them; they assume the responsibility for running the park, make it more attractive for tourists, and the city of Moose Jaw again is the ultimate beneficiary. And I think the hon. member has indicated that, too. The city benefits enormously from the park being there, and we don't want to see the park closed.

And if you check over the history of who owned that park since 1929 when it was a private zoo and it was taken over by other clubs and other organizations – why? Because they couldn't break even. They couldn't make money. So ultimately, where did it come? Mr. Chairman, when groups run into trouble they say, here government, you take it over and you absorb the loss.

Well we're very determined in government, Mr. Chairman, to be as efficient as we can and to cut out as many of our losers as possible, not by closing them down, but by making them available on a lease basis to somebody else who can perhaps run it efficiently and make it work.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Minister, I'm a little concerned that I did not hear you say, in the ways that you had considered to address the deficit of the park, I did not hear you say the words: greater or better promotion of the park. I think it's fairly widely recognized, at least in our community, that in some ways this Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park is one of the best kept secrets in Saskatchewan.

To my knowledge there has been one major highway billboard advertising the park – one billboard. Mr. Minister, I have a very specific question about that billboard. The park . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . There's two. There's two billboards. I stand to be corrected – two billboards.

Mr. Minister, on the billboard that I pass daily travelling between Moose Jaw and Regina, the one at Belle Plaine, I note, has now been covered and changed. The park is going to close on September 30. There's still a month of operations left. Why is that billboard covered?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm glad the hon. member raised that particular point, because in 1985-86 we spent \$35,505 promoting this park. In

1986-87 we spent \$33,208 promoting this park, and we did a province-wide promotion of the thing. We did a lot of advertising. I was at the kick-off for the campaign in the city of Moose Jaw, attended by the mayor and other local people in Moose Jaw who were very happy about the campaign because they thought it would promote the number of entries, and it was successful in that regard. The promotion was successful in bringing more people in, but at the kind of revenue or the kind of fees we're charging, there's no way we were going to break even unless we had everybody in the province visit several times.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Minister, I asked a specific question; maybe you didn't catch it. Just to . . .

An Hon. Member: — The billboard.

Mr. Calvert: — The billboard, please.

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry, nobody can tell me if they know if the billboard's covered up or not, or why it would be covered if, indeed, it is covered. I'll check that out for you.

(1645)

Mr. Calvert: — It's covered. I pass it daily. It now has a TIPS billboard, which is a reasonable thing to do, I would suggest, after the park is closed.

An Hon. Member: — I agree.

Mr. Calvert: — I'm glad to hear you say you agree, and hopefully the park will still be under your control a year from now, and indeed you will not do this again.

Mr. Minister, you talked about perhaps the need of some other facility in the park to attract visitors, and I don't think that's an unreasonable notion, but then you went on to say you didn't think it was wise for the province to be engaged in that kind of activity just now. Then I ask you to square that with the new marina and harbour that's just been opened up, up at Elbow. If we've got dollars to do that sort of thing, could there not be some dollars to put into the Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Now, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to respond to the latter part of the member's question-cum-statement, when he brought Elbow harbour into this. And this is very interesting. Lake Diefenbaker, in the estimation of my officials, and certainly many of my colleagues, has the potential to become a major tourist attraction. It is an excellent body of water. It's terrific for sailing and a host of water-based activities, but there didn't seem to be much impetus on behalf of private sector folks to get involved out there. By taking the initiative with the Elbow harbour which, yes, we constructed, but we did it through the New Careers Corporation whereby we took people with no job skills or little job skills, people who were on welfare, we employed them and trained them on that project.

So it was built as a training project whereby many of those people went on to find gainful employment afterwards, and at the same time we're left with a valuable piece of

infrastructure, Mr. Chairman, which has attracted now all kinds of interest from the private sector people to become involved not only in that particular site but with Diefenbaker Lake in general.

So I would say to the hon. member, that was why we did that project. It wasn't a question of saying we don't have money for a project in Moose Jaw to run a wild animal park, but we'll find something for Elbow harbour. That's apples and oranges, Mr. Chairman. What we wanted to do was get a development on to Lake Diefenbaker to spring loose private sector development in other areas on there.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Minister, it's my understanding . . . If we could maybe move, then, into the proposals for private lease of the park. Now it's my understanding that there's a bidder's conference, in fact, tomorrow in Moose Jaw. You've called for tenders, I think, in the middle of August, near the middle of August.

Again I question then your sincerity in dealing with the community of Moose Jaw, because as you well know the city council in Moose Jaw has put together a committee to thoroughly study the issue. And in late July that committee, through the city, requested that you would withhold or hold off the call for tenders until September 30 to give them adequate time. And so I ask then, Mr. Minister: why, in fact, did you call for tenders in the middle of August disregarding the request from the city of Moose Jaw that that call not go out until the end of September?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I know the hon. member — I say this in all honesty — is a sincere member. And the last comment he made somehow implied that I wasn't being sincere in my approach to the city of Moose Jaw. And I take it he made that comment not knowing that we had, in fact, responded to the city of Moose Jaw who said, please don't make a decision before September 30. So to accommodate them we've moved the tender closing date to October 5.

So tenders won't even close until October 5, and they have lots of time to get together whatever they want to do or to get in touch with me, department staff, and discuss it with us. We'd be pleased to hear from them.

Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, for that explanation. In your previous comments you suggested that to address the deficit of the park would require, perhaps, large increases in the gate fees or, indeed, the addition of some other attractions or better promotions. I can't somehow follow the argument that says a private developer can somehow address this deficit, whereas the province cannot, unless the private developer is intending to increase gate fees, make the park less accessible or somehow change what is the essential nature of the park.

In your proposal for tender you have suggested, I think, that the general theme of the animal park must be maintained. I would like some further detail on that phrase. What does it mean to say that the general theme of the animal park must be maintained by a private developer?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Well very simply put, Mr. Chairman, it continues as a wild animal park. That is the essential theme of the park, and that's what we want to see maintained. But at the same time, in granting a lease to anybody, or accepting a tender, implicit in that is that they have to invest money. They can't just come in and say, I've got a good idea; I'd like to take this off your hands and run it. They have to put cash up front. They have to invest in it.

And I submit that if they do invest and put in something significant in the city of Moose Jaw — perhaps a water slide, and I don't know; I don't look at any marketing studies on that kind of thing — but as an example, if they want to do a golf course in there because of the amount of land that's available, or a water slide, or something else, just perhaps — perhaps — it would become more attractive to a wider range of people, a larger clientele. And if the facilities were improved significantly, I imagine revenues would increase concomitant with that.

Mr. Calvert: — I have some very specific questions about this whole tendering process. If the park is leased, will you ensure that the number and variety of species housed in the park will be maintained?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Mr. Chairman, I just point out to the hon. member it would be very difficult for me to stand here today and say, if there are five moose and three elk and two white-tailed deer, that will be maintained forevermore.

Because of the dynamics of that particular park, and I'm sure the hon. member knows this, we take in orphaned animals in there right now; we have injured animals in there. Some die; some move on. We're a clearing house for any game farming or ranching activity that would be taking place as well. So by the very dynamics of the nature of the park, those numbers can fluctuate.

What I can tell the hon. member, as we're telling any interested parties, that we want to see that continue as a wild animal farm, and definitely we would have some expectations as to what we imply by a wild animal farm.

Mr. Calvert: — I'm still not clear. You talk about putting a golf course, for instance, in the Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park. If I know the park at all, it seems to me the appropriate or only location for a golf course in the park would be in that area which now houses the bison — the buffalo. I'm not sure that bison and golf balls are all that compatible.

Will you give some assurance that the wide variety of species now housed in the park — and it is a wide variety, and it tends to be a show-case of indigenous species, indigenous to western Canada, with the exception of a few others — would you give me the assurance that in some kind of privatization of this park we're not going to lose that; that we're not going to lose the opportunity to study our own indigenous species, and show-case them for visitors, and for students, and so on?

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Mr. Chairman, in discussion with

the officials, I was just pointing out to them it would be certainly my intention at any meeting with potential proponents to inform them exactly the position that you're taking right now, or I think it's exactly your position, hon. member, that we would expect to maintain the current flavour down there – certainly a variety of indigenous species to Saskatchewan and to western Canada, and I think that would have to be implicit in any discussions with the proponents.

Again, referring back to the dynamics of the park and how animals are acquired and the flow that's coming in and out, I really couldn't get into specific numbers, and I don't think we could tie anybody to numbers, but certainly, to take your point, we can make it clear to a potential proponent what the expectations will be in the tenders.

Mr. Calvert: — It seems to me, Mr. Minister, that the easy way to insure that the Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park does, in fact, remain a show-case of indigenous species, and so on, with a wide variety, is for it to remain in the provincial park system. There are some of us who fear that it will become something of a totally different nature, not to say that that wouldn't be wrong in a different situation, but there are many of us who fear the transformation of the Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park into some kind of a petting zoo and amusement park complex. That may have its place, may well have its place, but at the same time there is a place in our community and in this province for a wild animal park that show-cases indigenous species.

In terms of the tender, will you be ensuring that the park does remain accessible to people? And by that I'm asking you to ensure that, in fact, if you do tender it out, that the gate prices will not dramatically increase.

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — I wouldn't be able to give an assurance that there'd be no gate price increase whatsoever. Depending on what type of facilities may be added to that park, I think that, Mr. Chairman, would determine what potential revenue increase would exist.

For instance, we did – just off the cuff and only cursorily – we looked at, well, would a swimming pool go in there; would a golf course go in there; perhaps a restaurant. And a swimming pool, I forget which of us brought that one up originally, but depending on what kind of facilities went in there, I think that would probably determine what the entry fee would be.

And of course, if the entry fee was such that it was driving people away, then nobody's going to be doing any business in there. So I think anybody who wants to do business, wants to make it viable, wants to have a feasible organization, at the same time maintaining the flavour of a wild animal park, would have to give careful consideration to just what the traffic will bear. And I think that will be determined if – and it's hypothetical at this stage – if there are changes to be made in there, the nature of the changes.

Mr. Chairman: — Being near 5 o'clock, the committee is recessed until 7 p.m.

The committee recessed until 7 p.m.