

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — I rise today, Mr. Speaker, once again to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the names are primarily from south-eastern Saskatchewan: Estevan, Bienfait, and throughout that area. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to: (1) rescind the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement and especially its mandatory union hiring hall formula; (2) prohibit the expansion of this Construction Tendering Agreement or other like agreements to other Saskatchewan Crown corporations or to other government departments; and (3) prohibit the expansion of this agreement or other like agreements to other government-funded construction projects with local health districts, school boards, municipal councils, or other joint venture partners in Saskatchewan.

The signatures come from primarily the Kindersley area, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to table this.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to bring forward a petition today from names all throughout Saskatchewan, several of course being from constituencies right here in Regina though. And it is in regards to the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

And, Mr. Speaker, the signatures, the names that I have here today, are from . . . a lot from Esterhazy, Whitewood, Regina, Grenfell — quite a few from Grenfell — all throughout the south-west part of Saskatchewan; Gainsborough, and as I said before, many from Regina Elphinstone and Regina Albert South. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, once again I rise today to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows,

Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Regina and they're from Moose Jaw; they're from Estevan; they're from all throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to present this petition today.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from numerous communities throughout southern Saskatchewan.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions also from names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed these petitions are from Craik, Moose Jaw, Regina, and throughout the province. I so present.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are primarily from Moose Jaw and Regina.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to present petitions of many names from people throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

This petition is signed by many people in the Bienfait area as well as Regina.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows,

Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed the petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from Kipling, Windthorst, Estevan, and other centres.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to present petitions of behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reverse the decision to raise SaskPower rates and freeze any further utility rates until a three-party utility review committee is in place in order to debate, review, and revise any utility rate increase in the future in order to restore fairness to the utility rate process in the province of Saskatchewan.

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

These petitions come from the Dysart-Cupar area of the province, Mr. Speaker; Regina, Lipton, Lestock, Blaine Lake, Meadow Lake, Makwa in the north-west, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition dealing with SaskPower rates. And I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be please to reverse the decision to raise SaskPower rates and freeze any further utility rates until a three-party review committee is in place in order to debate, review, and revise any utility rate increases in the future in order to restore fairness to the utility rate process in the province of Saskatchewan.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And these come from Val Marie and from the city of Swift Current.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have today, Mr. Speaker, a new petition that hasn't before been presented, but I think it will be self-explanatory, so I'll simply read it to you.

Now that despite how busy the Cypress Lodge kitchen presently there is a proposal to close the kitchen facility and have all meals brought in from the Maple Creek Hospital kitchen. That the citizens of Maple Creek and surrounding area feel closing the Cypress Lodge kitchen services is not a decision based on common sense or principle.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to halt this absurd proposal before it is implemented.

Now these come mostly from the town of Maple Creek, but a

good many from the surrounding area and from surrounding villages that also have people in the lodge at the present time. I'm happy to present these on behalf of those people from my constituency, Mr. Speaker.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reverse the decision to raise SaskPower rates; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to challenge the implementation of Bill C-68, the federal firearms legislation.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 14 ask the government the following question:

Regarding child protection services in Saskatchewan: how many children between the ages of birth to 16 years are under the care of the Department of Social Services; how many child protection workers are presently employed by the Department of Social Services; and what is the average case-load for a child protection worker in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Tuesday next ask the government the following question:

Regarding the Executive Council's order of September 6, 1995 authorizing the Crown Investments Corporation to borrow \$100 million: (1) for what specific purposes was this borrowing authorized; (2) will the purpose or purposes behind this borrowing help create any jobs, and if so, how many; (3) why was this borrowing over and above what the Department of Finance had anticipated for the Crown Investments Corporation in the 1995-96 budget; and (4) what were the terms of the financing obtained?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and to all members of the House, guests, Mr. Speaker, that will be familiar to you. These are 15 adult students from the city of Moose Jaw. They are involved in the English as a second language course, Mr. Speaker.

These adult students will have come to us from literally all corners of the world and from other parts of Canada. In many ways these are, Mr. Speaker, our newest pioneers. They are, Mr. Speaker, taking their course under the auspices of the

Moose Jaw Multicultural Council. The council in Moose Jaw does some very important work with immigrants and newcomers to our city, our province, and our country.

Today, Mr. Speaker, these students are accompanied by Mr. Dean Kush, Ms. Monique England, and Mr. Darryl Peacock. I'd invite all members to welcome these students to our legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you, I want to introduce to the members of the Assembly this afternoon situated in the far gallery my daughter, Corinne, who has come to watch the proceedings this afternoon, and I wish everyone to make her welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Congratulations to Thomson Meats

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are many examples of jobs being created in Saskatchewan through exports. That is why it is important to develop our province's export potential as outlined in the *Partnership for Growth* strategy. Just last week we heard the member from Saskatoon Sutherland tell us about Shuttlecraft International and how it blossomed into a successful company with \$2 million in sales a year.

Thomson Meats of Melfort is also included in a large group of Saskatchewan businesses that are taking advantages of new opportunities and growth. Thomson Meats got its start in 1960, when a small butcher shop was opened. The company moved to Melfort in 1982 and the plant expanded in 1986. In an effort to promote expansion, diversification, and growth into new markets, the company went public on the Alberta Stock Exchange in 1994.

Mr. Speaker, this year's sales are expected to increase by 230 per cent over last year. Thomson Meats has undergone an expansion that will increase its production capacity as it seeks out new markets in the Pacific Rim, such as Korea.

Congratulations to the Thomson family for having the confidence to invest in Saskatchewan, for producing top-grade meat products, and for creating new employment in rural Saskatchewan.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities Convention

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to welcome the 1,500-plus delegates to Regina for the 91st annual convention of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural

Municipalities. I was a councillor for the RM (rural municipality) of Saltcoats for seven years then served another seven years as the reeve. So I have many of my friends and former colleagues at the convention. I know they are dealing with many trying issues and face a challenging year ahead.

I hope the provincial government takes the time to listen to the concerns of the delegates. After 91 years of regular meetings, SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) delegates of the past have dealt with countless complex issues. The provincial government would do well to draw from a tremendous amount of wisdom and experience among the current delegates.

I ask that all the members of this Assembly join me in welcoming SARM delegates to Regina. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Maple Syrup

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can remember, and I suspect that you can too, that once upon a time in Saskatchewan one of the first signs of spring was the arrival in our home towns of maple syrup — maple syrup in those tall, rectangular cans. The syrup was doubly sweet, first because it was a once a year treat, and secondly, because it came from the mysterious far East of Ontario and Quebec — Central Canada bestowing its blessing on those of us on the bald-headed prairie.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have good news for those of us who are maple sugar nostalgia buffs. Right here in Saskatchewan we are beginning to tap our own trees, collect our own sap, and, wonder of wonders, manufacture our own finished product.

I'm not quite ready to say that this new industry is the final proof of the success of our efforts at economic diversification, but I do think that in a small way the fact that some Saskatchewan people are successfully doing what most would think is impossible is a symbol of the Saskatchewan way we so proudly boast of.

A group in Broadview tapped about 4,000 Manitoba maples in the Qu'Appelle Valley near Marieval and produced a product labelled "Prairie Valley Maple Syrup;" in Cumberland House a group is marketing "Witches Wand Maple Syrup," made from the native maple trees; and the PFRA (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration) centre in Indian Head is actively promoting maple syrup production on the Prairies through research and workshops.

In ways large and small, Mr. Speaker, we are taking back our economic destiny from central Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Potential Federal Jobs Transfer

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, members of the official opposition have recently met with the national Health and

Welfare union, Public Service Alliance of Canada, and we share the concerns about the potential transfer of jobs from Regina to Winnipeg. We believe this is not in the best interest of Saskatchewan people and may further erode services available to the people in this province.

To outline our concerns and those of our constituents, we have written a letter to the Hon. Ralph Goodale which I'll table at this time. Today we join to express our concern and to publicly support the efforts of the national Health and Welfare union to maintain this critical service in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Schools' Energy Conservation Program

Ms. Murrell: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, three school divisions in the Wilkie region of my constituency are in the second year of a three-year project that has already saved them \$60,000 and will further reduce their expenses in the third year and into the future. This energy conservation project is one based on a series of small, common sense activities which is leading to large savings as well as setting an example for others. The Wilkie School Division, St. Peter's School Division and St. George's School Division are taking part in the project called Destination Conservation. The program is the creation of the Saskatchewan Environmental Society which is dedicated to helping groups save money by protecting the environment. SaskPower, Petro-Canada, Estevan Coal, and Prairie Coal all contributed to the start-up costs.

The teachers and students began simply; they turned down the thermostats and adjusted lighting levels. In the second year, they introduced state of the art lighting and heat monitoring equipment. The savings from the first two years will be reinvested in further energy retrofits.

As Ray Johnson, director of the Wilkie School Division said, the project would not have worked without the enthusiastic support of the students, teachers, and custodial staff. I join him in congratulating all involved in this project, which saves both money and the environment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Training Program at 15 Wing Moose Jaw

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform members of this House about recent changes to the federal programs that will benefit the people of Moose Jaw and district.

After several years of defence cuts, I am pleased to say that some of the downsizing will bring more jobs to Saskatchewan. This employment will provide direct and indirect benefits to the people of Thunder Creek and Moose Jaw.

Last year the department of National Defence retired the CF-5 fighter aircraft in a cost-cutting move. The CF-5 was used for fighter lead-in training for pilots moving from basic training to service in Canada's state of the art fleet of CF-18 fighter

aircraft.

Mr. Speaker, with the retirement of the CF-5, the department of National Defence will now be conducting this fighter lead-in training on Tudor aircraft at 15 Wing in Moose Jaw instead of in Cold Lake, Alberta.

The moving of this program will bring six additional instructors and will graduate some 24 students per year. The moving of these jobs to Saskatchewan will help save costs. It's also a tribute to the quality of training provided at 15 Wing Moose Jaw.

Mr. Speaker, over the last several years, several military officials from NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) member countries have also visited Moose Jaw to consider it as a site for both basic as well as advanced air training for member countries.

The moving of the fighter lead-in training from Alberta to Moose Jaw will surely improve the odds of Saskatchewan eventually becoming a pilot training centre for other NATO countries. At a time when the military is scaling back, it's positive to know that Saskatchewan is getting programs rather than losing them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Shared Services in Saskatchewan's Rural Municipalities

Mr. Jess: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The discussion over shared services in Saskatchewan's rural municipalities will continue throughout the province. And while that is taking place, there is a community in my riding which is quietly taking advantage of consolidating services into one facilities, and everyone is overjoyed at what is taking place.

How can the community of Maymont with a population of 180 people build a facility that cost \$3 million? The answer is simple. Smart economics, smart planning, and a caring community; not to mention fund-raising projects that included bingos, bake sales, and bred cattle auctions.

Maymont has a new facility that houses a hockey arena, kindergarten to grade 12 school, doctors' rooms, town office, seniors' centre, and regional library.

By having all these services under one roof the community is setting an excellent example of cost efficiency, and the space provided in the facility is being used to its maximum potential.

The rink fits in nicely with the schools' athletic program and a classroom is used as a snack room for the hockey games after school hours. And those are just two examples.

Congratulations to everyone who helped with this project to be brought to its completion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Crown Construction Tendering Agreement

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is to the minister responsible for Sask Water. On Wednesday, January 13, 1995, the Sask Water Corporation opened tenders for two contracts regarding the installation of materials for one phase of the Wakaw-Humboldt regional water supply system. The contracts were instructed to bid both contracts using union labour. The lowest total price for both contracts using union labour was approximately 30 per cent higher than the total cost for both contracts using non-union labour. This equates to an addition of about \$1.6 million on this phase of the project alone.

Mr. Speaker, last week the minister challenged me to table figures that I am pleased to do so today. Mr. Speaker, will the minister confirm that the CCTA (Crown Construction Tendering Agreement) will cost taxpayers an extra \$1.6 million just for this phase of the project?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question. I cannot confirm or deny the assertion he makes today. The tenders for the Wakaw-Humboldt pipeline in fact were tendered. They've been awarded, at least for a section of the pipeline, and they were advertised under the Crown construction tendering policy and the low bidder received the contract.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, I understand that the remaining two tenders for this project were opened two weeks ago. Once again these tenders were subject to the requirements of the CCTA. As I outlined earlier, this has added 30 per cent to the first phase of this project.

Mr. Speaker, the extra cost will result in the CCTA costing these two sections of the pipeline an additional million dollars. Will the minister confirm that the CCTA bidding requirements will cost Saskatchewan taxpayers in excess of two and a half million extra for this entire project?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Mr. Speaker, we'll not confirm those figures that the member is using in the House today. He has no model or way of documenting, that by use of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement, that the contracts actually cost any more than they would without the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

The other spreads on the Wakaw-Humboldt pipeline will be tendered in accordance with the Crown construction tendering policy. We believe that there will be good quality work done and the contracts are awarded to the low bidder.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, contrary to the minister's denials, estimates range from 17 to 30 per cent that we documented today. The Saskatchewan Construction Association believes that in '95 there were approximately \$575 million in Crown construction projects that would fall under CCTA. Even if we use NDP (New Democratic Party) math, we can see that this agreement is costing taxpayers anywhere from 97 million to \$172 million each and every year.

Mr. Speaker, how can the minister justify to the people of Saskatchewan this waste of hard-earned taxpayers' money?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I point out to the hon. member that over many, many years in Saskatchewan, whether it was a Conservative administration or whether it was a Liberal administration or New Democrats, there have always been tendering policies when it comes to work that's associated with government, either executive government or with Crown corporations. And some of those policies have served us well. I believe that the current program serves us well, which we continue to review to make our tendering practices the best they can possibly be, taking into consideration Saskatchewan workers, Saskatchewan content, and good quality of work.

And we believe the figures that the hon. member uses are not by any scientific model that he puts those in place. He's making assertions that I think are misleading in terms of quality work being done by Saskatchewan people for Crown construction jobs within this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Video Lottery Terminal Revenue Sharing

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Municipal Government. Mr. Speaker, the 2,000 delegates attending this week's SARM convention are also keeping a close eye on this government to see whether they will keep a promise to direct 10 per cent of VLT (video lottery terminal) revenues to our communities. The Minister of Municipal Government indicated yesterday that her government intends to break this promise and these funds will be directed into General Revenue Fund because, and I quote, "It doesn't matter which pot the money is in."

Well, Mr. Speaker, our community leaders care which pot the money is in. They are counting on these funds to provide more services or to lower their mill rates.

Will the minister explain why she uses the cost of the 9-1-1 system as the reason for not keeping this promise when in fact this had nothing whatsoever to do with the promise of VLT funding for our cities, towns, villages, and RMs?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to have the opportunity to answer that question. And I'm glad that in his opening statement the member opposite referred to the wisdom

and experience to be found amongst the delegates of the SARM convention. And having been a reeve and councillor myself for 12 years, I try to bring that same wisdom and experience to bear on dealing with his questions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, the answer that I gave yesterday still holds. And it is that we have used the money . . . well, are dedicating the money to health, education, and social services in this province — our priorities, the people of Saskatchewan's priorities. And it's as a result of cut-backs from the federal government that we need that money, and all the dollars we can find, to sustain the level of services in rural Saskatchewan and in all communities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this House I questioned the Minister of Municipal Government about her government's intentions regarding amalgamation. The minister once again indicated there is no top-down plan, but added, and I quote:

(The government wants) to help municipalities . . . be as strong as they can be.

(And) if we can't . . . we will come (to) the 21st century stronger, one way or another.

Does this mean the minister is prepared to take tougher steps to force — and I reiterate force — amalgamation if municipal governments will not play by this government's rules?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, first of all, may I say that this government doesn't have any rules. And this is not a game. This is not a game. This is serious. This is about the future capacity of rural Saskatchewan to respond to the challenges brought upon them by the withdrawal from the federal Liberals of the Crow payment, of transportation responsibility, of responsibility in housing, a number of areas where the federal government has done funding and they're not doing it now. This is as a result of that. We are using our best efforts to make sure that we can sustain the quality of our health, education, and social systems in this province. And you should be applauding that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Wildlife Damage Compensation

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of the Environment. Mr. Minister, the deer population has become a very serious and costly problem for farmers throughout all of Saskatchewan. Deer are causing thousands of dollars of damage to unharvested crops, stored grain, and feed supplies. And your government has no plan in place to deal with this problem. You refuse to even consider any kind of compensation plan. Mr. Minister, the

deer belong to the Crown, and the Crown's management plan has led to the current problems of overpopulation. Yet you refuse to accept any financial responsibility.

Mr. Minister, will you implement a compensation plan for those farmers who have had their crops and feed supplies destroyed by deer this winter?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the dear member for the deer question. Certainly it is no secret that there is problems in rural Saskatchewan regarding conflict between landowners and wildlife populations.

The member opposite indicated that we had no plan. Well for the member's information, we have spent over \$200,000 working with landowners in prevention programs, from the use of Bloodmeal to fencing to intercept feeding and a number of other programs. So we continue to work with landowners and will continue to do so until this winter is over.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, your \$200,000 doesn't keep the deer away from the people's feed supplies and from their unharvested grains. It's costing them thousands and thousands of dollars and you aren't providing any compensation to them.

In Manitoba, crop insurance covers 75 per cent of the wildlife damages to a maximum of \$7,500 per quarter — that's per quarter. In Alberta, they cover 80 per cent of the losses up to \$13,000. But just like the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) program, Saskatchewan farmers are left out in the cold with no coverage compared to our neighbouring provinces.

Mr. Minister, why do you refuse to deal with this issue? Why have you no plans in place to compensate farmers for the losses they are suffering this winter from deer depredation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again I thank the hon. member for the question. We are working with landowners, and in a number of areas; in addition to what I mentioned, we are circulating a questionnaire to over 1,500 farmers in south-east Saskatchewan to get their input as to how we can better design programs. We've already decided that we will open the season earlier next year for non-trophy animals and we're also looking at a permanent compensation program in cooperation with SARM and landowners.

Unlike the opposition, we are working with landowners and groups like SARM and the wildlife federation to come up with a permanent, long-term program to deal with these matters. And as far as Manitoba and Alberta goes, the farmers are not satisfied with the programs in those provinces either.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Patronage Appointments

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In spite of the NDP terrible job creation record, there are a few jobs being created in

Saskatchewan. In fact some NDP supporters wind up getting more than one job, Mr. Speaker. Take Garf Stevenson for example. First he gets \$500 a day to figure out how to delay health board elections. Then he gets appointed chairman of the Regina Health Board. And if that's not enough, he has just been re-appointed and had his term extended on the SaskTel board.

To the Minister responsible for SaskTel: Madam Minister, why is it necessary to give so many patronage appointments to Garf Stevenson? In fact why is it necessary to load up SaskTel with NDP patronage appointments in the first place?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Let me respond to the member for what I think is quite an unfair treatment of a very distinguished Saskatchewan citizen. This is someone who has headed Canada's largest . . . this is someone who with considerable success is head of Canada's largest grain trading organization. This is a distinguished son of Saskatchewan who members opposite, Mr. Speaker, are maligning.

I would have thought that members opposite would want to temper their comments somewhat when made in here when they're talking about someone such as Garf Stevenson who has no option to respond. We are proud that Garf Stevenson is able to lend his services to as many projects as he has.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Minister, I'm glad that somebody over there finally decided that maybe you should answer the question because there really wasn't a good answer for it. I know that, and it's pretty tough when you have to defend a man that has only one distinguishing characteristic for all of the three jobs that he's got, and that is that he has an NDP Party card. And it's pretty tough to defend that.

So let's carry this a bit a bit further, minister. Let's look at a couple of other names on this list like Sherry Leach, former member of *The Commonwealth* editorial board. I wonder what that is. Jim Scharfstein, the minister's business manager in the 1991 election, the other minister of SaskTel.

And prior to 1991's election, the Premier promised to eliminate patronage positions, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Mr. Premier, in the 1991 election platform, the democratic reform package, the Premier promised to ensure that appointments to Crown corporation boards and commissions would be made on the basis of merit and not on the basis of politics.

Mr. Speaker, my question is this: when are you going to fulfil that promise, Madam Minister? When are you going to make good on your word to end this kind of outrageous patronage appointments?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, what Mr. Stevenson was not, he was not an admirer of the former administration of which — two at least — some members opposite were a part. In that I may say he was joined by a lot of Saskatchewan people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — So if you're going to condemn Garf Stevenson for not being an admirer of that administration, then you're going to condemn a lot of Saskatchewan people.

Let me say with respect to the comment of the now Premier with respect to the public service, what he said was we would eliminate patronage within the public service and we have done that. And the kind of shameful activities which went on when members opposite were in office has been eliminated.

I am amazed that members opposite actually have the gall to raise the question of patronage in the public service. When members opposite, Mr. Speaker, were finished with the public service of Saskatchewan, it was nearly decimated. We have restored it, and we have restored the integrity and professionalism of the public service, and for that we are very proud.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, the thing that is shameful in this province is the way that this government would promise to do things better, promise to do things differently and then come right back and break those promises one right after the other.

Mr. Speaker, in just a few minutes my colleague, the member from Rosthern, will introduce legislation to establish an all-party committee to review the appointment of government boards and commissions. We think this would be an appropriate way to address this issue and fulfil your commitment to end political patronage.

Mr. Speaker, we ask the Madam Minister, or Mr. Minister, whichever the case might be, whichever one wants to answer the question, will your government support this legislation and straighten this mess out once and for all?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Let me just give a little advice to members opposite. Patronage is not the long suit of the Conservative Party. I think I'd pick another issue if I were you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gross Revenue Insurance Program Overpayments

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture has stated repeatedly over the past week that he will not honour a promise to the farmers of Saskatchewan. The minister has said that GRIP wind-up bills will have to be paid in spite of the promises to the contrary from his government. The minister stated on March 1 in this House, and I quote:

. . . and those people who have not paid their bills, to get their interest waived, it doesn't make any sense. It's not fair; the rules are there.

Would the minister confirm that the rules have not changed or he has not changed his mind?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in answering the member's question, I will again repeat that the rules are in place. If people have a problem with repaying their overpayment, then they should contact the corporation to see what options are available to them and to make arrangements for repayment.

But I just want to add, Mr. Speaker, that the member's credibility in this thing is still waning. If he wants the taxpayers of Saskatchewan to pick up the \$12 million in overpayment, I'll tell you when we sat down to review the Agriculture budget, there was a number of things that we would have been erasing if this member gets his way — things like 4-H programs, things like SCIC (Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation), and the list will go on and on. I can provide a list.

If you want that \$12 million cut, Mr. Member, I ask you, Mr. Speaker, I ask you to ask the member which ones he would cut in agriculture.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm a little surprised by the minister's response because it is my understanding that he has personally stepped in and examined at least one individual's concerns about his GRIP bill and has actually cancelled the farmer's bill. For his actions, I congratulate the minister for that.

Handling the situation on a case-by-case basis is what should have occurred from the outset. Would the minister confirm that he is now prepared to examine each and every bill on an individual basis?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I said the other day that the member's credibility was waning, and it's just dived off the scale.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that it is not true. I can tell you that the process is in place; that the minister does not, will not get involved in individual cases. And the member probably knows that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have described in the House over the past few days the anxiety and financial stress that this government has placed on the farmers of Saskatchewan because they refuse to honour that promise.

As a result we have a widow who has no idea where she will find the money to pay the bill. We have young farmers who will not be able to properly meet the needs of their children, and many others who simply do not have the financial means to pay these bills.

Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Agriculture not feel it is appropriate that he take the same approach with each farmer who received the bill as he did with the one individual?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would like to do is to ask the member to table this alleged interference. Please, would he do that, and then maybe we can get on with clarifying this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hear the minister saying that he has not stepped in, Mr. Speaker, and we have information to the contrary and I'd be happy to table that, Mr. Speaker.

I'm wondering what message is the minister opposite sending to the farmers of this province whom he refuses to acknowledge their individual problems and does step in to intervene with one particular farmer.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I do not find this funny, okay. I'll tell you the credibility of that member and his accusation without tabling a document is nothing short of . . .

An Hon. Member: — Scandalous.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Member — short of scandalous.

I have not interfered in a case. And for him to grab cheap headlines, first of all, on the back of a woman who has suffered a loss in her family, is cheap and disgusting; and secondly, to come forward with this again is cheap and disgusting.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, I will be happy to convey your messages back to the people that have asked, including this widow who has asked me to bring her concerns to this House. And I'd be happy to convey your message back that it's disgusting that I do so, Mr. Minister.

I would like to at this time table, Mr. Speaker, the document from the individual farmer for your perusal. And I will ask the minister once more, will he commit to individually talking to these producers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, for the umpteenth thousandth time, the member knows what the rules of the program are; the member knows that it is not possible for any one person to review the documents. It's ludicrous.

So I say to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, just start looking to the future. The past is gone; start looking to the future.

We've got a crop insurance program that we must maintain in this province. We've had 10 meetings around this province trying to . . . we're talking to farmers to build a better program. I'd ask the member to get on the bandwagon with trying to build a better crop insurance program, and get off the bandwagon of having his head buried in the past in the GRIP program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Casino Regina Tenders

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, the cynicism prevails throughout Saskatchewan, and my question this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is for the minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, virtually since the Regina casino project was announced, its tendering process has been awash in controversy. The most recent reports about the labour relations with employees is another example. Some contracts have been given out without tendering process as was the case with the touring contract awarded to a Manitoba company. And in other cases it appears superior local bids were not accepted, as was the case with the restaurant contract where a reputable local company put in a far lower bid but was still rejected in favour of a Manitoba company. And in both of these cases concerns have been raised subsequently about these Manitoba companies.

My question to the minister, Mr. Speaker, is why the people of this province do not have a right to know the details contained in these contracts. And would the minister not agree that when public money is used by the government, the taxpayers have a right to know what's in these contracts?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to thank the member for his question.

It's too bad that this is the only response that the members on the opposite side are able to have to success; that 500 jobs in a successful business enterprise don't seem to be at the top of your mind when you're discussing these issues.

I was pleased to hear you say that you support the labour laws, and we're concerned that they be followed. I think that's important to note.

I will mention that when it comes to the tendering, one of the big concerns here was to bring people from out of the province. And the only people who had the experience in the industry with the casino touring were the Mr. Canada Tours. Now over the long run there's many small operators in Saskatchewan who are starting to get involved in bringing people in from other areas. They may develop that expertise, and over a time we'll look what happens at the end of this contract as we move into another one. But people generally in the business community thought this was a good business decision to go with, someone with experience.

The restaurant was tendered. There was professional advice in

the reviewing of that tender. And the successful applicant received the tender.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I would just like to reiterate my question to the minister responsible for Gaming. When public money is used by the government, do the taxpayers not have the right to know what's in these contracts, Mr. Speaker. That was my question. I didn't hear the answer to that.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just mention that some information requests that came through were presented to the conflict of . . . or to the Information Commissioner and the ruling was that they contain sensitive business information and therefore could not be made public.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 11 — An Act to amend The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act (Appointments Review Committee/"ARC")

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill to amend The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act (Appointments Review Committee) be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 12 — An Act to amend The Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act and to enact consequential amendments

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move An Act to amend The Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act and to enact related amendments be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 13 — An Act to amend The Department of Social Services Act

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill entitled The Department of Social Services Act be moved a first time.

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

Bill No. 14 — An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Income Plan Act

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill entitled The Saskatchewan Income Plan Act be introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and ordered to be

read a second time at the next sitting.

**Bill No. 15 — An Act to amend The
Child and Family Services Act**

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill to amend The Child and Family Services Act now be introduced and read a first time.

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

Bill No. 16 — An Act to amend The Highway Traffic Act

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill to amend The Highway Traffic Act be now introduced and read the first time.

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

**Bill No. 17 — An Act to amend certain Acts
respecting Highways and Vehicles**

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I move the Bill respecting Highways and Vehicles be now introduced and read the first time.

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

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

Ms. Lorje: — I wish to obtain a ruling from the Speaker.

The Speaker: — What is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Ms. Lorje: — In statements by members, Mr. Speaker, the member from Melfort-Tisdale, while making a statement about jobs being moved from Regina to Winnipeg, tabled a letter to the Hon. Ralph Goodale, federal Minister of Agriculture. It was my understanding that statements by members were exactly that, and no more. And I would like you to rule on whether or not private members could or should table documents during those statements.

The Speaker: — Does anyone else wish to speak to the point of order?

Then if I've heard the member's point of order, I will take it under consideration and bring a ruling back to the House at the earliest convenient time.

Why is the member on her feet?

Ms. Stanger: — To introduce a guest, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the House a constituent of mine and a former MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and a former cabinet minister in the former Blakeney government. I'd like everyone in the House to welcome Bob Long, sitting at the back. And please enjoy the proceedings.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Questions no. 3 and 4, convert.

The Speaker: — Converted to motions for return (debatable).

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Opposition to Amalgamation of Rural Municipalities

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, at the end of my presentation I will be tabling my motion.

Mr. Speaker, this government continues to talk about bringing Saskatchewan into the 21st century, preparing for the new century, they say, making choices for today and tomorrow. In one sense I can't fault them for what they say; they truly are making choices. Unfortunately they are making choices without talking to the very people who will be most affected by their short-sighted decisions.

Mr. Speaker, it is because of this government's unilateral decision making that I am obliged to address the House today. I am talking about forced amalgamation for municipal governments, Mr. Speaker. Although this government makes so many one-sided decisions I can see how someone can become confused.

Municipalities are worried because this government is hiding the blueprint for amalgamation under a pile of empty promises. I am not against rural amalgamation, Mr. Speaker. If amalgamation promotes the sharing of services and the sharing of ideas and resources, then I support it strongly.

But what this government doesn't realize or won't admit is that for amalgamation to work it must be a cooperative process. All changes have to be voluntary. The government needs to figure out that reorganization must be driven from the ground up or it just won't work.

Changes made now in haste without input and consultation will be a detriment to rural Saskatchewan for many years. Rural governments and rural people will suffer the consequences of decisions made by urban bureaucrats who in most cases have no knowledge of rural Saskatchewan. Just because the population has dropped in rural Saskatchewan doesn't mean the need for services has. Roads still need maintenance for transporting our products to market, so the same attention is

needed.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities and communities are not stuck in the past; they know that money is tight and they know they have to buckle down to prevent the debt from consuming our province. Yes, they know that well, Mr. Speaker, because for many years they have had to cope with the financial offloading by the provincial government. In the past eight years rural municipalities have suffered a 36 per cent drop in revenue sharing. This NDP government has cut municipal transfers with a vengeance. And yet during this time, rural municipalities raised their mill rate only 10.8 per cent and managed to maintain services even while inflation rose by 34 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, unlike the province, municipalities aren't allowed to deficit budget. So these municipal governments have become skilled axe men and they have chiselled away as much as possible without destroying their communities. Imagine their frustration though, Mr. Speaker, when the government tells them to get ready for cuts and then increases the size of its own cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier and his sheep need to start leading by example. While the Premier is speaking out one side of his mouth telling municipalities to buck up for cuts and the other side of his mouth is busy creating cabinet posts and hiring expensive staff to run non-departments, what's even more frustrating is that the costs of municipal government are a mere fraction of the costs incurred by his government.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are leading the public to believe that amalgamating rural municipalities would put money in taxpayers' pockets. They are trying to convince people that switching to a county system like Alberta's would be good for our pocket books. But a report published in the 1995 edition of *The Rural Councillor* showed that in Alberta the cost per capita for municipal governments is \$129.24 per annum. Right now in Saskatchewan the cost is \$117.12, or \$12 less per capita. Why would we move to a system that was more expensive to run, Mr. Speaker?

Similarly, in Manitoba the provincial government completed a study to see if amalgamating school boards would save money. That study showed no significant savings would occur if amalgamation took place. Has this government even done such research, Mr. Speaker? If the reaction from municipalities is any indication, I highly doubt it.

To bring back this to an analogy the member's opposite can understand, I'll quote from the Premier himself. He recently told SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) that he would never consider amalgamating the prairie provinces because, and I quote: I believe strongly the closer a government is to the people the better that government is.

Well those were impressive words, Mr. Speaker; too bad he doesn't stand by them. If he did, he would understand why municipalities are dead set against forced amalgamation. Of course this government is notorious for not keeping its word. Is it any wonder that municipalities are living in a state of fear after they watch this same government viciously tear down the

health system in rural Saskatchewan?

Mr. Speaker, I was a reeve during the so-called health reform, and back then they talked about holding consultation with communities too. I, along with many other municipal representatives, thought the government actually wanted our input. But before the process was finished, the former Health minister brought in changes she had planned all along.

But I won't let myself be fooled again, and we will do whatever it takes to make sure this government doesn't get away with another farce like their health care reform. We will not let this government balance its books on the back of rural municipalities, and we will not stand by while this government systematically destroys rural life because I truly believe that rural life is still the lifeblood of Saskatchewan.

I can understand why this government would look to other provinces for answers, but before they jump on someone's bandwagon, they should hold up a mirror and take a good look at what Saskatchewan has to offer.

(1430)

Our province doesn't have the large cities of Ontario, Alberta, or even Manitoba. We are still a highly agricultural province. We have almost half of the arable land in Canada, and yet we house only four per cent of the population. That makes us unique, Mr. Speaker. Instead of cramming municipalities into an awkwardly fitted model from another province, this government should be creating its own model, a balanced model that incorporates cost effectiveness with natural occurring patterns of rural life. Most importantly, the designers of this Saskatchewan-based model should be municipalities themselves.

Mr. Speaker, the 298 RMs and the 549 urban municipalities are a fundamental part of this province. If these small urban municipalities want to join rural municipalities or share services, which I believe they already are doing, we fully support this. Because RMs are the foundation on which rural Saskatchewan is built, no other province has the same emphasis on communities that Saskatchewan does. Counties and regional municipalities in other provinces don't play the same role as our municipalities.

Our RMs provide the focus for rural life. They boast volunteer groups, charities, community leagues, crime-watch programs, sports and recreation, agricultural societies, and 4-H clubs. They provide rural people with a support system, with a higher quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, rural Saskatchewan is in trouble right now. On the government side of the House, we see a large contingent of members from the major centres. In a 19-member cabinet, we see only five representatives from rural areas, and those members are voiceless, particularly when they are faced with a top-down governance by professional politicians.

So who is speaking up for rural people, Mr. Speaker, if not the government? I can assure you that we as official opposition are

trying to be heard, but we are 10 voices in a room full of urban noise, and that's not easy to be heard. Mr. Speaker, I implore the government to listen to us. And I know they will want to turn a deaf ear to our pleas because we are opposition, and they are definitely not supposed to agree with us.

But this issue, Mr. Speaker, is too important to be trivialized in a political game. It should not be about winning or losing political a contest. If it does become a competition, the people in rural Saskatchewan will lose. But if this government truly cares about the people of Saskatchewan, the members opposite will not jump down my throat about listening to my message. Instead they will accept my words on behalf of the people of rural Saskatchewan who do not have a chance to talk to them directly. And if the government truly has the people's best interests at heart, they will re-examine rural amalgamation, and they will open up the discussion to every person in Saskatchewan.

This is what being in government is about, Mr. Speaker, and I just want to close by asking the government one question. What is the hurry? The amount of money to be saved is minimal at best, but the damaged caused by amalgamation could affect this province for years to come. It's worth thinking about.

Mr. Speaker, I am tabling this motion, seconded by the member for Wood River:

That this Assembly denounce any actions the government may be planning concerning amalgamation of rural municipalities, particularly because, as this Assembly is aware, municipalities have expressed vehement opposition to amalgamation done without extensive consultation with all parties that may be affected by these plans.

I so move.

Mr. McPherson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to join into the debate today and especially happy to second the motion put forward by the member from Saltcoats. Since I've come to know the member from Saltcoats as a colleague, I have learnt more about rural municipal government than I've ever heard from any of the people in the government benches, Mr. Speaker, and I'm proud and honoured that we would have someone so knowledgeable on local governments and rural municipalities as we do in our own caucus, Mr. Speaker.

What I have noticed also are the calls that I get in my constituency office, at home on the weekends, in the legislative office, from the reeves and the councillors. If you take a look at the riding I represent, I would have somewhere around 25 rural municipalities and about 25 towns or villages, and so we get a number of calls. Some of the members signalling to me opposite wouldn't understand this, Mr. Speaker, because they of course don't have any relationship to the rural municipal governments at all.

But you know the number of calls that we get, one thing has become clear because the message is the same all the time. They ask a few things. Firstly, they ask that the downloading stop. You can't continuously have downloading from your

provincial government on to the backs of the school boards, the health boards, the towns, the villages, and the RMs.

At some point we've got to come to grips with the fact that the people are paying taxes so that they can enjoy a level of service, even out in the rural areas. Not all services are for Saskatoon and Regina and Moose Jaw of course, Mr. Speaker. But in fact we do need services out in these rural areas and it's about time that I think we listened . . . I think the government listened to some of these local governments and start to hear them out. Year after year you can't have downloading and expect to have any sort of service out there.

Another thing that you hear continuously from them . . . and you would know that they're concerns are valid if you would just drive out to rural Saskatchewan, you know. And the members over there are heckling and laughing, but I'll even lend you a vehicle if you would just drive out and see what these people are dealing with out there. The roads, the roads are in just absolutely terrible shape. Why? Well it comes back to funding. You know everything that that government does comes back to funding — everything. The bottom line is I think we could run this province with five accountants, and I'm not so sure we aren't.

Gravel. When was the last time that there was extra money in a budget put forward by the government opposite that allowed for extra gravelling? It's one thing for them to complain about, you know, changes in transportation, even though I'm not so sure that they know anything of what they talk. But, in fact, why don't you do something about the roads?

You have a former minister of the Blakeney government in the House today, and I know that minister used to be in charge of Highways and Transportation, so I would ask, if you have a little time later, could you take the former minister and just go and hear from . . . his advice because I'm sure that he doesn't agree with what the government is doing today either. I'm sure that back in the '70s when he was the minister, there weren't these continual cuts to the highways and to the gravelling and to the RMs that . . . otherwise where did these roads come from?

You talk about, you know, you talk about having no money today, and yet we look at what happened over the years in Saskatchewan. We haven't been a wealthy province for 40, 50 years and built something up. They built it up in the tough years, Mr. Speaker. They built schools and hospitals and roads and highways. They did that in the tough years.

Now when everyone is living a fairly decent life . . . especially the Tories and then I'll give them some credit. There's problems there, you know, from what the Conservative government left but that doesn't mean you quit progressing. That doesn't mean you just put an end to having services out in the rural areas — hospitals or STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company) or on and on, schools. They're just cutting on a daily basis.

But getting back to RMs in particular, they're losing their funds for just basic maintenance and gravelling programs and roads as

a whole.

Another thing that they raise quite a bit is if in fact the government feels that they should involve themselves in municipal politics, has the government first of all taken control of their own problems, of their own deficits? And you know, that's an interesting question that gets raised . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I want to remind the member that the motion focuses very much, and several times the wording within, on the amalgamation. And I would ask the member to tie his remarks to the motion for the Speaker if he would, please.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And that's exactly what I'm going to do, Mr. Speaker, because the driving force behind their so-called need for amalgamation, Mr. Speaker, is savings, is dollars.

And that's the point I was trying to make. In fact it is one of doing it for financial reasons, amalgamating for financial reasons. That's why you did it in health care. There was amalgamations all throughout the health care. We couldn't have 400 boards — costly, too costly.

But do you know what I find costly? It's not just amalgamations. It's 42 political staff at two and a half million dollars, Mr. Speaker. Those are over and above what they had.

And I don't think the legislature wasn't operating at a certain level. I didn't see problems. And yet they clearly felt that they needed to have two and half . . . Do you know how many loads of gravel that would help out in rural Saskatchewan, putting on some of these roads to perhaps alleviate some of the financial stress out there?

And why, firstly, why would you think that there's a savings in bringing forward any plans of amalgamation? I have yet to see any studies done. Do you have a study? Does anybody over there have a study showing that there's big savings to the provincial government for doing this?

An Hon. Member: — We didn't say that.

Mr. McPherson: — Well sure you've said that, Mr. Member. Time and time again you're talking about your savings. Well where are they?

I think, Mr. Speaker, there are savings to be had. Just the interest on Crown tendering alone is probably more money than they've spent on local governments outside of the major centres. And I say take that money and let these local governments operate at the efficient level that they have been able to do. You have laws in place disallowing them to deficit finance. If you could only operate at the same level that some of these rural municipal governments operate at, we'd be away.

And I agree that if the Tory . . . if those same rules would have been in place for the Tories, then it would be heads up for all of us.

But getting back to this savings. I have yet to see where anyone thinks there's savings. These rural municipal governments are basically funded by local tax dollars. The amount of dollars that the provincial government puts into funding RMs is very insignificant. You probably fund more on patronage than you do on local government. So where is the savings? Firing one or two rural administrators? You know, if that's where the savings is, I could tell you where we could save a lot more — right here. And I'm going to quote from the *Leader-Post*, Regina, January 23:

The chief of staff also said some of the 42 assistants and secretaries — whose average salary is \$37,580 — are (still) being promoted and . . . receiving pay increases. (The salary ranges from \$26,000 for a junior secretary to \$62,000 for a senior ministerial assistant.)

And we've got 42 of these. Now how many jobs do you feel that you will save out in the rural areas? Like I'm not sure if you feel that you can force enough downsizing or amalgamations onto RMs that you're going to save 42 staff. Because, you know, if you were to go out and poll the people . . . They do like consulting. Of course they went out and consulted a few hundred people and say this is the driving force why we're now going to change how the government operates and what services are provided. And yet we can bring forward 70,000 signatures about saving a hospital and no, that's not consulting. No. A few hundred is far more important, so that's the way we'll go.

If you were to actually go out into rural Saskatchewan today and ask the people, would you rather have 42 staff at \$62,000 each or would you prefer some rural administrators; give us a pick; you know what they would say. They would say, leave us alone out here. We're funding our own. We're taking care of it. We're not running deficits. Why don't you people go home and take care of your own problems? You people — New Democrat government. That's what you should be doing.

The Speaker: — The member's time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1445)

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to enter into the debate today. Before I start that, I wish to say first that I'm very pleased — this is my first opportunity to enter the debate in the legislature as the member of Saskatoon Northwest — I feel very privileged to represent a constituency that is urban and rural. I'm also pleased to state too that I also live in rural Saskatchewan, just outside the community of Saskatoon, the small community of Harris.

I fully understand the changes that are taking place within the rural communities, Mr. Speaker. When I speak of communities, when I read this resolution today and when I hear what the opposition members have talked about . . . and they've used the harsh words of amalgamation. They used the harsh words of division between . . . of communities out there and not recognizing the problems are going on, not recognizing the

changes that are taking place in society in rural Saskatchewan.

I think of the community that I drive by every time I come to Regina — that being Davidson — and seeing the changes in the grain-handling system and the centralization of that grain-handling system and what that does, threefold, to our communities out there.

One, Mr. Speaker, it accelerates the removal of the local elevators and the tax base for local communities out there. That is a problem. The other one it accelerates is the question of the road system and trying to manage that into those centralized systems. And what we create within the municipal side are RMs that are faced with the problem of what is called drive-through RMs. It is not their own people within their tax base that are using the roads.

Mr. Speaker, it is people outside that community and those communities that are using those road systems, and RMs recognize that. Local, small urban communities recognize the problems. They know change is coming. They know change has already taken place. And they know there is a need for a spirit of cooperation, for communities to work together to solve their problems.

And they have come to this government with this problem. They have tried to work on a cooperative basis and many of them have done it successfully. But there are roadblocks to doing that. There are roadblocks within the system of creating that kind of spirit of cooperation. And it is this government's role trying to deal with that question, trying to make it a better system by which municipalities — urban and rural, no matter of their size — can come together to solve problems. That is the Saskatchewan way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whitmore: — But when I hear harsh words of amalgamation, when I hear harsh words of the question of division, that doesn't solve the problems — it inflames them — and it does not allow for a creative solution to the problems.

I know where municipalities are coming together to share things — the sharing of administrators, the sharing of equipment. Small urban communities asking municipalities to use their road equipment to clean their communities. The question of working together, Mr. Speaker. And at the same time, it is important to state that this government recognizes the value that these municipal elected officials have on the communities.

These people provide a great deal of volunteer time and effort to their communities, to their RMs, be it in terms of work, be it being work in terms of . . . I know of one case of an RM where the road patrol had broke down. Two farmers who were their councillors got together and worked together to fix that equipment over the winter in their shops. That's the spirit of cooperation, Mr. Speaker. And that is the direction that we need to take, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, when I see what's being talked about out

here and what a resolution does in terms of how it inflames, at the end of my talk I will present an amendment to the resolution, Mr. Speaker, at the end of my speaking, which I think captures the spirit that is out there in terms of working together. And this government has a proven record of doing that cooperation.

We brought forward a program where we would help municipalities, urban and rural, work together on projects — inter-cooperative projects, Mr. Speaker. And I would like to highlight some of those projects that are out there and why they've come forward and where those communities are, Mr. Speaker.

I think the first noted one where municipalities have come together to solve a program is in south-west Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, in the area of 9-1-1. Big time, Mr. Speaker, big time. The lists of RMs: the RM of Gull Lake, the RM of Lone Tree, the RM of Maple Creek, Mr. Speaker, the town of Shaunavon, the village of Climax, the village of Consul, the village of Golden Prairie, the village of Hodgeville; I'm just dancing over the list, Mr. Speaker. I haven't touched a tenth, but it illustrates communities coming together to work together for a common goal.

The Assiniboia district coordinated regional response system, Mr. Speaker. The town of Assiniboia; the town of Rockglen; the town of Mossbank; the RM 11, Hart Butte; RM 74, Wood River; RM 42, Willow Bunch; RM 44, Waverley. Again the spirit of cooperation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatoon planning district information system where we see a large urban and a rural coming together to work. The city of Saskatoon, the rural municipality of Corman Park, and the Saskatoon Economic Development Authority, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think one of the most noted ones that is active in west-central Saskatchewan is the west-central Saskatchewan municipal association where we have urban and rural communities coming together to work on common solutions, Mr. Speaker. It goes from Leader . . .

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

Mr. McPherson: — Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Member, put your point of order.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like you to rule on whether or not the member is being topical to the motion. I've heard much to do about emergency response systems and so on. So I'd like to hear your rule.

The Speaker: — I have been listening to the member's remarks and I've found them generally in order. I encourage all members to be very conscious of the motion and to direct your remarks accordingly.

Mr. Whitmore: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite reinforces my argument of the question of division and

opposition to change, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order, order. Now the member for Saskatoon is a veteran member and knows that it's entirely out of order to make comment on a Speaker's ruling. And I'll ask him to just avoid doing that and get on with his remarks.

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think one of the, you know, the other areas where communities are working together in terms of solving their problems is in waste management. Project of the north-east Saskatchewan regional waste collection and recycling system, including the towns of Tisdale, city of Melfort, and town of Nipawin, Mr. Speaker.

The Last Mountain waste management project, Mr. Speaker, which includes many of the villages around the Last Mountain area, the town of Strasbourg, the village of Bulyea, the RM of McKillop, the resort of Glen Harbor, and such, Mr. Speaker. Again, example of cooperation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, just one more. The project to organize a municipal government committee, Mr. Speaker, which is the area of the town of Eastend, the village of Climax, and the town of Maple Creek, and the town of Shaunavon and surrounding municipalities, Mr. Speaker. These are examples of cooperation.

And with that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to propose an amendment to the resolution, seconded by the member of Meadow Lake that:

Delete all words after Assembly and add the words: support the governments cooperative work with urban and rural municipalities to prepare for the next century by ensuring government at all levels provide effective, sustainable services within an affordable government structure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And certainly I am pleased to enter into the debate this afternoon as the member from Meadow Lake. I would also say that I will be speaking certainly against the main motion as put forward by the member from Saltcoats and as seconded by the member from Wood River, and will be speaking in support of the amendment from my good friend and member from Saskatoon Northwest. And that is to support the government's cooperative work with urban and rural municipalities to prepare us for the next century in ensuring good government at all levels.

I would like to say that certainly I believe that this is all about being positive. I think the key here is to be focusing on governments at all levels — provincial, local, RM, and even towns and cities — to be working together. I think that should be the seed of almost every decision that we make.

I do want to say that the government certainly has in its plans

absolutely no strategy or any plan at all for any forced amalgamation. The restructuring of municipalities, Mr. Speaker, will not take place unless they are initiated and supported by local government.

And it is certainly not any sort of a top-down approach by any stretch of the imagination, unlike . . . and I remember as the debates went on last year here in the Assembly and years prior, we listened and heard often from the province of New Brunswick where the Liberal provincial government there just arbitrarily downsized and created, I think it was seven districts, seven health districts if I'm not mistaken, and with very little consultation. So I find it just a bit ironic that members opposite from the Liberal opposition there are suggesting that working with local government is going to be problematic.

An Hon. Member: — I guess that's all they know.

Mr. Sonntag: — It certainly is. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I want to let you know that the department has reported through to the minister and to ourselves that a number of municipalities have actually approached the department officials for more information with respect to restructuring. And that's been certainly their own local decision.

I want to refer to a letter that was sent out — and probably most members will have seen it, including those opposite — and that is a letter sent March 1 from our Minister of Municipal Government who sent out to all the RMs and to the reeves and councillors, both urban, rural, and northern municipalities, in which she refers to the new services district Act which was referred to in the throne speech. And she outlines some of the background to that proposed new Act, and I know it's not been brought forward here, but in reference to that, she talks about and makes it very clear to all those involved that what this will be about is about cooperation between the different levels of government.

And I find it strange, in passing, Mr. Speaker, if you buy into the logic of the opposition members that suggest that local government is entirely efficient, perhaps those local governments who have marginal bottom lines would or should consider dividing their RMs into two or three or even maybe four. This logic would suggest that it makes them more efficient.

(1500)

When I listened to the member of Saltcoats who said that in Alberta — I believe it was — the cost per elected local government member was \$117, and here in Saskatchewan it's . . . or I should say, in Alberta it was 129, and here in Saskatchewan it's only 117, well again I say that logic would say, let's bring that cost down to \$50 per elected member and triple the number of RMs in Saskatchewan. I mean that seems to make good sense to me. Better yet, why not instead of suggesting . . . I suggest to our federal Liberal counterparts that the way to create efficiencies is not by cutting transfers, but let's look at doubling the number of Members of Parliament; let's look at increasing the Senators, the number of Senators in here. That would be popular, wouldn't that? This should get us

closer to a balanced national budget.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, what we've done is we've adopted a more logical approach and thus to provide a vehicle that allows for cooperation, and that vehicle will in fact be the new services district Act that I referred to earlier in the letter from the minister and certainly that was referred to in the throne speech.

Just a bit of background as well, Mr. Speaker — the average population per municipality here in Saskatchewan is less than 1,200. In Manitoba I know, as our Premier's referred to a number of times, it's over 5,400, and in Alberta it's nearly 6,900, and in British Columbia I think it's very nearly 18,000. And I see the member from Rosetown-Biggar nodding his head in agreement.

We have, we have 850 municipal governments represented by about 6,000 mayors, reeves, and councillors, Mr. Speaker. And in small urban communities there is on average one elected representative, Mr. Speaker, one elected representative for every 29 people and I certainly . . . not to suggest that, in my remarks, that anything will be imposed, but I think even when you talk to local government members . . . I know in my area up in Meadow Lake and through the different communities, Paradise Hills, St. Walburg, and the different RMs, all of them are good, common sense, logical people who recognize that something has to be done. And they realize as well that in working together with other RMs and local town councils and with our provincial government that that is in fact the way, that is in fact the way that they will accomplish more efficiencies — or greater efficiencies, I should say.

And in fact, Mr. Speaker, I want to refer you to one more fact. In some of the smaller towns and villages administrative costs take up nearly 46 per cent of the total overall expenditures. I will therefore, I will therefore again, just before I take my place, want to again take up, to second the motion by the member from Saskatoon Northwest and say that I will certainly be voting in favour of the amendment and against the main motion. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I too am delighted to join in my first debate in this legislature, and as a member, lifetime member of rural Saskatchewan, I feel it most appropriate to do so.

Growing up on a farm near Liberty has kind of kept me close to what I consider the grass roots. Maybe a little bit opposed to an acreage outside of Saskatoon, I think Liberty might be a little closer to the grass roots than that. I've also been raised in a family of people that have been on RM boards, have been reeves and councillors for many, many years and have suffered some of the consequences and some of the volunteer work that's gone on by reeves and councillors of local municipalities.

My father was a reeve, a councillor first, and a reeve for many, many years, and I know firsthand of the amount of work that he did in the most frugal way to support our local municipality — many, many hours of meetings; many, many hours of trips

across the roads; many hours of testing bridges, looking at culverts; going to SARM conventions, meeting with other councillors from across the province. So I know full well the amount of work that those folks have done. I also have a brother now that's involved with the council and is actually the councillor for the division which I farm in. I know firsthand the amount of time that he spends doing RM work and council work because then that leaves a lot more of the farm work for me to pick up on.

I have a problem with, when we're trying to convince people that have worked for years in the most economical and sincere way as to how they should run their business. And this is what is exactly happening here with the provincial government and local municipal bodies in rural Saskatchewan.

I'd like to quote from, if I can, Mr. Speaker, from "The Rural Councillor" newsletter on December 1 when it talks about what SARM wants:

A recommendation that SARM oppose any mandatory restructuring of rural municipalities, but not oppose amalgamations which are locally driven.

Many of these amalgamations and cost-saving measures have been in place and have been taking place over the last decade, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure that they will continue to do so with the good wisdom of the people, local people that are involved. It goes on to say:

The association should negotiate with the province to address specific concerns such as debt and potential liabilities.

Many instances I see the liabilities being toward the province and I would cite the capital road grants that are liabilities to the provincial government at this point in time, to many of the local municipalities, in the millions and millions of dollars.

It goes on further to say that:

A full-blown number crunching study not be undertaken because the numbers could be so easily manipulated.

And I would certainly agree with that. I'd also refer then to the amendment to the motion which talks about:

. . . ensuring government at all levels provide effective, sustainable services with an affordable governance structure.

I'm kind of wondering what that means. If someone in Regina decides that we don't have an effective service in their eyes in rural Saskatchewan and don't feel they want to sustain it with any further dollars, then we could almost see the disappearance of rural Saskatchewan once again. So I have a bit of a problem with the amendment.

I also was very much involved in another program — of health reform, Mr. Speaker, and a little sceptical of this problem with the amalgamations of the RMs. I would wonder if these people

that think that there are so many inefficiencies in rural Saskatchewan have ever really gone out to rural Saskatchewan and took a look at what we're up against. We look at miles and miles of gravel road. We're now seeing more and more miles of road being turned back to gravel, plagued by pot holes. I think maybe the term pot hole doesn't apply any more because many of them are much bigger than pot holes. We could talk about losing graders and that type of thing, and maybe that's where there could be an efficiency found.

Also I'd like to mention that on March 6 the member for Municipal Affairs stated that there was no plan to force rural local governments to amalgamate. And I heard the member opposite this afternoon talking about that as well. If there is no plan to force amalgamation, I would feel much happier about this — and I'm sure most of the councils across the province would as well — I'd feel much happier about this if the government could come onside and come up with a common message that this indeed is the case. It doesn't help when the Premier makes a comment contradicted by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

I'd also like to quote, Mr. Speaker, from a column by one of the writers for the *Leader-Post*, if I could. And we're talking about making municipal governments more accountable. And he goes on to write:

But don't be seduced by the Romanow government's holier-than-thou attitude when it talks about the excesses of municipal government. The fact is local politicians have little to learn from provincial governments.

I would certainly have to concur with Mr. Eisler on that comment, in that many of the ideas that have come forward over the years have been born at the local level by rural councillors and those people on small urban boards as well. Mr. Eisler goes on to say that while the provincial government brought the province to the brink of financial default, local governments were busy balancing their books.

Our local politicians, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest, at the local levels have to be accountable to their neighbours. The councillor that represents us knows that he cannot come back to us with increase after increase, mill rate increase after mill rate increase year after year, whether it be for local municipal funding or for health boards or for education. We're to the point now where the local tax base cannot support a further increase, and I see the forced amalgamation of many of these municipalities not being an answer to the problems.

Mr. Eisler goes on to write:

The problem that many in SUMA have with Romanow's talk of municipal amalgamation is that the idea is presented in such a simplistic manner. It is based entirely on the number of municipal governments. What is missing is talk about the roles and responsibilities restructured municipal government faces now and in the future.

We all know, Mr. Speaker, that as we move on and prepare for the next century that we all must change, and we're certainly

prepared to do that at the local level and at the rural level and we will be doing that.

I'd go on to add as well, there are many unanswered questions, Mr. Speaker, as to how amalgamation might work. And I would like to see from the provincial government some form of a plan of what they suggest as we see an urban and a rural municipality amalgamating. There are many problems that are associated with it. Funding certainly is one where we have a large debt on our land base. As I mentioned earlier we can't afford any further tax hikes and I'm just wondering what the proposals might be on some of these issues.

There are also the issues that I mentioned earlier about the capital grants, Mr. Speaker, that are owing to the local municipalities; how that would be factored into the equation when a number of them amalgamate, if they do.

I also have a bit of a problem with the top-down entity as well being forced when we look back to our pesticide storage site proposals when a proposal came out into our area that suggested that us and a RM (rural municipality) near Govan have a combined storage site. What the bureaucrats failed to look at when they were drawing up the plan, that there's a 60-mile body of water in between the two of us and it's a little hard to get across there to store cans in their site.

Those are the things that we need input from our local communities, our local municipalities, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that some of these changes are made with what I referred to in my maiden speech, if I would, as to common sense. Lots of times common sense is forgotten and decisions are made for political and other reasons and I certainly would like to see some common sense brought back into this issue.

Also one of the other problems that I see with forced amalgamations, and we certainly noticed that in the health reform, was trading patterns. We talked about that extensively and my involvement in health about trading patterns, economics, and all those types of things. And when people are sitting in Regina drawing up boundaries, once again they tend to forget where we like to go and where we do our shopping and where we do our purchasing.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I really can't accept the amendment as it really doesn't do what we'd like it to do and I just hope that through this whole process, Mr. Speaker, that the government will come to its senses on this. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to make my brief comments in this debate. And I'd like to begin by reading the motion of the hon. member from Saltcoats, which says:

That this Assembly denounce any actions the government may be planning concerning amalgamation of rural municipalities, particularly because as this Assembly is aware, municipalities have expressed vehement opposition to amalgamation done without extensive consultation with

all parties that may be affected by this plan.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there is an assumption here, the assumption that there is a plan to amalgamate. Let me assure you that there is no such plan to force amalgamation. There is a plan, however, to continue to consult and to work cooperatively, to work together with our rural and urban municipalities as we have done in the past and as we will continue to do in the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would like to support the amendment proposed by my colleague and good friend, the hon. member from Saskatoon Northwest, which reads:

to delete all words after Assembly and add the words, support the government's cooperative work with urban and rural municipalities to prepare for the next century by ensuring government at all levels provides effective, sustainable services within an affordable government structure.

(1515)

Now, Mr. Speaker, it was my honour during the last term to represent the rural constituency of Qu'Appelle Lumsden and now I represent the urban-rural constituency of Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

In all the time of service to the people of Saskatchewan, I would like to stress that any government initiative has always followed our strong belief in community and community leadership, cooperation, consultation and communication.

As an individual MLA, I appreciate the open door that has always been extended to me by rural municipalities, by my town councils and by my school boards. In turn, to our government caucus committees, the door is open to them to meet with us to share their ideas and concerns.

Most recently that was done through the consultation process, Preparing for the 21st Century. People in rural Saskatchewan have seen many changes take place. They are concerned about their ability to sustain programs and services in the face of these changes.

The federal government's withdrawal from the Crow benefit will force changes in transportation and trading patterns. Free trade agreements and the speed with which the federal government is moving towards deregulation of utilities has forced them to face changes in farm security programs and the cost of their inputs.

The changing demographics — changing shopping patterns, changes to where people access their health care, their education and their recreation — changes the ways local governments provide these programs and services.

Rural and urban Saskatchewan people are no strangers to

change, Mr. Speaker. They know they must prepare themselves for the 21st century and that change is inevitable. They also know from past experience it is our New Democrat government that is committed to work with them, to facilitate wherever possible and whenever possible, and to consult with them every step along the way to preserve our quality of life for future generations.

Our government has a history of consulting, working cooperatively with groups and organizations in economic development, for instance, through REDAs (regional economic development authority), *Partnership for Renewal*, and now *Partnership for Growth*; in agriculture and environmental programs; and in health. Working together cooperatively in all areas.

We've done much already. We're developing a 9-1-1 system to blanket Saskatchewan. We've worked in consultation with rural Saskatchewan to establish a new health delivery system. It was not without its problems but is acknowledged to be a world-leading change.

Mr. Speaker, this government's cooperation with municipalities has strong roots in history. Rural electrification may be one of the most significant initiatives accomplished by a CCF-NDP (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation-New Democratic Party) government in Saskatchewan, closely followed by the completion of the telephone system across rural Saskatchewan by SaskTel. This little engine that can, Mr. Speaker, now with an international reputation; now bringing its technologies not only to the international market-place — and we've all heard of their involvement with the Chunnel — but SaskTel is bringing Internet services to rural Saskatchewan, the only province in Canada to provide this exciting new information highway.

And, Mr. Speaker, I believe that there has never been a greater indication of mutual action than the recent changes we've seen in agriculture and the economies of rural Saskatchewan: value added processing, machinery manufacturing, world-leading technologies in ag biotech.

We're continuing to work with communities in delivering and designing health care, in pursuing educational change to respond to the need for lifelong learning, and in the challenge to work together to examine, to determine the best and most effective and efficient models of governance for Saskatchewan. Sustainable services within an affordable governance structure.

And, Mr. Speaker, the measure of success is in the excitement evident in every community in Saskatchewan — in the new REDAs, the new economic ventures that are emerging, farm-based furniture manufacturing, eco-tourism, guest ranches, environmental industries, seed processing, cottage industries. The list is endless and limited only by the imaginations of the Saskatchewan people. And let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that is virtually limitless.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is for these reasons and many more that I have entered into this debate and that I will be supporting the amendment and not the main motion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — If there are no more members wishing to speak, then we will move by virtue of rule 17(2) to questions and comments briefly on matters relevant to the contents of the speeches, questions and comment from members.

Mr. McPherson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have a question. I'd like to put this question to the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley. Madam Member, has the government undertaken a study of how many small rural communities might be turned into ghost towns by your government's forced amalgamations?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to stand in this House and answer the question. As with all things — and the member well knows this — it's our plan to continue to consult, to talk with rural communities. Now remember there are things that have happened as a result of your federal colleagues, i.e., the abandoning of the rail lines, which is going to create all sorts of problems we might not have anticipated. But as always, we will continue to talk.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is directed to the hon. member from Wood River. As I was listening to your comments in the debate, Member, you commented on . . . you tied in the interest on the Crown corporations tendering agreement, and I believe I heard you say that the money spent on the . . . the extra money spent, the interest on that alone would be more than this government spent to municipalities. I'm just wondering if I heard you correctly or if you would care to elaborate a little bit on what it was you were driving at.

Mr. McPherson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to elaborate because as what we were talking about, the Crown Tendering Agreement is a cost of some 115 million to 160, 150-60 million; who knows how large this is? And what we're saying is that it's millions and tens of millions of dollars that could be saved on Crown tendering if in fact your government would get its act together and listen to these RMs out in rural Saskatchewan who in fact are funded by the local taxpayers out there. And if in fact if you would listen to them . . . because what they're saying to you . . . and I have probably 50 or 60 letters from RMs here alone on the Crown Tendering Agreement. Now these people, if you're such a consulting group, this is a perfect opportunity for you to consult with these RMs and in fact use the monies that could be saved by not having preferential treatment on government Crown corporation contracts, tendering contracts, and that's what I was getting at. Thank you.

Mr. Trew: — Again I thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I direct my question to the member for Wood River because I'm not quite clear what it is you're driving at yet. Perhaps I'm a little dense. I know that you would like to think that. I'm wondering, is it the position of the member, and thereby the Liberal opposition, that the Crown tendering costs . . . are we spending

115 or 150, 160 million? I don't care; use any one of those three numbers. Is that the total cost or is that the extra cost that we're incurring because of the Crown corporation tendering agreement?

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, Mr. Minister, I don't think that you're dense. It's just that perhaps your government hasn't shared with some of the members, you know back-benchers and such, some of the costs of things such as the Crown Tendering Agreement. So that's why it's up to the official opposition to always make the members who are not in cabinet aware of some of the horrific costs that your government and the cabinet has placed upon the citizens of this province. And that cost is an estimate of \$115 million on the low side to some \$150 to 60 million.

If we're looking at some \$800 million of Crown corporation . . . of government contracts, some 550 to 600 million is in Crown tendering and . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . well what you would pay extra, Mr. Member, is in fact some — what is it? — 20, 30 per cent, 30 per cent more because of this tendering process. And we've brought forward many contracts . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now we'll try and bring a little order to the discussion here. The member was doing a fine job of answering the question and then began to respond to a question shouted from the desks. And I would simply ask that if you have a question, that you wait until you're recognized, put the question, allow the member opposite to answer it if they will.

Mr. Bjornerud: — My question, Mr. Speaker, is for the member from Regina Qu'Appelle.

At the present time, RMs, towns, are allowed to, under the current legislation, share services, amalgamate if they so wish. And I'd like to ask the member opposite, that if there is no forced amalgamation in the plans, then what is the need of legislation? I haven't had one RM or town tell me we need new legislation. So what I am asking is, what is the purpose of the service district Act legislation being brought in?

The Speaker: — Order, order. I'm going to rule the question out of order because the question is related to an Act which is neither before the Assembly nor the responsibility of the private member. And so for that reason, I will not allow the question to be put.

Mr. McPherson: — Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Was he not speaking . . .

The Speaker: — No, I would ask the member not to challenge the ruling of the Chair.

In the interest of clarity, I'll simply repeat that it is always out of order to ask a question of a private member for a responsibility for which they do not have, and the question was also related to a specific Bill which is not before the House. So on both of those points I find that specific question out of order.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A question I have

for one of the members opposite; I don't believe I have to be specific. Any one of them could answer it if they can. And the question . . .

The Speaker: — Again, on a point of order . . . And I think we can deal with this in a little more relaxed form because this is the first time that we're dealing with the private . . . with the seventy-five minute debate, and we want to add to clarity in doing that.

If I may take a moment just to clarify rule 17(2), and if members want to refer to that in your rule books, and let me read it and if you want to follow and make comment as to what this allows you to do:

At the expiration of sixty-five minutes, there shall be a period not exceeding ten minutes to be made available, if required, to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the contents of the speeches and allow Members who spoke in the debate to respond to questions raised.

The Chair is of the view that that means that any member can make a comment on the topic of debate or any member can put a question. However, the question can only be responded to by someone who participated in the debate, and therefore when putting a question it must be directed to a specific member who has participated in the debate. Not to a member who has asked a question, but who participated in the first 65 minutes of the debate.

I appreciate the cooperation of the House to allow me to do this, and I'll recognize the hon. member for Arm River.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for clarifying that.

I'll direct my question then to the member from Meadow Lake. And it's a question that's been asked by many of the municipalities in my area and I've said that I would bring it to this forum. How many dollars will be saved from the amalgamation of RMs?

Mr. Sonntag: — Again, Mr. Speaker, I'll just respond by saying to the member — and thank you for the question — that certainly our government is all about cooperation and working together with the different levels of government. The premiss in the question, I would say, is that he's suggesting that if there are smaller RMs, for instance, that we would force them to amalgamate.

We're not suggesting that at all. We are saying that maybe even smaller RMs might be more efficient. Our point in the amendment that we put forth is that we're wanting to be positive and we're wanting the different RMs and local governments to work together to create the best efficiencies, and we're not going to say where those efficiencies are.

(1530)

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the

member from Saskatoon Northwest. Does your government have a list of RMs that they're going to be forcing to amalgamate? And will you table that list so these RMs have the opportunity to protect themselves from such legislation?

Mr. Whitmore: — Mr. Speaker, before I answer the question I'd like to make a couple of comments. One, the question was raised in terms of my residency. I have been an active farmer on the family farm since 1977. To the question of rural municipalities — the amalgamations — there is no list, no list. As a former president said in terms: read my lips; there is no list.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a follow-up question for the member from Saskatoon Northwest because, as we saw from the Department of Highways, in fact they produced a list of which highways could or . . . you know, a prioritized list of which highways should be worked on; and in fact we know that the government has made lists like lists of hospitals to be closed and lists of schools to be closed and lists of highways that won't be worked on.

I would just ask him to just rethink the answer. Perhaps he could remember just a list of RMs that they know that they would like to cave in on.

Mr. Whitmore: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. As I referred to earlier in my comments, we see an opposition that wants to talk about division, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about a cooperation spirit between urban and rural municipalities to work together. There is one of preparing what they think is a list, and I do believe if anyone possesses a list, they do. For I think it's shameful for anyone to even concede that, when we are entering into questions of consultation with stakeholders, be it SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association), in terms of the trustees association, SUMA, SARM, and the affected municipalities, in terms of the discussion and developing a cooperative spirit, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The division bells rang from 3:34 p.m. until 3:35 p.m.

Amendment agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 19

Van Mulligen	Shillington	Whitmore
Kowalsky	Calvert	Pringle
Koenker	Trew	Stanger
Hamilton	Murray	Wall
Kasperski	Ward	Sonntag
Jess	Flavel	Murrell
Thomson		

Nays — 8

Aldridge	McLane	McPherson
Belanger	Bjornerud	Julé
Krawetz	Gantefoer	

Motion as amended agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 1—Crown Construction Tendering Agreement

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome this opportunity to speak on a motion of great importance to the province of Saskatchewan and to many people in the construction industry in particular.

In my maiden speech, Mr. Speaker, I said that if we're going to move forward to the next century, that the Premier always says that we have to be challenged to do, we have to first of all look at our past, and we have to be willing to look at our past with the light of correcting mistakes that have obviously been made. And, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that this government has made a very tragic mistake in their implementation of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

In the 1991 caucus document of the NDP entitled *Democratic Reforms for the 1990's*, and I quote from that document, it said:

... public tendering and acceptance of the lowest bidder should ensure that Saskatchewan taxpayers get the best possible price for all work.

It also further stated that contract specifications must be written without favouritism and must not change.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that most people would agree that that is a very laudable type of direction to put into place. And what we have instead is the reality — that the government has implemented a Crown Construction Tendering Agreement, CCTA, which will make it easy for all of us for the rest of this debate. And the outrage and the actual concern that has been expressed about this whole issue has been pretty much universal.

I quote from a Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* advertisement that had the names of almost 400 construction firms in the province that raised their concerns on Friday, June 16, 1995. And the headline reads: "Government union preference tendering to cost \$100 million this year."

And I would like to read this into the record because I think it's extremely important that the concerns that have been expressed over the last months about this issue are read into the record so that there is a public discourse in this whole issue:

The Crown Construction Tendering Agreement (C.C.T.A.), negotiated by the Government with the Building Trade Unions, is illegal in that it violates the rights of both workers and contractors according to Saskatchewan labour legislation. The government has delayed since March 29, 1995 an application to the government appointed Labour Relations Board which would declare the C.C.T.A. illegal and strike it down.

Second point:

The C.C.T.A. is a betrayal of the government's 1991 election promise of "fair and open tendering of all government contracts, with equal opportunity to all businesses based on merit."

Third point:

The C.C.T.A. discriminates against the employment of local workers and contractors, with preference going to union hall workers in Regina and Saskatoon and to big city union contractors.

Fourth point:

The C.C.T.A. will decrease competition and unnecessarily inflate government construction costs (\$100 million this year) and results in more tax and utility rate increase and/or more cut backs in health, education, municipal grants, . . .

And it goes on to list the 400 companies that say the following firms are opposed to this costly and unfair Saskatchewan union preference policy and believe they have a responsibility to tell all Saskatchewan citizens the true facts about it.

Mr. Speaker, that concern has been echoed in many formats and by many people who have expressed their concern about this policy. I quote again from the *Leader-Post* and I know that members opposite regard the *Leader-Post* in high regard in terms of its reliability for quotes.

This is from the *Leader-Post*, March 4, 1995 an article in a column by Bruce Johnstone. And the question is, he poses, and he says, and I quote:

When is a Fair Wage Policy not a fair wage policy?

When it's the NDP government's Fair Wage Policy, which is anything but.

And he goes on to copy the concerns that are there and I would like to raise some of them.

In reality, the Fair Wage Policy is fair only to unionized contractors and tradesmen. It's patently unfair to everyone else, including non-unionized contractors and tradesmen, who represent the majority of the construction industry in this province.

The Fair Wage Policy is also unfair to Saskatchewan taxpayers and Crown corporation ratepayers, who must foot the bill (ultimately) for the NDP's promise to give construction trade unions preference in government projects.

Why is the Fair Wage Policy unfair? It's unfair (Mr. Speaker) because it tilts the playing field for government work clearly in the direction of the construction trade unions and their employers.

It does this by forcing all contractors, including non-union

ones, to pay union scale when bidding on construction projects of more than \$50,000 in urban areas and more than \$150,000 in rural areas.

Aside from increasing the cost of government projects, the Fair Wage Policy requires contractors to hire union tradesmen almost exclusively.

The rules require that three out of four employees hired must be union members and that the non-union contractor must collect union dues from all employees, whether union or non-union.

The agreement also sets up a fund, which skims off 21 cents an hour of employees' wages (union or non-union), to "create, support and promote programs to continually enhance the unionized construction product."

What this gobbledegook means is anybody's guess, but it sounds better than "union slush fund," which is probably closer to the truth.

And I go on to quote further:

Where's the fairness in dictating union scale as the minimum wage for construction projects, regardless of the going rate in the industry (today)?

Where's the fairness in giving three out of four jobs on government projects to union members, who represent the minority of the construction trades in this province?

Where's the fairness in preventing non-unionized contractors from using all but a handful of their regular employees when working on government projects?

And where's the fairness in squeezing out experienced, skilled, non-union tradesmen from all but a few jobs on government construction projects?

For non-union contractors and their employees, the government's Fair Wage Policy isn't fair at all. "It's really fraud," said one non-union contractor.

In fact, the NDP's Fair Wage Policy has nothing to do with fairness and everything to do with the union movement's cozy relationship with the NDP.

And it's fair to say the policy is nothing more than pay-back for the unions' past support of the NDP and a down payment on the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, there is a number of other articles that go on to outline the same kind of concerns that have been quoted in the newspapers, from the *Leader-Post* and the *Star-Phoenix* to the *Moose Jaw Times-Herald*, and they outline similar concerns.

(1545)

This whole situation has resulted in such outrage by the contractors that we ended up in a situation in Yorkton where

actually the local contractors boycotted a project that was put forward. And again I quote Mr. Bruce Johnstone from the *Leader-Post* article on August 5, '95, and I quote:

Putting your money where your mouth is, is easier . . . (to say than it is to do).

But that's exactly what contractors in small-town Saskatchewan are doing to protest the government's pro-union policy on Crown construction . . .

Twice in as many weeks contractors have refused to bid on construction . . . (projects) for Crown corporations.

Why are contractors turning down Crown projects worth millions of dollars? Are construction jobs so plentiful that contractors and workers . . . (can't afford the) work?

The answer to the first question is: The Crown Construction Tendering Agreement, which was imposed . . . earlier . . . by the NDP government.

So what we have here is a situation that in rural Saskatchewan we end up with contractors who refuse to bid on government contracts because they don't want to comply with the outrageous kind of conditions that there are in this agreement.

Mr. Speaker, this is obviously something that is so wrong to the people of this province that I know that the government and the members opposite will realize that something fundamental has to change in this whole issue.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the debate over the last couple of days on this issue, it seems that people are very much confused as to how this all works. What we tabled today is documents that outline on one particular project how this program goes off the rails.

In the one section of the project, from the river to Wakaw, in the Humboldt-Wakaw water pipeline project, the tenders called for the contractors to meet all the requirements of the CCTA agreement. And that was largely done, except one contractor from Alberta had the courage to bid it with non-CCTA compliance. And his contract, which was rejected out of hand because it didn't meet this outrageous sort of conditions, were exactly shown in the documents tabled to represent a savings to the people of this province of \$1.6 million on this one phase of this project alone. Thirty per cent of the cost could have been saved on that one component.

And so when you say, how do you calculate the savings of these numbers globally, it is really quite simple mathematics. If you realize that Crown construction projects over time in a province cost somewhere in excess of \$500 million, a 30 per cent saving of that amount by abandoning this outrageous CCTA agreement represents over \$100 million. That's a saving that could be realized. And this saving then could be applied to meet priorities that the government undoubtedly has — priorities of health; priorities of education; priorities of child poverty; the priorities of the food banks — priorities that are there.

Daily we hear in the House that the members opposite say our problems are linked solely to the problems that we're inheriting from the federal government. They have got problems as well. This government faced problems four years ago in dealing with their fiscal situation that they inherited from the Tories, and everybody understood that you had to balance your budget. And that is a commendable thing that had to be done, but it is impossible to tell me that that wasn't done without severe cut-backs imposed on further levels of government. Everyone in this province had to tighten their belt and to help with this project. Similarly everyone in this country now has to help the federal government balance their books. And what we have to do is do our part as citizens. The Finance minister said that what he was trying to do was be fair right across this country, and Saskatchewan has been treated as fairly as any other citizen in this country.

What we're pointing out here, Mr. Speaker, is a way that this government, that is totally part of this government's policy, by changing the CCTA agreement could save in excess of \$100 million each and every year. And, Mr. Speaker, I say this without recrimination or anything else. We simply must admit that that is an important priority that we have to do.

It's necessary so that we can meet the other very essential programs that are needed in this province. We simply cannot afford, in this day and age, to have a policy that preferences one group of people at the expense of taxpayers, at the expense of people that are going hungry, at the expense of education cut-backs, at the expense of health cut-backs. We simply cannot afford this money, Mr. Speaker. And that's why we've asked that we consider this motion today — that we simply have to admit that a mistake was made.

We understand you mean well. That's not the point of this debate. We understand that you're trying. But you simply have missed the boat on this one. You simply did not estimate the magnitude of the costs that were going to occur by the changes in these policies that are outlying. We have demonstrated to you one simple example where it's 30 per cent. Now in other projects, it might be less. But even if it's half that amount, we can't afford this. We simply cannot afford it. The people of this province can't afford it; the taxpayers of this province can't afford it. And you know, members opposite, that programs that are priority for the needs and the essential items of this province can't afford this policy.

So we simply ask that this policy be reconsidered; that you admit that this thing has not worked out the way that you thought, and that we go to fair and open tendering and that the policy and principle of the lowest bid that qualifies without the CCTA kind of preconditions is what is in the best interest of all of the people of this province. And we urge the members opposite to not only support the details of this motion, but the spirit of what it is intended to say.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I very proudly, in closing, move the motion, seconded by the member from Thunder Creek, and I ask this Assembly to please consider this motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a honour to join in the debate by seconding the motion presented by my colleague from Melfort-Tisdale regarding the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons why I chose to run for election in this House is because I believe the taxpayers need a government that will use their money wisely and for the benefit of all taxpayers, not just a preferred few. The Crown Construction Tendering Agreement fails on both of these counts. It fails to provide value for money, and it fails to benefit all Saskatchewan people equally.

Mr. Speaker, estimates are that this policy will cost the taxpayers of Saskatchewan anywhere from 15 to — we've heard today — 30 per cent more for each contract awarded by the Crown corporations involved. These corporations, including SaskTel, SaskPower, SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), STC, Sask Water and Sask Forest Products, offered hundreds of millions of dollars worth of work in 1995. It leads to a much increased burden on the taxpayer. This, Mr. Speaker, means the taxpayers are not getting the best value for their money.

Mr. Speaker, in recent months we've heard a great deal of whining from members opposite about a reduction to their overall transfers for health, education, and social services from the federal government. They whine about this even though the dollar figures they use are very small in proportion to their overall spending. The members opposite complain about cuts from the federal government even though they go on and tell the federal colleagues that they should cut their own deficit. The members opposite, Mr. Speaker, want to have the best of both ways. Not only do they want to have it both ways, they insist on continuing to blame everything on someone else.

In the last four years it was on the Tories who are now the third party. With that record getting pretty well worn out, they needed a new scapegoat. Instead of bashing the Tories around, this government is trying to pick on the federal government, Mr. Speaker. The problem with the strategy of blaming is that this government avoids doing something about things that are under its own control.

The Crown Construction Tendering Agreement is one of those things that they could act on. Instead of blaming someone else, Mr. Speaker, the government could rescind this wasteful policy and ensure that any inflationary effects it may have are removed. Removing the policy could also ensure that taxpayers are getting the best value for their money.

The question, Mr. Speaker, that taxpayers would like an answer to is why would this government continue to keep a preferential and wasteful policy in place. The answer to this question can be found in the actions of this government.

Over the last several months we've learned that this government has no care or concern for wasting taxpayers' money. They figure it's okay to continue to waste money and blame other people for their problems. In the last few months they've shown their commitment to this by expanding the size

of cabinet and the numbers of political staff. They've added a department and another deputy minister. They introduced a wasteful review process in SaskPower and another for SaskEnergy. In both cases these reviews were useless because the government already knew what it was going to do.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are not interested in ridding the taxpayers of a wasteful policy because they just happen to like this sort of waste. They know it's easier to waste money and blame others instead of cleaning up a mess and taking responsibility for their own decisions.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement fails to provide equal benefit for all taxpayers. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure other people in this House would agree that the policies of our provincial government should benefit everyone equally because we all pay for them to the best of our ability.

Mr. Speaker, many small contractors, some of whom are in my constituency, are concerned that this policy will work against small businesses like theirs. Mr. Speaker, this policy requires contractors bidding on Crown projects with eight or more employees to have 75 per cent of them unionized. This includes subcontractors. Many small firms who get work on these jobs are small firms who are not unionized. While they have no qualms against paying a fair wage, this tendering policy will hurt them in other ways.

Local contractors in rural areas cannot afford to be unionized because they do not live by government work alone. They must bid for smaller jobs in their own communities and neighbouring towns. These local jobs will not bear the prices charged by union contracting. The Crown tendering agreement puts them between a rock and a hard place. They need government work, but they need private work. They must be unionized to get government work, but they can't afford to be if they want to continue to get the work they need locally to survive.

One of my constituents put the situation this way, Mr. Speaker, and I can quote from an article in the Moose Jaw *Times-Herald* where he said: "You have to be unionized to get a Crown corporation contract, but your regular customers won't pay union rates. We're not big enough to do either/or."

Mr. Speaker, the problem which will arise if this tendering policy is not changed is that local contractors will leave. If they can't make it, they'll do what they have to do to survive. The loss of local contractors will mean a loss of jobs in rural areas and our urban communities as well. Mr. Speaker, a few short weeks ago we heard this government tell us that jobs were their number one priority. If that is the case, then the solution to this problem is simple: tear up this agreement and help preserve jobs in this province.

The contractors who say they are caught in a bind are understanding people. They have every bit of respect for the people who work for them. In short, they believe that people deserve a fair wage for fair work. One of my constituents suggests that this government should have a fair wage law that sets standards. It would be a lot better if I knew when I bid on a

job that I'm not up against some guy who's paying half what I am.

Mr. Speaker, these contractors are worried about this, and they are offering solutions. These are solutions that my colleague, the member from Wood River, alluded to some months ago. This government promised to review how well this policy was working this month. They should now know from the boycotts that their policy is hurting Saskatchewan people, and it fails to benefit everyone, and it is time to change. So this is why I second the motion.

(1600)

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and congratulations for your first opportunity to take the chair.

I won't get into too much on what my colleagues have touched on already because they've done an excellent job of laying out a case as to why the Crown construction tendering process is in fact flawed, unaffordable, and really something that the people of Saskatchewan aren't wanting; aren't needing, and it really sets us back into the Dark Ages, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I won't get into that, only to say that the cost of having an extra \$115 million or more tacked onto projects in this province at a time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we need roads and we need schools and we need hospitals, and we need to take care of the kids that live in poverty and take care of children that don't have enough to eat on their way to school, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . that's the kind of stuff we should be spending the money on if there's going to be money spent in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In fact, you know when I think back a few months ago when in fact I was the critic of Labour and we were dealing with the Crown tendering . . . because it seems like it's been around for years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we're just dealing with it almost on a daily basis now. It's just one of the sore points that the people of this province have with the government. But I look back to a release that I did on September 8, 1995, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it is not that the people of the province aren't trying to make some of the policies of the government work . . . of course they are. And that's why the Saskatchewan Construction Association, . . . in fact president of that association at that time was Mr. Jim Chase. And they had a proposal of coming out with a fair-wage policy.

Now the preferred route of the Saskatchewan Construction Association, our own caucus, I think most of the people in this province, is to not have a policy. Go with the policy that was promised us going into the '91 election and again the '95 election, and that is that the lowest bidder that's filling all the requirements of the job . . . which aren't preferential treatment, the lowest bidder would get the job, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But in fact the Saskatchewan Construction Association took a view that if the government felt that they had all this extra money to spend, then so be it. Can we at least have a policy in place that's giving a level and fair playing-field to all the firms of the province? That's not being outrageous. That's being very

common sense. So of course they brought forward a proposal of a fair-wage policy which was supported by our caucus, not the preferred route, but it was an option, and it was an alternative to a very bad and costly policy of the government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I would rather touch on today is, in fact, what some of the people of the province feel about this policy. You know the government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, talks so much about going out throughout Saskatchewan and being on these consultation tours. It doesn't matter if they're talking about the budget or the future direction of Crown corporations or the direction of government as a whole. They're telling us they're consulting.

Well if they really and truly are consulting . . . and in fact the very reason why they're bringing down legislation which I think, in the end is only to force amalgamations of the rural municipalities . . . because a few hundred people at a budget-hearing process, you know, suggested it as an alternative. And yet 70,000 people trying to save the Plains Health Centre doesn't seem to be a consulting process.

But what I have here today . . . I phoned out to my constituency assistant, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I asked my assistant, I said, you know, I know we've gotten quite a few letters lately — and I'm talking within the last month — on Crown construction tendering policy only. And could you let me know how many? Fax a few letters up, whatever we have, so I could bring them forward to the government and that we may be able to let this government know exactly how some of the RMs . . .

And I'm going to deal today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just with rural municipal governments, their feeling towards the Crown tendering policy, the letters that have been sent to my office in Shaunavon, in constituency Wood River. So Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll go through a few of these. The first one comes from the rural municipality of Pinto Creek, no. 75. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm going to quote from a few of these letters, and it's regarding provincial government's Crown construction tendering policy:

Please be advised that the council of this municipality are not in favour of this program. They believe that it will discriminate against workers and companies that are non-union and certainly won't help to create work for small companies that can't afford to hire union wage employees.

That is from a community in my constituency of Kincaid, Pinto Creek.

The next one I have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the village of Meyronne, is only a few miles to the east of Hazenmore in the RM of Pinto Creek. The village of Meyronne, the response here is:

The council of the village of Meyronne disapproves of this agreement. Council feels that the additional tax dollars it will cost cannot be put onto the people of Saskatchewan . . . As well, it will obviously not be good for the non-union workers and companies.

Going further, we have the town of Willow Bunch on the eastern edge of my constituency:

Council strongly disapproves of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. They feel that the Crown is being very discriminating in its policies in their dealings with non-unionized companies and workers. All companies and workers should be treated equally by their government, and not just a select few.

These are the feelings of the people out there in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Going on, we have the RM of Lac Pelletier in . . . (inaudible) . . . and most of . . . well I guess all of that RM is within the boundaries of the Wood River constituency. They write . . . and I'm only going to take one or two lines out of each letter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the sake of time because I will table this later, and I'm sure all the government members are going to be most enthused to get copies of this and read through it and try and get some feeling of what the people out there really do feel:

In response to your request, the council would like to indicate that they are not in favour of the current Crown tendering policy.

That's from the RM of Lac Pelletier.

Here we have the Rural Municipality of Stonehenge, no. 73. And this is in Limerick:

Council disapproves of the whole idea of a union-preference policy. Increased labour costs will result in fewer jobs being tendered as there will always be only so much money designated for construction. As well, any small-town contractor who cannot afford to hire union workers will not be able to compete for subcontracts, and this will hurt our rural economy.

That's really what they're concerned about, Mr. Speaker: the cost to the province, also the cost of jobs in their own areas. There's a whole list of problems.

The Rural Municipality of Old Post, no. 43. This is in the community of Wood Mountain, still in my constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

Council has instructed that I write you and inform you that it disapproves of this agreement.

We're going to go through many of these where in fact they're disagreeing with the government policy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Here we have the village of Limerick: the council of the village of Limerick opposes this tendering policy and cites the lack of bidding on contracts in Swift Current, for an example, as an indication of how much opposition there is across the province to this agreement. The provincial government has obviously gone too far this time in trying to impose their will on the taxpayers of this province.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is interesting is how

strong the feelings of some of these councils. And you can't say they're politically biased one way or another. Some of these councils have a mayor, a reeve, 8 or 10 councillors, aldermen, and so a significant amount of people. And it is just not that they're all leaning one way; probably most are non-partisan. But they're having to deal with government policy and they're really concerned about this. The rural municipality of Auvergne, no. 76 in the community of Ponteix . . . and the members opposite would know the community of Ponteix because that was one of the first hospitals that they chose to close and shut the doors of that community's hospital:

Please be advised that the council of the RM of Auvergne, no. 76, passed the following resolution at their September 8, 1995 meeting.

And it goes on that the RM of Auvergne, no. 76, advised Glen McPherson, MLA, that this RM — it's a quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker — does not approve of the government's Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. I could see why that community would be concerned, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because perhaps if we didn't have these kind of wasteful policies, then the government, you know, would be able to keep some semblance of health care in a community such as Ponteix.

We go on to the rural municipality of Mankota, basically the same. They're concerned about the construction policies of the government. At the regular meeting of the RMs of Mankota, no. 45 and Glen McPherson, no. 46 . . . and again, Mr. Speaker, the RM of Glen McPherson, it's not named after me, although if for the record we would like to say it is, I'll accept that. Both councils expressed a great deal of concern with the allegations made by President Chase, a union monopoly, when it comes to government contracts, is not acceptable.

I'll try and hurry through some of these, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but as you can see, the list is getting quite lengthy here. The town of Shaunavon, my home town:

Please be advised that council does not approve of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

It is their general feeling that it is adding extra costs to projects and that it is not fair for companies that are non-unionized.

The village of Cadillac, a little bit to the east, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

Council would like to inform you that they totally disagree with the provincial government's Crown tendering agreement because of the discrimination against non-union workers and companies.

On and on and on and on, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The next one comes from, well the rural municipality of Hart Butte:

The point of our letter is that the construction costs will be forced to be higher due to the requirement of unionized labour.

I could really take up a lot of time, I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you can see that I'm passing by many of the letters that I have here:

The council wishes me to advise that they are opposed to any policy which would require union-only contractors bidding for provincial contracts including Crown corporations. All bids should be awarded to the lowest qualified bidder for contracts using public funds. Possibly it is time for the provincial government to take a page from the local government when looking for a fiscally responsible government body to emulate.

I see I have a letter from the town of Assiniboia, Mr. Deputy Speaker. An open letter here from CFIB (Canadian Federation of Independent Business) sent to the former minister responsible for Crown corporations:

CFIB has received hundreds of calls, petitions, signatures, and letters from small and especially rural non-union construction industry players.

City of Prince Albert, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

City council at its meeting last evening agreed to formally oppose the new agreement proposed by the provincial government, and this position will be conveyed to the local MLAs as well as to the provincial government.

(1615)

And that I find interesting because I don't recall at any time that the MLAs representing the area of Prince Albert — there would be two constituencies there and one or two surrounding — I don't recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at any point where these MLAs brought forward any concerns regarding the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. Perhaps they were going to and it just perhaps missed their mind, but in fact they have today that they could bring forward those concerns as the rest of us are:

Council formally passed a resolution opposing the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement and shall forward letters opposing this agreement to our local MLA and provincial government officials.

And they have that one also, Prince Albert . . . Oh sorry, that is from the city of Yorkton, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That would be the member or the minister now in charge of SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation). And I don't recall the minister, in fact not today in any debate, bringing forward any concerns from the city of Yorkton. And obviously they got concerns, otherwise they wouldn't have taken the time to deal with it at their, you know, regular meetings and take a position against the government policy.

That's really not a common practice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So you would almost think that in fact if there were these kinds of concerns passed on to the MLAs of Yorkton or the MLAs of Prince Albert, that they would bring these concerns forward.

From the city of Weyburn, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

Weyburn City Council still have strong concern over the implementation of the new provincial Crown construction tendering policies. The city council have a serious concern of the effect that the policy will have on contractors located in the city of Weyburn. City council unanimously request that the policy be rescinded, and more specific, the mandatory union hiring hall formula. We are of the unanimous opinion that this policy is not acceptable.

Well the member of Weyburn, there again I don't recall anything being brought forward from the member of Weyburn in regards to Crown construction tendering policies. But I'm sure that this would be a perfect opportunity today for these MLAs to bring forward their concerns, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Northern Lakes School Division . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I want to bring it to the member's attention in Beauchesne's, 6th Edition, page 152, rule 496:

A Member may read extracts from documents, books or other printed publications as part of a speech . . . A speech should not, however, consist only of a single long quotation, or a series of quotations joined together . . .

I would ask the member to please refrain from using single quotations and get on with . . .

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I believe I . . . Well once the heckling stops, I'll go on, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The very fact of the matter is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am giving a speech and I am giving the concerns of rural people, of rural local governments, and I'm only picking one or two lines. And I'm not questioning your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am picking one or two lines out of documents of which the MLAs opposite were asked by local governments to bring forward the concerns, you know, from the councils, the reeves, the RMs in Prince Albert . . .

An Hon. Member: — Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — What is your point of order?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I have been watching this for some time not wanting to interfere with what was a brilliant dissertation on the subject, your truly brilliant dissertation on the subject. It is however . . . it seems apparent however that the member is using an exhibit. He pretends to be reading letters; what he in fact is doing is unfurling a very long document for the benefit of the cameras to indicate how many letters there are. To me, the member is using an exhibit.

Those letters did not come all one by one. Patently the member has run them through a fax machine; you get a long document which he can then use in the House. This is an exhibit.

The Deputy Speaker: — I take the point of order and I would like to caution the member not to use the document as an exhibit. I caution the member not to use the document for an exhibit.

Mr. McPherson: — Well thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In that case I will table the letters and the documents today. I have no idea how many there are. If we can't table it . . . I'd like to table this.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and as you can see by the . . . I don't know how many letters I would have tabled today as I wasn't able to go through them all because of some gamesmanship of the members opposite, but there are perhaps a hundred; perhaps more. But now, if in fact there was really a group that wanted to consult with rural Saskatchewan, I think this was a perfect time.

I wasn't reading or quoting from letters of Liberal Party members or people that only had a narrow concern. I was quoting letters from governments, from local municipal governments; from cities, from cities and governments within your own ridings. The member from Weyburn, the members from Prince Albert, the member from Yorkton — if you can't stand up and speak for your people, why are you stopping others? A bunch of foolishness.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that the display in here by the members opposite today was absolutely shameful. And with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I will let them enjoy the rest of the debate because I'm sure they have letters that they would like to table from their own ridings and from their own towns and from their own RMs. Somebody that you should be sticking up for and you aren't. All you defend is your union friends. That's all you're defending. . . (inaudible interjection) . . . exactly. Where is your courage? Why not take a trip out to rural Saskatchewan and see what they think. Right there. Come and read the letters and you'll have a good view of what people think of your policies.

The reason you're afraid to go out there is because you've closed down every hospital. You're closing down schools. You're threatening to gravel the highways. Now you have a chance to see what people think, take charge of it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is a delight to finally have an opportunity to shed a little bit of light on this situation. I just want to say that if the Liberal Party facts were anywheres, anywheres in the same universe to reality, anywhere in the same universe to reality, I would be sending a fax to the member for Wood River. But the only fax he's got is tabled. And I don't care how you spell fax.

The Liberal Party in this motion is clearly saying that the Government of Saskatchewan has last year, since the Crown corporation tendering agreement came into force, that the province of Saskatchewan has spent \$118 million extra, above and beyond what we would have had to spend on Crown corporation tendering. Well I invite the Liberals not only in the

legislature but everywhere, to just pay attention to a little . . . perhaps an error. And, well before I share the number I want to invite the Liberal media, province-wide — I dare them to finally print something that is close to reality.

The reality I'm talking about is on the one hand we have got a Liberal Party that is out beating the drums, trying to leave the impression that the Government of Saskatchewan through its Crown corporations is spending in excess of \$100 million a year extra — \$100 million a year extra. You're on the record today. I recognize all of that.

Now what's the reality? What's the truth that the Liberal papers should be printing? What's the truth that the Liberal members . . . and I expect these Liberal members will go out into your respective constituencies. I expect the member for Wood River will respond with the truth to those people, those municipalities who sent a fax to the member for Wood River.

I expect that the Liberal Party will show some of the integrity, Mr. Speaker, that they spoke so eloquently of in the last election campaign. The integrity . . . and I'll use the quote rather loosely, but the former leader of the Liberal Party would say, what we need is integrity, so much integrity that we'll stand up and admit when we're wrong; so much integrity we will apologize when we're wrong.

I expect all of those members to have signed on with that same former leader, signed on to that code of ethics. This will be a test of the Liberal caucus to find out whether in fact they meant it when they signed their name or not. The Crown corporation tendering agreement . . .

Mr. McPherson: — Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — What is your point of order?

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like you to rule on whether or not the member is dealing with the topic of the motion. I see no semblance in what he's talking about and what the motion is.

The Deputy Speaker: — I have taken the ruling into consideration, and I ask the member to get on to the subject at hand.

Mr. Trew: — I thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason for what has been going on is the Liberal opposition saying that the Crown corporation tendering agreement is costing \$118 million extra in the past year according to their figures. They admit it may be marginally wrong. I suspect we could even push them, and they might even admit they might be as high as 10 per cent out.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that in the first year that the Crown corporation tendering agreement was in effect — I invite members to pay close attention — in the period from March when the Crown corporations tendering agreement came into effect until November '95, there was 47 projects tendered and awarded under the terms of the Crown corporation tendering agreement. The total value of these awards, Mr. Speaker, was

\$15,077,647. Fifteen million total value of all of the contracts awarded under the Crown corporations tendering agreement. Somehow from a \$15 million total in 47 contracts, the Liberal Party has got it that we have overspent by \$118 million in a year. Well . . .

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

Mr. McPherson: — Point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — What is your point of order?

Mr. McPherson: — The member opposite was quoting from some documents, and would he now please table the documents which he's quoting from.

The Deputy Speaker: — On your point of order, private members are not obliged to table documents in their speech.

Mr. Trew: — I thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can very much understand the embarrassment of members opposite having this being their first private members' opportunity and to have come forward with a motion for this Legislative Assembly that amongst other things . . . Well it says:

. . . this Assembly demand the government repeal the unfair Crown Construction Tendering Agreement which has since its implementation cost the taxpayers of this province \$118 million last year alone and will continue to cost this province in excess of \$110 million annually.

(1630)

I can understand the embarrassment when the total covered isn't even a fraction . . . It's one-eighth the amount that this motion claims it was — one-eighth. The total that was spent under the Crown Corporation Tendering Agreement is 12.5 per cent of the amount of money that the Liberals opposite are claiming we overspent.

Well I have difficulty even explaining it because the numbers are so goofy. The numbers are so far . . . The credibility is just gone.

And I wonder, Mr. Speaker, where is the credibility on other issues if you can miss on this one by so much and with so much self-centred self-assurance that you've got your numbers right.

I feel very sorry, Mr. Speaker, for our province. I don't think that we're served well by let's pick a number. I think the days of let's make a deal, I thought they ended in October of 1991 with the defeat of the former premier, the former member of Estevan. I thought those days of let's make a deal or let's pick a number were gone, but apparently not. Because under the Crown corporations tendering agreement, we have an opposition that is wilder in their numbers than the former premier in his wildest heyday could ever had been. And I just . . . I don't feel that any of us are served well by that.

I said as I started, that if the \$118 million that the Liberal Party claims was overspent, the extra cost, if that was real, I would be

sending faxes; I would be writing letters; I would be standing up in this legislature — I would have certainly stood up in caucus, long time ago. But the harsh reality is that the 118 million — and I keep referring to that because that's the number that the members of the opposition have used — the 118 million is just wrong.

The member for Wood River, Mr. Speaker, said it was time to get — and this is a direct quote — “time to get out of the dark ages”. That was how the member for Wood River started his speech. He said it was “time to get out of the dark ages”. And indeed I do invite all members to pay attention to reality; to pay attention to things going on in our province; to recognize that . . . I mean how on earth could you have possibly missed the mark so much?

Earlier this day I heard one member of the Liberal Party saying that the Crown corporations tendering is 5 to \$600 million a year. I simply pointed out that under the Crown corporation tendering agreement, the total expenditure in the past year was \$15 million. It's almost to the point where you don't know how to bring the truth.

The Liberal Party seems to be operating under the premiss that if you say something often enough, sooner or later it'll catch and some people will believe it. The member for Wood River may think that that's the way to proceed, but I can assure you, I hope that you do continue to proceed that way, because I guarantee it'll be your last term in this Legislative Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — The voters, be they from Wood River, Regina Coronation Park — name your constituency, any constituency — the electorate deserve honesty, the electorate deserve fairness, the electorate deserve your and my and our collective considered wisdom. The electorate expect it, the electorate deserve it, and they will get it.

From time to time, perhaps some of us don't utilize the opportunity as well as we should, and the electorate catches up. But the Crown corporation tendering agreement, Mr. Speaker, it's a serious matter that affects literally thousands of trades workers through Saskatchewan.

The motion that the Liberal opposition brought forward shows their utter contempt for working women and men in Saskatchewan. They are clearly on the record, with this motion, utterly in contempt of working tradesmen and tradeswomen throughout Saskatchewan.

You're proposing that we eliminate the Crown corporation tendering agreement and your sole hook, sole argument, is that workers are getting fair pay. Fair pay for workers is the major difference between the Crown corporation tendering agreement and the former, looser — much looser — rules. Fair pay is what this is about.

The Liberals, joined by the former official opposition, the Tories, have stood up and voted. They have spoken out. They have voted against progressive labour legislation in this

legislature since before we formed government in 1991. Both parties are on record as opposing The Trade Union Act, The Labour Standards Act, The Workers' Compensation Act, and now the Crown corporation tendering agreement. An agreement, Mr. Speaker, that is just that; it is an agreement that is a tripartite agreement.

It is an agreement that isn't something that just fell out of the sky. It took well more than a year of discussion, of consultation, of talking with people across the province. We talked with contractors. We talked with trades people. We talked with some municipalities and other levels of government. We certainly talked with the Crown corporations. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted that the Crown corporation tendering agreement did come into effect. The results of it have been very good, by and large.

Yes, there are some problems with the Crown corporation tendering agreement. I have talked with some friends of mine who tell me that there are still a minority, a minority, a very few — and I want to stress this to all contractors. You know if it's you I'm talking about. And if you are wondering, then that's who it is — but a very small minority of contractors that will do everything they can to circumvent the Crown corporation tendering agreement. This very small minority of contractors create 90 per cent of the problem in the monitoring of the Crown corporation tendering agreement and in the delivery of it.

They escalate costs because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, you will have projects of varying sizes. But clearly when I talk of 47 different projects all around this province that were tendered and let at a total cost of just slightly over \$15 million, you have to know that by definition many of these projects were fairly small, fairly small projects.

And yet if a contractor chooses not to report the number of employees that contractor has on site or if a contractor doesn't report so that the contractor needn't submit fair wages to them, needn't submit the pension benefits and the health benefits for those workers that they receive while they're on that job, if a contractor chooses to hide employees — I'll describe it that way — hide it from their organizations, from the unions; then that's simply the way it is. And the unions have no choice but to try and go out and monitor the situation.

And they're trying to implement this Crown corporation tendering agreement with a great deal of diligence and understanding, particularly for local contractors. They have a very keen interest in attracting new people into the trades. The reason for that of course is every year that goes by, what happens is we all just get a few more grey hair, and we're just one more year closer to retirement. It's no different in the trades, and that shouldn't surprise any of us. So you have to keep bringing younger tradespeople in as older tradespeople retire.

This Crown corporation tendering agreement does a wonderful job. It does a great service for the working tradespeople of this province. And, Mr. Speaker, I am very much enjoying seeing . . . because you really have to be here to see the reaction of the

Liberals. They're taking great joy when I say that the Crown corporation tendering agreement is doing a great service to working people.

They're taking joy because they're going to continue, I believe, they're going to continue to haul coal to Newcastle. They're going to continue to claim that the Crown corporation tendering agreement is costing an extra hundred and eighteen million or some other fictitious number that they pick out of the air.

I wish I had more confidence that members opposite had the integrity that they signed for when they agreed to become candidates for the Liberal Party. With that integrity, this whole matter goes away, and we can talk seriously about how we can make the Crown corporation tendering agreement work better.

We can talk seriously about how it is that the Government of Saskatchewan and the Crown corporations and the people of Saskatchewan cooperating, working together, can continue to provide the much needed services at the best level we can using the Saskatchewan way. The Saskatchewan way is not the Liberal way. Clearly not, clearly, by this motion on the Crown corporation tendering agreement, not . . .

Mr. Speaker, I keep struggling for words to describe how out of touch with reality this motion is. How can you possibly have spent an additional \$118 million, an additional \$118 million in the past year at the same time that all 47 contracts covered by the Crown corporation tendering agreement . . . the total of 47 contracts was fifteen million, seventy-seven thousand, six hundred and — I think it was forty-five, but don't hang me on the forty-five dollars. Fifteen million, seventy-seven thousand, six hundred-and-some dollars.

The credibility of the Liberal Party is on the hinge here, and I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, the credibility of the Liberal press is on the line here too — the Liberal press that continues to print, continues to fuel this debate in a scurrilous manner that continues to mislead the people of Saskatchewan, continues to decry the extra cost of the Crown corporation tendering agreement. They do so . . . it's a great disservice not only to this Legislative Assembly, but to the million-plus people that collectively we represent. And it certainly does a huge disservice to the tradespeople. And I submit to the Liberal Party that you're doing a grave disservice to the contractors by taking up a cause with your facts so far wrong.

Come at us with correct facts; we can have an argument about a difference in philosophy. Pick a number out of the air, and frankly there's no defending numbers that are picked out of the air. That's why we use very real numbers — \$15,077,647, the cost of the Crown corporation tendering agreement, all 47, as opposed to 500, 600 million total cost, total cost that the Crowns have tendered.

(1645)

Mr. Speaker, you know, you can get a small minority of contractors who want to compete outside of the Crown corporation tendering agreement. I know that one of the members opposite suggested that there was a one and a half

million dollar savings on a pipeline contract, one and a half or \$1.6 million savings, that they estimated on that portion of the pipeline represented a 30 per cent saving over the successful low bidder.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the contractor that bid that low was from Alberta. I was listening very carefully. The contractor was from Alberta. The contractor was clearly not prepared to follow the same rules that Saskatchewan contractors were following. As a result, that contractor knew that that contractor was not going to win that bid.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure everybody here that if we have a \$10 million contract bid and I'm qualified to bid on it but I know I'm not going to win that contract, you bet your bottom dollar that my bid is going to be something ridiculously low. I might bid \$3 million and not get it. Why? Because I have no history in contracting. I have no work force to back me up. I certainly don't have the fiscal, the financial resources to make a go of it. The place where I submit my tender would of course know that of me, so it doesn't matter what my bid is. But using their logic, they could claim any amount of savings. The point is you can bid whatever you want especially if you know you're not going to win the bid.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Another way of putting this is . . . I remember working in Outlook for the Wheat Pool Farm Service Centre . . . And 2,4-D ester 128, our price was at that time something like \$50 a pail. And there was a couple of places in Outlook that sold it as a lost leader off of their truck, and they would sell it for about \$30 a pail, a five-gallon pail. Well we always knew when the two other places were out of this 2,4-D because farmers would start coming into our shop and would say we want the 2,4-D.

I'd list the price, and they'd say oh I can get it for \$20 a pail cheaper across the street. My response was always, go there. Invariably the farmers would respond, well I can't; they're out of it. They have no more product. My response was . . . doesn't matter, When we're out of it, we'll sell it for \$10 a pail. When we are out of it, our price will be \$10 a pail instead of a fair price.

Mr. Speaker, the Crown corporation tendering agreement, as is well known . . . certainly Liberal opposition know it. Certainly members on the government side know it. Certainly people involved in the construction industry know it. The Crown corporation tendering agreement is being reviewed. When it was implemented, when it was implemented — signed in February of last year; agreed to start the implementation, I believe, was very early March last year — that after the construction season, it would be reviewed.

That review is happening as we speak, but I don't want to hold out any false hope to the Liberals that based on some fictitious numbers that they care to share or pick, that somehow that's going to have any effect on the review because, frankly, the Crown corporation tendering agreement is being reviewed in a very fair manner.

The Crown corporations are involved. The contractors are involved in the discussion as are the trades unions also involved. The three-party agreement is being reviewed by those three parties. The view is to make sure that the Crown corporation tendering agreement is as fair as it possibly can be, as effective as it possibly can be with easy administration and always, always guaranteeing fairness for Saskatchewan contractors for Saskatchewan tradespeople.

Fairness — and fairness includes fair wages. It includes some benefits like pension, like paid health plan benefit. And it also, Mr. Speaker, will make sure that we continue to have a fairly straightforward set of criteria for the Crown corporations' tendering.

The rules must not only be fair; they must be seen to be fair. They must be demonstrably easy to administer. And they must avoid . . . One of the things we want to always avoid is for Crown corporations to let tenders go to one of those very small minority of contractors whose only way of competing is by paying less than fair wages, by not providing pension benefits, by not providing health plans, by not providing health and safety and basic benefits for Saskatchewan workers. We're not allowing . . . we don't want contractors that are going to treat their workers in a less than fair and less than honourable manner.

Mr. Speaker, I invite the Liberal opposition to quit blaming the working people of Saskatchewan for your imaginary woes. I invite the Liberal opposition to quit inventing numbers. I invite the Liberal opposition to show some backbone, to show some spine, to do what you promised you would do in the last election. I invite you to stand up and admit you made an error. There is no shame in admitting you made an error. There's no shame in that. The shame for you is if you continue, continue to defy logic, continue to steadfastly stick your head in the sand and say, oh no, our numbers are right; our numbers that we picked out of the air are right.

And I just want to point out to the member for Thunder Creek, who's also the Finance critic, your credibility, sir, rests on this — your credibility. You cannot on one hand ignore that the total expenditure . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, order. I want to draw attention of the member to rule 28 in the rules of the Assembly. And if I may just quote it to the member, the point will be obvious:

Every member desiring to speak is to rise in his place, uncovered, and address himself to the Speaker.

I have listened this afternoon carefully, and there have been some examples of members directing their comments directly to members on opposite side. And I do want to urge, for the House to preserve the dignity of debate that is deserving of this House, that comments are most appropriately directed through the Speaker.

Mr. Trew: — I thank you for that ruling, Mr. Speaker, and I invite . . . How do I phrase this properly? Mr. Speaker, it is

patently obvious to me — and I hope that through my remarks that I make to you, patently obvious to all others — that Liberal credibility is going to be tied to this very issue.

On the one hand, Mr. Speaker, they cannot ignore the reality that 47 contracts in the first year of operation, which is the only year of experience we have under the Crown corporation tendering agreement, the 47 contracts let under that, Mr. Speaker, totalled \$15,077,647 . . . total value of the contracts, that's the fact.

We have, Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition claiming that somehow they can spin that 20 — pardon me — that \$15.077 million into \$118 million or even more. Well, Mr. Speaker, that has less credibility than the Liberal election platform, their election card, their election promises that required at least at a minimum double-digit growth in the Saskatchewan and Canadian economy for each of the next eight years to pay for their election promises.

Credibility is what is at stake for the opposition in this debate. Their credibility, Mr. Speaker, is at stake. I am trying to do them a favour by urging that the Liberal Party be accurate, be clear, be concise, that they stop beating upon the working women and men of Saskatchewan. Don't blame working people for ailments. Don't blame working people for wanting to earn a living. Don't blame working people for what's going on in the Liberal Party. Instead join with us to make this Crown corporation tendering agreement work. Join with us to make it work. It will work very effectively, not only for the Crown corporations, not only for the tradespeople that I very much care about. It will also work in the benefit of the contractors — the benefit of the contractors.

Mr. Speaker, ever mindful of the time and having thoroughly enjoyed myself for the last five or six minutes, I move that this debate be adjourned.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:59 p.m.

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