The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today on behalf of seriously concerned citizens concerning the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads:

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

The names on the petition, Mr. Speaker, are primarily from Regina and the small surrounding areas. Thank you.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads:

> 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 throughout numerous southern Saskatchewan communities.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. 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 the petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from Regina, Wynyard, Pilot Butte, Bethune. I so present.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well in regard to the issue of the closure of 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 signatures on this petition are almost exclusively from the Regina area.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present names of people who are very upset about the closure of the Plains Health Centre in Regina.

The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

The people who have signed the petition are from Regina, from Balgonie, from Canora, from Nipawin and all over Saskatchewan.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, I rise once again today to present a petition of names from people basically from Regina 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.

Mr. Speaker, the petition has been signed by many, many people from Regina that are concerned about the closure of the Plains and recognize the value of that institution.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present petitions of names from all over 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 who have signed the petition are from Moose Jaw, Rockglen, Chaplin. I also see Nipawin and Caronport on here. Thank you.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I rise again 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, they're from Regina, they're from Weyburn, and they're from Langham and pretty well all throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions from people throughout Saskatchewan and actually a few from throughout western Canada in regards to saving 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.

And, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, many from the Regina area, quite a few from Melville, Windthorst, and of course from Regina Albert South constituency and Elphinstone constituency. There's quite a number of them.

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 reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day 24 ask the government the following question:

> To the Hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General: (1) what is the annual salary of the senior Crown prosecutor who is employed at the North Battleford Crown Prosecutor's office and who was suspended with pay on October 25, 1995 arising from the investigation surrounding the Robert Latimer case in North Battleford; (2) how much has the said senior Crown prosecutor earned since he was suspended with pay; (3) how long will the said senior Crown prosecutor remain on suspension with pay?

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice I shall on day no. 24 ask the government the following question:

> Regarding the Saskatchewan Forest Products Corporation: (1) what was the total amount of tenders for capital asset construction activities in the fiscal year 1992-93; (2) if the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement was in place at that time, how much of that total would have been subject to the CCTA?

Mr. Speaker, I also have 34 similar questions regarding the actual amounts of tenders for capital asset construction activity for the fiscal years '92-93, '93-94, '94-95, '95-96, and the estimated for '96-97 pertaining to Saskatchewan Forest Products Corporation, Saskatchewan Government Insurance, the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, Saskatchewan Telecommunications, the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, and Saskatchewan Water Corporation and SaskEnergy. I will, if you please, read each of them, but in the interests of time, I would like to present them as a group to the Assembly.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to all of the members of the Legislative Assembly, it is my great pleasure today to introduce 13 people from the Regina Baptist Academy. They are seated, as you can see, in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I very much look forward to meeting with this group later for pictures and then a meeting in the appropriate-sized room which happens to be the Speaker's boardroom.

These 11 students are accompanied by their teacher, Nancy Smith, and chaperon, Daniel Lewis. I ask all members to join me in welcoming this group from the Regina Baptist Academy.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and to the Assembly Mr. Manley McLachlan, seated in your gallery. Manley is the executive director of the Saskatchewan Construction Association which represents over 600 private contractors in the province of Saskatchewan

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Traffic Safety

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the importance of traffic safety. Knowing the rules of the road and driving defensively are two things all drivers should keep in mind. An excellent case in point would be the chain reaction of fender benders in the parking lot of the legislature this morning. Mr. Speaker, in a matter of seconds a vehicle belonging to my colleague from Arm River was hit, in turn he lost his grip on the road, and of course that should not be confused with the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) that this government dismantled.

As I surveyed the damage, I noticed several vehicles belonging to members opposite, which were also damaged; I was surprised of course that my own was involved. And I was surprised to hear that one of the New Democrats had a vision, in fact, an impaired vision. I calmed after seeing it was an Eagle Vision, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, thankfully no one was hurt and I can assure this House that the member from Arm River will keep demanding that we send him the bills.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Dairy Youth Ambassador

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let me give you a quotation:

> The possibilities for our industry are endless. As competition gains more access to markets in Saskatchewan's dairy industry, we must adapt by developing innovative tools to ensure our survival.

This is a quote from a constituent of mine, an 18-year-old constituent. Mr. Speaker, Michele Schroeder, from the town of Leroy, has been named the 1996 dairy youth ambassador by the Saskatchewan Dairy Foundation. The award was given at the dairy association's annual convention and was based on her knowledge, poise, and public relations skills. Michelle is currently attending St. Peter's College in Muenster and plans to enter the College of Agriculture this fall, studying biogenetics.

She grew up on the family dairy farm and she has been an active participant in the dairy industry at both local and provincial levels. Her parents, Lorne and Theresa Schroeder,

are understandably proud. As ambassador, Michele will represent the Saskatchewan dairy industry, raising the profile of the industry, its products and its producers.

Mr. Speaker, I can say that I am happy to represent the Schroeder family. The Saskatchewan dairy industry has an excellent ambassador and the province has a certain future leader. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Congratulations to Humboldt Hurricanes

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Humboldt Hurricanes under 15 boys indoor soccer team for winning the provincial championships held in Prince Albert, March 9, 10, and 11. The tournament consisted of eight teams with Humboldt placed in a pool with Moose Jaw, the defending outdoor champions; Saskatoon Lakeridge Snipers, who have not lost a league game all year; and a very tough Regina UCT (United Commercial Travellers) international squad.

In order to advance to the finals, the team had to finish in the top two positions of the pool. Under the direction of their coaches, Michael Suchan and Willie Kosokowsky, the Hurricanes played undefeated in the tournament winning the provincial championships.

Congratulations, Humboldt Hurricanes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crown Land Management System

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During Agriculture Week we honour our province's farmers, as we should. But I also want to commend the members of the Department of Agriculture who work with our farmers and more often receive brickbats rather than bouquets for their efforts.

In particular, today I want to mention a little-known improvement begun in 1994 that saves the taxpayers of Saskatchewan nearly $500,000 a year in reduced operations and support costs.

The new Crown land management system is a new mechanism for managing nearly 9 million acres of Crown land we have in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. This is an example of public servants working quietly in the background without fanfare or recognition to reduce expenses and improve service to the public.

The new Crown management system allows for the automatic generation of lease documents based on the client and land information. This will assist farmers and petroleum companies and municipalities.

Essentially what we are talking about here is to use modern technology to streamline operations, to increase efficiency, and to improve communications with the clients of leased Crown land, Mr. Speaker.

As the old saying goes, Mr. Speaker -- adjusted for inflation — a loonie saved is a loonie earned. This is just one example where the cliché is a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Federal By-election Results

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the daily abuse in this House of the federal government, I want to point out to all my friends in this Assembly that there is a significant confidence which continues to exist.

I rise today to offer my congratulations to all those elected in last night's federal by-elections. As I've always said, the voters are always right. So clearly last night was no exception.

The federal Liberal government defied all odds last night by winning a whopping five out of six contests. For a government that is more than halfway into its mandate, this is remarkable. The by-election wins were a significant vote of confidence in the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, the vote also showed the level of disinterest Canadians have in either the New Democratic Party or the Conservative Party, both of which barely made a blip in last night's election results.

On this side of the House, we may not always agree with our counterparts in Ottawa, but like I say, you can't argue with the Canadian electorate. They know what's best and what's best right now is a Liberal government in Ottawa with the NDP (New Democratic Party) and Conservatives relegated to the sidelines. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Elk Processing Plant

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak about economic development in my constituency. Economic development continues to surge ahead in the city of Lloydminster. A $1.3 million elk processing plant is scheduled to open in the border city in May. This plant will be processing elk antler which has large markets in North America and many foreign countries.

For example, the Koreans use it for health and strength because when it is processed, it is considered a herbal remedy; 85 per cent of the finished product will be exported to Korea and the remainder will go to markets in China, Japan, Taiwan, and North America.

The antlers will be purchased from elk farmers around my area, processed, and eventually ground into powder to be placed into capsules for consumption. This plant will have the capacity to

process about 20,000 pounds of elk antler a year. Mr. Speaker, the finished product must be made to exact specifications and that is why skilled workers from Korea will be training local people how to run the plant.

I would like to congratulate John Jhung, the manager of the plant, for creating economic development in the community by using this home-grown Saskatchewan resource. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation Award

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, Gordon Lund memorial conservation trophy was presented to a Saskatchewan couple who have worked tirelessly for many years in the field of conservation. Dr. James Jowsey and Shirley Jowsey of Saltcoats have long been involved in conservation efforts and have promoted public appreciation of nature.

One of the most important achievements of the Jowseys is the research and writing of *Wildflowers Across The Prairies*. This book, which is a prairie best seller, provided a needed comprehensive and easy to use guide to prairie wild flowers. Jim and Shirley have also conducted many field trips and classes in wild flowers resulting in a heightened interest in their conservation. They continue to assist as volunteers in many conservation projects such as providing botanical and bird inventories on protected areas and assisting in the study of wetlands and the reintroduction of whooping cranes and sandhill crane populations in the Yorkton region.

Congratulations to the Jowseys for winning this award, which is presented to the person or persons who, by thought, effort, and deed are considered to have contributed the most towards the conservation of Saskatchewan's renewable resources. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Belanger: — I ask leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Belanger: — I would like to introduce some guests in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of people from the city here. We have Ted Walters; I ask Ted to stand. We also have Emil Leibel from Balgonie; Dave Ewart from the city here, Regina; Ron and Marge Yeo from the city; Harold Horner, also from the city here; Ken Manz, also from the city here; Roy Pretty from the city here as well; Darlene Sterling from the city here as well; and Lenore Shmeling from Riceton who is an RN (registered nurse).

These people are here this afternoon and they're from the Save the Plains Committee. I'd like to ask the Assembly to welcome these very special guests.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Hamilton: — With leave, to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two former sitting members of this Legislative Assembly. One for Cut Knife-Lloydminster, Bob Long; and one for Regina Wascana, Clint White. I was having a good visit with them and recall the days when Clint had taught me many good lessons of history and also had been a major influence in my being a sitting member here today. So I would like all members to welcome them to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I note . . . oh I'm sorry; with leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I note that in the east gallery there is a friend and well-known advocate for seniors' issues for the province of Saskatchewan. An extremely knowledgeable person and probably well known to many people in this Legislative Assembly. I would appreciate very much if all of us would warmly welcome Ferdie Ewald.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Plains Health Centre Closure

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition has presented petitions on behalf of thousands of Saskatchewan residents opposed to the closure of the Plains Health Centre during this legislative session. And we will continue to do so until all 70,000 signatures have been presented in this House.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Health explain why his government is choosing to base many of its decisions on the advice of 5,000 people who participated in pre-budget consultation meetings, yet refuses to acknowledge the more than 70,000 people who oppose the closure of the Plains?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question.

I want to say to the hon. member and to the House, Mr. Speaker, that the consolidation of services in the Pasqua Hospital and the General Hospital in Regina will not diminish the services available to people in Regina and southern Saskatchewan at all. But it will save the taxpayers $10 million per year and it will improve services, Mr. Speaker. And I find it strange that there would be anybody in this House that would disagree with that.

There have been three boards of the Regina Health District looking at this issue. All three have come to the same conclusion. It's hard to be on the losing side. Sometimes it's hard to accept change. But sometimes we have to change to build a better health care system.

That's what the Regina District Health Board is doing; that's what our government is trying to do. And I support what the board is doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health claims the decision to close the Plains was made solely by the Regina District Health Board. However, I have in my hands — and I would like to send a few copies over to some of the cabinet ministers so that they could follow along today, Mr. Speaker — a copy of a letter dated January 12, 1996, one day before the board voted on the status of the Plains, I might add.

Mr. Speaker, this letter from Deb Jordan of the minister's own department to Dick Chinn of the Regina Health Board states very clearly that the interim operating funding for the district is, and I quote, "predicated on the basis of the board moving ahead with the closure of the Plains." Will the minister admit in this House today the Regina District Board did not choose but was forced into a decision to close the Plains Health Centre?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously the decision to close the Plains Health Centre was a decision for the Regina Health Board.

Now the member is talking about funding for the Regina Health Board. I'll admit, as I admitted in the media yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that the Regina District Health Board, like every other health board, has to live within its budget, just as we all do, just as this government does. And when you can provide the same services at a reduced cost, saving $10 million per year, I say to the members, change is difficult, it's difficult to adjust to change. Sometimes you're on the losing side of an issue — it's disappointing, but the change is for the better. It will save $10 million per year.

Of course we've said to the Regina District Health Board, we provided funding on the basis of the consolidation which has already been occurring over the last few years, Mr. Speaker. And if the consolidation doesn't occur, obviously we're not going to provide funding that is based upon that consolidation occurring.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously the Minister of Health did not realize when he had to apologize in this House the other day for not understanding what his department was up to, he should have taken note of that. He may well have to do the same again.

Mr. Speaker, the letter I've just quoted from shows very clearly that the health board had to go along with the government's wishes or risk jeopardizing the health care of the people of southern Saskatchewan even further.

As an ad by the Save the Plains Committee in Saturday's *Leader-Post* states, and I quote: "With a gun like that at its head, what choice was left?"

Mr. Speaker, given the fact that the Regina District Board was held at ransom by the NDP government and the fact that no independent cost/benefit analysis has ever been conducted on the Plains, will the minister commit to such an independent study before any final decision is made on the future status of the Plains Health Centre?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — You know, I find this a bit strange, Mr. Speaker, because last week on two occasions the member from Wood River and the member from Thunder Creek were up in this House criticizing me because we had hired consultants to look into various aspects of health care, instead of just getting down to the job and making decisions.

Well in terms of the Plains hospital, three boards have made a decision. There have been two studies, Mr. Speaker; not one but two. Last week they say don't hire any consultants. This week they say hire consultants even though there have been two consultants.

So I say to the House, Mr. Speaker, that it doesn't matter what we do on this issue. The job of the members opposite is to complain, and I respect that. And the member from Wood River complains very well.

But on the issue of decision making and consultants, we're not going to study it more. We're not going to have more consultants brought in at a great cost, Mr. Speaker. A decision has been taken by three boards, and we're going to get on with the job, Mr. Speaker, and I invite that member to do so as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An ad appeared in Saturday's *Leader-Post* indicating that the biggest health care recruiter in the United States will be in Regina next month to try and lure health care professionals from this province.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed closure of the Plains Health Centre will result in the elimination of some 200 jobs. Many front-line health care workers at the Plains will obviously be attracted by the proposal in this ad. Will the minister explain if he intends to

stand by and watch health care professionals leave this province for other jurisdictions that have a real commitment to health care?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I want to say to that member, Mr. Speaker, that if she thinks that the jurisdictions that have a commitment to health care for their people are in the United States, I can only say that I disagree with that member. That American system is a system where 35 million Americans have no health care coverage, Mr. Speaker. And if the Liberals think that's some kind of an example, I can only say it's not the example that we're going to follow.

But I want to say the member, as I've said to the House, the closure of the Plains Health Centre doesn't result in the loss of any services to the people of Regina or southern Saskatchewan. And I want to say to the House as well, Mr. Speaker, that contrary to what that member wants people to believe, the number of physicians and specialists practising in this province in the last few years has been going up, not down.

And the American health care system is not an example for that member to be talking about as an example that the people of the province should follow.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, this NDP government continually talks about its commitment to the creation of meaningful, well-paying jobs to help provide a solid tax base in this province. Yet here we have 200 health care workers, representing a $7 million payroll, leaving. Many of these people are half of a dual-income family who are essentially being told, sorry, we don't need you any more.

Mr. Speaker, it was this government that only a few days ago criticized the federal government for relocating 50 health care-related jobs. Can the minister or maybe the Minister of Economic Development explain why his government now thinks nothing of opening a door for 200 front-line workers at the Plains Health Centre to leave this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I want to say to the member, Mr. Speaker, that the Plains Health Centre closure is not a jobs issue. It is an issue that has to do with providing services to the people of Regina and southern Saskatchewan in a cost-effective manner. The people that work and provide services at the Plains Health Centre will be working at the Pasqua Hospital and at the General Hospital, Mr. Speaker. The member simply does not have her facts right in that regard.

This is an issue of health services. Those health services are going to be consolidated; they are going to be provided to the people of Regina and southern Saskatchewan better than they have before, but at a saving. And we support that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Canadian Wheat Board Monopoly

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Minister, Saskatchewan farmers want more marketing choices. Governments should be encouraging this rather than hauling farmers into court for simply wanting to get the best price for their product.

Support is clearly growing for a dual-marketing system and an end to the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly. In fact your government's own polling showed that 58 per cent of farmers believed participation in the Canadian Wheat Board should be voluntary.

Mr. Minister, when are you going to start listening to Saskatchewan farmers? Will you follow Alberta's lead and hold a producer plebiscite to allow for dual marketing?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee the member opposite we will not be following Alberta's lead.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — A government that spends about half of what we do per capita on agriculture, we won't follow that lead.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the western grain marketing panel meetings around this province where there was overwhelming support for Canadian Wheat Board — overwhelming support. We have seen a group of economic professors, Mr. Furtan, Mr. Tyrchniewicz, and Mr. Kraft out of Winnipeg, do a study telling us that there is hundreds of millions of dollars of advantage to the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Speaker, after the combination of the Liberals and Tories taking away $320 million a year through the Crow benefit, I don't know why the member opposite wants to take another 3 or $400 million away by destroying the Wheat Board.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, I'm going by your own polling results. If you're going to do this kind of polling, why don't you listen to it. Seventy per cent of farmers want to be able to sell their grain to domestic markets without going through the Wheat Board, while 50 per cent think they should be able to sell to the U.S. (United States) outside of the Wheat Board as well. Yet the government continues to treat this as a criminal offence.

Mr. Minister, Saskatchewan farmers are not interested in destroying the Canadian Wheat Board. In fact 81 per cent of those polled consider themselves supporters of the Wheat Board. They simply want more marketing choices, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, immediately after question period I'll be introducing an amendment to The Referendum and Plebiscite

Act that will allow for a producer plebiscite vote on this issue. If you are truly interested in listening to Saskatchewan farmers, will you support this legislation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite should do his homework a little better. If he goes back to the Canadian-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, in article 705(5), the U.S. clearly indicate that any change in our marketing structure would cause them to implement on this newest regime of tariffs against our grain. Basically what they're saying is they're going to shut the border down if there's any influx of grain at all.

Mr. Speaker, I want to add to that the numbers from the submissions to the western grain marketing panel. There was some 77 or 80 submissions. You know that 12 of them were opposed to the board? The rest of the them were in favour of the board.

And this member here tries to use a survey, a poll that we put forward. The fact of the matter is if you ask the question -- here's the real question -- if dual marketing or continental marketing means the end of the board, do you still support it, majority of people say no. And we know very well that continental dual marketing will be the end of the board. We say no to that. We say yes to producers earning millions of more dollars, to the Canadian Wheat Board.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Plains Health Centre Closure

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I note that it was quite interesting that when I returned from lunch today I had a phone call from an individual who had called very deeply concerned about the question about the Plains health care centre. And I would like to ask the Minister of Health why his department or why his government will not accept responsibility for their decision?

As we saw in the ad taken out in Saturday's *Leader-Post*, the board, and some members of the board — people are very concerned about what's happening at the Plains health care centre — indicated to us, and we've heard this for the past four years, that they really had no other viable opportunity or alternative because the government basically said we will just cut the funding if you do not continue the process of shutting down the board. It's like they said, with a gun like that to your head, what choice is left?

Mr. Minister, you have said you would give the boards autonomy. That they would have the real powers to make decisions. And yet in this city you appoint six members, allow eight to be elected. The chairman of this board happens to be Mr. Stevenson, and we know all what he's done a number of . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, order. The member has had a lengthy preamble and I'll ask him to proceed directly to his question.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, when will you and your government and your Premier finally acknowledge to the people of this province that the decision to close the Plains Health Centre came directly from your government and your department, not the boards?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, what the member really takes issue with, I think, is the concept that when you fund a board or you fund a government that there should be fiscal responsibility and accountability and that people should in fact live within a certain budget. There's no question about that. And for that I accept responsibility, and the government accepts responsibility.

We're doing a good job funding the health care system, Mr. Speaker; we haven't cut it. But unlike the Conservatives, we're not going to give anybody in the province a blank cheque. We can't have one ourselves and nobody else in the province should have one either. And if the Regina District Health Board — three boards now, Mr. Speaker, and two studies — say that they can provide the same services to the people of Regina, but do it and save $10 million . . .

Mr. Speaker, what the Conservatives did in the '80s in terms of fiscal responsibility is not the example to follow. This kind of thinking, that we should simply pour more money into the system regardless of what the experts tell us, and the boards and the communities decide, is not the kind of thinking that in the long run will keep our health system sustainable for the 21st century.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, I think what people across this southern part of this province, certainly outside of the city of Regina as well as in Regina, are looking for is a totally independent study. Not a study that is commissioned to just indicate to the public that the government's right on track -- a closed study, as we saw the Minister of Agriculture just telling us about the Wheat Board, a study where they . . . well of course the Wheat Board would give that type of a report.

Mr. Minister, you control the purse-strings. Mr. Minister, your department tells the boards how to spend their money, the allotment of funds for acute care, and all the other different levels of care within the board system.

Mr. Minister, you're responsible. Mr. Minister, why will you not listen to the people of this province and acknowledge the fact that it would be appropriate to do a totally independent study to find out whether this is a fiscally responsible choice?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Speaking of fiscal responsibility, Mr. Speaker, it's difficult for somebody like the member, who is part of the previous administration in this province, to do

otherwise than to come into this House and berate Garf Stevenson yet again, who doesn't deserve anything but the highest praise from the people of this province and this legislature for his service to this province, and berate the people that have conducted studies with respect to the Regina Health Board.

And the member says he wants independent studies, well let me say this to the member, Mr. Speaker. One of the consultants on this study was a Mr. Atkinson, who is the same Mr. Atkinson that the member and his government retained to do studies into these matters when they were in office, Mr. Speaker.

Change is difficult. Getting ready for the next century is difficult, Mr. Speaker, but you've got to change sometimes when you can do things better, when you can spend smarter and more efficiently. That's what the Regina Health District is doing and it should have the support of the member, not this kind of criticism of various individuals throughout our province and country, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Classification of Care Levels

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Health should be aware, the recent review process for special services in regional care homes is adopting the Alberta classification system, a system that relies heavily on documentation rather than on needs assessment.

The Parkland Regional Care Centre in my constituency has been affected by this review. It has lost its regional status and therefore its regional funding.

Mr. Speaker, I recently learned from local health officials that British Columbia's Department of Health is considering adopting Saskatchewan's current classification system for level of care because it finds the Alberta system to be impractical. Maybe we have more in common with the Alberta model than just the name Cline.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is this: when other provinces are looking at our system of classification regarding the level of care, why are we using Alberta's system, a province that the Premier refers to as Alabama North, when that province has stripped health care dramatically?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — When the member says that we have something in common with Alberta, Mr. Speaker, I can only assume that the member is talking about the federal government in terms of its funding for health care. Because the federal government is cutting health care spending in this country by about 35 per cent to 1998. The Alberta government also has reduced health care expenditure quite significantly.

We have not done that, Mr. Speaker, because our aim, unlike what the Liberals talked about today in terms of the American health care system, is to preserve the medicare system, the publicly administered system, the single-payer system that we have that we founded in this province, not just for ourselves but for future generations, Mr. Speaker.

And to do that, we need to work in cooperation with all the people in the province. And I hope that the members opposite will think about that. Think about the system we have, not use the American system as an example, and certainly try to encourage Ottawa not to pursue the policy that it has been pursuing, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, local health care officials tell me that without proper funding of programs, patients suffering cognitive impairments such as Alzheimer's or dementia will not receive adequate programs. These programs give patients some chance at renewed dignity and independence. The choices your government is forcing on district health boards will result in these patients being controlled through over-medication and physical restraint.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister assure the people of Saskatchewan that there will be sufficient numbers of beds and program funding to ensure that our parents and our spouses will not face a future of excessive drugs and restraints and understaffed long-term care facilities?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I'm very pleased to hear in both the member's first question and the second question, Mr. Speaker, that he acknowledges what a good system we do have in the province of Saskatchewan.

And the member has some fears that we will do things like Ottawa may be doing or he fears Alberta may be doing to change our system. And I say to the member and to the House, Mr. Speaker, no. We have no intention of doing that at all. We are going to keep our system the best, not only in the country, but in the world. And we're committed to that, Mr. Speaker. And I think our health system is the number one system in the world and we're going to keep it that way. And I thank the member for that vote of confidence, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crown Construction Tendering Agreement

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour. In the past I've asked the minister to justify wasting enormous amounts of taxpayers' dollars as a result of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. He has failed miserably in his attempts. All he had to say was that I had no model or way of documenting that the contracts actually cost any more than they would without the CCTA.

Mr. Speaker, I have received information that a tender for a fire alarm system at SaskTel in Regina closed last week. This tender clearly shows the lowest bid using union labour is nearly

$60,000 — over 20 per cent -- higher than the lowest bid using non-union labour. Mr. Speaker, will the minister confirm that the CCTA is in fact going to cost Saskatchewan taxpayers an additional $60,000 for this one project alone?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — I would like to thank the hon. member for his question, Mr. Speaker. I would point out to the member, reflecting on his earlier questions, he was saying that last year the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement cost us 100-and-some million dollars more. I'd point out to the hon. member that I've checked those figures since, and all of the Crown construction tendering that was done last year amounted to only about $15 million. So when the member says it cost us over $100 million more last year, and there were only $15 million in total, I don't pay much credence to the accusation that the member makes opposite.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And with all due respect, I would rather believe the figures from the Saskatchewan Construction Association than what nonsense that we had tabled here last week.

Mr. Speaker, the CCTA is not a fair and open tendering policy. I don't know why the minister is so ignorant to this. Mr. Speaker, the lowest non-union bidder for the SaskTel fire alarm system is a Saskatchewan firm. The minister stated in this Assembly that his tendering policy takes into consideration Saskatchewan workers, Saskatchewan content, and good quality of work.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems that the lowest bidder using union labour is an out-of-province firm. This would leave me to believe that not only does the minister favour policies that help out his NDP friends, but also takes business away from the good quality construction firms right here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister finally do the right thing and repeal the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — I'd make a couple points with the hon. member, Mr. Speaker. One of the points is that sometimes bids are put in; they are almost vexatious in nature of the bid that's being submitted because they know they don't qualify for the bidding process. They put in a low bid so members like the member opposite can be confused when they place questions on the floor of the Legislative Assembly.

The other point I'd like to put forward is that from time to time there may be firms from outside of Saskatchewan get work in Saskatchewan. Why? Because we take the lowest qualified bid to do the work. We also want firms from Saskatchewan to be able to bid in other places in Canada. In terms of holding our country together and its fabric, we believe that the good policy that we have of lowest qualified is the policy we should stick with, not only so Saskatchewan firms can do good work in Saskatchewan for Saskatchewan construction jobs, but also that Saskatchewan firms can do work outside the province, in the good quality they do, for other places throughout Canada.

So I don't know. The member gets very confused in the questions he puts, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 52 — An Act to amend The Referendum and Plebiscite Act (Canadian Wheat Board)

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill, An Act to amend The Referendum and Plebiscite Act (Canadian Wheat Board) be now 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. 53 — An Act to amend The Snowmobile Act

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill to amend The Snowmobile 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.

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

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before orders of the day, I rise pursuant to rule 46 to ask leave of the Assembly to engage in a debate of urgent and pressing necessity regarding the proposed closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The Speaker: — The member has requested leave to introduce a motion under rule 46. I'll ask that the member explain very briefly, very . . . Order. Order. I will ask the member to very briefly explain the nature of the motion and then advise the House of the wording of the motion he proposes to put.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Closure of the Plains Health Centre

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday an advertisement appeared in the Regina *Leader-Post*. This advertisement finally provided an explanation as to why the elected Regina District Health Board would vote to accept the decision of previous, unelected boards to close the Plains. The reason was because the Saskatchewan Health department told the Regina District Health Board that they would have to repay $5 million which the government advanced them last year.

The Speaker: — Order. Now I would ask the hon. member to explain the reason why this is a motion which should be put before the Assembly now, not to engage in debate. I will ask him if he wants to comment on that, to go precisely to that right now and then to – order -- and then to immediately advise the

House of the motion he intends to request be debated.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason for the urgent and pressing necessity is in fact because of the strong-arm tactics of the Health department and the minister, the confidence in our health system that will be eroded should we not have this debated fully in this House, and the fact that we have 70,000 residents of this province that have . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I will ask the member then to advise the House right now of the motion he intends to put -- or I will proceed to other business -- the motion you intend to have the House consider.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The text of the motion is as follows:

> That this Assembly call upon the government to take immediate action to suspend all decisions regarding the closure of the Plains Health Centre until the Minister of Health and the Department of Health can unequivocally assure the people of Saskatchewan that there has been a cost/benefit analysis, that there is sufficient number of acute care beds to handle patient waiting-lists, that the specialty services given at the Plains Health Centre remain as accessible to residents of Saskatchewan, and that the concerns of the people of Saskatchewan are addressed before further change occurs.

Leave not granted.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will table the answer to question no. 22.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 22 is tabled.

Question 23 is converted to . . . Order. Question No. 23 is converted to motions for return (debatable).

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Redesigning Social Assistance

Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to move the following motion, seconded by the hon. member from P.A. (Prince Albert) Carlton, after my remarks:

> That this Assembly work with the government in its determination to review and revise our social assistance program as outlined in the discussion paper, *Redesigning Social Assistance*, so that they can truly work towards eliminating child poverty and towards assisting people out of dependence and into independence.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of this motion, as are members on this side of the House, because the motion and of course the redesign paper speak to reform. They speak to preparing for the changes over the next century. They speak to redesign. The document and the motion are futuristic. They afford all of us an opportunity to prepare for the next 10, 15 years in terms of the social assistance program.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a hollow motion because it's based on a specific discussion paper. The paper is very readable. It's a discussion paper that has been widely circulated in Saskatchewan, and the Minister of Social Services and his officials have met with, I know, hundreds of clients, client representatives, advocates, and community groups.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to remind all of us that the potential to redesign income security programs occurs about once every 20 years, when you really have the opportunity to think creatively and redesign programs. So it's a chance for all of us to do that in Saskatchewan. It's a chance for Saskatchewan people to again show some leadership in the social arena, as we've traditionally done. And it really I think is a chance for all of us in Saskatchewan, but in Canada too — because there's interest from across Canada in this discussion paper, in these concepts — I think it's a chance to reaffirm the values, the Saskatchewan values that we're all proud of historically here.

So there's a window of opportunity with this discussion paper. And I believe that there is the potential for a future where people can have opportunities greater than they currently do, that is, low income and unemployed people. There would be some possibilities for them to reach their potential, to become financially independent, and perhaps more importantly, Mr. Speaker, a chance for people to have some hope about the future — hope for themselves and their families, their children.

So this is not a simple exercise. Major reform of this kind is not a simple exercise. There are no quick fixes. Income support and social programs are very complex. There are a number of interrelationships to take into account. There's a relationship between income support programs and training programs. There's jurisdictional considerations; the need to put appropriate monies in and so on. And there are no individual solutions isolated from a whole bunch of other factors, so an integrated approach is required.

But I believe, Mr. Speaker, there are solutions though. We've demonstrated that in the past and we can demonstrate that now using, I think, the discussion paper that has been put forward by the Minister of Social Services. There are solutions if we work together, which is the strength and the character of Saskatchewan people. There are solutions if we cooperate, if we become creative, and if we're constructive. And I believe that the redesign paper, Mr. Speaker, does provide us a wonderful opportunity.

I believe that the government's doing its job. Its job is to put forth a proposal for consideration to consider revamping, and sort of manufacturing, in a way that fits the '90s and the next century, a program that's been in place for some 30 years. So there are changing demographics in the case-load. People are on longer than they used to be. The economy has restructured;

the labour market has restructured. And so I think we would all agree that reforms are in order.

Mr. Speaker, it's important though not to sort of throw out things that are working. There are some things that are still working and you build upon the things that are working. And things have evolved over many years for important reasons. So I think it's important that any solutions we choose, any new decisions, are more effective than the ones that they're replacing. I think that's important to keep in mind when we're considering the options.

And of course the challenge and the objective is, as the resolution says, to reduce child and family poverty; to provide opportunities for people; and of course to deal with the issue of supporting people with the tools and the bridges to become more independent.

Mr. Speaker, I know that all members in this House support these concepts. I think we all are here because we believe that people who are unemployed and more vulnerable and less fortunate require the support. We all are here because we believe in strengthening communities. We don't always agree on the analysis. We don't always agree on what choices to make. But I believe that every member is here because he or she believes that they're here to strengthen the communities, to strengthen the province, and to provide additional supports to families.

We're trying to prepare people for the future. We're trying to do it in ways that allow us to forget about the old mind-sets and think open-mindedly and creatively. And most of all, I would say that we need to do this in a way that preserves the dignity of the people that are most affected.

And it's easy to criticize. It's easy to condemn. But I think that it's incumbent on all of us to not do what Alberta's done, for example, to give people bus tickets to somewhere else. That doesn't deal with the issue.

It doesn't deal with the issue, what Ontario's doing. It doesn't deal with the issue. They're going to pay big time for the decisions they're making to put people out on the streets and so on. Manitoba cut a big chunk of money out of the shelter rates last year. They've announced they're cutting their rates by 10 per cent this year. They'll pay for that, I mean, because they're investments. Our child action plan is an investment in families and in strengthening communities.

(1430)

Mr. Speaker, I would say that the Ontario . . . we get out of Toronto here, I believe in today's paper, that Toronto is moving to fingerprinting. Well why on earth, why on earth would you take pride in the fact that you're going to start fingerprinting people on the systems. Well why would you do this to a particular group who are the poorest of the poor in the country. Why would you take pride in saying that you're fingerprinting them?

And as the article says, *The Globe and Mail*, that will give legitimacy to the welfare system if you start fingerprinting those who are getting benefits. It says fingerprinting will benefit a lot of people. Well what poverty advocates say, Mr. Speaker, is that lumping welfare recipients into the same category as criminals, who are already convicted, could be used for other purposes than welfare, in terms of keeping secret files on people.

Well that may be an extreme view, but why on earth would you choose welfare people to fingerprint? It just doesn't make any sense to me. And they go on to say, in Ontario — Toronto — that seven states in the U.S. are doing this and it's working very well. Well by what measure?

As the Minister of Health said earlier today, 35 million Americans have no health coverage. Is that the model that we want to be our model? Mr. Speaker, it is easier to blame . . . In my 20 years experience in this field I found that it's a lot easier to blame people on welfare than it is to come up with creative solutions to provide them with the opportunities.

And so I think the Ontario situation is just getting bizarre, and it's very, very rooted in punitive thinking, and to get the government off the hook, because they don't have the solutions, nor are they even interested in the solutions for low income people.

I believe that everyone in this House though is here for the reason that they want to make a better province for everybody. There are 78,000 beneficiaries, 34,000 being children, in this province who are on social assistance. Now that's a fairly significant percentage of our population, although it's the lowest in Canada of any province. But it's not good enough. So every member here is concerned about those 78,000 people and, of course, those who are just above the assistance level who aren't counted in the 78. I believe that every member is concerned about dealing with that.

And I want to read a Christmas message which was in the *Broadview Express*, Grenfell, December 25 message, a Christmas message. The quote says, from Ron Osika, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, and I believe that the hon. leader agrees with me and he says, and I quote:

> Adversity forces all of us to pull together. And together, the people of Saskatchewan have weathered many a storm. It is my belief that this spirit of community will continue.
>
> We must never forget people right here in Saskatchewan (who are) less fortunate than (we are).
>
> In a world that is quickly evolving, where change is occurring faster and faster, Saskatchewan has no choice but to keep up with those changes. The way things were done 10, 20, 30 years ago no longer apply to today's world. Adapting to those changes puts even more challenges in our path. But as we adjust to those changes, government cannot forget the human factor. Saskatchewan was built on neighbour helping neighbour. That message is especially important as we (move into) the 21st century.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Hon. Leader of the Opposition. That is right on. So I anticipate that the hon. leader and his party, who are concerned about the less fortunate, will take the invitation of the Minister of Social Services, the invitation that this resolution or this motion provides, to in fact give their creative suggestions to the minister.

And I know that they know that that's a genuine, sincere offer by the minister because this is the opportunity for all of us together here to redesign a program that truly does deal with family poverty and give people the tools to make sure that they have opportunities to become financially independent.

So I know that this is a motion that in spirit would be accepted by all members of the House and I really hope that all members will see fit to approve this motion. And then if there's not agreement on all the elements of the program . . . I'm not going to go into some of those elements today, the specific elements like the child benefit and so on, because the hon. member from P.A. is going to do that and I did that to some degree the other day. But if one disagrees with some of those specific strategies, then that's fine; make those suggestions known and I'm sure the minister will be open-minded about that.

So, Mr. Speaker, this I believe is a compassionate document, the discussion paper on the redesign of the social assistance program. I believe that all members of the Assembly are compassionate. We're all seeking solutions, to do the best we can.

Family poverty must be dealt with. And we believe that in order to do that it requires a fairly major redesign. And I know that there are people in the community who feel — and many clients — who feel optimistic that if we implement this program it would even be better if there was enhanced federal support.

I know that the Minister of Social Services met yesterday with his federal counterpart, discussing some potential joint cost-sharing on an enhanced child care program. I'm optimistic that something will come of that. And I think that that's the kind of example between governments that will in fact give — especially low income people — a hope that we can work together.

So, Mr. Speaker, what I will do then is, in closing, say that I move, seconded by the member from P.A. (Prince Albert) Carlton:

> That the Assembly work with the government in its determination to review and revise our social assistance program as outlined in the discussion paper, *Redesigning Social Assistance*, so that they can truly work towards eliminating child poverty and towards assisting people out of dependence and into independence.

In closing, I think it is a positive paper. We need everyone's ideas and I urge all members to support the motion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member from Saskatoon Eastview for putting this motion before the House. This is a very important issue and it's an issue which really does distinguish this government, this New Democratic government of Saskatchewan, from many other governments in Canada. And I'm very proud to be able to stand here in support of this motion.

In the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, the government indicated that we're setting our goals in this session, and in the three years to follow, as preparing Saskatchewan for the 21st century.

The part of that goal, and part of reaching that goal, is to redesign the social service network. And when I read through the paper I found that it was a very thoughtful paper. I was very pleased that it was a paper that was put out for discussion. And I was particularly pleased to see that the methodology and the attitude that the government was displaying here in Saskatchewan was markedly different from what was being done in the provinces both to the west of us and to the east of us.

Particularly when we think back of what Alberta did. Alberta lowered the rates given to social service recipients, and basically gave their people bus tickets, ending up in an influx of people moving, people that were on social services, moving from Alberta to British Columbia.

And then when we look at what was happening in Ontario, a very similar thing. In 1995, July of 1995, the Ontario's Conservative government of the day proudly announced, and I think it's a shame, that they were cutting social assistance rates by more than a fifth.

So what we saw there in the case of both of those right-wing governments, Mr. Speaker, was an attitude of governments where they were blaming the victim and where they were giving them the back of their hands and saying, out of here.

Mr. Speaker, that distinguishes them from this government. What we are saying to the people on social assistance is we want to give you a hand-up, not the back of the hand. A hand-up, not a hand-out; not the back of a hand, but a hand-up. And that is what this philosophy of our social assistance plan and redesign plan is all about.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that it is a measure of a society, it's a measure of a government, of how it treats its most vulnerable people — those who are unable to become independent. And in some cases this may be seniors, in other cases it may be children, and Saskatchewan's case certainly applies to a lot of the people that are involved on social assistance, are children. Or people who for other reasons are unable to get their independence, whether those reasons be due to lack of education, or whether they be because of physical purposes, or due to illness.

I'm proud of the system that we have developed over the years because we have a system where really nobody in our country, in our province, need lack for basics. This becomes very

obvious when you visit countries outside of Canada, particularly African countries or some south Asian countries, where you will see a friend or a relative take a leper and park him in front of a bank or in front of some business and leave him parked there for the day to beg for a living for the rest of the day.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that we in this country have found ways of giving people dignity and have developed a system which is quite sophisticated, but needs constant attention and needs adjustment, but have developed a system where I can feel proud that we, together as a society, can claim that we are taking care of those that are most vulnerable and most poor in our society.

Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan as of November, there were 79,615 people receiving social assistance. That's about nearly 7 per cent, but we must keep in mind that 34,600 of those are children, are children.

If you want a comparison, Mr. Speaker, in Ontario where they have 10 times the population — we have a population of about a million, Ontario has a population of about 10 million — in Ontario there were 1.3 million people who were taking social assistance and that percentage is far higher than it is in Saskatchewan.

When you take off the numbers of children on here, what we found, Mr. Speaker, that there was a full 18,000 people — 18,700 people — who were actually employable. And this is . . . a lot of our redesign is to try to assist those people who would be employable or capable of being employed to get them into the employed list. Because what they really want, Mr. Speaker, is jobs. They want to be able to work for wages and not work for welfare.

Of those 18,000, there are a thousand now who have full-time jobs and there are about another 4,600 who have part-time jobs; however, the system of pay does not always work to the advantage of people who may have large families. So if you were on rather a minimum wage, on a minimum wage, which is not quite enough to raise a fairly good-sized family on, the assistance plan kicks in.

Our redesign is geared, first of all, to help those families with children. There is a Saskatchewan child benefit which fits into this, Mr. Speaker, and it's designed to give families with low income assistance, those families with small children with low income. And it'll be designed to give them a little more money to keep those families working so they don't feel they don't have to go on welfare to get additional money. But they will be able to keep working, and their children will still have the benefits necessary, such as health and health coverage benefits, and benefits to be able to go to school with good clothing and have the equipment necessary to go to school.

There is also a proposal in this to supplement those people who are working with assistance. And those people who perhaps are working part time should not be penalized by having the money that they are earning through work being clawed back. So there's a proposal that that system be reviewed.

(1445)

And last of all, I think, it's also quite important that those youngsters under age 22 will have any disincentives to work and disincentives to move away from their families removed. The whole idea is to link up the youth with education and link them up with their families.

Mr. Speaker, we're doing all of this in the face of the Liberal cuts from Ottawa. In 1993 the federal government capped the amount that they were giving to the province of Saskatchewan. That meant from then on we were on our own. They offloaded. They said, we're not going to give you any more. Then in addition to that, they changed the unemployment insurance system which caused a great deal of people who were ordinarily able to work and have income from the unemployment insurance system to fall on to the social assistance case-load.

Then on top of that, the federal government offloaded aboriginal people that were off reserve on to the provincial system. And then on top of that, in the last year they cut back about $20 million to social services. That's part of the $100 million the Saskatchewan government is being asked to back-fill.

So when you put those three programs together, I wonder where the federal government is? The federal Liberal government is doing no better than the Conservative government in Ontario and the Conservative government in Alberta. No better. They are trying to penalize the victim. They are giving the people at the very bottom of our income ladder the back of their hand when they should be giving them a hand up, Mr. Speaker.

We say that the answer to those people that are looking for jobs, that want to work but find themselves unable to work, is through training and through education. And we are again redesigning our programs in the face of federal cuts, tremendous federal cuts, in the face of great adversity. But we know that the people of Saskatchewan have said that we should keep our health, our social services, and our education programs as foremost. And, Mr. Speaker, the people on this side of the House are determined to carry their load on that.

Mr. Speaker, I will close by summarizing, by saying once again, that I am proud that this government is not victimizing those who are already victims and is going to be redesigning the program to protect those that are the most vulnerable. I thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion as our caucus has put forth our own motion on the very important subject for the last two weeks. At the end of my comments, I will propose an amendment to this motion.

Mr. Speaker, our caucus has some concerns about what is and what isn't being addressed in this government's discussion paper entitled *Redesigning Social Assistance*. In consulting with a number of social assistance recipients and with groups

striving to eradicate poverty in our province, I have found that their focus is on social development through sound economic development resulting in a greatly diminished need for social assistance.

People presently receiving social assistance speak of their deep desire to become meaningful contributors to their communities through their own talents, abilities, and energies.

In 1987 the New Democratic Party formed a four-member task force which directed itself to undertake a public review of Saskatchewan's social services. The task force set about to draw information from the experiences and wisdom of the people in this province. One of their goals was to gain insight into how social services affect Saskatchewan people. Let me applaud the idea, and let me applaud some of the recommendations made in those seven public hearings and in over 190 presentations submitted to the NDP.

I would like to at this time remind the members opposite of one of their own principles put forward in that 1987 report, nine years ago. It stated that social services must be designed to maximize dignity, personal responsibility, self-respect, and opportunity, and to minimize complexity, inequity, and opportunities for bureaucratic control over the lives of recipients.

The theory was there already nine years ago. What has happened to that theory? Words are not enough, Mr. Speaker. Words must be accompanied by an underlying understanding of what is implied by the theory to put it into practice. I don't believe the NDP understands that those words can only become meaningful and have substance if an environment is created that will allow personal responsibility and opportunity to evolve through policies that support their community-based initiatives.

An environment that supports community-based empowerment, instead of policies that lend to government control over community decision making, which ultimately impede entrepreneurial initiatives, is needed. Excessive taxation, high utility rates, and the cutting of services in rural and urban communities are also a detriment to job creation.

When a hospital is closed or its staff are laid off, those people may be forced to leave the community. Doctors and nurses leave. Next, clinics and pharmacies close. When these community services are forced to close, owners and employees have to leave and they take their children with them.

In turn, school enrolments diminish. This means teachers lose their jobs and leave, also taking their families with them. By this time, more businesses are getting panicky and are afraid that they will not have the population base needed to remain viable. It's a devastating chain reaction and it is happening in our communities right now, Mr. Speaker.

We believe it is within the power of the Premier to create opportunities by lowering taxes and utility rates and by cutting through some of the red tape that hinders entrepreneurial spirit and restricts growth in the business sector. Instead, the government would rather introduce learnfare and workfare.

People aged 18 to 21 will have to go to school or work in order to receive social assistance. Learnfare and workfare can only be beneficial if there are jobs available or if an environment exists that promotes economic and social development.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Social Services, how can learnfare, with its exorbitant costs and more than likely yet another unnecessary layer of bureaucracy, possibly be an answer? We already have learning institutes that can take many, many people who want to learn, in.

If this government does not foster an environment conducive to job creation, we can get nowhere. And what about the many young people who live in northern Saskatchewan, who have very limited access to post-secondary institutions or to meaningful, full-time employment? What about people in their 30's or 40's on social assistance who want to go back to school? Where are they in this discussion paper? The youth and in fact all the people of Saskatchewan deserve better than what has been proposed in this discussion paper.

Mr. Speaker, once again I am drawn back to rural and northern Saskatchewan. I have to speak for these people because this government certainly hasn't. The people of rural Saskatchewan have watched their economy and their way of life disintegrate before their eyes.

Government speaks of partnership, but through its policies such as health reform, it pits communities against each other. They blame each other for taking away seniors' homes or hospitals when they should be blaming the NDP government.

When this happens to communities, Mr. Speaker, we see a ripple effect. The use of food banks in rural Saskatchewan is increasing. Poverty is increasing. Social problems are increasing. In fact the only thing that doesn't seem to be increasing is the number of jobs, and it's no wonder with the decimation of rural communities taking place under the present government system. I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I see a definite correlation.

Mr. Speaker, I also have to touch on the proposed welfare reform and how disabled people get lost in the message. Perhaps not everyone here knows that disabled people represent a small percentage of Saskatchewan's population, but they represent a significant portion of the welfare case-loads.

Currently they are eligible to receive money through the vocational rehabilitation for disabled program. However, in the proposed changes, they would be lumped together with non-status Indians and Metis in a large provincial training allowance program. These people are afraid that they will get lost in the shuffle. I would ask this government to think for a moment about how they can assure these people, the majority of whom can possibly work, that their drastically needed vocational rehab programs will not fall by the wayside.

I give the government credit for recognizing that something needs to be done with the social problems plaguing rural, urban, and northern Saskatchewan, but this discussion paper is only a band-aid solution that will not help heal a very deep wound, a

wound that has been created by the government slashing of programs and especially by its lack of real commitment to creating jobs.

Before this paper goes anywhere we need to see some real, valuable consultations with the people it will affect. After all, the people affected by these changes deserve a say in how this government plans to drastically alter their lives. Now, before this government goes any further, is the time to step back and take a long, hard look at social programs in this province. And now is the time to refocus on the real need, the need for comprehensive social development.

And this time we should include all areas of Saskatchewan when we create our model. That means we should include rural, urban, northern, southern, eastern and western Saskatchewan in the process. Because, Mr. Speaker, social development is at the very heart of our society, and social development programs deserve to be created in a thoughtful and compassionate manner. Because, Mr. Speaker, if this isn't done, people will continue to fall between the cracks. These people are your children, my children, our parents, our neighbours, and our friends.

Mr. Speaker, in the best interest of Saskatchewan people I would like to move the following amendment to the motion, seconded by the member from Athabasca, to be read as follows:

> That all the words after "Assembly" be deleted and the following words substituted therefor:
>
> condemns the provincial government for failing to recognize that significant and sustained job creation is the only way to cure the growing social assistance numbers in Saskatchewan, and because it has provided no real hope for those employable residents on social assistance to get back on their own feet with long-term jobs.

Thank you.

(1500)

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just before I begin, I want to say that I tire of the debate when it comes to social services and all the grand plans that governments have for people that are on social assistance not only in northern Saskatchewan but throughout Saskatchewan as well.

I sincerely appreciated the comments of the member from Prince Albert Carlton in reference to the need to emphasize that governments should help people on social assistance. And certainly as a member from a northern Metis community that certainly has seen many problems associated with the lack of opportunity, both economically and socially, I also see the pressing need for a new approach to social services.

I think we have to point out that we've got to re-emphasize compassion as government, Mr. Speaker. We have 58 people in here that make laws and create laws and create the legislation that would assist people and would help people.

And I want to also add to the comments of the member from Prince Albert Carlton that particularly from my area, from my region, we certainly don't want a hand-up attitude, nor do we want the back of the hand when it comes to social services. We cannot as a society justly beat our weakest member, the people that haven't got employment and the people that haven't got adequate homes and the people that haven't got adequate control over their lives.

The Liberals don't want that, and they don't appreciate any effort in that regard. So the northern people don't want the hand-up attitude; they don't want to come to the government with their hands up and say, please help us. They have a lot of pride, Mr. Speaker. They have the same dreams and ambitions as every single member in this House.

They don't want as well, Mr. Speaker, a hand-out attitude as well. Governments have got to start looking at northern Saskatchewan as a place that is very exciting, Mr. Speaker, and a hand-out is simply not going to do it. What the northern people want, and I think what the people on social assistance want, is they want a fair share and fair control over their own lives.

The madness has to stop, Mr. Speaker. We're going through a cycle of constantly turning people in and out of our social services system. And what do we end up with in the end as a north, east, west, south? You end up with a whole pile of children and a whole pile of problems that will not get any better unless we have a unique and better way to address the social services system, not only in northern Saskatchewan, but throughout the province as well.

We have to, as human beings, re-emphasize our compassion to our weakest members of our society. So what the northern people want, and I think what people want in general when it comes to social services, is they want excitement; they want a new approach, Mr. Speaker, particularly in northern Saskatchewan. They don't want a hand-up, they don't want a back of the hand, they don't want a hand-out. Mr. Speaker, they want a fair share of control and access to the resources, from governments.

And we as government, we've got to give them that opportunity. We all know what needs to be accomplished, Mr. Speaker. We need to be able to give people the opportunity to control their lives, to design a future for their children, and give them the tools to accomplish that — education, training, adequate assistance for business development, and the list goes on and on and on.

I think for years we've been hearing, as government, that this type of effort needs to happen. How many more years must the people on social services tell the government and tell us as legislators that we have to have a new approach; we have to have a unique approach; we have to have an exciting approach. We have to have an approach that consults with them. Say, how can we do things better.

Right throughout Saskatchewan, we'll all benefit if we invest in people — if we invest in people. And I say again, if we invest

in people. A truly socialist government, Mr. Speaker, would give people control over their lives, and I think that's a very key thing when it comes to northern Saskatchewan. So while I appreciate the comments of the member from Prince Albert Carlton, I think we have to go much deeper than that, Mr. Speaker.

In northern Saskatchewan there is a system of disincentives. The only place that is able to offer employment is the meagre jobs attached to the mining industry. Many people work in the mining industry, Mr. Speaker, and they have in essence tried their very best to create employment for northern Saskatchewan people. I am not knocking the mining company nor am I knocking the forestry companies that are operating in northern Saskatchewan.

But when it comes to addresses of . . . or government's paper, *Redesigning Social Assistance*, from my perspective as an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from a northern community that does not have an economic . . . the economic might that others regions have, I want to express my feelings on this thing. And if it's the feelings of many people throughout Saskatchewan, then perhaps the Saskatchewan government should listen.

After we leave the Assembly here today we all go to our families, we sit down at a nice table and we have some food and we live in a nice home, and of course we have the opportunity to stay with our family. But in northern Saskatchewan, many times, Mr. Speaker, there's so many problems associated with this system that we live under, including the social services system, that that same opportunity, that same contentment that we feel as human beings, is not prevalent.

I talk about the unique perspective on social assistance and I share some of my views, and I hope to make this system truly responsible, Mr. Speaker, to all people in the province, not just to the bureaucrats' design that say, well let's tinker with the social assistance program.

They've got to leave this cement building, go out to northern Saskatchewan or go out to the smaller centres, whether they're 100 people or 10,000 people, and visit people. See the dysfunction out there and see the frustration of people when it comes to social services.

If you're going to fix the system, I would urge this government to do a revamping of the whole system.

Northern Saskatchewan may get a hundred million dollars from the mining royalties — and I quote that from a CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) news story. I don't know how much they get from the forestry activity, the tourism activity, from the personal income tax, from the GST (goods and services tax) credits, and the list goes on and on. Now what northern Saskatchewan people get, in particular in my riding, what they receive in return is a system that really is filled with disincentives.

I think the important thing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share with the Assembly is a letter from a gentleman out of Green Lake. This is a gentleman that's about 45 years old; he's got children; he has hopes and aspirations, like many of us do for our children and our grandchildren, and I want you to read a letter. It has more to do with economic development, but this goes back to my point about social assistance.

Dear Mr. Belanger

Recently I had submitted a proposal to Saskatchewan Economic Development, small business division (in) La Ronge.

This proposal was for financial support (which is a loan) a loan to purchase log hauling equipment, (which is a) tractor unit and a log trailer.

These monies would be paid back at a monthly rate over a period of five years to the full amount of the loan plus all charges.

I was visited by an agent from SEDCO the first week in November 1995. We filled out all application forms as required and also did up a business plan.

I gave SEDCO a financial statement which was for the 1994 season.

This statement was audited by Deutscher & Aldous, certified general accountant of Meadow Lake. Also giving information regarding my company and myself that they asked for.

For some time this proposal was going along quite smoothly, or so I thought, and I feel that I was led to believe that there would be no problem in having this completed.

However, after a period of (several) weeks I was called around 11:30 p.m. telling me my proposal was declined. Then two days later another late evening call saying it was to be reviewed.

In the past five to six weeks my credibility, (my) pride, (my) integrity, and (my) honesty have been screened to no limits. I have been contacted by SEDCO several times, but still have not only any sort of answers regarding my proposal, each call seems to be more screening.

My understanding is SEDCO funds are for northern small business and people who meet requirements to receive such funds.

I am a northerner Metis, a resident at Green Lake where I have lived all my life.

I am not seeking handouts, but a chance to be independent and self supportive and employed. I have been so for the past two years and all I want to do is better my business and continue to be a self supporting individual.

And this is a gentleman out of Green Lake, Mr. Speaker, that wrote this letter with all effort. And the point that he makes at the end, Mr. Speaker, is, "continue to be a self-supporting individual." This points out, Mr. Speaker, that northern Saskatchewan is exactly that.

There are so many problems, Mr. Speaker, that I would suggest that we take a unique and fresh approach when it comes to proposals of redesigning our system. We should go out in the community and see how some of the communities in northern Saskatchewan . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The member's time has expired. Debate will continue.

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on the motion made by the hon. member from Saskatoon Eastview. As a province, we have been fairly successful in protecting the most vulnerable, supporting those who are unable to support themselves, and providing assistance to our neighbours in need.

But as you know, the federal government is changing the way it funds social services, health, and education. And in that process, it would reduce funding by 106 million in these areas in 1995-96 and by more in the coming years. Changes to the unemployment insurance program include lower income benefits and shorter periods of time for payment of benefits . . . have forced more unemployed to use social services for support.

The federal government also withdrew from providing social assistance for first nations people living off reserve. These changes have put an additional financial burden on the province, but can we in turn cut programs to our most vulnerable citizens? Not in this province, not in Saskatchewan — this we can be assured of.

We must address the problem of poverty, but we must address it with compassion, community, caring, and common sense. People have said that we should just cut benefits, but we must keep in mind that 44 per cent of recipients are children, the most vulnerable of all; 37 per cent are aboriginal, and this is expected to increase. How did this situation develop in a province with so much?

As a government, we need to deal with this as we look at restructuring our programs and services for the future. That does not mean we need to cut our programs and services, but we need to make them cost effective and efficient. Across government we are downsizing our staff, reducing or eliminating duplication between the federal and provincial governments, and better targeting our services to meet the needs of Saskatchewan people.

Social assistance is a cycle. This cycle of dependence must be broken. This is what *Redesigning Social Assistance* does — it breaks the cycle. Saskatchewan has taken some preventative steps to address child and family poverty through initiatives such as action plan for children, prevention and support grants, integrated school link services, and the child nutrition and development program. These programs address the needs of children, and the proposed Saskatchewan child benefit would address the needs of families by providing a monthly supplement based on family income. It would also supplement the wages of the many low income families who live below the poverty line but earn too much to qualify for social assistance.

I strongly support these initiatives because it encourages families to take pride in their lives, knowing they are providing a better life and a better way for their family.

Half of the individuals receiving social assistance in this province are unable to support themselves financially because of mental, physical, or emotional disabilities. These individuals will always need to be, at least in part, on social assistance. It is the reason we must remain committed to an effective support system. But for those who are able and want to be healthy contributing members of society, we need programs to encourage them. We need to educate and train, especially our youth. Educate and train, not only through school but with life skills — basic needs such as balancing a cheque book, cooking a nutritious meal, good hygiene, to teach them to be responsible and to have pride in their achievements.

The member from Humboldt says the poor and disadvantaged are not being looked after, but let's backtrack. We in Saskatchewan have maintained the social safety net despite attacks from the federal government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murrell: — The record speaks for itself. We are not fighting the deficit on the backs of the people who can least afford it. We are maintaining the values of caring and compassion toward the poor. On the other hand, across the country we see people venting their frustration and anger at the federal government and some provincial governments for tampering with the country's social programs in a most devastating manner. In Saskatchewan people are being consulted about change. At the federal level, people are being told about it after the fact.

In preparing for the 21st century, we consulted our people about redesigning social assistance and are continuing to do so. With input from these consultations, the proposed system will address problems associated with the poor and disadvantaged. No family would have to rely on social assistance for their children's basic needs. Low income working families would have an incentive to earn as much as possible. Youth would be involved in productive activities such as education or work experience. All persons attending training would receive the same level of financial help based on family size.

The proposed changes will address Saskatchewan family problems, whether they live in the North, the South, the East, or the West. And I would also remind the member that the minister from the North is responsible for Northern Affairs and is very knowledgeable on issues affecting people in the North.

(1515)

I am learning by listening, and if the members opposite would

refer to *Hansard*, March 25, 1996, page 472, the member from Redberry Lake talked about a family service agency, an agreement with Social Services and Saskatoon Tribal Council:

> This . . . will promote the development of an . . . agency that will assume responsibilities for the delivery of child and family services to the first nations people . . . (promoting) the culture and traditions of the people involved.

Positive initiatives, cooperative initiatives, through consultation.

The member from Thunder Creek referred yesterday to the *Academy Awards*. He neglected to mention the movie, *Sense and Sensibility*; therefore I shall, because the redesigning of social services needed not only a brave heart but sense and sensibility. This government is deserving of an Oscar for its directing and editing with all of these qualities. When the script is finalized, we will have a finished production that all provinces can follow. We, as leading men and women, can play a supportive role in the redesigning of social services; thereby protection of the most vulnerable will be assured.

I know that this government has accepted the challenges of restructuring social assistance so that it meets the needs of all of us. Therefore I support the original motion, introduced by the member from Saskatoon Eastview, and oppose the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too am very pleased to enter briefly into support of the motion of my good friend, the member from Saskatoon Eastview. And while I have respect for the remarks of the members opposite, I cannot support them and therefore will not be supporting the amendment but will be supporting the main motion.

I think too that it's worth saying that the member from Saskatoon Eastview was himself very responsible for the work that went into this social services redesign paper and is to be commended for the work that he did.

Well, Mr. Speaker, social assistance programs are intended to be programs of last resort. When individuals or families have very little or no means of support, the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan provides for basic needs: clothing, shelter, utilities, and food.

Now this program is 30 years old. Society has changed since it was first introduced in 1966. Originally the program was not expected to deal with large numbers of employable people. A small number yes, but generally they did not stay on assistance long and usually found their own way, using their own resources, back to a job. But now, Mr. Speaker, the labour market and the economy have changed. And these changes have a significant impact on our social programs.

In the 1960s unemployment was around 4 per cent. Now unfortunately the figure is higher. There are fewer middle income jobs. There's an increase in part-time work. And you really need a minimum of at least grade 12 to compete for new jobs, even entry-level jobs like working in a hamburger fast food outlet or working as a gas station attendant.

As well the current system doesn't do enough to address poverty and — and this is important — the current system sets up barriers to work, to achieving independence. And surely, Mr. Speaker, what we want to do is help people achieve independence. We believe that employment is far preferable to being on assistance.

But at the same time we must protect the most vulnerable in our society. As Canadians we believe that we have a responsibility to each other and to the less fortunate. And, Mr. Speaker, as a government, we have a responsibility to use tax dollars wisely.

Under this program, this program designed 30 years ago, our costs have risen from $190 million in '91-92 to 317 million in '94-95. And there are more people on social assistance — 26,000 in '91-92, and 40,000 in '94-95. So people are concerned. Is the program effective? Is the program sustainable?

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, the federal government is eliminating the Canada Assistance Plan at the end of this month and replacing it with the Canada Health and Social Transfer. This means less money for Saskatchewan — over $100 million less just this year.

As well the federal government has withdrawn from providing social assistance for first nations people living off reserves. Saskatchewan has of course accepted this new responsibility and looks after these individuals and families. But this has added about $40 million to our provincial social assistance budget.

So, Mr. Speaker, our government has responded to the obvious need for change, for rethinking and redesigning social service programs to encourage individual, family, and community responsibility, and to provide opportunities to attain independence, to help social assistance recipients participate in the economic and social life of their communities. We need to help people so that they'll be able to work to support themselves, not trap them in a dependency cycle.

We need to support children of low income families so that they grow up to be healthy, contributing members of their society, and we need to do a better job of linking dependent youth to jobs and education. And to that end we have introduced a social services discussion paper, *Redesigning Social Assistance*.

The key components of this paper are a Saskatchewan child benefit, a working income supplement, and a youth futures program. A child benefit would work like this. All children of low income families and children of families on social assistance would receive a benefit that is separate from social assistance. This would mean that children would no longer be dependent on social assistance and this will help low income families to move off and stay off social assistance.

Supplementary health benefits would be extended to children in families receiving the Saskatchewan child benefit. This would ensure that children's health costs are not a barrier to a family leaving welfare.

Through our working income supplement for low income families, we would provide low income working families with monthly supplements so that they would be better off working than they would be receiving assistance. And this would reduce poverty levels and remove barriers to work which presently exist within the system.

The youth futures program is, I think, Mr. Speaker, one of the most imaginative ways to break the dependency cycle. This program links low income, needy youth to school and their communities. This initiative would assume that parents are responsible for their children to age 21. Youth whose families are unable to provide for them would be eligible for financial assistance and would be required to enrol in school or work at a community service job to receive benefits.

Mr. Speaker, many government members have spoken about the commitment this government has to consulting. This discussion paper is no exception. Consultations have been very extensive, very extensive. Nearly 14,000 surveys have been distributed, and the results are coming back all the time.

As part of the overall government's new century consultation process, various ministers took part in 20 public meetings across the province where more than 2,000 people participated. The minister and departmental staff have met with representatives from approximately 250 organizations. The response so far has been very positive and the process is continuing.

Mr. Speaker, we need to redesign our social assistance programs. The challenge is to redesign it so that it protects the most vulnerable; redesign it so that it supports the people who are moving to independence; redesign it so that it is accountable; and redesign it so that it gives hope and a chance for a better life to those who need that chance.

So I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the proposals outlined in this paper will do just that, and therefore I support the main motion before us today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — If there are no further speakers, we will proceed to the 10-minute question and answer period, or questions and comments period. If there are no members wishing to put . . .

Mr. Belanger: — A couple of questions on the actual social assistance. The member from Prince Albert Carlton, was there any discussions with any of the native organizations and the native women's organizations in the Prince Albert area regarding the potential changes to this Act?

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you very much for the question. The consultations are ongoing right now. The changes would not be implemented until consultation period is finished, so if there is anybody that you think might want to give a comment or a suggestion as to what should be done, we'd certainly welcome it directly by paper or through yourself as a member.

I have consulted with some groups myself to date, but there's certainly still some time to do this.

Mr. Belanger: — I'm going back to some of the problems that the government, your government, has associated with the cut-backs that the federal government has instituted on the province.

How do you propose that this Bill — again, it's a question to the member from Prince Albert Carlton — how do you propose to have young people either work for their benefits, or go to school for their benefits, when they're cutting back training programs left and right? And plus the fact of the matter is, northern Saskatchewan, there's a lot of problems in terms of creation of jobs — it's an economically depressed area.

And yet the only answer you come back with is, well it's the main federal government. So how does this government propose to do the exact change that you speak about without blaming the federal government?

Mr. Kowalsky: — Well I think what we were trying to do was outline the nature of the problem, the extent of the problem; that our social services load has gone up in the last year or two when we were expecting that with an improved economy that it should be going down.

And the reason it's gone up is two reasons basically: part of it is because of changes to the UI (unemployment insurance) system; and secondly, because of the added load from the federal social service system through the Indian . . . Instead of Indian Affairs picking it up, the provincial government is now picking it up.

So what's happening is, through the budgeting process — and this will be announced, mostly announced, at budget time — but through the budgeting process, we're trying to do is to make sure that it's not the people who are at the very bottom of our economic ladder that have to take the brunt of this offload.

So there's an attempt being made throughout government to pare all parts of government so that we do not offload onto those people that are the most vulnerable, and at the same time . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The member is taking quite some time in his response and I'll ask if there are any other questions or comments.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to address a question to the minister from Saskatoon Eastview, I believe it is.

Mr. Minister, in considering some of the things put forward in the discussion paper, I have noted that low income supplement will go to people of low incomes to supplement the income

they do have. I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if this low income supplement will pertain also to farm people who have a very low net profit at many times and whether those people will be considered eligible for low income supplement?

The Speaker: — Before the member responds, I'll remind the members that it's private member's debate and questions are not put to ministers but to members. And I'll ask the member for Saskatoon Eastview to respond.

Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much. I thank the hon. member for the question. Well I think it's important to state that there are a lot of farm families on social assistance today. They may be rich in assets but poor in net cash and so on. And that number, you know, has increased over the years. And so there's no distinction here; low income families in the province are low income families in the province.

And so the idea of the child benefit is to provide another way of supporting . . . take the support for children out of the social assistance program, and that would be the case for families whether they're on farm, off farm, in small communities, or in cities.

Every citizen, by right of citizenship, has the same entitlements. And that's the same for low income families in terms of the health care benefits that would be provided if you're not on assistance. It doesn't matter where you live, you get the same benefits.

And of course in the North there's a little extra, additional consideration there. The North has a special food allowance. Every family on assistance, where there's a child in the North, every child gets an extra $50 a month that southern families don't get, to take into account the cost of living. This is the only province that does that, by the way.

(1530)

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to address the member with one more question.

I was wondering whether or not, for instance, if people eligible to go through the learnfare in fact do that, possibly attain a part-time job and then are laid off in that job or a full-time job and are laid off in that job, whether they will be re-eligible for social assistance?

Mr. Pringle: — My view would be that anyone who is willing to participate in retraining, go back to school, some community project, or work, the willingness is the key. And if through your own, or through some other circumstances, you're back on assistance and you qualify, you would be entitled. So I think the minister would answer that the answer to your question would be yes.

Mr. Belanger: — I just had a question for the hon. member from Battleford-Cut Knife. In your view, what do you think is the greatest gift that a social program such as social services can provide to a family?

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you. I would thank the member for his question. I think that one of the most important things would be allowing a person to have pride in himself, independence, and being able to have some hope for himself and for his family.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Pringle: — Mr. Speaker, could I ask the hon. member from Humboldt, if she isn't concerned that in fact, based on decisions of the previous Tory government and the current Liberal government federally, if she isn't concerned about the dismantling of the Canada Assistance Plan, which guaranteed rights to low income people across Canada, if that isn't a concern of hers. And secondly, why she wouldn't be concerned, or if she's not concerned, that over the last two years, plus the next two, the federal reductions in this area that we're talking about will be, in social assistance, will be about, and the offloading, equivalent to almost $200 million. Now I don't know how you can't be concerned about that. Are you concerned about that?

Ms. Julé: — I would thank the member for his question. It's not often that I get a chance to answer questions on this side of the House. I guess that the point is here, we're all concerned about everything that is changing. There's no doubt. And you have said we have to cope with changes and we have to realize that changes are happening.

My main concern is that we have got the wherewithal in this province, with all of the heads that we have — the members opposite and here — to understand that we have a responsibility to come up with solutions and to come up with programs and developments ourself, rather than looking at what has been in the past or what is changing that might be a detriment.

We are adults and we need to be able to recognize that we have got the capacity within us to do things, to actually move toward social development here. We know also that we cannot do that with simply our own heads. But if we do listen to the people of the province, as the member from Athabasca has said, in suggesting things that can truly change and that can truly lead to independence . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The member has been fairly lengthy in her response. We have time for one more question or comment. There being none, I will now put the question.

The division bells rang from 3:36 p.m. until 3:46 p.m.

Amendment negatived on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 11

Aldridge	McLane	Draude
McPherson	Belanger	Bjornerud
Julé	Gantefoer	D'Autremont
Toth	Goohsen	

Nays — 25

Van Mulligen	Shillington	Tchorzewski

Johnson	Whitmore	Goulet
Kowalsky	Renaud	Pringle
Koenker	Trew	Lorje
Cline	Stanger	Hamilton
Murray	Langford	Wall
Kasperski	Ward	Sonntag
Jess	Flavel	Murrell
Thomson		

Motion agreed to on division.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 3 — Wildlife Damage Compensation

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After I present my splendid oratory here, Mr. Speaker, I will be presenting a motion.

Mr. Speaker, just yesterday we brought up the issue of deer and elk damage to crops in question period. We brought it up a few weeks ago shortly after the session started, and we will continue to bring it up until something is done to address the serious problem, not because we are trying to grab the media spotlight but because the issue is near and dear to the hearts of Saskatchewan farmers. It's also near and dear to the wallets of Saskatchewan farmers, and it's because of this, Mr. Speaker, that we must discuss this important issue in the House today.

On Friday night, our leader and I met with farmers from across Saskatchewan in Melville. The stories they told were of total crop devastation. Some of them had lost 100 per cent of their crops that have not been combined to deer and elk this winter. The Environment minister was also there, and he can support this story, and I hope he will convince all the members on that side of the Assembly, on that side of the House, that something must be done to help our farmers. Maybe he can convince you people by telling some of the stories that were shared that evening with all of us.

I'd like to go into some of the things, Mr. Speaker, that were brought up that night and some of the problems in the crop losses that farmers have had. There were 21 RMs (rural municipalities) represented that night, and that's just a few of the ones that have really had damage, but the ones that were present.

Total damage of the people that had estimated their crop damage that were present that night is about $572,325, which shows the extent of this problem when we estimate that probably only about 10 per cent of the people with crop damage were there that night. The average damage estimate was around $13,000 per farmer, which no farmer, no matter how big or small, can afford to lose, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Their damages were from crop damage, yards, and bales damaged that were stacked in yards, equipment damaged. The lowest estimate was as low as $750 but the highest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was $42,000, of the people that were there.

I'd just like to go through some of the problems that people have had. The one fellow has a flax field with 60 acres, $12,600; another one has 35 acres oats, $6,000. There's that other guy who has barley and alfalfa bales that have been ruined, 10,900; another guy, 50 acres of barley, $9,000; another fellow, 40 acres of durum, $6,000, and also he has a 130 acres of linola which is $19,250.

These are figures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that are enough to break any farmer out in rural Saskatchewan after what the NDP government has done to them in GRIP. They're already down. And now we come along, and with no support, they're going under.

Another gentleman has 200-and-some acres of flax, $22,785. And the list goes on and on. So what I'm trying to say is it just shows the problem that these farmers have and the real need out there for help from this government.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a long, cold winter. And as we continue to wake up to freezing temperatures, sometimes it feels like it will never end. And to the deer and elk, they must have felt the same way too. They were forced out of their traditional feeding grounds and onto farmers' fields, and the only place they could find enough food to survive was on these fields. The problem was even made worse by the large deer population in Saskatchewan this past year. And I believe that was partly due to the underestimating of the population of the deer, which falls back onto the department of the environment and natural resources. They're the ones that have to answer for this mistake.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not suggesting that farmers or anyone should be allowed to hunt game out of season. But I think we have forced farmers in some cases to break the law because they had no other way to protect their livelihood, their crops, and to be able to buy groceries for their children. The only thing that was left to them was to go out and shoot some of these deer, and it was happening, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also think that it's a safe way to say that it was no secret that deer populations were going to be higher than average this year. They should have saw it coming. And this is bound to adversely affect farmers even in a mild winter, so we can't blame the winter for that.

Our deer are also becoming more brazen, Mr. Speaker. They are becoming more habituated to humans and now seem to be afraid of nothing, where they used to shy away from farm yards. It's nothing, Mr. Speaker, to look out your window on the farm now and to see a whole herd of deer right up in the yard where a few years ago they wouldn't even have dared come in the yard.

Mr. Speaker, everyone in this province I think enjoys wildlife at one time or another. And why then would we turn around and ask these few farmers to pick up the tab for crop damage and let everybody have the enjoyment of the wildlife and get off scot-free.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know this is wrong. It doesn't matter how many lawyers you put in cabinet. It doesn't matter how many city folks are elected to sit on that side of the House. The fact is Saskatchewan is still a province grounded in agriculture,

and the farmers are still an essential part of our economy, even though they don't seem to realize that on that side of the House.

I know the government is reluctant to give up money. We see it every day. I imagine the budget that the members will introduce this Thursday will be long on rhetoric and short on solutions. I can't predict where the money will be going or exactly what cuts are coming down, but I feel pretty confident that rural Saskatchewan is not going to come out the winner when this provincial budget is brought down.

Although we believe the debt and the deficit need to be reduced, we do not support having it happen on the backs of our Saskatchewan farmers. And that's exactly what we're afraid will happen. Maybe this would be a good time to return even a portion, and I mean just a dribble of the GRIP money that was taken from our farmers by this government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to suggest to the members opposite they have other options and that they don't have to penalize the farmers. If the member opposite would open their eyes and open their minds, they would be able to come up with solutions that help farmers without breaking the bank.

I'd like to know, Mr. Speaker, how closely have they looked at the deer damage in Manitoba? Manitoba has had a wildlife damage compensation program since '89. Perhaps I could just take a minute and outline the guidelines for that program to the members, just in case the members opposite have no idea what is being done by our neighbours to the East.

The wildlife damage compensation program is as follows. It is administered by the Manitoba Crop Insurance Corporation through its agency offices across the province. And of course that will only work here if the government prevents further closures of our Crop Insurance offices. The program specifically covers damage by elk and deer. Original funding in '96 was $240,000, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Funding was quickly increased to $450,000 because of the high number of elk and deer feeding in farmers' fields. Does that sound familiar?

Manitoba Crop Insurance Corporation has applied to the Manitoba Treasury Board to more than double this amount to $1 million. Officials in Manitoba estimate that crop damage claims from deer and elk damage will reach between 800,000 and $1 million. Saskatchewan is very similar and likely to have the same kind of situation with no program, and I repeat, no program, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in place. These guidelines include the intercept feeding and capture, of sale and elk to professional elk ranchers, and special control permits that let landowners and tenants shoot deer and elk.

Mr. Speaker, no one is advocating chaos by calling open season on hunting, and no one wants to see animals needlessly destroyed. But we live in a society that includes both humans and animals, and we must find methods of ensuring that a balance is maintained. It's a difficult issue, but if you're a farmer with a family to feed and you have to sit by and watch helplessly as deer and elk eat up your family's income, the issue becomes clearer. Your priority will be to provide food and security for your family, and so it should be so.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is not the only province that has introduced measures to help minimize and compensate for crop damage. Alberta has also an ongoing compensation program, funded by the wildlife damage fund there. In our neighbouring province to the West, the program is managed by the Alberta Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. According to their statistics for '94-95, administration expenses for the program were $85,910 and pay-outs to farmers were $445,810 including pay-outs for damage by waterfowl. Farmers do not need to have purchased crop insurance in order to qualify for benefits.

An interesting note to Alberta programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that if a farmer has purchased crop insurance and makes a claim on this program, his benefits from the wildlife damage fund is deducted from any other crop insurance benefit. Alberta also ran a control program through the fish and wildlife division of the department of natural resources which ended February 17 of this year. This program allowed for a special elk hunt in a doughnut shaped area surrounding Calgary. The Alberta government recognized that this 50-square mile area is particularly hard hit by elk damage, and they took steps towards a solution.

That is something that is sorely missing in this province by this government. What is particularly sad is that we are identified as an agricultural province, yet our government is barely willing to admit that big game damage to crop is a problem. How can the members opposite sit by nonchalantly as our neighbouring governments are working on behalf of their farmers? And I'm not sure if the members opposite don't know what to do; or if they just don't know, then they want to do nothing. Either way, the farmers of this province are the losers, and that's simply unacceptable.

(1600)

By continuing to ignore crop damage caused by deer and elk, the government of the province is hurting our farmers. They say they don't care if our farmers are at a financial disadvantage. But we as the official opposition are saying we do care. We don't believe farmers should be punished for a serious gap in government policy. And as is often the case when government policy is weak or lacking, people are forced to create their own rules.

Earlier this year, some Saskatchewan farmers were so desperate, they took the law into their own hands and shot the deer in their fields without permission. We don't advocate breaking the law to make a point, and at the same time though we need to listen when a point is so deliberately made.

An Hon. Member: — How many deer were shot?

Mr. Bjornerud: — Many, many deer. It means that something is wrong with our legislation, and it means that we as elected officials must work towards correcting this poor legislation. Earlier this year, the Minister of Agriculture made a comment that Saskatchewan farmers should be treated equally with the farmers from Alberta and Manitoba, and I agree.

I'm sceptical though after having seen the fiasco with the GRIP

program where the government treated our farmers anything but fairly, even letting the federal government take back money that our farmers desperately needed and, for that matter, money the Saskatchewan economy needed.

Mr. Speaker, if it was possible, many of the farmers in this province would take their farms and move to Alberta and Manitoba, and the beauty of that being, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we would get to see our kids because most of them are there. But they can't. And instead these farmers are forced to stay here and to fight against a government that stopped listening to them a long time ago.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that our words today do not fall on deaf ears, because this issue deserves to be heard and to be addressed by the members opposite. On behalf of the farmers in my constituency, in my colleagues' constituency, in every constituency throughout the province who elected members . . . who the elected members is forced to sit back in silence across the side, I bring forward the following motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

> That this Assembly call on the government to immediately implement a real plan to address the urgent problem of big game foraging on farmers' crops, firstly, by taking reasonable measures to remove or control the population of big game near farmers' grain fields and, secondly, by putting in place a reasonable compensation plan for farmers whose crops have been destroyed or damaged by big game.

I will read the motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

> That this Assembly call on the government to immediately implement a real plan to address the urgent problem of big game foraging on farmers' crops, firstly, by taking reasonable measures to remove or control the population of big game near farmers' grain fields and, secondly, by putting in place a reasonable compensation plan for farmers whose crops have been destroyed or damaged by big game.

Seconded by the member from Melville, Ron Osika . . . or the member for Melville.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. I want to remind the member that it is not parliamentary to use proper names.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege for me to speak in favour of the motion presented by the member from Saltcoats, to explain to the members opposite who aren't familiar with some of the problems that we face in rural Saskatchewan. And I'll be happy to enlighten them on some of the values that the wildlife, along with the farmers out there, the services that they provide.

Farmers have gone through quite a traumatized decade as a result of some of this government's policies, Mr. Speaker. And I would just like to share a few of those with you. Of course the main one is the GRIP fiasco which we're under right now. This government's plan of stealing the $188 million from the farmers' GRIP pot is certainly an indication of the lack of commitment to our rural people by this government.

Many other things that I'm sure that this government had nothing to do with . . . and I'm quite happy that elected people in general cannot affect mother nature; otherwise I'm sure that this government would have a major catastrophe on its hands in regards to mother nature as well.

Farmers have gone through, this past year, a series of natural disasters: drought, frost. Mr. Speaker; we've seen the plight of the bertha armyworms from the South into Saskatchewan to eat on our canola crops. We also had the infestation of the wheat midge move farther south than it ever has before, even into the area of Saskatchewan where I reside and farm at. Last spring, of course, we had on the eastern side of the province the flooding and the late seeding caused by . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I want to bring it to the attention that — a mistake on my part — that the member from Melville is not in the House and therefore cannot second it. Would another member like to second the motion?

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, I would be prepared to second that.

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for noticing that and giving us the opportunity to change that. We were just testing, Mr. Speaker; we were just testing. I notice the members opposite didn't pick up on that, and I'm quite surprised, given the experience of some of them. Especially the Deputy Premier in the front row should have done that.

The Deputy Speaker: — I advise the member not to elaborate on the Speaker's ruling.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'll try and refrain from doing that. I'll try and refrain from doing that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The member opposite is talking about leadership. I understand that he is in line as well for Mr. Romanow stepping down rather quickly.

But to go on to the natural disasters that we've seen across Saskatchewan this year, I alluded to a few of them, from the drought to the frost, the wheat midge, the bertha armyworms, the flooding in eastern Saskatchewan, the hail storms which I talked about in previous days in the municipal hail Act amendment.

Also we're in a time, Mr. Speaker, when cattle prices have gone very flat and don't appear to be picking up in the near future. So it's an extra burden for the farmers that are feeding the wildlife with the hay that they need so desperately to feed the cattle.

In this province, Mr. Speaker, as members opposite will know that hunting, tourism, and all the things that accompany that are a major source of income for this province, and we'd hate to see that jeopardized by a lack of commitment by this government to look after the farmers and the wildlife as well.

We talk about hunting, Mr. Speaker. We see hundreds and hundreds of hunters every year coming up from our neighbours to the South to access our wildlife in Saskatchewan. We see these very hunters being looked after, Mr. Speaker, by outfitters. Whether that's their whole occupation or many of our farmers in the North now are engaged in outfitting as well, and it's a major source of income for those farmers in the North.

We also see, Mr. Speaker, the tourism in Saskatchewan is a high source of income for the province, and the wildlife attracts many people to the province, just for their pleasure of viewing as well as for the hunting. It seems a little bit ridiculous to me, Mr. Speaker, that this government would be asking farmers to subsidize all those industries in the province when they're a major boom to their economic development, if I could call it that, and asking the farmers and the people in rural Saskatchewan to subsidize that whole system of industry.

Not only to the major sources of income from hunting, tourism, outfitting, and what have you, we also see these people that are coming up for those activities are utilizing our restaurants in our small towns, Mr. Speaker. They are using hotels for lodging. They're certainly buying gas at the service stations across Saskatchewan, and many, many other spin-offs as a result of the activities that are attracted here because of the wildlife in this province.

We also see that, as the member from Saltcoats mentioned earlier, that our neighbouring provinces are much more prepared to look after our farmers than what this government is. And they could possibly take a lesson from them, and maybe they should go and visit and chat with them and get some of their ideas if they're having trouble coming up with some.

Mr. Speaker, we heard — and the members opposite, many of them were at the SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) convention — we heard from a farmer that farms on the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border, that farms in Manitoba and farms in Saskatchewan as well, and how displeased he was with what this government has done for the farmers of the province. Whether it's as a result of the GRIP fiasco, as I mentioned earlier, or whether it's in regards to the lack of commitment to agriculture in what we're talking about today in the wildlife damage across the province.

We've also seen, Mr. Speaker, and I alluded to it a couple of days ago, the commitment that the federal government has made to the province of Saskatchewan to its agriculture sector. And I'd just like to run over a few of those, Mr. Speaker, if I might.

And we talked about the NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) basic where in '94-95 we had in excess of $23 million pumped into the province; in '95-96, another fifty-one and a half million; and next year over $66 million.

We move on then to the NISA enhance where we've got another 36 million last year, another 42 million this year, Mr. Speaker — a considerable amount of money that the federal government is kicking into Saskatchewan. And the members opposite continually criticize the federal government, but they fail to recognize that they have made a commitment to rural Saskatchewan and to agriculture and to the farmers.

If we move on, Mr. Speaker, to NISA kick-start where there was some 40 million last year, another 60 million this year. We talked about the crop sector companion program where in '95-96 there's about $55 million. We also talk in '96-97 where we're going to have in excess of $100 million.

We can move on into an agri-food innovation fund that the federal government is providing over 4 million in the past year; 20 million next year; and in '97-98 there will be an additional $40 million, Mr. Speaker. No small sums of money for the agriculture sector of the province.

We talked about crop insurance, which this government says they're into doing studies now to see what the needs are of the farmers. They know full well the needs of the farmers. They want a sustainable crop insurance program that's affordable, which we don't have now. That's plain and simple. Let's get on. Put the commitment there, Mr. Speaker.

The federal government has put in, in its '94-95, over $67 million; in '95-96, an additional 68 million; and in '96-97, another $74 million, Mr. Speaker.

To name just some of the programs we've talked about, and I've heard this government speaking in support of the interest-free cash advance. In '94-95 that amounted to about $8 million; this year about another eight and a half million; and '96-97 will be twelve and a half million dollars, Mr. Speaker. A lot of money for this program.

As well, if we're talking about GRIP, in '94-95 there was also about $143 million kicked in, whereas this government has tended to roll the monies from programs that were not usable by the farmers of the province and just keep rolling in year after year and not adding any new money into the agriculture programs.

(1615)

Mr. Speaker, we talk about wildlife damage and a lot of it I know is on the east side of the province, and south-east, and north-east as well. I would like to let you know that even some of your relatives, Mr. Speaker, in the Liberty area of the province are being ravaged by this wildlife damage as well.

We're fortunate enough not to have any crops out in our area but there are cattlemen there with hay bales, hay stacks, cut feed out, where there's 2 and 300 deer, Mr. Speaker, crawling all over top of those hay stacks and no compensation for the farmers. And I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that your relatives are not very happy about that and they've been calling me to find out what we can do, along with the rest of the farmers in the province, to alleviate this problem.

I mentioned earlier that cattle prices, Mr. Speaker — as you know full well being a stockman yourself — that the cattle prices have gone down, gone to hell if I might, and the farmers are spending hundreds and hundreds of dollars trying to

maintain their cattle with expensive feed, Mr. Speaker.

Alfalfa is expensive. There's a great market to sell bales and yet this government seems to want to let the wildlife crawl all over these stacks and make them virtually useless for the cattle. I'm sure you're aware, and I'm sure the members are aware, Mr. Speaker, the damage that elk and deer can do to stacks, and that when they're crawling over them and virtually living on them, that after only a couple of days the stacks and the feed supply are rendered virtually useless, Mr. Speaker.

Hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars that the farmers, the cattlemen, are having to pick up on and pay for, and to subsidize a tremendous hunting and outfitting industry in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I will not prolong the discussion much longer on my behalf but I would ask that the members opposite, including the member from Saskatoon Eastview, recognize the plight of the farmers in this province and that he will do what he can in talking to his colleagues opposite to try and convince him that we need to move on this and do some of that.

Also I would just ask all the members opposite, including the people in the back benches who are farmers and fully recognize the problem here, that they stand up with us today and try and get something done for the farmers of our province so that we can maintain a viable hunting industry in the province, and a viable tourism industry, Mr. Speaker, and a viable outfitting industry, Mr. Speaker; and all the benefits that spin off from it including the restaurants, the hotels, the gas stations, the bed and breakfasts, and all those things, including the hotels in the province, Mr. Speaker.

So with that I would be more than happy to second this motion, Mr. Speaker, and speak in favour of it and ask the members opposite to do the same. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened to the member who moved the motion, the member from Saltcoats and the seconder, the member from Arm River, the member who's moved almost everything today, and I'd be certainly more concerned about the damage one might receive in the parking lot rather than the damage from deer damage.

Anyway being serious though, Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree that both the hon. members raised very good points, and we the government recognize that the farmers across Saskatchewan, especially in the south-east part of the province this year and in years past, have been affected very adversely and we just want to acknowledge and recognize that.

I want to provide just a little bit of background if I could, Mr. Speaker. Over the past 10 years, as anyone who has lived in Saskatchewan will know, we've gone through 10 very mild winters and as a result of that, it has allowed the deer population and elk population to increase rather significantly.

The conditions this year though, as you will know, we've had a very severe winter with prolonged cold, above average snowfall in most parts of the province. I know that's not happened in our area in the north-west, but also as a result of some of the warm weather mixed in with all of the snow resulted in ice crusting on the snow. And the net result of this, Mr. Speaker, is that we've had above average deer mortality and also increased deer depredation damage on field crops and on some of the haystacks.

If you tie all of this in with the late seeding and the poor harvest in the south-eastern part of the province as I referred to, you have a recipe for a major problem, which of course is what we now have. And as I've said earlier, Mr. Speaker, no one is denying that these farmers have every reason to be concerned or should be looking for some assistance in helping out in this problem.

Although the government is not in a position to provide financial compensation, I want to tell you about some of the things that we are doing to provide some help for these farmers. Currently most farmers will be aware that under crop insurance there is coverage. Secondly, the government delivers a fairly extensive $330,000 big game damage prevention program and I just want to outline for you some of the coverages that are provided under that damage program, Mr. Speaker.

Under that program there is the use of blood meal and scare cannons as crop damage deterrents. Also the Department of Environment provides temporary and permanent fencing material as barriers to protect stored forage products. They have a placement of quality feed to short stop deer and/or elk from entering farmyards, the use of additional hunting permits to increase the harvest of deer and elk in affected areas, and I know that that's been used fairly extensively this year, Mr. Speaker.

I want to point out that there is no single solution in resolving the big game damage issue. The answer lies in taking a joint approach with landowners, doing as much as is legally possible to address their individual situations.

Government is aware, as I've said earlier, of the big game damage on agricultural crops and the associated financial losses to landowners.

Government is using all the available tools to minimize crop damage, Mr. Speaker. And landowners who are experiencing wildlife damage are encouraged to contact their local SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) office as soon as is possible.

I also want you to be aware that our government is reviewing and/or considering the possibility of implementing spot loss coverage for wildlife damage. This option is being included as part of the crop insurance review and may be an option for the 1997 crop year.

Mr. Speaker, having provided a brief historical background and after having outlined what our government is doing and what it proposes to do, I would now like to move adjournment of debate on this motion.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:24 p.m.

TABLE OF CONTENTS