

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition on behalf of concerned citizens of the province of Saskatchewan with respect to the closure of the Plains Health Centre in Regina. The prayer reads:

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

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from Melville, from Balcarres, from Craven, and some signatures from Regina. Thank you.

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

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

The communities involved, Mr. Speaker, are Melville, Bangor, Stockholm, Waldron, Atwater, and other Saskatchewan communities, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The people that have signed these petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from Regina, Fort Qu'Appelle, White City, Broadview, and communities throughout southern Saskatchewan. I so present.

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

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

The people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Regina and Weyburn, but the majority are from the community of Yellow Grass. I so present.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well on behalf of citizens concerned about the impending closure of 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.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from a number of communities in southern Saskatchewan and also from the city of Regina.

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

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

The people that have signed this petition are from Regina, Moose Jaw, and Saskatoon.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise to present a petition of names from concerned citizens throughout southern Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by many concerned citizens from the communities of Moose Jaw, Parkbeg, Mortlach, Avonlea, Willow Bunch, Strasbourg, as well as Pilot Butte, Stoughton, and some from Regina as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions of names of Saskatchewan citizens concerning the Plains Health Centre. And 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.

And those who have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from communities such as Sedley, Grenfell, Nipawin, Ogema, Wolseley, Sinaluta, and then going into my constituency, the community of Mossbank. We also have the city of Moose Jaw represented here, as well as Regina.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again 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.

And the people that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, they're from Regina here. They're also from Preeceville. They're from Southey. They're from Assiniboia, Carnduff, Lemberg, and they're from all throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today, on day no. 65; the 65th day that I've been with my colleagues and the people in Saskatchewan in their efforts to save the Plains Health Centre. And so I'm bringing forward this petition today, Mr. Speaker. And 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, I have pages and pages and pages of people, and it looks like these are from the . . . basically from the Regina . . . and in particular Regina Elphinstone and Regina Albert South constituencies. I so present.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud on behalf of some citizens from Saskatoon and Asquith, to present petitions on the Saskatoon Family Support Centre:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to urge the Department of Social Services of the province of Saskatchewan to reconsider their decision to reduce these programs, and to return the programs of the Saskatoon Family Support Centre to their previous level of delivery of service.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed. 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; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to urge the Department of Social Services to reconsider the decision to reduce parent education support programs.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you, in the east gallery today, a group of students from grade 6 to 9 from the Countryside School in Salcoats. Their teacher is also present with them today, Ray Isaac, and some of their chaperons are Norman and Darlene Wohlgemuth, Burt and Irene Friesen, Roland and Ann Warkentin, Reg and Rena Penner, Sheryl Isaac, Carol Wohlgemuth.

I would like to ask the members of the Assembly to welcome them here today, and I will be meeting with them at 2:30.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce in the west gallery, a fellow from my constituency. And I have to tell him I hate to keep meeting like this, but it's either that or read the *Hansards* which Paul does faithfully. I have valued Paul's political advice in the time I've known him. And I thank you for joining us today. You can see we've worn most of our other guests out, and it's a lonely task these days. So thank you for coming.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you, a couple of ladies who have been here to watch the proceedings many times in the past while. And they're in your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

Firstly I'd like to introduce you to Vicki Lissel. Vicki has been heading up the Saskatchewan chapter of the hepatitis C society. She also just returned from Toronto where she was present for the continuing proceedings for the Krever inquiry.

With her is Bonnie Soerensen. Bonnie has also been active in the fight for compensation for people infected by tainted blood. Both of these women are here today to watch the proceedings in the House, and I'd ask that we welcome them warmly here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Tourism Awareness Week

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the beginning of the session, members have made statements inviting the public to our constituencies for a wide and exciting variety of events, announcements that prove there is something in Saskatchewan for every tourist. I suspect there will be even more announcements every day.

With that in mind, I'm happy to recognize this as Saskatchewan Tourism Awareness Week, June 3 to 9, in the province.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, tourists spend about a billion dollars a year in Saskatchewan, thereby contributing to an estimated 40,500 full-time and part-time jobs for Saskatchewan families and young people.

Special events and activities are planned this week to emphasize the garden of delights that we offer the tourists to our province under the 1996 theme, Saskatchewan Vacations: Good as Gold. This theme recognizes both the economic value of tourism to the province, and Tourism Saskatchewan's new Great Saskatchewan Gold Rush campaign.

Mr. Speaker, you may recall that under the leadership of the Minister of Economic Development, Saskatchewan formed Saskatchewan's first Tourism Authority, and recently the industry-driven partnership was strengthened by the merger of

the Tourism Authority with the Tourism Industry Association of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members to join with me in commending the vision and hard work of everyone involved during Saskatchewan Tourism Awareness Week.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Providence Place Protest

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This coming Wednesday, yet another public meeting will take place about this government's cuts to health care, this time in Moose Jaw. This meeting is sponsored by a committee of community groups who joined together several years ago for the purpose of building Providence Place and its world-class geriatric unit.

These residents committed countless hours and millions of dollars to help build this facility, only to discover that this government wouldn't honour its commitment to operational funding for the geriatric unit.

Mr. Speaker, thousands of people are concerned about the threatened closure of this unit. I would like to send the Minister of Health some letters from concerned residents. Later today, Mr. Speaker, I will deliver to the minister over 1,300 more letters from people who oppose this government's decision to cut funding to the geriatric unit. That will bring the total number to almost 4,000.

In closing, I urge the minister to follow the example of community groups that helped build the geriatric unit. Come to Moose Jaw and tell them you'll make good on your commitments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Northern Saskatchewan Children's Festival

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for the past eight years there has been an event held in downtown Saskatoon that's tailor-made for children. The annual Northern Saskatchewan Children's Festival begins today in Kiwanis Park and runs until Saturday.

Children and their families from across central and northern Saskatchewan will be attending the festival, which includes various performing arts such as vaudeville, clowns, acrobats, musicians, actors, and jugglers. There are 49 performances of 11 different shows involving local talent and artists from across the country.

These performances include a musical duo who will show Saskatchewan children what Newfoundland life and music is all about; a colourful group of dancers and musicians from Manipur, India; the Rymers from Northern Ireland will perform music, mime, and storytelling; and Beatlemania-Fab Four look-alikes from New York with their wonderful Broadway tribute to the Beatles.

Mr. Speaker, the Children's Festival is expected to attract about 20,000 people and is always a popular event in Saskatoon. I encourage everyone to attend the Northern Saskatchewan Children's Festival along the riverbank in downtown Saskatoon. I am sure it will be educational and lots of fun and provide an opportunity for children and their families to share good times together. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Passing of George Leith

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to today extend my condolences to the family of George Leith, who passed away on Friday. He had spent many, many years serving the Canadian public.

Mr. Leith served two terms in this House as an elected representative of the Liberal Party for the constituency of Eston-Elrose. He was first elected in 1964. He went on to continue his political career as a special assistant to Eugene Whelan. Mr. Leith also served on the Canadian Grain Commission and the National Committee on Grain Transportation.

I'm sure that all my colleagues in the House will join with the official opposition in extending condolences to George's friends and family across western Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Children's Miracle Network

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to congratulate the Children's Miracle Network, STV (SaskWest Television), and SCN (Saskatchewan Communications Network Corporation), on a tremendously successful telethon this past weekend.

Last Sunday, the Children's Miracle Network raised well over half a million dollars for 160 organizations throughout the province. The telethon was broadcast from 7 p.m. on Saturday through to 4 p.m. on Sunday on both SCN and STV. It was run by volunteers from the stations and from the Children's Health Foundation. STV in Saskatoon lined up 30 volunteers — announcers, technicians, and other staff members — to help with the event.

The Children's Miracle Network will use the money to fund organization and projects that provide patient care, research, and health education. The Children's Health Foundation is a good example. The foundation hopes to unlock the mysteries of some rare childhood diseases and improve the safety, welfare, and health of Saskatchewan children.

Mr. Speaker, the spirit of Saskatchewan was shining through on Sunday as people through the province showed their support and generosity for the project.

I would like to congratulate the Children's Miracle Network on a tremendous fund-raiser, and thank the volunteers for their

time and commitment and for making the telethon a big success. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Passing of George Leith

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to join with the Leader of the Opposition in extending our condolences to the George Leith family. Mr. Leith represented the Eston-Elrose constituency for two terms in the '70s. My home is within the old Eston-Elrose constituency and I had occasion to meet Mr. Leith on brief visits.

Mr. Leith was a respected representative and I'm sure he will be missed by many. I had occasion to become also good friends with one of Mr. Leith's son-in-laws, Mr. Brent Bannister. Mr. Leith is survived by a loving family and we extend our most sincere condolences to the Leith family.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ranch Ehrlo Society Sod-turning Ceremony

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday I was happy to take part in the sod-turning ceremony for the new school building of the Ranch Ehrlo Society which is located near Pilot Butte in my constituency.

As well as celebrating the new building for the Schaller School, the staff, the students, and friends of the Ranch Ehrlo Society took advantage of the day to mark its 30th anniversary of service to Saskatchewan youth and families — an anniversary that is truly a reason for celebration.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Ranch Ehrlo Society is a non-profit organization which now operates 10 group homes in and around Regina as well the campus near Pilot Butte. Residents are from 8 to 18. The special educational needs of the student residents are provided at Schaller School. In addition, integrated elementary and high school classrooms are located in Regina schools.

Over the years, Ranch Ehrlo has changed its programing to meet the needs of children who are not served by more mainstream programs and it's approach has worked because of its committed and caring staff and because of the community support it relies so heavily upon, such as the donations that are provided for the building of the new school. Our province will also be contributing \$400,000 over the next 5 years.

Mr. Speaker, Ranch Ehrlo is one of a kind in Saskatchewan, but like all of our schools it is preparing its students for their entrance into the new century. I congratulate the society for its work over 30 years and wish it well in the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

30th Anniversary of Ranch Ehrlo

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to pass

along congratulations on behalf of the official opposition to all the staff and supporters of the Ranch Ehrlo program who recently gathered to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the program.

Ranch Ehrlo offers a unique program in Saskatchewan for the treatment of troubled youth. It is also one of the few places in Canada that is pioneering a program to battle solvent abuse.

When it first started 30 years ago, six youth were in the program and were cared for by about 20 staff members. Over the years, Ranch Ehrlo has developed and grown. Today it employs 150 full-time staff members along with 40 part-time workers. The society now looks after about 90 youth. The programs currently offered at Ranch Ehrlo include education, work training, and counselling.

I would like to congratulate all the people who have worked so very hard to foster Ranch Ehrlo's growth. And I would also like to commend all the youth who pass through the program and who have used the skills they have learned at that place to better their lives. Thank you.

Regina Big Brothers Golf Tournament and 25th Anniversary

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ninth annual Big Brothers Texas Scramble Golf tournament was held May 31 at Emerald Park Golf Club. More than \$12,000 was raised at this fun event. I'll announce the winners of the golfing prowess in a minute.

But first, Mr. Speaker, this year marks Regina Big Brothers 25th anniversary, a special year for two very special groups. First, the many young boys who have benefited by having an outside-the-family person who cares and who shares time and events with their little brother. Second, the Regina Big Brothers Association that need our collective support to carry on their service to humanity.

Regina Big Brothers have a number of events lined up this year. Needed to help make these events happen are: big brothers; new board members; runners for the Big Brothers Torch Run from Regina to Moose Jaw, August 3, commemorating the Saskatchewan Summer Games; and fourth, ticket sellers and promoters for the Message in a Bottle event.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the moment we've been waiting for, the golfing prowess. At seven under par the winners were: Dave Ferguson, founder of the Prairie League Professional Baseball League; Les Wallace of IBM; and the member for Regina Coronation Park.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Political Contributions Disclosure

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, given some rather startling revelations in just the recent past, I would

like to bring to the attention of this House a copy of the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the annual fiscal returns of registered political parties in Saskatchewan for the period January 1, 1995 to December 31, 1995.

The report states, and I quote:

The Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan disclosed that contributions to the P.C. Lotto Saskatchewan fund established by the party in 1988 were inadvertently not disclosed in the party's annual fiscal returns for the years 1988, 1989, and 1990.

Mr. Speaker, this statement is a clear admission that even the new PC (Progressive Conservative) Party acknowledges that disclosure should have been made in the appropriate fiscal year.

Will the Minister of Justice explain, as a result of questions that have been fuelled by these recent revelations, if it were found that MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) or the party represented are in contravention of The Elections Act and if the new PC Party have used a secret fund to aid an election campaign, what penalties would be imposed and would the election of such members become null and void?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I take this question because of the responsibility that I hold for The Elections Act which I have been discussing with the members opposite for some months now. The situation raised by the member is, I understand, in the hands of the appropriate authorities including the Chief Electoral Officer. And our indication is to wait until we receive advice from him and from other officials who will be interested in the question.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the response. And under section 210 of The Elections Act it states that all donations received by individuals, corporations, and organizations to a political party must be disclosed in that fiscal year. Will the minister explain if there is an exemption of these rules for the new PC Party, and what action is the minister or his department prepared to take today?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, in response to the member's question I'm not aware of any exemptions that were accorded to anybody. As I said to the member, this situation is in the hands of the Chief Electoral Officer and we are going to be awaiting his report.

In the meantime the new Elections Act is in front of the House and I'll be talking to members opposite about what might be appropriate so far as that Act is concerned.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Possible Wilkie Hospital Closure

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The official opposition has demonstrated how the sick and the elderly have become victims of this NDP (New Democratic Party) government's chronic under-funding of our health care system. Now it appears that this government is directing its venom at

the most defenceless in our society, the severely disabled, Mr. Speaker.

Because of this government's actions of course, which is the offloading to the health districts, the Wilkie Hospital may be closed. As a result, 10 severely disabled young people who are provided with 24-hour care and therapy may be forced to move.

Will the Minister of Health explain why his government is abandoning the most vulnerable members of our society.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, implicit in the question from the member is the implication that the Greenhead Health District, which is responsible for the Wilkie Hospital, will be abandoning the people that live in the Wilkie Hospital.

And I want to say to the member and to the House and to the public that of course that's not the case, Mr. Speaker. We've heard allegations from the opposition before that seniors are going to be thrown out on the street. Now we're hearing that handicapped people are going to lose their homes. And I can assure the House of one thing, Mr. Speaker, and that is that if there are handicapped people, and I believe there are 10 in the Wilkie Hospital that need to be cared for, they're going to be cared for, Mr. Speaker. They're going to be cared for today as they have been in the past, and they'll be cared for in the future. And the member knows that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that this government has severely downloaded and offloaded to the health districts. That is why the problems arise, Mr. Speaker.

My office spoke, Mr. Speaker, this morning with the mayor of Wilkie. Wally Lorenz says that these disabled patients need the care and therapy they get at the Wilkie Hospital. He suggests their lives will be placed in jeopardy if not provided the quality of care they now receive. Simply moving them to a long-term care facility will not provide them with the level of care that they require or in fact deserve.

Mr. Speaker, this government appears bent on meeting its bottom line regardless of who they hurt along the way. In this case they have chosen a target that cannot speak for themselves. Obviously the humane side of health care no longer exists in this province.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister make a commitment in this House today to intervene and protect the disabled residents of the Wilkie Hospital?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, if it is the member's argument that these multiply handicapped individuals are not going to be cared for, then I say that the member has no argument because we live in a humane society, Mr. Speaker. The government is humane; the district health board is humane.

No decision has been taken by the district health board — no decision has been taken by the district health board in this matter, Mr. Speaker, but I can tell the member that when and if a decision is taken by the district health board, that decision will be to provide these multiple-handicapped individuals with the very heavy care that they need, Mr. Speaker. And for the member to suggest otherwise is just playing politics, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Compensation for Hepatitis C Victims

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last Friday I called on the Minister of Health to show some compassion and provide compensation to those who contracted hepatitis C through no fault of their own.

I brought to the attention of the minister a specific case involving Bonnie Soerensen whose six-year-old son has this life-threatening disease. I indicated that she had contacted the minister's office eight months ago, but her calls were not returned and she was provided no information. The minister denied this accusation, indicating to the media that his office did provide the information.

Mr. Speaker, Bonnie Soerensen says she was outraged to hear Friday's comments because she received absolutely nothing in the way of information or assistance from the minister or his office. Will the Minister of Health explain if he intentionally misled the House, and will he apologize to Bonnie Soerensen?

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. Now the hon. member knows that he cannot do indirectly what the rules do not permit him to do directly, and the rules clearly do not permit him to do directly, to accuse the member of intentionally misleading the House. I will ask the hon. member to withdraw the unparliamentary remark and apologize to the House.

Mr. McPherson: — I withdraw the remark and apologize for that remark, and instead I will rephrase the question to ask the minister to explain his actions, which then I think will only result in one thing: that he then apologize to Bonnie Soerensen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as I explained to the member on Friday, the first day that I ever heard about the Soerensen case is the same day that I met with Ms. Soerensen. I said that to the member the other day.

And as I also said to the member the other day, in cases where it is clear that infection was caused by a blood transfusion and where there is serious medical problems and where negligence is established for which the Government of Saskatchewan is responsible, we will consider settling such claims. And each claim will be considered on its merits. I've written Ms. Soerensen; I've advised her of that. I've advised the member of that. I've advised the House of that. That's what we'll do, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, obviously the minister is not disputing with myself. He's disputing with people in the public. Mr. Speaker, the minister admitted to the media last Friday that Bonnie Soerensen's six-year-old son deserves compensation, as he says. But he is prepared to do nothing about it. He says, let's wait for the Krever Commission to unveil its findings.

Mr. Speaker, one thing these people do not have is a lot of time. What is so frustrating is the fact that this government didn't have to find someone to blame before they compensated HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infected hemophiliacs. This situation is no different; these people we are talking about are human beings, Mr. Speaker. Why is this so hard for the minister and that government to understand?

Will the minister make a commitment in this House today to take a leadership role and begin drawing up the terms of a compensation package for that six-year-old, for Vicki Lissel, and for all the others who've contracted hepatitis C through no fault of their own.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I've explained to the member repeatedly that each case has to be looked at on its own merits. What the member is suggesting, as he suggested the other day, is that I should stand up in the House and announce immediately how much compensation any particular person infected with hepatitis C should receive.

And so I challenge the member, Mr. Speaker. If he's not just playing politics, as of course that is what he's doing, then let the member get up and tell the House what exact amount of compensation should be paid to Ms. Soerensen's son or anyone else infected with hepatitis C. But he's not going to do that, Mr. Speaker, because that cannot be determined at the present time.

But if the member is not just playing politics, let the member stand up and tell the House what amount it is that the people are supposed to pay right at this time. Let him do that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Closure of Queen City Cleaners

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Finance. Madam Minister, it was recently announced that the Queen City Cleaners here in Regina is going out of business on June 15. Queen City Cleaners has sent out a letter to its customers explaining the reasons for this decision. The letter reads:

For 76 years, Queen City Cleaners has served the citizens of Regina and area. During this period we have survived many downturns in the economy. We survived the Great Depression, the Dirty Thirties, the war years, the polyester revolution, and numerous recessions. What we've been unable to survive is the voracious appetite of governments at all levels for an increasing share of our customers'

disposable income.

Madam Minister, a 76-year-old Regina business with 50 employees and a million dollar payroll is going out of business because taxes are too high. How many more businesses have to shut down before we start to see some meaningful tax relief in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite refers to a company that has announced changes to its structure in Regina. I only wish that he would pay more attention to the announcements that are being made of new companies setting up in Regina and throughout the province.

Last Friday of course RRR oil recycling announced the establishment of a firm here in Regina. On Saturday we attended, along with about two thousand other people — including the former member for Thunder Creek, Rick Swenson — the opening of the spa in Moose Jaw which will employ up to 100 people.

And I want to quote from a Canadian economist, Gerry White from the *Canadian Business* magazine, who said today in a report, and I quote:

If you want to live somewhere in Canada that has got a quality of life and potential real estate value, you put your money on Regina and Saskatoon.

Now if all of those things are coming up roses, obviously Saskatchewan is going to have a very, very bright 1996 and '7. So of course, Mr. Member, you can come here and have . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, I would only wish that you would pay more attention to the existing businesses here in Saskatchewan that are struggling to survive. In NDP Saskatchewan, even the cleaners are getting taken to the cleaners.

Mr. Minister, this letter sums up exactly why Saskatchewan is struggling behind other provinces in terms of economic growth and job creation — the voracious appetite of government for an ever-increasing share of our customers' disposable income. And nowhere is that voracious appetite more than in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, when he was in opposition, the Premier called taxes the silent killer of jobs. Taxes have just killed another 50 jobs here in Regina. Mr. Minister, where are those workers going to go? How many more jobs have to be lost before you start to address the problem of the tax burden in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, it comes as a little bit disconcerting from the new-old Conservative opposition who

are responsible for the mountain of debt in this province, of which \$850 million of taxpayers' money, taxpayers' money which you talk about here, going to pay interest on the debt that your previous administration under Mr. Devine racked up for the province of Saskatchewan.

Now just calculate that on the E&H (education and health) tax; \$80 million per point of E&H tax, or 720 million is the total amount we take from sales tax, doesn't quite cover the interest on the debt that you left the people of Saskatchewan.

I say to you, look in the mirror. Look in the mirror. Check with your buddies, those that were kicked out in the last election, as to why the taxes are high in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Personal Care Home Licences

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, after two years of waiting, your government finally brought in regulations for personal care homes. And although we think it took far too long, we certainly applaud you on this move.

However it has come to our attention that there are further unnecessary delays, this time for licences through your department. Mrs. Trina Illchuck and Mrs. Joanne Johnson from the Moose Mountain area have applied for a personal care home licence and were told by your department that they would have to wait six to eight months for application to be processed. These women have over 26 years experience in senior homes and as special care aides.

Mr. Minister, if individuals meet the criteria outlined in the regulations, have the financial backing and the medical training necessary, as well as 35 to 40 persons waiting on a list, what's the hold-up? Why is it taking so long to process these applications?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I think the member raises a very valid point. And if these individuals have been told that it will take that long, I'm concerned about it also, and I will ask the department to look into this situation. I will not ask them to give special treatment to these individuals, in the sense that the applications should be dealt with in the order in which they come in. But I will ask them why it's taking so long and what steps could be taken to speed up the process.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A further question to the minister. Mr. Minister, I thank you for the response. And I'm going to ask you, Mr. Minister, can you give a commitment to this Assembly that you will have a response by the end of the week as to what the delays are that would hold up a special application for a licence such as we have here in the community of Arcola?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I can't commit to the member that I will have anything specific to say with respect to the particular application he's talking about, if that's what the member is asking.

I can commit to the member that I will take this up with the department at the earliest possible time, such as this afternoon, and do my utmost to see if there is some way to speed the process up. I make that commitment to the member, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Universities Restructuring Report

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister responsible for Post-Secondary Education.

Mr. Speaker, this government's election platform promised open and accountable government. Now we find out that they ain't being anything but open and accountable. Minister of Post-Secondary Education said he is refusing to release a report on restructuring the province's universities, this even though the report will cost the taxpayers at least \$44,000.

Will the Minister of Post-Secondary Education explain why he feels he can ignore his government's promise to be open and accountable and refuses to share the report with the taxpayers of this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I wanted to inform the hon. member that I never did refuse or say that I would refuse to release the report. The question of whether or not the report would be made public came up at the end of a hour-long session that I had with faculty members in Saskatoon last Friday.

And I had never considered whether the report would or would not be made public because the report, so called, is not expected to make any recommendations or make any decisions or do anything other than report on progress. And the process within the university is very public process in the sense that there are any number of committees and any number of people involved in it. And it is quite likely that the report that I'll be receiving from Mr. MacKay will report on matters which are well known within the university community.

But in light of that, let me say to the hon. member, I believe that if people are interested in seeing the report, we'll be glad to make it available.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for those comments. Students and staff at the universities, Mr. Speaker, are scared about the future of those institutions. They know that the government can slash funding; they can force program closures and perhaps even forcing

universities to amalgamate. It is no wonder that they're scared of secret reports, when you know that this government has a hidden agenda.

Mr. Minister, if you want to stop this speculation and put the fears to rest, my question then is, what is your plan as far as the report, and what will you be doing with its recommendations?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've just indicated to the member, I didn't know there'd be so much interest in the report. I can't think of anything that Mr. MacKay is likely to be reporting to us that isn't already known. And on that basis I believe we'll make . . . on that basis — if members opposite will be so kind as to listen — on that basis I can't think of any reason why we'd want to withhold it. I think we will make it public when it comes along.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rural Internet Service Charges

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for the vast majority of Saskatchewan communities SaskTel is the only provider of Internet services. However, on the ever-expanding information highway, SaskTel has created two classes of Internet users — those from the province's major centres, who are on-Net, receive 20 hours of service on the Internet for \$20; those who are the rural customers, who are off-Net, receive three hours of Internet services for \$20.

Will the minister in charge of SaskTel explain why rural residents are being discriminated against and why rural residents pay more than 6 times what their urban counterparts pay for this service.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to answer that question. There are, yes, two kinds of subscribers — subscribers off-Net and on-Net. The rural subscribers are for the most part on the off-Net. It should be noted that there are no long-distance line charges, and so it makes sense that the block of time would be more expensive in rural areas, Mr. Speaker.

So there are no line charges, and I would also point out, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan is the only jurisdiction in North America where there is widespread access by rural subscribers to the Internet, at any price. In Saskatchewan, SaskTel has undertaken to provide that service where no one else will do it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, then if this access is so available, nowhere is the unfairness of SaskTel's Internet structure more obvious than it is in Lloydminster. In Lloydminster, Alberta side, a customer can receive 50 hours of service for \$50 before paying an additional \$1.50 an hour. On this side of the border, a customer who pays \$20 monthly fee to SaskTel receives only three hours of service. After three hours, one must start paying \$6 an hour.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister make a commitment in the House today to provide a level playing-field for Internet users in urban and rural Saskatchewan with Alberta?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, as this is an emerging service, obviously there will be changes in time as the pattern of people who subscribe to this service develops. And I am reasonably sure that there will be some changes over time, as the system develops, to the line and time charges.

But Lloydminster can hardly be described, Mr. Speaker, as a rural area. And I would be interested to know from the members opposite how much rural subscribers in Alberta pay.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Business Credit Checks

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier promised through his *Partnership for Growth* to cut back on regulations. Today I have another suggestion for this regulations problem.

If someone wants to do a credit check on a specific company, they can call on someone like Dun & Bradstreet to get that information. But if that same business owner wants to find out who is inquiring about the company, they're out of luck. And if that business owner wants to find out what information Dun & Bradstreet is giving out about their company, they have to pay a fee. Even the NDP government in B.C. (British Columbia) is more in tune with business than this government. They have removed these oppressive regulations.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister repeal the regulations that prevent businesses from accessing this information and set businesses free from the heavy hand of government control?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite I find it a little surprising that her talk of regulation, that that's a difficulty, in large because most businesses that are moving here, if the member would listen for a moment, the most companies that have been moving here and investing in Saskatchewan, whether it's in the oil and gas industry or biotechnology, are saying the reason they're doing it in Saskatoon — or in the areas of oil production — is because the regulatory process in Saskatchewan is more streamlined than other parts of Canada. And for ag biotechnology they're saying it's better than in any other part of the world.

Why don't you get onside with what's positive about our province? I say again, look, look, look here, *Canadian Business*. *Canadian Business*, I say *Canadian Business* says that Saskatchewan has one of . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Now the hon. member knows that he is not allowed to use exhibits. The hon. member knows that. If he uses an exhibit, I'll ask the page to remove the

item. Order. Order. I'll ask the page to remove the item. Order . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Order. The Speaker is not seeking advice. Order.

And if the hon. minister would like to complete his answer, I'll recognize him to complete his answer. Order, order. The hon. member will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, before I was interrupted, I was quoting from a magazine and I want to continue that . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. Now the minister knows that he's not to be commenting on the rulings of the Chair. And I'll just ask him to, without commenting on the Chair, to proceed to conclude his answer and to do that directly.

Order. Order. Order. Order. All members will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to quote from a recent article that talks about the Saskatchewan economy and says:

As recently as the 1990s . . . or 1990, the people were bleeding away from the economically hard-pressed city, plunging crop prices . . .

And it talks about the problems. It says:

Today, though, that people look at Regina and Saskatoon as two of the top communities in Canada to invest in.

So I ask the member opposite: get onside; be more positive; accept what's happening in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and to all the members of the House, I would like to introduce a group seated in your gallery. Today we have visiting Regina and the legislature, a group of grade 5 and 6 students from the Foam Lake Elementary School. I believe there are about 52 students and their teachers: principal, Mr. Jim Hack; teachers, Dennis Bugera and Ruth Gislason. I'd also like to introduce Wayne Freison, the bus driver.

I look forward to meeting with the students and the staff in the course of the afternoon, after you've concluded your tour. And I ask all members to join with me in welcoming this group from Foam Lake.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on Status of An Act to amend The Education and Health Tax Act

The Speaker: — Order. Before orders of the day, the Speaker would like to make a statement to the House. Order.

On May 28, 1996, Bill No. 117, An Act to amend The Education and Health Tax Act respecting the taxation of Saskatchewan Indians off-reserve, The Education and Health Tax Amendment Act, 1996, was introduced by the member from Moosomin.

This Bill is presently standing on the order paper for second reading. I direct members to the second readings heading under private members' public bills and orders in supplement 7 which you received today.

It is the Speaker's duty to review all Bills in respect to rule 36 of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*. This rule states in part that any Bill which proposes "... to impose any new or additional charge upon the public revenue or upon the people..." must first be recommended by the Lieutenant Governor before it is considered by the Assembly. Order, please. The principle underlining this rule is fundamental to our constitution ... Could I have order, please? Order.

The principle underlining this rule is fundamental to our constitution because the executive of government is held strictly accountable for all public expenditure. It must also be solely responsible for initiating legislation involving the imposition of new or additional charges upon the public revenue or upon the people through taxation.

The question to be addressed here is whether Bill No. 117 contravenes the parliamentary principle of the Crown initiative in financial matters.

Bill No. 117 seeks to repeal an exemption from the taxation provisions contained in The Education and Health Tax Act granted to aboriginals living off reserves. The effect of this Bill will be to increase the incidence of taxation and thereby create additional revenue for the Crown.

I refer members to Beauchesne's, 6th Edition, in paragraph 601 where it is stated that:

The recommendation of the Crown is needed for such measures as bills relating to the ... repeal of an exemption from an existing duty, as the burden of the duty is thereby augmented ...

Therefore I find that Bill No. 117 requires a recommendation from the Lieutenant Governor. Because Bill No. 117 requires a recommendation and because the member from Moosomin is not a member of the Executive Council, I must — order — I must rule that the said Bill is out of order and will be removed from the order paper.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — In accordance with our policy of being open and accessible, I table the answer to the question.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 111 is provided.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 16 — Third-party Funding

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the motion as put forward by the member of Kelvington-Wadena will be as is indicated in the blues, and I would like to support the motion as put forward.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for the NDP government to finally take responsibilities for its actions. It is time for them to stop offloading financial difficulties onto third parties, who are struggling to cope with the cuts. And it is most definitely time to take meaningful steps towards creating a more ...

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. The hon. member ... Order. The hon. member is out of order. He cannot be debating any motion which has yet to be moved. And the motion is listed in the name of the hon. member for Kelvington-Wadena and cannot be considered unless moved by the hon. member for Kelvington-Wadena.

I would ask for leave, if the House would return to item no. 2 in private members' motions. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to begin this debate, and we've had it several times before but unfortunately it's something that we seem to have to discuss over and over again. The reason we have to continually debate this issue is because this NDP government can't, or won't, stop its arrogant, selfish, and political way of dealing with business in this province.

Mr. Speaker, time and time again I, along with my colleagues, have pleaded with this NDP government to take just a few moments to sit back and take note of the irreversible damage they are doing to our province. Instead of standing up and taking action for the people of this province, they have chosen to cower from the many critical issues that are facing Saskatchewan residents.

The members opposite stand up and spout a lot of meaningless rhetoric in an attempt to convince themselves just how great a job they are actually doing. Well, Mr. Speaker, the only ones they have convinced are themselves. The public aren't buying into it. In fact the people are completely fed up with this NDP government. I can't understand why the members opposite feel they must put politics ahead of their constituents.

The member from Regina South ran his campaign on the promise to save the Plains health care centre. He was elected, and then he turns his back on his constituents. I would ask the member how he can still look himself in the mirror and why he'd want to. Mr. Speaker, I guess I can't blame the member since he was just following suit with all of his colleagues on their crusade to break every promise they ever made.

Mr. Speaker, when the government opposite is questioned about their ruthless commitment to totally dismantle rural Saskatchewan, they have a patent response — blame Ottawa or blame the Tories. I've stated before in this Assembly that I can sympathize with the government for having to tackle the enormous debt left by the former Tory administration, but that was six years ago.

Now this NDP government has shifted the blame to the federal government. The federal government is trying to get its fiscal house in order, and instead of encouraging them to do so, this NDP government chastises them. On the one hand, this NDP government wants increased transfer payments, and on the other hand, they tell the federal government to cut taxes. I would encourage the NDP members opposite to join the federal government as they attempt to balance our national budget.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard all the cabinet colleagues say over and over again that they have back-filled 100 per cent of the reductions in transfer payments. Well if they have back-filled dollar for dollar, then why are so many hospitals closing, and why are so many school closures becoming more and more of a reality, and why are municipalities having to do more with less?

The budget for health care in this province has not changed since this NDP government's so-called wellness model was introduced. This wellness model has meant complete devastation of our health care system. It is translated into the shutting down of over 50 hospitals and health care facilities. I guess it's fair to say that this NDP government hasn't been adequately funding health care for many years now.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government has offloaded onto municipalities and communities at record levels. The books of this province were balanced on the backs of Saskatchewan taxpayers. The taxpayers have done their part, but the government onslaught hasn't broken stride.

(1430)

In a time where we must be prepared for the next century, this NDP government is driving the people of Saskatchewan into the ground. The members opposite know this and they just won't admit it. They enjoy playing politics too much to actually do the job they were sent to this Assembly to do. All we have to do is watch members opposite attempt to justify their cruel and irrational decisions.

Mr. Speaker, the business people of this province are the ones who will lead Saskatchewan into the next century. Business is the job creator. Quality, sustainable jobs is what the people of this province need and it's what they want. This NDP government would be far better off if they would quit blaming

everyone else and direct their energies into creating environment that stimulates real economic growth.

The people of Saskatchewan don't want to hear that this NDP government blame whichever scapegoat they choose for the week. They want jobs and they want to contribute to our province. And all they ask for in return is quality health, education, and social programs; and in rural Saskatchewan, highways.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people are amongst the most hard-working people in the world. They've proven time and time again that they will pay their share of taxes. In fact they do. But in order to do so, Saskatchewan people need jobs and the only way jobs can be created is through real economic growth. I'm not sure if the government knows what the indicator for real economic growth is, but it is in job start-ups.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has a lot to offer. It is a great place to live, to work, and to raise a family. It is a place with unlimited potential for any businessman or woman. The problem is that we have a government in Saskatchewan that apparently doesn't want to see the people of this province prosper. I think they only want to see government prosper. If they truly wanted to see the province prosper, then why would they insist on setting up roadblock after roadblock in the business community?

Last week in this Assembly, the member from Regina South stated that the number of business bankruptcies in Saskatchewan has declined every year since 1991. Mr. Speaker, since 1991 Saskatchewan has seen nearly 2,300 businesses go bankrupt — far more than Manitoba has experienced. And I can't for the life of me figure out why the member from Regina South is so proud of so many bankruptcies.

Mr. Speaker, I guess it is understandable, since this is the same member that claimed that transfer payments in terms of tax points don't exist any more.

Mr. Speaker, let's take a look at Saskatchewan's economic performance in 1995. Statistics Canada shows our economy grew by only .8 per cent. This is the third worst in the entire country and well below the national average. Just before last June's election this NDP government claimed that our economy was booming. They also claimed that there were thousands more Saskatchewan people working. Mr. Speaker, once again this NDP government felt it had to play politics instead of dealing with the truth.

The Minister of Economic Development responded by saying, and I quote, "I think you'll see a phenomenal number of jobs for 1996." I sincerely hope that the minister is right. But we can't forget that he said the very same thing last year.

Mr. Speaker, we don't hear the NDP members opposite say too much about these numbers. They call it preaching doom and gloom when I say it. But unfortunately it's nothing short of reality. As a result of this government's choices, our economy doesn't have much opportunity to experience real economic growth and create quality, sustainable jobs.

As Eric Howe, University of Saskatchewan economics professor, stated, we have a built-in problem due to our enormous tax base. He said, and I quote, "Even when the economy should be firing on all cylinders, it's still spluttering."

Mr. Speaker, this leads me to the motion that I have put forward:

That this Assembly condemn the government for its policy of offloading its financial difficulties onto the municipal governments, the district health boards and their affiliates, and the school boards, and rather that this Assembly call upon the government to face its financial difficulties by creating a business and economic climate in which the province would foster and encourage real economic growth, which in turn would produce a tax base capable of enabling the government to effectively deal with its financial difficulties and at the same time meet its responsibilities in the fields of health, education, social services, and municipal services.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this motion clearly sums up two things. Firstly, that this NDP government has balanced their budget on the backs of third parties, forcing them into a very severe financial difficulty. Lastly, this motion provides a fair and compassionate alternative to the drastic offloading practised by this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, by creating a business and economic climate that would foster growth and encourage real economic growth, Saskatchewan would be able to deal with its financial difficulties. By producing a tax base that evenly disperses the burden would enable the government to meet its responsibilities in the fields of health, education, social, and municipal services.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is not meeting its responsibilities in these areas. I know they don't want to admit that they are on the wrong track and they've made several detrimental decisions.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage the Assembly to support the motion that I have put forward. Thank you.

The Speaker: — Now to be in order, the hon. member must conclude by moving her motion — you can't debate after moving the motion — and also identifying the seconder.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Moved by myself and seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale:

That this Assembly condemn the government for its policy of offloading its financial difficulties onto the municipal government, the district health boards and their affiliates, the school boards, and rather that this Assembly call upon the government to face its financial difficulties by creating a business and economic climate in this province which would foster and encourage real economic growth, which in turn would produce a tax base capable of enabling the government to effectively deal with its financial difficulties and at the same time meet its responsibilities in the field of

health, education, social services, and municipal services.

The Speaker: — Before recognizing the hon. member for Canora-Pelly, the Speaker would ask if the Assembly would provide leave to the Speaker for correcting an error that I made in the Speaker's statement.

Leave granted.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Correction to Previous Statement

The Speaker: — I appreciate the cooperation of the hon. members. In the Speaker's statement, I correctly referred to the Bill as An Act to amend The Education and Health Tax Act respecting the taxation of Saskatchewan Indians off-reserve, but in error referred to it as Bill 117. For the information of the House, it is Bill 116 on your order papers, and I want to correct that error for the information of the members.

I thank you for your cooperation.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 16 — Third-party Funding (continued)

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to support the motion put forward by my colleagues, the hon. member for Kelvington-Wadena and the member for Melfort-Tisdale.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for the NDP government to finally take responsibility for its actions. It is time for them to stop offloading financial difficulties onto third parties who are struggling to cope with the cuts. And it is most definitely time to take meaningful steps towards creating a more prosperous financial climate in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it is known that over the last four years education cuts in this province have been millions of dollars. In fact in excess of \$20 million has been cut from the education budget. The boards of this province have faced 2 per cent cuts and 4 per cent cuts and 2 per cent cut again, and in fact then a final zero per cent increase or zero per cent decrease if you might like to use that term.

And as a result, massive funding has been transferred from the Government of Saskatchewan to local governments, that is, the boards of the province of Saskatchewan. And they are reeling under this impact.

Mr. Speaker, as Education critic, I must stand up today to speak on behalf of school boards, staff, and students, who are so deeply affected by this government's offloading policies. As I have continued to argue throughout this session, education in this province is facing a shaky and frightening future. But this government is playing dumb. They feel that if they continue to pretend that nothing's happening, people won't notice their covert methods of slashing funding to school boards.

Mr. Minister, as I've indicated in the House — Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry — as I've indicated in the House before, a method of financing school boards is done by an equalization formula called the equalization grant. And one of the factors that plays a very important role is referred to as the equalization factor; it has previously been called the computational mill rate. This mill rate distributes a method of providing grant to all school boards in the province. There are many boards in this province who have high assessments and a mill of taxation will create a revenue of in excess of \$800,000. And I'm referring of course, to the large urban centres.

But when we start to look at smaller rural school divisions, a mill will probably produce a revenue source of 35, \$40,000. This, Mr. Speaker, is the way the boards receive funding. When this government changed, by way of the grant allocations this year, when they changed the equalization factor by increasing it by 2 mills from 66.4 mills to 68.4 mills, what they have effectively done is ask the local taxpayer — it is a method of downloading — they have asked the local taxpayer to contribute an additional \$14 million to the costs of education.

As a result, boards have had no choice — and I will identify for you, Mr. Speaker, some of the problems that school boards are facing — they haven't had no choice but to make serious cuts to education.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think people will be fooled for too much longer. As soon as they see how government cut-backs are affecting the children of their communities, they will speak out. As soon as they see their schools losing programs and watch as teachers are forced to move away from their communities, they will start to protest. Already we can see that happening.

Let's look at some of the school boards across the province. The Timberline School Division is facing a 3 mill increase in 1996. Student enrolment did decrease, and it decreased by 34 from last year's total. The government cut the grant to the Timberline School Division by almost \$160,000.

Now this is a school division whose mill rate . . . whose assessment produces a value of less than \$40,000 per mill. So that's the equivalent of 4 mills of taxation if they want to balance. What they have decided to do, Mr. Speaker, is of course make other changes. And they have decided that there will be 2.5 teaching jobs that will be eliminated this fall.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to note that Timberline School Division has been following a process of redesign. And they have been looking at the way they deliver education programs in all of their schools. They have had a committee in place that is looking at restructuring. And this committee has been working for two years, Mr. Speaker. And I want to say that it takes its toll on everybody, not only the residents within a community, the staff.

And I also note that an article that appeared last week in the local paper has indicated that one of the board members, a board member from Sturgis, has decided that she will resign. The resignation has been submitted because of the pressures that she has felt put upon herself, that the board is trying to

cope with the lack of funding, the fact that the government has decided not to provide an adequate grant system, and on the other side the pressures of trying to maintain schools. And due to pressures upon herself and upon her family, she has decided that it is not worth staying in public life and has decided to resign.

(1445)

So you can see, Mr. Speaker, that the toll is not only on the community, but is also on individuals, as here we have an example of a school board member who has said, enough is enough; I don't need this. And she has decided to resign.

Mr. Speaker, the Kamsack School Division isn't fairing any better. In fact it's probably worse. They are looking at a 4 mill hike this year in their tax rate. The funding for the band program and for the special arts program has disappeared. Effective January 1, the funding for the band program in the Kamsack School Division will no longer be provided by the Kamsack School Division board. They have asked that the parents — that the parents — will be responsible for fund-raising to keep the band program going.

Mr. Speaker, Kamsack School Division has been noted for its strong music and band program throughout the years. I'm sure that many people in the House, many members, have had the opportunity to hear Kamsack school bands perform at opening ceremonies, conventions and the like, throughout Saskatchewan.

And now, Mr. Speaker, what's going to happen is, effective January 1, funding will no longer be provided. It will be a fee-for-service kind of thing to the parents. That is a program that is cherished by many. I have letters coming in from residents in the Kamsack School Division to say our band program is very important to that select group of students. Not every student is going to be taking part in extra curricular activities that are sports related. Many are in the area of fine arts and music. And the interest shown in the band program in Kamsack I'm sure is going to be hurt when it becomes fully known that every parent will have to contribute certain dollars to be able to have their son or daughter take part in the Kamsack band program.

The special arts program in the Kamsack School Division is also disappearing at the end of this school year. Bus driver positions have been eliminated; and 3.5 teaching positions are being axed in the Kamsack School Division. So we have significant changes to that school division.

Mr. Speaker, the Timberline School Division and the Kamsack School Division are but two examples of many other divisions that have indicated to me the kinds of cuts that they are making.

Now the government can feign innocence and they can insist that any cuts are purely a school board decision, but the fact is, Mr. Speaker, boards are forced to make these decisions because of provincial government offloading. The decision to close a school, the decision to eliminate a program, the decision to cut staff, to reduce grades in a particular school and downsize,

those decisions are made by the board of education at that local level.

But, Mr. Speaker, they are driven by the financial requirements of that board. And if adequate funding is not provided by the provincial government . . . and the taxation level has reached a maximum in many school divisions, rural Saskatchewan. Tax arrears, Mr. Speaker, are exceedingly high. I've indicated to this House, Mr. Speaker, that in east-central Saskatchewan those school boards that have a mill rate that produces anything up to \$40,000, many of them have tax arrears that exceeds \$1 million. That percentage as a percentage of their assessment base is double what is common across the province. It is double the provincial average.

So you can see that the boards are struggling very dearly. The cuts that the boards have experienced over the last four or five years are starting to show up very significantly because the mill rates have increased every year. The form of downloading that the provincial government has used with regards to the local taxpayer and the school boards, the school boards pass it off to the ratepayer. If they want to maintain programs, if they want to maintain schools, if they want to maintain the number of teaching staff, that has to be funded.

How do you fund that? You increase the mill rate. And as a result there are certain people that look at the tax rate and say, I just can't pay any more. And as a result, arrears have grown significantly in many school divisions.

I ask the members, do they honestly think that school boards are making these tough choices because they want to? I don't think so, Mr. Speaker. No school board wants to axe teaching positions. When you cut a position and a family moves away, and that family has children, it's a domino effect. As soon as you cut staff, you have people move away. As a result, a business closes and maybe another family moves away. And in the end, you have to make more cuts. And that is what is happening to the rural boards of education especially.

Does the Minister of Education think that her actions have no effect on school boards? Is the NDP government so contemptuous of Saskatchewan people that they can say these things without conscience? If this is the case, Mr. Speaker, I pity every child in this province, who deserves a high-quality education.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government has any thoughts outside the parameters of the insular caucus office. After seeing the kinds of choices this government makes, I seriously wonder what sort of process they go through. Do they sit around the big table in the Premier's office and haphazardly slash a department budget, celebrating every time red turns to black, without giving any thought to what this means in human terms? Do they even begin to equate the numbers in the books with the people who live in this province?

Mr. Speaker, whether they realize it or not, the money they so carelessly play with comes directly from taxpayers. So when the government sets priorities, it shouldn't be with their patronage interests in mind. They shouldn't make decisions

based on what makes them look important or gives them a sense of control. The government should make decisions that are good for the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, children, more than anything, are at the heart of our society. If you ask people why they want to build a prosperous future for Saskatchewan, I am sure they would include our children in the answer. Children embody all of the hopes and dreams of our society and we see them in a future full of promise and hope.

Mr. Speaker, I think the members opposite would agree with me when I say children are one of the most essential parts of our society. But, Mr. Speaker, if they are willing to say this is true, why then are they not willing to protect these children? Why are they not willing to fight for their future? Why do they let programs and resources dwindle, without uttering a single word in protest. I'll tell you why, Mr. Speaker. It is because they have bought into this government's humanless approach to governing.

Now the members opposite will criticize us and say that we want savings but are asking for more money in health and education. They say we are contradicting ourselves, but, Mr. Speaker, we are not contradicting ourselves. We believe in a fiscally responsible government, and we believe in reducing the provincial debt, but we don't believe that we should make those cuts on the backs of our seniors or on the backs of working families or on the backs of our children. It's a matter of priorities, Mr. Speaker, and it's time this government got its priorities straight.

Mr. Speaker, I can't help but again bring up the promise made by the Premier himself in 1990. He said, "Increased education is a priority. All I can say is we simply have to find more money." In six short years, the Premier lost his compassion and his integrity, but I want to know how he can look at the students who come into this legislature daily and know that by breaking his promise, it is those young people who are suffering. Where is his compassion, Mr. Speaker?

Time and time again we have brought up the discrepancies between urban and rural programs run by this government, and we aren't the only ones who are concerned. In an article from the March 28 edition of *The Western Producer*, Jack Braidek writes:

I do suggest that a hard look be given at how education is delivered out in the country and perhaps in urban centres too. The old notion that you move bodies to where education happens is becoming more and more heartless and costly.

I hope the government takes articles like this very seriously because they do express the way people in rural Saskatchewan are feeling. Mr. Speaker, as boards of education have completed their budgets for 1996 — for the fiscal year, 1996 — many have been forced to make great discontinuances. In fact we are aware of many schools that have been announced as closed for the future at the end of June 30. As we move into 1997, Mr. Speaker, boards of education are looking at many, many

schools. We hear right here in the city of Regina, Scott Collegiate, long known for its strong program in one of the inner city schools of this city that has had an enrolment decline — yes, it has declined slightly — but it is still a school that has in excess of 160 students. But the board of education that is facing major cuts is looking at this school and saying, can we deliver a program somewhere else and can we deliver it more cost-effectively?

And as a result, it doesn't matter whether you're a rural school division of 5 or 600 students looking at balancing the books or whether you're one of the two largest systems in the province of Saskatchewan — Regina Public — they are also looking at school closures as a way of saving costs and trying to balance what this government has done to them as far as offloading of revenue.

And since the government seems determined to ignore us, they need to hear what's really going on in communities throughout the province. Do they listen to people? Do they listen to teachers who are losing their jobs? And of course, do they listen to school boards who are forced to deal with harsh government cuts?

Mr. Speaker, a letter in the *Leader-Post* from the president of the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association explains the frustration boards are feeling. He writes:

Here is the situation in a nutshell. The provincial government has told school boards, after three years of provincial funding cut-backs and in light of federal transfer reductions, you will get no more and perhaps less money. At the same time, the government is negotiating a contract with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation that will result in significantly increased costs, costs that school boards and the local ratepayer will have to pay for.

Consequences of the government's actions, if it stays this course, are clear. Fewer teachers working in Saskatchewan, fewer programs for students, more school closures, and higher property taxes.

Mr. Speaker, the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) represents the people who are most directly affected by government cuts. It is the school trustees who have to take the heat for the government's actions.

While the Minister of Education sits in her insular little office in the marble palace talking about how government is not hurting our education systems, board members are dealing with angry teachers, parents, and students.

Mr. Speaker, I stand by my beliefs that this government is hurting education despite the minister's protests that funding is increasing. And I say that only because the facts are there.

Fact — teachers' salaries in 1997 will cost boards a further \$8 million. That's in addition to the costs that were borne this year in 1996 which the Minister of Education says will be funded by the government.

Second fact — other staff increases will cost between 3 and \$5 million. With every labour settlement for one sector of the entire complement, there will definitely be a spin-off for all of the other groups involved in this sector. The teachers have negotiated a contract that calls for some salary increase — not a lot, but some.

(1500)

What we are looking at now, Mr. Speaker, of course, is what about the bus drivers? What about the custodians? The teaching assistants? All of the staff that works, the non-professional staff, that works for school boards throughout the province. If they are entitled — and I'm sure they are — to a settlement of some type, those negotiations will take place. They've started, and they will continue to take place throughout 1996 and '97. Using a bare minimum, those costs are going to be somewhere in that 3 to \$5 million, further costs to boards of education.

Fact, Mr. Speaker — grants will be reduced by another \$7.1 million next year, 1997. Minister has indicated in the budget address that there will be \$900,000 supplied as an extra amount of money to boards of education. This is not so, Mr. Speaker. Next year, as I've indicated, \$8 million will be the increased cost for teaching staff only. And as a result of the minister having indicated that she will pick up the cost of this teaching staff complement, that means that there will be an \$8 million increase.

But as a result of the \$7.1 million decrease, there is only a net of \$900,000. Boards are still faced with a decline because they have an \$8 million bill, and they have a \$7.1 million cut. You add those two numbers together, Mr. Speaker, and you have \$15.1 million net change to the boards of education in this province.

If the minister is correct and says that she will be adding an \$8 million grant to the total, the boards of this province are still out \$7.1 million for next year.

That is also taking into account that we will not have a change to the equalization factor. The equalization factor, as I previously described, that went up by 2 mills this year. If that changes at all, for every 1 mill change in the equalization factor to all the boards in this province, that's a further \$7 million. As I indicated, this year it changed by 2 mills, which was \$14 million. If we have any change again next year, we could be looking at huge amounts of money as far as costs to boards of education.

Mr. Speaker, we haven't even looked, we haven't even looked at the day-to-day costs of operating a school division, the increases. It is known. Paper costs this year have jumped anywhere from 30 to 50 per cent. We note that there has been a significant increase in the cost of gas as provided for rural transportation. That has not been taken into consideration at all in terms of the grant factor. So boards of education will be forced to deal with a massive shortfall of money, even though the minister has guaranteed that they will cover teachers' salary increases. As I've indicated, the boards are going to be out at least 10 to \$12 million when you take those other increases into

account.

What does this mean, Mr. Speaker? It means program losses. It means school closures. It means shorter weeks, and it will definitely mean higher student/teacher ratios. Mr. Speaker, that is a statistic that Saskatchewan cannot be proud of. We have one of the highest student/teacher ratios in all of Canada. That is something that we have to work at, to change, Mr. Speaker.

When the minister plays her numbers game, it becomes obvious who the real losers are, that is, our children. Mr. Speaker, this government would like to blame all their evils on federal cut-backs. But I don't buy that. And I don't think the people of this province should be expected to buy that. The fact is, this government is systematically chipping away at Saskatchewan's social and community infrastructure.

It is the members opposite who decide where the money goes. It is the members opposite who decide to offload funding cuts onto municipalities, onto health boards and their affiliates, and onto school boards.

Mr. Speaker, by listening to the people of this province, I am certain the NDP government could come up with innovative, compassionate, viable solutions. This government does have an opportunity to stimulate the economy. And if they work on improving the business climate and started bringing in money, then they could channel some of these funds into badly needed social programs.

Mr. Speaker, I find it odd that our party has to fight for social programs, seeing as the NDP is supposed to represent the left-wing side of the political spectrum. But when it comes to health, education, and municipalities, they seem to have chosen to perch on the far right.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said earlier, I strongly support the motion moved by the member from Kelvington-Wadena and for the very reasons I have just discussed. I implore the members opposite to also pledge their support. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also support the motion put forth by my colleague:

That this Assembly condemn the government for its policy of offloading its financial difficulties onto the municipal governments, the district health boards and their affiliates, and the school boards, and rather than this Assembly call upon the government to face its financial difficulties by creating a business and economic climate in the province which would foster and encourage real economic growth, which in turn would produce a tax base capable of enabling the government to effectively deal with its financial difficulties and at the same time meet its responsibilities in the fields of health, education, social services, and municipal government.

As a new member to this legislature, I thought that oral question period would be a time to get answers on behalf of the

people of Saskatchewan. But time after time in this session, our members have stood in this Assembly, they have asked questions about the rapid dismantling of the health care system on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. And time and time again, we have had to put up with non-answers from an arrogant Health minister.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to outline some concerns the people of Saskatchewan have about their crumbling health system. I hope this time the government takes a new approach and actually listens to some of their concerns.

The health care debate in Saskatchewan is not new. It's been ongoing for decades, but what is new is that the people of Saskatchewan have never seen a government try to totally absolve itself of all the massive health care cuts that are sweeping this province. This government's so-called health care reform is a systematic dismantling of the health care system, piece by piece.

What is most maddening is that when the people turn to the Minister of Health for explanations for the bed closures, the staff cuts, and cuts in services, the minister simply shrugs his shoulders and lays the blame on local health boards or the federal government.

I just don't understand how this same government can boast about its wonderful health care reform, yet it refuses to accept any responsibility for health care cuts at the local level. Perhaps it's a disease that afflicts the government of the day. The current government is showing all the symptoms of refusing to be accountable to the very people it is supposed to represent. Despite the protests and the raucous health board meetings and the petitions, this government is refusing to listen.

A quick look back in *Hansard* to the Devine years show that the now Deputy Premier once proposed a motion during private members' day that said that the Tory Health minister not be paid more than a dollar because he was refusing to accept any responsibility for the health care system.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that if you ask the people of this province today, they would say that the Health minister should be paid even less than a dollar. He is not earning his salary because if you listen to his answers every day in question period, he claims he is not at all responsible for the mess that Saskatchewan's health care system is in. He accuses my colleagues and myself of creating a false fear about the crisis Saskatchewan's health care system is facing.

Well I would like to inform the minister and his government that I am simply relaying the messages on behalf of the Saskatchewan people. These are the same people who in some towns are forced to use a pay phone to get health care services. These are the same people who are trying to cope with the closure or changes to 52 hospitals across the province. These are the same elderly people who are being ripped apart from the people they have known all their lives because the care centres in their home towns are being shut down.

It may come as a surprise to the Minister of Health to find out

that hundreds of people across Saskatchewan are so worried about the decline of their health care services that they turn out by the hundreds for local health board meetings. These are emotional and extremely tense meetings. The government members opposite would soon find that out if they decided to attend some of those meetings.

An issue that many of those local health boards are dealing with is the pitting of communities against each other to compete for dwindling health care dollars — dollars that are allocated by this government. That's why we are seeing long-time friends angrily arguing with each other. Because each of their communities is trying to prove which one is more worthy of health care funding.

Every day I stand in this House along with my colleagues and present petitions on behalf of the thousands of Saskatchewan people who are against the closure of the Plains Health Centre. I know our caucus gets dozens of letters and phone calls every week expressing concerns about the state of health care. And I am sure that the government gets many of the same phone calls and letters.

Yet the Minister of Health seems to think it's not his responsibility to answer these concerns. He proudly stands in this Assembly and he says that his government has back-filled federal cuts dollar for dollar. I know that that is not true. And he is certainly not fooling the people across Saskatchewan.

If the health care funding levels were being properly maintained, we would not be seeing headline after headline in community newspapers explaining how the local health boards are being overwhelmed under the burden of funding cuts.

It's shocking to see this government's lack of regard for the well-being of Saskatchewan people. Because when those members were in opposition, they campaigned on the health care issues. When the Health minister or one of his representatives is involved in any national conference or discussion on health care, they proudly take credit for the revolutionary health reform in Saskatchewan. They hold Saskatchewan up as a model for the rest of Canada.

But it's a much different story when the minister leaves the national stage. When responding to any question about health care services in Saskatchewan, he quickly points his finger of blame at the federal government or the local health boards. Now that's quite a double standard.

The government wants to take credit for health care reform but it believes it is not responsible for millions of dollars in health care cuts. Saskatchewan people know who holds the purse-strings on health care in this province. This government allocates the health care funding, then it cowardly sits back and lets the local health board members clean up the mess the government has created.

In fact it seems that the government members hardly have the time to visit their own constituencies to listen to people's health care concerns. They did not show up in Swift Current and they did not attend the meeting in Central Butte. They did not

answer to the people in Fort Qu'Appelle or in Moose Jaw. I find it hard to believe that not one of the 42 government members in this Assembly had the time to attend those health care meetings.

Mr. Speaker, it all boils down to a question of compassion, honesty, and commitment to providing quality health care services to Saskatchewan people. I am sad to say that this government seems to be lacking in each of those areas.

(1515)

I would like to offer the members across the way a little advice. I think it's time that this government gave the people of Saskatchewan a bit more credit. The people across this great province know that this government is reneging on its responsibility to make sure that the sick and elderly are receiving quality care. The government is not fooling anyone by pointing the finger of blame at Ottawa or the local health boards.

It's time that this government sincerely started listening to the health care concerns that we bring forward on behalf of the people. It's time that the government made some attempt to answer people's health care concerns.

The truth of the matter is that there is fear in communities across Saskatchewan about what the end result of these massive health care cuts will be. I can't even tell you how many elderly people have talked to me about questions of who will care for them when they can no longer care for themselves. Some of these people are spending the last years of their lives wondering if they will be forced to move away from their families.

This is an alarming situation. Our elderly deserve better and so do all the people of Saskatchewan.

If this government wants to end the talk of a health care crisis, it will start responding to the needs and concerns of Saskatchewan people. The voters of this province will not forget your broken promises. I thank you.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to stand today in support of the motion before us and discuss this government's track record in rural Saskatchewan.

Having been a member of rural Saskatchewan for my entire life and lived in basically the same community for some number of years, I've always watched with great interest, Mr. Speaker, on the devolving of rural Saskatchewan and the work and the soul and the heart that was put into rural communities and rural living by rural residents. And it's always amazed me how governments may come and go and yet rural Saskatchewan always stays. However, this particular government, Mr. Speaker, I'm not so sure that rural Saskatchewan can withstand its plague.

I wonder . . . I often think back and wonder what was discussed at the first cabinet meeting of this government in 1991 after they were elected. And I'm wondering if the discussions did indeed centre around rural versus urban in Saskatchewan. And

it's becoming very evident as days go by that indeed that discussion did take place at that time.

And I'm also wondering how long it took for this government to decide that rural Saskatchewan really didn't count any more in their eyes. And I think that's where we're at today, Mr. Speaker, and wondering: what does rural Saskatchewan mean to the government of today?

I wonder if the government took many meetings, many cabinet meetings, many discussions, and what role the MLAs from rural Saskatchewan played in those discussions, Mr. Speaker. We see today where it's more increasingly clear that the rural MLAs have less and less say in the decisions of cabinet and the decisions of this government. I wonder what input the MLAs in 1991, the rural MLAs, had into the decisions made at that time which has led us to where we are at today.

The motion that we have before us, Mr. Speaker, talks about rural Saskatchewan in three different forms — in terms of municipal governments; it talks about rural Saskatchewan in terms of health and district health boards and their affiliates; and it talks about our education system through the school boards and what's happening in the decreased funding and the lack of commitment to these areas in rural Saskatchewan.

As I said, having lived in rural Saskatchewan my entire life, it gives me some background and some right, over and above that of being an MLA, to talk about rural Saskatchewan and defend it. I too have spent the majority of my spare time in the last 25 years fighting for health care and the rights of the people of Saskatchewan, particularly rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And I think that also gives me some rights in addressing this serious problem that we have before us this time in the history of Saskatchewan.

If I think back, Mr. Speaker, to when I first became involved in health in this province, it was certainly at the local board, as many communities had similar boards to what our community had in terms of a hospital board, of what was the facility that was in our community that we worked so hard to strive and maintain and meet the needs of the community.

Unlike larger centres, we didn't have the luxury of having two or three different agencies or facilities within our community because of the population and because of funding problems. But the one facility, one agency, did usually meet the needs and we worked very hard to ensure that that happened.

We also worked very hard to ensure that the people in the community were heard and their views were brought forward to the health board and were looked at, and most often were acted upon, Mr. Speaker. The residents of the communities banded together in terms of volunteering their time, as did I as a trustee, most often having some mileage paid. However at the end of the day, usually it was out-of-pocket expenses. But that did not deter the spirit of volunteers.

Across the province there were somewhere in the neighbourhood of 455 to 460 volunteer boards at the time of the onset of the wellness model in this province, at which point in

time they were quickly disbanded and tossed aside, without even so much as a written thank-you or gratitude by the minister of the day.

In our community we had many, many people represented there at the community level, on our community health board, from — I'm just trying to recall the number of small towns and RMs (rural municipality) that were represented — in excess of 20, Mr. Speaker. Some members represented two or three different communities at the board level, while others were large enough to be able to have a sole member for their representation.

But the board members were not the only ones that volunteered their time and their services. The community people themselves came forward in many different ways to support the health initiatives of the day, to ensure a viable and a needed health system for the community and the district, and one that met the needs of the people.

These people varied from anyone giving a small donation or a large donation to the health board, to the hospital board, and sometimes amounted to considerable amount of dollars which was used to sustain the health facility, of course, when governments of all stripes were a little bit slack in their funding of the health programs in the small communities.

There was people as well that volunteered their time to go out and raise monies as well, through many different types of activities, whether it was a bingo or whether it was a hockey game or a ball tournament or simply a fund-raising exercise to gather up some much needed dollars to buy a certain item for within the health agency.

There was also of course, a group, an organized group, of volunteers which are still present in today's system, called the health care auxiliaries. These people operated out of the facility in direct relationship with the health board and worked to solve many of the problems that these health agencies would find in terms of funding, in terms of human resources, which provided the volunteers with an avenue to do their work on behalf of the people of the community.

We've come a long way from that time, Mr. Speaker, and it certainly hasn't been down the path that I would like to have seen in terms of the thanks and the homage paid to our volunteers.

As well, at that time, Mr. Speaker, many of our health trustees who came from varied walks of life . . . I recall our local board had an accountant and insurance agent on the board as well as a couple of farmers. We most likely had a storekeeper. We most likely had a professional person from other walks of life as well. I don't think we ever had the luxury of having a lawyer sit on our board — at least not in the 20-some years that I spent on the board. Although we would have been very happy to have had some legal counsel on that board. However, in small communities, most often we don't have an abundance of lawyers and their time is often spent looking after the legal interests of the local people.

However, unlike the government opposite — there are a

number of lawyers sit within their cabinet and so they do have the luxury of having that expertise. However I'm not sure that that — a lot — is the answer to many of our problems.

In our local community, as I said, we had our local health board, our hospital board and it's . . . I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker now, as opposed to the Speaker of the House, and I welcome you to listen to the debate. We came from varied walks of life and we had many relationships in other communities that were involved with different health agencies and facilities as well.

But as we became more familiar with our jobs, I guess, I recall back to about my fourth health board meeting, when I was appointed by our local municipality to represent their interest on it, that there was a bit of turmoil in that association. And being a new kid on the block and having piped up on a few issues, suddenly found myself being nominated for the Chair. And so at a very young age and very early in my health career, I found myself being the chairman of a local health board, which was a bit of a feat for someone who was prepared to volunteer some time, but certainly not the amount of time that it takes to chair one of these boards.

However, I said sure, that I would try and do my best, and we worked toward the same goals as the previous Chair and the board did in ensuring that health needs of the community were being met. However as we became more familiar with our role as a health trustee, we realized that things have to change, as do they in every walk of life and every occupation — that things change and you need to change with them. But always change must not be for the sake of change but for the sake of the betterment of the community, of a particular organization. And that's what we've strived to do.

In striving to do that and to accomplish that, we realized that we couldn't survive within ourselves and that we had to reach out and work with other communities and other health agencies. And we certainly strived to do that, and did.

Many of the neighbouring communities that we worked with, you know, had similar boards as we did. And we were very happy to be involved with the communities of Davidson and Craik, and certainly Watrous, who all had health agencies — and as far away as Central Butte, Mr. Speaker, which is a considerable distance from my home town of Liberty, and Imperial, where the health facility now is.

But none the less we came together as a group of concerned citizens under the guise of health volunteers and health trustees and were able to make some great gains in the health areas in insuring that the citizens and the taxpayers of all those communities' health needs were being looked after, whether it happened in the community of Imperial, whether it happened in the community of Central Butte.

But we did do that, and we worked very hard at attaining some of the goals that we set for ourselves back in the late 1970s.

As well, we moved so far as to come together as a unique group called a district coordinating committee, where we actually sat

down and drew up some plans for the whole area as to where we might be heading with this whole health issue, whether in terms of community-based services or institutional-based services.

And all the services that we need to provide needed to be provided to the citizens of those communities in a friendly, home-based setting; not having to uproot our seniors from their home communities and having them put in an institution in a larger centre — some being as many as some hundred miles away — which only deteriorates the state of an elderly person in that instance.

We also tried to maintain people with other needs within the community and to get the services provided to them that were necessary to have them remain in the community and live out a healthy and viable lifestyle.

(1530)

Through the district co-ordinating committee, the local communities themselves provided the funds for us to use, to have, you know, someone that would do a bit of the bookkeeping for us and bring together the people on a regular basis to meet. And I was actually lucky enough to have been the Chair of that group before it was thrown aside in late 1991, early 1992, to give way for the government's wellness plan.

At that point in time, many communities were trying to decide where they could best fit into this whole picture under the wellness model. And unfortunately despite the words of the minister of Health of the day, Ms. Simard, that it would not pit community against community, Mr. Speaker, it has done that very thing. It has and it did pit community against community.

As I said, the communities tried to fit into the program of course, as humans sometimes do, without recognizing that some changes have to take place. However, if people are unsure of the program where we're headed, they tend to be a little reluctant to go, and certainly in this case were very reluctant to believe in all the things that the Health minister of the day would talk about and promise them.

The communities at that time then tried to decide how they could best fit into the system, into the wellness model, so that down the road when the cuts were coming — as they knew they would and they have, and they are — wanted to make sure that they could survive. So that their community could survive, so that their health agencies could survive, so that their health facility could survive. And that's not the way to try and reform a system, Mr. Speaker.

The way to reform a system is to educate the people. Bring them onsite and show them where they're going. Show them the values of the program that you're working for, and then when everyone's working together you can move ahead much faster and you will have the support of the people. Unfortunately that did not happen, and it has not happened, and consequently we're where we're at today in health reform.

As I talked about the people being unsure of where they were

headed with this whole wellness model, I would like to quote an article from the *Leader-Post* back in February. And it talks about . . . it quotes Dr. Roberta McKay. She makes a couple of statements which I found very interesting, and the first one is that people get sick, Mr. Speaker, she says. And that's a fact of life. No matter how much we try and prevent illness and sickness, we can help but we can't solve that. People will get sick, many times through no fault of their own; many times through their own fault. We can't stop that. This is a free country and all we can do is hope to educate people.

And I guess, having been one that's never been a smoker in the course of my lifetime, I do believe that of course smoking is very hazardous to our health. However, it is also a huge tax base for the governments of the day and it is hard to really criticize the smokers on one hand, and when you're trying and hoping that they will buy more and more of the products to ensure that the dollars keep flowing in.

However, all we can do is hope to educate those. And I certainly have been and I will continue to lobby my better half that maybe smoking isn't the best avenue for her to continue on if she would like to spend her last days healthy with her healthy husband.

I would like to quote again from this article. It quotes Dr. McKay as saying:

"It begs the following question. Wasn't it a bit bold to stake the major part of health reform on something that no one is sure works better than the old way? That's what we've been saying. That is, that this is a massive social experiment with no evidence it will work or be less expensive," McKay said.

The problem that I see with this is that the experiment is with people's lives, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I don't think that it's right that any government experiments with people's lives. And that leads them down a path where they're unsure where they're headed and where we're headed in this whole wellness model.

However, communities did try and come together in some form in the wellness model in the districtification process. And of course now we're seeing that there are many communities, as I said at that time as the chairman of the provincial health association, that many communities are fitted into the wrong districts and they did that for all the wrong reasons. Unfortunately that will take some time to straighten out. However under the lack of funding commitment by the provincial government to these districts, I think that that will most likely happen much sooner than later.

As we move through that process of course, as I said, being involved as the chairman of our local health facility and as well as the chairman of our district organization, and I also was a member of the Davidson Comprehensive Health Board, one of the first communities in the province to come together under one roof as a health board which represented many of the local services which, to name a few, have included their hospital, the acute care end of it, which would have also included the respite program; the long-term care sector where they had a special

care home in Davidson; the ambulance, of course, which played a great role in emergency services in that community and surrounding communities; as well as the home care group that was there; and also the housing authority.

It seemed to me at that point in time . . . and I had pressed for many years to try and have these types of boards set up where a community could be represented by one board, by one health board which would represent all the needs of a community. And I talk about community, community could be . . . meant more than the town of Davidson; it meant the town of Davidson, the surrounding area, and many of the small towns which utilize the services within Davidson.

But we did however come up with that board, and the board was working very well. There was lot of work done by the chairman of the board of that day who put a plan together, who brought all the people together, was well known in the community by everyone. And I applaud Mr. Lynn Sentz for the work that he did in that community in bringing that comprehensive health board together.

However, once again when the wellness model hit and the board was thrown aside and of course the communities were forced to fit in within the boundaries of some district health board, and they chose the Midwest Health Board, the Midwest Health District represented by the Midwest Health Board to fit into.

So many of these volunteers that had put so much time and effort into their local community in terms of health were all thrown aside without so much as a thank-you and the wellness model proceeded. And we're at, of course, to the point where we're at now.

One of the problems with all that is that when you do away with the people that have been involved in the health system, the trustees, you threw away years and years and years of knowledge, Mr. Speaker, knowledge that could never again be captured and harnessed and in going towards solving many of the problems that we're faced with today in health.

So however, the health reform process moved on and it did pit community against community. And we're to that point again in time, Mr. Speaker, where communities are once again pitted against each other in trying to survive, as was so clearly illustrated a week and a half ago in the community of Canora where the district health board there was put in a severe problem where they've had a decrease in funding from the provincial government, where they aren't living up to their obligations as a provincial government to ensure that people have a safe and satisfying health system and of course to meet all the needs under the Canada Health Act.

And of course accessibility always comes forward when we talk about the Canada Health Act and where we're headed with that, and what accessibility really means under the terms. Does accessibility mean that you have access to acute care services within the province, regardless of how many miles you are from it? Does accessibility mean that you have access to emergency services regardless of how far it might be, but you have

access? If the ambulance is 200 miles away, I guess you have access to it, Mr. Speaker. If you live some \$300 from an acute care facility and of course there's some way of getting you there, I guess you can call that access to acute services.

All these terms in the Canada Health Act are being stretched to the max these days, Mr. Speaker, and certainly in Saskatchewan they are no different.

In the community of Canora in the health district of Assiniboine Valley, we saw one of the problems that we have in pitting community against community, where they're all fighting for the services that they deem to be what's needed within their communities. We saw the community of Kamsack being represented there. We saw the community of Preeceville being there. And of course, Mr. Speaker, the meeting was held in Canora, and those people were very much represented there and certainly put their case forward admirably as to what they wanted to see.

Those people talked about many things, about the services that they feel are necessary and that are needed by the residents of those communities. And I sympathize with them because they're not unlike the concerns that I have in my own community and certainly throughout my own constituency of Arm River.

The people talked about losing beds and cutting back. And certainly we all know that with today's limited budgets we have to be frugal, and we have to stretch a dollar and make the most out of our dollars that we have, but not at the expense of the needs, the health needs in particular, of our citizens of the province.

The people there talked about . . . acute care beds seemed to be the issue for them that day. But it was also only one of the issues. We have the issue of long-term care beds where we're seeing right across the province people being moved out of, what they view to be their homes, the special care homes, and being relocated to other communities, to other places, whether it be for nine or ten days under the respite program or whether it's to some closed-down acute care ward in a hospital somewhere, wherever the people can fit in.

And not under the guise of wellness or what's needed for those people, it's all economic. It's nothing but economics by the government, by downloading to the people in the districts as well as the people of the province.

The people there talked about home care. The board chairman himself mentioned the fact that home care will not be in any form that we have known it to be in the past. That was a discussion that I had as a member of the provincial health association some two or three years ago, that because of the lack of dollars in health care that there would end up being in health care . . . that our old programs such as the home-making and the meals on wheels, Mr. Speaker, would be things of the past simply because of priorities in the system. And that's coming to fruition now.

The chairman of the Assiniboine Health District talked about,

because of the priorities and because of the lack of funding from the provincial government, that the home care program would be changed and that the priorities would be nursing care. Of course we all know that we all have to make priorities, but the old home care program, Mr. Speaker, was a proven and trusted one by many people in the province, especially our senior citizens.

And when you had people that were able to keep in their own home but couldn't look after their own home-making, their own house cleaning, these programs, even though, even though, Mr. Speaker, the clients themselves paid a portion of this home care funding, the home care dollar went a long ways. We had people that would go in, and home-makers that would go into the homes and look after these elderly people. And quite often spent many more hours in the home than were ever billed for, Mr. Speaker.

So now we're seeing that program being eroded as well as the rest of health care in the province, and a program that was laid out as to being the saviour of health care. And as Dr. McKay had stated that it's, and I quote again:

Wasn't it a bit bold to stake a major part of health reform on something that no one is sure works better than the old way?

So we staked the program, the government staked the program — their wellness model — on home care, and now we're seeing that the funding is not there for it either. And so the program itself is being eroded to the point of destroying the whole program and the security that it provided for keeping our elderly people in their homes.

(1545)

The advantage of a home care program or home-makers' program is of course to keep our people in their homes as long as they can, whether it be seniors — and that's the largest numbers that we have in this province and they're steadily growing; our age is steadily increasing in the province — but there are others as well. There's handicapped people that are able to stay in their own homes using some home-making services, some home care services.

But what's happening now is we're seeing that program being eroded to the point of the service not being there. We're seeing many, many beds closed whether it's in acute care sector or we're seeing in the long-term care sector. We're seeing it all across the beat, Mr. Speaker, and these people are being put out into other avenues, and we hear the minister talk about finding places for people. I raised the issue this morning in the north-west about where those handicapped people will be able to reside. And so I hear him saying, well there will be housing provided for the people, whether it's those or whether it's the people of Moose Jaw or whether it's the seniors in Swift Current, that housing will be provided for those people. But where, Mr. Speaker?

If you put them back in homes, put them in private homes, the home care program, the home-makers program, has been

eroded to such a point that the districts will not be able to fund that either. They don't have the dollars to fund all these programs by keeping people in their home, even if that's what we all know is best for particular, our senior citizens.

So what are they to do? What's going to happen to these people if the money is not there for the home care program? I don't know. That's the question that I hope the Health minister and the cabinet of the day have really taken a serious look at, Mr. Speaker, and will address so that we can . . . so that we don't have to see so many headlines in the paper as this one here from the *Leader-Post* where the headline is: "Health care was top worry". And I quote from the article on January 10, I believe:

Anxiety about health care in Saskatchewan reached a higher point in September than . . . any other point in recent polling history.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if this is what health reform and the wellness model is all about, I'm wondering why we have to see headlines such as this, and we have to see quotes such as this from polls that indicate that people have never been so uneasy about health care in this province than they are now under this NDP government.

It's a little worrisome for many people but it's also for the families of seniors. And I guess again I come into that class, where I today still have an 82 . . . an 83-year-old mom and dad living together in their own home without any home care to this point, Mr. Speaker. And I'm wondering what would happen if something does occur that they would need home care. These folks live in rural Saskatchewan. They still live on the farm, Mr. Speaker, and they're many miles from any home care worker, and the cost — and the cost, Mr. Speaker — to get these home care workers to them on the farm is enormous. And if we can't afford to keep our seniors that are willing to spend their last years in dignity and happiness in special care homes, how in the world can we ever afford to have home care provided to those people living on the farms in Saskatchewan if they wish to reside in their homes?

A question that I will be posing at some time to the Minister of Health is, what is the cost, how far are they prepared to go, to keep people in their own homes in this province?

But there are many other people. There are families where both the husband and wife work, don't have the luxury to be at home and look after their seniors any more. We've moved to that point in the history in Saskatchewan where there's more people working now than ever before. And so the option isn't there for people to be there to look after them. And when they're away from nine to five and these elderly people need care during the day, who's going to provide it if we can't do it, if we can't afford it through the home care program?

So here we have the government based its wellness model on a program that they're not prepared to fund, that we're now seeing is being eroded, and that those services are not going to be able to be afforded by the district health boards to ensure that these people can stay in their homes for the rest of their life if necessary, as long as they can live in comfort and

certainly have some dignity.

One of the issues of keeping people in their own homes is that very one of some dignity and the very people that built this province are now our seniors, and I'm just wondering why we've decided, or why this government's decided, that they're not that important any more and that they can be bounced around the province at will trying to fit them in to wherever there's a bed for them.

I think we've come to that point that I would not want to see have happen with my parents. They were born and raised in a community. They contributed to it through volunteer exercises, as I alluded to earlier. My father was on the health board previous to my becoming on it. He was a councillor. Helped organize a seniors group in Liberty.

These people built a community and now they're being asked to, in their last days, be moved away many, many miles to a strange environment to live out their last days.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I attended the funeral of an aunt of mine who was 97 years old, who passed away. And that lady was able to spend her last number of years in her own area in her own community in a special care home. As I listened yesterday to the eulogy at the funeral and to the many relatives and friends gathered afterward — as often happens in rural Saskatchewan; people get together and visit and reminisce about the person that we've lost — the same theme kept reoccurring, Mr. Speaker.

And that is the care given to this woman in the last 10 years of her life in a small community in a small, special care home by local people, by local staff, and how that made that lady feel and was able to live out her last years in dignity and happiness with local friends and relatives being able to come and visit her, as would not have been the case had the small, special care home not been in the community, Mr. Speaker. So we cannot underestimate and we cannot understate the very importance of keeping these senior citizens . . . to live out their last days in happiness and dignity with friends and relatives.

I just noticed another article from the *Leader-Post* where we talk about long-term care. Over the last number of years and even up to date, we seem to talk a lot about acute care. Acute care has been the hot subject in the wellness reform and many places lost their acute care designation through that wellness process. And sometimes the acute care words, I guess, were much overused and way too much emphasized on, because many of our small institutions, Mr. Speaker, in the province hadn't provided what is now known as acute care for many, many years. So that was not the issue. That is not the issue.

The issue now is providing the services that are needed by local residents, Mr. Speaker. Sometime we talk about respite. We talk about recovery. Back when I started as a health trustee, acute care covered everything. It went everywhere from level 4 to level 1 to level 6. It was respite; it was recovery; it was people coming home from major surgery in our large cities. And that's the way it should be, Mr. Speaker. That's what wellness is all about. It's having people recover in their own

communities, living in their own communities, and living out their last years in their communities.

So anyway the acute care scenario has been much overstated in the past, and it continues to be. But this headline from the *Leader-Post* reads, "Long-term care next hot issue."

And I'll just quote from the article a couple of sentences, Mr. Speaker, where the writer goes on to say, "Long-term care will be the next hot spot in health reform, predicts the chairman of the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations," which is SAHO.

The chairman of that day of that association goes on to talk about, most health districts are pretty strung out in terms of economics. It also goes on to say that they haven't had the money they needed to break some new ideas. I get a little disturbed when this particular article and this particular former chairman of SAHO talks about new ideas.

He also goes on to talk about the extreme costs of small health care . . . or small, long-term care agencies in Saskatchewan, in particular rural Saskatchewan. That they need to be . . . that they're not cost-effective, they're not economic. Therefore once again we have decisions being based on economics as opposed to what's needed to meet the needs of the citizens of Saskatchewan's health care needs.

He also goes on to talk about the infrastructure that we've got has too many small, high-cost facilities. Well what's the cost of a life? What's the cost, Mr. Speaker, of having our elderly people live out their last days in their own community? I don't think you can put a cost on it. At least I'm not prepared to do that. But it appears that the government of the day is prepared to do that. And that is the problem that we're seeing today.

We also go on to a quote in here from Susan Wagner, a University of Saskatchewan nursing professor and at that time chairman of the Saskatoon Health District Board as well, and talks about the shrinking fund is going to force districts to eliminate nursing home beds.

Well that's all fine and dandy to say in the name of economics, but what happens to the people that are in those beds and our growing elderly population of seniors that are going to be needing those beds, Mr. Speaker? What's going to happen them? Where are they going to go?

She goes on to say it will likely lead to the closing of whole facilities because so many districts have small homes with 10 or 15 beds that are uneconomical to operate.

Economics, Mr. Speaker. That's what this is all about. That's what this government has based its health reform on, is economics. The needs of the people have not been factored in and they continue to proceed on that issue.

We talk about the small homes being uneconomical. Back in 1990, 1989, we proceeded in our community to build a new integrated facility, as they were called, something that I personally had been striving and fighting for for some 15 years

with different Health ministers, different deputy ministers across the piece. And finally they were starting to be built.

In the community of Imperial, we had an old hospital built back in about 1964. And we felt at that time if we could just add onto that existing structure, add on 10 or 15 long-term care beds, we could quite adequately meet the needs of the people of the community.

I recall some of the discussions that took place within the community and out of the community and with Sask Health at that time. And I in particular recall the support that the board, the present board at that time, had for that approach to health care in the province. I recall it very vividly.

I also recall us proceeding to do all the necessary studies that we could in the most cost-efficient way we could, without going out and hiring expensive firms to come in and do studies, as it seems to be the norm now by the districts, to tell us how we could most effectively meet the needs, the health care needs, of the people in the province.

I also recall the very day that a bureaucrat from the Department of Health came out, Mr. Speaker, to address the board on this issue, and at that time told the board, the whole board in attendance, that the addition of a long-term wing to the present hospital was not an option.

However the government of the day, which was a Conservative government, said that the only way that they would approve any type of change of agency in our community was if we were to build a new structure, a new building, a new integrated facility.

Well of course the costs associated with doing that were enormous and of course sky-rocketed from our original proposal to add a long-term care wing on. And so it took considerable discussion and consultation within the community to go out to see if we could indeed raise that kind of money.

(1600)

However we did, Mr. Speaker. And we built a new integrated facility. And we had . . . built it with 10 long-term care beds and we built it with eight acute/respite recovery type of beds, Mr. Speaker.

People got behind the project. We raised the money. We borrowed some money. And we built it. We also built it in mind with having space that we could do clinics, out-patient clinics, Mr. Speaker. And to this day that program still goes on in the integrated facility in Imperial. Of course it's not called that any more. It's been given a new name — health centre or something. I'm not sure of the exact terminology of it.

But that program still exists today. We named it at that point in time, Let's Keep Healthy Clinic. It still exists there today, Mr. Speaker, where once a month we bring in an expert in whatever field it is, whether it's chiropody or chiropractors or you name it — eye doctors, what have you, and it's attended by some 40 to 60, usually seniors, every month to talk about and explain to

them by these professionals how they can best keep those needs being met while they live in their own home. So that program still exists.

We also did it with the understanding that when we first started out, there was funding under the program for an activities director which, I'm very proud to say, we never utilized that funding in that the local health auxiliary took that program over and provided the service to the institution at a saving of about 20-some thousand dollars a year to the institution, which the money was used then for other things, to provide other health care needs in the area and in that agency that the citizens needed.

The program of course is still under place. However, there is a paid director now that provides that program in the facility, which is a little surprising, that when the wellness model came through and the districtification occurred and the communities out there decided to go into the Regina Health District, that once that happened, then the district deemed it necessary to have that position as being a paid position. So it is now, and there's a paid activity director there that provides that service.

We also, as we were building this facility, looked at bringing other people in, making activity areas so that we could have seniors' groups that would come in and do all sorts of things to help entertain the residents and make them feel at home within the agency. That did happen; that still is happening today where people are allowed to come in.

They actually do things, whether it's a sing-song or whether they have the local choir . . . sometimes chooses to practice there. We let people come in to do meetings. They actually go so far as from time to time — I think they still do; at least they did when I was the chairman of the local board — provided meals for our local groups that were dinner meetings and what have you there.

So under the spirit of cooperation, the community, this facility, and this agency was built and evolved into something that does meet the needs of the community, and we went beyond a reasonable doubt through the districtification process and the health reform to prove to the government that these types of facilities, known then as integrated facilities, certainly are most cost-effective and are not economically unfeasible. So there's an example, Mr. Speaker, of one community that came together to ensure that the needs of the local people were met.

However, what's happening now is, with the economic crunch created by the former Devine administration and now with the policy of this present NDP government to meet its economic targets on the backs of the sick and elderly, we're seeing where many of these small projects are being severely pressured to be able to continue to operate and be maintained at local communities. That's very unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because as we move through this process, we're certainly going to talk more about it over the next three or four years. And we're going to see continued pressure on many of the district health boards to whack and slash at many of these small institutions which they deem to be uneconomical.

One of the issues that has arisen as a result of the last budget and where the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance and the members opposite talked about the greatness of their budget and that the health dollars in the health budget basically remained the same, but they forget to talk about the rising costs that we have in day-to-day living in Saskatchewan. They also forget to talk about labour costs. And we're just starting now to see some of those costs come to the forefront. And who's going to pick up those dollars?

We're, as I stated, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing the districts all over the province being taxed to the limit, making decisions based strictly on economics and not on the well-being of the people that they serve, but strictly economics. And the health care needs of the people in the districts are being ignored.

However, the labour costs is a fairly problematic area, I would think, for all the districts in this province. As we know, the provincial health association negotiates on behalf of its workers through a plan, I guess for lack of a better word, provided by the government of the day and the Minister of Health. And what the role of the provincial association is, to go and negotiate with the unions and say okay, well you know, we all know how the union process works. However the government likes to keep its unions happy and so they constantly provide wage increases in one form or the other, and therefore it places an extreme burden on the provincial health care association, Mr. Speaker.

Now they're sitting at the table, our provincial health association of SAHO sits at the table representing basically all the health care agencies in the province, which of course include the 30 major ones of the health districts. So they're at the table. The districts are out there whacking and slashing and closing because they're being underfunded by the provincial government, and yet SAHO is sitting at the table with an offer from the government offering the union workers more money.

Now to me there's a problem there. There's always been a problem there, but in this particular instance and this particular time in Saskatchewan history, there's a major problem. Because I would think if I was a district board I'd be saying to my provincial association, we cannot afford any more increases. We're taxed to the limit. We don't have the money. We're closing homes; we're closing beds; we're putting people out; and we can't afford any increases.

However, the provincial association is there with the government's mandate of who knows what — 2, 3, 4, 5 per cent, including all the benefits that we all know go along with packages. So who will pay for this? Because I haven't I heard the Minister of Health say that he's going to come forward and provide the necessary funding for those workers?

What I've heard him saying is, oh the districts will do the right thing. The districts are doing a great job. The districts will have to pick that dollar amount up out of their budget and pay it in increased wages. Whether it's direct hourly wage or whether it's benefits or what it is, it's still dollars — dollars out of the district health board's budget.

So what does that mean, Mr. Speaker? To me it means that, okay if we have to pick up another 3 or 4 per cent wage increase, I can relate that into whatever terms you want into district dollars. Depending on the size, depending on the number of employees they have, they've got to find that money in their budget. Now they don't have it, so what does that mean? It means more closures.

So at this point in time the districts are only starting to deal with and tackle the problems that have been created over the last two or three years of downloading by the provincial government, to them. And they've been grappling with that. Now all of a sudden they're going to be hit with some more costs and they're going to have to deal with that.

So I only see one thing happening, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the people of the province — and in particular if you're in a small community and you have some type of service there, you better be prepared to stand up and fight for it because it's going to be hit upon because the districts are in an untenable situation. They don't have the dollars to continue on and they can't.

Once again, if I was in a district . . . and I've talked to many of them and they're starting to realize that they've got to go as a group, and if they can't go as a group through their provincial association, then they'll have to go by themselves.

Just to quote another article from the *Leader-Post* and it's back a couple of months ago when there was a moratorium placed upon union negotiations by the government in preparation for them bringing down their budget. Because certainly the government didn't want this to come to the forefront, the monetary issue with the unions to the forefront at budget time when they're trying to show that they were maintaining their health dollars in Saskatchewan.

However, the vice-president for SAHO, Brian Morgan, and I quote, says:

That's what bothers us. We seem to be directly targeted. SAHO has been placed in an extremely awkward position.

And that position, Mr. Speaker, is a position that I've just described where you have them representing the health care agencies in the province, virtually all of them, and they're also going there with a mandate from the government and most likely for a fairly large wage increase — an untenable situation to put the district boards in through their representative at SAHO.

So, Mr. Speaker, we've seen that this government keeps talking about the downloading, about the offloading from the federal government. We hear that daily. We've heard it for months and I suspect we'll hear it for several more months.

However, one thing that the provincial government fails to recognize is that virtually they've passed on everything that they've been downloaded on onto other agencies, whether it's the health, or whether — in the motion that we're addressing here — whether it's health or whether it's education or whether it's the municipalities, they're passing down, they're passing

down the dollars, the offloading to these other agencies, the same way as they're complaining about the federal government having done.

However, they are very slow to react and to talk about some of the projects that the federal government has come in to help them out with. And I've raised some of these before, Mr. Speaker, in the House. And their health infrastructure announcements that are made, whether it's in Macklin . . . I noticed in this article we talk about the town of Vanguard, half a million dollars to expand and renovate the existing health centre there. Neilburg is another \$808,000. And one in Norquay for an upgrade of well over half a million dollars — \$600,000 to be example.

However, the provincial government fails to recognize the millions of dollars that are pumped into this province by the federal government, and all they do is criticize about downloading. And yet that's a little like the pot calling the kettle black, when they're doing exactly the same thing.

They also talk about these . . . and this article also goes on to talk about the above cases, and there was nine of them in total. And it goes on to say that the majority of the 10.2 million in funding is from the districts themselves. So the provincial government's had pretty much a free ride on this one.

I just happen to notice as I talked earlier about the acute care fight, Mr. Speaker, that's been actually raging in this province for the last four years, five years, another headline of acute care beds to be closed. This is an article from January 25, and it was talking about the South Central Health District Board to close the acute care beds at the Pangman Hospital on May 1. And of course we raised that issue back on May 1, that there were more closures. And of course the Pangman Hospital was the 53rd such facility that was closed, or to use the government's terms I guess, reformed.

And from a community going to have, you know, 24-hour emergency care, 24-hour nursing care, having these recovery beds in their small hospital so that their people can come back from major surgery in the larger centre and the tertiary that's provided in the tertiary hospitals, to having a viable health agency, a viable health facility in their community, to one where they virtually have a 9 to 5 service in their community provide the services.

Still better than some of the communities that moved directly from a viable health institution to a telephone booth, Mr. Speaker. But I'm sure that Pangman will do everything they can to survive and hang on to what services that they do have now, and hopefully that we can bring this government to its senses and rethink their whole wellness model and admit that they made a major mistake in the way it was handled and the way that the people were educated about it and some of the moves that they have taken.

I noticed another headline where we're talking earlier about communities pitted against communities, and the former Health minister talking about Health reform and the wellness model would not pit community against community. I said earlier, it

has. It did, and it will continue to do so.

And the article here is from the *Leader-Post* again, Mr. Speaker, where it talks about the scenario I described earlier in the north-east part of the province where, and I'll quote from the chairman once again, Mr. Peterson: "From our perspective it isn't doable. The district can't afford to continue to operate the home."

(1615)

And this is in reference to the Eaglestone Lodge in Kamsack where of course the Kamsack folks are trying to fight for the services that they feel are necessary in their area. And the district health board made a decision based strictly on funding which was a direct result of offloading by the provincial government to the health districts.

I really think if you look back, Mr. Speaker, over the health reform and the wellness model as it started back in late 1991 after this government came into power, is that it's strictly been based on economics. I recall some discussions with my involvement through the provincial health association at the time, about where we were all headed with wellness and what input the local people would have and the local communities would have.

And the minister of the day I think originally started out with some good thoughts about health reform. And she talked, and I talked to her for many, many times over the course of the first couple of years of her portfolio, where she talked to the people and explained to them that, you know, where they were trying to get to and that all the things that make up a small community would be taken into the equation, would be factored into the equation, Mr. Speaker, and that included the finances, economics.

And the communities were prepared to work with the government of the day at that time under those guises that all factors being equal, that everything would be looked at. If a health agency was in a community and there was a number of jobs involved there, that plays a great part in the survival of that local community.

However, it became more evident as the time went on as we started talking to other cabinet ministers, the Finance minister in particular. I recall when that portfolio changed from the minister of the day who quit at that time for health reasons and there was a new one appointed, it seemed at that point in time all of a sudden all those things that we talked about as health trustees with the department and with the Health minister were going to be thrown out the window.

And the boom was lowered in the offices of the provincial association over on Park Street, that health reform had come to such a point that economics would not play a role in the decision making in a community whether a community would maintain its services or not. And of course that was in direct reference to the 52 hospitals that were either closed or converted.

So the wellness model took a turn, at that point in time, to the worst. And that is one of the reasons where we're at today, because health reform was based strictly on economics and continues to be and it's not based on the needs and the well-beings of the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, on the motion there's two other areas that are touched on. One is education and one is municipal services. And as the member so clearly indicates across, it is very interesting and it appears there is a trend created there in that health kind of led the way in reform.

And as I look at the education reform being started now, Mr. Speaker, I sense and I'm a little bit leery — no, I'm not a little bit leery; I'm a lot leery and sceptical — that education reform is going to take the same direction that health did. We've seen now, as I said earlier in health, it started out, the minister went out and talked to the communities, talked to the people and get their input and we're going to listen to what the people of the province said.

I'm hearing the same thing over the last month or so. We've heard the ministers of Education say, in particular the minister of . . . it just slips my mind where the minister is from, but she talked about going out, starting to listen to people. And those meetings are now being held across the province. I believe I have one up in my country tomorrow night, Mr. Speaker. There was one there last week which I wasn't able to attend, but I will be there Wednesday night.

It seems to be taking the same trend, where under the guise of going out and talking to the communities, listening to the people, listening to the education trustees . . . Familiar ring. They were trying to listen to the health trustees. We're going to listen to all these people and we're going to come back and formulate our opinion on what's going to happen with education in this province.

Well I think, Mr. Speaker, that the decision has already been made. I think the minister and the government knows full well what they're going to do with education in the province, and it means a downsizing of services in rural Saskatchewan for our young people out in the small communities. That's why I'm sceptical; that's why I'm leery. I'm afraid education will take exactly the same route as did health.

We're also seeing that the government is talking about municipal governments. We've had a great controversy over the last three months about a Bill that they brought forward. And of course what it did was it got the people in rural Saskatchewan on their feet, particular the many reeves and councillors that we've got throughout the province.

Because, Mr. Speaker, many of those same reeves and councillors were the same people that were involved in health care. The reeves and the councillors and the aldermen and the mayors were the very people in many cases that sat on some of these health boards. In many instances the local councils felt it necessary that they have direct representation on their health care boards because the local hospital districts, of which we were one at home, had taxing authority, Mr. Speaker; therefore

these people that were duly elected wanted to ensure that their tax dollars were being used in the most frugal possible way.

So small wonder that these councillors, that these small councils with their reeves and their mayors and their aldermen, are sceptical about what's happening with municipal services.

These same reeves and councillors and aldermen and mayors were the same people that were basically thrown aside when the health reform took place. It's no small wonder they're sceptical about what's going to happen to them in the reformation of the municipal sector, local governments, in this province.

However the education scenario is so much like happened in health that it really is scary, and it bothers me somewhat. If the government and the minister responsible is truly interested in going out and talking to the people of the province that are involved in education — which would include the boards, it includes the teachers, and includes the taxpayers of the province — then great. But they're prepared to talk to them, but they're not prepared — and they're even prepared to listen — but they're not prepared to take under advisement what these people are saying because their plan is already made up. And that's the unfortunate part.

If you're going to do that, if you've already got your mind made up, why try and fool the people once again as you did in health reform and do it again in education and a third time in the local government aspect.

The government saw what happened when the local councillors and reeves and that group, through SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), told them what they thought of their plan. And there seemed to be a contradictory conversation with these groups from the Premier and from the Minister of Municipal Affairs as to whether they were going to proceed and how they were going to proceed, which is very interesting.

One day the minister would say that yes, they are going to proceed. And then the Premier would get pinned down as he did at the SARM convention and actually took quite a rough ride at that convention . . . and in his comments . . . and unfortunately then came out hard and says that we will be proceeding. And the next day the minister says we won't. And so it was back and forth. And I think they were feeling severe pressure from our local government boards, through SUMA and SARM, and recognized the errors of their way.

Unfortunately that didn't happen in health. As people were trying to fit into the system and communities were fighting against community, trying to ensure that their services would be saved, those people couldn't come together. One of the things that the minister of the day and the government of the day and the Department of Health did so well through their whole wellness reform, that they were able to pit more than just community against community, Mr. Speaker. They were able to pit health sector against health sector.

Using the guise that the community wellness model would look

after all the health needs of the people of the province, and slamming at the acute health care sector, it brought the long-term sector onside because they're saying, well we're going to cut acute care; the long-term care sector is basically going to stay the same, stay stagnant, so they weren't going to see a lot of cuts. And the community, the home care program, was going to just see a massive broadening — more money, more services, and that was going to be it. So you had the sectors at each other's throats as well.

And we saw that happen at the provincial level too, where there was three provincial associations involved — the acute care, the long-term care, and the home care sector — and everybody's fighting for their turf and for their own territory.

And what happened? Well it's like the old adage. The government came right up the middle. They got what they wanted, they got their wellness model started. And in the meantime the communities and the people involved with different health sectors were so busily fighting amongst themselves that nobody was really noticing what the government was doing. And now we're paying for that very thing.

And that is exactly what the government is planning on doing in education. They're going to go out, they're going to try and pit the teachers against the trustees, they're going to try and pit community against community. I've had phone calls already in my own constituency about teacher cuts and school closings and our community should have it and theirs shouldn't. That won't happen. The people will not let that happen again, as it did in health care.

The same thing will apply to the municipal sector, the local governments. Those people are some of the most efficient groups in our province. They work within their budgets. They're directly accountable to the people that elect them. Unfortunately that's not always like the MLAs on the sides opposite. They don't seem to be accountable to their constituents. And so the plan of coming up the middle will not work in terms of agriculture, in terms of the local governments.

The local government boards, I've talked in this House before about the volunteer time and the hours that the local councillors and the reeves and the aldermen, or alderpersons, and the mayors do, especially in small communities, is enormous. I know full well. I had a father that was a councillor and a reeve for many, many years; a brother that's a reeve now, and many friends that are councillors around the province. And you only have to talk to them to know what they're having to put up with and from what they're doing . . .

And for this provincial government to talk about being more frugal and more accountable and having to come together because of some plan that possibly a bureaucrat puts together some place, is just irresponsible. These folks for years . . . councils for years have come together in utilizing shared services. There is offices across the province, RM offices across the province, that have amalgamated, utilizing the same administrators, the same secretaries, many shared services that they're using.

So they're way ahead of this provincial government in coming together and seeking out some economies that are amongst them, and they know that. And this province's government knows that too.

But however, the provincial governments use this as an opportunity to further download under the guise of reform. And as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, reform is great, but you have to have change, not just for the sake of change, but because it makes some sense. And in the terms of many of our seniors across the province, including my father, it's about time the government tried to use some common sense.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I'm proud to stand today and speak in favour of this motion and hopefully that . . . I can only hope that some of the comments today will hit home with some of the members opposite, especially those members in the back benches there, that there has been a mistake made in health and that they will not let it happen again in agriculture and certainly not in local municipal services. And therefore I'm very happy to support this motion.

(1630)

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the opportunity today to rise and speak in support of the resolution moved by the member from Kelvington-Wadena. It's high time this government stopped trying to solve its financial problems on the backs of municipalities in the province. It's high time they took the responsibility for their actions and admitted that the problems in Saskatchewan health, education, and municipalities, stem from the NDP government itself.

Mr. Speaker, on a daily basis we hear this government complain about federal government offloading, and almost every answer to every question is quickly and cowardly thrown back to the feds or the previous government. The finger-pointing never stops. But, Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between the federal government's offloading and the offloading by the provincial government onto local governments and local boards. The federal government doesn't vehemently deny that these cuts are affecting Canadians. The provincial government, on the other hand, uses denial as its main defence. They have stubbornly dug in their heels and refuse to take any responsibility for cuts to school boards, to health boards, and to municipalities. And it is partly because of this that I feel I must address the private member's motion.

Mr. Speaker, federal transfer payments in the fields of health, social services, and education have levelled off and that has put stress on the provincial treasury. I admit this. I also admit that this government did inherit an enormous debt piled up by the free-spending Tory administration of the '80s. And we know that there are no huge, untapped pools of money anywhere to be found to finance pet political projects.

But, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that the members opposite can continue to hide behind the past. It is time for them to face the problems of the present and to find real and workable solutions. This government, Mr. Speaker, is on its fifth year. When will

they accept the responsibility for the decisions made by themselves?

It's time for them to face up to the people living in communities all across Saskatchewan and start making better, more progressive choices for the people of this province, and to include, stop moving everything from rural to urban Saskatchewan.

Instead the right solution has so far seemed to elude this government. Instead of learning from mistakes of the past and moving on, the members opposite have tried to offload their financial woes onto the backs of our local municipalities. They introduce poorly thought out legislation and are forced to withdraw it when they face severe opposition from RMs, towns, and cities, namely SUMA and SARM.

Mr. Speaker, The Service Districts Act was a government nightmare. They decided that municipalities would have to amalgamate one way or another, as the Minister of Municipal Government put it, or at least she put it that way once. The next time she spoke on the issue, she was saying she would ask her government to withdraw it. And I agreed with that very much.

The government's wishy-washy position on the Bill showed exactly how poorly laid out this legislation was. If it wasn't for the efforts of SARM and SUMA, the government would have blindly passed a regressive piece of legislation. I can only say how happy I am that the members opposite and the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Government finally came to their senses.

I would like to think it's because, for the first time this session, they actually listened to the people who changes would affect. Of course, that would be a complete change of character for the long-term, professional politicians on that side of the House.

I don't mean to be cynical, Mr. Speaker, but I seriously hope that withdrawing The Service Districts Act was not just another carefully planned manipulation by this government. I would hate to think that the municipalities involved in this problem were being used as a pawn in this government's unsavoury political games. Mr. Speaker, I'm sad to say that this would not be the first time municipalities suffered because of carefully crafted government plans.

For example, when the provincial government decided it was going to enter the world of gambling, through the introduction of video lottery terminals, the question naturally arose: how will the profits be divided up and where will they go? The minister of Municipal Government at the time, Carol Carson, stated that at least 10 per cent of the revenue should go back to the communities — a very good statement and a good move. It was understood by all that this was to be an unconditional grant to the municipalities in which the VLTs (video lottery terminal) were located. Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister even agreed at that time to this deal.

Since VLT revenues were predicted to be in the neighbourhood of \$95 million, the municipalities counted on transfers from this government to the tune of \$9.5 million. But then the

government threw a curve ball. The Finance minister told municipalities they would have to decide how these monies were to be divided up before the provincial treasury would actually pay them out.

Their position was that SSTA, SAHO, SARM, and SUMA would all have to agree on a formula for dividing up the money before they received even one dollar. Well unfortunately for the people in Saskatchewan communities, this plan was good for the government but bad for them. The government got a chance to play a part of a benevolent caretaker while at the same time didn't have to pay out one red cent — possibly a pre-planned program.

Mr. Speaker, we all know how difficult reaching a consensus would be. Priorities of these organizations were far from the priorities of the NDP and from each other. For example, SAHO took the position that since every real source of health problem . . . a greater share of the \$9.5 million should go to local health care organizations. Understandably, the other organizations weren't willing to accept this argument. Perhaps as government grants to them haven't been so deep, they may have been able to work out an acceptable plan. As it was, these organizations are being forced to fight for every dollar, in a twisted plan by the NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, to some extent it must be said that SAHO had a valid point. Gambling can cause health problems even though this government adamantly denies it, at least publicly. But I know there are members opposite who oppose the government's expansion into gaming. I know there are members both in the House today that are absent who didn't support the introduction of VLTs. Still the government got into and still they're taking all the money and none of the responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, the SSTA decided that it did not want any part of the revenue raised from gambling. And it must be said that the SSTA's position was certainly a principled one. It's pretty hard to justify funding education through the use of games of chance, particularly VLTs.

The Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association took the position that the VLT revenue should simply be sent back directly to the municipalities with no strings attached on a per capita basis. Well sadly enough, Mr. Speaker, I think they were dreaming. This government makes no move without strings attached, and the sooner people realize it the better off they will be. Mr. Speaker, SUMA said the money should be sent as an outright grant back to the same communities that money came from. But the provincial government again said no. The government was unwilling to see the money go to municipalities in any form which might enable them to simply give some tax relief to the ratepayers.

Furthermore the government wanted the transfers of VLT revenue to be high profile so that the provincial politicians could get lots of press and lots of credit. Imagine that, provincial politicians wanting applause simply for giving back to the communities just what they had taken away tenfold.

What kind of government is this, Mr. Speaker? It's a sad tale, Mr. Speaker, but it ends this way. Since SUMA, SARM, SAHO, and the SSTA could not agree, which I believe the government knew ahead of time, when they could not agree how to divide up the paltry 10 per cent share of the VLTs revenues, the money was never paid at all, a premade plan within the government. The provincial government simply said, since you cannot agree, we will give you nothing. End of story.

The government played a political game, and the people of this province lost, especially rural Saskatchewan. And that's a sad reflection of the NDP government, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this government obviously places no importance on honesty or accountability. Instead they spend their time practising the art of deception and are very good at it.

That's exactly what they are doing when they pretend they are not offloading onto the municipalities, health boards, and school boards. That's exactly what they are doing when they introduce a Bill like The Municipal Revenue Sharing Amendment Act. With this Act, the government is strutting around patting themselves on their backs for keeping funding levels to the same for the last three years. They are keeping them at 92 per cent of what they were in '93-94.

It doesn't matter though that inflation keeps going up. It doesn't matter that the municipalities are facing \$10 million in cuts. It doesn't matter that the Bill is a bad thing for Saskatchewan communities. The members opposite insist on congratulating themselves for their goodwill and generosity. Mr. Speaker. This is nothing more than a cruel joke.

I know and the members opposite know that the provincial government is seriously harming local governments, the same people that are very efficient out there. My colleague had mentioned earlier that these same councillors, reeves, and aldermen work very hard to be accountable, are answerable to their neighbours, and keep their own house in order.

Well, Mr. Speaker, with their short-sighted, urban-based plans for rural amalgamation and their disregard for small town community-based life, they are hurting every one of our communities. In a province built on community spirit and on cooperation, this government is sadly out of touch. The members opposite have no compassion and no sense of responsibility for their actions. And in the long run, it is the sick and the elderly and the children and the people of rural Saskatchewan that suffer.

Mr. Speaker, a government that cared about the people would re-evaluate its priorities and put the well-being of the people at the top. But unfortunately this is not a government that truly cares about the people.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is the government need to take responsibility and needs to start building a strong economy. Despite the Finance minister's wishes, I think we should fight to become a have province. I think we should work on becoming a prosperous province that has the ability to preserve the infrastructure of health, education, and local governments.

Mr. Speaker, I offer my full support to the private members' motion. I only hope that somehow, someday, this government will finally realize that people do matter and that is the people of this province that will make Saskatchewan great — not the people here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In briefly commenting on my great deal of pleasure and my tremendous desire to speak to this motion, I am made aware that just a motion or an expression of support for the motion would be enough. And I there also adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I'm not sure, I may have to have this motion written out, actually. With leave, we're going to move to motions for returns (debatable). Actually I may have to have that written out. I had it written out but I think it's just outside the door. Do I need it in writing?

The Speaker: — The House will just stand temporarily in recess.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move, seconded by the member from Prince Albert Carlton:

That this House do now proceed to motions for returns (debatable).

Leave granted.

(1645)

Motion agreed to.

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

Mr. Kowalsky: — I'd just ask on a point of order, Mr. Speaker, if you would clarify whether or not leave was actually required to proceed on that motion — just for clarification purposes, please.

The Speaker: — In response, the hon. member from Prince Albert Carlton raises a point of order. The question he raises is whether leave is required to present this motion. The answer is yes, simply put. However it would have been in order to have a superseding motion when the question was being debated before the House. However once the House carried the motion to adjourn debate, then leave is required in order to proceed to set a special order for the House, and therefore the order is in order.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Just a word of explanation, Mr. Speaker. We're going to proceed through these, and we're going to give members opposite leave to move motions which are not standing under their name. Thus we will deal with them all. We won't have to stand motions for those who are not present. Otherwise this takes an enormous amount of time as you return to it several times.

We are prepared on this side of the House, we are prepared to give leave once, a blanket leave. If that won't work, then feel free to ask leave for each one, but we're prepared to give leave, probably to the member from Moosomin who'll probably do them all. We're prepared to give leave to the member from Moosomin and the member from Wood River to move motions that aren't under their name.

The Speaker: — It is permissible for the House by leave, to set its procedures. The Government House Leader has asked for leave in dealing with motions for returns (debatable) that leave be granted to permit motions for returns (debatable) which are in the name of members who are not in their desks at that time, to be moved by another member of the same caucus. So the government . . . is it clear? Is it clear what the leave is that the Government House Leader is asking for?

Yes, let me repeat that so that — this is rather unorthodox — that the House, if it gives leave, knows very clearly what it is giving leave for. It is normal that in motions for returns (debatable) that the member in whose names the motion sits on the order paper, must be present . . . must be in his or her desk in order to move it.

The Government House Leader has asked for leave that if a member is not in his or her desk, that another member of his or her caucus would be permitted to move that motion and the House would therefore entertain it. Is it clear what the question is? Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

MOTIONS FOR RETURNS (Debatable)

Return No. 1

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 1 showing:

Regarding health district boards across the province: (1) according to the Provincial Auditor's audited statements of each health board, the number of health district boards that ran deficits in the '94-95 fiscal year; (2) according to the Provincial Auditor's figures, the number of health districts that ran deficits in the '93-94 fiscal year; (3) the number of health districts that expect to run deficits in the '96-97 fiscal year; and (4) whether you plan to honour the former Health minister's commitment to provide our caucus copies of the Provincial Auditor's audited statements for each health district.

So moved, seconded by the member from Rosthern.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I may say with respect to I think all of these motions for return (debatable), before I take my seat I'm going to provide . . . I'm going to table the answers to the questions. I think this is the first time this has ever been done, but when we . . . if the motions are amended in accordance with our suggestions, all answers will be tabled here and now.

As I say, I think this is the first time this has ever been done.

You get your answers here and now. I won't trot out the sorry tale of woe that occurred to us when we were in opposition; we waited months for these things. So I therefore move, seconded by the member from Prince Albert Carlton:

That we add the words "operating capital, operating fund, and capital fund" after the word "ran" in questions (1) and (2) and after the word "run" in question (3).

This is just simply for clarity, so it's clear that you're getting the information for the operating fund and the capital fund. It isn't clear without it. With that brief explanation, if I could attract the services of a page, I'll move that. And I will, before I take my seat, I'll also file the answer.

The Speaker: — I'll ask the page to return the answer because the Government House Leader is anticipating the conclusion, and the motion is before the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

Return No. 2

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As previously agreed to I move, seconded by the member from Rosthern, that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 2 showing:

Regarding former employee Ms. Chandra Prasad: (1) the reason Ms. Chandra Prasad received a severance of 25,000 after resigning from the position of junior protocol officer after working in the Provincial Secretary's office for nine months; and (2) the one that approved Mrs. Prasad's severance; and (3) the formula that was used to determine the amount of severance received by Ms. Prasad.

The Speaker: — Again I need to remind the hon. member that he needs a seconder for his motion.

Mr. Toth: — Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I did mention the member from Rosthern earlier.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I will, on the passage of this motion, table the answer. We're prepared to answer this here and now.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 3

Mr. Toth: — Again, Mr. Speaker, as previously agreed, I move, seconded by the member from Rosthern, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 3 showing:

Regarding the approximately 12,000 farmers who received gross revenue insurance program (GRIP) bills from the government: (1) the number of the approximately 12,000 farmers who received GRIP bills from the government have paid these bills to date; (2) the rate of interest the government is charging for those producers who are late in paying these bills; and (3) the amount of the largest GRIP

bill sent out by the government to an individual farmer.

I so move.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — This one may be modestly more controversial. I will at the conclusion of my comments be moving an amendment which will delete the third question. We are doing so on the advice of the department who tell us that if we answer the third question, we will be divulging confidential information about individual files.

An Hon. Member: — We already know it.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Well you may already know it. But it's one thing to know it; it's another thing . . . The member from Moosomin says they already know it. That may well be. But it's one matter to know it; it's quite a different matter to have the matter a matter of public record.

Some of these things we just go on the advice of the department. We're advised by the department that this will disclose confidential information. And therefore I move, seconded by the member from Watrous:

That we delete section (3) and substitute the following therefor:

(3) The range of the largest GRIP bills sent out by the government to farmers.

So delete the one that's there and substitute that one.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

Return No. 4

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as previously agreed to, I move, seconded by the member from Rosthern, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 4 showing:

To the minister responsible for SaskPower: (1) the amount SaskPower has collected in additional revenue from Saskatchewan home owners since the 12 per cent rate increase took effect January 1, 1996; (2) the amount SaskPower has collected in additional revenue from Saskatchewan farm customers since the almost 13 per cent increase took effect January 1, 1996; (3) the total amount of additional revenue collected from SaskPower rate increases since January 1, 1992 to date.

I so move.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I will, as soon as this is passed, table the answer.

Motion agreed to.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.

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