

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

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

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — By leave, to move a motion with respect to . . . I'll read the motion so that the members will . . .

By leave, that notwithstanding an order of the Assembly dated June 7, 1996, extended sitting hours motion, that this House do observe routine proceedings at 1:30 p.m. every sitting day except for Fridays when routine proceedings will occur at 10 a.m.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move, seconded by the member from Lloydminster:

That notwithstanding an order of the Assembly dated June 7, 1996, extended sitting hours motion, that this House do observe routine proceedings at 1:30 p.m. every sitting day except for Fridays when routine proceedings shall occur at 10 a.m.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**Bill No. 21 — An Act to amend The Interpretation Act, 1995 and to enact a related amendment /
Loi modifiant La Loi d'interprétation de 1995 et édictant une modification corrélative**

The Chair: — I will ask the minister to introduce his official, please.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I'm pleased to have with me today, Madeleine Robertson, Crown solicitor from the Department of Justice.

Clause 1

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, Minister, and, Madeleine. Looking at this Act I understand the purpose of this Act is to ensure that aboriginal and treaty rights are protected by all provincial legislation. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — That's correct. I think the purpose of this legislation is to make sure it's absolutely clear that any legislation that we would pass will not in any way affect their rights as set out in the Act. And we set out a specific clause in

The Fisheries Act two years ago, and when we realized that there would be a number of Acts coming in that might have the same affect, we decided it would be much easier if we just made the change here so that we wouldn't have to insert the clause into every new piece of legislation that we brought. So it's put into The Interpretation Act so that the particular clause will apply to all legislation in Saskatchewan.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Before this Bill was tabled, did you find that there are many pieces of Saskatchewan legislation that infringe upon the aboriginal and treaty rights?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The answer to that would be no. We are bound by the constitution so this is really just a recognition of the constitutional rights of the aboriginal people.

Ms. Draude: — The laws haven't been updated since 1982. I understand that that's when the last aboriginal and treaty right was updated. Can you tell me why; why it's taken this long?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The Canadian Constitution Act was passed in 1982. And as you know, there have been no amendments to the constitution since '82. The Charlottetown initiative did not succeed. That was the last attempt to change the Constitution of Canada. And so practically, '82 was the last change in the Constitution of Canada.

Ms. Draude: — So why would the Saskatchewan laws . . . Was there anything to update, not until this year?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The Constitution Act of Canada is federal law, and this is a reference to the federal Act. It's not reference to any Saskatchewan legislation.

Ms. Draude: — Would it be correct to say that all legislation in Saskatchewan has been interpreted as not invalidating or detracting from the existing aboriginal and treaty rights even before this amendment was tabled?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I also notice that The Fisheries Act, subsection 2(5), was repealed by this Act. What exactly was taken out?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The only other piece of legislation where we put the recognition of the constitutional rights right into the Act was The Fisheries Act. But if we have this into The Interpretation Act, it would just be redundant to keep it in The Fisheries Act. So all we're doing is removing the clause that was put in two years ago so that the only place that you have this recognition clause is in The Interpretation Act.

Ms. Draude: — Has the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) and other groups been notified of this change, and are they happy with it?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes. And it was basically their suggestion that we do this.

Ms. Draude: — I don't think we have any further questions. This is the only thing they do.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 4 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 113 — An Act respecting Wascana Energy Inc.

The Chair: — I would ask the minister to introduce his official, please.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. With me today is Scott Banda, the general counsel for the Crown Investments Corporation. I welcome him to the Assembly and introduce him to the other members.

Clause 1

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And welcome to your official, Minister. We have a few questions that we would like to address in this whole area of the Wascana Energy Bill. Minister, would you please sort of explain the main proposals of the Bill and what it's intended to accomplish, both for Wascana Energy and for Saskatchewan people.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — This Act clears up some administrative details. It clarifies that the name of the Act now is The Wascana Energy Act as it applies to Wascana Energy. It strengthens head office provisions for the company, for Saskatchewan. It clarifies the nature and the role of the board of directors. The board of directors will be required, as they are now, to have 50 per cent Saskatchewan residents, and it also alters the formula that under any circumstances there will be at least one Saskatchewan board member.

And it additionally then removes ownership restrictions from the company so that it is in a position to operate in the market-place in a way that allows them to access capital for expansion and allows them to engage in the activities that the company believes it needs to engage in in order to continue to be a growing Saskatchewan company.

Mr. Gantefer: — Minister, I assume that there was a fair bit of consultation between the government and Wascana Energy. Could you detail that process? How long did it take? Was it negotiation, or is it essentially complying with the wishes of the company?

(1015)

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Discussions with Wascana Energy have been going on for some time. My involvement has been only since last November when I took over as minister in charge of Crown Investments Corporation. We've had very good and positive discussions with the president of Wascana Energy and their officials with our officials. They have asked for these changes in order that they may operate as a successful and growing Saskatchewan oil company. And we have common

agreement on the nature of all the aspects of this Bill.

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Minister, were there any outstanding issues that you weren't . . . or didn't feel that you were able to bring forward in this legislation, or does this legislation cover fully all the recommendations that came from the company?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — The recommendations that were discussed and worked through have the full support of the company.

Mr. Gantefer: — Minister, how much of Wascana Energy does the Government of Saskatchewan own now?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — 7.4 per cent.

Mr. Gantefer: — Is there any plans that your ministry has to increase or decrease that amount from its current holdings?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — No, the 5.8 million shares — is it? — we hold are like other assets we hold in the name of the shareholders, the people of Saskatchewan, and they are managed on an ongoing basis, as are the other interests that we hold on their behalf.

Mr. Gantefer: — The new Act no longer prohibits foreign investors from holding more than 35 per cent. Can you explain what that . . . is there a new ceiling, or what the reasons are for that.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — One of the provisions of this Act, as you mention, is the removal of the foreign ownership restriction. One of the dilemmas with Saskatchewan companies operating in the market-place is that the companies can estimate what their ownership structures are. But there comes a point when they are at risk of violating the legislation and they won't know it because when shares are being traded in the market-place there is not an exact knowledge of who holds them.

And in order that they did not want to find themselves in contravention of the Act, they asked that we remove that.

This also provides them with the freedom, if there was a foreign holding that might help them expand their company, they could do that without violating the restrictions as well. So it provides them the freedom to operate as an aggressive oil company in the industry.

Mr. Gantefer: — How much is owned by foreign investors now?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — As I said, the dilemma is that no one is certain of that because you can't tell.

Mr. Gantefer: — Minister, in section 5, clause (3), again we see your government's sort of happiness at operating all these different functions by way of regulations. I'm wondering what is intended to be the regulations that you need this clause in there for. Is there a direction in that regard or has this become one of your standard clauses?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — This is standard wording to provide us

with the capacity to do the things we've agreed to in the Bill.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, has Wascana Energy felt that it's sort of been hurt in the past by the image that it was a government company? And is this going to move away from that in a more public way, that distances its holdings from the government?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — I think the presence or absence of the government as a shareholder in companies is generally not a factor and is, I'm sure, as often a positive factor as a negative one from my experience with the various holdings we have.

The issue that was of concern to Wascana Energy in this case was not the government holding, because government continues to hold what it always did. The issue is their capacity to operate in the market-place in such a way that they can build their company without restriction by acquiring other assets and getting capital more freely.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, has there been any estimation from Wascana's part in terms of how many jobs and what kind of expansion this is going to allow their company to realize?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — That's all sort of in the course of doing business. They are confident it will strengthen their capacity to grow. And that's in our common interest and we will watch them manage their way into that new future on the basis of this legislation.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, how many directors on the board do we have currently?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — We have two and the new formula will also result in us having two. Under the present formula, if the province were ever to sell its holdings, we would be down to zero. Under the new formula, there is no circumstance under which the province doesn't have one.

What I can say about the relationship with Wascana Energy is that it is a cooperative relationship, and we continue to respect their management with respect to respecting the needs of the province in this regard.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Minister. That's all the questions that I have on this Bill.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 11 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

**Bill No. 94 — An Act to amend
The Education and Health Tax Act**

The Chair: — I would ask the minister responsible to introduce the officials, please.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Thank you very much. I know the members of the Assembly will want to join me in welcoming to

the Assembly, on my immediate right, Bill Jones, the deputy minister of Finance. On my left, Len Rog, the assistant deputy minister, revenue division. Sitting behind him is Doug Lambert, director of revenue programs branch. And sitting behind Mr. Jones is Arun Srinivas, analyst, taxation and intergovernmental affairs.

Clause 1

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And also welcome to the minister here this morning and the minister's officials. Would you be able to just start out perhaps with just a brief summary of the intent of introducing . . . of this Bill being passed.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I'd be pleased to do that. This amendment to The Education and Health Tax Act is to provide a new system for collecting education and health tax from trucking firms that operate in Saskatchewan and one or more other jurisdictions, and that's all it does. This is a technical amendment which is revenue neutral and which applies to interprovincial trucking firms.

Under the new system, interjurisdictional carriers — or interprovincial carriers as they're often called — interprovincial carriers will purchase or lease their vehicles tax free and then pay a prorated tax based on the percentage of the distance they travel in Saskatchewan, the value of the vehicle, and a declining tax rate each time they register their vehicles.

The vehicle registration office in each province or state will calculate and collect the tax from their carriers on behalf of Saskatchewan. This will make it easier for carriers to pay the education and health tax and it will improve compliance, particularly from non-resident carriers, to ensure that all carriers pay their fair share of the taxes.

Under the new system, the E&H (education and health) tax will decline each year from 4.2 per cent in the year that the vehicle is first acquired and registered, to less than 2 per cent in later years. These tax rates are adjusted to take into account the fact that trailers and most repair parts will be exempt under the new system.

The changes will come into effect on January 1, 1997. They are expected to be revenue neutral for the province, as I said. I would add that these changes are welcomed by the trucking industry, which found the other ones awkward and convoluted.

So this is a case of where a system which has in some ways been pioneered by Saskatchewan is being adopted by all of the provinces and the truckers welcome the change. It is revenue neutral for them and considerably simplifies the paying of the tax. It also means, as a matter of interest, the tax is paid over the lifetime of the vehicle and not all at once up front. And to that extent it evens their cost as well.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Are there just strictly trucking firms that will be impacted here, or would there perhaps be bus lines as well?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Just trucking firms.

Mr. Aldridge: — Could you give . . .

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I'm sorry, I'm told that buses are also included. I'm sorry. I'm told by the officials that buses are also included.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could you give us perhaps some sort of a total number of companies which may be affected? Based on what present-day knowledge you have, how many trucking firms, how many bus lines, does this particular legislation have an impact upon?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — There are 2,800 carriers operating in Saskatchewan including 750 carriers who base-plate their vehicles in the province. That means that their primary licence is in Saskatchewan; 2,050 carriers whose primary licence is another jurisdiction but also re-license in Saskatchewan. So a total of 2,800 carriers.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could you perhaps provide us with what might be your opinion as to why so many of these trucking firms feel a necessity to actually register their operations out of our province in the first place. Why isn't the environment here, within our province, more conducive to having more of these firms actually maintaining their registered office here in the province and operating thereafter in other jurisdictions? Why do we see them doing the opposite?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — That's quite a complicated question which is well beyond the purview of this legislation. You might want to ask the Minister of Economic Development that in his estimates. We wouldn't . . . I wouldn't have that information, nor would the officials who are with me be in any position to speculate as to why some are in Saskatchewan; as to why some aren't. Or for that matter, whether or not we have our share. This is simply the number of carriers that operate in this part of the world.

So your question is well beyond the jurisdiction of the province and well beyond the responsibility of this department.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You had made some comments earlier about being revenue neutral, so I was going to ask you, as far as the additional costs of administering this new legislation — costs of enforcement and collecting fees or if there were any additional staff being hired, but perhaps related to what you told us earlier — if you could just perhaps elaborate.

(1030)

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — No, I'm told that there are no increased administrative costs with the new procedure.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Minister, with respect to, if I go to clause 5.6, it seems to give the Finance minister quite a bit of authority in terms of intervening in increasing amount of payable tax. Could you just outline for us this morning, what sort of guidelines would the minister use when deciding if it's

necessary to increase the taxes payable?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — It is basically as set out in the legislation. I think the legislation is largely self-explanatory. Section 5.6 provides the tax is calculated on a prorated formula based on the estimated percentage of total distance that the vehicle will travel in Saskatchewan during that licence period. When an audit is conducted, if it is found that the person actually travelled a significantly different percentage of their total distance in Saskatchewan than was estimated, then the department may adjust the tax. A similar provision applies under the current method of collecting the tax. So that's your answer.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We have had some minor concerns expressed to us by some trucking firms that are located and operate strictly within the province itself, where they feel there may be some impact negatively to them where they will be required to pay the entire E&H tax amount versus their interprovincial carrier competitors who now will only be paying a prorated amount. And could you just perhaps give us a little bit of assurance that this isn't the case, or if it is, what is your opinion? Is there a detrimental effect to companies operating just within our province?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — It would be minimal. It may have a modest effect on cash flow, but it would be very modest. I think I can say on behalf of the minister, I can give assurance on behalf of the Minister of Finance, that if indeed this is a major problem for the intra-provincial firms, that the minister I think would be — the minister and the department — would be happy to meet with those and to hear those concerns.

That wasn't expressed by the trucking industry when these changes were discussed with them. These changes have been discussed with the trucking industry. None of those concerns were expressed with any energy, certainly. And I think I can only say to the Assembly, and through the Assembly to the intra-provincial truckers, if this is a major problem, we'd be happy to take it up with them.

As I say, if it's a problem at all, it would make a very minor difference in their cash flow, and I can't imagine it being a major concern.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, you had indicated that there was 2,800 carriers involved. How many of these are members of the Saskatchewan Trucking Association.?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — We don't have that information.

Ms. Draude: — I notice in the write-up that you had indicated that the Saskatchewan Trucking Association was very supportive of this, so I'm just wondering how many of these 2,800 truckers involved were actually supportive, if you don't know how many were part of the association?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Our experience in the past has been that the Saskatchewan Trucking Association is representative of the industry and thus speak for the industry. This has never

been a problem with Saskatchewan Trucking Association before. They have in fact been quite representative of the industry.

So I think we can say, based on past experience, there's never been a problem in the past. They're in tune with their members and speak for them. I've no reason to believe that this year is any sort of an aberration.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, just to clarify it for me, and there's a lot of trucking firms that are in Alberta, registered in Alberta, that have to comply with this, so you must have had to get some agreement from them as well. So is there . . . Or didn't you have to get an agreement from them? Are they just going to pay this tax and smile?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Well the Alberta government would have liaised with the Alberta Trucking Association. It's our understanding that truckers generally in the cooperating jurisdictions are all in agreement. Our direct contact would have been with the Saskatchewan Trucking Association and we have been assured by them that all of the trucking associations are supportive of this.

Ms. Draude: — So if the Alberta firms are in support of this as well, then I would guess there would have to be an increased cost in administration, at least in Alberta, because they never had these charges before. So in order to actually do this, there has to be some kind of set-up in Alberta now.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — It's actually quite inexpensive. It's calculated through the vehicle registration system. It is no more expensive to collect it through the vehicle registration system than it is through the initial purchase. That's just basically the same system.

Instead of having the dealers, the truck dealers collect it, the truck sales dealers collect it, you've got the people issuing the licence collecting it. But it's the same system. There's really no difference in administration and therefore no difference in cost.

Ms. Draude: — Who's actually going to police this system so that you can be sure that the mileage that's being said is being used in Alberta compared to that in Saskatchewan is actually correct?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — That is the responsibility of the department to police the payment of this tax, as they police the payment of all taxes paid in the province.

Ms. Draude: — Is it going to be done through the truckers' log books?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — In the normal course, spot audits will be done, as they're done with everything, and those spot audits will be adequate to ensure that truckers are complying with the law.

Ms. Draude: — So then basically it's up to the honesty, the honour, of the trucking firms to say how many miles are going to be . . . I know that you can check gasoline records, but

besides that, you're going to be relying on the honesty of the truckers.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — That's true of all tax systems in Canada and it's true of all the tax systems in democratic countries. They're all self-assessing. They all depend upon the integrity of the citizenry, with some reinforcement of that through spot audits. This is no different than income tax or sales tax anywhere else. This is the universal system.

Ms. Draude: — So then the Alberta firms that have never paid E&H tax before are going to be, on their honour, expected to pay the amount of tax applicable in a direct relationship to the miles done in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — No, it won't be any different for the Alberta firms. It'll work just as it does now. When they register it you collect a *pro rata* share of it. Alberta will not collect a *pro rata* share for Alberta because they don't pay sales tax. Nothing will change for the truckers in Alberta.

Obviously Alberta would not be a part of any scheme which suddenly imposed upon truckers in Alberta a sales tax. Nothing will change for the truckers in Alberta except that this system is a lot easier for them to pay and administer and therefore they welcome it, as others do. But it won't result in Alberta truckers paying any more tax.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, this particular piece of legislation I believe was referred to in the budget speech as being a measure of increasing employment. And seeing as it has been suggested that it might create jobs in the province, I wonder if you might be able to indicate to us how many full-time jobs you might be estimating that this particular legislation may create in the province, and how would you go about measuring that sort of thing, to determine if it has actually had a positive impact on job creation in the province.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — We don't have any economic models done which would tell us how many jobs are going to be created. Those are expensive to have done. But it was mentioned in the budget, and there's a number of reasons why it would aid unemployment. The primary reason is it allows our dealers to compete on an equal footing with dealers in other provinces. Because they don't collect the sales tax, thus they are in the same position as Alberta is. So that's the primary reason why it creates more jobs — because it allows our dealers to compete more effectively.

It also probably will result in a more efficient and lower cost trucking industry. And that is obviously in everybody's interest, whether you are in the trucking industry or whether you simply depend on it to move products to market.

So for all those reasons, we think it's going to increase employment. No economic model was done which would give us any precise figures.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Also with respect to . . . on this sort of topic but more particular to bus lines, and

using as an example, like, a line such as Greyhound or any other larger bus line, but in this case somebody such as Greyhound which would do a lot of their repair work out of this province, for example, do you envision by introducing this legislation that there may be some day where we might be able to see a little bit more spin-off activity in terms of maintenance and repair, for example, to a bus fleet as a result of this?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Yes we do. In fact we envision that happening relatively soon. This should enable Saskatchewan trucking sales and service firms to compete more effectively with, particularly, Alberta firms. So we think that will happen; we think it will happen fairly promptly.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I just have one further question for you here. And I'd have to apologize if it was alluded to earlier or answered. But it's my understanding that one of the problems with respect to this legislation deals in terms of there will be some transitional matters.

If I want to use an example, if a company was to purchase equipment say in December of this year and it paid the normal E&H tax, starting the very next time that it registered this vehicle, it would also have to pay the new prorated tax. And as a consequence, we would have some instances where people would be paying a tax twice. And albeit it would be a one-time occurrence, but it might occur.

And given it's a transitional problem, has your department undertaken anything to lessen the injury that may be involved in this regard?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — As a matter of interest, this department has. This department is on top of all problems, this one included. Always well ahead of the eight ball. They have worked out a transitional system which will leave . . . otherwise there would be no purchases between now and the first of January. If you didn't have a transitional system, you'd have no purchases between then and now. So there is a transitional system which has been worked on with the trucking industry.

Mr. Aldridge: — Just one further question is with respect to the regulations and as it would pertain to what sort of items would be under this tax and what isn't. Would you have copy of those regulations with you here this morning, or if not, could you tell us when they might become available. Could you give us some best estimate as to that?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — No, the regulations have not been finalized. That would be in consultation with the trucking industry. It's one of the problems with what appears on the surface to be a legitimate request by opposition members to see draft regulations. The difficulty is they're not finalized until after we discuss them with the trucking industry. Time frame for completing them is probably the fall. We'll begin to discuss them with the trucking industry relatively shortly. A time frame for completing them and proclaiming the legislation is probably sometime in the fall.

Mr. Aldridge: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister, but in keeping with your Premier's own words, quite often the devil is in the

detail, so that is why we do ask for such. But we have no further questions here this morning for you and would thank again your officials for being here this morning.

(1045)

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 7 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 95 — An Act to amend The Labour-sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Act

Clause 1

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, and your officials, I am just wondering if you can explain the changes to this Act as it pertains to the venture capital Act as we knew it before.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I think I can. The Labour-sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Amendment Act, which is the one under discussion, implements initiatives which are parallel to changes made to the federal legislation. That's what we're doing here.

We have . . . the federal government has legislation which is probably called the same thing and does the same thing at the federal level; we have legislation which parallels that. They're mirror images of each other. The federal government implemented changes and these changes mirror the changes made federally.

By and large, they are two in number. One, the federal government announced in its March 6, 1996 budget, the federal tax incentive to investors investing in both federally and provincially registered labour-sponsored venture capital corporations would be reduced from 20 per cent of investments up to 5,000 to 15 per cent of investments up to 3,500. That's one change.

Secondly, the minimum holding periods for such investments would be increased from five to eight years. And they instituted a three-year waiting period for investors who have redeemed shares and wish to reinvest.

So those are the two changes. We simply parallel federal changes.

Ms. Draude: — So there will be a decrease in benefits to employees that are investing in the venture capital company?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Yes. More properly, I think, called investors. But they, yes, they're probably employees. Yes, the answer to your question is yes.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, what is the difference between type A corporation and type B corporation as it pertains to this Act?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Type A is a pool fund that requires the sponsorship of a labour union to create a broadly based investment corporation. Type B is intended to be created by a group of workers, all of whom are employed by the same employer.

Ms. Draude: — Out of the existing labour-sponsored venture capital companies, how many of them are union and how many of them are from companies whose employees are not unionized?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — There are no type A's. There are 20 type B's.

Ms. Draude: — I'm sorry, but type A is the union sponsored ones?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Yes.

Ms. Draude: — Other than in the event of a death of a shareholder, is there any circumstances that would allow a shareholder to redeem his or her shares prior to the time prescribed in the regulations without repayment of the tax credit to the province.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Yes, there is one circumstance, I'm told. For the type B, if the employee leaves the employment of the place, they can thereupon redeem their investment, somewhat I suppose like a co-op member who moves out of the district.

Ms. Draude: — So what effect will that have on the company then, other than what it will do to their own financial status. Is there anything else that will happen to the company?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Yes, someone else buys it and it creates an obvious incentive in the corporation to keep the employees happy and keep them there. But yes, someone else buys it, or the company, if they have excess capital, will absorb it.

Ms. Draude: — Is it a part of this Act or be part of each specific company's dealings with their venture capital to say if they can decide who the share would go to?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — That's a management decision.

Ms. Draude: — This amendment deals with the partial waiver of the recapture of tax credits for shareholders who have held their shares for the prescribed period in the regulations. How does the minister determine the amount of the recapture of tax credit that may be waived?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I'm told that this has always been allowed; it's just not been in the legislation. As I'm sure the member appreciates, by and large this legislation is permissive.

However, this is a subset of income tax and this is all done federally. So we don't get involved here. I suppose we don't get involved here in the administration if this is done federally. This is just permissive legislation which allows the federal

government . . . which allows people to claim on their income tax and so on these credits, and the federal government administer the income tax. So while we will attempt to answer questions with respect to administration of these things, it's really done at the federal level.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I thought it was interesting when you said that there wasn't any venture capital corporations now that have union involvement. I think that also begs the question, when you suggested that perhaps it would be an incentive to keep the employees happy and keep them in the company, when it comes to trading in their shares, how do you see this when it deals with unions? It leads me to believe that perhaps employees who a member . . . or are working for a company that does not have a union, feel more like they're part of the company than the other ones.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — There are quite a few in Quebec. It's been quite popular in Quebec and quite popular with the unions. There are now some in Ontario, but the private sector unions are quite small in Saskatchewan. And they really would . . . I would have difficulty thinking of a private sector union in Saskatchewan which would be large enough to do this. Private sector unions in Saskatchewan are fairly small.

The bulk of trade union members in Saskatchewan work, in one form or another, in the public sector. The private sector unions are fairly small actually, so I think it has more to do with the nature of the economy that it has to do with any relationship or any effect unions may have on a shop.

Ms. Draude: — We understood last week from question period that a company in North Battleford, for example, Peak's Manufacturing, just had a union started in that company with only 25 per cent of employees a member of the union. Would they be able to . . . would a company then have the option of selling shares to this group of people, or would they be regulated into it?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Either both type A or type B would be available to them.

Ms. Draude: — If they wanted to and the employer wasn't in favour of it, would there be any way that through the unions they would have to?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — No, it takes two to dance. There's nothing which requires an owner of a company to accept an investment from anyone. These things only operate by agreement.

Ms. Draude: — You can look at me like a doubting Thomas if you want. How will changing the timetable to 100 per cent within 24 months for which type A corporations must invest the capital they have raised affect the operations of the corporation?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Yes, it leaves them with a longer time frame within which to make the investments, and perhaps facilitates long-range forward planning. To that extent it's probably . . . these changes will probably result in stronger businesses or places of work.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, if the labour venture pool of money has been in place for a number of years and the company actually starts a subsidiary or has a parent company, can they decide to invest in either one of those companies?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — The answer is yes for type A, and no for type B.

Ms. Draude: — What is the role of the minister in approving tax credits for federally sponsored labour-sponsored venture capital corporations?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — This enables the minister to ensure that any labour-sponsored venture capital corporations meet Saskatchewan law. That's the discretion given to the minister — meet Saskatchewan law and policy. That's what the legislation does. That's what all the legislation does actually.

Ms. Draude: — You probably told me earlier and I apologize, but can you tell me when this Act, the original Act, came into place?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — In 1986.

Ms. Draude: — So in 10 years we only have 23 venture capital corporations formed. Are they still all in place; are they still active?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — The officials tell me that 17 or 18 are still in place. That's probably a pretty good record actually. These are high risk. Venture capital corporations are by definition high risk. So that's probably a fairly good record actually.

Ms. Draude: — I actually think that the idea of allowing employees or encouraging employees to become part of a company is a good idea. Is there any way . . . does the government do any advertising? Do they do any way of publicizing that this is an option to employees and to employers?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Yes, the Department of Economic Development do, I'm told, promote this type of activity. This is not done by the Department of Finance. They're administrators only. It's the Department of Economic Development which are responsible for promoting it. I'm told they do do that.

Ms. Draude: — The only tax credit that's available then is actually a federal one then?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — No, no. The credit is available both as against federal and provincial tax payable.

Ms. Draude: — Has there been any thoughts towards increasing the amount of provincial tax credit available to encourage employees to become part of the company?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — No, the federal government is going the opposite direction actually. The provincial credits remain the same. We're dealing here with the federal credits. The member I'm sure — nods her head — she appreciates that. The

federal government's going the other direction, so if you have a concern about this you may want to take that up at the next Liberal convention.

(1100)

Ms. Draude: — So there isn't anything that the provincial government is doing to actually encourage it with a higher rate?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — We find the federal Liberals very difficult to deal with. The member opposite may have more success than we have.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. I have no further questions.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 10 inclusive agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — It may be some commentary on the quality of representation that the officials have fled here without waiting to be thanked. I do, however, want to thank the officials for attending and assisting us this morning.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 80 — An Act to amend The Wildlife Habitat Protection Act

The Chair: — I invite the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to introduce Stuart Kramer, deputy minister; Dennis Sherratt, director of wildlife; and Doug Kosloski, legislative analyst.

Clause 1

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess the . . . first off I want to welcome you and your officials in reference to the discussions on this Bill. And I just want to get clarification right off the top. The intent of the Bill is to basically have habitat available for wildlife protection and just to ensure that there are lands set aside for the wildlife. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Yes, that's correct. The Bill is designed to secure the best wildlife habitat on Crown land. But at the same time we accommodate agriculture interests. Grazing and haying continues. The Bill simply does not allow the sale of these Crown lands which are important to wildlife, or nobody can break them up or drain them as well. So it protects the habitat while working with agriculture as well.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay, 1992 amendments to this Act provided for an addition of land to be protected under the Act. And consultation was done after the 1992 amendment was in place, and now we're faced with another amendment to remove 25,600 acres of land from being protected under this Act.

Were there any consultation with farmers done before the implementation of the 1992 amendment, and if not, why not?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Yes, there was some consultation done prior to the addition of those lands in 1992.

And as you correctly state, we're taking out about 25,000 acres from the Act. And these are perhaps quarter sections where the farming operation's water supply is on or corrals. And so we have an advisory group which decided we'd take these out and allow them to be sold to the current lessees.

Mr. Belanger: — Could you basically and briefly give me a description of exactly how much land has been set aside and the exact location of these lands?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — There's about 3.4 million acres in the Act. This is about 30 per cent of the Crown lands used for agriculture. So we haven't certainly put all of the land in the Act.

So it's about 30 per cent and 3.4 million acres. It's scattered throughout the province, the settled region of the province. There's some fairly large tracts of Crown land in the Act in the south-west where there's some large ranching operations.

Mr. Belanger: — Is any of the, the land we speak about, is any of that land in northern Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — It's all located below the forest fringe. It's all being used for agriculture purposes.

Mr. Belanger: — I guess the second part of the question — I'm really just trying to understand is a bit more from our perspective is — how was the land identified and then set aside for this habitat? Did you go through consultations only or did you have some involvements from environmental groups or some special interests groups in terms of what land that you've identified to set aside for habitat? Or was there animals being considered in terms of where their natural habitat was? Like how did you determine this particular area of land to be set aside?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — There was a scientific, biological inventory done of basically all of the land south of the forest fringe. And any of the Crown land which met certain requirements and had good habitat for a variety of species of wildlife was put into the Act.

So it was a scientific basis that was determined.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair, and welcome to the minister and your officials. I just have a couple of questions. I'm wondering if there has ever been a request by an individual or a group or a council who may ask for this land to be removed, if that would ever be a case of why it was transferred from the Crown land into this group?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Yes, there certainly have been requests and that is why we are removing 25,600 acres with this amendment.

And what we have is a public advisory group — stock growers, wildlife federation are on this group. And for an example, if an individual applies to have the land removed, if it looked as

though this particular parcel was an important part of his agriculture operation, this would be given serious consideration.

On the other hand, if it was ideal habitat and the farmer or rancher could continue to use the land for grazing, it's original purpose, we may not remove it. So we would certainly consider these requests, and have done so.

Ms. Draude: — I understand you to say that an individual could request it on a single basis and you would determine whether it should be done. Is there any public consultation, advertising, or something done to allow neighbouring people or the towns to understand that this could happen?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Basically the requests are all from the current lessees. However if a community . . . if it's a quarter section or something near a community and the community was interested in acquiring it or developing it, we would certainly review that request as well. But basically it's the current lessees who have applied.

Ms. Draude: — Maybe I'm not on the right wavelength, but I'm just wanting to make sure that if somebody applies to have this land transferred, if anybody around them would have any objections, if they would know this was happening so that they would know to object.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Yes, I'm sorry I misinterpreted your last question there. Basically the purpose of the public advisory group — which is the stock growers and wildlife federation and a couple of other groups — we feel that they have broad enough representation that if somebody had a problem with a quarter section coming out or wanted a quarter section added in, that this would get through to the public review process.

But as far as advertising in the paper, we don't. It's basically the lessee applies, this group looks at it and we look at it from a scientific basis, and the decision is made at that time.

Ms. Draude: — The advisory council actually makes the decision, and I understood you to say that there would be wildlife representatives and stock growers; who else is on the advisory council?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Currently, the group consists of the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association, the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, the Department of Agriculture, and SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management). So there's just the four on it at the current time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you and welcome to your officials today. Just for clarification, I'm wondering whether or not the federal government has got some say in this amendment. As far as what I can see here, this is about Crown land, okay. And there's obviously federal Crown land and provincial Crown land. In regards to this amendment and in fact this Act, does the federal government have authority to have some say in it, or is this all done through provincial initiative?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — This is just provincial Crown land, so the federal government has no involvement in the process.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. Could we then assume from that that the federal government, as far as land entitlement for the first nations people, could not in fact impose a land entitlement on the land that you have set aside here?

(1115)

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The treaty land entitlements is a cooperative process with governments as well as individual people. And before we would give up any of this land, all third-party interests would need to be settled. For an example, the lessee may decide that he's not going to renew the lease, not going to keep farming. So we want to be very sure that all third-party interests are met.

And as far as the federal government being able to come along and say this provincial land has to be put up for a TLE (treaty land entitlements) settlement, we don't see that happening.

Ms. Julé: — All right, thank you. This land is set aside primarily for wildlife habitat protection, okay. So if it ever came to the point where there was an agreement by provincial and federal authorities on this, that some of this would be used for land entitlement, would the wildlife habitat protection — the reason that this Bill was set out in the first place — would in fact that be protected? Would that have to be part of the conditions of land being turned over?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Yes, in fact we are. This amendment does remove 21,000 acres of land from the Act for treaty land entitlement. Now all third-party interests have been settled on these lands, so nobody is being displaced. The current people that use this land are not being displaced.

We do not automatically allow every piece of habitat land to be settled or turned over for TLE. Again, on a scientific basis, if a particular piece of land is very unique, we would not give that up for TLE settlement.

We also are looking at areas where we do take land out of the Act for TLE settlement, to replace that land with habitat of comparable value, though this may not always be possible. But we are looking at that as well.

We are also fairly confident that the first nations people will utilize this land in probably a similar manner in which it was used — for an example, cattle grazing.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, officials. I wonder if you could tell us how much land is involved in this Act?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — There's 3.4 million acres in the Act, which is about a third of the agriculture lease land in the province. And we are taking out 25,000 acres for farmers, ranchers, to purchase as per request and approval, and 21,000 acres for treaty land entitlement settlements.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. On any of this land, does the government pay grants in lieu to the RMs (rural municipality) or urban municipalities, as the case may be?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The lessees who use this land pay the taxes on the land to the municipalities.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Is all of this land available to be leased? Is all of the land currently being leased?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Virtually all of the land is leased. There are a few vacant corners here and there, but most of it is leased and the taxes are paid on that land.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. Is cattle grazing the sole use for the land when a person leases it or when someone else leases it? Is it simply cattle grazing, or is it utilized for other things such as some of it for cultivation?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — It's largely grazing. There are perhaps some quarters with small areas cultivated or have been broke up and seeded to grass, so haying is certainly a part of the use made of this land as well. And also oil and gas operations are also occurring on some of these lands.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. What kind of fees are you looking at in charging these lessees when they lease the wildlife lands?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The lease fees are based on the Department of Agriculture's standard formulas for establishing grazing and haying fees. So it's a standard formula for throughout the province.

Mr. D'Autremont: — What happens in the case of an oil lease? Who receives the revenue for the surface lease on that? Obviously if somebody is leasing the land, they are leasing 160 acres to a quarter. If an oil interest comes in, they're going to lose some of the productivity of that land.

Do they receive any compensation for that? Are their fees dropped? Do they receive any compensation in a nuisance sense for having to protect their animals or to cultivate around these locations?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you for the question. I don't have the specifics on that because it's more Department of Agriculture's policy, but we'd be very pleased to provide that information for you. I do believe that the lessee certainly gets a small sum at least to help offset some of the inconveniences and what not. But we can get you the exact details.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. If you're following the Department of Agriculture's policy, that means that the lessee would get \$100, which is totally inadequate in some of these circumstances where the quarter may be next to some property where their buildings are at, and they have the nuisance factor and yet none of the benefits that accrue from it.

Further, since you are selling 25,000 acres back to some of the

producers, in the case where an oil lease is on the property, they would have to pay additional sums of money to gain that lease back, whereas they got no benefit when it was originally put on there if they were the lessee at that time.

I think if you're following the Department of Agriculture's policies, that it should be reviewed as it's totally inadequate to the current circumstances.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Well I'll certainly pass that on to my colleague, and we will get you the details that we can on the lease arrangements.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The wildlife that's on these wildlife lands, the government is responsible for them. But what happens in the case where you have good habitat. You have a large herd of, say, white-tailed deer or elk on this land, and they don't stay on that quarter or half — or whatever it is — of wildlife land. They move off of that onto the neighbouring farmer's land causing crop damage, etc. What preventative measures, what compensations, do you have in place to protect those kind of . . . those farmers from those circumstances and to protect them from the depredations that the wildlife being raised on this land will cause to their crops?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Certainly under extreme or unusual conditions such as last winter, wildlife damage was fairly extensive, and it didn't matter whether there was habitat in that area or not. The white-tailed deer population had increased because of a number of mild winters, even though we had a very high harvest of animals last year.

Our goal is to work cooperatively with landowners, and certainly we are continuing to come up with new programs. One of the more effective ones is providing permanent fencing material for farmers who incur damage on a regular basis. We're even looking at planting some lure crops in some of our habitat lands to help keep the deer, wildlife, on the Crown land instead of out on a farmer's field.

So we are . . . our goal is to work cooperatively. Most people in the province enjoy wildlife and are prepared to put up with a little bit of damage. But when you can get very severe conditions, such as we experienced last year, when there is a problem . . . So we will be continuing to work on programs in conjunction with landowners.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Unfortunately permanent fencing doesn't help unharvested crops that are lying out in fields. It's quite difficult to put up a permanent fence to exclude white-tailed deer or elk on a quarter section or a half. It's simply not economical to do so. It would be much better to pay a compensation under circumstances like last winter than it is to provide permanent fencing, even though the member from Rosetown seems to disagree with that.

The wildlife lands, Mr. Minister, promote the increase in wildlife populations. If these lands are going to be in place . . . and they are in place throughout the agricultural area of Saskatchewan, promoting the increase in wildlife, and nobody disagrees with that. Most people agree with it. In fact that's

why a large amount of this land is turned over or sold to the wildlife funds.

But there's a price to pay, and it's the farmers in the neighbourhood of the wildlife lands that pay that price. It's not the wildlife member in the city of Regina or Saskatoon or the supporter of wildlife a hundred miles away that's paying that price. It's the farmer who's living next door to it who pays that price. And that's unfair to that particular farmer, Mr. Minister, and some form of compensation needs to be provided to that farmer for the crop depredations that he suffers. And your government, up until this time, has not been prepared to do that. Some form of compensation for the farmer has to be arrived at.

Now that can be a monetary compensation for the losses he has suffered; it can be some form of ability to gain some revenues from the sale of hunting licences in his area. Some form of compensation has to be provided for those farmers who are living next door to this problem on a continual basis. It's not a one-year situation.

The wildlife, the deer, the elk, don't stay on that little quarter section of land their entire lives; they range away from that. And it's the farmers who live in the neighbourhood who are suffering the depredation, who suffer the expenses, who suffer their crop losses, whereas the whole society benefits from it — the guy in Regina, the guy in Saskatoon, the guy a hundred miles away — benefits from that but pays none of the cost. It's the farmer next door that pays that cost; that he is deserving of some form of compensation, Mr. Minister.

So what are you proposing to provide that farmer next door to the wildlife land who, on an ongoing basis, suffers that depredation? What do you have in place for him?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you for your comments. We are certainly . . . we realize that compensation would be the best way to deal with this problem, especially with crop damage, and we are working very diligently with SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and landowners, wildlife federation, etc., to come up with something, hopefully in place this fall. We haven't got the details fleshed out yet but we are certainly looking at developing a program like that.

Certainly the habitat lands, as you say, are important to wildlife, and the purpose is to protect wildlife. And when we think of wildlife many people narrow it down to Canada geese and white-tailed deer, which happen to be two species which are very adaptable to people, and they are increasing in numbers in despite their habitat lands.

These lands are important to many of our native plants and animals which are in serious trouble, and so we want to address that as well.

But we recognize the problems of some species such as white-tailed deer and we are working on a compensation program. And we will continue our damage prevention programs and other programs such as lure crops, adjusting hunting seasons to allow a greater harvest in areas where there's larger number of deer.

(1130)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Move on to something else. What price do you pay for wildlife lands when you purchase it? How do you determine what the value of that land is and what you're going to pay for it?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Before . . . this is not exactly on the wildlife habitat lands, but the wildlife development fund lands, if a piece of land comes up for sale or we would like to purchase a piece of land, we go back about two years, take all of the land sales in a particular RM, average it out, and we offer the average price or slightly below in purchases.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. What if there have been no land sales within the immediate area within that two-year period. Do you have some other formula that you use to develop the price of the property?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — If need be, we would certainly expand the review to neighbouring RMs or that similar type of habitat, soil classification. And again, it's always a willing buyer/willing seller operation as well.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, now that we've established what you're prepared to pay, an average price in the area, what do you sell it for?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The 25,600 acres which we are selling to landowners, ranchers, farmers, although it's administered by the Department of Agriculture, the actual sale, again I'm sure it is based on the average price of land in a particular area, and again willing seller/willing buyer.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well when you were buying the land, you said you took the average price or lower. If you're selling the land, the 25,000 acres, do you take the average price or lower for that land, the 25,000 acres that you're selling? You must have some averages within the area of the land that you're selling. Have you taken that price and lower, or have you taken that price and higher?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We're dealing with two categories of land. The wildlife development fund land, we go out and actively purchase it and we do not sell any of that land, so we don't have a formula for getting rid of it.

This land, 25,000 acres, the lessee has applied for it. And perhaps when a price is arrived at the lessee may decide well, I'm not going to buy it; I'm just going to keep leasing. And again the actual sale is through the Department of Agriculture, who I'm sure again reviews the land sale prices in the particular area for the class of land and the type of land.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well on the 25,000 acres that you're selling, are you selling that at the average price of the land in the area where the land is being sold?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — This amendment simply removes that 25,000 acres from the Act because somebody — the current lessee — expressed an interest in acquiring it. And I guess the

Department of Agriculture and the lessee would have to arrive at a price. And again the sale may not go through; the lessee may just simply decide to keep leasing it.

I'm sure that for both parties to agree, the average fair price of land in a particular area would be arrived at.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well I think this is an important question, Mr. Minister, as to what price this land is being sold for.

You've said that when you purchase land you buy it at an average price or lower. Now I think it's important to know whether or not any of this land is being sold at less than the average price, and if it is being sold at less than the average price, who determined that this was going to be a valid sale?

If any of it is being sold at a higher than average price, is the price for this land greater than what you purchased it for initially? If so, who benefits by that? Does the money stay within the funds used to acquire wildlife lands? Is it turned over to the Consolidated Fund? What happens to the money?

But if this land is being sold and you've got 25,000 acres you're transferring out of the Act to sell, is any of that land being sold at less than the average price? Is it being sold at a price lower than it was originally purchased for? If so, who made the decisions to sell those individual parcels?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Again, we have the two categories of land. This Crown land in The Wildlife Habitat Protection Act, most of it has been Crown land since the province was settled — old school sections, large areas in the south-west which has never been privately owned; the Crown has owned them for many years.

So I guess I don't have an exact formula but I would be happy to obtain — or ask the Minister of Agriculture to provide — a formula as to how they arrive at their prices to dispose of this land if the lessee is interested in purchasing it.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister; if you would do that for us, please. Could you also then determine whether any of this land has been sold at less than the average price in the area and indicate that in your notices?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We will endeavour to provide that information to you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Does any of the money for the 25,000 acres being sold revert back to SERM for use for the purchase of other wildlife lands or does it go to the Consolidated Fund?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — It all goes to the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Unfortunately then that means that we have a net decrease in the amount of land available for wildlife. And while I was complaining earlier about the farmer next door, I believe that this is a good program. It has some value. It just needs some compensation and some protection for the neighbours. I think that perhaps

some of this land or other land should be then designated under the wildlife protection area to maintain the balance of what we have today.

In fact is . . . the World Wildlife Fund shows that while we are slowly increasing our protection of lands, types that are needed to be protected in this province, we still have a great deal of length to go before we reach their guidelines of 12 to 13 per cent. And if we're transferring lands out of the protection area, I think that we're moving backwards rather than forwards on this area. So I think it's incumbent on you, Mr. Minister, to encourage your government to move ahead on this, rather than step backwards.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Yes, I certainly appreciate your comments and share your views on this. We are in fact adding another 3,600 acres to the . . . for protection under the Act with this amendment as well. And we've talked about a no net loss of wildlife habitat. Unfortunately there's only so much land. But our goal is to, as we determine if additional Crown land is important to wildlife, we have that option to add more land into the Act, and we will certainly be pursuing this in the years ahead.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to ask a question regarding the . . . I guess what some of my constituents have put forward to me as far as conservation areas and I would guess it would be, is that the same as wildlife habitat protection areas? When we say conservation for wildlife, it's the same thing is it?

An Hon. Member: — Most of them are, yes.

Ms. Julé: — All right. Some of the observations of my constituents have been that in fact there have been hunters coming in and hunting on the land that has been set aside for wildlife, okay. Is that against the law, to hunt on that land? Or in fact is it up to the farmer that owns it and has said that it is for wildlife protection, is it up to them to give permission? How in fact does one understand, as a citizen, what the legalities are there as far as hunting on that land? Because if there is permission given by either the farmer or if there's no law stopping hunters, then in fact the whole intent of protecting wildlife is for nothing.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Again we have various categories of land. The Wildlife Habitat Protection Act land, because it's being leased by a rancher/farmer, the hunter should get permission to hunt on that land. Secondly, if the land is posted, then of course there should be no hunting.

The other category, which we've talked about today, is the wildlife development fund land. That is land purchased from hunters' money. An impost on the license has resulted in the wildlife development fund being established.

We do allow hunting on these lands, but it's hunting on foot only. And I guess we believe that controlled hunting, well-managed hunting seasons in fact do not endanger wildlife, and white-tail deer is only one species that we might look at on these lands. And we do believe that we need to harvest these

animals and utilize the animals to the best of our ability.

So hunting is allowed on some of the lands. If the person donated a quarter section of land to the wildlife development fund and did not want hunting on it, it would be so marked and anybody hunting on that piece would be charged.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I mention these things because of the comments made by the hon. member from Cannington. And there was certainly the feeling out there . . . in fact I have a relative who has donated some land for this, for wildlife protection, and the statement has come many times to my dear relative that although this is a wonderful place for ducks, etc., to be sitting, and it's a good intention that she had, what's happening is that farmers in and around are having those same ducks come and eat up all their crops.

And so there's some real irritation out there with the fact that this is happening and that there's no compensation for farmers, and on top of it, who is really benefiting? In fact, are the hunters that are coming in from the States or so on, and tourism benefiting? Well that's very good that we are getting tourist dollars in here, but it is at the cost of the farmer next door or in the surrounding area.

And so I concur very much with the member from Cannington that if the province by and large is going to in fact benefit from this through all kinds of dollars that are brought into this province, then in fact maybe we should be looking at the farmers who give up and sacrifice so dearly for that kind of thing to happen. And with some kind of compensation in place, I believe that there would be an equilibrium here that would respect everyone. So if you could just comment on that please?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We do have a water fowl crop depredation program in place, albeit not maybe perfect, but we do have that program in effect. We also operate bait stations and lure crops to reduce the damage in surrounding crops. And again, you're very correct in saying that we need to work with landowners, municipalities, because the future of wildlife in southern Saskatchewan does rest in the hand of landowners. We need their cooperation and we look forward to working with them. We have some good programs in place, but there's always lots more to do.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just a couple of questions in terms of the 3.4 million acres of land that you have set aside. You mention that 30 per cent of that land is Crown lands and the other 70 per cent, I assume, is lands that you've leased from the different farmers and different ranchers in the area — is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Just to clarify that. There's about nine million acres of Crown agriculture land in the province; this is owned by the province and leased out to landowners or ranchers. Of that nine million, or just over nine million, 3.4 million acres have been identified as very important to wildlife.

So it's that 3.4 million out of the nine that's in the Act. The other six million of agriculture leased land is not in the Act at all. So this is all Crown land.

Mr. Belanger: — Have you got any, in terms of figures, as to what it costs, may have cost you, and where have you got the money to either buy up this land or lease this land in terms of trying to protect it for the wildlife?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — This, as I'd mentioned earlier, is Crown land. Much of it has been held by the province since the land was settled so we haven't had to buy any of this 3.4 million acres. This is another very important benefit of this legislation.

The province already owns it, it's been leased out to landowners/ranchers, and this Act allows the ranchers and landowners to continue using the land. The Act simply prevents them from buying it or breaking it up and draining it. So other than administration, paper, it hasn't cost . . . very little.

(1145)

Mr. Belanger: — Have you got any dollars at all from any special interest groups. I'm talking about groups like the world wildlife federation. Any support in that effort? Or special interest groups in terms of assisting in some of the costs or some of the planning of this particular Act?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — With respect to this particular Act, there's been no money come in because we haven't needed it. We already own the land. This Act just prevents us or a government from selling the land, or allowing the lessee to break it up or clear it or drain it.

So we haven't required any money. The wildlife development fund land, the other wildlife land program we have, is basically strictly funded by hunting licences.

Mr. Belanger: — A portion of this particular Act is to remove 25,600 acres of land from being protected under this Act and that effort is primarily for the first nations treaty land entitlement process — is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The 25,000 acres being removed at the request of landowners is one parcel that is being taken out. We're also removing 21,000 acres of Crown land for treaty land entitlement. And this 21,000 acres, although in the Act . . . all the third-party interests, the people that were using the land up until now — the ranchers/farmers — have decided that they don't want the land any more.

So rather than go out and lease it to somebody else, we've allowed the land to go to treaty land entitlement, and there may be more of that coming yet. So we have the two parcels: the 25,000 for the current ranchers and farmers; 21,000 for treaty land entitlement.

Mr. Belanger: — Has there been any . . . So in essence, this Act does not, in no way, shape or form, drive a wedge between any first nations group or any other third-party interest in terms of trying to have access to this land?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — In response to your question, we believe that all third-party interests are settled. We aren't displacing anybody off the land. And once the third-party interests have

been settled, we will . . . If a first nations wishes to have the land that they applied for, third-party interests are settled, then the land is turned over to the first nations.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you. Has there been any other lands in northern Saskatchewan — I'm talking about the forest fringe land that has been set aside for the habitation protection Act — or is there any thought of doing that as well for northern Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — This particular legislation simply deals with agriculture leased land, which would be south of the forest fringe. Certainly we are looking at other programs in cooperation with northern people to protect unique areas in the North. But this particular legislation is just agriculture leased land south of the forest fringe.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, and that pretty well completes my questions. And I just wanted to point out that I think it's incumbent upon government and I encourage that process to continue whereas that you look at the interests of all people involved with a particular piece of land. And certainly in reference to the treaty land entitlement process, as Saskatchewan residents, we must look at resolving this long-standing issue and to make sure that there is no wedges being driven between the non-aboriginal communities that enjoy the use of that land, you know, between the aboriginal communities that want to access to that land.

I think the balance that you're trying to achieve here is admirable. I sincerely hope that much more of this type of consultation and discussion could take place prior to an Act being implemented so as time goes on we can have less and less problems with the people affected by Acts of this nature. But thank you once again. I believe one of my colleagues has another question.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — I'd just like to point out that, certainly, we are committed to settling treaty land entitlements and this is one way, one avenue that we can take some land out of the Act once third-party interests are settled. We don't want to, as you say, drive a wedge between anybody. We want to make sure the land is vacant basically and that's when we would turn the land over.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I just have one more question, Mr. Minister. I'm wondering why your government doesn't use the funds from the sale of these lands for the compensation for wildlife damage? There would be funding available for that then.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The Crown lands of course belong to everybody, and they are an agriculture lease actually. So we believe in operating through the Consolidated Fund.

And certainly we will do everything in our power to come up with more money for compensation. It would be, as far as I'm concerned, great to have this money, but I realize that there's highways, hospitals, and a number of other areas that need attention as well.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, if I could refer you to section 8(1). It sets out penalties to corporations that contravene any terms and conditions of the protection of wildlife habitat lands. The maximum penalty for a corporation will now be \$50,000 with a further penalty for a continuing offence. Mr. Minister, could you tell me how many corporations have been charged to date?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Well we're happy to report that nobody has been charged yet, and we believe that by and large industry, and I guess I use the oil and gas industry as an example, in the last number of years have been very environmentally responsible, in fact are working with us. But if somebody did desire to cause a problem, the old fine maximum of \$2,000 was no deterrent. But we do believe that \$50,000 is, and we hope we won't have to use it. And again we look forward to working cooperatively with everybody.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could you give me an idea of what kind of offences would warrant a \$50,000 fine, and at whose discretion would the amount of the fine be put forward?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Just a hypothetical example would be an industry that deliberately dumped waste material, toxic chemicals, perhaps in a burrowing owl colony or something like that. Something that was very deliberate and malicious I would see as resulting in a fine. And the actual amount of the fine would be determined by the court.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. I would like to refer to the part that says the maximum penalty for the corporation would be 50,000 with a further penalty for a continuing offence. What kind of a further penalty do you have in mind here? How much . . . is that a certain amount of money, a portion of the 50,000? And can a corporation continue to be fined until the offence ends?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Well I would envision this being very rare, probably simply not happening. But if somebody was charged or told to clean up a deliberate mess that they'd caused and they didn't do so, then the Act does provide for an additional fine of \$5,000 a day. And again I guess that would be determined by the courts. But that would be a rare circumstance indeed, I'm sure.

Ms. Julé: — Okay. Clause 6 of this Bill repeals the old schedule of protected lands and replaces it with a new schedule. What is the purpose of this change, apart from the removal of I guess it's 47,100 acres of land and the inclusion of 3,600 acres in the schedule. Is it for simplicity's sake only, or are there other reasons for the change?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The lands in the Act have been added at three different stages, I believe — 1986, '88, and '92. So there are sort of three different schedules. This simply puts all of those three into one volume. And it's, as you say, for simplicity and convenience mostly.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I missed one of my issues, forgot it when I was asking you questions earlier. It deals with the grazing rights, with cultivation rights

for some of this land. How are the transfers made when someone wants to give up the grazing rights and someone else wants to pick it up? What's the process in place for that?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Not to pass the buck again, but it's the Department of Agriculture determines who leases this land. And I know it's based on a number of things such as the age of the applicant, how close they live to the Crown land, and perhaps how much their assets are worth. But that's a Department of Agriculture decision.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. What is the policy on subleasing, subletting the property? Do you have a policy on that?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Again commenting on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, I don't believe there is a policy on subleasing. But again if you wish to add that information, we can provide it.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. And it's my understanding that there is a policy in place on that, and that subleasing is not allowed.

An Hon. Member: — If you knew the answer, why did you ask the question?

Mr. D'Autremont: — To see if the minister knew what the answer was. Well obviously he wasn't sure about it.

What mechanisms do you have in place, Mr. Minister, to determine whether or not subleasing is taking place? Because I'm hearing complaints that there is indeed some subleasing taking place, whereas one neighbour would like to be able to acquire the grazing rights. The neighbour that has it at the current time is unwilling to let it go because of some personality conflicts and is turning around, subleasing it to someone else. What mechanisms do you have in place to determine whether or not the person who actually has the grazing lease on it has any cattle and is grazing any cattle or are they subleasing it?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Well, thank you. What I meant . . . what my interpretation was, we have no policy on subleasing, meaning we don't sublease. But you're certainly correct there. I guess the local community basically, the ag rep, neighbours, whatever, certainly if something is illegal we do our best to enforce it with everybody's help.

Mr. D'Autremont: — If a current leaseholder was subleasing out to someone else, would that be in contravention and therefore his lease would be revoked and anyone else would then be free to apply for it?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — I'm sure every situation would be different. And again I simply cannot give the details on the part of the Department of Agriculture, but it would be dealt with accordingly.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 7 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

(1200)

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to thank the opposition members for a very thorough questioning on this Act and look forward to their cooperation. I'd also like to thank my officials for their help here today as well.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the minister and his officials for coming in today, and for their cooperation and their answers, and look forward to working with them in the future.

Bill No. 84 — An Act to amend The Wascana Centre Act

The Chair: — I invite the minister to introduce her official.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have with me today, Jim Brickwell, senior policy analyst with municipal policy and legislative services in Municipal Government.

Clause 1

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Minister, and your official. I just have a few questions on this amendment and they're basically for information that I would like to tabulate. How many people are employed with the Wascana Centre Authority?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — This year there's 127.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. Are there any plans to continue with a long-term development proposal in the near future?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Every year the development plan is reviewed by the board and I don't think there's been a year where there hasn't been new work done on the park. And as well, every five years the plan is reviewed at public meetings with the community. So there is quite a rigorous requirement for an ongoing review.

Ms. Julé: — Why in Bill 85, which covers the Meewasin Valley, are there subsections referring to the city and university, but in the Wascana Centre Authority amendment, Bill 84, there is no reference to these partners?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think it's just a difference in the way the Bills were written. You'll notice that in (e) under the amendment, it says participating parties; and the participating parties are understood to be the government, the university, and the city.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. In the 1996-97 estimates the Wascana Authority received \$782,000. Could this possibly be broken down?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — That entire portion is the statutory

funding that it gets from Municipal Government. Were you wanting to know the actual breakdown of the funding?

The detail would be in the annual report and we don't have a copy of that with us, but we could get you that information and send it to you.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, this is all the questions I have. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

**Bill No. 85 — An Act to amend
The Meewasin Valley Authority Act**

The Chair: — I invite the minister to introduce his official.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The official will be a familiar face to you. It's Jim Brickwell, who has assisted the committee in the immediately preceding Bill.

The Chair: — Perhaps I should have invited the official to introduce the minister.

Clause 1

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And welcome to Mr. Jim. I wonder, Mr. Minister, if you could just brief us a bit on the mandate of the Meewasin Valley Authority.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — This is an Authority that is a partnership of the province, the city of Saskatoon, and the University of Saskatchewan with respect to the husbanding, the care, for the Saskatchewan River valley as it passes through the city of Saskatoon and the immediately surrounding area.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I would like to ask, over how many acres does the Authority have control at this time?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, and to the member. I'm going to have to provide that information with you. I don't know. It's a large area. It's all within the city of Saskatoon, but I don't know the exact acreage.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. Could I ask you then how many employees the Meewasin Valley Authority have on the payroll?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, I'm sorry to tell the member we're going to have to inquire about that as well. We don't have it in the material that we brought to the House today. It will be no trouble to get the information though.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The next question I was going to ask is, could you give us a breakdown for the last fiscal year of the amount paid out . . . so I presume you don't

have that with you either, or do you?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I can give information on that, with respect to that question, Mr. Chair. In the '95-96 year, the authority spent \$1,263,884 on its operations; \$1,764,496 on its construction projects; and set up depreciation allowances for 70,000; for a grand total of \$3,098,380. There are also some allocations to various funds, but so far as expenditures are concerned, those are the broad categories.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So the amount that you have stated goes for operations. It was one million plus. Does that include the payroll for the staff?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Yes.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, there are obviously some things taking place throughout the Meewasin Valley where fees and so on are charged to the public for coming in and for enjoying a part of the Meewasin Valley. Are any of the fees or the monies collected from those fees, do they go back . . . is there any formula, I should say, that that money would go — if there are any fees — the money would go or be designated for the university or for the province or whatever? I'm just wondering if there's any designations of those monies in particular.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, and to the member, I think it is correct to say that there are no fees charged by the Meewasin Valley Authority for any of the services they provide. I could be wrong, but that's the impression I have.

If there were such fees, they would go back into the operational account of the MVA (Meewasin Valley Authority). But I don't think there are.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, are there any plans for expansion or to further develop the existing property?

(1215)

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The Meewasin Valley have a planning process that is continuous and is long term. They have been throughout their history, constantly developing things like the trail through the valley and various other facilities, like interpretive centres and the like.

There will be such matters on the drawing board — improvements to parks and improvements generally to the river bank. And they evolve over time and they're modified from time to time. And it's a major function of the MVA to make such plans and to keep them up to date and review them and consult the public about them. So the planning process is going on all the time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I don't think I was born when this all started . . . anyway, Mr. Minister, what I'd like to ask you is, where did the funds come from initially to get this whole project started? Could you let me know whether it was from the provincial government, or did the

federal government give us a hand in this? Where did the funding come from?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The three partners — the province, the city, and the university — have been involved from the beginning. I think it was before my time too, difficult as that may be to believe. But in any event, the partners were there at the beginning and contributed from the beginning and there was no federal money used to get the thing off the ground. The federal government have made important contributions from time to time during the years by way of projects of one sort or another and their participation is very important in that way. But the fundamental funding of the Authority and its activities have been by the partners that are before us in the Bill today.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Those are all the questions that I have and I thank you very much.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.

The Chair: — I invite the minister to move the Bill without amendment.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, just before I do that, I'd like to thank Mr. Brickwell for coming to assist the committee today and the work on this Bill and on the Wascana Bill that has just been completed.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

**Bill No. 21 — An Act to amend The Interpretation Act, 1995 and to enact a related amendment/
Loi modifiant La Loi d'interprétation de 1995 et édictant une modification corrélative**

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

Bill No. 113 — An Act respecting Wascana Energy Inc.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

**Bill No. 94 — An Act to amend
The Education and Health Tax Act**

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

**Bill No. 95 — An Act to amend The Labour-sponsored
Venture Capital Corporations Act**

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

**Bill No. 80 - An Act to amend
The Wildlife Habitat Protection Act**

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

Bill No. 84 — An Act to amend The Wascana Centre Act

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

**Bill No. 85 — An Act to amend
The Meewasin Valley Authority Act**

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

The Assembly recessed until 1:30 p.m.

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of concerned citizens of the province of Saskatchewan regarding the closure of the Plains Health Centre, 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.

And the signatures on the petition are from Melville, from Fort Qu'Appelle, B-Say-Tah, and Regina.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to present petitions on behalf of concerned citizens throughout the province regarding the 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.

The names on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Regina and Lemberg, Saskatchewan. I so present.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. 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:

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 the communities of Radville, and Weyburn, and Oungre. 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.

The signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, all from the city of Regina.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again 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.

People that have signed this petition are from Gainsborough, Redvers, Manor, Pinehouse, all over southern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I too rise to present petitions of names of Saskatchewan people with respect to 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 Siltou, Craven, Lumsden, Moose Jaw, the city of Regina, and also some from the community of Bethune.

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, are primarily from the city of Regina. And I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with my colleagues today in presenting petitions on behalf of citizens all throughout southern Saskatchewan in their efforts to save the Plains Health Centre here in Regina. 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, the people that have signed the petition are . . . a few from Regina, but the bulk of them are from the Yorkton area. I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to present petitions on SaskPower:

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

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the entire province of Saskatchewan. I'm sure that there isn't a community in here

that's been missed. And I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order, petitions regarding the closure of the Plains Health Centre have been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to introduce to you and all my colleagues in the House, a group of students that are seated in the east gallery. These are grade 5 and 6 students from the Invermay School, a very special group as well since one of those students happens to be my daughter, Lindsay, as well, visiting Regina and visiting the legislature.

I'd like to introduce their teacher, Mr. Joe Kowalshyn; chaperon-parent, Mrs. Mary Kuras; and of course the bus driver, the most important guy I think, who's been up since about 5 this morning to get this group of students to Regina — Mr. Lawrence Stefanowich from Canora.

Welcome to Regina. Welcome to the legislature. And I hope that you have a great day and I'll visit you later on for drinks and a photo session. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to members of the Legislative Assembly, a group of students seated in the west gallery of the legislature. There are 17 English as a second language students, adult students, from the Wetmore campus of SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology). They're here on a tour of the building today.

I'm introducing them on behalf of my colleague, the Hon. Harry Van Mulligen, from Regina Victoria. And I'll be pleased to meet with them a little bit later to discuss what they've seen and hopefully answer their questions.

I'd like to ask you and everyone to join in welcoming them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I want to introduce to the Assembly some very special visitors from the other side of the province of Saskatchewan, from the far North, the community that most of us are familiar with now.

They're from the small community of Fond-du-Lac and I'd like to ask them to stand as I introduce them. They're here visiting the Assembly. First of all — we have in fact the Northland Community College class — we have their teacher, Gareth Cook; and the students, Darlene Mercredi, Felix Mercredi, Morris Mercredi, and Jacqueline Isadore.

I'd like to welcome them to the Assembly and also ask my colleagues here to also make them welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the Assembly, I would like to introduce four very special guests. These guests are particularly special to our page, Jocelyn Arthur. It's her parents, Alan and Kathy Arthur, and her grandparents, Jack and Vera. I would ask everyone to welcome them to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce 28 grade 5 students seated in your gallery. These students are from Peart School and are accompanied by their teacher, rather, Bill Murphy, and chaperons, Rock Legendre and Mary Hague. It will be my pleasure to meet with this group of grade 5 students at 2:30 on behalf of the hon. member for Regina Victoria.

I ask all members to join me in welcoming this good-looking group of students to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Ag Biotech International Conference

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow the ag biotech international conference begins in Saskatoon. Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food is one of the sponsors of this conference, and it's fitting that it's being held in Saskatchewan and especially in our city of Saskatoon as Saskatoon is quickly being recognized as the centre of agricultural biotechnology.

There are currently some 28 companies engaged in ag biotech in Saskatoon employing over 300 people. The ag biotech industry has grown by over 300 per cent since 1991 with sales of over 300 million expected by the year 2000, up from today's base of just 42 million.

Examples of the benefits of ag biotech are actually quite numerous in our province. Anyone who knows the history of canola research will know the benefit of that research to agricultural producers in our province. The benefits also of genetically engineered seed that is resistant to herbicide. This translates into a benefit, it's estimated, to Saskatchewan canola producers of approximately \$20 per acre. So there'll be 600 representatives gathered in the city with over 800 speakers at the ag biotech conference in Saskatoon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Federal Funding Agreement with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Late last week the

federal government announced the ground-breaking new agreement that will provide the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations with \$50 million over the next three years.

This new funding arrangement will give native people more control over their own job training programs and will hopefully cut through some red tape. Blaine Favel, Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, says a number of bureaucratic strings that limited our leaders will be eliminated. That's because about 40,000 treaty Indians living in towns and cities will have one less level of bureaucracy to wade through.

This deal gives FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) the authority to set up employment services and training to Indians living off reserve. First nation leaders are best acquainted with what their communities needs are concerning job training, so it only makes sense that they have the authority to deliver those programs.

I would like to congratulate FSIN and the federal government for reaching such an important agreement. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ag Biotech Resource Kit

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in addition to the statement made by the hon. member from Saskatoon Sutherland-University, we all know the information age is playing a role in teaching Saskatchewan high school students all about agriculture.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food, and the deputy minister, who is also the past-president of Ag-West Biotech, were on hand today in Saskatoon as an agri-food biotech research resource kit for high school students was unveiled. This resource kit is called "A Quick Dip in the Gene Pool" and is for high school students across western Canada. It includes a facilitator's guide, two videos on genetic research, computer discs in either IBM or Apple format, and an audio cassette, and for schools with the capability, the material is also available on CD-ROM (compact disc read-only memory).

"A Quick Dip" is designed to create interest among our students and encourage their curiosity along the road to scientific exploration. The resource kit will be demonstrated at the Ag-West booth at the conference in Saskatoon. Saskatchewan is one of the major participants of this educational project which involves the four western provinces, agriculture industry, research scientists, and others. This is a good example of what can be accomplished through cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, agricultural biotechnology has made a significant contribution to our economic development and growth. And it's important to our future farmers, entrepreneurs, and researchers, to be aware of the tremendous potential this area holds for the future. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ninth Annual Law Enforcement Run

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to commend all the people who are participating in the ninth annual law enforcement run. In Regina this weekend, over 300 people braved the scorching conditions to run a 2 kilometre course at the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) Academy.

This is just one of the many events taking place as 26 law enforcement agencies help raise money for Special Olympics. The law enforcement run is expected to be a tremendous success by raising about \$95,000 across Saskatchewan.

I would like to thank the people across the province who demonstrate their tremendous generosity and compassion by donating and pitching in to help out this very worthy cause every year. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Liberal Party Donation List

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you ever get an invitation from a Liberal, take it with a grain of salt. Last week, the Liberal leader and the member from Wood River were inviting, even challenging, anyone who was interested in coming down to the Liberal Party office to take a look at their donation list. In fact Friday morning the member from Wood River said the difference between Conservatives and Liberals is, and I quote, "Conservatives can come into our office and look at our list any time."

Well, Mr. Speaker, Lyle Hewitt from our office decided to take the member from Wood River up on his invitation. I understand Lyle and Emmet Reidy were having quite a pleasant visit right up until Lyle asked to see the Liberal donation list as offered by the member from Wood River. He wasn't shown the donation list, Mr. Speaker; in fact he was shown the door by a clearly agitated Mr. Reidy.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is the Liberals follow the same reporting practices as everyone else, but only the Liberals have been sanctimoniously denouncing the other parties and saying you can walk into their office at any time and look at their donation list.

Mr. Speaker, we called them on it and they were bluffing.

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. Now the hon. member from Wood River knows that you cannot do from your seat what you're not permitted to do when you have the floor. Order, order. I will ask the hon. member to withdraw the unparliamentary remark that he made and apologize to the House.

The hon. member for Wood River, I ask you to withdraw the unparliamentary remark that you made and apologize to the House.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I withdraw any unparliamentary remarks I might have made.

The Speaker: — And I ask that, on record, you apologize to the House.

Mr. McPherson: — And I also apologize.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, Mr. Speaker, one very telling statement came out of this whole incident. Emmet Reidy said he wouldn't show us the list because he was scared those people might now be interested in donating to us. Based on the Liberals' performance as of late, that's probably the most honest statement we've heard from the Liberals in a long time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Banners for Wascana Park

Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Speaker, creating a park out of a pile of bones by a muddy creek is one of our proudest accomplishments and its importance to our city is dramatic and ongoing. Wascana Park is the environmental, recreational, cultural, and entertainment heart of Regina.

On Friday, I commented on the dragon boat festival to take place in the park in August. This morning, as a conclusion to Tourism Awareness Week and to complement Tourism Regina's Rediscover Regina campaign, the Branch Out group of Wascana Centre announced a new summer banner program for Regina — 70 banners designed by Marlon Janzen from the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, Barry Ellingson from the Science Centre, and Erik Norbraten of Brown Communications Group, feature friendly messages in vibrant colours.

They will be fastened to street lights around the park to give a celebratory atmosphere. The Branch Out group consists of the major tenants of Wascana Park — the Legislative Assembly, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Royal Saskatchewan Museum, Centre of the Arts, Saskatchewan Science Centre and Wascana Centre Authority. This group of six has come together to increase the number of visitors to each attraction and to make each visit more informative and enjoyable — a fine example of initiative and cooperation. Wascana Centre is truly a happening place this summer. Mr. Speaker, see you in the park.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Foam Lake Community Hall Opens

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the residents of Foam Lake and district on the opening of their new community hall. I had the pleasure of attending the ribbon cutting ceremony last Friday night. It was the culmination of a project that has been developed for many, many years.

While the committee treasurer has actually only paid about \$600,000 for the construction of this new building, the Foam Lake hall is actually worth about three-quarters of a million dollars. This is a testament to the amount of dedication and volunteer hours it took to plan and to build the hall.

The result is a tremendous facility that will enable Foam Lake to host all kinds of events that otherwise would have bypassed the community. I ask that all members of the Assembly join me in congratulating the people of Foam Lake and district on their superb cooperative effort. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Communities Hold Fund-raising Walks

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fifth annual Hip Hip Hooray walks were held nationwide recently. Saskatoon's was on June 7, and they did a very fine job. Congratulations to their committee chairperson, Clare Johnston, and publicity person, Lisa McGowan, and everyone else involved.

Yorkton had its first annual Hip Hip Hooray walk this weekend on Sunday and raised over \$8,000. Well done in Yorkton.

Regina's second annual Hip Hip Hooray walk, Sunday, saw more than 78 walkers raise more than \$13,000. And that's up from last year.

The money raised is all put to use for research, education, and further equipment. Hip Hip Hooray not only raises money, but it educates us and reminds us all just how important our personal mobility is. It also reminds us how incredibly fortunate we are to live in a time and a place blessed with technologies and the resources needed to help us more fully enjoy life.

Congratulations to the Regina Hip Hip Hooray committee chairperson, Carolyn Kim; orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Justin Naude; and other committee members, Blair Broadfoot, Lillian Andrews, Flo Karnes, Sandy Euteneier, Jody Smith; and sponsors Marlene King and John Booker.

Next year's Hip Hip Hooray fund-raising walk is May 27 in Wascana Park and will be bigger and better than ever.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Political Donations

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Premier indicated to the media on Friday that his government is preparing to bring an amendment to The Election Act which, in his words will, "once and for all and absolutely totally clarify the situation and toughen up the Bill."

The Premier also indicated that these amendments will be passed, with or without the consent of the other parties in the legislature, in the next few days.

How does the Premier propose to legislate a solution to the problem without a full examination of the extent to which the existing legislation has been either evaded or violated?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, in response to the member's question, we don't expect to have any difficulty understanding the problem by the time we've finished our consultations.

We have met already with the third party. We have a meeting scheduled for later this afternoon with the Liberal Party. We'll have follow-up meetings to those, if necessary. And between the three parties, we ought to be able to work out a provision which is crystal clear, which is beyond any dispute about interpretation, which will inform us in this legislature and all of the people in our parties as to what is required, what is not required. And we don't think that there's any special difficulty if we apply our minds to it in good faith.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That means we will be able to deal with matters from this point onwards. What about the law and the legislation that's been in place that appears to have been evaded or violated. The Minister of Post-Secondary Education has shared with me a number of proposed amendments to The Election Act, but I question why we would go behind closed doors to discuss amendments that we agree have been contravened.

Before making any changes to legislation we must first examine what appears to be a wilful attempt to circumvent the law. It appears to me that this government would rather try and fix a law and not answer for what they've done.

Will the Premier explain how he intends to ensure that these violations are carefully and properly investigated? Will he initiate an independent inquiry into this matter to determine once and for all . . . to clear the air?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I first want to say, Mr. Speaker, in case my friend has not yet heard it from me or understood what I've been saying, that we do not agree that the Act has been contravened. Speaking for our party, speaking for our party, we're in full compliance with the law and according to all the advice that we get, there is simply no doubt about that. So I want to make that clear.

We have, before this Assembly, having passed second reading, ready for committee consideration, this very Act. And it would be irresponsible for us not to address ourself to this problem of interpretation and to revise those sections, recast them in such a way that there is simply no doubt about what is the election contribution disclosure law in this province. And the member must realize that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact remains that these were not amendments that were included in the initial discussions that we had for changing The Election Act. They only came to light when in fact it was brought to the public's attention that there was some question about impropriety. Mr. Speaker, when the controversy involving undisclosed party trust funds first came to the media's attention last week, the

minister in charge of Post-Secondary Education indicated that there was nothing wrong with anonymous donations to political parties. Only days later the minister is now saying there needs to be amendments to tighten up The Election Act to cover the loopholes involving disclosure.

Will the minister explain why he appears to have come full circle on this issue? Is he for or against public disclosure of political donations?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, the remarks that the member attributes to me were taken in the context of a discussion about the history of our disclosure laws. That's been a long history characterized — the member for Wood River may be interested in this because I think he'd learn something from it — characterized by decades of discussion about to what extent there should be disclosure of political contributions in this country.

Now obviously the member from Wood River doesn't know the view of his own party with respect to the disclosure of the names of political contributors, as was learned when the third party staff member went around to the Liberal office to find out that very information.

We think this is an opportunity to clarify this law. We propose that there be full disclosure and we have said so in our Bill . . . in our draft amendments that we want to discuss with the Liberal leader this afternoon. That is our thinking on the matter. If the members opposite have opposite views, they'll have an opportunity to indicate that to us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Care Funding

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the members opposite know, the chief of staff at the Moosomin Union Hospital has resigned because of funding restrictions imposed by this government. Dr. Steve Gordon said he was frustrated because the hospital is understaffed, there isn't enough money for training, and morale is low. He said they can't even get enough funding to properly train nursing staff and upgrade their life-saving skills.

Mr. Speaker, is the Minister of Health concerned that his drastic cuts to health care funding will force more and more doctors to resign in complete frustration over these funding cuts?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — No. I would have been concerned about that, Mr. Speaker, had we not back-filled the federal Liberal cuts in health care. But I heard the doctor on the radio this morning, Mr. Speaker, and my impression from that interview was that this was largely a local issue, in that there was some frustration between the doctor and the health board in terms of health board decisions about funding and the speed at which certain letters had been answered and so on.

And I think it would be inappropriate for me to get involved in what I think is a local issue between the physician and the Pipestone District Health Board. But I do want to commend both the board and the doctor for being concerned about education, and I hope that they will resolve any differences that they may have. And I'm pleased that the doctor indicated also that he's going to be continuing with some other activities in the area that apparently are not dependent upon the agreement with the board.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, Dr. Gordon is not the only doctor who is frustrated with this government. The *Canora Courier* recently published a letter from the Canora Hospital medical staff to the Assiniboia Valley health district. They are concerned that the number of acute care beds in the district is failing to meet the needs of the people. The letter says:

We urge you to listen to the people, consider the health care needs of the AVHD (Assiniboine Valley Health District), rescind your motion dealing with acute care beds, and provide a more adequate number of beds.

Mr. Minister, are you going to do something to address the concerns of the medical staff in Canora and throughout the province, or do you plan to keep ignoring them until they too decide to quit?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — The question, Mr. Speaker, should always be whether the number of hospital beds exceeds the average daily census of the area. In other words, are there enough hospital beds to deal with the number of people requiring to be hospitalized? And the approach of the Liberal Party, as indicated by the member from Melfort, who was up in this House last week complaining about the fact that the number of hospital beds in that district, at Melfort hospital has gone from 80 to, he said, 40 — so he said, why are half the beds gone?

The answer, Mr. Speaker, is that the average daily census — in other words, the number of people that go to hospital in Melfort — is 32; 40 beds is adequate to deal with 32 people. You don't need 80 beds, Mr. Speaker, to deal with 32 patients.

But that is the sort of line that the Liberal Party wants to put out there to confuse the public. And now the member says, people are dying in the streets, when the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that if somebody needs to go to the hospital, there is a bed, there are enough hospital beds. This is just scaremongering on the part of the Liberal Party, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Kerrobert Court-house Closure

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, a few weeks ago, you heard from the people of

Kerrobert and area tell you that they are opposed to the closure of the Kerrobert court-house. Over the weekend, the Law Society of Saskatchewan told you the same thing. Law society members say it's unfair to force people to drive two or three hours to attend court, and they say the closure of the Kerrobert court-house will place rural people at a disadvantage. What else is new, Mr. Minister — another attack on rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, in light of what the law society is telling you, will you reconsider the decision to close the Kerrobert court-house?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Leader of the Third Party for that question. I am meeting tomorrow with members from the city council in Melfort, including the mayor, along with the minister in charge of the Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation. I met with them previously when I was in Kerrobert about six weeks ago and this is a follow-up from that meeting.

We're listening carefully to the concerns that the community has. We're making sure that all people in Saskatchewan have excellent access to justice, excellent access to the courts, and that is our commitment, and that's what we'll be doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, you say that there's no need for a court-house in Kerrobert because we have the technology like fax machines and phones and what not. Mr. Minister, there are many instances where a person still is required to appear in court. I don't know if you've been watching too many episodes of *Star Trek*, but I'm not aware of any technology that allows you to beam yourself to the court-house, Mr. Minister.

But you have said that there are more affordable options, like holding trials by telephone. How exactly is that going to work, Mr. Minister? Is this phone-in court policy already in place?

I also understand, Mr. Minister, that you're planning on meeting with the people of Kerrobert tomorrow, representatives of the town of Kerrobert tomorrow. What will you be telling the people of Kerrobert tomorrow? What they want to hear from you is that the court-house is going to remain open. Is that what you're going to be telling them?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the second question about this. For the information of the member, here in Saskatchewan we have been using telephone conference chambers applications in court for approximately 10 years, and that's something that we've been using very well.

Also I'd like to inform the member that in Calgary; London, Ontario; Ottawa — places like this — people are appearing in court over television on remand from the jails. This is a kind of technology that is being used in other parts of Canada. We are not using it in Saskatchewan at this time, but we're reviewing

that.

The real issue is, will the people have access to hearings and court and trial in their communities. The answer to that is yes and that there will be opportunities for people to go to trial in Kindersley, Unity, Wilkie — all of the places around that area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crown Construction Tendering Agreement

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is to the Minister of Labour or his designate. Mr. Minister, under your union-preference tendering policy, companies are forced to pay a 21 cent an hour payroll tax that goes into a fund to promote union activities. Now, Mr. Minister, very directly, can you tell us how much money has been collected to date through that fund?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, I do not have in my head or on paper in front of me that amount, but I want to say to the members opposite that all of those discussions regarding the issues that are dividing the construction industry are being discussed at a common table with all the partners there. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a supplemental for the minister. Mr. Minister, since you won't tell us how much money has gone into the fund, we've done a little bit of rough estimating that we'd like to run past you.

Now based on your figures of \$30 million worth of projects awarded under the CCTA (Crown Construction Tendering Agreement) and based on an 18-hour average wage and an estimate that labour makes up about 40 per cent of project costs, about \$140,000 has been collected through this unnecessary payroll tax. That's \$140,000 that has been added onto the project costs for no good reason, Mr. Minister, and it is the taxpayers who get stuck with the bill. Quite frankly we don't think that that's fair or right. And, Mr. Minister, what benefit have the taxpayers seen from \$140,000 payroll tax in this area? Name one.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, the construction industry in Saskatchewan has benefited from the fact that good quality, Saskatchewan-trained people have been working on the construction industry on this block of \$30 million worth of work. And those who have an interest in building the Saskatchewan industry have agreed to sit down at a table, and those who have destroyed Saskatchewan and its industry in the past are sitting there asking questions, seeing if they can stop progress yet one more time. I just want to again applaud the efforts of those who want to build Saskatchewan.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a second supplemental for the same minister. Mr. Minister, when this union fund was first introduced, the deputy premier at the time said the money would benefit non-union contractors through research into efficient construction methods. And now Bill

Hyde said non-union contractors would benefit because the fund would be used to educate them about bidding on Crown projects.

Well, Mr. Minister, the Saskatchewan Construction Association say that they have seen no evidence that even one dime of this fund has been used to the benefit of non-union contractors. Mr. Minister, this is a union fund designed to promote union activities, nothing else, and the taxpayers are paying for it through inflated Crown construction costs.

Mr. Minister, why did the former minister and the vice-president of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) say this fund would help non-union contractors when that clearly is not the case?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, there is a substantial commitment by the industry and by working people in this province to work with the training strategies in this province in order to build the strength and success of our construction industry here.

The members opposite know that that's been substantially challenged by the cut-backs by the federal government with respect to its contributions towards purchased seats in the secondary training institutions.

I want to say one more time that it's my belief that the construction association and the building trades and the CLR (Construction Labour Relations Association) are discussing this issue and many others with respect to how they can continue to build the Saskatchewan construction industry in a healthy way that supports Saskatchewan families and Saskatchewan workers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rehabilitation Services

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of this House a letter addressed to the Leader of the Third Party. And I would like to send this letter today over to the Minister of Health so that he may follow along.

In this letter, Evelyn Ereiser of Edmonton expresses her concern over the state of health care being provided for her sister Bernice, a 59-year-old disabled woman who recently suffered a stroke. Mr. Speaker, Bernice Ereiser is undergoing daily physiotherapy while she remains in St. Paul's Hospital. Unfortunately this rehab treatment will end next week because of the lack of bed space. She'll be moved to a transition ward at Parkridge in Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, the family of Bernice Ereiser feels that she is the victim of a priority system in which, and I quote from that letter:

A 59-year-old mentally handicapped individual doesn't stand a chance of getting the facility placement which she so desperately requires.

Will the Minister of Health explain why the mentally challenged do not have a place in this government's vision for wellness.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the member is aware that it is the physician that decides whether or not a person is admitted into an active rehabilitation program in Saskatoon. And apparently that has always been the case, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly have seen the letter the member refers to. I've looked into the situation. My understanding is that the physician felt her physical condition warranted a certain placement. Obviously the sister disagrees, and the member disagrees. But this is a decision the physician has made.

I certainly will raise the concern with the district health board, but this is the medical decision that has been arrived at. I don't think it has much to do, Mr. Speaker, with any level of funding. I think it's simply a medical decision that has been made.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Human Rights Commission Funding

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission sent out a press release a few days ago outlining its concerns about its budget cuts. Chief Commissioner Donna Greschner stated:

This cut has caused an immediate reduction in educational services and we are gravely concerned that the cut may also cause a further delay in investigating cases.

Mr. Speaker, I find this to be very disturbing because some human-right complaints are being backlogged for as long as two years. Many of the people filing complaints are suffering workplace harassment because of their sex, race, or age. A long waiting period to have their case heard could eventually discourage people from seeking help from the Human Rights Commission.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister please tell the people of Saskatchewan who desperately need the assistance of the Human Rights Commission why their access is being limited?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for that question. As we all know in this House, and we've heard usually once, maybe ten times a day, we have had to make some very difficult decisions in this government to deal with the fact that the amount that we were to receive from Ottawa was not what we expected. And this was something that ended up being a situation where all departments, all agencies of government, were asked to do their part in this. And the Human Rights Commission has done their part and has assisted us in this way.

We in the Department of Justice are working very closely with the people at the Human Rights Commission to make sure that there are not any greater delays in any cases that go to that Human Rights Commission. We've also been looking carefully with their staff at how some of the matters are dealt with. And I think that we can say that we have a very good Human Rights Commission in Saskatchewan. It's effective, efficient, and it is doing a good job for all of us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, the Human Rights Commission releases its review of services this fall, but we already know the staff is trying to process a tremendous backlog of complaints. Will the minister commit to upholding the principles of equality and justice by making a concerted effort to assist the commission in improving its delivery of services?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to that by saying that this is something that we are continually doing. It's something that's always part of government policy, that we work carefully with all of the agencies and commissions that we are involved with, and that this commitment is not something I have to make now, it's something that's part of our commitment as government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Northern Living Conditions

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the minister responsible for Northern Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, the people of the far northern part of this province face extremely high costs of living every day. One litre of gas in Uranium City sells for about \$1.18. A loaf of bread in Stony Rapids costs \$2.60. Two litres of milk costs \$4.50. And even one package of Kraft Dinner costs more than a \$1.50 in Stony Rapids.

Mr. Speaker, I want to know what this government is doing to help these people living in the far North, and will this government commit to subsidizing freight costs to the North in order that costs for daily essentials come more in line with those paid in southern Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, the member from Athabasca may not know that indeed there used to be a program in the '70s with the NDP (New Democratic Party) government of the day of \$250,000 subsidy a year. That was cut back by the Tory government later on. We have replaced it now, Mr. Speaker, with about a \$5 million program to go to the people on welfare and we've been helping them in that sense. The money goes directly to the families, Mr. Speaker, rather than subsidizing the transport companies.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, the people in the far North are very worried what will happen to their communities come 1997. Next year the Canadian Coast Guard is going to stop

dredging the McMurray River so that the barge that carries daily supplies can get from Fort McMurray up to Lake Athabasca and into the far northern communities.

Mr. Speaker, the people of the far North need a road through there. This government has committed some money to the project, but the people of the North need to know what this government is doing to prepare for 1997 in order to ensure that there'll be more money to construct a high-quality road in order to maintain the supply of goods to the people of the far North.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll have to probably say my speech about the 10th time; if you remember, that indeed the priorities in regards to northern development and the monies that we had, was to put \$6 million on the Cumberland bridge. And we put about one and a half million dollars in regards to the road in relation to Grandmother's Bay. And then we did some improvements on the forestry area in and around Canoe Narrows for the people to get part of the forestry industry. And also on the Athabasca road, Mr. Speaker, as well as, you know, part done with Garson Lake this year.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have had our commitment, etc., and that everything . . . as money becomes available in regards to northern roads, we will continue to build in northern Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker; it is now the middle of 1996 and another problem from a far northern community of Stony Rapids, a town that is living without the basic essentials of water and sewer. Mr. Speaker, the people in Stony Rapids have been desperately, for years, calling for proper water and sewer services. They've been asking this government on a constant basis. We are now moving into the 21st century, and there are still people in this province without water and sewer, Mr. Speaker.

What is this government doing for the people of Stony Rapids? And will the minister stand up today and commit to putting in water and sewer system in Stony Rapids so that people in these northern, far northern, communities can move into the 21st century like the rest of the province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, the member from Athabasca is a little bit behind the times. I talked with the representatives from Stony Rapids about this, that we had indeed put in about \$90 million over 20 communities over our first term in office, and indeed when money becomes available . . . If it was not for the \$114 million cut-backs, Mr. Speaker, we would have the roads and also the sewer and water in northern Saskatchewan, but in fact the federal \$114 million cut is affecting our budgeting in regards to the North.

I wish that the member would write letters to the people, you know, and his MPs (Member of Parliament) from northern

Saskatchewan — who are invisible in the North — to really deal with the issues of northern Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 76

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 76 — An Act to amend The Health Districts Act, to repeal The Union Hospital Act and The Lloydminster Hospital Act, 1948 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts** be now read a second time.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, it's high time we had a chance to talk about the NDP government's disregard for health care. And with a Bill like The Health Districts Amendment Act on the table it seems like a perfect time to talk about what's so terribly wrong with this government's health legislation.

I would hate to see this government continue on their current path when it comes to health care in this province. I would hate to see the situation get even worse than it already is. Because, Mr. Speaker, I don't think it has to be that way. I think there are solutions if the NDP government would take the time to look at them.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of every person in every community throughout Saskatchewan who has suffered because of this government's action, I feel I must stand up in the House today to make a stand on their behalf.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen firsthand how devastating this government has been to health care. We have spoken with people in our own communities and in communities across Saskatchewan who are frustrated and confused — not only that, they are also afraid. These are the people who have been personally touched by health care cuts. They are the ones who have seen their parents, their children, their families, and their friends, shamelessly ignored by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if this government remembers back to March 4 to a Shellbrook woman named Julie Walker. She spent three agonizing days at the Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon waiting to have her broken leg attended to. It was only after she contacted the media that she received care.

Mr. Speaker, the Health minister's reaction would be to blame the hospital or to blame the federal government or to blame Grant Devine's Tories. But, Mr. Speaker, we know this is a cover-up and the Health minister knows it's a cover-up. The truth is, it is the provincial government who must take responsibility. When a case falls through the cracks, this

government owes it to the people to look into it and to make sure that that never, ever happens again.

Mr. Speaker, it is people like Julie Walker who have seen how painful the NDP government cuts have been.

And what about 84-year-old Moose Jaw resident Jack Nicholson? The members opposite should remember him. He is the man who suffered a fall while left in the hands of a home care worker last fall. His daughter, Lorraine Michon, was worried about her father, Mr. Speaker. But when she contacted the Moose Jaw Union Hospital she was told there weren't enough beds to admit her father. He eventually died, Mr. Speaker, because of a tragic accident and because the health care system didn't provide adequate support.

Why do you think there weren't enough beds? Does the Minister of Health care and realize that it's severe funding cuts to health districts that have forced bed closure throughout the province and have prevented badly needed beds being added to other units? Mr. Speaker, I would sincerely hope that he does start to think about it before the situation is played over and over and over again.

Mr. Speaker, Pearl Fitzpatrick's family is worried about the health care cuts that were just too deep. Ms. Fitzpatrick, who is from Eatonville, was shipped off to Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon where she waited five days to have a broken ankle examined by a specialist.

Two days later she was released. Why? Because once again there was a bed shortage. When home care staff finally examined her, they found she had developed gangrene. Her second visit to the hospital lasted about a month because doctors did not know whether she would lose her leg.

Mr. Speaker, this is a senseless tragedy and a tragedy that should not be happening in our province. The people who choose to live here despite oppressive government policies are compassionate and caring. They care about each other and they want to see a decent quality of health care for all the residents. When they hear these stories, how do you think they feel and how do you think it affects them? Well let me tell you, Mr. Speaker. They are scared. They are very afraid. They're afraid to trust a government that lets these things happen.

Mr. Speaker, the examples don't end. The member from Wood River, my hon. colleague from Wood River, has brought up the situation of Vicki Lissel in the House several times this session. In case the members opposite need reminding, she is the woman who has been asking for government compensation for victims of hepatitis C. She is the woman who the Health minister refuses to meet with.

Mr. Speaker, this government may think it can turn its back on these people. Maybe the members opposite think if they ignore the problem it will go away. That certainly seems consistent with their actions in the past.

But I want to ask . . . I want them to ask themselves, is this right? Is it right for these people who are forced to suffer

silently, alone, even though they did nothing wrong? Doesn't society at least owe them some compassion and understanding? I would hope that the NDP members would agree. But their cold silence tells a sad story.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on about individual cases that we might be able to bring up in the House, because unfortunately these stories are not rare. Tragedies like these are happening all over the province. Still this government continues to hem and haw and to run away from their responsibility. It can't be our fault, they say. They frantically look around and start pointing the fingers blindly. But if they were honest and if they were compassionate, they would take a long, hard look in the mirror and realize they can do something about it. If only they want to, they can do something.

Mr. Speaker, we can also illustrate this government's lack of commitment to health care by looking at the state of facilities throughout the province. My colleague, the member from Athabasca, stood up in this House not so long ago to describe the horrendous conditions of the hospital in La Loche.

Can the members opposite remember his description? Did they listen when he talked about the trailers pushed together with a leaking roof and wiring problems? Did they think about the people in northern communities who have to rely on this facility to provide health care? I hope they did, Mr. Speaker, because it's a pitiful example of what this government is doing for health care.

And by no means are the northern people the only people who are suffering. People in rural communities throughout Saskatchewan are falling victim to the government's wide-edged axe. Look at Swift Current. They are losing the Swift Current Care Centre and are watching in disbelief as seniors are coldly kicked out of their home — a home they've known for years.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health used words like consolidation and streamlining to justify the decision to close down this facility that our sick and our elderly rely upon. This is simply unacceptable. People are not objects to be toyed with and moved around at the will of the NDP government. People deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Why can't the members opposite see that? When will they finally realize that the cuts they make in the back rooms of the legislature are the same cuts that are tearing down our entire health care system? Instead they decide to play games with Saskatchewan people.

One of the most despicable tactics is pitting communities against each other and making them fight for badly needed health care dollars. This is a cowardly strategy, Mr. Speaker. How can this government take a situation involving the life and death of Saskatchewan people and make it into a competition?

For example, the Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Hospital was looking for a greater share of funding, and rightly so. It needed this money to keep programs going. But at the same time the people from Balcarres and Lestock were upset because that meant their

share of the pie would be less. And no, it's not a matter of greed, at least not on the parts of these hospitals. It's a matter of ensuring the safety and care of actual people who are hurting, who are suffering.

Mr. Speaker, all these cuts are creating extreme anxiety among the sick and the elderly. They are worried sick that no one will take care of them when they can no longer care for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, getting sick or old should not be a punishment. But this government doesn't seem to understand that. Our seniors are facing an uncertain future after devoting years to developing this province, and after years and years of working to make Saskatchewan safe and a caring place to live, they are now afraid. They are afraid that their commitment to Saskatchewan has made no difference whatsoever.

Look at the situation at the Eaglestone Lodge in Kamsack. Eighteen seniors were forced to live in a state of anxiety because they did not know what would happen to them if the lodge closed permanently. Is this the compassionate health care system the NDP promised the people of Saskatchewan? Is this the same government who, when in opposition, asked the Tories, why should the sick and the elderly carry the burden for your incompetency?

Well I ask the members opposite the exact same thing today. Why should the sick and the elderly carry the burden for your incompetence? Mr. Speaker, what can health boards do, especially when this government introduces a Bill like this one which gives even more power to the minister? Health boards already have their hands tied despite the government's promise that they would be true representatives of the people. The fact is that government holds the purse-strings and they will continue to hold the purse-strings after this Bill is pushed through.

(1430)

The most striking example of the government exercising its control is the Plains Health Centre here in Regina. A Health department official, Deb Jordan, sent a letter to the acting chief operation officer of the Regina District Health Board which clearly shows this. The letter said, "interim operating funding for the district is predicted on the basis of the board moving ahead with the closure of the Plains Health Centre". Isn't that great, Mr. Speaker? Now the government is threatening our elected representatives on these health boards.

Is that a government that believes in being accountable to the people? I certainly don't think so, and neither did the people in this province. Shortly after that decision, a group of concerned people placed an ad in the *Leader-Post* which said, "with a gun like that in its head, what choice was left". Indeed, Mr. Speaker, what choice was left?

From what I have seen of this NDP government, this is exactly the goal they are aiming for. They will do anything to ensure the power remains within the tight grasp of government. It doesn't matter that over 70,000 people have signed petitions objecting to the closure. It doesn't matter that the facility is used for residents from right across the province. It just doesn't

matter to the government what people really want or what they really need.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's time for the government to re-evaluate its priorities, and I would suggest that they do this before they pass legislation that will affect health care in our province to a greater detriment. I want them to think about the individual stories they have heard in this House, not only from myself but from my hon. colleagues. And to think about the stories that they are hearing in their own constituencies, because if they take the time to listen I believe they may finally hear what we have been hearing for several years now. People are scared and unsure and are losing faith in their government.

Mr. Speaker, before this Bill is brought up in the Committee of the Whole, I implore the members opposite to think about what legislation like Bill 76 will mean to the people who they were elected to represent. After all, this is their main job. Their job is not to stand behind poor policies and watch health care get ripped apart by unfair legislation. They do not have to support every bad decision the Health minister or the Premier proposes. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that my words here today may have had some impact, and I hope that we will see some real, valuable changes in this Bill and in other health legislation this government brings forward during this session. Thank you.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take a few moments today to discuss the impacts, in the amendments to The Health Districts Act, that it will have on the people of this province, especially those in northern Saskatchewan. Before I get into the details about the effects that this Bill will have on the people of the North, I'd like to speak in more general terms about the impacts and effects that this Bill will have on all people across the province for many years to come.

As we have said before in this House, the Bill before us today deals only with the legal aspects of district health boards. None of the concerns of health boards or of the people of this province have even begun to be addressed by this Bill. This government has been running from health care issues from the day this session started, and I have a feeling that this is going to continue until the very last day we sit in this House.

Mr. Speaker, we all have seen how health care in this province has been ripped apart since this government came to power in 1991. Yes, they blamed the problems on the former Tory administration in 1991, and they continue to do so today. Well, Mr. Speaker, enough is enough. It is due time that this government take responsibility for its action. It is due time that this government begins to work for the people of the province instead of against them.

This government has come up with a good scheme to get out of the responsibility for cuts to health care — simply blame the district health boards. The government makes the unpopular decision, then the Minister of Health, each and every day in this House, gets up and says that these boards are autonomous and they're the ones making the decisions. Well I'd like to tell that member that he should remember that he and his government are the ones funding these health boards. The government is holding the purse-strings, and this is all their doing.

The story is somewhat different in northern Saskatchewan where there are currently no health boards. What the government tells us when you question health care in the North, that it is the federal government's fault.

Well I'm really beginning to wonder why we need a provincial government at all. The district health boards make all the rural and urban health care decisions, and the federal government makes all the northern choices. What do we need a Minister of Health for? I guess he is the one who appoints the board members and tells them what they can and can't do.

I want to discuss for a moment the newly formed Lloydminster Health District. Why is it that this government can create this district and the people of the North are still waiting? Where is this government's priorities?

The biggest problems with the creation of the Lloydminster Health District Board is that its entire structure will be determined in the regulations. What is there to hide and why all the secrecy? I think that we would all agree that there has to be a need for a health board created in Lloydminster. So I'm not sure what the government is trying to hide or get away with.

For a government that claimed that the district health boards are autonomous and make their own decisions, this new Bill seems to be imposing a number of restrictions on these new boards. Not only does this Bill impose new, oppressive enforcement provisions against municipalities, it also creates new restrictions on the power that district health boards have to buy or sell property.

It seems to me that this government wants all the control but none of the responsibility. Well let me tell the members opposite this: you just can't have it both ways. Either give up the control or accept the responsibility. This government was elected to be accountable to the people of the province and I think it is time that it started to govern and legislate in an open and an accountable manner.

Mr. Speaker, many northern communities are lacking basic health facilities. District health boards have not yet been set up in northern communities and the people of the North are tired of waiting for equal health care and health care facilities.

I'm still finding it hard to believe that this government can continue to say it is committed to the people of the North, yet four health Bills are before us today and not one of them deal with issues in northern Saskatchewan. Municipalities are mentioned, urban areas are mentioned, but once again the people of the North have been completely ignored.

This Bill causes a great deal of concern for the people of La Loche. People at St. Martin's Hospital there are especially worried because the hospital simply does not have the money to repay any debts that were incurred by former union hospital boards. We all know that, the state of health care facilities in the North, and this is going to be a major problem. How can anyone expect the La Loche hospital to repay debts of a union hospital board? It is crazy to think that these mice-infested health care facilities have extra money sitting around to pay old

debts.

Mr. Speaker, we have recently spoken with a number of northern health care facilities who were kind enough to review this legislation and tell us their views. Section 19 of this Bill is amended so that a municipality will have to pay the Saskatchewan Municipal Board interest on any outstanding debt at prime rate of interest of the chartered bank that holds a General Revenue Fund.

Well, Mr. Speaker, northern municipalities are still in debt. These small northern municipalities have very little economic base and there is simply no way to raise money. La Loche is no different.

I will go out on a limb here and state that when this piece of legislation was drafted, northern Saskatchewan was not in mind. This is a not a problem only in the North, Mr. Speaker. Rural municipalities are lacking funding in economic bases as well. I wonder if the minister will be able to explain where these small northern municipalities will be able to come up with extra money to pay interest owed on an old debt.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill, like many others tabled in this House, will be better understood once we are able to look at the regulations.

With regards to by-laws or medical, dental, and chiropractic staff, there's very little of this in the North. Enacting by-laws to govern medical staff and their procedures will be extremely costly to northern health care facilities. And to be honest, there is such a lack of medical staff that by-laws are really not urgent at this time. Staff is.

Northern health care facilities see this type of legislation as totally out of their league. These people need funding. They need better facilities. They need more health care professionals. What they don't need are more laws telling them how to govern the few people who do work in this particular area.

This Bill also indicates that there will be regulations to govern dental and chiropractic staff. I will quote from a letter that I got from Violet Lemaigre of St. Martin's Hospital with regards to this section. She writes, and I quote: "Would we have access to these services in the North? And if so, how?"

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask if this government is going to commit itself to work to get better dental services in the North. Will chiropractic services be available to the people in the far northern communities? These are questions we have.

Mr. Speaker, northern communities are very worried about the future of their health care facilities. These facilities are falling down on the people of northern Saskatchewan, and it is extremely difficult to attract quality physicians and dental hygienists in northern communities, yet all this government is worrying about is by-laws and regulations to govern specialists that do not exist in northern Saskatchewan.

I think the time to develop northern health districts is long overdue. District health boards need to be established in

northern Saskatchewan. I understand that four district planning committees have submitted recommendations for the formation of district health boards in the North. When can we expect to see some action from this government?

Interim district health boards are going to be appointed. When would elections take place for the permanent board members?

It seems to me that every time I question this government about health facilities and health boards in the North, I am told that they are in the planning stages or in the reviewing stages. Well, Mr. Speaker, now is the time to move into the implementation and construction stages of this process. We in the North have been waiting long enough. We have had enough of fluffy legislation that continues to ignore the people of the North, especially those in the north-western part of this province. I wonder if the implementation of the Athabasca health facility will move along as quickly as the La Ronge facility did. These people have waited long enough. Please stop ignoring their needs.

New section 26.1 of The Health Districts Act is also an area of concern for northern residents. This section establishes a relationship between district health boards, which are not yet in existence in the North, and affiliates. In order to provide funding, the government and the affiliates will enter into agreements. But, Mr. Speaker, we haven't got no health district board yet in that area, so how could we be part of that process.

Due to the fact that St. Martin's Hospital is the only acute care facility in the proposed health district, if an agreement with the government cannot be reached, this hospital will be forced to close. I really don't see how this will be of any help to the people of the North.

I do understand though that it is difficult for this government to remember northern Saskatchewan. After all, as the explanatory notes in clause 13 state, that an amendment had to be made because "reference to The Northern Municipalities Act was inadvertently omitted when the Act was drafted and passed in 1993."

This makes me really wonder what the current minister for Northern Affairs was doing during the drafting of this Bill. We all know that Northern Affairs deals with all aspects of life in the North — education, social services, housing, and yes, even health. This only goes on to confirm my belief that this government has no commitment to the North. Even their own northern member forgets about northern legislation.

This government claims equal treatment of the North. They claim that services are equal; maintenance is equal; funding is equal. Yes, the people of the North are so far behind that it is no longer acceptable any more.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely wish that this government would take the time to see what the people of this province really need and really want. This is in regards to health care and services and facilities. I think that if the people of the North were consulted, and if we were consulted from the start, we would see that their needs and their wants are fairly simple. They need facilities that

are up to standards of 1990s. They want accessibility of the services similar to those available to the people of southern Saskatchewan before all the hospitals and care homes were closed.

They need health care professionals who are trained to deal with problems in northern Saskatchewan. They need social workers who have knowledge of native traditions and ways of life. They need addiction treatment centres closer to home so that they don't lose touch with their communities and their families. They need health care centres in order to get proper health and sanitation problems under control. They need health care education. They need to teach these people alongside of them how they can both better lives in spite of conditions in which many of them live in northern Saskatchewan.

They need a common bond and a common voice to be able to express their concerns to this government. It is due time that the district health boards be established. It is due time that health board members be elected. And it is due time that this government started paying attention to the people of the North with regards to health care, social problems, and economic issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I am happy, Mr. Speaker, today to enter into the debate on Bill 76, An Act to amend The Health Districts Act. And while, Mr. Speaker, we agree with much of what the Liberal caucus members have been saying, there are a few points, I think, that we should add to this debate for consideration by the government before they pass this particular piece of law into our society as a tool for people to work and live by.

Mr. Speaker, there is a quote that you will be hearing many times from our members in probably the days to come. The quote is from the Minister of Health, who recently said in this House, and I quote: "Either you believe in local decision making or you do not." That quote may go down in history as one of the most violated quotations ever to be repeated in this House.

(1445)

The legislative agenda of this session shows quite clearly that the Minister of Health in fact does not believe in local decision making. For while he says one thing to make it sound as though he's caring and interested in local control and local decision making, his actions and the type of Bill that we see before us today say exactly the opposite — a direct contradiction which we intend on pointing out.

And perhaps after we do that, Mr. Speaker, the minister will be good enough to take a look backwards and say, well maybe we've gone too far, maybe we've made a mistake. And maybe in the process of democratic debate, he will see the error of his ways and will change some of the things in this Act and in the other health Acts to make our province truly a better place to live.

Several of the Bills before us this afternoon are clearly aimed at giving back to the minister a broad range of powers over health

districts and the facilities that they manage. And that is the key, Mr. Speaker.

For weeks, whenever the destructive consequences of this government's health policies have come to light, the Health minister has passed the buck to the districts. Don't blame me, the minister will say. He'll say, it's all the health boards; they're doing it. It's their decisions that are running the health facilities out in the country and in the cities. It's the health boards. I've got nothing to do with it. He shrugs his shoulders and simply walks away from all the problems as though he's scot-free and clean as a whistle.

Well it just isn't really working that way, Mr. Speaker. Because at the same time that he has been putting on that charade, he has been putting legislation before this House that would turn the district boards even more into scapegoats and puppets of the government with no power to do anything except to catch the flak from the minister on one side and from the general public on the other.

It's a no win situation for people that are on these health boards even as things stand now. And after this particular piece of legislation is passed, they will even have their hands tied in a worse fashion. And in fact they will become either puppets of the state or clearly the footfalls of the general public. I can't really see why anybody would ever want to stay on a health board after these kind of conditions are imposed upon them, because truly, democracy and the democratic process that they thought they were entering is being violated and will not be allowed to work.

Already the minister controls the purse-strings of the boards so tightly that they have little choice but to make cuts and close facilities that the minister doesn't have the guts to do for himself. So what happens . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I understand the hon. member would want to be using parliamentary language, and just selected a word which falls outside the realm of parliamentary language. And I'll ask him simply to withdraw the remark and continue his debate.

Mr. Goohsen: — I withdraw that unparliamentary word, Mr. Speaker. Clearly the minister does not have the intestinal fortitude with which to see through some of the decisions that he makes, and we want to make sure that he understands that the people of our province see him as the one who is responsible directly for making these decisions. And even though he may pass a piece of legislation that provides him with even greater powers to pass the buck and to blame other people, he will ultimately be held responsible.

Now with this legislation the minister extends his powers even further — even further than he already has. Now I've just pointed out, Mr. Speaker, that by controlling the purse-strings you basically turn the boards into puppets. Well it goes even further now. You not only control the purse-strings and force people to make decisions by the way that you administer the money or the way that you tell people that they can get the use of the money, but now he goes further.

For starters, the minister now would have the power to restrict the amount of real property that the health boards can acquire or dispose of. This clearly puts the decision to build or to close a hospital right back on the minister's desk. Because now the health boards will of course be restricted by this new regulation in the legislation and how the real property of health boards can be handled.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's very important. It would be so easy for us to have slipped past this legislation and let it pass and not have taken note of what the implications can be here. But realistically, if you allow the health boards to be put into this kind of a position of having to account to the minister for the buildings that they're going to build or the ones that they're going to dispose of, if that accountability is no longer completely in the hands of the health boards, then the minister has taken control of this aspect of health care in all of Saskatchewan.

For some reason, this limitation was not thought to be necessary when The Health Districts Act was originally passed. Of course back then the minister could appoint his own people to the boards without having to worry about anybody that might be considered a little bit against the government, or even a lot against the government, getting involved, because they weren't elected; they were strictly appointed.

Now that the boards are at least partially elected, they might actually go off and make some sort of independent decision. And of course the government is saying, through this legislation, that we can't have that and we won't allow that. So what they're really saying is that we don't trust you now that you're elected and so we're going to change the rules to make sure that we're in total and absolute control.

What point is there to a democratically elected board if they no longer have any direct decision-making powers and any controls?

So further to this Bill, it limits the boards in terms of policies that they can set. Now if you are limited now, of course, in terms of policies, you not only can't handle the physical aspects of health care, which is the building structures, you now have to worry about policies. Well health care, it seems to me, depends largely on buildings and largely on policies — policies like we heard about in Alberta.

In fact just a few days ago, a young man was turned down for certain kinds of treatment. Unfortunately he passed away, and that was the news that was on last night. And it's unfortunate, but policy was what decided what that government would pay for or not pay for. So policy is very important, for those people who don't understand that policy is important.

That was a policy decision made by a government through their health system, a decision that some kinds of medical care are too expensive. And so that policy is we don't pay for them, we don't allow them to be brought to the general public. And of course, if you want it, you can find another source of financing, which of course in that case, people did, but it unfortunately was too late.

But I use that as an example to show how policy affects what goes on in our medical system and why it is so important for health boards to have the right to make policy, because policy being made at the local districts means, of course, having control over situations that might be unique to a certain district in our province.

For example, the member talks about northern Saskatchewan a few minutes ago in his address, and obviously there are some distinct kinds of problems up North that we would never have in the city of Regina. I guess distance itself could be the most important one that would readily come to mind for everyone. You're thousands of miles from anywhere.

No one really chooses to get away from the North, I'm sure, because it's a beautiful place to live. But the reality of life is that if you've cut a blood vessel or an artery, you're likely going to die. A very simple little wound that in the city could be patched up in a matter of minutes can be a death sentence to you up North. So policies of how you rescue people and get them to safety are extremely important.

Those same kinds of policies may not necessarily be necessary or apply in Regina. You couldn't, for example, talk about landing a helicopter, I'm sure, in downtown Regina to pick up somebody to take them for a medical emergency. Obviously the system that we have now with a good ambulance and good ambulance attendant can take care of that problem.

But in northern Saskatchewan it might very realistically be proper for the health board to have arrangements with the military to bring in a helicopter in a severe situation to help get patients moved in and out. Those kind of policy decisions, of who calls them and when they should be called, all should be dependent on the people that know and understand those processes. Those kind of policies now could be in jeopardy and could possibly be taken out of the hands of those local health boards and be restricted by a decision of this piece of legislation providing the minister with a veto power basically on what everybody decides to do.

And in the minister's own second reading speech, he says this Bill addresses the matter of model district medical staff by-laws which, among other things, recognizes the shift from facility-based models of health delivery to a broader, community-based approach. This amendment proposes to formally ensure that district health boards and affiliates will have such by-laws in place.

In short, Mr. Speaker, the minister will decide what policies the boards shall have, and if they disagree, he will simply pass regulations to impose policies or use his veto to block the conflicting by-laws.

So there you have it. The minister is still in absolute control. And so when he says, it's not my fault, I had nothing to do with it, the health boards made the decision — the truth of the matter is that he has always had the responsibility and he should always have the responsibility.

And we're saying that he shouldn't duck the responsibility of

admitting that he has it, that he is the minister, but he should also then have the bravery to allow the health boards to make decisions and to live by those decisions when they are made.

How can this amendment possibly be reconciled with the statement, either you believe in local decision making or you do not. And obviously it can't be reconciled because the two are tremendously different — the two stated positions.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, there is a very dangerous provision in this Bill to disband district health boards and impose his own administrator. Once again, we see just how afraid this government is of elected health boards, because he provides himself with the power to completely just fire elected people.

I mean how do you in a democracy say, you're elected by the people, you got 52 per cent of the vote or 51 per cent plus; but we don't like what you're doing, we don't like the decisions you're making, so you're fired. Good bye, *adios*; you're no longer in business; I'm taking over and we now have a dictatorship. Well, Fidel, what's new in Cuba? I mean it sounds to me like we've gone back a couple of steps here.

Well anyway, Mr. Speaker, that's what this Bill provides, and that's what the people should understand that it does provide. It provides a dictatorial approach to health care, and it does not provide what the government itself has said it wanted to give to people, which is the freedom of choice and the right to make decisions.

So we don't say that necessarily some dictatorial things are wrong in life, but it is desperately wrong to try to snuff the people and tell them that you're giving them the right to choice when in fact through the back door you're setting up the dictatorship with dictatorial powers.

Certainly and clearly there are some good reasons for this provision, and we do recognize them, and we've talked about that. If a district somehow becomes insolvent or if there were some emergencies, then the government would have to step in. And of course those are a couple of things that we thought about when we decided that you can't just come out with a blanket statement saying that the minister is absolutely never going to have the power to do anything. Because if you do that of course, then there can be a crisis where the minister obviously must step in. And you can't expect the Premier to call a sitting of the legislature just to give the minister the power to take over a wreck out in the country some place.

So obviously if a health board has blown the family inheritance and all of the health board's money and cashed in all of the local jewellery and sold the furniture and maybe even sold the hotel to some guy in Alberta or whatever, and the first thing you know the hospital is converted into a hotel rather and it's been sold off — and all these kinds of silly things might possibly come true somewhere. We never know, with all this gambling that's going on, what people might try next.

But obviously there are situations where the minister does have to have the opportunity to be able to step in to straighten things out. So I guess it's the old story — well you'd like to have

everything black and white but we do see the need to have a little grey area here. And we never did say from the start that we don't want the minister to have the power to run an efficient and effective health care system.

But don't tell us one thing on one hand and do the other thing through the back door. So I would suggest however, Mr. Speaker, that such circumstances, that they could just as easily be dealt with on an ad hoc basis either through emergency legislation before this House or through orders of the council.

So this is another thought that we had, Mr. Speaker, is that we could possibly, if we were in sitting time, deal with emergencies through the sitting of the legislature. At that time we can give the minister an emergency power, but of course the Executive Council would also have that ability. And that of course takes, I think, a reasonable approach to dealing with situations of crises during non-sitting times. The cabinet of course is always available and I'm sure that they would have no aversion to giving the minister the power necessary to clean up a bad situation if one should happen to arise.

Now if the minister insists on this amendment I would suggest that it at least spell out a mechanism for recognizing and dealing with an emergency situation. In other words, tell us how you're going to deal with emergencies. Be out front with us. State it in the legislation. Don't leave it up to the imagination simply, with the minister having veto powers to do whatever he pleases. And I think that's, in fairness, what people are looking for in our democracy, is some kind of guideline that they can understand ahead of time and not leave everything up to the last minute when a crisis hits.

(1500)

It is an obvious invitation for an abuse of power by the minister. It enables him to appoint a public administrator for any other reason that is in the public interest by his interpretation. And that, we believe, goes far too far.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, our caucus believes that many of the provisions of this Bill do insult the intelligence and the independence of district health boards. And barring dramatic amendments, which I hope will come, I would urge all members at this time to seriously consider that they should stand up for the health districts that are in their community. Each MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) has a health district that they are particularly interested in and each one is going to be affected by this Bill and the effects of this Bill.

Every MLA in this building, everyone that's elected, has some health board that they have a direct concern with.

So I would urge them all to stand up and vote against this Bill and to defeat it, unless the minister has the courage to bring in the necessary amendments to make this the kind of law that Saskatchewan has come to depend on and believes it should have and has a perception of having earned. And I believe that that perception, in this case, is reality. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased

to join the debate on Bill 76, The Health Districts Amendment Act.

We have all seen and experienced the effect of this government's health reform. They called this reform the wellness plan. Before I get into the problems that the health districts are facing, I would first like to say a few words about the role of the Department of Health.

Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Auditor laid out the role of the Department of Health very clearly in his 1996 spring report. He said, and I quote:

The department is to provide leadership and vision to the health system, to protect and improve the health and well-being of the people of Saskatchewan. The department provides policy direction, direct services, and funding.

The key part of this statement is the aspect of funding. The role of the Department of Health is to provide the funding. The department receives over \$1.5 billion from the government coffers and the department also raises revenue in 1995 of over 41 million.

Mr. Speaker, many of the critical decisions that have been made by the health districts hinge upon the amount of funding they receive from the Government of Saskatchewan. This is where the many problems that health districts are facing come into play. The health boards are given the decision-making authority, but those decisions are based on the level of provincial funding.

Mr. Speaker, this is what allows the Minister of Health to bury his head in the sand and blame the health districts when hospitals close, when beds are lost, and health care professionals are laid off. The hands of the health districts are tied. They have to operate within a budget that is dictated to them by the Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, the minister knows he is responsible for the health districts and he knows that they make decisions based on the funding priorities of his government, yet he sits back and passes the blame onto the health districts. He uses the health district as the political buffer to break NDP election promises such as the promise to provide separate funding for the geriatric unit at Providence Place in Moose Jaw.

Mr. Speaker, I would like now to address some of the concerns raised by the Provincial Auditor in his '96 spring report. One area of concern deals with the definition of health needs assessment. I believe this is critical, especially when this government provides funding based on need. As stated in the Provincial Auditor's report, a single definition of health needs assessment does not exist. It does describe needs assessment as an essential first step which provides the base for sound planning and decision making.

The problem is that needs-based funding is a new concept for health care professionals in Saskatchewan and it can be a very complex process. As a result, health districts are finding that they may need assistance — assistance in terms of finding the

necessary data, preparing and analysing the data and consequently reporting it, in order to make the proper decisions. The Provincial Auditor describes some of the problems that health districts had.

For instance, the availability or location of needed data was not commonly known. The data was not specific to the district's population due to changing boundaries, lack of access to comparable data from other districts and the province or the country, and needed health information was not available from any source because the health system usually tracks illness and treatment-oriented statistics like drug use and hospitalizations.

Mr. Speaker, if the data used by health districts to assess the health needs of their residents is inadequate, the districts may fail to identify and act on the most important health needs. They may waste through excess or duplicate services, and they may be unable to show services are effectively improving health as required by this Act.

Mr. Speaker, in an attempt to help solve this problem, the Provincial Auditor recommended that health districts should plan for the entire health needs assessment process over the long term, such as 3 to 10 years. The difficulty with this is that this NDP government is prone to saying one thing and doing another. It will be difficult for health districts to plan too far into the future when this government may decide it is time to play politics with them.

The Provincial Auditor also recommended that health districts should organize and combine their needs assessment information to provide an overview. This should be done in a way that helps districts compare key information at district, provincial, and national levels and allows the information from all districts to form a provincial picture.

He went on to say that health districts should improve their analysis of collected needs assessment information, including their process to identify important health needs, and set priorities for action.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note what the response of the Department of Health was. The department said, and I quote:

We agree that the needs assessment process is important to the success of health districts (and provides the Provincial Auditor's opinion) . . . and supports the Provincial Auditor's opinion that districts' need assessment processes require improvement. The department is committed to supporting districts as they undertake these needs assessments which assist them in identifying the health needs of their residents.

(They went on to say that) The department and districts will continue to work together towards improving districts' needs assessments processes and addressing the concerns raised in the Provincial Auditor's report.

Mr. Speaker, the minister committed himself to working with the districts but it appears that once again this is nothing more than lip-service. If the minister was working with the districts,

he would not be so quick to blame them for the many problems in our health care system in Saskatchewan. Every time a hospital closes, a senior is faced with the threat of bed closures, or a health care professional is forced to leave our province, he simply says it was a decision of the health district.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister how he can blame the health districts when he controls the purse-strings. He and his NDP colleagues — the supposed left-wingers, the supposed protectors of health care — are the ones who initiated the health reform process. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to ask the Minister of Health if this is what he had in mind when this reform was first introduced. Did he envisage the closure of over 50 hospitals? Did he envisage the cutting of numerous health care positions in this province? Mr. Minister, what did you and your NDP government hope to gain by this reform?

I sincerely hope that it wasn't what you had in mind. I think it is time to come clean with the people of Saskatchewan and tell them what they can expect over the next three years. Tell them just how big a mess the new Liberal government in Saskatchewan will have to clean up when we take office after the next election.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for the Minister of Health to stop hiding, to stop passing the blame, and stop ignoring the very serious problems in our health care system. The minister refuses to go out to the health care rallies being held all over the province to protest what he and his government have done to the health care system. Instead he sits back and pretends that everything is right on track.

Mr. Speaker, there is a reason that these concerned residents are packing into town halls to protest against the systematic dismantling of the health care system. They want and deserve to be heard. The Minister of Health owes it to these concerned taxpayers to go out and tell them face to face what he is doing. And he owes it to them to go out and try to explain why he is doing what he is doing.

But, Mr. Speaker, he won't do it. The reason why he won't is very simple. It's because he knows what he is doing is wrong, and he can't explain it. He would rather leave it up to the health district to deal with these issues because, after all, he claims it is their decision to make. Mr. Minister, you know that you aren't leaving the health districts any options. You have broken promise after promise to the people of Saskatchewan, but you refuse to take responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, it all adds up to one word: arrogance. This NDP government shows blatant disregard for the people of Saskatchewan each and every day.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if the minister would ever muster up enough courage to go out to some of these town hall meetings, I can assure him that he would be in for a rude awakening. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are fed up with the choices made by this NDP government. They have a lot to answer for. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too

would like to address some of the shortcomings in this Bill to amend The Health Districts Act. I add these comments to what my colleagues have already said. I want to make it clear that I echo their concerns as well as the concerns of the member from the third party. However, I don't see the point in rehashing the same issues that my colleagues have already addressed.

Instead I would like to add to what has been already said, and in hopes that the members opposite will finally come to understand what the people of this province are worried about in this Bill. People in my constituency are asking me: can't you stop this government; can't you make them realize what they're doing to our health care system?

I hope they will listen to the concerns we bring forward and realize that we are speaking on behalf of our constituents and on behalf of their constituents. Unlike the members on that side of the House, we cannot and we will not let the government silently destroy health care in this province.

Mr. Speaker, it's almost impossible to talk about the specifics of this Bill without talking about the non-specifics of the regulations. In other words, what is in the Bill is not necessarily as scary as what's been left out.

Mr. Speaker, the government is at it again. Time after time, we see loosely drafted legislation brought forward by this government. Now we know they have a lot of lawyers to rely on. Their cabinet is full of legal advisers, and we know that they can find even more money to pay for legal advice. I'm sure that their fund could help find more if they were short. So I know that this poorly designed legislation isn't coming from ignorance of the law.

I can only assume that the members opposite have chosen to draft this hazy legislation to work to their own advantage. Instead of drafting tight legislation, this government has chosen to leave lots of room for interpretation. And this is where the regulations come in again.

Mr. Speaker, we are so tired of this government's refusal to be open and accountable to the people of the province. In every piece of legislation and in every back room deal they make, they are hiding actions from the public. And why is this, Mr. Speaker? What do they have to hide?

Well I guess I know there's some secret funds they don't want us to know about. But what else are they afraid of? Are they afraid that if people know what they're up to, they'll hit a wall of protest and plummet in the view of the voters?

Mr. Speaker, in the case of Bill 76, like so many other Bills brought forward this session, the members opposite stubbornly refuse to table regulations in this House. They would much rather pass a Bill that lets them bring in the real power later — out of the sight of opposition politicians and out of the sight of the Saskatchewan people, out of the sight of the people who elected them.

And why not? If people knew the full scope of this legislation, maybe they'd oppose it. Is that what the government is afraid

of? And if that is what they're scared of, then why don't they bring . . . if that is what they're not scared of, then why don't they bring the regulations out in the open and let them succeed or fail under public scrutiny?

Mr. Speaker, I'm not even beginning to suggest that we should include every last detail in a piece of legislation. Many of the Acts are already convoluted enough, so I do recognize the regulations are a viable and necessary part of our system.

What I do object to, though, is this government's overuse of regulations. I object to them using regulations as a way to gain control without having to answer to the people. And I really object to them giving themselves the power to make changes in the back rooms of the NDP cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, not only does this Bill introduce new topics for regulations, it greatly expands the minister's power to make these regulations. Just think about the implications of this. We have a Health minister who has no concern for the health or welfare of the Saskatchewan people making the rules.

And who do you think will suffer, Mr. Speaker? It'll be the same people who've been made to suffer all along: the people who have seen their hospitals in their communities shut down; the people who have watched as seniors are kicked out of care homes and forced away from the people they love; the people who have watched their friends and their families suffer needlessly because the nearest facility is hours away.

Mr. Speaker, some of the regulations outlined in this Bill could make a vast difference in the way our health care system runs. For example, one topic for regulations includes the power to set standards for district health boards and to set standards for affiliates.

(1515)

What kind of standards does this government have in mind? Hopefully they're not the same standards followed by the past and present Health ministers. Hopefully this doesn't mean that the district health boards and the affiliates will stop listening to people and blindly implement decisions that are bad for everyone. Because this is the standard set by the NDP government so far and nothing in this House has made me think it is heading in any other direction.

Another regulation arising in this legislation includes the drafting rules for appeals by doctors, dentists, and chiropractors. The district health boards will examine their by-law concerning appointments, assessment, discipline, classification, and organization. In other words, the Health minister will have even more control over the health care professionals and the health care organizations in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we can't understand why this government feels a need to control every aspect of our life. Don't they have enough faith that the people of this province can make informed, intelligent decisions about the way they run their own lives? Don't they realize that by putting power back into the hands of the people this province will actually grow?

It's like an over-controlling parent, Mr. Speaker. If you don't let your child make his own decisions, he will never learn to be a self-supporting, contributing member of society. He will rely on his parents for everything, and when they make the wrong decisions or can no longer make decisions, he will be lost.

Let me tell the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Saskatchewan, the people of this province, are not in need of close government control. They do not need the government to tell them what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. What would be nice is if this government gave them some idea of what was being done. Then they would become actual participants in the governing of their province. That would probably be a real unique idea. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker — people who actually have a say in the decisions that affect them.

Unfortunately this government can't seem to see that far. They can't see past the tight grip of control they insist on keeping over every aspect of our life in this province. The only part of society they don't want to be responsible for is the mistakes they have made. They prefer to pass off onto the federal government or onto past administration these problems.

What's even worse is that they prefer to let third parties take the blame for their poor decisions. Instead of admitting that their funding cuts are forcing schools to close, they're letting the school boards take the heat. Instead of accepting responsibility for cuts to municipalities, they're forcing communities to cut back on essential safety and maintenance services.

Mr. Speaker, we have to move away from over-governance. We have to move away from a government that insists on playing for power in every action they take. Mr. Speaker, we simply have to move away from this underhanded way of bringing in legislation. Government by regulation is not what the people of this province want, and they are not willing to accept it.

Mr. Speaker, I have some very serious questions that I would like to further raise when we debate this Bill further. I would hope that the members opposite will have some solid, reasonable explanations for why they choose to give themselves all-encompassing power. I'm sure that's an explanation we would all like to hear. So I therefore move adjournment of debate on Bill 76. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 77

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 77 — An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act** be now read a second time.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've noticed a growing trend since we began this session in the legislature. I guess I might be accused of being naïve, as a newcomer to politics and all. But, Mr. Speaker, as a member of the general public looking in on this place from the outside, I always thought that government legislation, that is government

Bills, would answer more questions than they create. However, as we move along towards the end of this session, Mr. Speaker, I've now come to the conclusion that that just is not necessarily so.

Mr. Speaker, I've come to the conclusion that the government's motivation is not spelled out in the words of the Bills that have come before the House. And as we've said time and time again, the motivation seems to be more power for the government and less accountability to the people.

Mr. Speaker, look at the legislation this NDP government has introduced. Whether it be the closing down of court-houses, amalgamating local governments, or giving too much power to the government's political appointees at Saskatchewan's family of Crown corporations, I find that there's always more to these Bills than first meets the eye. I think Bill No. 77 could very well be another example of this deceptive approach to government embraced by the party opposite.

Mr. Speaker, while Bill No. 77 may seem logical to some, at least on the surface, again it is one of those Bills that raises more questions than it answers. Namely, it raises questions about this government's intentions when it comes to changing the way we pay our doctors. The method of payment for physicians in Saskatchewan has been a long-standing argument. It dates right back to when medicare was first introduced in this province in 1962.

Many people argue that the current payment-for-service method should be scrapped. And they argue vigorously in this regard. But just as many argue against putting doctors on a flat salary. And, Mr. Speaker, this definitely is a debate worth having in Saskatchewan because people obviously have some very serious concerns about what is happening. They deserve to have access to the government's ears. They deserve to have a forum that takes them seriously and that gives them a chance to create positive, long-lasting solutions.

But, Mr. Speaker, the government can't play its typical power games. It should be an open and honest debate with the government asking the people of Saskatchewan — and this must include the doctors of Saskatchewan as well, Mr. Speaker — as to what they see as the pros and cons of these two systems. And then most importantly, they must listen.

Now I know listening is a foreign concept to many of the members opposite. Sure, they pretend to be listening, and they can pretend to be concerned. But people in this province don't need a government of good actors. They need a government of smart, compassionate, hard-working people who truly represent their best interests. That's the way any such debate in this regard should take place. It should not be done through any back-door tactics by a government, away from the attention of the people.

Mr. Speaker, I know full well Bill No. 77 does not deal with these topics directly. But clearly this very subject was on the minds of government officials when they crafted this piece of legislation. Whether it was the main impetus of Bill 77, I don't know. But obviously the government is thinking about this

debate. It's thinking about changing the way we will be paying our doctors. The government's own explanatory notes that accompanied this Bill, such as they were, clearly state that these changes recognize the ongoing shift to other, alternate methods of payment, such as capitation and salary.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this Bill is a clear signal from the government that it expects to see a lot more physicians moving away from the current fee-for-service method of payment to something different. My question is whether or not the government expects these doctors to voluntarily move to another system or whether this government plans to take more drastic action. Do they plan to force doctors in Saskatchewan onto a salary?

Mr. Speaker, perhaps we're reading too much into this Bill at this time. But given this government's track record when it comes to reforming our health care system, Saskatchewan residents cannot be blamed for being suspicious of any action taken by the NDP government or by the Minister of Health. The whole health reform process was conducted under the guise of public participation. But in the end, it was just another part of the smoke and mirrors game this government plays so often and so well.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to go too far astray of the subject matter at hand, but I don't think you can discuss any health care Bill in this House without touching on what this government, what the NDP, the party of Tommy Douglas, has done to our health care system, especially in rural areas.

Yes, this government held public meetings to discuss health reform, but only after it first took its broad axe and hacked away at 52 rural hospitals throughout this province. No, Mr. Speaker, that occurred later.

My constituency, Mr. Speaker, there are three such hospitals that are now referred to as wellness centres. Those facilities at Theodore and Invermay and Norquay were hospitals that provided acute care to the residents of the area. And at the time that this government proposed, through the broad axe, that they would close 52 hospitals, there was a great outcry from the public. People were not prepared to look at an alternative.

Yet in the end, when it was obvious that that plan was going to proceed, that indeed the hospital as we knew it in Invermay was no longer going to be open, people accepted that because they looked at the other plan, the plan that this government had for regional hospitals — the plan that the other hospital within the district would in fact be able to handle the acute care needs.

Mr. Speaker, the nearest hospital to the community that I'm from, which is Invermay, is about 30 miles and that is the Canora Union Hospital. That hospital at a time 3 years ago had over 30 acute care beds. This last year it was reduced to 20, and now the Assiniboine Valley Health District Board is proposing that that 20 acute care beds will be reduced to 14.

When we look at the population of our community, Mr. Speaker, the population of that district health board, we're talking in excess of 17,000 people. And when we take a look at

the number of beds that will be left in the three remaining hospitals in that centre, we have a total now of only 42 beds. That translates to about 2.3 beds per thousand. This is well below a Canadian average. This is below one of the statistics that's available from another province in this country.

We have the level of acute care funding that is the lowest standard in all of Canada, and the people in the Assiniboine Valley Health District are up in arms, Mr. Speaker. They feel that the government has reached a point where it no longer cares. That will occur with our doctors, Mr. Speaker, as well, because doctors have indicated that they are fed up with being unable to provide the care. They know they don't have the beds. They have to fight amongst themselves.

We see physicians who are now debating with a fellow physician as to whether or not they have the availability of a bed, a bed that is needed for a sick person — someone who has just been injured or someone who has suffered a heart attack. And now we have tremendous stress on those front-line workers, whether they're doctors, whether they're nurses, whether they're the assistants that provide the care in the hospital. We know that we have had . . . We expect, within our health facilities, we expect good care. We've received it. But now there is a situation whereby we may not have the beds. We may not have the ability to place people in these hospitals.

I spoke a few minutes ago about the fact that people looked at the closure of the small hospital in Invermay and they opposed it but in the end they said, okay, we're going to have to look to something bigger — change. The government said, you know, everyone's afraid of change.

But now we looked at Canora, now we're seeing what's happening to Canora, and we have examples of many people . . . my own personal example, Mr. Speaker. When I was hospitalized for two days in January due to an injury, I had to wait for three hours while I sat in a wheelchair and the physician ordered someone else out of a bed. That happened to me personally in the month of January of this year.

(1530)

Two days later, I wasn't prepared to leave that hospital bed, Mr. Speaker, but the doctor came to me and said, we need your bed more than what you need it right now and you're out. And by the way, I was told to leave that bed before 8 o'clock in the morning and have my breakfast in a wheelchair while it was prepared for another patient. This is unacceptable type of care, Mr. Speaker, and we have to address this.

This government which prides itself so much on its openness and accountability chose not to ask the public what they thought of closing the hospitals. Because, Mr. Speaker, they knew what the answer would be. They knew the people would tell them not to do this. They would beg them not to do this.

As we've seen over and over again, this government doesn't like to listen to what they don't want to hear. And they certainly don't want to hear from the people in our province, who now live in fear because they no longer have adequate emergency,

acute, or long-term care in their region of rural Saskatchewan.

This government adopted the religion of wellness without asking the people what they thought. And for those members opposite, the theory of wellness is just don't get sick and everything will be fine; don't have an accident and you won't need a hospital.

Well, Mr. Speaker, despite what this government's theories are, people do get sick, people do have accidents, and people do get old. And that will always continue to be the case. It will always be the case that people need adequate medical care. They will always need adequate emergency care, and they will always need adequate long-term care. And as often as we can, we should be providing that care as close to their homes as possible. Medicare must not and should not be centred around the major cities in our province while people hundreds of miles away from the cities are left to fend for themselves, helpless in the knowledge medical attention is not readily available in their area any longer.

Mr. Speaker, the policies of this government are not what the people want. Day after day, we receive calls and letters at our constituency offices and here at the legislature. They are from people who no longer believe this government cares about them. They no longer believe the myth that the New Democratic Party is the party that fights for quality medical care throughout our province. Nearly every day now, the people wake up to the news that yet another medical facility is closing its doors due to this government's lack of commitment to providing quality medical care to the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, despite the cries of outrage from those people, despite the issues we raise in this legislature on a daily basis, the situation seems destined to get worse before it gets any better. Our health care system is in crisis. It is failing, Mr. Speaker, and this government appears either unwilling or unable to stop its deteriorating condition. They seem more willing to pull the plug on the system, particularly in our rural communities.

The government opposite has taken the opinion that by living outside the city, you're taking your chances. They seem to be saying, if you're foolish enough to actually live outside the city, you don't deserve the same level of service. That's what the NDP government is saying, Mr. Speaker, but that's not what the people of Saskatchewan are saying. And that, most definitely, is not what members on this side of the House are saying.

Mr. Speaker, attracting doctors to Saskatchewan has never been an easy chore, and getting our own doctors to stay here is getting harder every day. That's why, before the government jumps headlong into putting all doctors on salary or capping the number of services they can charge for in a full year, we must have a full-fledged discussion with the people of this province.

And I don't mean the type of discussion which usually takes place when this government is involved — the type of discussion this government usually engages in — is where they talk and everyone else listens.

And when the people finally do get a chance to say something, the government does not listen because it's already made up its mind. That's not the kind of public input we need in this discussion, Mr. Speaker.

On a matter of putting doctors on salary or capping their billing at a set annual level, we must study the issue long and hard before jumping into anything. We must ask what effects such policies will have on keeping doctors in, and attracting doctors to, Saskatchewan. Because, Mr. Speaker, to follow a policy that may cause more of our doctors to head off to other jurisdictions, would not be a wise one in my view. We must ensure we adopt a policy that is conducive for attracting quality medical personnel to our province — and I mean all parts of our province, Mr. Speaker.

In reading over this Bill some very basic questions come to mind, questions that this government must answer once and for all. Does the government intend to introduce capitation for physicians on a wide-scale basis? Does the government intend to use the power it has given itself under The Health Districts Act to force health district boards to enter into contracts with all doctors in the district, where capitation is the result? Does the government also intend to take this step with affiliate members of the health districts?

Mr. Speaker, the government should — and must — answer these very simple questions as it continues on its self-indulgent health care reform process. The government, I feel, must also address the growing problem of the lack of doctors in rural Saskatchewan. Clearly, closing dozens of hospitals throughout Saskatchewan doesn't help attract these individuals to those areas of our province desperately in need of their services.

So what do we see as a result in communities throughout the province? We see entire communities being destroyed. Because, Mr. Speaker, the community works together as a whole. The actions of a small faction can affect the entire community. Now cooperation and working together may be a totally foreign concept to the NDP members, but in rural Saskatchewan especially it is reality and it is what has made our province great for so many years. It is why people are proud to say they are from Saskatchewan, and it is why people here are renowned for their friendliness and their willingness to help others.

But if the NDP government continues on its current path straight to the heart of urbanization, we will lose some of that. If a doctor is forced to leave a community because this government makes bad, short-sighted choices, the community suffers. Not only are they forced to look elsewhere for a doctor, businesses lose a potential customer. If the doctor is married, the spouse may also have a job and will leave. And if the doctor has children, the children leave the school. Because this government dishes out educational funding based on a per student capita, the school board suffers. That means they will have to cut costs including resources, services, and possibly jobs. So then the teacher is forced to leave the community, and this vicious cycle continues. When a family leaves a small urban centre, whether it's a doctor with a spouse and children . . . the spin-off is tremendous, Mr. Speaker.

It's a difficult concept for people living in a large urban centre like Regina or Saskatoon to understand, how one family moving away can have such a tremendous effect. But when the spin-off occurs in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, the continued reaction just never seems to have an end and is always detrimental. I'm not being melodramatic, Mr. Speaker, but this is a scenario that plays out daily. I stood in this House not long ago and I listed off the cuts forced on school boards throughout our province. And I just touched on a few of those boards that have reported what they were forced to do as far as balancing their budgets.

The same situation is playing itself over and over and over again throughout Saskatchewan, but what is this government willing to do to stop the decline? Well I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that's a question we ask ourselves on a daily basis. Because every time we watch a seniors' home close or we see the doors to a hospital being shut for the last time or we see the doctors leaving the province in droves, we have no good explanation. The only explanation we get from this government is a weak, finger-pointing non-answer from the Minister of Health or from the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, before the government pushes this Bill through, they need to take a look at the long-term implications, because even though capitation is by far the most powerful cost-saving instrument for governments, it is strongly opposed by doctors and by the Canadian Medical Association. And rostering, which must also be discussed in relation to this Bill, is not necessarily the best solution for Saskatchewan either. In order for rostering to work, hospitals, family doctors, and specialists, would have to come under the direction of a single authority which would subsequently challenge the autonomy of health boards. But we already know that health boards aren't autonomous. Because this government has to control the purse-strings, health boards don't really make the financial decisions.

The other main problem with rostering is that competition would sky-rocket in large centres and rural areas may have trouble finding a doctor to stay in their area. We are already waving goodbye as our doctors head south to the United States, and rostering could make this even worse.

So who wins and who loses? Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe the government thinks it will win, but the fact is that rural residents will lose and any government who can consider that a victory should be ashamed.

Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 77 is merely one of the government's latest attempts to change health care in this province. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, what seems okay on the surface is sometimes rotten deep down. So, Mr. Speaker, please don't blame us for being suspicious of the government's motives. We can only draw from our experience, and our experience with this government's health care reform has been anything but positive.

Mr. Speaker, we have questions about this Bill and we would like to hear the government's answers, because health care is at the very core of Saskatchewan society. And before we support legislation of any kind, we need to hear how it will affect

people now and how it will affect the people of this province for many years to come.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that the debate be adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 82

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 82 — An Act respecting Health Facilities** be now read a second time.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the very future of health care in Saskatchewan is at risk because of this government's policies. And the legislation that the NDP government is bringing before the House this session could have a profound, long-term impact on our health care system. Still the members opposite sit back and take these Bills lightly.

Mr. Speaker, it appears they don't care what the legislation means to their constituents. All they care about is that they ram the legislation through as quickly as possible, and head off for summer holidays. Well, Mr. Speaker, the official opposition does care about the effects this legislation will have. The members in our caucus do want to answer to our constituents because, unlike the members opposite, we strongly believe that we are here in this House to represent them, to represent our constituents. We are here because they have problems and solutions and hopes and dreams that can help this province become a better place to live if only the government would listen.

(1545)

Mr. Speaker, we have sent this Bill out to interested parties throughout the province and some of the comments we are getting back don't bode well for this government. For example, let me quote from one response we got:

This is a particularly dangerous piece of legislation because at the outset it appears innocuous. However because it is so loosely drafted and gives the minister both a surprising level of discretion in granting licences and so little discretion in removing licences once granted, it is one that must be subjected to significant scrutiny and debate.

Imagine that, Mr. Speaker — it should be subjected to significant scrutiny and debate. And what does this government propose? This government wants us to poke at the surface, superficially, and then hand it over to them to pass.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we aren't about to do that. So the members opposite should sit back and prepare to answer some very serious questions — questions asked by people throughout Saskatchewan that can only be answered by the members on that side of the House. Mr. Speaker, the government tries to say that Bill 82 will prevent a two-tier health care system. Well I hate to tell them this but it's much too late. For the past five years, since this government came to power, they have been working very hard to create a two-tier system.

Every policy they make, and every piece of legislation they introduce, is proof of this. Of course, Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about the two tiers in Saskatchewan as being rural and urban. And believe me, there's no question which tier this government holds at the top. I guess we shouldn't be surprised that rural areas get the short end of the stick, and when it comes particularly to health care. All we have to do is look at the cabinet — urban lawyers, urban educators, urban businessmen, and a couple of farmers thrown in for appearance sake. Why should anyone expect their agenda to be anything but urban-based?

Mr. Speaker, our health care system is failing. I don't know how many more examples we need to bring before this House every day before the government finally admits it. How can the Deputy Premier go home every night knowing that the words of Louise Simard are coming back to haunt this government? In 1989, just seven years ago when the NDP were in opposition, she stepped up on her high horse and rode out to win the battle of health care. She said:

The opposition is going to fight these cut-backs for health care and these changes to medicare. It's going to fight the erosion of the principles of medicare. I feel rather certain we'll be having a change of government next time around and then the public isn't going to have to worry about these problems any longer.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess reality knocked her off her high horse. Little did she realize that those words would be used as weapons, and that the NDP government had no intention of fighting for health care. Mr. Speaker, a more cynical person would suspect that she already knew that her words were just empty rhetoric.

But I would never suggest that. I don't imagine they got the art of empty rhetoric down pat until they took over as government. But whether it was cold-hearted rhetoric or simple naïvety, the fact is her words could not be any more false. She said the public would not have to worry about health care, not with the NDP fighting for it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the public is worried. No, that's not nearly strong enough — the public is terrified, because they have watched hospital after hospital being shut down. They have seen beds lost to government cuts. They have seen health care professionals forced out of work by government cuts, leaving the province. And they have seen that health care may not be there for them when their children are sick or when their parents need help.

What kind of government let's people live in fear? I think that's a question that only the members opposite can truly answer.

Mr. Speaker, with this Bill the government is trying to remove services which are currently ensured to a second tier system. It targets Catholic hospitals, private practitioners, private facilities, and elected health boards.

And when I say targets, Mr. Speaker, I mean exactly that. The NDP government is using this Act as a weapon. One man I

spoke to referred to it as a Trojan Horse. And we all know what happened in that story, Mr. Speaker. If you bring in a secret weapon disguised as a gift to the people, it can do a lot more damage than open warfare. And that's exactly what this government's health legislation is doing. The members opposite bring forward a Bill and talk about how wonderful it is for the people of this province. But when you look deeper into the Bill, things don't look so rosy.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is a classic example of an oppressive Crown. It pits citizens against the state. It gives the minister unconditional power. Well surprise, surprise. This sounds a lot like our biggest complaint about every piece of legislation that this government has brought forward in this session. More power to the government, less power to the people — perhaps the NDP should use that as their new motto. There's something to be said about truth in advertising you know.

Mr. Speaker, some of the guidelines in this Bill are ludicrous. For example, the Bill allows the minister to search and seize private-practice property. Since when can one member of a commercial relationship search and seize the property of another member of the same commercial relationship? As well the minister can delegate all his power to any health department employee — to the secretary, to the janitor, to anyone. Isn't there a competency issue at stake here? Although I guess we could ask the same question if the power was to remain solely with the minister. I'm not sure law school teaches the intricacies of health care.

Mr. Speaker, this Act states that a private facility cannot charge fees if the service costs are being paid out of the public purse. Fair enough. But this can be changed at any time by the minister through regulations, and he doesn't have to let anyone know. Why the shroud of secrecy, Mr. Minister? Why does this government have to introduce legislation that lets ministers hide their actions from the people of this province? How is this open and accountable government? Is that what they're telling us?

Mr. Speaker, this Bill does not even properly define private operators. Private or public facilities are not protected because the minister can change the definition through regulations. So what we are left with, Mr. Speaker, is a government which is accountable to no one, with no clear mandate and no real concern for the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, let me again quote from an opinion we received about Bill 82:

This legislation has either been drafted extremely poorly, or it is specifically circuitous and evasive. By reading together sections 2, 12, and 29, it would appear that the primary purpose for this Bill would be to allow the government to create a series of procedures that are deemed, for the purposes of this Act, not to be insured services. If a health facility can only perform an insured service, but it can bill the patient directly, then obviously it is creating an alternative to the present health system. On the policy side, this statute would allow for the development of certain controversial, standalone clinics.

Let's go back to this, Mr. Speaker. He said either this Bill is poorly done or deliberately secretive. Either way it doesn't make for good law. The people of Saskatchewan have no choice but to accept the legislation this government pushes through. Yes, they can protest, but if the members opposite don't listen, then what good can it do? Therefore we should be absolutely sure that there is good, logical reason for bringing in a law before it is rammed down the throats of Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, when the government decided to introduce this Bill, they did it in the name of preventing private health care. But the Premier himself admitted that the legislation was little more than a political statement. In the May 2 edition of the *Leader-Post*, the Premier says, and I quote: "It is a political statement because it is a statement of principle and philosophy."

Principle and philosophy? What I want to know, Mr. Speaker, is why the word practicality never crosses the Premier's lips. Is his government introducing a Bill that could have serious ramifications on health care in this province just to make a point? That is exactly the kind of self-serving statement we have come to expect from the NDP government. Little do they care what is good for the people. All the Premier cares about is how he comes across. Well I'd like to tell the Premier that legislation should not be about pumping up your ego — it should be about creating laws for the people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, if the Premier thinks this Bill is a realistic compromise to long waiting-lists, I think he is dreaming. Our government wants private clinics to open up in this province with the blessing of whomever the Minister of Health designates, but doesn't want to let them make money.

Well I don't mean to doubt the principles of true socialism, but I think that our society is a little more motivated than that. Philosophically speaking, it would be great if the Gimbel's of health care would move to Saskatchewan out of the goodness of their hearts, to cut down on the waiting-lists. But what is their motivation when in other provinces they can make some sort of profit?

Mr. Speaker, this government's position is confusing. On one hand they say they are promoting capitalism and business expansion. The Minister of Economic Development stands up in this House as a self-proclaimed champion of business. Yet on the other hand, the Minister of Health is introducing this Bill to hold back capitalism and competition. There's a discrepancy here and the people of Saskatchewan know this.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying we support extra billing. What I am saying is that there is a problem here and the government is making it worse by ignoring it. They are making the people of this province suffer because they continue to chop away at health care.

Mr. Speaker, it's time they stopped introducing philosophical pieces of legislation and started looking for real answers to the problems plaguing our health care system. It is what the people of this province truly deserve.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I also have to question why the government even bothered introducing a Bill that threatens action but promises none. Even the Premier admits that it is an unnecessary piece of legislation. And with its philosophical leanings, it has shown itself to be nothing but a chance for the Premier to spout left-wing rhetoric.

But the fact is, Mr. Speaker, if it is allowed to pass, it will have long-term implications for health care in this great province of Saskatchewan. And that is something we must take very seriously.

Mr. Speaker, before I conclude, I just have to emphasize once again how crucial decent, accessible health care is to our province. The people of this province just can't take much more. The cuts have already come too fast and much, much too deep. People in every community throughout Saskatchewan are struggling to make sense of the mess, but the government just keeps adding to it. And every time it seems like a community might be digging itself out, the government throws a new pile on it.

Where are the members who just six or seven years ago promised to defend medicare? Where are the people who promised to stop the Plains hospital from closing? Where are the people who told their constituents that health care would not suffer?

I believe some of these members are present here today, Mr. Speaker, but they are different people now. They sit back while the urban controllers make choices that are bad for their communities. And they sit silently as they watch community after community fall under the government's slash-and-burn approach to health care.

(1600)

Mr. Speaker, I implore all members in this House to think about health care and what it means to every man, woman, and child living in this great province of Saskatchewan. I want them to think about how important it is to building a sense of security in all communities. I want everyone to consider how legislation will affect the people of this province, the very people who elected us — all of us. And then, when it comes time to pass the legislation, I hope they do the right thing and speak on behalf of the people that they represent and make the right choices and the right decision. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to join in on the debate regarding Bill No. 82, The Health Facilities Licensing Act.

After the systematic dismantling of our health care system over the past few years, I think any Bill that deals with the health care system needs to be closely scrutinized. When I look at the record of this socialist government, I can't help but hold them solely responsible for the many severe problems in our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government introduced a health care reform which they called the wellness model. If that is not an

oxymoron, I don't know what is. What has this wellness model meant for the people of Saskatchewan? It has meant that over 50 hospitals would be closed, nursing homes would be closed, acute care beds would be lost, and health care professionals would have to seek employment outside of our province.

Mr. Speaker, they call this a wellness model. Many residents of rural Saskatchewan have seen their hospitals boarded up, forcing them to drive great distances to receive the health care they so badly need. I would ask the Minister of Health to show me how the people of Saskatchewan have actually benefited from this health reform. They haven't saved any money. We all know that the same amount of money is being spent on health care as was before our wellness model came into place. I know he would be very hard pressed for an answer.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's not just rural communities that are hit by this health reform. It is also having a detrimental impact on urban communities. The Plains health care centre right here in Regina is scheduled for closure. I along with my colleagues have presented hundred of petitions on behalf of the Saskatchewan people who are worried about losing this facility. The government opposite does nothing but close their eyes and plug their ears. Every day they make snide remarks about the petitions as we present them. They absolutely ignore the petitions and the people who have signed them. So much for government of and for the people.

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Health provides his feeble answers to issues raised every day in question period, he constantly blames the health boards for decisions that are made. This is completely appalling to me. This NDP government holds the purse-strings. They are the ones who dictate to the health boards how much money they will receive each fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, we all know the old saying — remember the golden rule: those who have the gold makes the rules — applies to this government. They are the ones who dictate to the health boards how much money they'll get. The health boards' hands are tied, and consequently they have to make decisions based on a budget set by this socialist government.

Mr. Speaker, all they have been successful in doing is creating a buffer for government to hide behind. The health board makes the decision to cut back programs and services or close facilities based on their budget provided by the government. And the Health minister sits back and says it was the decision of the health board. Can't the minister understand that the health boards don't have any real options or alternatives because they don't have the money. The government controls it.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government blames everyone from the federal government to the previous Tory administration to former premier Ross Thatcher. The time is long overdue for this NDP government to stop blaming. Take some responsibility and provide Saskatchewan people with the health care they need and the health care they deserve.

Health care is something that the people of Saskatchewan value

dearly. And right now they are very scared of what this NDP government has in store for them. I challenge the Minister of Health to go out to the town hall meetings that are happening all over this province, listen to and see what people are saying and feeling. The Minister of Health owes it to the people to go to their community and explain to them in person why he is shutting down their hospitals, why he's throwing the seniors out of their homes, and why so many of them are just . . . they are abandoned.

And then they tell the people that it's not their fault; it is the health boards' fault. Well, Mr. Speaker, I assure the minister that those concerned residents won't buy into his charming way of ducking and hiding from the truth.

Mr. Speaker, I want to address the impact that a hospital closure has on a rural community. When a rural community loses a facility like the hospital, a nursing home, or a school, it has a profound impact on the economy and the prosperity of that local community. The loss of facilities means jobs losses and consequently rural depopulation. When people in rural communities lose their jobs, they tend to leave that community, not necessarily because they want to but rather because they're forced to.

If a nurse in a rural community loses his or her job, they are forced to leave the community, and they take their children with them of course. This translates into a decline in school enrolment and also means a cut in funding to the school, which translates into job losses for teachers and school staff. It may also mean an increase to mill rates as so many communities are currently experiencing now.

When people leave a rural community, the tax base shrinks, and all of a sudden there is no money for the local governments to operate. This means that the rural roads and highways can't even be properly maintained.

A decrease in population translates into severe economic downturns for that community. Every business in the community is affected by this negative string of events. When businesses suffer, they too are forced to cut back in their own operations. Once again this means job losses and further depopulation.

Mr. Speaker, this is a vicious circle that begins with the arrogance and thoughtlessness of the NDP government and ends with the complete destruction of rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, what really saddens me is that the sole motive behind the choices are made by the politics of this NDP government. They show no remorse for the people whose lives they are throwing into utter chaos. The socialist cabinet full of lawyers don't seem to care about rural Saskatchewan at all. As long as Highway No. 11 between Regina and Saskatoon is drivable, they seem to be quite content.

Mr. Speaker, this arrogance is inexcusable. But what bothers me even more is the fact that their rural NDP back-benchers aren't standing up for their constituents either. Some of them have sat here for several years and have said nothing publicly.

Even the new NDP back-benchers have fallen victim to the NDP muzzle. I can't understand why they don't say something. Why don't you stand up and represent your constituents?

Mr. Speaker, The Health Facilities Licensing Act follows suit with the NDP approach to governing. This is to take all the decision-making authority and place it right smack in the minister's lap. They set up a shell or a charade and lead people to believe that they are the ones who actually get to have some input into the decision making. But this is simply not the case. This NDP government is a master at smoke and mirrors.

In this Bill, the ultimate decision-making power is in the hands of the minister. Surely the health board or the accreditation board operator can make a recommendation. But once again this is a politically driven lip-service. It's like saying to someone, you can make all the recommendations you see fit, but in the end we're going to do whatever we want anyway. Mr. Speaker, I must say this is an arrogant way to govern, even for a socialist government.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health has the strict authority to grant or to refuse a licence, renew a licence, and he can suspend or cancel a licence. It seems that the minister can do whatever he wants.

But I can also guarantee that whenever there's a glitch in the system, the minister will once again point his finger at the health board. After all, this government has created the perfect scapegoat. They have mastered the art of blaming and pointing the finger at someone else. Instead of taking some initiative, some leadership, and some responsibility, they just choose to pass the buck.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are sick and tired of this irresponsibility. The people are intelligent, and they can see through this Teflon armour this NDP government has chosen to wear.

Mr. Speaker, once again I implore the members opposite — any cabinet ministers with integrity and any of the back-benchers — to get your heads out of the sand and take a good hard look at what this government is doing. Hospitals and nursing homes are being shut down. Long-term and acute care beds are disappearing. Seniors are losing their homes. Health care professionals are being driven from their communities. And the list goes on.

Mr. Speaker, it is the job of each and every member of this Assembly to represent their constituents. The members opposite are failing in their role. I say to them again, take responsibility for the choices and the decisions of your government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to take some time today to discuss the impacts that this Bill will have on the people of this province, the people who rely on fully staffed health care facilities today and those that will be relying on these facilities in the future.

I feel that I must bring these issues to the attention of the members opposite as it is quite obvious that they are not thinking of the future of this province. They charge us over and over again with our doom and gloom attitude, and they ask us to move with them into the 21st century.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that I want to be with these people in the 21st century. We will have no affordable care homes to live in, no rural or accessible hospitals to go to, and our children will be forced to care for us in our old age regardless of their financial situations.

From the time that this government was first elected in 1991, promises have been made, and promises have been broken. I feel that it is absolutely appalling that this government feels that it can break its promises on the backs of the sick and elderly of this province. Mr. Speaker, many NDP members have made significant promises about the care that the seniors of our province will receive. In 1991 the former Health minister said to the PCs (Progressive Conservative), and I quote: "Why should the sick and the elderly carry the burden for your incompetence?"

Mr. Speaker, that was five years ago, and this party is still singing the same tune. Well enough is enough. It is time that this government take responsibility for what is happening to health care in this province. The question that I now want to ask is this: why should the sick and elderly carry the burden of the NDP arrogance and their incompetence?

This government campaigned on promises to protect the seniors in this province. They campaigned on promises to make sure that hospitals and care homes will be there for the people who need them. The 1995 NDP election platform states clearly on page 36 that "hospitals will always be there when they're needed." Well, Mr. Speaker, it's barely a year later, and already there are no hospitals in many areas where they are needed, and there will be no hospitals where they are needed in the future.

I would like to use the closure of the Plains Health Centre as an example. This centre is a place for trauma patients. It will gone next year. This is also the only hospital in the city that has a helicopter landing pad. But that too will be gone next year. It is the most accessible hospital for people in the southern part of the province.

But by next year, these people are going to have to travel through Regina to either the General or the Pasqua Hospital which are already bursting at the seams. To add to this, the parking situation at the Pasqua Hospital is appalling, and there is simply is no room for expansion unless, of course, this government is considering building a parkade as part of its cost-saving measures.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP 1995 election campaign platform tells a tale of what this government wants the people of this province to believe it's going to do. When we look around this province, one year later, we see that the election platform is nothing but a bunch of empty promises.

In that election platform, it stated clearly on page 38 that

"Saskatchewan is for a public, universal, accessible, comprehensive, and portable health care system." I beg to differ with that statement, Mr. Speaker. Our system of health care may be public, but due to the cuts and closures since the election, the system of health care in this province is far from accessible and comprehensive.

I have already shown this point with regards to the Plains Health Centre, and I think that if you spoke with anyone in rural or in northern Saskatchewan, they would argue with you about accessibility of health care service in their areas.

(1615)

The 1995 NDP platform document also states that this government wants to "ensure that nurses, doctors, therapists, and other health care providers are full partners in the process from the ground up." Once again, here is an example of a promise that has not been lived up to. If nurses had been involved in the process of hacking apart our health care system, would they have been picketing outside of the Weyburn hospital to oppose the cuts? I urge this government to go out and speak with nurses and doctors across this province and see what they would think about what is happening to the health care system in Saskatchewan. I doubt very much that you will find a lot of contented staff members out there.

The key issue is safety. Many of these nurses fear that the cuts have gone so deep that they just are not able to provide the level of care that is necessary. The basic necessities are not there. The safety of patients is in jeopardy. Many seniors have experienced accidents, have had falls, and have suffered traumatically because of nursing cuts.

Nurses feel badly, but they cannot possibly do more with so little help. The quality of care provided is suffering as there just is not the staff available to provide the care in a sufficient manner. This is not the fault of the nurses, doctors, or any other care-givers. It is the fault of this government who, through funding cuts, shows that it does not believe that the people of our province deserve adequate access to health care facilities and sufficient services in those facilities.

Mr. Speaker, I will give you an example of how these cuts to hospitals and care centres are affecting rural Saskatchewan. The town of Cudworth, which is located in my constituency, has been given a very strong indication that the loss of their hospital may be imminent.

Recently a consultant came out from Regina, just showed up one day and gave a firm recommendation that the towns of Wakaw and Cudworth could start looking at what they will do in light of the possible closure of their hospitals. The review process that was gone through recommended a joint planning committee between the towns of Wakaw and Cudworth to look at alternatives. This review process and a proposal for a joint planning committee is smoke and mirrors.

This is another example of the provincial government attempting to look like it is consulting with individuals who have a stake in the decisions at hand with regard to hospital

closures. The decision had already been made. Some time before this consultant turned up, St. Michael's in Cudworth, along with other facilities in the Central Plains Health District, drew up comprehensive working strategic plan. These were totally rejected. I'm wondering why, if local people are allowed to make their own decisions.

This was also done to the Regina District Health Board regarding the closure of the Plains hospital. They were told to either agree to close the Plains or lose all funding. The decision to close the Plains was like choosing between cutting off your arm or your leg. It was a no-win situation.

The proposal for a joint committee composed of reps from Wakaw and Cudworth, each of which are in two different health districts, is also a no-win situation. This is driving a wedge of bitterness between the centres and creating a feeling of utter contempt for government who is forcing them into this situation.

Mr. Speaker, there is an ever increasing need in rural Saskatchewan for long-term care and hospital care for our province's ageing population. Closing the Plains and other nursing homes has taken away a centre that provides outstanding care to our seniors and to all members of our society. Closing 52 rural hospitals took away care centres for our seniors as well. Now the threat of the closing of the Cudworth hospital takes away one more place that seniors in my constituency could go for care.

The consequences of those drastic cuts to health care facilities are popping up all across the province. A woman from my constituency, a woman from Cudworth, was taken to Saskatoon last summer for tests. Not only did she have to go to two hospitals in Saskatoon before the tests could be done, but she also had to wait for hours for the basic comfort of a bed.

Mrs. Hauber, an 89-year-old woman, suffered through one of the most traumatic events of her life in early August of last year. Not only did Mrs. Hauber have to wait a long period of time to get a bed. The bed that she had to get into was on wheels that were not locked. When Mrs. Hauber tried to get out of the bed, it rolled away from her, and she ended up falling and needing sutures to close up the wound in her forehead. Staff cuts in all hospitals under the direction of this government have lent her these kind of traumatic experiences and many more similar frightening experiences.

Mr. Speaker, for an 89-year-old woman to feel that insecure and that scared in a facility that is supposed to care for people while they are ill is totally unacceptable. Mrs. Hauber went to Saskatoon for chest X-rays and ended up with bruised ribs and stitches in her forehead. How can the Minister of Health honestly say that this is an example of quality health care? This is nothing but an example of people who slip through the cracks of our health care system due to overcrowded hospitals and the lack of staff available to care for these people.

Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Hauber's family took her back to Cudworth hospital to recuperate from her traumatic experience in Saskatoon. What started out as a short trip to Saskatoon for

precautionary treatment turned into a three-month nightmare for herself and her family. What would the Hauber family have done if the Cudworth hospital had been forced to close down? What are people in similar circumstances across rural areas that have already lost their local hospitals to do in similar situations?

Mr. Speaker, the example that I have highlighted today is unfortunately not an isolated incident. This sort of thing happens every day. People are constantly turned away from emergency in Regina and Saskatoon hospitals as there just isn't the room to care for these people. They are oftentimes told to go to their local hospitals or care centres for temporary treatment until a bed opens up in the city. The seniors of Saskatchewan in many circumstances come from areas that no longer have local care centres. They also feel many times that being in a hospital is what they need.

Mr. Speaker, mental and emotional health is just as important to the quality of life as physical health, is it not? Yes, the remaining care centres in Saskatchewan may adequately treat physical ailments, but what about the people, especially seniors, who need a bed for an extra day or two to recuperate emotionally and mentally? These people have nowhere to go.

No, I agree hospitals are not meant to serve as hotels, but they are meant to serve as centres for health treatment for physical, mental, and emotional health care. It is the seniors who suffer the most in this situation. Many of them have little or no family around to care for them and many of their friends do not have the capacity to care for their ageing friends.

Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Hauber was extremely fortunate to have her family with her in time of need. She had her daughter there to look after her and to get the attention of the overworked health care professionals. Had Mrs. Hauber been alone in Saskatoon, there is no telling how long it may have taken for her to be looked after.

Should the Cudworth Hospital be the next one slated for the chopping block, there is no telling how many more people will fall through the cracks. The people of Cudworth and surrounding towns fear that should their hospital close, their access to acceptable levels of care will be non-existent.

I guess if this government does not see the fact that this province is ageing, more people are going to be requiring health care services and there will be nowhere for the people to go. There is no question that waiting-lists are going to increase, not only for surgeries but also to get into long-term care homes, because they are being closed at an astronomical rate.

It is now not quite five years since this NDP government has first been elected, and more than 52 rural hospitals have been closed, and care home after care home is being told that there just is no more money and they will be forced to close their doors.

Do these people not listen to themselves? Do they not hear what they have been telling the people of Saskatchewan for the past five years? Do they honestly think that if they had

campaigned on honesty and told the people of this province of their plans to shut down most every rural care centre across the province, that they would be here today?

Places like the Rose Valley health centre is losing 10 long-term care beds; the Souris Valley Regional Care Centre has been forced to close 20 long-term care beds; the Nirvana Pioneer Villa in Melfort is also losing 20 long-term beds.

How much more can the ageing population of this province take? It looks as though this government is asking the ageing people to leave. The pioneers of this province have no guarantee of anything any more and they are scared stiff, Mr. Speaker.

Introducing legislation such as the one before us today is only adding to the fears of the general population. The baby boomers are worried that they will be caring for their parents; the seniors are worried about being a burden on their kids; and the health care workers worry that adequate health care standards will not be able to be met if there are any more cuts.

I just cannot understand a government that cuts services to the people who will need them the most in coming years. Is it the plan to cut care homes now and then build more of them in 20 or 30 years? I don't see the logic behind that.

Mr. Speaker, it is a well-known fact that the population of Saskatchewan is ageing at a fairly quick pace. The birth rate is decreasing and the baby boomers will be moving into retirement. Where does this government expect these people to go in their latter years?

The scary part of all of this is that the major crunch won't come for another 20 years when all the baby boomers become seniors. For a government that claims to be looking to the 21st century, for a government that claims to be leaving the past behind, this government has not even begun to look at the trends that are going to impact drastically on their current plans.

During the current decade the fastest growing segment of the population is the over 80, low income women. These women are not wealthy. The majority of these women did not have careers outside of the home, and therefore do not have much in terms of independent savings. As well, many of these women's husbands did not have transferable pensions.

It should come as no surprise to members opposite that many of these women are poor and their greatest needs are appropriate housing and good health care. These people are receiving neither, thanks to the cold and callous way that this government has decided to run health and social programs in this province.

The problem facing these people is best summed up by David K. Foote, author of *Boom, Bust & Echo: How to Profit from the Coming Demographic Shift*. Mr. Foote states in this book, and I quote:

The public sector is too preoccupied with deficit cutting to think about imaginative solutions to social problems, and the senior seniors are too poor to interest the private sector.

It is true that some seniors are well enough to live in their own homes but that does not mean that care homes and hospitals can continue to close at the current pace. Many of these seniors live in rural communities that no longer have care homes or health centres. So where are the seniors supposed to go in time of need?

I just cannot believe that members of this government are naïve enough to think that if they close hospitals people won't get sick; that if they shut down care homes for seniors, people won't get old. What kind of mentality is that?

Mr. Speaker, in the last five years the number of seniors in this province has increased by over 12,000. That means that there are 12,000 more people needing, now or in the future, special care in their communities. There are over 147,000 seniors in this province today. The message that this government is sending out to people is that the seniors of this province do not count. They are not in the workforce. They are not creating jobs, and therefore they do not count.

Now what kind of message is this to send to the pioneers of this province? We will all be seniors one day, and we all hope that there will be facilities that can take care of our needs.

As families move around the country and there is less of a nuclear family staying in small communities, there is no longer the option of moving in with one's children. This just is not an option for many seniors today. Where are these people supposed to go? Yes, home care is a good solution for many seniors who only need light care. But what about the level 3 and 4 patients who simply cannot be cared for at home?

The Minister of Health goes on and on, saying that no one will be kicked out into the street. But he has yet to say where these people will be placed. He has yet to come up with a viable option for the seniors of this province. Maybe if this minister spent a little less time dealing with the legal aspects and spent a little more time working with the human side of things, he would be able to understand the relevant concerns facing the seniors of our province.

Mr. Speaker, the former Health minister made some very interesting statements on health care reform in 1992. The former minister said, and I quote:

The fact of the matter is, if you move people out of hospitals and into the community, you provide not only a higher quality of health care, but at a reduced cost to the health care system.

(1630)

Mr. Speaker, I think that we could all agree with the premiss of that statement. But the fact of the matter is that this simply is not happening. Yes, people are being moved out of hospitals, but they are not being moved into their communities because their community's care home has been closed down. Funding to care homes that could care for the seniors of our province is being cut off, leaving these people alone and faced with a move into Saskatoon or Regina.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill gives the Minister of Health such blatant powers over licensing of health care facilities. I do not believe that any one person should have the express power to do what he wants when he wants, without consulting with the people that will be affected by this decision.

This NDP Party is governing like it's going to be in power for ever. I don't know who they think they're fooling. The people of this province all see how the health care system in rural Saskatchewan is being destroyed, and they are not going to stand for it.

Believe me, when election time comes around in three years, the people of this province will not forget what the NDP Party has done to health care. The people whose parents' care homes were closed will not forget. The people who had to wait months for surgery will not forget. The people who had to drive for hours just to get basic health care will not forget. The doctors and the nurses of this province will not forget. Memories are not that short, Mr. Speaker, especially considering the fact that the problems arising with regards to health care cuts will only increase as time goes on, as the number of seniors in our province continues to rise.

I would like to close by saying that this government is governing as though it is going to be in power for ever. Consultation is not an issue for them, nor are the views of the general public. I urge this government to open its eyes and see what is happening in this province. Listen to what the people are telling you, and govern in the way in which you were elected to do, by representing the views and the needs of the people who elected you.

Therefore I move adjournment of the debate on Bill 82. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 114

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 114 — An Act respecting the Establishment of a Crown Foundation for District Health Boards and their Affiliates** be now read a second time.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A few days ago, my colleague from Melfort-Tisdale spoke on this Bill in the House. And in his speech he told the government members they were digging themselves deeper and deeper into a hole — deeper and deeper into a hole over their short-sighted and heartless health care policy. And the members opposite, in their indifference, laughed.

They laughed at the very notion that the people of Saskatchewan are turning against them in their health care policy. The members opposite, in their arrogance, are seemingly oblivious to the fear that they have created in this province. They are seemingly oblivious to the anger that is springing out of this fear.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a growing opposition that is out there, especially in rural areas. Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, rural people are angry, and they've been angry for quite some time. They're angry because they know in a province governed by the NDP people, people in rural Saskatchewan have been treated like second-class citizens. Since 1991, this government has done everything in its power to make the lives of every man, woman, and child in rural Saskatchewan just that much more difficult.

It began with the tearing up of legally binding GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) contracts. It continued with the shameful neglect of the highway system throughout our province.

And on and on it went, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The cancellation of the RUD (rural underground distribution) program, even though it was proven to save lives; the broken promise to return VLT (video lottery terminal) money to our smaller communities; the cut-backs in education and closure of schools in many of our small towns; the closing of government services outside of the city, even court-houses, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How much more can the people of Saskatchewan take?

But probably the worst indignity people have had to suffer through is the absolute decimation of health care in this province. This is the worst, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it's more than simply a mere inconvenience. It's a threat to the health and lives of people throughout our province — people, citizens, taxpayers who no longer have ready access to emergency service, who no longer have access to acute care, who no longer have access to nursing homes in their communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite laugh when they hear all is not well in our province. Their so-called wellness model has been somewhat of a disaster for most residents of this province.

Only the government opposite could hack and slash its way through our health care system and ending up spending as much as they were five years ago. In fact the Health minister uses that telling figure as a defence. He says there's no problem in our health care system because, look, we're spending as much as we always were. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's a misleading argument because the money is being spent but the minister . . . because the money is being spent the minister would claim that they're doing a good job.

But the minister who sits in this House every day has evaded answering the question which is on everyone's mind — where is that money being spent? Because it certainly isn't being spent on the sick; it certainly isn't being spent on the elderly.

I would challenge the minister to actually go out to the communities he says he is serving so well — go out to Swift Current, go out to Melfort, go out to Estevan, go out to any of the dozens of small communities that no longer have direct access to doctors, or any health care at all.

I would challenge the minister or the Premier to look out the

window next time they're flying from Regina to Saskatoon. Look down. There are real people down there. They are the people your policies have forgotten. They are the ones that no longer fit in your plans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would challenge them to go out to these areas and ask the people what they think of the NDP's health care policies now. I challenge them to go out there and try to continue to portray themselves as the defenders of health care in our province. I challenge them to go out there and try once more to hold themselves up as a party that's out to protect the people.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I doubt if the Premier or the minister are willing to take up the challenge because I think they know what kind of reception they would get. Try as they might to pass the blame off on someone else, the people know where the buck stops. It stops right at the desks of the Premier and the Minister of Health.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this Bill we see that the government does indeed have a plan, a plan to deal with its own lack of commitment to health care in Saskatchewan. And that plan is craftily constructed, and it's one relying on charity — charity, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our health care system which used to have five basic principles now has a sixth: charity. Or perhaps I should say there are now five and a half principles, because seemingly the principle of public funding by the provincial government seems to have gone by the wayside, or at least it's heading in that direction.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are very giving by nature. Prior to health reform, many of our citizens helped their communities raise millions and millions of dollars to improve health care in their communities. But then along came the heavy hand of health reform, and those funds were put into jeopardy.

The people saw their truly local representatives, those who volunteered to run the local institutions, pushed aside and replaced with district health boards. That wouldn't have been so bad if the government had played fair ball and made these boards truly effective and truly representative. But the NDP, in its cynical brand of politics, struck out on both those counts. As the people have come to see, these boards are not allowed by this government to be effective. Nor are they representative. While many good people were elected to the boards, they have neither the power nor the influence to go against the government's bidding.

One need only look a few blocks from here to see that. When the Regina Health District Board was trying to decide how to cope with the lack of funds provided by this government, government officials basically told them they had to close the Plains hospital — no discussion. It wasn't up to the board. The government held its gun to the board's head. What other choice did they have, other than to do the government's bidding? No choice whatsoever, Mr. Speaker.

And let's turn to the representative part of the argument, Mr. Speaker. Not only do these boards not have the power to act

without the government's consent. The NDP made sure that it would get its way by giving itself a way to effectively stack the district boards. They couldn't simply have the people of Saskatchewan elect these boards. They couldn't trust the people to do that. Instead they had to reserve spots on these boards that would allow them to appoint members they knew would be inclined to do anything that the NDP wanted without questions asked.

Is it any wonder the people of Saskatchewan are less than enthusiastic about these boards? Is it any wonder the people can see right through this government's charade when it tries to pass the blame for cut-backs off onto these boards? If the government thinks the people are fooled by these kinds of games, they should think again.

Now the Health minister wants the people of Saskatchewan to donate a fifth of their incomes to these boards. Where does the government opposite get off on telling the people that they have to do more to ensure the viability of health care in their communities? The government is quickly abandoning its commitment to health care, and now it wants residents to come in and pick up the slack.

Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that, as always with Saskatchewan people, they will do everything in their ability to help the health care system to survive. But in return they expect the government to do the same. And, Mr. Speaker, they expect the government to deal with them openly and honestly.

The people of Saskatchewan are among the most generous in the world. But people here are also among the proudest in the world. They have worked very hard, and they've sacrificed time and time again to build this province. They will not sit idly back and watch this government destroy everything the people built and then watch that same government turn around and tell them that they have to do more.

Residents of Saskatchewan will not be treated with contempt by a government that will not own up to its own responsibilities. They will not continue to pay among the highest taxes in the world while seeing their basic needs ignored by this government. They will not believe in a government which sees the need for 19 cabinet ministers, for two ministers of Education and two ministers of gambling while ignoring the needs of the people. They will not put up with a government which cries poor one day and then defends an expensive union-preference policy the next.

The people of this province are wise to this, Mr. Speaker. The government in its unbelievable arrogance may not want to believe that, but we on this side certainly know that. The people can now see through this insidious propaganda machine that is this government, and they are at the end of their rope, Mr. Speaker. Their patience is at an end.

But the government's incessant preoccupation with control knows no bounds. Now it wants to set up a whole new level of health care bureaucracy. To oversee the generosity of the Saskatchewan people, the government wants to appoint 12 more people who will have the authority to control the money

contributed by the people of this province. Seemingly there are no guarantees how this money will be spent. The people can't really be assured that the money stays in their own communities. This government-appointed board will control the money. And because it is appointed by the government, in reality, as everything else dealing with health care in this province, it will be the government who will be in control.

Why, if these health district boards were put in place to control health care, why can't people simply make their donations to them? And if the donors would so wish, they could specify their desire as to the use of the money accordingly. Why the need for further appointees? Why the need for even greater government control?

Because, Mr. Speaker, this government knows no bounds when it comes to control. Yet even after they have that power, they take no responsibility for it. They in fact practise what we've come to describe as selective responsibility in that regard, where they do like to take acclaim when there's good news to be presented, but when there are difficult decisions to make it's quite another case. They continue to throw their hands up in the air and say that there's nothing that they can do. They say people should talk to the district boards, or they should talk to the federal government. They should talk to anyone but the provincial government because there's nothing they can do — or so the members opposite would have us believe.

Their problem is, Mr. Speaker, no one does believe them — not any longer. The smoke has cleared, and the mirrors have been shattered. No longer will the people stand for this government's excuses. People are now demanding they own up to their responsibilities, the responsibility they were given when the people elected them to govern.

(1645)

The people wanted a government that's willing to take action, to show some leadership. They don't want and they certainly don't need a government that can only think of more people to blame for their own doing.

Mr. Speaker, you've probably gathered from my comments that I'm not in favour of this Bill. I'm not against the generosity of the people of the province, nor am I against those people using their money in any good cause that they would see fit. But I am absolutely opposed to the way the members opposite have continued to treat the people of Saskatchewan. I'm against the abdication of responsibility continuously shown by this government. And I'm most certainly against the continued deterioration of Saskatchewan's health care system.

Mr. Speaker, as far as I'm concerned, Bill 114 is more of the same from this government. Because of its own decisions, its own choices, the government finds itself in a bind. Their much-vaunted health reform program was undertaken with no plan in place. Cuts were made. Services were reduced before this government had a clear vision of which direction it was headed. And now that they find themselves in a worsening and deeper pit day by day, they are grasping at any straw that they can find. They are pointing fingers in all directions to find the

next scapegoat.

The Tories proved a convenient excuse for a few years. Then it was the federal government's turn to take the blame. Then the government began blaming the cuts on their own district health boards.

And now comes the final insult. Now the finger of blame has come to rest on the people of Saskatchewan. In fact I recall Health department officials being on record in the media in this regard as saying something to the effect that they expect to have every fallen sparrow laid at the foot of health reform. And this reference was in fact being made to the very victims of the health care mess that we find ourselves in today. These are the very people who have suffered through cut after cut in their health care at the hands of this government.

Now the government is telling them they have to do more. They have to donate more. Over and above their taxes, they have to scrape up more cash to contribute to the Crown foundation for health districts.

Mr. Speaker, you just have to wonder how far out of touch the members opposite have become. And we know, Mr. Speaker, how far they've gotten out of touch, and so do the rest of the people of this province.

And I can just recall a rally in Moose Jaw last week where the government was reminded that they will find out at the ballot box in this regard. And if the Premier or the Health minister or any member opposite actually open-mindedly takes a trip out into the areas of the province devastated by this government with respect to health care, they'll also soon know.

So I have nothing further to add at this time, Mr. Speaker, and I would at this time move adjournment of debate on Bill 114. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.

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