

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of the great community of Balcarres. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to establish a special task force to aid the government in its fight against the escalating problem of youth crime in Saskatchewan, in light of the most recent wave of property crime charges, including car thefts, as well as crimes of violence, including the charge of attempted murder of a police officer; such task force to be comprised of representatives of the RCMP, municipal police forces, community leaders, representatives of the Justice department, youth outreach organizations, and other organizations committed to the fight against youth crime.

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

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to establish a special task force to aid the government in its fight against the escalating problem of youth crime in Saskatchewan, in light of the most recent wave of property crime charges, including car thefts, as well as crimes of violence, including the charge of attempted murder of a police officer; such task force to be comprised of representatives of the RCMP, municipal police forces, community leaders, representatives of the Justice department, youth outreach organizations, and other organizations committed to the fight against youth crime.

And the people that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Veregin and Kamsack. And I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to present petitions today to do with the problem of youth crime:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to establish a special task force to aid the government in its fight against the escalating problem of youth crime in Saskatchewan, in light of the most recent wave of property crime charges, including car thefts, as well as crimes of violence, including the charge of attempted murder of a police officer; and such task force to be comprised of representatives of the RCMP, municipal police forces, community leaders, representatives of the Justice department, youth outreach organizations, and other organizations committed to the fight against youth crime.

The petitioners, Mr. Speaker, are from the town of Kamsack.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to establish a task force to aid in the fight against youth crime.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the members of the Assembly, I'd like to introduce 12 very important people from Porcupine Plain. They're the air cadets. Along with them are their chaperons Brenda Kipling and Ted Kwiatkowski, as well as 2nd Lieut. Teale and 2nd Lieut. Green.

We all know that there's a lot of commitment and work involved in being a cadet, not only with the cadets themselves but also with their instructors. So welcome to all of you and I look forward to meeting you later.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to join the member from Kelvington-Wadena to welcome the air cadet squadron from Porcupine Plain. Because you see, Mr. Speaker, Porcupine Plain is right on the edge of the Carrot River constituency; so I know that some of the cadets are certainly from my constituency.

I want to welcome them all here today. Have an enjoyable visit and have a great and safe trip home. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and this Assembly, 15 students from St. George School seated in your gallery. They are accompanied by their teacher, Brennan Merkosky, and chaperons, Marge Larnus and Rob Barth. And they've travelled here from Wilkie to visit us. I will be joining them later for drinks and a photo, so please make them welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege and a pleasure for me this morning to introduce to you and through you to you to all members of the Assembly, 135 students seated in the west gallery and the east gallery from across Saskatchewan. They're from across Saskatchewan and also from our neighbouring province, Manitoba.

I'd like the Manitoba students to know that our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families as they address the floods in their province.

They're here as a part of a youth leadership conference sponsored by the Health Education Association of Saskatchewan, which is a coalition of education professionals, health professionals, and others interested in supporting health education in schools.

So with that in mind, for the past three years, the health education association has been working with youth from all over our province and neighbouring provinces on a project to develop leadership skills in the area of health and take those skills back into their communities and their schools.

They're accompanied this morning by Dale Bayley, who is the president of the association; by Shaine Peters, the youth adviser; by Lisa Williams, the coordinator; and they're looking forward to, following question period, meeting with myself, and I've also arranged that they would be meeting with our Minister of Health.

Their motto is "tobacco stinks" and they want to tell us if there are any stinky parts to the legislation that still need to be addressed, Mr. Speaker.

So I'm very excited to be able to introduce them to you and to meet with them. I ask all members to behave during question period, and to give them a warm welcome. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the rest of the members of the Assembly, I'd like to introduce a constituent of mine from Liberty, Mr. Don Wolff, in your gallery this morning. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Wolff is here today in the hopes of meeting with the Premier later on and presenting him with 750 letters from concerned citizens around Saskatchewan. So I'd ask the Assembly to please welcome Mr. Wolff here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to join with the member from Regina Wascana Plain in welcoming all the students who are here, but specifically pointing out a few students from the Windthorst area, I see. And Gordon Bates, a teacher from that area; Betty Metzler, who's a health coordinator, health nurse.

Mr. Speaker, I had the distinct pleasure of meeting with some of these students and discussing this issue of smoking. And the question I guess that was pointed to me quite directly is, was I in favour of banning smoking in public places? And I think I . . . I hope I got the message across.

It was certainly an honour to work with them, and the fact that we do want to have smoking in public places such as we have in the Assembly here today. And I think it's very good that students are taking a very sincere interest in this . . . on this topic, especially when we look at the statistics that are pointing out that young people are becoming more involved.

And I want to commend the students, and I certainly encourage

them in all their efforts and their deliberation. I welcome them to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take pleasure in introducing to you and ask other hon. members to kindly join me in welcoming Vi Campbell and her son Colin to the legislature this morning from North Battleford.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, some friends visiting with us this weekend — Peggy Pitzel, sitting in your gallery, and four of her children. There's Meagan, Spencer, Mari, and Chloe, and I'd ask that all members welcome them here today, and they are very pleased to not have to be in school today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislative Assembly some 14 grade 4 and 5 students in the east gallery. These students are from the Climax School in my constituency. They have with them today, and my eyesight won't be able to pick them out, but Lee Jensen-Guenther, a teacher; and Janice Gilroy, and chaperons Richie Ostrander and Judy Klein. And I want everyone to welcome them here today.

As many members know, Climax has been raised on several issues in this legislature in the past few years, and I heard on the radio this morning yet another incident in Climax. A good friend of mine, and a friend of many of the people up in the gallery today . . . have a 6/49 winner from the community of Climax — some \$5.3 million winner. Yes — Allan Mything was the . . . Allan Mything. And not only did he win once on last Wednesday but he had two tickets that won. He had a second ticket that won \$2,200. So congratulations to Allan and thanks for coming to the legislature today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Saskatchewan Youth Association on Tobacco Prevention

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very happy earlier to introduce a group of students who have come to Regina to develop a provincial youth association dedicated to tobacco prevention among their peers and their communities. I'm equally happy to recognize them and the urgency of their task in a member's statement today.

Their message is simple and forceful — tobacco stinks. Their suggestions are openly challenging to us and to all legislators at all levels — make it illegal for minors to possess tobacco; make it practically impossible to find a public place to use it; and improve enforcement of measures that are already in place.

We in this Assembly have made some progress. For instance, the former Health minister, Louise Simard, banished smoking from this building. I think it fair to say that the people's building should not stink.

But I can also understand the impatience of the health education association and of the young people who have come together to plan their strategy. After all, recently one tobacco company admitted what we already knew — that young people are the target of tobacco advertising.

We can all do more — individuals and government. Not to be overly dramatic, but we can do more because this really is a matter of life and death. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

YWCA Women of Distinction Fund-raising Banquet

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night 12 Saskatchewan women were honoured at the YWCA's Women of Distinction fund-raising banquet. These women were awarded for their contributions to arts, science, sport, business, humanitarian service, health, and work for rural communities.

I would like to express my congratulations to these women for their dedication and their commitment to their careers and their communities. Congratulations as well to the YWCA on their most successful dinner event ever. It raised \$50,000 for the YWCA battered women's shelter.

The YWCA's achievement is twofold. By recognizing the outstanding women of this province, they help provide role models for aspiring young women. They also raise money for women in crisis — women who are outstanding in their own right by the strength of their own determination and courage in beginning a new life.

Saskatchewan women are resourceful and dedicated. These 12 women represent what we can do when we set our minds to it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join with my colleague, the member from Kelvington-Wadena, in recognizing some remarkable women in this province. Last night I and more than 600 other people attended the 15th annual Regina YWCA Women of Distinction dinner and awards ceremony. And a fine evening it was, Mr. Speaker.

Two significant things happened. First, more than \$50,000 was raised for the Y, most of which will go to the Isabel Johnson Shelter and residence. That in itself is reason enough for the evening. But as well, 12 women were honoured for their contribution in their field to our community.

It should be pointed out, Mr. Speaker, that there were 12 winners, but many nominees in each field, any one of whom would have been an equally deserving winner. That's a long way of saying we have a lot of talented, committed women in Saskatchewan.

Time allows me only to name the award winners. In science and technology, Katherine Berman. The young woman of distinction was Christine Stapleton. Schmirler the curler's rink was named in sports and recreation. The arts and culture award went to Gail Bowen.

Sheryl Simons won the business, labour, and professions award. Keitha Kennedy in community and humanitarian service. Verna Thompson for contribution to a rural community. And there was a tie for the health and wellness recognition — Janice Cibart and Hilary Craig.

My congratulations to all winners and all nominees. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Construction of Balcarres Grain Terminal

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to draw to the attention of the House a development going on near the community of Balcarres in my constituency. And I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to explain to the House that thanks to the initiative of several residents throughout the area, the sod will be turned this July on one of the largest projects to hit Balcarres in many years. Terminal 22 expects to start construction this summer on a \$14 million inland grain terminal 1 mile west of Balcarres. When construction is completed on the facility in the autumn of 1998, there'll be 20 jobs created and that number is expected to jump to 30 jobs by the third year of the facility's operation.

Mr. Speaker, the terminal will have a storage capacity of between 1.1 and 1.2 million bushels. Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer my congratulations to Bill Huber, president of Terminal 22, and the 21 other directors who launched their efforts about two years ago. Their efforts and success show the initiative of the people of Saskatchewan. Perhaps the government can take some lessons from this group in its own economic development efforts. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Soil Conservation Week

Mr. Flavel: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the members of the Assembly that this week has been designated as National Soil Conservation Week. It serves as a special reminder of our need to conserve the resource that is fundamental to our Saskatchewan way of life — the soil.

This week is designed to increase the public awareness that our producers are taking steps to conserve the soil and implement environmentally sustainable agricultural practices.

While we have encouraged diversification within the agricultural industry, while we have sought ways to increase profitability, and while we have elevated our competitiveness worldwide, we must also take precautions to protect the health of the soil and the water resources that make such economic activity possible.

The soil is a fragile resource. It must be protected and nurtured

to ensure a healthy and prosperous agri-food industry.

The agri-food innovation fund has recently provided \$5.5 million in funding to assist with the development and adoption of emerging sustainable farming practices. This investment in sustainable agriculture will ensure Saskatchewan farmers and processors continued success in their endeavour. But it also recognizes the importance of conserving our soil resources for our future generations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Cancer Month Recognition

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is cancer month and I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the seriousness of the disease and the excellent work being done in this province on cancer research and care.

Too many people in this province have had a personal experience with cancer as a victim, a loved one, a friend. Too many of us have felt the devastating impact of this disease. Last year there were 5,724 cancer victims and the predictions for 1997 are grim — 4,700 new cancer cases in Saskatchewan, 2,200 cancer-related deaths.

This month dedicated volunteers are canvassing to raise funds for cancer research. An awareness campaign is under way to raise the profile of what needs to be done to combat the disease. Over 10,000 volunteers in Saskatchewan contributed to the \$33.5 million raised nationally by the cancer society. Talk to cancer survivors in Saskatchewan and they will talk about the Canadian Cancer Society and the Saskatchewan Cancer Foundation. Cancer affects aspects of people's lives and these two organizations provide a network of care, support, and hope for those affected by this terrible disease.

I salute those involved in the fight against cancer. Your hard work and dedication has made a difference in the lives of so many people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

News Media Accountability

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Historic leaps often take place a small step at a time. Consider this: everyone agrees that open and accountable government is desirable, even necessary, in a democracy.

We know this is so because the more steps we take to be open, the more the ever-vigilant media find to criticize. This reminds us, of course, that in a democratic society the news media play a vital role in the functioning of that society. And believe it or not, we down here recognize that role. It may gripe us from time to time, but we do value it.

But we toiling in the pit down here also believe that what is sauce for the political goose should also be spread over the media who gander at us. If we should be open and accountable, so should you.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report a first, small, important step. Two days ago Regina CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) *News Hour* allowed a camera into its story meeting for the day. The meeting was broadcast that evening on Cable Regina. This amazing crack into media secrecy came about because of the efforts of the Coalition for News Media Literacy and its journalism at work program, a program designed to introduce to the public the internal workings of journalism.

First the CBC, Mr. Speaker, tomorrow Conrad Black; someday we might even be exposed to the inner working of Murray Mandryk, a day we look forward to with co-mingled dread and anticipation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

1997 Anavet Cup Winners — Weyburn Red Wings

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, recently I congratulated the Weyburn Red Wings for winning the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League Championship. At that time I mentioned the Red Wings were hoping to qualify for a national championship. Well, Mr. Speaker, last night I witnessed that wish become a reality along with 1,900 cheering fans.

For the past week the Red Wings have been taking on the best junior team from Manitoba, the St. James Canadians, to decide the Anavet Cup. The Red Wings may have lost the first game, but they came back with four straight decisive wins. Last night they clinched the 1997 Anavet Cup and with it the right to compete in the Royal Bank Cup in Prince Edward Island, May 3 to May 11.

The Red Wings are one of only five teams from across Canada competing for this cup. Judging by the decisive way the Red Wings disposed of recent opponents, they have the talent, skill, and drive to win the Royal Bank Cup for Saskatchewan. The Red Wings have proven themselves to be a truly great hockey team. As one of the players said last night, we just refuse to take no for an answer.

The players, coaches, manager, and trainers have all worked hard to achieve this level. The entire Weyburn area and the province of Saskatchewan is extremely proud of your accomplishment and we're behind you all the way to P.E.I. (Prince Edward Island).

Please join me in congratulating this remarkable group of athletes, the Weyburn Red Wing organization, on winning the Anavet Cup and wish them well as they compete at the national level. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hospitality Network Movies

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

you'll have to bear with me this morning as I am somewhat tired, as I spent a good part of the night doing research.

Yesterday we brought to the attention of the public the fact that the provincial government is peddling XXX movies to hotel patrons in Saskatchewan. The minister in charge of "SaskPorn" described her government's relationship with the Hospitality Network as a strategic alliance. She also told this House she is proud to be associated with the Hospitality Network. Somehow I don't believe the general public would be proud of their government as a promoter of porn.

Madam Minister, you indicated yesterday that you would verify if XXX movies were being distributed, as we have suggested. Have you checked into this issue and are you now prepared to tell this House that SaskTel is getting out of the XXX business?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very sorry that the member opposite had to spend his night researching — I guess lurking in a hotel room surfing the Net for his definition of . . . But I think he should be very careful, Mr. Speaker, because when he uses the word, pornography, he is accusing a Crown of violating the Criminal Code of Canada. And this, Mr. Speaker, is not the case.

What the procedure is, is that the distributor, the Hospitality Network, buys movies, entertainment packages, which come from a distributor in Quebec. They are rated there with the Ontario film classification code. When they arrive in Saskatchewan they're referred to the Justice department and they're approved, rated, by the Film Classification Board of Saskatchewan. And they are not approved for viewing in Saskatchewan hotels or any venues unless they're approved by our Film Classification Board.

So I have faith in their judgement, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskTel Blocking Fee

Mr. Bjornerud: — Madam Minister, all we're talking about really is what's right and what's wrong. And when a member of the family of Crown corporations is promoting pornography, I think we all agree that's wrong.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition hears from people on a consistent basis who have concerns about the easy accessibility children have to 1 900 numbers. The latest such call comes from Bud Penny of Christopher Lake who discovered on a recent phone bill that a member of his family had run up a \$400 phone bill as a result of 1 900 calls.

When Mr. Penny contacted SaskTel about blocking the 1 900 service from his home telephone, he was informed this would require a \$9 charge and an additional monthly fee.

Will the minister in charge of SaskTel explain why parents who want to prevent their children from accessing pornography are

forced to pay to block this service?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I certainly acknowledge that there is a nominal fee for blocking the service. But it should be remembered that there are very many legitimate uses for the 1 900 number. For instance, many manufacturers list a 1 900 number for warranty information for their products. There are information services, a large number of information services, that use the 1 900 number.

So if a subscriber wants to block the 1 900 number for all purposes, there is a fee because it requires an alteration in the equipment, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Madam Minister, you're providing a service that all patrons out there do not want to receive, and they definitely should not have to pay to block it.

Mr. Speaker, it may interest the members of this House to know that while our provincial telephone company charges a blocking fee, its counterparts in Alberta and Manitoba, TELUS and MTS (Manitoba Telephone System), do not. Our neighbouring provinces have decided that parents should not have to pay a fee to protect their children from 1 900 pornographic services.

Why do you feel SaskTel has the right to gouge parents who are only trying to protect their children? Do you not think SaskTel has a responsibility to help keep pornography out of the reach of our youth?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat that there are many, very many legitimate uses for the 1 900 service. And I don't think that a one-time fee of \$9 could be considered gouging, Mr. Speaker. And that's what the charge is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Board Information Availability

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning we heard from the member from Regina Victoria talking about open and accountable government and I just want to point out one example here of what a joke that is, Mr. Speaker.

Recently, when the residents of the community of Wadena tried to access some information regarding their hospital through the district health board, they were told that if they wanted the information they would have to go through the freedom of information Act to receive this information.

Now these health boards are a creation of this government. They're a front for the government's health policy and a front for the government downloading.

Will the Minister of Health explain today why residents have to fight their way through bureaucracy and red tape to find information out that should be readily available to them?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member from Arm River — the Liberal member from Arm River — once again that the president of the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan, one Anita Bergman, is a member of the Regina District Health Board, an elected member.

Is the member from Arm River suggesting that the president of the Liberal Party is a front for the provincial government? I don't think so.

Mr. Speaker, it's a ridiculous assertion. But I would say this to the House and to the people: the member wants to talk about openness and democracy — the leader of the member's party, one Dr. Jim Melenchuk, is on record as saying that the elected health boards in this province should be abandoned and that we should replace them with 450 boards, the members of which would be hand-picked by him, Mr. Speaker.

Now that kind of system, going back to 450 hand-picked, appointed boards, may be that party's idea of democracy; our idea of democracy is to elect members of district health boards, Mr. Speaker, and we will side with the people on this issue, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess there's a perfect example and a good reason why we would want to do away with the district health boards, if they're not accountable to the people who elected them, in particular not accountable by the members that were appointed by that government, Mr. Speaker.

We have seen the gag orders, Mr. Speaker, placed on health care workers; we've seen gag orders placed on board members; we see important health issues being discussed and implemented behind closed doors that are affecting these very residents that have been stonewalled by these district health boards.

On behalf of the residents of Wadena, Mr. Speaker, and the rest of the residents of Saskatchewan, what's the minister going to do about this problem?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — What we are not going to do about this problem, Mr. Speaker, is to abandon the public medicare system.

I want to remind the House that that member is on record, Mr. Speaker, not only as wanting unelected, undemocratic, 450 boards hand-picked by the Liberal Party, that member is on record as favouring a private system of medicine, a two-tiered system of medicine.

And I want to quote once again. That member on May 1, 1996 said this, Mr. Speaker:

If there are people that are prepared to pay, (meaning pay for their health care) then I think we have to let them pay.

That's what that member says.

Now then we have, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Liberal Party saying this about privatizing our hospitals. He says:

If private clinics can deliver the same level of service as hospitals and make a profit, I don't have a problem with that.

Well we do have a problem with that, Mr. Speaker. We're in favour of the public medicare system. We're going to keep public medicare; not a private, two-tiered system that that member wants to set up.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess when you have a government that doesn't want to be open and accountable and does everything behind closed doors — and we could point out a dozen issues in the last two months, Mr. Speaker — why would they want to pass that on to district health boards? Why would they say to the district health boards, you be open and accountable; we're not but you should be?

I'll ask the minister once more: Mr. Minister, what are you planning to do with the district health boards to ensure that residents who are directly affected by decisions made by the district boards are . . . what are you going to do to enable them to get the necessary answers that they need to the questions and be open and accountable, of which you are not?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I have faith in the local health boards; I have faith in the people of local communities and I'm going to let them decide what decisions are appropriate for their communities. And what we're not going to do is have private medicine; what we're not going to do is get rid of the medicare system; and what we're not going to do is follow the advice of Dr. Melenchuk, who says this — this is a quote from the *Leader-Post*, September 25, 1996:

Melenchuk prefers the Australian or "regional" model of medicine where there is primary care (that means a doctor's office) for populations of about 10,000 in rural areas integrated with secondary care or hospitals for populations of about 100,000.

What that party is saying, Mr. Speaker, is that we should have hospitals in two cities in Saskatchewan: Saskatoon and Regina. That's what they say, Mr. Speaker.

We're not going to adopt that model; we're going to keep the system we've got in this province which has served us well, Mr. Speaker, which is the public medicare system, Mr. Speaker. That's the system that the people want; that's the system that we're going to keep.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Condie-Queen Elizabeth Power Line

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While we're on the subject of open and accountable government, of which the NDP (New Democratic Party) are not, let's talk about the Condie power line for a minute — open and accountable.

Here's a government, that while the taxpayers of Stalwart were in the courts, proceeded with building the line in the Stalwart area. While we're in the courts in the Meewasin Valley Authority — and that one's still in the courts — they proceeded and finished the line at the tune of \$300,000 of taxpayers' money.

Mr. Speaker, today we have a gentleman from Liberty, Mr. Don Wolff, who has driven in here today to present the Premier with 750 letters of concerned citizens around the province about the lack of accountability of this government — of the Premier and his government.

Mr. Premier, will you agree to meet with this member, Mr. Wolff in the Speaker's gallery today, receive those letters, and listen to the concerns of the people from around the province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the hon. member didn't extend the courtesy to my office or to me requesting a meeting. And as the hon. member will understand, my agenda for today is quite committed and quite pre-committed.

I will obviously have enough time to take the petitions from the member. My suggestion would be that perhaps the minister of Power and the Deputy Premier on my behalf, if the time is available, will meet after question period with the individual involved.

But I do wish the members, generally speaking, not on Condie, just generally . . . I know this politics — this high politics. If you want legitimate discussion about legitimate problems, please give the ministers just some forewarning so that we can rearrange agendas, rearrange meetings, before question periods. So that we can meet with these people on a legitimate basis rather than getting up and grandstanding and grandstanding only.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your ministers have known for over two years that this Condie line was going to be rammed through to the people of Arm River and the landowners contained.

The reason that there was such short notice this morning, Mr. Premier, was because the gentleman from Liberty — we weren't sure if we could get him in. He is here. I think it's incumbent upon you to meet with him. If your Deputy Premier wants to be there, I would appreciate that. If the minister

responsible for SaskPower can be there, I would be happy to that too.

It's not grandstanding — any more, Mr. Premier, than you yesterday with the issue of timing where you closed debate. You can get up and grandstand and knock the federal Liberals, the provincial Liberals, and everybody concerned. So don't talk about grandstanding to me, Mr. Premier. You're the one that's great at doing it; so please meet with Mr. Wolff.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, obviously the Liberals are extremely sensitive about their federal counterparts in Ottawa, and they're very sensitive about the variety of the very embarrassing issues they have found themselves in.

When the member gets up and says that the Condie line has been rammed through . . . I think the Condie line started in what? 1992 — 1992 we are told. The minister in charge tells me three-quarters of the people affected have voluntarily entered into arrangements with the Saskatchewan Power Corporation in this situation.

Now listen. I understand the hon. member's request, that there is a person who has a petition and wants to present it to the government. Fair enough, we'll receive the petition.

What I'm saying about grandstanding is you cannot . . . since this matter has been going since 1992, you cannot get up in — you can do it, but you can't do it credibly — you can't get up in question period, giving no notice to myself or to other ministers — and this is a habit that you and your party have adopted — and saying right away, will you meet, will you put everything aside and meet. I'm simply saying that is not fair to government and it's not fair to the person who's come this way.

If you want a legitimate discussion of the issues involved, give us some fair warning and stop your political grandstanding on this issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier would listen to my response, I indicated the reason why we couldn't give too much notice, because Mr. Wolff was having a problem getting in here this morning.

How much notice, Mr. Premier, did you give to us yesterday morning on your motion? Who was grandstanding? You were grandstanding, Mr. Premier, trying to make politics out of something that you'd tried to make the people of the province believe that you were sincere about, in wanting to fix the time thing. We're sincere about fixing that and our leader was working on that much before your grandstanding in here yesterday morning, Mr. Premier. So don't talk to us about grandstanding and politics. You're great at grandstanding and politics and hiding behind district health boards and everyone else.

So, Mr. Premier, for once do the honourable thing — take the

time out of your busy schedule and meet with Mr. Wolff.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says to members of government, regardless of the political stripe of the government — without any notice, whatever you've lined up by terms of agendas or meetings with officials or other people, whatever the obligations are, without giving the government any notice — your obligation, he says to the front bench, is to drop everything in order to hear this particular important issue. That's what the hon. member says.

An Hon. Member: — Well that's what your House Leader did yesterday.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well yesterday . . . the argument is about the motion yesterday. It is the business of . . . If you thought you were being jammed, you didn't have to give us consent. You didn't have to give us consent. And don't be so doggone sensitive because your country cousins there in Ottawa have goofed on the issue of the Elections Act.

And don't be so sensitive about the fact that you bring down an innocent person, ask that person to come to the gallery, give no notice to anybody on an important issue — this is an important issue, not only to this person but to us — give us no notice whatsoever. And you do it for cheap politics, pure and simple, and you abuse the citizenry in doing that. Shame on you for doing that. Be responsible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Voting Hours in Saskatchewan

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question this morning is for the Premier. Mr. Premier, you've got to give Gordon Kirkby credit. According to this morning's *Star-Phoenix*, he's not backing down one inch on this election timing issue. You know, I think I know the reason why too. It's good news for him. It's good news for him because it's going to take an hour longer to vote him out of office than we thought.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, according to the *Star-Phoenix* and according to Mr. Kirkby, the Liberals have no plans to change their screwed-up voting times. Of course as we know, Mr. Premier, Gordon Kirkby is no big wheel in the Liberal government.

So I'd like to ask you, Mr. Premier, following yesterday's emergency motion on this issue, did you have an opportunity to contact the Prime Minister to tell him first of all, what time it is here in Saskatchewan, and second of all, to get on with fixing this mistake.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question because I did fax to the Prime Minister a letter incorporating the essence of the resolution, which was passed unanimously, and asking the federal government to take the immediate steps.

I don't know if this is true so I perhaps should be somewhat careful in answering additionally, but I'm advised by my staff that we have had yet an additional unfortunate response in the House of Commons on this issue today. Where the House Leader, Mr. Herb Gray, says in the House of Commons today in response to a question by a Saskatchewan MP (Member of Parliament), look, everybody in Saskatchewan wants you to make sense out of this foul-up that you've concocted; let's get it on and get it done within a matter of seconds. The response of the federal Liberal House Leader is, the way to solve it is for Saskatchewan to go to daylight savings time.

So maybe Mr. Kirkby isn't such a small player in the Liberal government. It may very well be that he has a greater influence and control over them than we think.

Either way, this is really a very unacceptable response, and I want to tell you, displays a Liberal government and party which has lost touch with the people of Saskatchewan totally.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Law Society Investigation

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, four charges have now been laid by the Law Society of Saskatchewan against Dean Mattison for his dealings with Ken Dickoff in the SaskTrust scandal. And we know that Mr. Dickoff has received a five-year prison sentence.

But Dean Mattison, former law partner of the Premier and former minister of Justice, was never charged. Many people have questioned the decision, Mr. Minister. Of course the NDP did an independent prosecutor's report on Dean Mattison, but then you refused to release the report.

Mr. Minister, in light of the charges being brought against Dean Mattison by the law society, isn't it time to end the cover-up and release the independent prosecutor's report?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The law society has started their investigation of this matter, which they've announced. The law society is a self-regulating profession. They take care of these matters themselves. The whole situation as it relates to our department is that we're not involved, obviously. And we are in a position where we will wait and see what the law society does.

I think practically, the whole matter is a situation where the report that was dealt with ended up saying and confirming that there should be no criminal charges laid. But that still doesn't mean that the law society doesn't have some questions. And they are in fact going to use their procedure to deal with the matter.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, as I recall I believe it said something about, wasn't in the public interest. But you didn't release the full report.

Mr. Minister, you've released the report on Phoenix Advertising. You released the report on David Milgaard. You released the report on the former Justice minister. Why are you refusing to release this report?

Mr. Minister, by not releasing it, it raises a lot of suspicious questions, when several SaskTrust officials were charged, but the lawyer who worked on most of the deals was never charged — and that even looks more suspicious. It even looks more suspicious now that the law society is proceeding with charges.

Mr. Minister, if there are good reasons for not charging Dean Mattison, why don't you release the report? And what are trying to hide?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — As I stated in this House last spring when this matter arose, the Justice system has a method of whereby they investigate matters and then proceed to look at them. If a decision is made not to proceed with criminal charges, then that's where the matter lays and no further report is given from the Justice system.

In this particular case, the matter was reviewed by independent counsel and the whole thing was dealt with last spring. Now the law society through their own forms of investigation are looking at the person's practice as it relates to his law practice, and that is their right as a self-regulating body.

As we all know in this legislature, we have been bringing forth many Acts that relate to a number of the different professions in Saskatchewan. The reason we do that on the recommendation of the Department of Justice and the government is that we have a lot of faith in our people that they know how to regulate and adjust their professions. Let us allow the law society to do their job.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, a further question. Mr. Minister, isn't it true that your government does a significant amount of work with the Woloshyn Mattison law firm, in fact hundreds of thousands of dollars a year? In light of the law society's charges against Dean Mattison, Mr. Minister, will you suspend your dealings with Woloshyn Mattison until the charges by the law society are dealt with?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the Government of Saskatchewan does hire lawyers from many law firms throughout the province, including the law firm of Woloshyn Mattison, and the main consideration that we do have when we give out legal work is that we know that the people can do the job.

We are also in the process of identifying some other considerations that reflect public policy and how we deliver legal work, and one that I would . . . I'm happy to state publicly today is that in the promotion of the employment equity policy, that we would like to hire law firms that actually have a fair number of women and others who need to be employed.

And I guess what I would say is that there are many

considerations when we hire law firms. Some years we hire a law firm, other years we don't. All of those things will be taken into account as we hire people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Manufacturing Employment Levels

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the issues that has not surfaced in this House in relation to employment is the fact that growth is being recorded in the public sector but there is actually a decline in the number of private sector employees in this province. Among the industries in which there is a decline in employment is manufacturing.

Will the minister explain if these declining employment levels are connected to the fact that manufacturing investment has taken an 85 per cent tumble since this government came to power — something that is in sharp contrast to Manitoba where the same manufacturing investment has grown by 72 per cent over the same time period.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I have here in front of me a document which perhaps I shouldn't be mentioning to members . . . But no, no, this is a document which the federal Liberal Party has released in the obvious anticipation of an election. And it talks about . . .

An Hon. Member: — Expensive glossies.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Very expensive — talks about jobs and job creation. And that's what the Liberals say in their campaigns and that's what the Liberals say in the question period with respect to jobs, but I'll tell you what people who know about what's happening in Canada and Saskatchewan say about jobs.

I have here in front of me a clipping from the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* of April 24, 1997. The headline says "Blind eye to job creation may prove Liberals' undoing, says forecaster."

This relates to an assessment of the Saskatchewan and Canadian economy by a person by the name of Michael McCracken of Informetrica of Ottawa. And I'll just give you this one little quotation, which answers the question. Mr. McCracken said, quote:

. . . provincially, the Romanow government has done more to encourage employment than most other provinces. It has decided to reinvest surplus revenue into programs now that it has the deficit under control.

Mr. Speaker, this is verified by the numbers, that there are more people employed at the end of March of this year than last year, and we are on a steady, positive, upward trend for job creation in the province of Saskatchewan. That's what McCracken says.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Resignation of Minister of Highways and Transportation

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to inform the House today that earlier this morning I submitted my resignation as the Minister of Highways and Transportation effective April 28. Health considerations have brought about this decision. The Premier has accepted my resignation.

As many of you know, for several months prior to February 26, 1997 I experienced chest pains, fatigue, and other related symptoms. Doctors diagnosed a blocked artery, necessitating an angioplasty and the insertion of a metal stint. Since that procedure, I continue to take the prescribed medication.

While I feel I have fully and adequately performed all my duties since then, the stress of cabinet responsibility has often left me feeling tired and not performing, I believe, to the standard that I have set for myself. In addition, implementation of the ambitious goals of our government's new 21st century transportation plan has exacted a high level of attention and energy. This added to the pressure of public life — every one of us will know that. Consequently my recovery has slowed.

As you appreciate, health and family comes first. The only fair and proper thing to do is to take some time away from cabinet duties in order to ensure a complete recovery. With the removal of my additional duties as cabinet minister, I feel that I can continue to serve the needs of my constituents. This has always been one of my priorities in public life, and it will remain so.

It has been a privilege to work with the dedicated public servants — some of you are here today — whose contributions have helped to turn around the fortunes of this province and who are committed to ensuring that Saskatchewan continues to prosper. In particular I would like to recognize and thank my staff who have, without reservation, always given me their loyalty and personal support — our family away from home.

I would like to thank the Premier for giving me the opportunity to serve the people of Saskatchewan as a member of Executive Council. I remain strongly committed to his leadership and the direction taken by our government. The decisions may not have always been easy, but together we have made Saskatchewan a better place in which to live and work.

Finally I would like to thank all members of the Assembly. I have sometimes disagreed with the members opposite; however I have never doubted the fact that their motivation is the same as mine. And I have been proud to work with the people of Saskatchewan. I think it's going to be a little easier heckling from over there than answering some of your tough questions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well that . . . I can't say that we're happy to hear this news. And I can say this on a personal level, I've known the minister for some years and I've always thought quite highly of the efforts that he put into

his role as an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and as a minister. And I know that he has found, like many of us do, politics can be a very rough ride at times.

And of course with the minister's role in cabinet, you know, and the portfolio that he was given; it's a tough portfolio. It's coming at a time when of course there's, you know, troubles to get the funding for what I guess he, as a minister, would consider his priority. He's going up against other ministers and their priorities.

I will say that all the dealings that I've had with this minister on a personal level have always been dealt with in a very professional manner. And I recall one instance in fact where I had to have a special favour and it had to do with getting a dinosaur statue just south of the community of Ponteix. And they had already done a lot of the construction and cut away on the hillside and spent a good deal of money, only to find out that the Department of Highways is not going to allow them to go ahead with this project.

Well I wasn't sure how to approach the minister at the time. So I was out in the field; I had my cellphone with me. It was late in the evening; I was harvesting. So I phoned his wife, Sylvia. And I think it was just right around midnight, and I had a chat with Sylvia for about 45 minutes. And I think it was about two days later, I got a call from Andy saying that it's a go, but don't ever phone my wife again.

So I just want to give him all the credit in the world and wish him well. I hope he can return to a cabinet position, at least before we form government. And that may not be too far away, so don't be gone too long. And best of luck in the future, Andy.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Member, all members of the Legislative Assembly, this is certainly a disappointing and surprising turn of events. As you know, public life unfortunately does exact a toll from time to time on all of us, I think, in a very stressful vocation that we are all involved in.

I've always felt that the minister has conducted himself in a very . . . always conducted himself in a very professional manner. And I would hope that we would want to wish you very well in the future. And we certainly, all I think, members of the Legislative Assembly, pray for a speedy recovery from your health concerns and we want to wish you very well, Andy.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Opposition House Leader requests leave to respond; is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and members. And I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words, particularly since Andy is my constituent. And it really is such a unique situation because over the years, the hon. member and

myself have been adversaries in the political arena. But I have to say to the House that I'm very proud to have him as a constituent, and more than that, he's become a good friend.

Mr. Speaker, I'm really pleased that the member is remembering the priorities that we all have to remember, and that is your own health and your family and those issues even supersede the duties that we all feel to the province of Saskatchewan.

So I certainly would like to join with all the members in wishing you the very best and speedy recovery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1100)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, request that question no. 50 be converted to notice of motions for returns (debatable), and with leave, that questions 51 to 56 also be converted.

The Speaker: — The Government Whip requests to deal with all items simultaneously. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

The Speaker: — Items 1 through 7 are converted to motions for returns (debatable).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 46 — The Highways and Transportation Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, The Highways and Transportation Act, 1997 provides a legislative framework for a new era in Saskatchewan. Members are aware that we recently released a comprehensive transportation strategy titled, investing in Saskatchewan.

This new legislation allows us to proceed with initiatives in the strategy. Investing in transportation is a multi-tiered plan to move Saskatchewan from a province with a transportation system designed for the needs of the 1950s to a sustainable transportation system that supports economic growth and social well-being well into the future.

I'm advised the former Act was last substantially changed in 1949. Clearly, circumstances have changed since then. Federal transportation policy changes, rail abandonment, elevator consolidation, and increased trucking are all putting increased pressure on our road and highway network.

Our government is clearly responding to the transportation challenges. In the last budget, we committed \$2.5 billion over the next 10 years to improve our transportation system. On April 10 we took the next step and released our long-term plan

to ensure the transportation needs of the people of this province are met well into the future.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation I am speaking about today goes one step further. This legislation puts into place the framework needed to proceed with the initiatives outlined in our transportation strategy. As part of our plan, we are looking at innovative ways of funding road improvements. Our proposal for partnering with the private sector will enable us to make much needed improvements to our highways in the province.

We already need several . . . we already have several partnering agreements. For example, we have a partnership agreement with two uranium mining companies to upgrade No. 102 and Highway No. 905 in the North. This Bill establishes a special fund to accommodate revenues from these partnerships which will then be directed into specific highway improvement projects. I want to stress the voluntary aspect of these agreements, Mr. Speaker.

Companies have a choice as to whether they wish to enter into partnerships or not. The transportation partnership fund is a vehicle for those partnership agreements where our partners wish the government to retain custody over the fund. Even though the fund is in legislation, we have shown we are responsive to industry concerns over use of their contributions.

As members, we do not want to make a practice of dedicating tax revenues for specific purposes. If we were to do this, we would be depriving the ability to spend money on needed services such as health care and education. But the transportation partnership fund is different; contributions to it are not tax revenues. The money in the fund will be directed to specific transportation system improvements.

The legislation further enhances the ability of private sector partners to take charge of the fund's directions, as the private sector will have the majority of representatives on the advisory committee. I can assure the members of this Assembly I will take very serious, all recommendations of the advisory committee. I will be pleased to discuss the fund and partnerships further in committee.

One of the main objectives of our transportation system is to preserve the integrity of our road system. Overweight trucks cause significant damage to our road system, especially our secondary roads. This legislation establishes the concept of consignor or shipper responsibility. We firmly believe all parties to a shipment must concern themselves with road system integrity. In the new law we are simply saying shippers bear some of the responsibility for overweight shipments.

In order for our enforcement personnel to have access to evidence of contravention of weights and dimensions rules, the Bill requires shippers, carriers, and receivers to keep records. We understand there are some concerns about imposing these paperwork requirements on small operations, including our farmer community.

The Bill recognizes this concern by exempting completely all shipments by two- and three-axle trucks. The exemption is from

the requirement to keep . . . The exemption is from the requirement to keep records respecting weight and dimension shipments. It does not exclude any existing commercial carriers from having to keep records.

The Bill grants us further flexibility by allowing us to exempt additional persons by regulation from the record-keeping requirement.

The requirement for receivers to keep records applies only if the receiver causes the shipment to occur. A grain elevator only has to keep records if the grain company initiates shipments of the grain to the elevator. If a farmer delivers grain on an unsolicited basis, the elevator need not keep records.

We have consulted extensively on this issue, Mr. Speaker. I will be pleased to deal in detail with this matter in committee.

In recent years, several large concerns have established new roadside developments which have a major impact on traffic adjacent to provincial highways. The Bill proposes an arrangement whereby persons wishing to undertake developments must discuss the impact of those developments with the department. These discussions may come to an agreement whereby the developer pays part of the cost resulting from the development. The arrangement may form a transportation partnership agreement. Similar legislation has been in place in Alberta for several years.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill raises statutory fine levels significantly. Our reason is to get the message out that violations of the law, especially when it affects safety, or quality of our road system, will not be tolerated.

This Bill makes several housekeeping changes as well, Mr. Speaker, to our transportation law. The Bill includes provisions now found in The Highway Traffic Act dealing with certain regulations respecting commercial vehicle safety.

The Bill also updates our practices respecting unsafe approaches to provincial highways. My department will continue to work with landowners to ensure safety is not compromised by approaches. I am confident we can continue to ensure the public safety in this area.

The Bill contains a number of other updated provisions which recognize how my department does business. It updates responsibilities to reflect our new transportation strategy. It covers departmental purchases, tenders, and selling practices.

We will be happy, Mr. Speaker, to go through these details when we are in committee.

I now move second reading of The Highways and Transportation Act, 1997.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the Highway minister has caught me off guard again here today. I was going to give a very aggressive speech

as usual, but maybe we'll tone it down a little. However, we've still got a lot of concerns that we've got to go over.

I'd first like to say . . . and this part of my talk I wasn't going to change because I think the minister, regardless of the news that he gave to the legislature here minutes ago, I think the minister still deserves credit and he was going to get it anyway — and it's in regards to the Department of Highways finally coming out with a business plan.

And, Mr. Minister, this business plan has not been done before in the department. It was something new. It came about last August and I guess it . . . The business plan and the document that came sometime later, the transportation strategy document, are really companion documents for the Bill that has come forward. And so I'm going to sort of deal with all three of the documents today, Mr. Speaker.

Now the business plan — and I know it's the first one and I guess there is another to be brought forward . . . or annually to be brought forward by either the beginning or end of June in each year — and I give the minister all kinds of credit for initiating this, Mr. Speaker. And I give him this credit because what the people of the province don't often get, you know, especially from departments, is — you know we're moving that way more with Crowns, Crown corporations — business plans and seeing where they're going in the future. But we don't get that in departments.

And what this here business plan for the Department of Highways will eventually, you know, once it becomes a much more refined document . . . is going to at least give the people of the province some idea in a vision sense where the minister would like to take his department. So I will take that amount of time to give the minister credit for initiating such a plan and getting it on the go.

I guess some of the problems that I see when we look at the three documents in total — the business plan, the transportation strategy document, and the Bill — is that I think part of it is really to take away from some of the problems that the government is experiencing from the public. Now I know that the amount of calls that we get, especially through the pothole patrol hot line . . . And if you don't mind, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to get a plug in; 1 888 621 Bump — 2867 — is the line for those watching that would like to phone in and become a pothole patroller and let us know the condition of the highways in their area.

But what is really going to come of all this, Mr. Speaker, it looks like it's more of a media event. And we saw this in Crown corporations a few years ago. I remember the amount of information that was brought forward was so overwhelming, it was so overwhelming that just a, you know, the few members that I was able to work with couldn't digest it all, couldn't make much of it. And I'm not so sure if some of that strategy isn't coming forward in these companion documents with the Bill.

If in fact the government can have some information overload and say a lot of nice and fuzzy things, that perhaps they will get

away with actually taking action is my point, Mr. Speaker.

And when I take a look in the business plan, mandate and vision for the future, some of this I think becomes clear. And I think it becomes clear because it's mentioned somewhat in the transportation strategy. But when you get to the Bill, which is really the meat of what's going to happen, then some certain things are not there that I think should have been.

And one of the things in the business plan talks about, emphasize improved grain and rail logistics to coordinate the transition of current grain handling and transportation system to a modern, logistics-driven system for the benefit of Saskatchewan producers.

Well I would agree with that, that there's got to be a . . . you know, the logistics of grain and the movement of grain and where the rail beds, railroads, are in the future, exactly how they're going to be utilized to their fullest. It's got to be well thought through. And I'm not so sure that it is being well thought through. And I'm going to get into a lot of the railroad part of this later with short-lines and some of those problems. So I won't emphasize too much more on that yet until I get into the transportation strategy document.

Also there is, in the business plan, they really spelled out that they were going to develop regional transportation planning. And I assume that this meant that they would further what has come about in south-west Saskatchewan with the south-west transportation advisory committee and the work that they have done and how, Mr. Speaker, we can now expand this to work right across the province.

And I can only say that I hope that works well and I hope that it actually, in the end has the teeth to do something. There again I'm going to touch on that later in this strategy document. I just want to deal right now with the business plan.

(1115)

You know, there's a lot of words in here about the harmful effects of federal transportation policy. And, you know, we've stated publicly that there are some concerns. But the concerns are of . . . well are very similar to what we're having here in the province as far as monies raised through motor vehicle licensing fees. Fuel taxes are raised at not only provincial level but at a federal level as well. And at some point there's got to be a lot larger commitment of these taxes go to where their intended purpose.

And now the government can argue whether or not that is their intended purpose, but I'm sure that the people of Saskatchewan, and of course Canada, would be on our side in saying that if you're going to raise the fuel tax for the improvement and the construction of provincial highway systems and road systems, that that's where it should go.

Now I've heard several times where the government is saying, well it's really not the case because this money has to fund education, has to fund health care. Well that's what E&H (education and health) tax was all about, and many of the other

monies that come out of, especially out of the south-west part of the province in oil, land lease sales, you know, millions and millions of dollars . . . every time we see these vast amount of monies whether it's a sale of Cameco shares . . . I could go on and on.

The government is saying that it has to go into these major projects. And . . . (inaudible) . . . we need spending. We need more spending in the Department of Health. There's no question. If it means providing that service to the people for acute care, for long-term care, we're not arguing that. But what we do argue, and we've made the point many times, Mr. Speaker, is that rather than have slush accounts — I guess for lack of a better term — slush accounts in Liquor and Gaming waiting for an election to come about, let's put the monies . . . let's direct those monies to where the people of the province really do believe that they are going or should be going.

So, Mr. Speaker, when I take a look at some of the stuff in the business plan, it sounds very good. It shows that there's sort of a vision. But it really comes down to what is the role of the Department of Highways? It should be very simple. I mean we shouldn't need a strategy and a vision to construct highways or to pave some secondary roads. We shouldn't need so much a vision for it as we do a commitment by the government that it's a priority and it's a commitment by the government that rural Saskatchewan will start to receive their fair share. Because let's not forget for a moment that the large portion of the monies raised through fuel taxes and through motor vehicle licensing fees come from rural Saskatchewan.

And that really shows itself, Mr. Speaker, when I take a look at a research study that was done by the Canadian Automobile Association, and some of their findings about the amount of money that is raised in this province through fuel taxes, and what is spent in this province in comparison to what is spent in other provinces.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to just quote some of the research findings out of the CAA (Canadian Automobile Association) report, because I think they really show where in fact the Department of Highways is going, where it's going in comparison to what, with the other documents, they're saying they would like to go. And I'll quote this:

Over a 10-year-period, 1988 to 1997, Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation expenditures have decreased 21.6 per cent.

So we're spending less, almost 22 per cent less, down to \$168 million. And during that same time period, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan fuel tax revenues have increased over 110 per cent. So people are paying a lot more in fuel taxes. Revenues collected from motorists in the form of motor vehicle licence fees have increased 36 per cent. And the actual road-related expenditures over the last decade have decreased nearly 17 per cent, to \$151 million.

This research study, Mr. Speaker, just so you know, was done right here in the University of Saskatchewan. So it's not a political document, although I'll try and make it one at times.

But don't confuse that with our own research.

The expenditures, Mr. Speaker, when we take a look at where the government's going . . . and as I just said, the expenditures are down, revenues are going way up — but let's take a look at how severe they are.

In the 1996-97 fiscal year, the Saskatchewan government plans to collect \$430.9 million in fuel tax and motor vehicle licence fees, but plans to spend only 168.8 million on highways and transportation expenditures. Now this leaves a surplus of \$262 million for the one year, '96-97, for that year alone — \$262 million. So when we take a look at some of the announcements that came about in the budget . . . and the minister did his best to make them sound very rosy, that there was the two and a half billion dollars going to be spent on our highway system over the next 10 years. It sounded impressive.

Yet for those like myself who work with those numbers and the Department of Highway's numbers on a daily basis, a quick calculation showed that really that could even be seen as a substantial cut yet again in what is actually being spent. I would think over that 10-year period where they're going to spend the two and a half billion dollars, the surplus, not just the revenues, but the surplus is going to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of four and a half billion dollars. That's the surplus.

So I mean, when you come out with a statement and try and sell it as something very positive, two and a half billion, you're only . . . it's what, a third? It's about a third. It stays right in line with what the Canadian Automobile Association report is saying, where in fact there is some 30 . . . well I'll quote from it again:

In its budget the Saskatchewan government will expend 39 per cent of the revenues it collects from motorists through fuel tax and motor vehicle licence fees on highways and transportation in '96-97.

And this total compares to a decade ago, in 1988, where 94 per cent of the revenues collected were put back into highways and transportation. That is significant; that's a significant amount of money. If you take a look, Mr. Speaker, here's another interesting stat. Over a five-year period from '93 to '97, Saskatchewan will collect over \$2 billion in fuel taxes and motor vehicle licence fees from motorists. During the same period, only 859 million will be expended back into highways and transportation expenditures.

So you can see where I'm coming from with that four and a half billion dollar surplus over the next 10 years, Mr. Speaker, because over the last 5 they've had a surplus of 1.23 billion. And I know they would like to take credit but you know when you take a look . . . go out into rural Saskatchewan. Really, to appreciate what's happened, you have to get out of Saskatoon and Regina and travel rural Saskatchewan and just see how bad it really and truly is.

When you get out there and you start to see the damage that has occurred from . . . and we can't just say it's all heavy truck traffic, just the damage that has occurred by not . . . by allowing

the highways to deteriorate to the state that they have. We have potholes, we have people that have phoned in to the pothole patrol hot line and there are potholes that were so large . . . one fellow was following a tandem truck filled with gravel, Department of Highways truck, and there was a pothole so deep that the truck just crept into the pothole — and he thought he was going to dump into this pothole — and the entire truck, for the width of the road and the length of the truck, fit into the pothole.

An Hon. Member: — That was a valley.

Mr. McPherson: — So he waited . . . Well I know. They look like a valley, as the member across was saying. But he slowly crept the truck out the other side and drove away. They didn't dump . . . I guess there were worse holes that he was heading to. How could they be worse? This thing was axle deep.

So when you take a look at what the government is saying and you look at all the rosy predictions — where they want to go; where they might go, or where they would hope to — and yet, go out and take a drive on some of these highways. Oh, it's . . . I think that the government, not only because we're requesting it or CAA or the truckers associations or the people of Saskatchewan — especially rural Saskatchewan — but at some point you have to accept that if you're not going to spend the money on our highway system, it's really a debt in itself.

Now we all know too well the arguments for slashing hospitals and schools and nursing homes, and I could go on and on. The government has said that because of the Devine government there's this huge debt. And people didn't disagree. They know that the Tories, when they left office, left them in a horrible, horrible position. They knew that. They . . . What is it, 14, \$15 billion of debt that was left? And people accepted that had to be addressed. But . . .

An Hon. Member: — Not at the expense of the Tories.

Mr. McPherson: — Well you're right, Mr. Member — not at the expense of the Tories. However, to say that we're going to give up everything that the people of Saskatchewan, the pioneers of this province, worked so hard for, for years and years . . . There was tough times before when they built these highway systems, when they built these health care systems, when they built most of the nursing homes. There were tough times back then also.

Why is it now, when things are starting to turn around, that we still have to be accepting cuts, that we still have to be saying, we can't afford? We can't afford to care for the elderly. We can't afford hospitals in rural Saskatchewan. We can't afford to fix their highway system so that they can even go and get the services elsewhere.

So that, Mr. Speaker, is why we routinely ask that this government, when they have the ability to do so — and I say they have it now; they're in their fourth balanced budget — they must start spending money back into rural Saskatchewan on that highway infrastructure. Because when you don't, that in

itself is a debt. It's a debt that somebody at some point is going to have to pay. And that's coming up. It can only get so bad before it's fixed.

I think that perhaps there is a bit of a bigger plan here, and I'm sure the government views it this way as well. If the highways get to be in such disrepair and become in such a deteriorated state, the people themselves — this is what the government is hoping is going to happen — the people are going to throw up their hands and say, you know, the member from Rosetown-Elrose, when he was Highways minister, came out with a plan for the reversion of highways to gravel.

And I think that's what the government is still hoping to do, is follow through on that former minister's, Highway minister's, plan to turn a lot of our paved roads back to gravel. Because they are hoping the people are just going to say, we can't take it any longer. These holes are ridiculous, they're unsafe, can't haul our grain with our trucks on these kinds of roads. Fill them with gravel. If gravel is going to last longer than pavement, so be it. Well that's no way to handle the people of rural Saskatchewan. It's not. Because it doesn't have to happen in other provinces. They too have debts.

How many times have we heard the Minister of Finance stand in this House and say that Saskatchewan was the first. Saskatchewan was the first to get their debt in control, Saskatchewan was the first to have balanced budgets. And hey, that's great! The people of Saskatchewan are proud of that. Because it wasn't the Minister of Finance that paid that debt down, it was the people of Saskatchewan, and especially rural Saskatchewan. And I dare say the people of south-west Saskatchewan paid the biggest price of all because if you take a drive out there and see what they have left for services, it's shameful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But when we look at what other provinces are doing with their debts, with their same problems that they're getting branch lines abandoned, with all the like problems they have . . . and so we'll pick a sister province. And I know that the government does not always want us using Alberta because Alberta has far bigger population and they have, you know, resource revenues that perhaps we don't have or didn't used to have is a better way of putting it.

So let's use a like population of Manitoba. Heavy into agriculture, having branch lines abandoned. I mean they've got all the same problems. They have the debts, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but let's see what they're doing. Over the last 10 years, and this is again out of the Canadian Automobile Association booklet, over the last 10 years Manitoba has increased its highways and transportation expenditures by 10.4 per cent.

(1130)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you remember what Saskatchewan did? It decreased by 21.6 per cent over that same time period. And during the same time period, Saskatchewan increased the revenues it collects from motorists and fuel taxes and motor vehicle fees by 88 per cent while Manitoba increased their

revenues by only 17 per cent. In the '96-97 fiscal year, the province of Manitoba will expend 84.1 per cent of its revenues it collects from motorists on highways and transportation expenditures. This is comparing Saskatchewan at 39 per cent. In '96-97 Manitoba's highways and transportation expenditures will comprise 4.17 per cent of its total provincial spending, while Saskatchewan — and Saskatchewan keeps bragging about having the most highways, and on and on; you know all their arguments why they can't fix any of them — that'll only comprise of 3.3 per cent.

Well I could go on and on, I guess, and quote from the document. But it clearly shows, it clearly shows that it's not even a point of just having finances available; it's a point of government having priorities, and it's a point of doing what they think they have to do to serve all citizens of the province and not just single out certain projects or initiatives that they have, Mr. Speaker, perhaps for . . . or Deputy Speaker, for their own political gains or goals. And I think that's starting to show itself with the urban/rural split that this government has created.

So when I look at this business plan — and please keep in mind the kind of numbers and figures that we have just heard — and where the monies are being expended — they're going down; the revenues are going up so dramatic. And then start to wonder, what's really with the vision plan, with the goals and stated objectives. It comes down to either you're going to fix the highways or you're not going to fix the highways; either you're going to spend some money or you're not; either you're going to get involved in ensuring that the railroads are to remain in rural Saskatchewan through short-line operators or you're not. And that's what it comes down to. It doesn't take much of a vision.

I think the vision could be summed up, I think it could be summed up in a matter of a few minutes if you take . . . if you picked five, six of these pothole patrol sheets that I'll get into later. Because I think that really says it from a rural citizen's point of view, what kind of vision is really required out there.

You'll have to bear with me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I want to just hurry through the business plan, but I don't want to miss anything that . . . Oh here it is. On page 6 of the business plan, there's a section dealing with capital upgrading and a few of the points in that business plan that the government wants to establish — benefit/cost analysis for project prioritization.

Well I don't know what that means to most people, but I'll tell you what it means to people in rural Saskatchewan — especially in rural Saskatchewan and especially in areas where they're not as heavily populated as perhaps closer to some of the cities. When you're going to look at cost/benefit analysis and prioritization, what you're really saying is those areas of the province that don't have as large a population or as much traffic, we're just not going to have you on any list for priorities.

That's what it means. You will never get your highways rebuilt, re-paved, new construction. In fact as the member from Thunder Creek has just mentioned behind me, that really your concerns of safety, the safety of your kids, of your mothers and

fathers and grandmothers and fathers, seeking health care, going to school in the morning on school buses, all the services that they're requiring today really have to be . . . they have to go and seek them travelling on our provincial highway system because they're losing their services out in those areas — buses, hospitals, schools. I could go on and on.

But now they don't have — and it's in their government's own documents — they don't really have a hope of bringing some of their projects forward. And I know I've got a document here that I want to go into in a little while about just some of the areas of the province where I think it's shameful even where they are situated in this prioritization list.

It also says here, under capital upgrading, that the government is going to continue to consolidate operations to reflect declining capital programs. Well when we take a look at — oh here we go, infrastructure — when we take a look at equipment — and they have a section in this business plan about what we have for equipment — this really tells you what they intend to do as far as consolidating programs.

Sounds good, but when you put it into practice here's what it means to the people, is that they're going to have less service. We know how many calls that the minister and the government members must get during the winter months when there's ice on the highways, snowdrifts, the highways are impassable, but nothing ever seems to get done. Why?

Because they've continued to cut back on each and every one of these highway depots. I can't remember offhand just how many highway crews or how many depots they've closed.

An Hon. Member: — 14, 15.

Mr. McPherson: — What was . . . 14, 15. It was several. That was in one year.

An Hon. Member: — They're not going to stop. There's more that will be cut.

Mr. McPherson: — Well exactly; there's more coming, as the member from Thunder Creek mentioned.

Let's take a look at the equipment though. The department manages and maintains a fleet of equipment for the preservation and operation of the provincial transportation system. The current fleet consists of approximately 1,670 power units and 1,500 sundry units. The total value of this is about \$41 million. And then it goes on to talk about where it's going to be in the future, and I'm going to quote from the government's own document: it is estimated that the number of power units required will be reduced to approximately 1,400 — that would be from 1,670 to 1,400 — by the year 2000. Well the year 2000 is coming up really quick, really quick.

An Hon. Member: — Fewer jobs too.

Mr. McPherson: — Fewer jobs, exactly. Far fewer jobs.

In addition, the total equipment usage is expected to decline by

approximately 25 per cent. So not only are we going to have — if I can read the government's own document correctly . . . we're going to have far, far fewer power units. By power units, I guess we're talking whether it's graders or trucks, snowploughs, on and on; we're going to have far fewer in a couple of years.

This is from a government saying that we're going to spend so much more in the next 10 years and our highways are going to be so much improved. And they're talking safety, and on and on, and yet their own document says no, it's going the other way.

So not only are we going to have a lot fewer units to do the work, it states in here that the equipment usage is expected to decline by approximately 25 per cent. So what does that mean?

An Hon. Member: — Well how many jobs are going with that?

Mr. McPherson: — Well that's right, as the member from Humboldt has just said, how many jobs are going with that? And I know she's raised many of these concerns with me to raise with the minister about the highways in her area. Many of those highways are deplorable. All of our members are continuously talking about the state of highways in this province.

And I can only see by the business plan that this government is putting forward, where you're going to cut some 300 units in a couple of years and have the workload that those remaining units are going to have cut by some 25 per cent. And it says in here why, Mr. Deputy Speaker: these decreases can be largely attributed to declining budget levels.

Well isn't that contradicting what the Finance minister has been telling us? It's one thing to say that over a 10-year period our spending is going to be where, but . . . you know, two and a half billion dollars.

But what really is \$200 million in 10 years compared to today's dollars? What could \$200 million buy today as compared to what it will buy 10 years from now? You can only assume, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it's going to be not very good.

I see there's customer satisfaction surveys. I think I'll touch on those later because I believe I have a more interesting document to go over.

By the year . . . objective by the year 2000, at least 85 per cent of the highway traffic will be on an infrastructure of satisfactory quality with no more than 2 per cent on unsatisfactory quality.

That's a great objective, a great goal. It's one that I could only hope from the bottom of my heart that they would achieve. But is there even a remote chance of that happening? There can't be. There can't be when you're cutting back on the equipment. You know your dollars are going down. Take away how glossy the announcement sounds, there's fewer and fewer dollars; there's bigger and bigger surpluses.

There's less equipment; there's less men. You're consolidating the depots. How can you expect that 85 per cent of the highway traffic will be on a very satisfactory infrastructure? Impossible. Impossible.

Their own document tells you why it's impossible. Spending is going down. Page 13 of the business plan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it talks here about quality road network. And it gives some performance . . . I guess this was done on a survey that the government takes each and every year, or they've started it looks like '94-95, '95-96, and then since then they don't have anything filled in.

But let's take a look at really what people, the people that they're surveying, at least those that are responding, and let's hope that . . . I can only assume that many of those are people that are more inclined to be more positive, if they can be, to the government. Others that respond to surveys . . . and we'll get into that, pothole patrol ones later. I don't think the government wants those on any sheet of their business plan because they're not as good.

Pavements, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And these are the people that said that they feel the paved highways are in a satisfactory condition. The survey in '94-95, 65.4 per cent felt that their highways were satisfactory. Then it goes down — tolerable, unsatisfactory, unranked. And those figures are quite amazing really. But the following year in '95-96, satisfactory on pavements fell to 57.8 per cent. So in one year we've dropped almost 10 per cent of the people feel that the highways were drastically deteriorating.

On thin pavements, only 31.6 per cent in '95-96 felt that the thin pavements were satisfactory. On gravel roads, 18.7 per cent of those responded, felt that the gravel roads were satisfactory. Total system overall, 51.3 per cent felt the total highway and road system of this province was satisfactory.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government members opposite would have to stand in their place today and tell us how they really expect the people of the province to believe that when you're going downhill, it's going down, Mr. Members . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It's going down into a pothole, as the member said. It's going downhill, and yet your projections and your objectives in a business plan are saying, in a couple years it's going to be going uphill. And you're going to take it uphill with a lot less equipment and a lot less money and a lot less people. Well nobody is buying into that; nobody is buying into that.

In fact when we take a look at some of these target results and client satisfaction, page 15 of your report, and I hope members have a copy of the report so they can follow along . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well thank you.

We're looking, general users targeted results, okay, for the '95-96 year that I quoted a moment ago — 51 per cent, as I've said. The following year they expect that to drop 1 per cent, down to 50 per cent. But in '97-98, up to 60 per cent; '98-99 up to 70 per cent. I think what they're trying to do is paint the picture that, just hold on folks; we're going to be there to help

you and it won't be too long, perhaps in election year or the year before and the year of the election. Well that's what it tells me.

Mr. Member, let me give you an example of another rosy picture that I deal with in my critic area and that would be in crop insurance. Crop insurance contract holders were in the neighbourhood of 52, 53 per cent of the farmers were into . . . had crop insurance contracts. When the government changed the program recently, they were saying we think, or were hoping beyond all hope I guess, that we'll get it up to 75 per cent. And yet when all the numbers and facts and figures came in, they found that it had decreased very, very little. I don't even know if it rates. It's a few hundred more contracts. We're talking thousands of farmers, but only an increase of a few hundred more contracts.

(1145)

Now I don't want to accuse you . . . and I don't want to rain on your parade in saying don't ever come out with a rosy prediction. I don't want to do that. I hope you do have a lot of rosy predictions. I just hope you start to follow through on a few of them. I hope that you will start to put the priorities of your government, and follow it where your predictions or your rosy predictions say you're going.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I'll leave the business plan alone for awhile. Once again, I'm glad to see that the minister initiated something that I think in the future is going to be very positive for the people of this province. However, as the member from Humboldt has suggested, there's something called follow-through and follow-up on some of the predications instead of going out and saying we believe we're going to be up here and we're going to do all these warm and fuzzy feeling things to have the people of this province believe that we're doing much better. Yet cutting monies out of these departments is not the way to go.

You think it isn't causing stress out there? We had the minister give a bad news announcement today, that he himself can't take any more of the stress and pressure because of what's happening in that portfolio. It has got to be a terrible portfolio if the rest of the cabinet is saying no, we don't believe that there should be highways that are satisfactory to the people of Saskatchewan.

Hey, it wasn't the opposition that created the problems; it was the government that created problems for the minister. And I wish him well in the future, and I give him lots of credit for what he endeavoured to achieve in his department, and we really wish him well as far as his health concerns and such go. But it's the government, it's the government, not the minister, that has got to take any blame that's going to come their way from the citizens of this province in the bad news that's coming about for them in the future.

Why some of that bad news? Why some of that bad news? And before I forget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you think it's just the opposition or some rural folk that are doing it, it's not. Let's think back to this past winter, when SGEU (Saskatchewan

Government Employees Union) members who were in the . . . the highway workers who were members of the SGEU union, were putting on I guess some forums, or they were travelling throughout rural Saskatchewan, raising public awareness of the safety issues, of the state of our highway system.

They too can see where this is going to go. It's not beneficial.

An Hon. Member: — You've got to give them credit.

Mr. McPherson: — Yes, of course, as the member for Thunder Creek said, you've got to give them a lot of credit. They stand up against the government for whom they work and just say, listen, it's gone on too long. They're not unlike the nurses of this province, who time and time again have taken a very tough line against the government who employs them and say listen, we've got people that we do work for, whether it's seniors or whether it's the people that use the highway system. And if you're going to cut, cut, cut, continuously, they can't provide the services that they were hired to provide.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what's become obvious then, when you look at sort of where this is all going, is that we have a government that wants to put far more policy . . . want to deal far more in the policy area than in the area of pavement. So it's policy versus pavement.

When I take a look at this so-called comprehensive plan that the government, the government, the cabinet put out I guess a few weeks ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they make a strong case.

They make a very strong case for rural Saskatchewan having a very up-to-date transportation system. They make a very strong case as to why, when we have two-thirds of our exports . . . Well our exports account for nearly two-thirds of our GDP (gross domestic product).

And when you look through this document and it speaks about the need in rural Saskatchewan to retain a rail service, I expected when I got to the back of the book that there would be some fairly impressive directions given. Or if they weren't in here, that in fact they would show up in Bill No. 46 with what we're discussing here today.

That, I'll have to say, was very disappointing; to find out that really in the end we're . . . there is no direction. It's just part of saying something to make people feel good that there's something coming. And they catch people off guard.

I mean take a look at our own opposition. We held back some Bills for some time that we wanted to present to this House and didn't do it because we too we're expecting far more in this comprehensive transportation strategy document.

So now we're in a dilemma as to whether to try and convince the government to do something with a Bill that we've given notice of first reading to — an Act to facilitate short-line railroading in this province — or to try and inject it with amendments into the Bills that they're bringing forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So if we were caught off guard as people that work and basically live in this political system, how do you think the people of this province felt? Of course they were caught off guard. There's communities after communities after communities out there that actually thought that the government was going to set some . . . well some substantial direction in the area of short-line railroading. They didn't get it.

In their own document, the "Investing in Transportation" document, page 5:

More than any other province, Saskatchewan producers and shippers are dependent on rail transport.

I couldn't agree more.

Some of the other things that I noticed in here is that they're talking about the immediate need to find efficiency in grain handling and transportation industry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you read the document, or the first time you read it, wouldn't you have thought that either in the Bill or later on something would become very clear, that there's an overall plan and it's going to be very clear for the people to see? It never showed up.

I mean we look through here. We look through here and we see where the government takes stock of what we have here in this province, the state of our highways, the needs of our producers, the needs of our communities, especially rural communities.

But where's . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, exactly. Where's the plan to do something, to make sure it's going to go into the new millennium that they are trying to drag the people into, I guess, kicking and screaming because, just like in the health care reform, the plan isn't clear. People aren't willing to go blindly with you and be taken somewhere where they don't think that it's going to be beneficial for them and their families.

Now the document also talks about the global challenges. Well there are those. I don't know what this province intends on doing about them.

There's national challenges. And there, to the minister's credit, I know he has done his utmost in trying to get more federal monies into the highway system. And we agree with that, that there should be a national highway program for those highways — I guess it would be 1 and 16 — where, you know, they're inter-provincial highways. Four-lane them.

I think a 15-year plan that this government is undertaking . . . and I can't remember the amount that that plan is going to cost. Do you remember it? Thirty million? Well, whatever. I don't remember the amount of money that that 15-plan was going to take. But 15 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to four-lane our major highways? Fifteen years at a time when they're giving the bad news about abandoning rail lines and having people not sure where farming and agriculture is going to be? I have no idea what to expect on my farm in 15 years in so far as transportation is concerned. So I think 15 years is just something that is really and truly unacceptable.

I do believe that on the Highways 1 and 16 that there should have been more federal monies available. But let's not forget the kind of surpluses that this provincial government has to deal with. They are going to, over that 15-year . . . Let's imagine where we're going to be in 15 years. If they're going to have a surplus of about a half billion in the next 10 years while they're only spending two and a half billion, I can only assume then that in another five years from there we'd probably be looking around 8 to \$10 billion of surplus in the next 15 years — surplus money. Surplus.

Well that, I think, shows how unacceptable it is that we would put our residents and in fact tourists, people from other parts of Canada, at risk on our provincial highway system. That's unacceptable. Safety should be first in the minds of the government.

An Hon. Member: — More economic activity will put more trucks on the road, more traffic.

Mr. McPherson: — Exactly. When we take a look at what they have for provincial challenges I was quite surprised to read in their own document what they view as some challenges, that being the amount of branch lines that are going to be abandoned, announced for abandonment. And in the government's own document I'm going to quote from:

While some rail rationalization may be required as part of the modernization of grain handling and transportation system, abandonment of rail lines will cause . . .

And then they go on, and I guess we all know they're going to make some case that they're really concerned about those lines.

But the fact of the matter is that when you read a government document which says that some rail rationalization should occur, that means somewhere somebody has sat back and says, okay, let's decide which ones. And I would ask the government members, if you have a list of which ones your provincial government — not the CN (Canadian National), CP (Canadian Pacific), federal government — which ones your government feels should be abandoned, would you please table those today. Because you would not make these kinds of statements unless, government members, you've already thought about it.

And I think that if you're already thinking that we can afford to rationalize or abandon more railroads in this province after the first front section, the front section of your booklet tells about how important railroading is, railroads are, to the export of our commodities, well that's shameful. Table the document. Maybe you're right — I doubt it and I don't think the people would be on your side either when you start tabling documents about the provincial government supporting the abandonment of branch lines. Shame.

Quoting right out of their booklet:

Nearly 30 million tonnes of product, valued in excess of \$5 billion, is exported . . . annually (30 million tonnes). The physical characteristics, distance to market, and relatively low value of the commodities shipped from

Saskatchewan dictate rail transportation as the only economical mode of transport. Much of this rail captive traffic is served by only a single railway carrier. This combination has resulted in excessively high freight charges paid by Saskatchewan shippers. Saskatchewan shippers, on average, pay freight rates which are 45 per cent higher than shippers of commodities moving similar distances in other parts of Canada.

You know, the people find this so confusing. On one hand, right on the same page, page 14 of your own document, you talk about nearly 30 million tonnes of product having to move across our transportation network, and not only three paragraphs before that, you talked about yes, you agree there should be some rationalization.

Do you know how many trucks it takes to move 30 million tonnes of product? Do you have any idea how that could possibly come about — even in certain areas of the province and if you took a far less amount? It can't happen. It can't be handled.

And while we're looking at and while what we're looking at the amount of product that we're going to move, I think one other things that's got to be made mention of, page 15 on your booklet. I'll quote again:

It is anticipated that the elevator system will continue to consolidate over the next decade, perhaps as few as 100 grain delivery points province wide.

(1200)

One hundred delivery points province wide? That's over the next decade.

So let's just think back to what the business plan said, and it was stating that in the next few years, we're going to have a satisfactory rating . . . What was it? Eighty per cent or something of the people are going to say we've got great highways in this province?

And yet on the other hand we're saying we are going to do it with less equipment, less money, we're going to do it but with the provincial government admitting with less rail, and we're going to do it with far fewer grain gathering facilities.

And I see now they've got grain delivery points, a little graph in their booklet, where we went, 1972-73, from it looks about 900 to today where we're looking approximately 475 elevators — we'll call them elevators — in this province. And yet in the next 10 years we are going to cut that back to 100?

You're going to cut it back to a hundred, you're going to help close or suggest which branch lines should be closed, and you're not going to put the monies necessary in your highway system. Do you know what that is going to . . . do you have any idea what that's going to do to the highway system?

I think back to some of the farmers in the Climax area that had actually calculated out the amount of bushels that would be

moving — and I believe this is on line from Val Marie to Consul, the one that was in the announcement, I guess, of a few weeks ago of one of the branch lines proposed for abandonment. And I believe if I remember right, it was 7 million bushels of product moved from that line north — 7 million. So now if we don't have the rail system to do it . . . and let's not forget what rail system we're talking about; we're talking about a rail system of which is in excellent condition.

Taxpayers, I would say in the last . . . well when was that rehab program about, you know . . . I think it was \$575 million was spent rehabilitating the branch . . . or the, you know, branch lines, maybe the main lines, in Saskatchewan alone. That rail line that they're talking about down there, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . .

An Hon. Member: — Don't let it go to waste.

Mr. McPherson: — Oh, you can't let it go to waste. That rail line would probably last 50, 60, 70 years, with little to no maintenance.

The highway system which would have to accept that traffic . . . well there would be two main highways. It would be No. 4 heading from Val Marie north up through Swift Current; or No. 37 which is heading from Climax, through Shaunavon, up to Gull Lake, if that's what the plan is, to start trucking it up on those highways to move 7 million tonnes of product. We were talking about a semi-trailer truck unit hauling . . . they'd be running night and day every day of the year, 24 hours a day, to move that product.

Does that not surprise people that that firstly would jeopardize a lot of people's lives. If you're going to put those amount of trucks, that amount of trucks on our provincial highway system on one or two highways, you can't tell me that we're not putting someone's life at risk — some school kid, just residents, at risk. I think that is shameful.

I say that there is no option. There is no option available to this provincial government. They have got to come to the forefront, do the right thing. You can't allow that line to be abandoned. It's fine to say, well we put on a short-line rail conference and that's it; that's all we're going to do. That's not all you can do. That's not all you can do.

One other thing that we have raised with many of your members at times — we've raised it with some of the grain companies and it was part of what we were trying to work into our . . . the Act that we gave notice of first reading to on the facilitation of short-line railroads Act. And that is, should the elevator companies not have to put some of these elevators up for sale to the community, to farm organizations, to an area, to the people that live and work and produce in an area or in a community. Should they not have to put those elevators up for sale before they abandon them, before they tear them down or burn them down or whatever they're going to do?

Do you not realize the impact you're going to have and where this is all going to lead? You're having, you're having the railroads on one hand saying, well we're going to abandon line,

and they're saying really a lot of it has to do with the fact that elevators are disappearing. That we have these huge cement terminals going up on main lines. So you can't expect us as the railroads to keep our branch lines and our railroads running out there in rural Saskatchewan and people are trucking right by them.

Hey, we agree with that. We agree with that. You talk to the grain gathering companies and they're saying, well when we see the railroads putting forward their plans to abandon track, branch lines in the province, well you can't expect us to let some other, you know, ConAgra or whoever, go and build terminals at all the choice locations up on the main line and we're sitting out there with these, you know, old wooden elevators. We've got to keep up, in a business sense.

And well we agree with that too. The fact of the matter is we think, I think they're working hand in glove. It's beneficial to both railroads and the grain gathering companies to close down their services off of the very heavy lines, the main lines. But is it, exactly?

An Hon. Member: — It doesn't mean the government has to go along with it.

Mr. McPherson: — Exactly. Good point. The member from Thunder Creek says that doesn't mean this provincial government has to accept that philosophy. They shouldn't accept it, they shouldn't accept it because of the risk that they're going to be putting their own residents at. They shouldn't accept it because of the costs that they're going to be offloaded onto their highway system. That shouldn't be acceptable.

If they can put on restrictions . . . well let's just think about it. There are restrictions on the railroads as to what lines I guess they can abandon, when they can abandon, their process to abandon. Why don't we have that on our elevator systems as well? What would be wrong with that?

You see if you just allow it to be taken down, lifted apart, bulldozed over, if you allow that to happen then what you won't have, you won't ever have the ability to have specialty crops or organizations or cooperatives. Pick these elevators up in communities such as Val Marie or Climax or Consul. They could use those elevator systems for grain drying, for cleaning of product, for storage and handling of specialty crops. Who knows where it's going to end. But I'll tell you where it's going to end if they're not there. Nothing will ever happen. Nothing will or can ever happen. So . . .

An Hon. Member: — And this government can put the skids on that if they want to.

Mr. McPherson: — Well that's right. As the member from Thunder Creek says, this government is in the position and has the ability to slow that process up. What we have been doing, what we have been doing . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member says, and what about the federal government? I agree.

And that is why, that is why there have been discussions between myself, the member from Thunder Creek, and the federal Minister of Agriculture to do just that — to slow it up. To slow it up. We've written letters; we've had personal meetings. We've tried to encourage your own government here in Saskatchewan to also take this path.

Let's talk about what's going to happen then if you don't buy into what I'm saying, if you don't buy into the fact that we must — we must — keep these branch lines from being abandoned and we must keep some grain-gathering facilities out there in a real way.

Well it says it all on page 16 of your transportation document. And there's a graph in there. It has total travel, truck travel, road damage on Saskatchewan highways. Now we show a percentage increase in total travel, truck travel, or road damage to paved highways from year 1961 — I guess that's when they started to monitor or keep track — and it shows that by 1995 total travel on these highways had increased. And I'm going to have to guess here. It looks about . . . well it's a little less than 200 per cent. That makes sense. The total truck traffic has increased, I would guess it would be around 225 per cent.

But the amazing one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is road damage. From '61 to 1995, the government's own figures show that road damage in that time period, with those increases to truck travel, total travel, the road damage has increased to, it looks to be a little over 1,500 per cent — 1,500 per cent.

So if you're going to now take a look at what's going to happen if you're going to allow, if you're going to allow more railroads, more branch lines to be abandoned, put less into our highway and road infrastructure . . . and you're doing it on a daily basis. Not just to your provincial highway system either. What about our municipal governments? On one hand you're saying that you're doing so much — you've got plans here; you've got business plans. You've got strategies saying that we're going to go somewhere in rural Saskatchewan — right? — with your infrastructure, highway infrastructure. But on the other hand, you go and you're cutting — what is it? — 12 million this year. Twelve million dollars out of rural municipal. And how much more out of urban?

An Hon. Member: — Seventeen.

Mr. McPherson: — Seventeen million. And a lot of that would be for those smaller communities, but 12 million out of rural municipal governments.

You see this is the problem people have with your government. You're saying one thing, but your actions are going completely the other way. And they're all . . . you know, people go back and read news releases of months previous thinking, well I guess I must have read it wrong and I heard it wrong because they said they were going to do just the opposite. They were going to build the system up.

How can we allow such an increase that we're talking about, an increase of truck traffic on our provincial highway, municipal road network, and expect that we wouldn't see this damage to

our roads and highways increase not by 1500 per cent, we'd be talking 15,000 per cent. You and I both know that there would be no way of repairing it. How would they keep up with the repairs? You can't do it today. You can't keep up today.

But the government is trying to convince us with their document, in a nice, slow fashion, that change is coming, change is necessary — same kind of change arguments that we heard when they wanted to close down our hospitals.

Let me quote here:

Our transportation network was built over the last 50 years to serve a widely dispersed population. It has served us well. However, rural Saskatchewan's transportation needs are changing and our transportation system must evolve with these (changes).

What does that mean? What does that mean? Because we, I don't think, we weren't like France, you know. It's not that our population rode the rails a lot any ways to go from community to community. They weren't like a lot of European countries that use the rail system for transportation of themselves and family.

What our transportation system is used for is to export our commodities. And we all know . . .

An Hon. Member: — Exporting — it's our lifeline.

Mr. McPherson: — Well exactly, it's our lifeline in rural Saskatchewan, those exports.

And so it's one thing to say, well we don't have the population so you've got to change your transportation needs. Why? Because the population went down, does that mean we're growing less product? Well no, we're growing more product; we're growing more than ever. It makes no sense. It would be different if what you had out there were a lot of passenger trains and very light rail to carry light loads and passenger loads. But that wasn't the case.

What this is for is to move bulk commodities of tremendous weight. Weights that our highway system will hold. Just imagine what it would be like if we had only our highway system to rely on and the flooding that we have witnessed this spring — and I guess some last spring. If that was an annual event, do you for a moment think that we could move our product at all?

At least when it's a wet year, we still have lines, we have branch lines that can still move a great deal of our agriculture commodities and our products that we're growing out there for export. That won't happen on our highways. People have not thought that through about the bans on our highways . . .

An Hon. Member: — We don't have enough weights and measures supervisors.

(1215)

Mr. McPherson: — Well exactly. We don't have enough people to supervise or police it.

So there again, another section of the document that just . . . it just doesn't fit with reality out there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now we're into the vision section of this document. And the reason I'm referring to the document, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is because the Bill is really compiled from that business plan and this document. So it's sort of a companion document that really built the Bill, I guess.

They have a vision of trade corridors, and that's great. I think we do have to expand this north-south trade. We can't rely on east-west, you know, especially in a province like Saskatchewan because we are so land-locked. We're talking — what? — 1,000, 2,000 miles . . . or kilometres of movement of commodities in any direction.

So we've got to utilize all the tools at hand. And I think using those tools of moving our product straight south through North America into Mexico — that's great and we're supportive of that. But it's no good to just have in a general sense that we're going to promote corridors, unless of course with that announcement you're going to say which corridors you're going to promote.

And we've heard for a few years now that there's different corridors, and I don't remember what they're named or exactly where they go by. I know one, one of the corridors that was being looked at was heading south on No. 4 Highway, south of, you know, Rosetown through Swift Current through Cadillac, Val Marie, and straight south.

So unless this document — if they really and truly wanted people to believe that they had any intention of following through on this — unless this document were to show that that corridor would be built up and beefed up near immediately and that Highway No. 4 would have massive, massive undertakings right away, what does that really mean to the people?

Well maybe they don't mean it's going to move by highway. Maybe what they mean is this trade corridor will be by rail, and in fact it makes some mention of that but very vague. Well where would that rail be? Now they have an opportunity to go from the community of Consul heading south and linking up with Burlington Northern. And I've heard some say that that linkage could be done for approximately \$20 million.

But do you know what that would mean? We're not talking about then just having the product from Val Marie to Consul moved by rail. It can . . . instead of places like Shaunavon and all along the line moving all the way up to Moose Jaw, we're now moving it the other way. We're moving it down Burlington Northern. It gives us an option as far as getting things either to the port or down to Mexico. There's all kinds of options.

But are they even considering south-west Saskatchewan? I see nowhere in here any indication that the south-west part of this province is part of that plan.

It talks here about a competitive rail sector. And I guess I might as well get into part of that right now. There was . . . Oh here we go — branchline abandonment strategy. Well I tell you, you sort of have to bounce all over the document to get an appreciation of where it's going.

But on page 31 of their document — and here again they talked about "While it is recognized that some level of rail rationalization is necessary . . ." They go on about that theory again, that somehow this provincial government is promoting that. I think that's wrong.

Here's what the government has done. After stating for pages and pages and pages the importance of moving our exports by rail because our provincial highway system can't take it, here's what they're going to do. Here's their strategy:

The government has established a Shortline Advisory Unit within the Department of Highways and Transportation to provide advice to potential investors.

Advice. And you feel that's your role as a provincial government — to provide advice only?

An Hon. Member: — Talk is cheap.

Mr. McPherson: — As the member from Thunder Creek has said, talk is cheap, talk is cheap.

In too many instances have I seen in your documents, that talk is far too cheap. It takes more than advice. Do you members, as members of provincial cabinet and your back-benchers, do you not feel that the provincial government should and could take a role in — an aggressive role — in dealing with these abandoned or proposed for abandoned branch lines? I think you should. The people out in rural Saskatchewan think you should.

Why? It's not that the . . . it's not that the people really and truly want to see the government continuously get into the ownership of things, but the alternative is absolutely unacceptable. And even with your own actions — if you would have taken it, if you would have taken it another step further — with your own actions you have had all kinds of pressure from groups, from SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), from a lot of individuals, people that have been in the short-line business. You've had a lot of pressure, I know, to do something with legislation that in fact makes it very difficult for short-line operators to exist in this province.

So to try and help along . . . so to try and help the government along, I guess because you didn't have the courage to deal with it yourselves, we brought forward a Bill . . . and you know you only have some weeks. You know we all know that it's going to be a shorter session. You people want out of here earlier to help your federal cousins try and win more than a small, small handful of members in the federal parliament, and so you don't have a lot of time left to deal with some of these issues.

And here's the Bill that I brought forward on behalf of the official opposition. It was an Act respecting the suspension of successor rights in relation to the acquisition of short-line

railroads, and to amend The Trade Union Act in consequence thereof. And let me tell you why we've brought this forward and so many others, so many others have also asked that you deal with this.

Here it is — a group called the Moose Jaw/Outlook transportation council and SARM; I'm going to quote from them:

Successor rights have been holding up the development of short-line industry in all parts of the province, says executive director of SARM. "Really, we've seen little or no movement by the provincial government," said Sinclair Harrison.

And this is in the — what's this in? — the *Leader-Post*, an article on successor rights.

So that's why we've brought it forward. It's not to try and create a problem between the government and the unions. I think what it does, it adds a lot of common sense. And what we try and do with such legislation is have a win-win-win situation. Everybody can enjoy the benefits of this.

We know full well, and so do you, that if in fact portions of railroad are let go in this province and going to be turned into, you know, a hopeful short-line rail operation, that under present legislation . . . And I guess there are some ways to getting around that, but I don't know how many lawyers you have to have on stream to help you accomplish this, so that would make one wonder why you'd have to go that route at all. But you have to honour the collective agreements that the union had with CN and CP.

Now it's not that we're opposed to the people that have to work on these rail lines because let's be honest: if short-line is going to take over in the province as much as many communities and areas would like it to, we're going to have to use some of those people that have the knowledge and the ability to run the equipment. I mean, I don't think any of us in this room would want to go out and jump on a train and hope that we could drive it down some track and be able to stop it right at the appropriate elevator.

All we're saying with this Bill is when the sale is made that the . . . We're not asking that the unions be busted up. That's not our game, so I don't want to be heckled back on that one. But that the collective agreements are too restrictive . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I will have to call the member on the relevance to the Bill — he is referring to another Bill that is not before the House at this time — and remind the member that we are debating Bill No. 46. When and if that Bill comes before the House, there will be ample time for it to be brought forward. So I would ask him to get back onto . . . and hold his remarks to Bill No. 46.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So my point in what should be in Bill No. 46 that I don't see in Bill No. 46, but of course we have created avenues for the government to deal with it anyway, is to deal with some of the

restrictive collective agreements that short-line operators would find themselves in.

We've got to create an environment, we've got to foster an environment that is really reality today in Saskatchewan. And is it . . . And I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the people that work on these lines themselves agree with this.

We've had these discussions with some of the people that are in these working positions and they agree. You have to have some latitude. You have to allow . . . And the examples I've used before where the engineer of a short-line railroad can go back and do some repair work, say, on a hitch on the last car of the train, or in fact have it where the flagman could perhaps go ahead and fix the light on the front of the train. All we're asking is to show that there is some flexibility to take this part of the argument out of this bigger equation.

So I'm asking that the government consider that either amending their own legislation that they're bringing forward, or consider some legislation that may also be here before this House, because I'm telling you, advice only is not going to cut it.

I guess that . . . I know I skipped over the document rather hurriedly, but that's not to say that I haven't given it perhaps more than it deserves; because maybe it didn't deserve as much as I've given it.

Suffice to say that at least the minister showed that he was wanting to move in a certain direction. I don't think that he could move cabinet in direction . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I don't think he could move cabinet in the direction where he knew it had to go.

So I guess there is a few of the other things that the government should and could be considering in this Bill No. 46 that, as we believe, the province should be playing a bigger role in what happens with these branch lines.

Well the member across is hollering that the feds should put up their money. But if the member would have listened long, long ago, to comments that we've all made publicly, we wished more than anyone that there could have been money for a national highway program.

But truthfully, the people of this province gave your provincial government a period of time to get their fiscal house in order. You've had four balanced budgets. You've done that.

Now the people are saying it is the time. The time is right to start taking care of another deficit that you have raised and you've been part of . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And you've been part of, Madam Member, you've been part of it, of allowing our highway system to deteriorate to the point it has. Well I hope your heckling will soon turn into a speech and you will get up and tell the people in your constituency how proud you are of the highway situation. I'll get into some of the calls up in your area real soon.

Let's take a look at . . . This was a slide presentation of which

the deputy minister, Brian King, gave me a copy of from the short-line rail conference. And I appreciate, I appreciate that. But when we take a look at your own slide presentation and it talks about road conditions year 1995, there are . . . and it shows good condition, poor condition for pavements, thin pavements, and gravel.

(1230)

Then we have poor condition from pavements. We have some pavements that 30 per cent are considered to be in poor condition. And what we're talking about there, it looks like about 3 . . . about 4,000 kilometres are in poor condition.

When we look at our thin pavement, 50 per cent of the road — your own document says 50 per cent of the roads are in poor condition. And that would take in about 9 . . . well it's got to be about 6,000 kilometres.

And of gravel roads, we've got 59 per cent are considered by your department to be in poor condition — 60 per cent of the gravel roads in poor condition. An admission by your own government.

You should be ashamed because there is no way that you can convince any of us or the general public that the cut-backs to rural governments of some \$12 million this year should have occurred. How does your own document contradict things that you do? And you sit there and have the nerve to heckle and try and, well, I don't know what. I can't wait till you get up and answer your own, your own heckling and questions, Madam Member.

Delivery points in Saskatchewan. Straight downhill. Take a look. And I know I touched on that one earlier; I won't get into it again — but 100 delivery points? And we expect that the one that we just looked at with the poor condition of gravel is not going to be far worse? It will go from 60 per cent to a hundred per cent.

Well the slide presentation talked about the importance of rail to Saskatchewan, markets over a thousand miles, freight rate bills exceeding a billion dollars a year. It's as though you've recognized the problem but refused to deal with it. You're just refusing to deal with it. The damage . . . And if any of the members would like some of these charts, I got them from your own government. And perhaps you don't have a copy. Talk to me later or get a photocopy because I think these speak loud and clear.

Would you like a copy? Okay. I'll take care of this because . . . I'll send that over because you will be absolutely surprised at how severe some of these graphs show our system to be in. In fact . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh, we'll get into potholes I think a lot of times, Mr. Member.

If I could get one of the pages just to please make a . . . photocopy this and send it over to that member who continuously heckles, and we would see if we can't take up a little of his time reading along and then he'll follow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we take a look at . . . and I often bring a lot of my arguments back to '90-91, and there's a reason I do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that is because the present government, when they were in opposition — when they were in opposition — time and time again made the statement that what we had for a highway system in Saskatchewan was one long golf course. And they called them Grant Devine's golf courses.

Remember all the speeches, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I'm not saying you gave any, but you may have. Time and time again they made the statement that these highways had 18 holes to the mile — Grant Devine's golf courses.

What do you think we have today? What do you think we have today? Because when you were saying we had golf courses out there, there was an amount of money being spent of \$155 million. And this is for maintenance and construction. So you'll have to do a little bit of work if you've got your *Estimates* there, Mr. Member, to follow along because we actually pulled out exactly the figures which go into maintenance and construction — \$155 million.

So shortfall from that '90-91 to '91-92, now we're talking about when the change in government occurred — 15 million; the following year — 41 million; the following year — 31 million; the following year — 37 million; '95-96, the following year, 45 million; '96-97 — 16 million. That's the shortfall from '90-91 when the present government in opposition was saying these highways are in terrible shape and have got to have something done with them.

You know what that amounts to — \$187 million shortfall, from when you said those highways need to be repaired immediately to today; 187 million. This year in your budget you brought forward \$30 million of Saskatchewan taxpayers' monies — not yours — Saskatchewan taxpayers' monies. Out of a \$262 million surplus, you pumped in an extra \$30 million — only 10 per cent, roughly 10 per cent of the surplus — and you want credit? Well credit is not due. Credit is not due.

What we have raised time and time again is the fact that you can't even get up enough flags, warning signs, danger signs, whatever they are. What many of the people think they are — those little orange signs — they think that there's an election coming up because they look like little New Democrat lawn signs. But they're all over our highway system. And I've been asked on more than one occasion: who are these two candidates all over the province — Bump, and Danger?

Through the freedom of information Act, the member from Thunder Creek . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well and you too, I see you're chuckling. The member from Thunder Creek through freedom of information got some interesting facts.

During the '95-96 fiscal year, the department purchased 6,585 warning flags — thanks, send one across please — warning flags of various types and sizes at a cost of \$22,000. And I'm sure, you know, that was '95-96, we can assume that there was more purchased this year. Now the question is, the question is, Mr. Member, when you purchased the 6,500 flags, was it

enough? How many times have we raised in this House the fact that you don't even put up warning signs when bridges are out and people are destroying their vehicles?

Kids on their way to school with their mothers hitting bridges that are being washed out. No signs, no nothing. The question is, do you really think that you even have enough warning signs? The public don't. You get out and travel some of those highways and run into them.

I wish I had more time today because there are so many interesting calls that we've had to the provincial pothole patrol line talking about . . . I'll tell you what several of these calls are. People that have hit some of these potholes on our major highways in this province, and you know what? They've had wheels ripped right off their cars. They've lost transmissions; they've lost rear ends, axles . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well sure, look at the amount that we're getting in.

You think people aren't concerned? You think people, when they're filling out your survey and saying, oh yeah, we've got 80 per cent of the people are satisfied with your highway system and then in the same document it shows just the opposite to be true — where is it all going to end?

Well I know the member opposite now, he's enjoying reading the stuff I sent across. You should come over here and see some of the information that I have yet to use. You'll enjoy the upcoming week I'm sure, Mr. Member.

But when we take a look at the amount of money that's being cut back, we can't even get out . . . or your government. I don't want to say we, because we would take some of those rural roads, no question. But your government can't even get out and take care of some of the potholes. And yet you're bringing forward documents saying, we have a vision. Well, you get out there and drive some of those roads, you end up with a poor vision.

An Hon. Member: — Double vision.

Mr. McPherson: — Double vision. There we go.

And in many cases I've asked the Minister of Transportation and Highways to, you know, without being political, because it's not good to always to be political, and so I've asked the member to please, at my expense, will you not get into the vehicle with me, and at my expense we'll go out and take a drive down some of these roads, especially in the south-west. I know them well. And I would pick up all the expenses for the day or the week or whatever it was going to take.

And in fact then, when I sent him across the probably couple of hundred of the first pothole patrol calls, I said once again, come along with me. Let's go out there and see what these roads are like. See if the people, when they're complaining, really and truly have a complaint.

And the response I guess should have been expected. A written response back to me that as Minister of Highways and Transportation, I drive extensively in all areas of Saskatchewan

— I thought they flew by government air, but — as a result, I am fully aware of the condition of most highways in our province and in addition my officials provide me with updates on road conditions on a regular basis. As such I must decline your offer at this time.

Well, if the member . . . if the ministers, if cabinet ministers are so fully aware of the situation on some of those roads and highways out there, why then, when we have bridges being washed out, roads being washed out, vehicles being damaged, why isn't something being done? Why aren't you at least putting up some warning flags?

One thing I will say about this legislation, and I read through it again last night, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as long as the government doesn't try and pull out of some of their responsibilities later, it talks about liabilities of the minister, the role of the minister, responsibilities and powers.

But liabilities . . . and there was one section in the Bill that deals with just these kind of damages that we get several calls about; and if we're getting several calls about them, we know that you are also. But this section in the Bill deals with people that are using our provincial highways system, and through no fault of their own and driving a roadway which they feel should be reasonably expected to accommodate their travel, and if damage is the result then the government is going to pick up that tab.

Now the only question I'm going to have on that section until we've been to Committee of the Whole — I want you to consider this — is perhaps making that section retroactive. Because I've raised this with many of the members that there is quite a number of people that have had, you know, as I said, wheels ripped off, and axles bent, and on and on . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Where? Oh, here.

Well here's an example of what we're talking about, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Constituency case file: car damage on a pothole patrol — I guess there is no need to mention the name, address in Hodgeville. The other night he and his wife were on Highway No. 19 near Hodgeville returning from the hospital where his wife was being treated for medical problems, an oncoming car, could not dodge the potholes which were full of water due to rain, both tires hit potholes bottoming out a 1991 model vehicle; the fuel line was spurting out gas and the oil system was damaged, on and on and on.

We've got several of those that we're going to touch on. But perhaps what we want to do is consider making some of these damage claims retroactive to, I think it would be fair to say, back it up to '90-91. Is there a problem with that? I mean, that way we know exactly if I'm wrong or you're wrong, whether or not the highway system is getting much worse and going downhill or not. If you don't think it does, and you don't think there's been this kind of damage, then make that damage claim retroactive to '90-91 when you took office. And I guess the facts themselves will bear out, will they not?

With that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have so much more to say. In fact, I really didn't get into any of my notes. I guess we're just

warming up here, today. But I would like to adjourn Bill No. 46.

Debate adjourned.

(1245)

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 47 — The Psychologists Act, 1997

Clause 1

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. The issue in the Act which of course appears to be of the most public concern is the question of the psychologist designation of being granted to both doctoral and master's level professionals. So I'd like to ask a couple of questions of the minister in that regard, if I may.

First of all, if he could give me the figures, at least approximate, as to the number of doctoral level psychologists in the province and the number of master's level psychologists.

And also I did make reference in my speech yesterday and I wonder if the minister could talk a bit on it, that my understanding is that we have had doctoral level positions in this province go vacant for very long periods because we have simply been unable to recruit doctoral level psychologists. And I would like it if the minister would please talk on that for a minute.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I thank the member for the question. With me by the way is Mr. Drew Johnston, who is the senior health professions analyst in the Department of Health.

There are 109, approximately, psychologists in Saskatchewan with a doctorate. There are about 150 psychologists in the province with a master's degree. Most of the psychologists with master's degree are actually in clinical practice. Most of the psychologists with the doctorate degree, or certainly roughly half of them at least are not actually in clinical practice but would be occupying academic positions.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, I wonder if the minister would just carry on with the second part of my question, would be that we've had difficulty recruiting doctoral level persons for certain positions. Does he identify that as a problem in this province?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, that is a problem in this province, and also in other provinces too. We have found for many years that to meet the needs of the public, we need to rely on master's level people to provide psychological services.

Mr. Hillson: — I understand that there is uniformity of practice across Canada as to the designation of psychologists; that in Alberta, master's level professionals do have the designation of psychologists, and in Ontario they do not. I wonder if the minister could just fill me in as to whether there is any agreement, any standardization across the country as to what in fact a psychologist is?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — There are currently five provinces that regulate a master's level as well as Ph.D. psychologists, namely, Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. In four of those provinces all of the psychologists can call themselves psychologists. In Ontario a distinction is made. Of those provinces, that five provide the regulation of the nature we would provide, and so if you add us we would be six, I suppose.

Then out of those six, if this Bill was passed, there would be one that would draw a distinction as between master's level and Ph.D. in terms of who could call himself a psychologist, and the rest would allow all of them to refer to themselves as psychologists.

Mr. Hillson: — So in point of fact if this Bill passes, we will be firmly with the majority in terms of Canadian practice.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — That's correct.

Mr. Hillson: — May I ask the minister: obviously every profession is going to have the odd practitioner who is going to be a problem, but does our experience here or in other provinces indicate that there is more cause to be concerned with a master's level practitioner versus a doctoral level practitioner?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — No, there hasn't been any suggestion of that and we don't have any evidence to suggest that. Our view is that all of the psychologists should be licensed and regulated as a matter of public policy and protection regardless of the nature of their academic credential. But we don't really say that one needs to be regulated more than the other. We're saying that they should all be regulated equally.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Deputy Chairman, given that we will in the new professional association have a clear majority of master's level practitioners, is there any concern, in view of the fact there frankly appears to be a cleavage between the two levels, is there any concern that the professional association will be tilted to one group as opposed to the other. Or will they be able to work on behalf of the profession as a whole as opposed to what, frankly, we seem to be seeing right now, namely that there are two distinct groups here?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I believe that they will, all of the psychologists will be able to work together cooperatively in the interests of the profession and the public.

The cleavage is not quite so simple as the member may think. Let me explain. Although the Saskatchewan Psychological Association, which is an association of doctoral members — which are the only psychologists that can now be regulated in our province — opposes in the main the legislation, there are many people who have a doctorate that support the legislation. The association however does not; and the majority, I believe it's fair to say, do not. But I should advise the member that there are two other organizations that support the legislation. One is the Psychological Society of Saskatchewan; the other is the Saskatchewan Educational Psychologists Association.

And the reason I say it's . . . the matter is slightly more

complex than simply a cleavage between the Ph.D. people and the master's level people is that some doctoral level people are members of the Psychological Society of Saskatchewan and support the position of the PSS (Psychological Society of Saskatchewan) that this legislation should go ahead. So that in the main, the master's level people dominate the PSS, but there are also people with their doctorates in psychology who join with them in supporting the legislation. And one of them, for example, was in the gallery yesterday.

What I have said to some of the doctorate level people who are concerned that master's level people should be able to call themselves psychologists, and they also are concerned about the possibility of being dominated by a master's level psychologist, is that there will be a transitional council set up of nine people. And some of those people will be appointed by the Saskatchewan psychologists association. They will be doctorate; so that will be three.

We will ask the Psychological Society of Saskatchewan, the master's level people mainly, to nominate a member who is a doctorate member of their association to be on the council. We will make a similar request to the educational psychologists. So that it's by no means clear that we wouldn't be able to actually have a majority of doctorate level people on the transitional council because neither the . . . neither of the two groups that support the legislation wish to use it unfairly to dominate any other group. They all wish, I think, to proceed in the interests of the profession and the public as a whole.

Mr. Hillson: — The minister is aware that I spoke in the House yesterday at some length about the fact that this legislation gives the minister bylaw powers over the association. This is not a power, for instance, that the minister has in the case of the profession to which you and I belong. What is the thinking as to why the government should have bylaw-making powers over the association here, where I say that's certainly not standard with all self-governing professions?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Part of the thinking relates to the question that the member asked previously, which is about whether one group will be able to dominate another. If that was the case, if for example the bylaw-making provisions of the council of the profession were used in such a way as to discriminate against the doctorate level people — which we don't have any reason to believe they would be and we don't think they would be — but if that was so, then we would have . . . the minister would have the ability to prevent that kind of abuse. So I want to make that point.

The other point I want to make is that this provision is not unique to this legislation. Other professions, including the pharmacists, the medical laboratory technologists, the medical radiation technologists, the opticians and the optometrists, have similar provisions in their legislation and have had for more than a decade. This is not an unusual provision.

We don't anticipate that it would be used, but if a council of a profession used their powers in a way that was not in the public interest or discriminated against any aspect of the profession, then in that rare event, we would have the ability to interfere

with the bylaw-making process. We don't anticipate that that would be necessary, but it actually is not as unusual a provision as has been suggested.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Minister, you informed me that there are 109 doctoral level practitioners in the province. Would I be correct in assuming that they are by and large in the two cities? And I wonder if you could tell me how those numbers of 109 and 150 link up, in your view, with need? Do you consider Saskatchewan to be adequately serviced for the two categories? Do you consider there is a shortage? A surplus?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Of the 109 Ph.D. psychologists in Saskatchewan, 57 are in academic positions and 20 are with health districts. Of the ones that work for health districts, who would be people providing clinical service, only two or possibly three are located outside Saskatoon and Regina, whereas 34 master's level psychologists are located outside Saskatoon and Regina. Therefore there is a need outside Regina and Saskatoon for master's level psychologists, clearly.

And also, in answer to the member's question more specifically, I think it would be desirable to have more doctorate level psychologists too. And the legislation, I think, will not prevent the education of more doctoral level psychologists or their ability to practice, but in the meantime we will recognize the reality that exists, that the master's level people are acting as psychologists.

In the same way, I might add, and the member will be familiar with this, that at one time you could teach school with having gone to normal school or a Standard A certificate, and gradually the criteria was raised to a Bachelor of Education degree. But we never, although we wanted to attain that, and I think we want to attain more Ph.D. psychologists in time, we've never . . . we've tried not to take away the ability of other people to be properly licensed and regulated in their profession.

The committee reported progress.

(1300)

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

Mr. Krawetz: — With leave, to bring greetings.

Leave granted.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Ukrainian Easter Greetings

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as many people in Saskatchewan know, of course, today is Good Friday for those celebrating Easter under the . . . for Ukrainian Orthodox. And as I indicated last year at this time, I know many people who will be celebrating the Velekden, the Easter Sunday, will be doing so by attending a religious church service and then of course followed by the blessing of the traditional Easter baskets, baskets filled with freshly baked holachi or the traditional, beautifully decorated

Easter eggs, the pysanku.

To the members of the House who are celebrating Good Friday, as I am today, I wish each and every one of you the traditional Chrystos Voskres.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — . . . remarks made by the member from Canora-Pelly. And I want to add to his remarks. My family traditions, we . . . many of us have met with our families, and we take this opportunity to get together and celebrate in the old traditional ways, ways that have been brought to Canada from parts of Europe. And it's quite interesting to observe those traditions.

And I do also want to wish everyone who is celebrating in this way this weekend the best, and the best in their gatherings. And also to those who may have friends who may get invited to an Easter dinner, it would be a real treat.

And so I respond to my colleague there. In his address he said, Chrystos Voskres, and I respond to him, Voyisten Voskres, which means, indeed Christ is risen.

The Speaker: — With those positive wishes for members, the Chair would join in extending wishes for a weekend of meaningful celebration and joy to all members, whether or not, whether or not they're celebrating the Easter weekend, in your constituencies and with your families.

The Assembly adjourned at 1:06 p.m.

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