

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens from the communities of Kamsack and Melville. Our 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.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions on behalf of the many citizens of the province concerned with the problem of child prostitution. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reform provincial legislation that may help save the lives of children who are being exploited for sex in public places, and stop prostitution which jeopardizes the safety of all citizens and their children.

The petitioners are from Swift Current and Saskatoon. I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. I also have petitions to present from people who are concerned about child prostitution:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reform provincial legislation that may help save the lives of children who are being exploited for sex in public places, and stop prostitution which jeopardizes the safety of all citizens and their children.

I present these.

The people who have signed this petition are from Saskatoon and from La Loche.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens of northern Saskatchewan; if I may read the prayer into the record:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the rebuilding of Highway No. 155, thereby ensuring adequate access for residents of the communities linked by this road including Dillon, Patuanak, Turnor Lake, and Pinehouse, and an access road to Garson Lake.

This petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by residents of Buffalo Narrows, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Amyot Lake, and Turnor Lake. I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens concerned with rising farm input costs, rising actually to unjustifiable levels. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to urge the government to stop contributing to rising farm input costs and begin using its influence to hold farm input manufacturers accountable for their decisions.

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

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those who have signed these petitions are from communities throughout the Thunder Creek constituency, communities like Vanguard, Cardross, Caron, Briercrest, and also from the Moose Jaw district, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy 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 of Saskatchewan humbly praying that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the rebuilding of Highway No. 155;

Humbly praying that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to protect the Dore, Smoothstone lakes area by declaring it an accessible protected wilderness area;

Humbly praying that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to establish a task force to aid the fight against youth crime in Saskatchewan;

Humbly praying that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to support the creation of regional telephone exchanges; and finally

Humbly praying that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to urge the government to commission an independent study to review the social impact of gambling.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Murray: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all

my colleagues in the legislature, a group of 50 bright young men and women seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. They are participants at the Canada-wide Science Fair which, as you will know, is being held at the University of Regina.

I had the great pleasure of attending the regional science fair in Moose Jaw a month ago and I was most impressed with the projects there. So I can only just image what a variety of projects there will be at the university.

The Canada-wide Science Fair is the national exhibition and forum created by the Youth Science Foundation of Canada to showcase the achievements of Canadian youth participating in the National Science Fair program. There are currently 109 regions in Canada, Mr. Speaker, including 11 in Saskatchewan, which are eligible to participate in the National Science Fair program. So there are over 600 young scientists, ages 12 to 19, with over 300 science projects, gathered at the university this week.

Please join me in extending to all of them a very warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to other members of the Assembly, some 47 students from Martensville. They're in the east gallery, along with their teachers, Jim Golding and Vanessa Goodwin, and 10 chaperons. They come from the Sask Valley School Division, which is a very well-known school division throughout Saskatchewan.

And I love the theme that they have for their school, which is "on track to excellence;" they are doing things right in Valley Manor Elementary School.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Child Care Week

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is the first day of Child Care Week in Saskatchewan — a week where we take the time to recognize the importance of quality child care and the commitment of child care workers in the province.

Caring for our children is without a doubt one of the most important and sometimes difficult jobs in our society. The people who dedicate their lives to the child care profession deserve our extreme gratitude and recognition. These are very special people to whom we entrust our most valuable resource — our children.

But, Mr. Speaker, all too often, as leaders in this province we arbitrarily pick a day or a week to recognize certain groups in society. And while I agree that it is important to recognize the work of all involved in the many day care centres throughout the province, I also would like to commend those parents who devote their total care and dedication and nurturing of their

children constantly on an everyday basis.

Children with positive experiences early on in life have a greater chance of becoming strong — physically, emotionally, and intellectually. And, Mr. Speaker, there are too many children in this province who do not have access to quality child care because their families live in extreme poverty.

If the government is serious about quality child care, they must do something to alleviate the child poverty which presently exists in Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Weyburn Red Wings Do Well in Royal Bank Cup Tournament

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've stood here two previous times to comment on the success of the Weyburn Red Wings hockey team — once for capturing the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League title and a second time to congratulate them for winning the Anavet Cup.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this past weekend the Red Wings were in Summerside, P.E.I. (Prince Edward Island) playing in the Royal Bank Cup tournament. Approximately 116 teams began the season with the hope of reaching this tournament; only five made it.

The Red Wings proved throughout the round robin portion of the tournament that they deserved to be there, as they finished in first place. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, they are not able to capture the championship as they were defeated in double overtime by the host and eventual champion Summerside team.

I want to congratulate the Red Wings for a terrific season. They have given the people of Weyburn and Saskatchewan many fond memories of their past hockey season, and were fine Saskatchewan ambassadors in Prince Edward Island.

I also want to congratulate Geoff Derouin, who was named outstanding goalie, and Mark Hartigan, who was named most valuable player and top scorer in the tournament.

I'm looking forward to attending the homecoming celebrations in Weyburn on Thursday. I'm sure members of the community as well as team representatives are eagerly awaiting the start of next season so that the Redwings can begin defending their titles.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rising Costs for Farmers

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Today I presented petitions from farmers and ranchers in Thunder Creek. Earlier this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I surveyed the producers in my seat to see whether they were concerned about the rising cost of farm inputs. Many not only responded, but

took the time to look through their books and provided detailed accounts of just how much these rising costs eroded their bottom line.

Farmers from communities like Avonlea, Assiniboia, Chaplin, Rouleau, Moose Jaw, Herbert, Vanguard, Pense, and many others, told me that they're worried rising costs for fertilizer, pesticides, and machinery parts are harming their farms.

In addition they were angry about the rising costs for government-provided services, particularly electricity through SaskPower.

I wrote to the input manufacturers themselves and made them aware of my constituents' concerns. I also asked them to justify their pricing decisions. I also wrote to both federal and provincial ministers of Agriculture to ask them to address this issue.

I urge the provincial minister to act. This government, which rakes in multimillion dollar profits from the sale of farm inputs like power, fertilizer, and gas, might begin that process by examining how its own policies harm farm families by contributing to the rising cost of farm inputs.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Canada Health Day

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today is Canada Health Day, and it's also the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth. This is a welcome opportunity to review Saskatchewan's contribution to health care renewal and to consider in the midst of the federal election campaign what role our national government can and should play in health care in this country.

In 1991 Saskatchewan had empty hospital beds while important community services like home care, physiotherapy, mental health counselling, and drug and alcohol abuse, went underfunded.

We increased funding in those areas while still maintaining the highest number of hospitals per capita in the country. We passed legislation to prevent a two-tiered health system. Health districts boards, whose members are elected and nominated by the community, ensure that decisions about health care are made by people who live in those communities.

In renewing health care, Saskatchewan took a broader view of health, recognizing that people need shelter; education; food; a decent income; safe streets, homes, and workplaces; and clean air and water, to enjoy good health.

Under the Canada Health Act the Government of Canada is responsible for enforcing the fundamental tenets of Canadian medicare.

Saskatchewan people, and all Canadians, should take the

opportunity in this federal election to remind the Liberals of their responsibility to provide adequate funding for our most cherished national program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Watson Liquor Store Receives Award of Excellence

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a business person, I know the value of an employee who provides exemplary customer service.

Today it gives me great pleasure to bring to the attention of this Assembly one such employee, Audrey Painter, who works at the Watson liquor store. Audrey was recently recognized by the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority for her outstanding customer service, by the presentation of the President's Award of Excellence.

Audrey, who has been acting manager for the last eight years, has greeted customers with a smile and friendly service. One customer noted that Audrey has a better memory for his likes and dislikes than he does.

The Watson liquor store has recently received the SLGA (Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority) Retail Award of Excellence for the class of this store.

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. members are aware, I come from the Watson area, and even though I disagree with most decisions made by this government, I can wholeheartedly endorse the presentation of these awards to Watson, and to Audrey Painter.

I would like to take this opportunity to add my personal congratulations to Audrey and the staff.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Estevan Miners Commemoration

Mr. Ward: — Mr. Speaker, the names of Nick Nargan, Julian Gryshko, and Pete Markunas are hardly known to most Saskatchewan citizens. And that is unfortunate, because these three Estevan coalminers were the miners killed in 1931 because they wanted a fair wage for a day's work and decent working conditions for workers at the time at the mines.

On Saturday, I was proud to take part in a ceremony which we hope will help remedy this oversight and allow these three men to take their rightful and identified place in Saskatchewan history.

A commemorative service took place on Saturday, first in front of the Estevan court-house where the Estevan riot took place, and then at the grave site of the three men where a plaque was unveiled. A large crowd was there, including labour leaders, present day miners, family and relatives of those who took part in the riot, and one survivor of that day — Mr. Pete Gimby.

Mr. Speaker, an act of senseless violence like this still shocks us — or should shock us — because in Saskatchewan we do not approach differences of opinion with violence. The fact that we let it happen once should keep us on guard so it does not happen again.

As we know, history has a way of repeating itself to those who do not remember its lessons. The last words on this day should go to Mr. Gimby when he said:

It was my dream of having such a day as this, so we can pay respect for the three miners who died for us. I beg the young miners to keep this tradition every year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Students Support Manitoba Flood Victims

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that most members of this Assembly have shared my horror at the devastation wrought by the flooding in Manitoba. Over 27,000 people have been forced from their homes.

Such tragedies however, tend to bring out the best in people. Victims of the Manitoba flood have received help from all over Canada, and especially from right here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of attention is focused nowadays on problems caused by a small number of our young people. But the response of many young people to this tragedy reminds us that most young people are decent, caring, compassionate individuals. The students of Lashburn High School in my constituency fit that description and they have pitched in to help in the crisis.

Students participated in a combined bike-athon-walkathon to help raise funds for the victims of the flood. Approximately 90 students in grades 7 through 9 will be sponsored for the number of kilometres they run, walk, or bike around the school's track. Their goal is to reach 1,100 kilometres, the distance from Lashburn to Winnipeg.

Saskatchewan people have always been known for the . . . have known the value of working to help their neighbours. We know that cooperation and compassion helps to forge . . . foster stronger and supportive communities and benefits each and every one of us.

By helping our neighbours in Manitoba, the students of Lashburn High are doing their bit to build a stronger and more compassionate Canadian community.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

SaskTel's Failed United States Venture

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

Deputy Speaker, another day and more revelations about the NDP government and the NST-SaskTel mismanagement of public funds.

Last month the minister in charge of SaskTel indicated that the Crown company did not withdraw from this lame duck investment earlier than it did because, and I quote:

What was paramount in our minds was that if we were going to withdraw from the project, that it would be an honourable withdrawal and that no contracts left unfilled, no bills left unpaid, and no employees would be left unpaid.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, NST executive Merv Hussack contends that SaskTel is not telling the whole story, claiming SaskTel backed away from a handshake agreement to sell the U.S. (United States) company and did not fully pay almost 200 employees who were thrown out of work.

Will someone in authority explain why this government misled this House?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to respond to the member opposite: has been indicated by management of SaskTel that they have met their obligation to employees. I am told that there are some outstanding issues with management with respect to some expense accounts. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, the employees of that corporation were treated fairly. Any outstanding disputes with management will be treated through negotiations and a final resolve will come to pass.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, NST officials have obviously discovered what Saskatchewan people already know: this government has absolutely no honour. Mr. Minister, what kind of message do you think this sends out to other potential investors in Saskatchewan projects? More importantly, please explain why you continued to sink million of dollars into this project when you had no intention of honouring an agreement with your partners. Why did you not get out while the going was good and save Saskatchewan taxpayers millions of dollars?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, let me comment first on the, I guess, the reaction of people outside of this province to what's going on in this legislature. Mr. Speaker, there isn't a jurisdiction where people do not feel proud and support the assets that they own. Members opposite are shareholders, as all of us are, and I want to say that these Crown corporations have done very good on behalf of the taxpayers and the shareholders of this province. But I want to say it's quite clear that members of the Conservative and the Liberal Party are certainly alone in the support for the advancement and the proper management of these Crown assets.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, with respect to SaskTel and the people who were working for NTS in Chicago, they were treated fairly as the law of that jurisdiction would demand they are. I've indicated that there are some outstanding disagreements with the management of that corporation, but I want to say not only related to the expenses of the management of that corporation, but to the way they ran that company.

SaskPower's Proposed Project in Guyana

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Saskatchewan should thank the Government of Guyana for being upfront and honest about the sale of its power company, because the NDP (New Democratic Party) certainly aren't.

While the minister in charge of SaskPower refuses to provide details about a deal to purchase 50 per cent of the Guyana electrical corporation, the Government of Guyana . . . And they suggest the final deal is expected to close on July 1.

Price Waterhouse, which is advising the Guyanese government, initially arrived at a sale price of \$20 million. Yet the NDP with its proven business wisdom has agreed to purchase it for some \$31 million.

Will the minister explain why SaskPower would get into this venture in the first place, and why the Crown company would agree to a purchase price that's \$11 million more than Price Waterhouse has suggested? And, Mr. Minister, have you been suckered once again?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite, I've read the musings of the journalist in Guyana as well. But I want to say that there are some inaccuracies in this article.

I also want to say to you that the honourable thing to do would be to honour the letter of intent that we signed with the Guyanese government not to disclose the details of this letter of intent.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to do that, nor is SaskPower Commercial, nor are any people who work within SaskPower, because the honourable thing to do is honour the agreement that we've signed with them.

But having said that, Mr. Speaker, let me remind that member one more time: there has been no deal signed; there is no firm price at this time through a negotiated agreement. It will have to come to the board of SaskPower Commercial, at which point it will be looked at. It will then go to the board of SaskPower, who will look at it again. And a decision will not be made until we are assured that we have bought it for the cheapest possible price, that the return on investment will be adequate and appropriate, and that any investment, if there is — and there is at this point not one nickel's . . .

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

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, SaskPower is not only paying 11 million more than what Price Waterhouse has recommended, it is also investing in a utility company that requires a \$210 million investment according to the Guyanese ambassador to the U.S. He suggests the electric company of this third-world nation is riddled with obsolete systems.

At the same time, the Inter-American Development Bank suggests Guyana's electrical sector is in a severe crisis. This investment would appear at best to be a black hole, Mr. Speaker.

Adding insult to the people of Saskatchewan is the fact that you refuse to release information which would justify an investment of millions of their tax dollars.

Mr. Minister, what proof can you give the people of Saskatchewan that this deal is not going the same route as your gigatel fiasco; how many millions of additional tax dollars will you have to go into this black hole before you admit it's a bad deal?

Get the hell out of it now and stay out of it. You'd be better off . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I would like to bring to this member's attention that this unparliamentary language is not allowed in the House and I would ask him to retract that statement, please.

Mr. McLane: — Well, whatever the statement, Mr. Speaker, I will retract.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, I can tell . . . You know, Mr. Speaker, it amazes me that the member opposite can get as excited as he does over a newspaper article. And I tell you, if you take verbatim everything that's written in a newspaper article and believe it to be the truth, maybe you might have some cause to be upset.

But I told the member opposite before, the details of the agreement will come to the boards — both Commercial and SaskPower. We will do due diligence and based on due diligence and analysis of the agreement, we will make a decision as to whether or whether not to invest money.

Now I'm certainly hopeful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we can conclude this arrangement and make a decision one way or the other soon because I hate to see that member as upset as he apparently is today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Natural Gas Rates

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While we're after the minister for SaskPower, we'll go to SaskEnergy.

Mr. Speaker, in late January the NDP government proposed a 2.3 per cent rate increase for natural gas customers. The proposed rate increase was subject to a 45-day review process,

which is a hoax in itself. It was then to be rubber-stamped by this government to take effect on April 1. Mr. Speaker, today is now May 12 and there has been no official announcement.

Will the minister in charge of SaskEnergy explain if the delay is an indication that cabinet is rethinking the proposal? Or is it a case of not wanting to make a bad news announcement which might harm their federal counterpart cousins in the federal election?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you with respect to the federal election that the bad news announcement for your political party came with the “red book” in 1993 — a GST (goods and services tax) commitment they never took; \$390 million a year in freight out of the pockets of the people of western Canada. Mr. Speaker — that’s the bad news federally.

With respect to SaskEnergy, I would suggest to the member opposite that the April 1 was a request made by SaskEnergy. Cabinet has not had the opportunity to review in detail their request. We will make a decision at the appropriate time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Auto Insurance Rates

Mr. Hillson: — Deputy Speaker, if they don’t like us quoting the newspaper, I’ll quote the government. The minister in charge of SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) has told us repeatedly that in spite of over 70 million a year being paid out to accident victims due to no-fault, that they’re still \$112 million in the glue. They have lost as much money. We’ve been told repeatedly that they’re going to have to jack up rates and we’re going to be facing higher auto fund rates.

In view of the minister’s continual hints that we’re going to have our rates jacked up, he still won’t tell us exactly how much or when. My question to the minister is, what’s the delay in the announcement? Is he delaying it till right after the federal election? Or is he delaying it until this House closes so he won’t have to face the music in this House? What is the reason for the delay when he says we’re going to be hit?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member . . . the minister responsible for SGI has clearly indicated that the auto fund is in a deficit position. And I think we all recognize that. And there are good reasons for that.

The repair costs have been increasing very dramatically. Air bags have been a major cause of costs with respect to the repair of vehicles. And those are issues that will have to be addressed.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we will look . . . It will come to CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) as a proposal. We will have a look at what may or may not be required. Our goal and our aim is to minimize the impact on our client group.

But I want to say as well, Mr. Speaker, to members on that side of the House, if they can’t understand the concept that these corporations will at some point in time have increases . . . and they will have decreases.

SaskEnergy gave the people of this province, because the price of natural gas dropped, a decrease of 12 per cent in the last two years. They don’t want to talk about that. When the price of natural gas goes up, the price to the consumers are going to go up. It’s business, it’s common sense . . .

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

Mr. Hillson: — The hon. minister has been good enough to explain some basic economics to us and why he has to jack up rates, but there seems to be an enormous conflict in our friends opposite over there.

Every time the minister in charge of SGI tells us he’s going to jack up our rates, he points to the bad experience with auto thefts. Every time the Minister of Justice speaks up he says that car thefts are not a problem. He’s pointed out repeatedly that in point of fact several people in Regina have not had their cars stolen.

What is the problem? Is the government not talking to each other? Do the ministers not communicate? What in fact is the line? Is the minister of SGI right that we’re going to have to pay higher premiums because of car thefts and house break-ins, or is the Minister of Justice right that it’s not a common problem? Which is the line the government is using today?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, let me understand where the members of the opposition come from. Are they wanting to see rate freezes across the board? Are they wanting to see rate decreases across the board? Or do they want to see rate increases? And I think they should stand up and they should clarify what their position is.

Mr. Speaker, they want more money for health care; they want more money for education; they want more money for highways. And they want to see balanced budgets. They want to decrease the tax load of this province by harmonizing the GST — which would increase it by \$180 million.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I’ve got a little difficulty in determining where these members come from. I think what they want to do is sit down with the leader of their party, regroup, determine where they want to go. Because what they’re talking in this House makes no sense to members on this side of the House, I would suggest, to the media, nor to the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower’s Proposed Project in Guyana

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the minister responsible for SaskPower. Mr. Minister, what are you thinking about? How can you let that old air bag, Jack Messer, expose Saskatchewan taxpayers to this kind of risk?

It's going to cost \$210 million to fix up that mess that you call a power company down in Guyana, and you want to buy half of that. That's like someone that's still wanting to buy Bre-X shares.

Mr. Minister, the Guyana power company requires \$210 million worth of repairs. If this deal goes through, you're on the hook for a hundred million plus. Will you get out of this deal before it's too late? Why don't you just pull the plug on this whole deal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I hope you'll bear with me; I'm going to take a little time to explain this.

The members read a newspaper article; they get very excited. They talk about a \$210 million repair cost to this power corporation. Wrong. What that is is a proposal by a consulting group that looked at an expansion that isn't even being looked at by SaskPower Commercial.

But I want to say, members of the Conservative Party and the Liberal opposition read a newspaper article and they can barely contain themselves, Mr. Speaker. And I'll tell you why.

They've been in this House for — what? — 42 days. How many days have we been sitting? They can't find an issue. They can't complain against the budget because the people of Saskatchewan are very comfortable what's happened in this session. A tax decrease on the provincial sales tax of 2 points, \$180 million — it's little wonder they've got no issues and have to rely on Guyanese newspaper articles by some journalist.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, you keep telling us we shouldn't believe the media reports. The problem is we get no information other than media reports. We ask the minister to release the letter of intent. He refuses, but then we read about it in the newspaper the next day.

We ask the minister how much it'll cost to rebuild this company. He refuses to answer, but we find it'll cost \$210 million.

Mr. Minister, what's the point of all this secrecy? You could end all the speculation. You could end all the newspaper reports about this if you just simply release all the documentation surrounding this deal. Why don't you do that for us this afternoon, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm going to help that member a little further. What is reported in that particular newspaper article is not the letter of intent. I am telling the members on that side of the House what is in the letter of intent is a confidentiality clause that binds both sides.

And I am saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am not going to stand in this legislature and breach an agreement that we made

with people who may become potential partners of ours. I'm not about to do that.

And I say, if those members understood anything about negotiations, they would understand why there are confidentiality clauses in letters of intent and documents of the like. It's to protect the interests of both people who are sitting down and attempting to negotiate a reasonable deal.

Now they may not understand that, Mr. Speaker, but members on this side of the House do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, if you pump millions of dollars into the repairs at the Guyana electrical company, how are you ever planning on recovering this money? This is one of the poorest countries of the world. Jack Messer just can't wheel in and jack up rates like he does here in Saskatchewan. The Guyana government has already frozen power rates for a year and made future increases subject to the approval of a public utilities review commission, which incidentally is something we should have here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, I'm going to ask you a straightforward question and I think the people of Saskatchewan would like a straightforward answer. This shouldn't be the subject of a secret deal, Mr. Minister. Why don't you release all documentation surrounding this deal and provide for the people of Saskatchewan an estimate on how much it's going to cost to upgrade the Guyana electrical company.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that a capital purchase price will be based on how much we can return with respect to power rates, with respect to electrical consumption, what it'll cost with respect to repairs.

Mr. Speaker, these are all of the things that are being analysed by SaskPower Commercial at this time. That analysis is not complete. Once the analysis and the negotiations are complete, it'll be brought to the board of directors of the corporation. It's a normal course of doing business.

I want to say to members opposite, do they stand up in this legislature and scrutinize every business deal that's done in this province, or do they just scrutinize the ones that they pick off of a Guyanese newspaper?

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, this deal will not be completed unless we are sure that there is a security of our investment, that the amount that we have invested is appropriate in relationship to the worth of the assets. And until it comes to the appropriate people, that decision will not be made. Once that decision is made, we'll share it with the member opposite.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Pornography on the Internet

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question is for the only minister responsible for the government today, the minister answering the questions for SaskTel.

Mr. Minister, one month ago the PC (Progressive Conservative) caucus identified a number of illegal pornographic use-net news groups available on the Internet through SaskTel's Sympatico. We provided you with a list of some of the more offensive news groups and you made a commitment to block them. SaskTel has now blocked some — I repeat, some — of these use-net groups, but this morning we discovered that alt-sex pedophilia is still available through Sympatico.

Why is Sympatico continuing to allow the distribution of this illegal material?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, the member . . . the minister indicated that she would respond to the member. She's at a meeting this morning that keeps her out of the House. And I will take notice on her behalf and she will be responding to the member directly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Minister, I'm glad that you're going to take notice, but the minister said last month she was going to do something about it.

And this is quite the age that we live in. IBM can program a computer to analyse 200 million chess moves a second and defeat the world chess champion, but SaskTel can't figure out a way to block child pornography.

Mr. Minister, since we raised these issues last month, SaskTel has blocked a number of these use-net groups we identified, but it still hasn't blocked at least two dealing with pedophilia. It's kind of ironic that a Saskatoon man has just been charged with illegally distributing child pornography through the Internet, yet this material continues to be readily accessible through SaskTel Sympatico.

Mr. Minister, why isn't this material being blocked?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'll take notice on behalf of the minister, as I indicated in my previous answer.

Saltcoats Reassessment

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, my question is for the minister in charge of Municipal Government or her designate. I brought to her attention last week the disastrous results that resulted from SAMA's (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency) lack of common sense approach in reassessing the town of Saltcoats. This government has had time to reconsider its pass-the-buck attitude.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, who is really in charge of this province's reassessment? Will this government show some leadership and assist these people who are at the mercy of SAMA's I-don't-care attitude?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, that member, having spent some time and having some experience in municipal government, will understand that SAMA is the agency responsible, for goodness sakes. He will also know that it's being done on behalf of the municipal governments. He will also know that SAMA has . . . or that SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) has representation on the board, that SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) has representation on the board, and the government and SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) have representation on the board.

He also understands that there is an appeal process whereby if folks are not comfortable with their assessment, they can do an appeal process after having SAMA review it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, it's not news to me that SAMA is in charge of the reassessment. What I'm asking: who on earth is in charge of SAMA? If not you, who? Someone has to be the overseer. You can disband SAMA if you . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Order. I would ask the House to allow the member to put his question and allow the minister to answer. The whole House is getting a little too loud; so I would ask you to calm down.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The minister indicated in this House that these people have the right to appeal, as you have said, and more than 50 people have. Due to this high number, the Appeal Commission has reserved decision to a later date.

If these appeals are passed on to the next level, it would cost each appellant \$50 for every \$100,000 that their properties are assessed at, just to take their cases any further. This could cost Saltcoats residents thousands of dollars in total just to have their say and to right a wrong SAMA has partially admitted to.

Just once will this government do something right for the people of rural Saskatchewan and help right this injustice?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member can stand up and grandstand all he wants, but he knows who's in charge. He also knows that in 1985, 87 per cent . . . or 85 per cent of the people . . .

An Hon. Member: — 1995.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Or 1995 — voted to endorse the SAMA arrangement. He also knows that SARM has members

on that. He also knows that SUMA has. And he also knows that SSTA has, and that the provincial government has representation on it. It's the board of directors that runs the operation.

Certainly there's a minister responsible for Municipal Government and you understand that. But you also understand that municipal reassessment has not taken place in this province for 30 years and that municipal governments were facing court challenges that in all likelihood they wouldn't win.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the member opposite is not as naïve as he pretends to be. He knows the support that the municipal governments gave for SAMA. He also knows its make-up, he knows the appeal process, and he is very well understanding of the whole situation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Permanent Voters List

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, every provincial election enumeration costs this province \$900,000. Now of course this federal election the federal government has instituted a permanent voters list that will do away with enumeration in every single election.

My question is, why don't we link up to the permanent voters list of the federal government so that there will be a permanent voters list for provincial and municipal elections as well, and save us a million dollars per election?

And while the government is answering that question, they may also explain . . . a month ago they said they were considering linking municipal and health elections on the same day instead of a few days apart. Do we yet have an answer on that, or are we going to go to the expense of two election days this fall instead of one?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I know they wanted to hear again from the Minister of Energy and Mines, but I felt I just had to say something today. So I want to say something today about the question that the hon. member asked.

Saskatchewan has supported the initiative of the federal government to establish a permanent voters list. When we amended The Election Act in the last session, we made provision for those kind of arrangements to take place.

Before the Bill was passed in parliament, the Hon. Herb Gray telephoned Saskatchewan and talked to me about this, about our support for it. I confirmed our support. We think that there is a great deal of gold to be mined in this particular spot, and we will be cooperative, and we will try to come online with a provincial voters list, based on the federal voters list, for the next election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 70 — The Archives Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 70, The Archives Amendment Act, 1997, be now introduced and read for the first time.

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

Bill No. 71 — The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997/Loi de 1997 sur la réglementation des boissons alcoolisées et des jeux de hasard

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 71, The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997 be now introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be read a second time later this day.

Bill No. 72 — The Children's Law Act, 1997/ Loi de 1997 sur le droit de l'enfance

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 72, The Children's Law Act, 1997 be now introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be read a second time later this day.

Bill No. 73 — The Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act, 1997/Loi de 1997 sur l'exécution des ordonnances alimentaires

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 73, The Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act, 1997 be now introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be read a second time later this day.

Bill No. 74 — The Family Maintenance Act, 1997/ Loi de 1997 sur les prestations alimentaires familiales

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 74, The Family Maintenance Act, 1997, be now introduced and read for the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be read a second time later this day.

Bill No. 75 — The Matrimonial Property Act, 1997/ Loi de 1997 sur les biens matrimoniaux

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 75, The Matrimonial Property Act, 1997, be now introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the

Assembly, ordered to be read a second time later this day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 71 — The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997/Loi de 1997 sur la réglementation des boissons alcoolisées et des jeux de hasard

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to give second reading to The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997. This Bill is being presented in both English and French.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is essentially identical to the Act it is replacing. The purpose of the Bill is to provide the government with the means to regulate the sale and consumption of alcohol within the province and to regulate horse-racing and gaming.

The Act that is being replaced by this Bill was first considered by this Assembly in 1988. Since that time the Act has been amended on numerous occasions. As a result, the drafters made a number of technical drafting changes to facilitate the translation into French. In addition, the provisions of the Act were consolidated and renumbered.

This Bill contains one change to the existing Act based on an opinion from my department's constitutional law unit. It was determined that the provision requiring applicants for permits to be Canadian citizens was contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As a result, that requirement was dropped in the Bill. Other . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. I have been advised that this Bill is a financial Bill dealing with the government finances, and the Crown recommendation has not been received for this Bill. Therefore we cannot allow second reading to proceed.

**Bill No. 72 — The Children's Law Act, 1997/
Loi de 1997 sur le droit de l'enfance**

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to give second reading to The Children's Law Act, 1997. This Bill is being presented in both English and French. Mr. Speaker, I would like to give a brief background to this Bill and to the other Bills being considered today in English and French.

Following the current decision of the Supreme Court in 1988, the Government of Saskatchewan and the Government of Canada entered into a series of agreements to recognize and promote the language rights of Saskatchewan francophones. One of those agreements provided for the translations and presentation to this Assembly of legislation that is of importance to the francophone communities.

Under the terms of the 1988 agreement, the Government of Canada is paying 75 per cent of the costs associated with

translation.

Mr. Speaker, our government began a process of consulting with Saskatchewan francophones to develop a list of Acts that were of the greatest importance and usefulness to them. They provided us with a list of 35 Acts which they identified as Acts they would like to have translated. In 1995 eight Acts from that list were introduced and approved by the Assembly, and in 1996 a further 10 Acts were approved.

This session we are introducing six more Bills from that list. They are: The Small Claims Act, 1997, which has already been approved by this Assembly; The Children's Law Act, 1997; The Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act, 1997; The Family Maintenance Act, 1997; The Matrimonial Property Act, 1997; and The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997.

In addition to the Acts identified by the francophone community, this Assembly has enacted other legislation in English and French, including five Acts in 1988, one in 1993, and a further two Acts earlier in this session — The Court Jurisdiction and Proceeding Transfer Act, and The Enforcement of Canadian Judgments Act.

After the five Bills before the Assembly this afternoon are approved, Saskatchewan will have enacted a total of 32 bilingual Acts.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is essentially identical to the Act that it is replacing. The Bill establishes rules respecting the custody and access of children, and the guardianship of their property. It also provides rules respecting child status and parentage. Enacting this Bill will allow Saskatchewan francophones to read the law in their own language and to feel more comfortable when dealing with domestic legal issues.

(1430)

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of The Children's Law Act, 1997.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and, by leave of the Assembly, referred to a Committee of the Whole later this day.

**Bill No. 74 — The Family Maintenance Act, 1997/
Loi de 1997 sur les prestations alimentaires familiales**

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to give second reading to The Family Maintenance Act, 1997. This Bill is being presented in both English and French. This Bill is essentially identical to the Act it is replacing. The Bill establishes the legal responsibility to provide support to one's children and one's spouse. The claimants who are entitled to support are given the right to apply to the court for a maintenance order.

This Bill incorporates the amendments found in Bill 28 of this session that were earlier approved by this Assembly. To facilitate the translation into French, the provisions of the Act were consolidated and renumbered, however, the Bill does not

change the existing law.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of The Family Maintenance Act, 1997.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and, by leave of the Assembly, referred to a Committee of the Whole later this day.

**Bill No. 75 — The Matrimonial Property Act, 1997/
Loi de 1997 sur les biens matrimoniaux**

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise again today to give second reading to The Matrimonial Property Act, 1997. This Bill is being presented in both English and French. This Bill is essentially identical to the Act it is replacing.

The purpose of the Bill is to recognize the joint and mutual responsibilities of spouses and the joint contributions that spouses make in acquiring matrimonial property. In the case of a marital dispute, the Bill allows for applications to court to resolve questions of distributing matrimonial property, and it also recognizes the right of spouses to enter into inter-spousal contracts.

The Act that is being replaced by this Bill was first considered by this Assembly in 1979. During the years since 1979 legal drafting standards have changed. As a result, a number of drafting changes were made to the English version to facilitate the translation into French.

The changes made include the following: use of gender-neutral terms — for example, use of his or her rather than his; use of shorter sentences; and use of the active voice.

In addition the provisions of the Act were consolidated and renumbered. However, the Bill does not change the existing law. The result is, I believe, a Bill that is easier to read.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of The Matrimonial Property Act, 1997.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and, by leave of the Assembly, referred to a Committee of the Whole later this day.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 36

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 36 — The Health Districts Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker, The Health Districts Amendment Act attempts to clear up some problems surrounding remuneration for members of district health boards. This is only one area in my constituency, with the boards that I am associated with, that is of a drastic need of

clarification. There are many other problems that need clearing up in the Central Plains Health District.

Mr. Speaker, since the budget speech of March 20, 1997, I have had the opportunity to sit in this Assembly and listen to this government generally and to the Minister of Health specifically speak about the year of stability that is upon us in health reform. I have understood the minister and the government to say that this year we will see an end to the destruction of health services that this government consciously brought upon the people of Saskatchewan. This year is supposed to be a period of stability and building; no more job loss and no more money . . . and more money, rather.

I have also listened to my constituents who reside in the Central Plains Health District. What they are facing is continued loss of services, loss of jobs, and not enough funding for necessary services — completely opposite of what I am told by the Hon. Minister of Health.

So I ask myself: just what is the truth? And my purpose today, Mr. Speaker, is to try to get to the truth about health reform generally and the Central Plains Health District specifically, including issues surrounding the minister's responsibility to ensure remuneration ceilings are complied with through an order in council, which was apparently not done in 1995-96 in the Central Plains Health District, according to the auditor's report. And because of some of these problems, I wrote a letter to the Minister of Health on November 14, 1996 trying to alert him to the escalating problems within the Central Plains Health District.

And I told him that there was a great deal of frustration and anger on the part of community people, health care providers, community leaders, facility owners, some district board members, and citizens regarding the operations and management of that health district.

I had mentioned to him that I had heard numerous complaints regarding the lack of opportunity for meaningful discussions at the district board level. And that is because the Carver model excludes timely input from community members. So in essence, people feel excluded.

People in that district also spoke to me of misinformation that they have been given, inability to access information, intimidation tactics, muzzling of board members, and unfair tactics in decision making.

I have personally tried to assist these people in getting some answers to their questions by submitting them to the CEO (chief executive officer) of the district. My letter went to him September 19, and to date I have not received an answer.

Recently I witnessed a motion passed to close St. Michael's Hospital in Cudworth. This was done in spite of the fact that community leaders in Cudworth worked with the process in a very open and intelligent manner to put together a proposal for an integrated facility in their community. This proposal, if implemented, would have saved the district money and provided better access. These people in Cudworth had the best

interests of the entire district at heart.

It was evident to me that many board members did not have enough information to make an informed decision. In fact some board members voiced this loudly, but to no avail. The motion was passed anyway, and citizens of Cudworth were not allowed to speak until after the motion was passed. Their treatment, along with the additional barrage of complaints, suspicion . . .

There is evidence that the decision to close St. Michael's Hospital was contrived, predetermined, and certainly not in the best interests of the people of Central Plains Health District or the province of Saskatchewan. You can be sure that the remaining communities with health facilities in this district lack trust and faith in this undemocratic process.

People in the constituency will not be suppressed. I mentioned this to the minister and I mentioned that he should expect to hear more on these matters as the mayors, health advocacy groups, and many others are uniting their efforts to take action to ensure that their health facilities will not become victims of the slash and burn mentality that has been inflicted on other communities and agencies throughout the health district.

And I appeal to the minister to set aside the politics of health reform and to respond to the serious and immediate needs of the residents of this health district. I ask him to please not approve of the decision of the health board without speaking directly to the people involved at the community level. I mentioned also that these matters are serious and worthy of full investigation by himself as Health minister of the province.

This letter on my part, Mr. Speaker, was a sincere request, an attempt to solve a serious and growing problem — one could say cancerous — that has resulted from health reform.

It is my duty and my responsibility as an elected representative of my constituents who live in the Central Plains Health District, to bring to the attention of the Minister of Health and this Assembly, the citizens' honest concerns and experiences.

But why is it my responsibility to inform the minister? It seems to me that democratic institutions require a series of checks and balances — internal controls — to see that there is public accountability for decisions made and that proper actions are taken by those in power. We are here to serve the people. Our accountability is to the people and so the people must have a voice. Government can delegate a lot of tasks but it cannot delegate its ultimate responsibility and accountability to the citizens of Saskatchewan.

Why should the Minister of Health take my letter of November 14 seriously? Well it seems to me that the information flowing into the minister's offices come from two sources. One is from the board and administration of the Central Plains Health District through the Department of Health to the minister. The other is from the people through the political process — both the informal partisan NDP information system and the public political system where members of the Legislative Assembly represent their constituents and bring forward their questions and concerns.

It seems to me that any minister, if she takes her duties and responsibilities as a minister seriously, must look at both flows of information, compare them, and ensure that they are saying the same thing. If this is not the case, the minister has a duty to identify the problem and do her best to rectify it. If she cannot solve the problem, then she should cease to be minister and someone who can do the job should be put in place. If no such minister can be found, then the government should be changed.

In the Health minister's case it appears that there is a grave discrepancy between the information he is receiving about the Central Plains Health District through his bureaucracy and the information he is receiving from the citizens of that health district. So that is why the minister ought to have taken seriously, and ought to have acted upon, my letter of November 14, 1996. For whatever reason, the minister chose not to act, other than to write me a response to my letter basically stating that he trusted the health district is responsible.

So the month passed, Mr. Speaker, and the minister carried out his responsibility to this Assembly and to the citizens of Central Plains Health District by choosing to do significantly nothing to help. Please note that I am not being critical of the minister. I fully respect his right to choose to do nothing of significance — a decision for which I am sure both he and the government will agree is part of the decision-making process for which he is fully and ultimately responsible.

In the months following November 1996, Central Plains Health District Board and administration carried on undaunted. I expect that they had full knowledge that the Minister of Health had acted on his ministerial responsibilities by choosing to do nothing of significance. This of course, ensured the level of public accountability that the health district has grown to expect. For as we all know, consistent and repeated experiences over a period of time soon do become expectations. Needless to say, my constituents who are citizens of the Central Plains Health District continue to enjoy the same respect, consideration, and treatment as identified in my November letter.

With the passing months and continuing experiences, information kept filtering out of the health district though. No matter how competent a bureaucracy is, a lid cannot be kept on everything. So in order to fulfil my responsibility to the Legislative Assembly and to my constituents, I wrote the Minister of Health another letter dated February 20, 1997. And I would like to read some excerpts from that letter.

I asked the Minister of Health to intervene and address the serious administration and operational deficiencies within the Central Plains Health District. I mentioned to him that I had been advised by various community groups and individuals that they have either spoken to him or written to him outlining their concerns surrounding the process taken by the administration to arrive at decisions affecting the delivery of health services. The concern, I stated, "is that these decisions are not in line with the principles outlined by Saskatchewan Health."

(1445)

The announced closure of St. Michael's Hospital in Cudworth and now the impending financial, personnel, and service cuts at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Humboldt are seriously questioned. People find these measures are totally unacceptable considering the value and necessary extent of services provided through these highly respected institutions. I said to the minister, "Given the knowledge that these facilities have in the past operated in a fiscally responsible manner, I question the motivation behind the decisions."

And so again I brought matters to the minister's attention, pointing out also that there was some very serious discrepancy surrounding the management of the Central Plains Board. The letters that came to me were alarming, and some of those letters I would like to mention in a moment, surrounded the auditor's report. Because of the serious implications in those reports, I was asking the minister that as a responsible minister for Health, he take the necessary action to ensure that the Health District of Central Plains was responsibly managed.

The following things are what I wanted to bring to the attention of the Assembly today regarding the auditor's report of the Central Plains Health District. Some of the statements were alarming, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the statements surrounded the internal financial reports. It was stated that:

In our opinion, the financial reports which were being received by the board did not contain sufficient detail to allow the board to effectively monitor the activities of the health district.

More alarming was this statement that:

The financial reporting package given to the board was in summary form and did not contain a balance sheet.

The board (said the auditor) has not formally defined and documented its internal financial reporting needs.

In statements under accounting records, the statement:

We found little evidence of supervisory review of the work being performed by the clerical staff with the accounting department. Clerical work was not being double-checked, and the finance policy manual must be expanded to include procedural controls.

And then the auditor did point to those controls.

The review of the auditors also mentioned that:

Our review indicated that the following control procedures were not being performed. Accounts receivable sub-ledgers were not being agreed to the general ledger control accounts. The accounts payable sub-ledger was not being reconciled to the general ledger.

There was no second review of the long-term charges to ensure that monthly charges were correct, or that all residents had been billed correctly. There was no evidence that the payroll registers were being reviewed by management. There

was no evidence that journal entries were being reviewed by management. Adjustments to client accounts receivable sub-ledgers were not being reviewed by an individual independent of the billing process.

Now in regards to the capital assets, the auditors recommended that fixed assets sub-ledgers be established by the health district. Employee job descriptions — there were problems surrounding that. Expenditure approvals — and this is what brings me back to this Bill — and also service agreements with affiliates, there was a statement here that the board remuneration and expense reimbursement rates have not been approved by an order in council.

Now that did alarm me a bit because I recognize that an order in council is around the cabinet table, which I believe the Minister of Health should have been recognizing that the Central Plains remuneration had not come across the table of the cabinet for approval. If in fact the management of Central Plains was not seeing to these things, it should have been evident to the minister just through the fact of omission — that there was nothing coming across the cabinet table, that there had been a serious omission here.

There are a number of other statements in the auditor's report that do point out some grave, grave, and serious problems.

On May 7 I did finally receive a response to my February 20 letter from the Minister of Health. And I'd like to bring to the attention of this Assembly that the minister's response was there but it was very far from satisfactory. And so I guess I will have to accept that for now.

I would like to bring also to the attention of this Assembly some of the following articles that appeared in the Humboldt *Journal*. And the first one was on February 13 raising concerns over the future of services at St. Elizabeth Hospital. In this news article it states that:

Although no final decisions have been made, there are worries about the future of major services at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Humboldt.

(The administrator of the hospital) . . . says (that) all areas are under review and nothing is sacred when it comes to (them) meeting the budgetary requirement of the hospital.

"Everything is on the table . . . (the administrator mentioned) including areas such as obstetrics, anaesthesia, and surgery.

And it is the possibility of losing surgical services that has Humboldt's mayor questioning the process at hand. He said:

"It is my understanding that people in the health care field, including the Minister of Health, contend that St. Elizabeth's (does have) . . . the capacity to provide more surgery rather than less.

(The mayor) . . . was referring to a conversation he had with . . . (the) Minister of Health, at the annual

Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities convention last month.

(The mayor also says that he finds) . . . it incomprehensible that people from Humboldt and area will have to travel to Saskatoon, Melfort, Prince Albert or Regina to have . . . (those kind of procedures performed).

So it does point, in this newspaper article, to the fact that the minister is, on one hand, saying that we should be having all the services in Humboldt; on the other hand, there are such grave problems surrounding the management that it appears we may not.

I have also an article from the Wadena paper that I would like to quote from:

Communication "breakdown" a concern (in Central Plains)

The provincial government has acknowledged that issues of health reform are of great concern within Central Plains Health District.

(And the mayor of Wadena) . . . has promoted local concern at a district level since last September, as (has the mayor) . . . of Cudworth and (the mayor) . . . of Humboldt. The Mayors have also formed a coalition with representatives of local government throughout the district to address (some of) the cuts. Each of these three communities are targeted for changes as budget cuts to acute-care funding are implemented.

While the communities have expressed support for the reform of health care, serious questions have arisen regarding decisions made by the Central Plains Health Board.

After several requests, three mayors attended a meeting with Sask. Health representatives Kelly Richter (Assistant Director with Integrated Health Services . . .) and Steve Petz (Assistant Department manager) on Thursday, Feb. 6. (The mayor of Wadena) . . . was cautiously optimistic about the success of the meeting.

(He says) "It went very well." . . . "Each of us expressed our views and Richter and Petz made notes and promised to get back to us with helpful (information and) solutions."

"Everyone had agreed that a breakdown in communication with the . . . (Central Plains Health Board) has occurred and that many problems relate to that breakdown," . . .

Further on in the news article, dated February 12, there are statements like:

Under reform, all board decisions are to be made in partnership with affected communities. To date, it is believed that the current board has not given satisfactory explanations for why and how decisions are being made within the district.

The mayor also stated:

. . . that the general consensus is that the government has implemented many cuts and stabilization should start to occur (very) soon. He noted that Richter and Petz made a real effort to get the facts and figures straight and expressed real interest in the concerns forwarded by each mayor.

Now in spite of the fact that all of that has happened, we still do not see any solutions either through management controls or to the funding cuts directed at the district.

Now according to the article from the mayors of those communities located in Central Plains Health District, the Minister of Health has had discussions with them along with his department's officials regarding the operations of the Central Plains Health District, and I commend the minister for being approachable. And I'm confident that the minister has chosen to become more informed about that district from sources outside of the Central Plains District. I am also confident that the minister knows full well the seriousness of the situation and the dissatisfaction of the citizens of that health district.

Mr. Chairman, a few weeks ago I raised I raised a question in this Assembly directed to the Minister of Health with respect to the closure of St. Michael's Hospital in Cudworth. And rather than dealing with my question, which was in fact a question of accountability and proper decision making, the minister chose to answer on the basis of his not taking responsibility as the Minister of Health, for the functioning of the Central Plains Health District Board and administration — a responsibility that is clearly identified through The Health Districts Act and regulations, as well as Department of Health policy and procedures.

The minister also stated that I was taking sides in this matter. And I assure the minister that if a proper health plan was in place I would not even have to question what is happening in the Central Plains Health District.

Well months have passed, Mr. Speaker, since my letter of November 14. I have not received a satisfactory reply to that letter or to the one of February 20. The minister has had representations and communications from concerned community leaders and citizens of Central Plains Health District. Despite clear and public indications of a need for the minister to act in carrying out his responsibilities to the people, he is apparently choosing to do nothing.

It appears to me that the Minister of Health seems to see the concerns of the people as being nothing more than a lack of respect for local decision making by a locally elected health board. I am concerned that the minister has taken an overly simplistic view of a very serious problem.

The Liberal vision of a reformed health system sees local decision making by locally accountable health boards at a community level with a view to true community accountability. And the Liberal vision also sees a government that cares enough to be involved and shows positive leadership when true

problems are encountered — a government that realizes that it is ultimately responsible for the public trust given to it by the people of Saskatchewan.

Two of the key ideas in a Liberal vision are balance and accountability. What we seem to be experiencing through this government's vision is instability and finger pointing.

I would also like to bring to the attention of this Assembly an article from the Humboldt *Journal* dated April 14 where the chairperson of the district makes a statement that he is sure that we are in a position to begin to formulate a plan and answer some of the questions which people have been asking the board members for months. And he states:

“Altogether, the Saskatchewan Health funding for the Central Plains Health District will increase by \$522,000 in 1997-98, a percentage increase of 3 % over 1996-97 baseline funding levels.”

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. The hon. member from Humboldt has the floor and it is on the debate of the second reading. I'm sure that other members will have an opportunity to enter the debate, if they so wish, rather than hollering across the floor.

So I would wait for hon. members . . . for the member from Humboldt to be finished and then they can enter the debate themselves. But until then I would ask the hon. members to please to come to order and to listen to the debate.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Deputy Chair, the chairperson of the Central Plains Health District also states that he is pleased to see that they will be receiving a funding increase.

“. . . however, we must remember that in 1996-97 we also received a supplementary allocation of \$662,000 so that, in balance, the Central Plains Health District will actually receive less funding from Saskatchewan Health in 1997-98 than we received last year.”

So again we look at this. With less funding, how is it possible to be able to retain the services at hand right now as the Minister of Health said should be retained?

Once again we seem to have the experience that what is being said by the Hon. Minister of Health and this government is opposite to what is actually taking place in the province of Saskatchewan. Responsible communications and problem solving is essential, especially when working with something as important as our public health service system. Delays in dealing with important service and relational issues only serve to compound the problems.

And so I would have to ask the Hon. Minister of Health: how bad are you prepared to let the situation in the Central Plains Health District become before you try to seek a solution, before you personally investigate this situation?

Your answer may be as simple as when the destruction is

complete. It may be as complex as this government didn't consider the need for a problem resolution process despite the serious nature of health reform. Whatever the reason, you as Minister of Health have a duty to let the people know.

As a part of this question, I would also like to know how the Minister of Health proposes to see that the problems are solved while respecting and encouraging the establishment of positive relationships between the Central Plains Health District Board and administration and the communities and affiliates who are key participants in that health district.

Or is it perhaps your intention, Mr. Minister, to allow the problems in Central Plains Health District to escalate to the point that the government takes control of the affiliates? What positive solutions do you have?

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

Bill No. 2

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mrs. Teichrob that **Bill No. 2 — The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjerneud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Many of the amendments proposed within Bill No. 2 will enable local governments to apply changes to the reassessment system. As we have said before, this legislation is a band-aid for the government's mistakes relating to the reassessment process and to the hurried way that they have brought this in, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I really feel that we should have waited at least one year so we could test-run all the rules and regulations that have been brought in, ironed out the mistakes, and we could have done away with much of the confusion that has been caused by the government. The explanatory notes even admit that the minister and her officials did not anticipate the dramatic effect of reassessment. The government should have thought this through more carefully from the beginning.

But to be honest, the mishandling of the reassessment process really does not surprise me because the NDP government has shown nothing but contempt for local governments.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about some of the meetings I've had and the frustrations that local municipalities, whether it's towns or RMs (rural municipality), have to go along with Bill No. 2 and the reassessment and some of the frustrations that are adding to their problem. I think many of these governments out there are feeling abandoned right now; that nobody really cares, nobody is helping them get through this tough time. They're being left on their own.

I think the cuts and the policies actually encourage people to leave small towns in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And Bill No. 2 and the frustrations that are brought on by it are only adding to this problem.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to talk about the revenue-sharing cuts that have been passed down onto local governments, continually actually since 1991.

This year we have seen another \$29 million cut — \$17 million to urban, \$12 million to rural. And I honestly think if the numbers were all in it would actually be far more than \$29 million.

Mr. Speaker, every type of grant for municipalities out there have been cut, but some worse than others. I'd like to give you some examples, Mr. Speaker, that I had got from meeting with a number of these RMs.

(1500)

The RM of Shellbrook had its conditional grant cut from \$160,000 to \$63,000, a 61 per cent reduction. RM of Rosthern has been cut from \$110,000 to \$40,000, a cut of 65 per cent. RM of Langenburg has been cut from \$115,000 to \$30,000, a reduction of another 74 per cent on top of what they've already had in the last six years, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now you tie this in to what Bill No. 2 has done with reassessment, and I think you must agree with me the frustration that these people have out there.

Some of the examples of unconditional grants: RM of Meota had unconditional grants drop from 53,000 to 18,000. RM of Meadow Lake suffered a cut from 65,000 all the way down to \$6,000, a 91 per cent cut, Mr. Speaker. RM of Golden West went from 37,000 to 2,000, a 95 per cent . . .

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

Mr. Thomson: — With leave, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I want to thank the member for Saltcoats for allowing me leave to introduce guests.

As you will notice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've been joined in the gallery today by a large group of people who are here with the Canada-wide Science Fair. This is a group that in part was introduced earlier by my colleague, the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley. And I'd like to welcome this new group of people here today who are visiting and touring through the building.

I'm looking forward tonight to joining them at the banquet and having an opportunity to meet with them and enjoy some of Saskatchewan's hospitality.

As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these folks are joining us from across the country, and it is a distinct pleasure to have

them here in Saskatchewan today. So if you'd join with me in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 2 (continued)

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would maybe mention to the member from Regina South I would also like to welcome the guests here today. But being that he broke my concentration, I'm afraid I'll have to start all over and read all these numbers out again. I'm sure the members opposite wouldn't mind. But I will carry on.

RM of Meadow Lake, Mr. Deputy Speaker, suffered a cut from 65,000 to \$6,000, which I had said was a 91 per cent cut. And I think that was worth mentioning twice. RM of Golden West went from 37,000 to 2,000, a 95 per cent cut.

The main farm access program, which was cancelled, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is going to be a program cancellation that will hurt rural Saskatchewan for many years to come.

And a number of the projects that were started last year by RMs, thinking that the government was going to assist them to the tune of 50 per cent and spent thousands of dollars in engineering fees and prelim work, are now finding out that they're on their own to pick up that tab. And in many cases, it's wasted money because they can't afford to build these roads.

And all we have to do, Mr. Speaker, is when we go home on weekends, the ones of us from rural Saskatchewan, as yourself, is drive on some of these rural roads and see how the infrastructure is breaking down now as the frost comes out. And the last thing we need out there is cuts to road programs. We need a fresh injection of money; we need the cuts to stop; we need the bleeding to stop; and we need somebody to really start to care about rural Saskatchewan and our road network.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd also like to talk about the futures program which the minister so eloquently also cut. She cancelled this program, and the reason for cancelling — the only reason she could give — was because it was an accounting problem for the government. Well I would suggest why it was an accounting problem for the government goes back to the previous minister, Carol Carson, who in her wisdom decided to transfer funds to the future program into the debt. So it started to show as a debt, although it really wasn't for that year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the futures program was a very good program. It cost the Government of Saskatchewan absolutely zero. The RMs actually borrowed money to fund the government's share until it was time for them to pay for their allotment for that year.

What it did was enable RMs to go out and build a stretch of

road for 6 miles, 10 miles, whatever their allotment would work out; they would fund the project, and the government would pay in the following years as the allotment came due.

Now what we're going to see is we're going to see RMs building 1 mile of road or 1 kilometre of road a year, ripping up a 6-mile stretch for six years in a row, frustrating the ratepayers that are in that area and have to drive on these roads. And what are we accomplishing? An accounting improvement, according to the minister.

If it was dollars and cents, we could even see her reasoning why she had done this. But when it comes down to accounting, and it's not a comfortable thing for the accountants — I don't know, I have a real problem with this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It makes no sense whatsoever. And I'm sure someone — someone is going to pay for this mistake down the road.

We should be looking at the main farm access program, we should be looking at the futures program, we should be taking a good look at it and reinstating these programs. Because our rural RMs out there cannot afford to pick up this tab for themselves, and the infrastructure is breaking down already, is going to get worse.

Mr. Speaker, many of the RMs I met with, and actually the towns in that matter too, say that it worked out to about four out of every five of them are going to have to raise their mill rate.

So, Mr. Speaker, you can see why with Bill No. 2 and reassessment and the problems it's caused, and the lack of common sense that was used to bring it in, how these people have so many things on their plate out there that I might even mention in the case of Saltcoats this week, where the mayor had quit this week because of the frustrations, and was finally convinced to come back.

We are losing good people out there. Alderman, councillors, mayors of towns, Reeves of RMs are getting to the point where they can't take this frustration any more, and this government has left them out there to do it on their own. It just can't happen. It just keeps going on and on.

Mr. Speaker, a big part of the problem with reassessment has been the Minister of Education's downloading from where the government funded 60 per cent, RMs funded 40 per cent, and we have made it totally flip-flop that has led to the problem that a lot of these people are quitting for. Now the government funds 40 per cent, the taxpayer right on the front line is expected to pick up 60 per cent that again, Mr. Speaker, it just cannot keep on going like this.

If we want to start solving these problems out there, we should be reversing that trend. And a number of people in rural Saskatchewan want the government to fund 100 per cent of education. Well if we even got back to the point where the government was funding 60 per cent, most of us would be a lot happier than we are today.

On top of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to solve a problem with the rural . . . rural farm landowner was going to pay a higher

proportionate part of education tax because the rural land assessment had gone up higher. The Minister of Education and the Minister of Municipal Government came along and said, well we'll help this problem. We'll bring in the .84 factor, and we'll take a little of this away — not all of it mind you, you're still going to pay more than you were, but we're going to dump some of this back on the urbanites.

Well now what do we have? We have the urbanites mad at the rural people, the rural people mad at the urbanites, the school boards caught in the middle, and all these same people are representing people just like we are, except they are taking the brunt of all the frustrations that really should be pointed at this government across because that's where it starts and finishes.

We must also remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this is the government that also cut \$328 million from net education funding since 1991. I don't think they really care about education, health, municipal governments or anything when it pertains to rural Saskatchewan.

And what I am saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is when you bring a Bill in like the one on reassessment at the same time you do all this downloading, people out there cannot handle all these things in one year. Someone has to take a look at this, realize this, and realize that without rural Saskatchewan this province does not survive.

I have heard the comment come from across; in fact I've heard the Premier say that unless rural Saskatchewan survives, this province doesn't survive. Then why in God's name is that government trying to kill rural Saskatchewan? Local governments have no choice but to raise mill rates. The local taxpayer is picking up the tab. Even though the books are balanced in here, they aren't going to be balanced for long out in rural Saskatchewan whether you live in a town or in an RM.

Mr. Speaker, I want to bring to light also the part that the people of my home town of Saltcoats have been trying to put up with the frustration, and it comes directly with reassessment and Bill No. 2.

SAMA in it's wisdom has come out there and thought, well we'll compare the town of Saltcoats, a little town of 540 with a small lake beside it, and I honestly think that SAMA must have figured this was the Mediterranean or the Red Sea or something and the . . .

An Hon. Member: — Well it's a pretty little town.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Yes, and you could park your yacht in from in front of your house. Because no common sense was used here at all.

Now the problem gets bigger, Mr. Speaker, when no one want to accept responsibility for SAMA. And I realize, yes, SARM has three members on the board of directors, SUMA has three members, and the government has three members.

But the minister must realize that SAMA was set up by the government of the day when they were set up, and I would

suggest if SAMA had to be disbanded, it could be disbanded by the government of the day. And if it can be disbanded by this government, then it can be controlled by this government and leadership can come from that side of the House — leadership has to come from that side of the House. Someone over there should help these people when they're in the position that they are in.

And the problem being, Mr. Speaker, that along with this higher assessment that this town has had, and far higher, in fact double compared to some communities of the same size, once again comes along the education tax. And the problem I have with that, Mr. Speaker, and the residents of the town of Saltcoats, is that once we are stuck with that higher assessment, we will never get rid of it.

For an example, Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell you that in the next 10 years comparing the town of Saltcoats to eight miles down the road to the town of Bredenburg which is a minuscule bit smaller than the town of Saltcoats, between policing and the additional education tax, the town of Saltcoats will pay \$1 million more in tax than they were before, compared to their neighbouring town. That should tell you right there there's been a problem with reassessment.

(1515)

Now the SAMA officials admit yes, we have made a little bit of a mistake here, but they have that attitude that really who are you to question us. Unless two and two doesn't add up to four you have no right to appeal.

Well I question that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When the numbers prove that there has been an injustice done here, out of a little town there's been 50-some appeals, this should tell the minister, and SAMA for that matter, that something is wrong with their numbers and they should go back out and totally, totally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, reassess this town and do it with some common sense in mind. I think everyone would be much happier out there, and I would be willing to bet that this government would receive a lot less heat over this, because this one is not going away.

I honestly believe that some of these things that the government does is that same old adage, that we want to divide and conquer. If we have the RMs fighting with the urbanites, we have the urbanites fighting with the RMs, we have school boards looking over to see what little piece of pie they can get, people forget where the problem started, and it started across with this NDP government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, everything this government does, whether it was health care with the wellness plan, where we got people mad at the health boards and we dumped the blame on the health boards, when really where did wellness come from — the previous health minister and the government across.

Then we had things come out to do with education and the higher education taxes. And we try and divert the attention from the government and pass it on to the school boards. Well the school boards, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the only thing they can

do is pass it on to the local ratepayer because of all the funding cuts this government has put on them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, out in Saskatchewan we are very proud over the years to have a strong community spirit, but in the last number of years this has really worked at our strength in holding up that community spirit. I know we will prevail in spite of this government, but it would sure be nice for once to work with this government and survive out in rural Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have . . . I'd like to just touch on amalgamation, and I don't believe this problem has gone away. And part of the frustration with Bill No. 2 I think also ties in with amalgamation.

And the one thing I would like to just quote from, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a study that was done on older adults in Saskatchewan. And actually this comes back from October 26 of '93 and it comes from a Jim Fodey, chief of staff for the NDP.

This is a study done on checking out the elderly — where they live and the problems going to be created from the elderly. And I believe this study was well worthwhile doing. What I have a problem was, is what this government took from this study and, oh-oh, what are we going to have to pay for it out in rural Saskatchewan on account of it.

I'd like to quote, Mr. Speaker, part of this study. And it says:

The rural Towns and Villages of southern Saskatchewan provide a mirror as to what the province as a whole may look like in 40 years if present trends continue. With very large older adult populations, these municipalities are faced with eroding tax bases and considerable stresses in the provision of health care and other elderly-oriented services and facilities, especially since many young economically-active individuals leave these communities due to the lack of job opportunities.

Towns and Villages, like Rural Municipalities, are experiencing significant population decline along with their aging trend.

And I think we find that more true every day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I'm sure you do in your area, where our farmers' average age is increasing gradually.

It may eventually prove desirable to politically amalgamate the Towns and Villages with their adjacent Rural Municipalities. (And here's where it gets interesting, Mr. Speaker.) This would create larger units to more effectively support the infrastructure of local government, while "normalizing" the population pyramid by combining youthful and elderly populations.

I always wondered where this government was getting the foresight to think that amalgamation was a wonderful thing.

And I guess this tells it all. Because some study said, well what we will do is amalgamate the towns and villages and RMs, and then people can't say, well all we have left in rural Saskatchewan is old people, because this new project will amalgamate them with the young people. Let's bring the average age down by 30 years.

I have never read anything so ridiculous in my life, Mr. Speaker. And the Minister of Municipal Government is fell for this one. In fact the whole government must do, because she's still the minister.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from another part of this study. And it goes on to say:

A large number of older adults remain in the more isolated rural areas of southern Saskatchewan, despite the tendency to relocate to larger settlements. For these individuals, problems of accessibility to services and facilities will remain a serious problem. (And I agree.) Should all or some of these needs be addressed under the present distribution patterns, or should older adults (and this is the interesting part) . . . should older adults be encouraged to relocate to centralized locations, where a "critical mass" of individuals exists to allow optimum delivery of services?

Well doesn't this one hit home, Mr. Speaker. Close the rural hospitals, move the old people into the cities, and we can give them the best care that we have. But don't leave them out in our rural communities where they actually were born, raised, raised us, our families. No, we can't afford to keep them there any more. Let's move them into the cities.

And this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is what the opposition from all sides here has been saying is that you're killing rural Saskatchewan by closing our rural hospitals; you're killing rural Saskatchewan by closing our schools; you're hurting rural Saskatchewan by the funding cuts you are dumping on us.

And when we go back as far as 1993 and this study that was done by this government, it starts to make the picture look real. Where did all these ideas come from? A study a way back then that tries to figure out how can we get away from providing services to rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And now I think I can see what's happening.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a number of other questions on Bill No. 22, but at this time I would pass it on to Committee of the Whole and get my questions answered there. Thank you very much.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

Bill No. 3

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the Hon. Ms. Teichrob that **Bill No. 3 — The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I certainly hope that the members opposite have been paying attention to all the concerns that we've raised concerning these municipal Bills in the past few months, because we are relaying the real stories of the people forced to deal with this government's municipal policies every day.

Bill No. 3, The Urban Municipality Amendment Act is necessary in order for communities to implement the reassessment program changes. Some communities say they will now use the new power to decide if they want to increase the reassessment phase-in period from three years to six.

As my colleagues have pointed, the problem with the six-year phase-in period is that the minister is admitting that she did not properly plan for the reassessment process in the first place. The explanatory notes that were issued along with Bill No. 3 state, and I quote:

Among re-examination of the impacts that reassessment will have on some specific economic sectors, it has been recently determined that some of the shifts are more dramatic than originally anticipated.

I have spoken to many communities within my own constituency that are extremely upset with the way this government has handled — or rather, mishandled — the reassessment process. What we are seeing right across Saskatchewan is numerous examples of communities already devastated by revenue-sharing cuts.

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

Mr. Thomson: — With apologies to the member from Melville, to ask leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I again want to apologize to the member from Melville. I was going to allow him to go on a little longer but unfortunately the last Liberal speaker drove off the student group so early, I thought I'd better get in a little quicker on this one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is again my pleasure today to introduce to you a group of very bright young people who are joining us in the gallery from across Canada. These people are here in town for the Canada-wide Science Fair which is being held at the University of Regina, and I will not take . . . A nice, big wave. That's very pleasant.

I hope that they enjoy their time here in Saskatchewan and the debate in the Assembly this afternoon, although my expectations aren't that big on the debate part. I simply ask members to join in with me in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 3
(continued)

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Just because of those comments, I'll start all over again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, many communities throughout rural Saskatchewan are finding that their funding cut-backs are much more than the 25 per cent forecast by the minister initially. In fact there are several communities that are facing cuts of more than 40 per cent. We are seeing many articles in local newspapers in which mayors, councillors, and other administrators are trying, they're trying their best to explain to residents that they have nowhere else left to make cuts. The funding withdrawals they have been forced to cope with since this NDP government came to power are now insurmountable. Many of these people say they have no other choice but to raise their mill rates.

So for the NDP members opposite, who can't seem to understand what devastating effect this is having on Saskatchewan communities, I'll gladly spell it out for them, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thousands of Saskatchewan people are being forced to pay higher property taxes this year not only because of reassessment, but because of the revenue-sharing cuts levied by this provincial government. That is nothing more than back-door taxation. This is the same back-door taxation that NDP candidates supposedly took the Tory government to task for in the late '80s and the early '90s.

An NDP caucus document from 1991 called *Tax Fairness for the 1990s* says on page 4, and I quote:

People are concerned that provincial government underfunding of local government caused an increase in the local property tax burden, which is unfair and regressive.

Later, on page 8 of this same document, the NDP caucus writes:

Saskatchewan people are becoming increasingly concerned by the PC provincial government's pattern of shifting the tax burden onto local property taxpayers, a tax shift that amounts to a back-door tax increase. As a result of this policy of underfunding local governments, the direct provincial share of the total school board costs has dropped significantly from 54 per cent in 1981 to 49 per cent in 1989.

This from an NDP caucus document, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Oh, how soon they forget.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's really too bad Bill No. 3 was not more than an admission that this government has bungled the reassessment program. The Minister of Municipal Government and all the government members opposite should at least try to live up to their own promises. But the fact of the matter is

Saskatchewan property owners are now picking up as much as 60 per cent of the education costs.

I realize that the members opposite don't like to hear that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They keep chirping about the fact that they really don't care about what's happening to people in rural Saskatchewan. And that's evident. That means that the government's share of education funding for the K to 12 system has dipped to 40 per cent or less.

The numbers show this NDP government is not only disabling local governments by way of vicious funding cuts, but since 1991 this NDP government has also slashed, has also slashed \$328 million in net funding from Saskatchewan's K to 12 system. That's shameful. Is it any wonder, is it any wonder Saskatchewan people are growing more and more frustrated with this NDP government? Time and time again they are forced to reach into their wallets to pay for government mistakes and mismanagement.

(1530)

While Bill No. 3 may give local governments more authority and options when dealing with reassessment, the minister and her officials should have more carefully considered the consequences of reassessment before the program had started. Why not delay it for another period of time? Try it out and see where all the difficulties and the problems that would be encountered — have a test run. No, they wouldn't consider doing that. I'm getting many phone calls from town administrators who are absolutely fed up with the problems of SAMA and the reassessment debacle.

Swift Current had to issue several notices of reassessment because every time they issued one notice to property owners, the government was forced to tinker with the program again. As a result the city of Swift Current was forced to absorb the extra costs and residents were forced to sort out the confusion. And I don't hear anything from the member representing Swift Current saying anything about that.

Last week and again today my hon. colleague from Saltcoats brought up the case of the reassessment fiasco in Saltcoats. Property owners there are outraged — and you can't blame them — that their community has been assessed as one of the most costly categories because Saltcoats is considered to be either a bedroom community of Yorkton or a resort community because of a nearby small lake.

So while property owners in Saltcoats are facing property taxes as high as \$30,000 — \$30,000 on some lots — just down the road in Bredenbury, and my hon. colleague referred to it, the same type of lots, the same type of lots are assessed at an average of \$300. There have been at least 50 appeals filed so far and several letters written to SAMA officials demanding that this mess be sorted out.

Yet when we brought up this issue in the House last week, the minister was unwilling to even address the problem. The people of rural and small town Saskatchewan are feeling totally abandoned by this government.

If the Minister of Municipal Government will not accept responsibility for her own portfolio, where are these people to turn? This lack of planning, lack of accountability, and lack of leadership, and a refusal to accept input on the reassessment process, are all symptoms of the arrogance of this NDP government.

This legislation may help facilitate the reassessment process, but the reassessment process is creating huge divisions between local governments right across Saskatchewan.

This government must not place the funding for our children's education at the heart of the reassessment mess. But that is exactly what's happening. Local school boards are placed in the middle of this controversy because this government refuses to accept the responsibility for adequate funding for local governments and education.

While the minister wrongly claims that everything, and I quote what she said, "is fine in municipal land," smaller communities are trying to deal with drastic cuts to the revenue-sharing pool. SUMA states that even after the removal of health levies, the cut could still be at least 36 per cent for some communities.

Dozens of towns and villages across Saskatchewan are finding themselves in the cross-hairs of this government. Massive revenue-sharing cuts, coupled with the underfunding of the education system, amounts to nothing more than a direct attack on Saskatchewan communities. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to enter this debate on behalf of municipal government in this province.

I must say that I think my colleague, the hon. member from Saltcoats, has done an excellent job in pointing out the havoc and devastation caused by this government on some of our smaller communities and on rural Saskatchewan.

But I think it is important, I think it is important to remember in this debate that it is also our larger communities, including the two largest cities, that are affected by this government's passing the buck, this government's abrogation of its responsibilities, this government's not caring about local government.

And I have been saddened, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by the fact that we have all these members from Saskatoon and Regina who don't seem to think these issues are important or significant, who do not seem to see the need to stand up and defend municipal government, even in our larger cities.

And of course we know what the NDP attitude is in terms of our small communities in rural Saskatchewan. I mean we've long realized that close and attack is the only NDP rural policy. But I think we're surprised now to find that in the case of Saskatoon and Regina even, those cities will have to look elsewhere for someone to defend their interests; they're not going to find them in the MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) I see opposite, who are grinning to themselves as I

talk about the problems with municipal government in our larger centres as well.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have the problem of reassessment. Now everybody agrees that reassessment needed to be done. Of course the last time they had reassessment in this province was under the Liberal government in the '60s; the last government that seemed to be interested in getting things done; the last government in this province that seemed to be interested in getting our roads paved. They're also the last ones who had reassessment. So it took over 30 years to have reassessment done.

Because reassessment had been left for over 30 years, it was bound to be disruptive. I think we all acknowledged that; we all accepted that. But certain things could have been done in order to manage the dislocation.

What were these things, Mr. Speaker? Well first of all, if it had been done in an atmosphere of stable funding. Well what happened? Reassessment came in the same year as the minister of Municipal Affairs took the meat cleaver out after revenue-sharing grants to our municipalities.

The minister of the machete brigade went to the revenue-sharing grants, and municipal grants for urban municipalities were cut an average of 42 per cent. In the case of my own community of North Battleford, it was 47 per cent. So there is half in one year; the same year as reassessment. So either one would have been a serious problem, but you throw both into together and you have catastrophe.

What are some of the other things that could have been done to ease the pain of reassessment? Well if the assessment figures, the reassessment figures, had been in the hands of the urban councils on a timely basis, preferably six months or a year ahead of time. Well what happened?

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we see what happened was that the reassessment figures were not put into the hands of the councils until well into this taxation year. So consequently the town and city councils found that they were not able to formulate tax policy, to send out assessment notices, to set the mill rate, because they were still getting new figures on assessment from the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency.

And worse yet, they seem to get new figures from SAMA every few weeks which . . . you know, another letter from SAMA saying, throw out the old figures; here is the new figures. And this went on and on, and so, you know, every time the town council or city council would say, well are these last ones? — well we don't know . . . (inaudible) . . . And of course they weren't the last ones.

So what happened was, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Saltcoats this morning, we heard on the radio the Rev. Walter Farquharson, former NDP candidate, saying the problems he has — retired minister, not a wealthy millionaire. Of course you know over there, they're always saying tax the rich. Tax the rich. Well now the truth comes through, who they're really after. Here's this retired minister in Saltcoats, lifelong supporter of their

party, and he's practically being driven out of his house by this tax-the-rich philosophy over there.

And then we see, then we see in Swift Current, in Swift Current . . . in Swift Current we had the city council receive four different assessment figures from SAMA. Finally, after the fourth one, they voted unanimously to request the resignations of the heads of SAMA.

And in North Battleford last week, my friend, Councillor Glenn Wouters, again sometimes associated with friends opposite, he said that SAMA is causing nothing but trouble. SAMA's causing nothing but trouble in the city councils trying to manage tax shifts. And yet this government refuses to take responsibility.

I see the Hon. Minister of Education doesn't seem to believe this. Please read the lead article in the *North Battleford News-Optimist* and the details are all there if you think in any way I have . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I have taken it any way.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, yes I'm trying to put a human face on the fact that this government has not taken responsibility for the reassessment. This government has had reassessment come in in the same year as 42 per cent cuts to municipalities and this is creating chaos in all municipalities in this province.

Well we have also the tax tools, the tax policies that were going to be available to our municipalities. They should have been available a year ago. Instead we're debating them here in this Assembly today. We're talking about six-year phase-in period. Well how can there be a six-year phase-in period when (a) it's coming in this year and (b) there's going to a rolling phase-in in only three years time. I understand that the six-year phase-in that we're talking about may be used by as few as one municipality in the whole province.

Well I see the Minister of Education doesn't want me to personalize but it's already been mentioned that Meota received cuts of 53,000 to 18,000 in one year. Now one of the councillors there of course, is my opponent in the by-election, Glenn Tait, who said that if he was here he could bring pressure to bear on the government to give a better deal for us in the North Battleford constituency. Well he hasn't done a very good job of it in the case of his own council. Whether he could do a better job in here I don't know.

But the one thing we do know is that in spite of his enormous influence with this government, his council has been cut from \$53,000 down to \$18,000. So that doesn't sound like a lot of influence to me, and I just hope he can have more positive influence if he does succeed and he is MLA for North Battleford.

Well my colleague from Saltcoats has already pointed out that this government, through its municipal funding policy, has pitted Saskatchewan people against Saskatchewan people. We have rural against urban; we have condominium home-owners against other residence owners; we have schools districts against municipalities. And that is a direct result of the fact that

the property tax is now bearing about 60 per cent of education costs. When this government took office it was only 40 per cent. So there's a 20 per cent increase that's being borne by the property taxpayer, and that is causing great stress to property owners, but it's also causing stress between our school districts and our municipalities.

In terms of our small communities, we find that the problems of rail line abandonment is another thing that is going to seriously affect their tax base. And we're very worried about the tax base of our smaller communities.

Well I was speaking with the council of the RM of Val Marie recently. They tell me that they've had several bridges affected by washouts from the flooding of the Frenchman River this spring. Of the several bridges affected, only one qualifies for any provincial help.

So the problems we see run right through the entire piece, whether you're talking about rural municipalities, our small villages, towns, our cities, right up to Regina and Saskatoon. It doesn't matter who you are looking at, the same issues are here; and respect for local government, respect for property owners and ratepayers is simply absent in this government.

And while we have a strong contingent here speaking on behalf of farmers and property owners in our rural municipalities, I'm very disappointed that we haven't heard more from our MLAs from Regina and Saskatoon and Prince Albert and Moose Jaw on the pressures that reassessment is causing to our cities and our towns. And I would encourage members opposite to talk about some of the letters and the phone calls they must be getting — I know we're getting them — on the pressures of reassessment. They must be getting them as well.

So in conclusion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a number of things all coming together to municipalities this year — the reassessment, the 42 per cent cut to revenue sharing, to grants, and the inability of SAMA to present timely assessment information and assessment values to the municipalities so they can get busy and try and manage the shifts.

Any one of these on its own, any one of these in and by itself, would have caused enormous problems for municipalities. But you throw them all in together and you get chaos.

The problems that we were going to face this year would still have been there, but they could have been managed much, much better and with far less dislocation if we had a provincial government that cared, if we had a provincial government that could properly manage the challenges facing this province, and especially local government in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

(1545)

Bill No. 34

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Calvert that **Bill No. 34 — The Young Offenders' Services Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just a few comments on this Bill, The Young Offenders' Services Amendment Act.

When the minister was speaking the other day, he made a comment or commented about the fact that it was evident that the formal, court-centred system of dealing with young people who break the law has, for at least some individuals, met with very limited success in both terms of accountability to victims and in terms of reducing the likelihood that the youth will re-offend.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I certainly can agree with the minister on that. It's an issue that our caucus and our party has talked about for a number of years; an issue that I've actually had the privilege of talking about with the former Minister of Justice in this Assembly, and the current minister, and now the member responsible for Social Services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, across this country people are quite concerned about the Young Offenders Act, and there are a number of issues that, even in this current federal election campaign, that different parties are taking stands on as to how you address the Act; how you change it to make it an Act where people are more accountable for their actions.

However, the Young Offenders Act is certainly an area that is the jurisdiction of the federal government and not this province. But certainly input from the province . . . I'm sure the federal government and members of the justice committee in Ottawa would certainly appreciate when you would discuss that issue.

But when it comes to young offenders in this province, there are areas where we can take some responsibility. And this specific Act is addressing issues and concerns that relate to the actions of young people and how you deal with them and whether you . . . If you just go through the formal court system and you find a person guilty of break and enter or car theft — as we've seen certainly in the city of Regina it's been quite prevalent over the last year — and incarcerate these individuals, Mr. Speaker, I think, and as the minister indicated, there is certainly more and more evidence showing that just to incarcerate . . . first of all, get a conviction and then incarcerate a person for a time period in a jail system does not help that person become accountable and recognize the responsibility they have for their actions.

I think what the minister is suggesting — what this Bill is intending to do is bringing victims together with the offenders — is something that may in the long run keep more young people out of jail and maybe help them and assist them in building their character and creating value in their lives — making them, giving them, helping them to become more productive people in our society.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think the comment the minister spoke about when he talked about restorative justice is something that is certainly positive. And I appreciate that and I think it's certainly something that we need to work towards.

And I think that there was one example the minister had mentioned, as well, where he had been involved in . . . a means of a young offender being brought face to face with a victim. And afterwards, speaking to the individual and his comments . . . or the person's comments were, it's much, much easier to go to a court where they can remain silent, represented by professional legal counsel and sheltered always from any contact with the individual, the victim, that they have hurt.

So there's a strong indication, Mr. Speaker, and I think you find that in families as well, if a parent says there will be some penalties if you disobey the rules of the house and you stretch the parent to the limit and the parent applies the law, a young person generally, finally realizes after a parent has finally shown them what the consequences are that it would have been easier if they would have obeyed the parents' command rather than disobeying.

And I think this is a good example as well. When you bring a young person before a victim, that individual is all of a sudden made more aware of the consequences of their actions — when they have to deal with the victim who's maybe had a car ripped off. The person may have just bought that vehicle, it's cost them a significant amount of money, and all of a sudden this vehicle is in for a major repair. And to that victim rather than having a very . . . a good quality vehicle, now they've got a vehicle that's maybe had 8 or \$10,000 worth of damage to it, and it's a repaired vehicle.

And I don't know of anyone who really wants to drive around a vehicle that's been in a major accident. And they feel victimized.

Or you've had things stolen out of your house. You've worked hard to begin to provide for yourself and to . . . maybe that stereo system or that TV that you worked for a number of months to put aside money so you put it in the house. Those are things, Mr. Speaker, that if you just go to a court system, individuals do not realize that the hurt they create on the victims.

And so by bringing them together I think, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill I think will go a long ways. And it certainly addresses some of the concerns that our caucus has, that I've had. And I look forward to working with the minister and in working through this program, and not only working on what we have here in the legislation that we have here today, but also building on it so that we can create a better society in which we can live and which people can feel comfortable and a lot safer to live in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

Bill No. 59

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Atkinson that **Bill No 59 — The Education Amendment Act, 1997/Loi de 1997 modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Just a few comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before my colleague, the member from Rosthern, wants to add some comments to this Bill as well. I understand that the Bill certainly does deal with some clarifications. And I understand as well when translation of the legislation into French was undertaken, there were a number of omissions and errors that arose and this Bill is clarifying that. But beyond that there are a few issues in the Bill that I think need a further debate and I won't take a lot of time to debate that.

The question of amendments related to school year day issues I think is something that a lot of boards will certainly be pleased to see as they begin to look at alternative ways of providing education. And certainly I know one of the concerns in the school division that my family . . . that I grew up in and that my family are attending today is the major concern about the start up of the school year and the fact when they moved to the semester system, the finals for the first semester were coming into the January period. You'd have that Christmas break and a lot of students found that difficult.

And I think boards and teachers are looking at the fact — and I think students are mostly in agreement with this as well — that to move the start-up date into August and conclude your first semester before the Christmas break is something that I think everyone really feels strongly about. And they feel that it's important that that be allowed. So that's an issue I think that a lot of people are going to be looking at and following it very closely.

Another issue is the clarification of the length of school days. And as you may or may not be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was a fair bit of debate last year when the school division, the Scenic Valley School Division, decided to take the minister at her word and became a little innovative with an idea as to how they could implement the budget cuts that were pressed upon them in a manner that would mean the least number of teaching positions that they would have to cut and yet still provide quality education.

And they brought forward the experimental four-day school week, adding a lot of the other services that weren't directly related to the curricular activities onto the Friday. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from what I find in talking to the administrator and parents in the area, there seems to be quite a consensus that the four-day school week is working well.

The concern that I have here is that this provision may discourage other school divisions from looking at this as an alternative — at the four-day school week.

But in general, the Bill before us I think brings forward a number of positive ideas. We just wanted to make sure that the

issues that we may have concerns or have some concerns with, we took the time to certainly bring them to the attention of the individuals involved. whether they be teachers or school boards or unit divisions, make sure that . . . get their feeling on the matters before we certainly allow the Bill to proceed.

And I know other members have spoken on this Bill, and I realize our critic for Education would like to add some comments. So therefore I'll take my place and allow other members into the debate on Bill 59. Thank you.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As my colleague just mentioned, there's a lot in this Bill that I think we are totally in favour of. It does have a few problems and a few concerns and I think we need to address those.

I think also in the last day or two or three we've received . . . I've received substantial information from both sides of the issue on this Bill and I think as that information continues to come in, we need to continue to look at this and make sure that we're going down the road correctly.

We often talk of local autonomy and how local municipalities and health districts and local school boards should be allowed to make decisions, what's best in their own communities. And I think by and large, we totally agree with those sorts of things.

Our local municipalities, be they RMs or towns, know exactly what's best in their areas. They know what services are needed. They know how best to provide those and provide those efficiently.

I think the same thing goes with the health boards where we . . . looking at having more and more people elected, because those are the people that have the heart and the mind of the constituents out there.

And local boards, division boards, district boards are in the same area. They know what's best for their communities. They know what's best for their kids. Because in each community the situation is somewhat different, based on the size of the area, the kinds of students they have, their backgrounds, and all those sorts of things. This makes sense.

And if this government would allow the local autonomy it has promised on so many occasions, I think a lot of these problems would be gone and things would be working along fairly well.

I've made a few points about parts of this Act that I believe are necessary and I think one for the varying of the school day. And I realize that there's still some allowance for the exact times of closures and all those sorts of things, but we still need to look at the other aspect.

I think my colleague mentioned the concept of Scenic Valley. I was there last year when that . . . when those plans were being put into place. And it was absolutely impressive the way every single component of that community from bus drivers, caretakers, teachers, students, parents, everyone came on side and said we're prepared to try this.

(1600)

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they've tried it for one year. They've done some research; they're coming back at very close to 100 per cent approval — 90 per cent, which is amazing; that when you have those different kinds of groups, as I mentioned, that were in there, everything from the people who work in the schools — the caretakers, the buses, and the teachers — down to the parents and the kids all think it's just a great system.

That was a major innovation. We know by the concerns and the interest that the minister showed in that particular thing that this was really quite unique and quite different. It seems to be working out very well.

That's the kind of innovation that came from the grass roots, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It didn't come from higher up, it didn't come from the Minister of Education, it didn't come from this House — it came right from the bottom. I think we need to allow that.

Who would have thought that idea would have come up? Who would have thought it would have even been able to put into place? And who would have thought it would have been as successful as it now is?

There may be dozens of more ideas out there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that are just as innovative, just as unique, and maybe just as successful. We need to be able to allow to try those because we have, by no means, invented the perfect system up to this point.

I also want to comment on this concept of placement of students. Placement refers to many different sorts of things including the geographic student within the school system. And I think those are things that we need to leave back up to the local system. They know what kinds of problems they have out there, the concerns that are out there, how those can be met most efficiently and for the benefit of the kids.

As a former teacher and principal, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this will inevitably lead to an unnecessary conflict between parents, guardians, and boards of education because it opens up more opportunity for more litigation, for additional costs. And these things can just go through different appeals and those sorts of things.

It goes without saying that school boards have been cut by this government by over \$20 million in less than five years. And that's an amazing cut on a per year basis. And every one of those cuts has to be worked through by the local schools. If we come on from this angle and present situations that may engender further costs, I think we may be just causing more problems and not providing any solutions. School divisions in my area still aren't sure how they're going to deal with these millions in cuts — and it is millions.

Mr. Speaker, moving on. Section 19 regarding the local collective agreements of teachers is a concern as well. And I think we want to underline one fact — contracts should not be torn up. We're not in favour of taking those contracts, tearing

them up, and say get back to the table and come up with something. Because regardless what the situation is, that will put one group at an uneven and an unfair situation. And whatever that group is will be different from school division to school division.

The present legislation provides that where a new school division is established and two or more existing school divisions are established that the local agreements continue until a new agreement is negotiated. This means that administration is required to treat individual teachers differently, making assignment of teachers to different schools within a school division difficult.

And there are dozens, if not hundreds, of situations that come to mind where you can create some very awkward situations. Where certain school divisions have created certain contracts with their teachers, other school divisions — for whatever their different circumstances were — have different ones. Now in certain circumstances these teachers will be teaching side by side — one of them may do noon-hour supervision, one of them may not; one of them may have days of leave, and others may not. It creates a very divisive thing within the school.

Now as I said earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we do not want to see those contracts torn up. But where this legislation is somewhat weak, and we think substantially weak, there is nothing in place there to sort of ensure that this process of having two contracts in place in one division doesn't go on for ever and ever.

And we think there should have been some mechanism in place to take care of that situation; that after a certain process has gone through — and I won't say necessarily a period of time — but after a certain process has gone through, teachers can work side by side in the same school under the same contracts. That will create a whole lot more unity than having a divisive situation such as this creates.

And I think, for the benefit of the staff and the cohesiveness of the staff, that was left out of this contract and should have been in there somewhere.

My understanding is that the SSTA has provided the Department of Education alternative ways of handling this problem, both practical and fair. I'm not sure how practical and fair they are, but they need to be looked at. I'm sure, checking with teachers, they could have come up with some contracts.

The minister I think often holds up Sask Valley school amalgamation as one of the positive ones; it was one of the first ones. I think they worked through great processes involving all of the stakeholders in education in their contracts and in the amalgamation. And I believe they have in place something to take care of this situation. Their contracts will not go on for ever and ever, creating divisive situations. They will take care of that. They dealt with a way to do that. There was a process in place. This has no process in place. This just says they can go on till whenever. And that one has something definitely in place. Something should have been here as well.

Section 20 is also of some concern. I don't believe it is necessary for the Minister of Education to approve regular day-to-day boundary changes where only one school or attendance area is transferred. In effect, where the minister orders a boundary change, the minister will also be ordering the receiving school division to administer two local agreements with attendant problems — and we've already given a few examples of those — and negotiate new collective agreements. And some of those things just create more problems than they solve.

As I mentioned at the start, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm receiving a fair bit of information from both sides in this particular issue and I'm sure that will still continue. And because of that information still coming in, I move to adjourn debate on this. Thank you.

Motion negatived on division.

The Deputy Speaker: — The debate will continue.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

Bill No. 60

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Atkinson that **Bill No. 60 — The Teachers' Federation Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Actually all the weekend I've been looking forward to standing up on this debate.

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the presence of the president of the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) and the general secretary, Mr. Herron, and other representatives here who, from the teachers I've talked to, have initiated quite an aggressive campaign. And in fact there's a number of calls I still haven't been able to catch up to teachers on.

I thought I should just enter into the debate of it a little bit, because the impression I got from some of the teachers I talked to was that unless the teachers called me, this legislation would not get passed through this Assembly before the Assembly adjourned. And I was quite disturbed by that.

Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a process that's followed. This piece of legislation, Bill No. 60 and 59 were only introduced for the first time on May 2, were read for the second time on May 5. There are 58 Bills ahead of these two Bills and some of them have been here for two months. And there's a process that's followed. And I was a little dismayed.

And some of the teachers I talked had a good understanding of how the Assembly operates and the fact that when a Bill comes before the Assembly and when the opposition hears how, after a Bill is introduced and read for the second time, that there is a process of consultation. And so I thank the STF for informing their members. We're looking forward to getting back to the

membership and informing them that while we were adjourning the Bill, it didn't necessarily mean that we were totally opposed to the Bill.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a number of . . . there are a number of portions in this Bill that certainly are positive and cover a number of concerns that teachers have brought to this floor and brought to our caucus. In fact my colleague will probably be mentioning about his discussion with the STF, and our caucus has met with the STF representatives on a number of occasions. In fact I enjoyed visiting with members of the STF in Saskatoon after driving through quite a snowstorm back about a month ago and just rubbing shoulders with them.

And needless to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm not trying to say that I agree with everything the STF does because they certainly don't agree with every stand I take as well. And that's fine. That's fair. That's how democracy works.

But on this specific Bill, Bill No. 60, there were a number, and are a number of areas that we have acknowledged that are certainly positive and bring some positive direction into the teaching profession. And I think the Minister of Education has heard those and is bringing forward this Bill to address some of those issues. It cleans up many inconsistencies and obsolete references in the original Bill, and as a result I believe it does move forward by including provisions for mediation to ensure effective and harmonious bargaining on teacher contracts.

There are, however, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some concerns which have been brought to us and yes, the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association raised concerns regarding section 17, sections 19 and 20, successor rights, and section 45(1) which gives — and this is an area that we have had a definite concern — gives us some concern in regards to what the section means when it says power to discipline teachers.

And that is a question that we have raised and want to raise and look forward to raising with the minister as we go along and move along through the stages of debate on Bill No. 60. It seems that these provisions do appear somewhat broad and I think need to be clarified.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one thing that one of the STF members talked or mentioned . . . that I was talking, to mentioned we said the SSTA does not talk for teachers. Well I don't think anyone said that. I don't think anyone necessarily figures or concludes that they do. But the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association certainly does stand up for the ratepayers they represent as well.

And so when it comes to education in this province, there are basically three groups: you've got your teachers; you've got your school trustees; you've got government. And we all need to, at the end of the day, find ways in which we can work together to provide a more harmonious education system to meet the needs of young people to prepare them for the 20th century.

An Hon. Member: — 21st.

Mr. Toth: — Or 21st century, pardon me.

I guess one of the concerns we do have — and I think the member from Saltcoats addressed that very clearly when he was speaking regarding municipal taxation on the municipal Bill — one of the big concerns we do have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the fact that from 1991 to today the shift in government and property tax owner has moved from the 40 per cent provincial, 60 per cent to property to a 60/40 split where the government is only carrying 40 per cent of the burden now.

And for some educational boards, that means a significant reduction in their funding. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, three of the boards of education right in the area that I represent, in this current budget where they thought they were receiving more funds, actually have received, in some cases, up to \$500,000 less. And as a result, at the end of the day, what it's going to be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that there may be fewer and fewer teaching positions. And that is a concern to not only the school trustees of the area, but it's of concern to parents as well, as we look at how we provide education and the schools, or access to the educational system that might be available.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can understand why we're standing here today and why we're debating this piece of legislation, why we're bringing these few points to the attention of the Assembly, because I think we're all partners. We all need to work together. We all need to find ways of working together. And it wouldn't be very prudent of us, as a caucus, to just take one side and just to listen to one point of the issue and not discuss concerns with other concerned groups involved in this type of a debate.

So that's why I have looked forward to this debate. And I look forward to the comments that other members would have regarding Bill No. 60 before the Assembly today. Thank you.

(1615)

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our caucus has recognized that on the whole this Bill is good. And we went through it, and as I personally highlighted the areas I had questions with, there is very little highlighter on my particular page.

We don't want to overlook the fact that it cleans up many inconsistencies and obsolete references, and including provisions for mediation that goes some distance to ensure effective and harmonious bargaining. And I think that's one of the things that, regardless where on this issue you stand, you're in favour on. You want things to be effective and you want them to be harmonious. And I think the Bill has a lot of good things to say in that area.

Nevertheless our caucus can't support this Bill in total as there's one or two things in there that I think need to be addressed. And referring specifically to clause 45.1, and my colleague referred to the fact that we've been getting some response on that. A fair number were faxed, a few letters, and a lot of phone calls.

To date I've called back everyone that has called me, and it's been very interesting. Because when I refer to that particular aspect and say, here's a possibility for interpretation, what could be meant by contrary? And in every single case everyone has said, that's not what we mean. And usually these have been people who have been primed by their union leaders to go ahead and call us. They say that isn't what it means. I said, I think I agree with you because I've met with people from the STF and they as well tell me that isn't what it means.

Well I may not be the greatest student of the English language, but I can tell a hawk from a handsaw. I can also read that particular sentence and know very specifically that that particular phrase that's in there says "conduct contrary to," and it lists and it's left very wide open. And as that particular part stands, none of the individuals I've phoned back were in favour of it.

I mentioned it to the people I spoke to from the STF. And every one of those individuals, if that part was kind of corrected and changed, I can live with it, no problem, because the rest of the Bill — and there's a lot of it there — is good stuff; we're totally in favour of it. But that part creates some definite questions. Those provisions are far too broad. They allow for all kinds of interpretations.

Now admittedly people could say, well this would never happen. Well if it's never intended to happen, then let's not write the legislation in such a way that it could happen. Good legislation is written in such a way that it's clear and distinct what it will do and what it will not do. This legislation states what could happen, but there's a lot of other things in there that might happen and those might need to be taken out of there.

Given the federation council power to decide unilaterally what is in the collective interest of teachers and to discipline accordingly, puts the rights of individuals and teachers at risk.

And it's interesting, when I decided I needed to know exactly what information the STF was sending to the teachers, I phoned one of the schools in one of the areas that I've taught with in other lives and asked if they'd send me a copy of that. And they said, well yes, but they hadn't contacted me at all on that. And I said, well how come? Well they said, they'd met as a staff and looked at that and they agreed with my concerns, because as a staff they want the abilities to go ahead and meet the needs of their students in whatever way they see necessary in their community.

And it isn't the same from community to community, school to school, staff to staff. But they didn't want to be limited in any way, shape or form.

And so they're definitely on support with the concerns that I had. And as I said earlier on, when I talked to the teachers and said, is that what you think it should mean, invariably, without exception, they all said no. So the point is, that particular aspect needs to be clarified.

Examples have already been given in this House, and have been given in the media of what possibly could go wrong. This

section gives the STF the power to discipline teachers for even speaking about the conditions of their employment under The Education Act — possibly fairly extreme, I agree. But that door should never be there; it should not be something that could be opened.

Likewise, concerns have been raised that if a teacher volunteered for extracurricular activity in a school, it might be — and we're talking about the might be's; those might be's should not be there — if we look at that possibility, someone might be able to go ahead and coach those particular students in a hockey team, which is a community thing, but possibly not at a noon hour in a school situation.

Granted these interpretations are somewhat speculative, but as we know, in our modern litigious society the interpretations of laws are often stretched to extreme lengths. It is important therefore that as we as legislators to ensure that Bills are worded precisely, so that there is no room for confusion in the future.

On this topic, we have heard lately that the STF executive themselves have come to agree that this wording is vague. They did not intend for it to say what I said it might possibly say — to have that interpretation there.

If this is clarified, then most of our outstanding concerns on this legislation will be addressed. Until that time, we can't support this Bill.

And as I said earlier on, we're still getting information from all sides on this Bill. I move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 60.

The division bells rang from 4:23 p.m. until 4:37 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 31

Van Mulligen	Mitchell	Atkinson
Johnson	Lautermilch	Upshall
Kowalsky	Calvert	Pringle
Koenker	Trew	Bradley
Scott	Nilson	Cline
Stanger	Hamilton	Murray
Wall	Kasperski	Ward
Langford	Thomson	Krawetz
McLane	Gantfoer	Draude
Bjornerud	Julé	Aldridge
Haverstock		

Nays — 4

Boyd	D'Autremont	Toth
Heppner		

The Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 71 — The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997/Loi de 1997 sur la réglementation des boissons alcoolisées et des jeux de hasard

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to rise to give second reading to The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997. This Bill is being presented in both English and French.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is essentially identical to the Act it is replacing. The purpose of the Bill is to provide the government with the means to regulate the sale and consumption of alcohol within the province and to regulate horse-racing and gaming.

The Act that is being replaced by this Bill was first considered by this Assembly in 1988. Since that time, the Act has been amended on numerous occasions. As a result, the drafters made a number of technical drafting changes to facilitate the translation into French. In addition, the provisions of the Act were consolidated and renumbered.

This Bill contains one change to the existing Act. Based on an opinion from my department's constitutional law unit, it was determined that the provision requiring applicants for permits to be Canadian citizens was contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As a result, that requirement was dropped in the Bill.

Other than the one provision, there are no other changes to the existing law. I beg to inform the Assembly that His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the subject matter of the Bill, recommends it to the consideration of the Assembly. And I move that Bill No. 71, An Act respecting the Regulation of Alcohol and Gaming be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and, by leave of the Assembly, referred to a Committee of the Whole later this day.

Bill No. 73 — The Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act, 1997/Loi de 1997 sur l'exécution des ordonnances alimentaires

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to give second reading to The Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act, 1997. This Bill is being presented in both English and French.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is essentially identical to the Act it is replacing. The Bill authorizes the Minister of Justice to establish a maintenance enforcement office to assist claimants in collecting support, alimony, or maintenance payments to which they are entitled. That office has acted diligently on behalf of Saskatchewan claimants and has been highly successful in enforcing maintenance orders.

The Bill also establishes maintenance enforcement remedies. To facilitate the translation into French, the provisions of the Act were consolidated and renumbered; however, the Bill does not change the existing law.

I beg to inform the Assembly that His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the subject matter of the Bill, recommends it to the consideration of the Assembly. And I move that Bill No. 73, An Act to facilitate the enforcement of maintenance orders be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and, by leave of the Assembly, referred to a Committee of the Whole later this day.

(1645)

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 71 — The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997/Loi de 1997 sur la réglementation des boissons alcoolisées et des jeux de hasard

The Deputy Chair: — Before we begin the Act, I invite the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I'm pleased to have with me this afternoon Susan Amrud, who's the director of legislative services; Ian Brown, who's the director of legislative drafting; and Ken Ring, who is Crown counsel in legislative drafting.

The Deputy Chair: — Committee members, this is a very lengthy Bill. I'm asking leave to proceed with the Bill by parts, and if there are concerns with specific clauses in a part, we will revert back to that clause. But the intention of the Chair is to call the Bill by part. Do I have agreement?

Mr. Hillson: — If I just may, Mr. Deputy Chair, I think this will facilitate early dealing with the matter as you've suggested . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. What I will do is call short title, clause 1, short title. Is clause 1 agreed?

Clause 1

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I think, in terms of our handling of this Bill today, I would just . . . First of all, welcome this afternoon, the minister and his officials.

I am of course aware of the agreement whereby this province has undertaken to translate significant statutes into both official languages. And I understand that is the basic reason for the exercise before us this afternoon, is to make sure that significant pieces of legislation are in fact available to persons of both official language groups in this province. And the Liberal opposition has no problem with that, obviously.

So the only question I have is, I would like the minister to confirm that there are no substantive amendments to the present legislation. If there are, I would ask him if he'd be good enough to identify them for us so that we could turn quickly to anything that does in fact involve a substantive amendment.

If the minister can confirm that there are no material changes to the legislation and the legislation is in fact only to comply with our agreement, our undertaking to translate into both official

languages, then this procedure can be expedited very quickly as far as the Liberal opposition is concerned.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, as I just completed stating in my second reading speech, in this Bill there is one change. And based on an opinion from the department's constitutional law unit, it was determined that a provision requiring applicants for permits to be Canadian citizens was contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This has been corrected and that's the only change.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 188 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 72 — The Children's Law Act, 1997/Loi de 1997 sur le droit de l'enfance

Clause 1

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, again I would simply ask the Minister of Justice to be good enough to confirm that there are no material changes contained in this Act. It is simply for the purpose of us complying with our undertaking to have our statutes available in both official languages.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I confirm that there are no changes in this legislation.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 62 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 73 — The Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act, 1997/Loi de 1997 sur l'exécution des ordonnances alimentaires

Clause 1

Mr. Hillson: — Again I would simply ask the minister to be good enough to confirm that there are no substantive changes to this Act, that we are simply complying with our undertaking to translate into both official languages.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I confirm that the Bill doesn't change the existing law.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 75 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 74 — The Family Maintenance Act, 1997/Loi de 1997 sur les prestations alimentaires familiales

Clause 1

Mr. Hillson: — I would again request the minister to give the usual assurance in this case, and if so, we may proceed through committee as far as the Liberal opposition is concerned.

o'clock, this committee will recess until 7 p.m. tonight.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I confirm that this Bill does not change the existing law.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 31 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

**Bill No. 75 — The Matrimonial Property Act, 1997/
Loi de 1997 sur les biens matrimoniaux**

Clause 1

Mr. Hillson: — And I request here again that the minister confirm that there are no substantive changes to The Matrimonial Property Act. It is simply to comply with our undertaking to translate into both official languages.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I confirm that there are no substantive changes to this Act. There have been some drafting changes to update the language, but other than that there have been no changes.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I recall that the minister did, in his second reading speech, make reference to gender-neutral language. And I believe he also made reference to simplifying the language in some cases. If that is all it is, again the Liberal opposition has no problem.

But I would ask him if he would be good enough to confirm that there are no substantive changes in the Act, no substantive changes to the law, but a matter of cleaning up the draftsmanship here.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I just did say that I do confirm there are no substantive changes.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 61 inclusive agreed to.

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes. Before I do that, I'd like to thank my officials for being here this afternoon, and I'd especially like to thank the people in legislative drafting who have worked diligently at completing the French translation of these Bills so that we could proceed.

And with that, I'd like to move that we report this Bill without amendment.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

The Deputy Chair: — It now being just past the hour of five

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