The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present petitions on behalf of Saskatchewan residents here this afternoon. The prayer is as follows:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to work with aboriginal and Metis leaders in the province of Saskatchewan in an immediate effort to end the destructive and dangerous practice of night hunting in the province for everyone regardless of their heritage.
>
> And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition comes from the Glentworth, Fir Mountain, McCord areas of Saskatchewan and I am pleased to present on their behalf.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present. The prayer says:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to make a commitment to develop a long-term plan with respect to the Saskatchewan film library, ensuring that under no circumstances will any more films be destroyed; rather that the films be given away to schools, sold, or provided on a fee-for-service basis.
>
> As in duty bound, your petitioner will ever pray.

This petition was signed by people from Indian Head and Vibank.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition as well on behalf on people concerned about the Saskatchewan film library. The prayer reads:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to make a commitment to develop a long-term plan with respect to the Saskatchewan film library, ensuring that under no circumstances will any more films be destroyed; rather that the films be given away to schools, sold, or provided on a fee-for-service basis.

The signatures on this petition are mainly from the community of Assiniboia, Mr. Speaker, and I am pleased to present on their behalf.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition and I read the prayer:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to make a commitment to develop a long-term plan with respect to the Saskatchewan film library, ensuring that under no circumstances will any more films be destroyed; rather that films will be given away to schools, sold, or provided on a fee-for-service basis.
>
> And as in duty bound, your petitioner will ever pray.

And these all come from Regina.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present to do with the problems caused by night hunting. The prayer reads:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to work with aboriginal and Metis leaders in the province of Saskatchewan in an immediate effort to end the destructive and dangerous practice of night hunting in the province for everyone regardless of their heritage.
>
> As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The community involved in this petition, Mr. Speaker, are all from the town of Togo. I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I bring forward a petition today on behalf of the people in Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to allocate adequate funding dedicated toward the double-laning of Highway No. 1, and further, that the Government of Saskatchewan direct any monies available from the federal infrastructure program toward double-laning Highway No. 1 rather than allocating these funds towards capital construction projects in the province.
>
> And as in duty bound, your petitioner will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed the petition are from the Shaunavon, Consul, Eastend areas of the province. I so submit.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions on behalf of citizens concerned over the safety of the No. 1 Highway. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to allocate adequate funding dedicated toward the double-laning of Highway No. 1, and further, that the Government of Saskatchewan direct any monies available from the federal infrastructure program toward double-laning Highway No. 1 rather than allocating these funds toward capital construction projects in the province.
>
> And as in duty bound, your petitioner will ever pray.

And, Mr. Speaker, those who've signed these petitions are from the communities of Shaunavon and Frontier. I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to work with aboriginal and Metis leaders in the province of Saskatchewan in an immediate effort to end the destructive and dangerous practice of night hunting in the province for everyone regardless of their heritage.

This petition, Mr. Speaker, comes from the Hague, Laird, Saskatoon, Turtleford, Lloydminster, and Goodsoil area of the province. I so submit.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present to this Assembly and I'd like to read the prayer:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to make a commitment to develop a long-term plan with respect to the Saskatchewan film library, ensuring that under no circumstances will any films be destroyed; rather the films will be given away to schools, sold, or provided on a fee-for-service basis.
>
> And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, these petitions are signed by individuals from the Edenwold, Carnduff, Pierson areas of this province. Thank you.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I present a petition on behalf of concerned citizens with respect to the endangerment of lives and long-term survival of wildlife, and the prayer reads:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to enact legislation to completely ban the practice of night hunting in Saskatchewan.
>
> And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The signatures on the petition are from Melfort and Pleasantdale. I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition, the prayer of relief which reads as follows:

> Your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to enact legislation to ban the practice of night hunting in Saskatchewan.

This petition is signed by citizens of the town of Kamsack. I so present.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present the following petition:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to allocate adequate funding dedicated towards the double-laning of Highway No l., and further, that the Government of Saskatchewan direct any monies available from the federal infrastructure program towards double-laning Highway No. 1 rather than allocating these funds towards capital construction projects in the province.
>
> As in duty bound, your petitioner every pray.

And the people that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, they're from Shaunavon; they're from Dollard and Frontier, Saskatchewan. Thank you very much.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

> Of citizens regarding the allocation of adequate funding dedicated toward the double-laning of Highway No. 1;
>
> Various petitions that have been tabled as addenda to sessional papers 241, 242, and 243.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I introduce to you and to the others members of the Assembly, seated in your gallery, my Member of Parliament for Churchill River, Rick LaLiberte. If you'd just stand please, Rick, and let's welcome Rick here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — May I say, Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, that we may think that we have large constituencies, but Rick's constituency, Churchill River, covers 57 per cent of this province, if you can believe it.

Also I would like to take the opportunity . . . There are also, observing here today, two of my office employees here in the legislature. Natalie Bourgeois and Joy Strueby are here observing the proceedings today. So if you'd welcome them as well.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would like to join the member in regards to welcoming Rick LaLiberte as the representative. Part of that 57 per cent, of course, is in my riding and I would like to give him first, a good northern Saskatchewan welcome.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Cree.)

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Liberal caucus, I too would like to welcome Rick to the Assembly today, and certainly point out that he's a fellow hockey player — he plays left wing while I play centre. So it's always nice to see a fellow hockey player join us today. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to welcome to the Assembly someone who really needs no introduction — Lorne Nystrom, who's my Member of Parliament back in Ottawa.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Qualified Workers Needed in Hog Industry

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan consistently has the lowest unemployment rate in the country, and that's even, Mr. Speaker, as our labour force continues to grow. More jobs are being created and more people are working in Saskatchewan than ever before, Mr. Speaker. A dramatic example of this reality is the fact that hog producers in the Carlton Trail Regional Economic Development Authority area around Humboldt have gone to Newfoundland and even New Brunswick to find qualified workers.

Mr. Speaker, Stomp Pork Farms near Leroy is expected to increase its sow production between 2,400 and 4,800 sows by next year. Mr. Stomp already employs 35 people and he indicates that he'll need 40 additional workers by the end of next year.

Another hog producer in the area, Florian Possberg, says he can use workers even before the end of this year in his operation.

The expansion of hog barns in Saskatchewan has created a significant spin-off activity for construction firms, including lumber, cement, and structural steel companies.

The expected 500,000 increase in the hog production over the next year will create from 250 to 300 new, full-time, permanent jobs for men and women in rural Saskatchewan. This is in addition to the jobs already created during the construction of these facilities.

Mr. Speaker, this is good news for the Saskatchewan economy and especially for our rural communities, Mr. Speaker, even those communities in the constituencies of members opposite.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Awards for Aberdeen School Newspaper

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, the Aberdeen School was recently awarded top honours in an annual Saskatchewan student newspaper competition. The awards were sponsored by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*, and the Regina *Leader-Post*.

In addition to being named best overall student newspaper and collecting the plaque and $200 in prize money, Aberdeen School, *The Muse* — the school paper rather, *The Muse* — was recognized as the best newspaper in the category for high schools with enrolments of 150 to 499 students.

Judges said that Aberdeen came out on top because the newspaper was well laid out, nicely sectionalized, and showed a creative use of typography. It was well written, extremely informative, and showed excellent student participation. All this, Mr. Speaker, from a school with about 150 high school students.

Congratulations to the Aberdeen School on a job well done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Can-Oats Milling Products Inc.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, more people than ever before are working right now in Saskatchewan, and I would like to highlight to all members of the constituency that in the constituency of Rosthern, Can-Oat Milling Products Inc. is currently constructing an $18 million processing facility located north of Martensville that plans to open on December 19 of this year.

Mr. Speaker, Can-Oats is privately owned. It's a Canadian company which purchased the Saskatoon North Pool elevator this year, and the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool owns 34 per cent of the shares in Can-Oats Milling Inc.

Hundreds of jobs have been created, with economic spin-offs benefiting all aspects of the construction industry during the construction of this facility. Grain farmers in the area are happy to know that this facility will need 75 tonnes of raw oats a year and will be producing oat products to be marketed mainly to South America and the southern U.S. (United States). That's a lot of oats, Mr. Speaker.

Livestock producers will be happy to know that the oat hull by-product, which will be substantial, can be used for livestock feed pellets which will be sold locally.

The grand opening for the milling operation will likely be held next spring and the general public will be invited to attend, and I would like to invite the member from Rosthern to put this on his calendar. So that in addition to his dead-of-the-night, secret meetings he . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The hon. member's time has expired.

Member for Melfort-Tisdale Apologizes to His Wife

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, people in this House think that our most acute critics are members opposite. I'm here to tell you that that's not true.

Last night when I returned home for a meeting and I walked into my home, my daughter came to me and said, dad, do you realize what you've said? And unfortunately she knows how to use the Internet; and I quote," and when I was first dating my present wife", and therein lies the *faux pas*.

And so, Mr. Speaker, if I may apologize publicly to Carole, my past wife, my present wife, my future wife, my only wife — love you, hon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Provincial Housing Boom

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to take you on a quick trip around our province to talk about the booming housing industry, so hang on to all three points of your hat.

By way of preface, let me quote Paul Cayton, who's a CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation) market analyst for Saskatchewan, who says, "job and wage growth are encouraging new family formations leading to demand for more housing". That's a bureaucratic way of saying things are really hopping. And it's my way of saying more people are working in Saskatchewan than ever before.

For example in my city of Regina, housing starts are up by 19 per cent over 1996. Work has begun on 494 houses in the city, and this of course does not even include the resale of housing. Housing starts in the province's nine cities have increased 2.7 per cent in the first 11 months of 1997.

Not to be left out, Saskatoon house construction will reach its highest level in 10 years in 1998 according to predictions by CMHC. And to meet the needs for housing caused by the increasing oil and gas activities, Swift Current has seen a 34 per cent increase in construction of single and multiple housing this year.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, growth is not just occurring in our cities. This spring our government announced $8 million over three years to provide housing programs in the North. This year 24 homes will be built in remote northern communities — work, by the way, awarded for the most part to northern contractors and providing northern jobs. That was a quick trip . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The hon. member's time is expired.

Tribute to Northern Leaders

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday, December 13, 1997, a group of northern people gathered in Prince Albert, and the purpose of the gathering in Prince Albert was to honour and tribute the many northern leaders that have come throughout our ranks to help build northern Saskatchewan and to help present some of the many northern Saskatchewan's problems.

I'd like to take a few minutes to recognize some of those people in the Assembly today. One of course is Vital Morin, an elder who comes from Ile-a-la-Crosse and served as a former mayor. The other was Leonard Larson, a businessman from Buffalo Narrows who also was a former mayor. And the other is Nap Gardiner, a broadcaster, and now works with the MP (Member of Parliament) and is also a former mayor; and also Ms. Fitz of La Ronge; Allen Adam who is a former vice-chief of the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations).

And of course the most important one, and certainly in our books, is Mr. Lawrence Yew, a former MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) who represented the Cumberland constituency.

I think this is very fitting that we ask the Assembly to join me today in applauding and recognizing this very, very strong effort on behalf of the New North committee to recognize and to pay tribute to northern leadership. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

CenAlta Well Services, Inc.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We heard on Tuesday about the booming oil and gas industry in Saskatchewan in my area and in several others. One of the several others was the south-east part of the province. Regardless of where it happens, oil patch activity is good for the province and it is good for service industries in the communities where the services are located.

One such example of this is the town of Carlyle in the constituency of my friend, the member from Cannington. He too has been busy at night and perhaps missed this daytime expansion of the economy in his area. CenAlta Well Services, Inc., a company that specializes in oil and gas well services, has announced that it will establish a branch office in Carlyle. CenAlta has been in operation for 31 years and has offices in Alberta, Saskatchewan, as well as Russia and China.

Of particular note, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that 16 employees and their families will be relocating to Carlyle — another indication that there are more people than ever before working in Saskatchewan. That is good news for Carlyle, for the merchants, the schools, and yes, the tax rolls of Carlyle — another rural town that is holding its own quite well because Saskatchewan is prospering under steady, good government. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

World Champion Tap Dancer

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, while many Saskatchewan residents know we are home to a world champion curling team, a speed skater, and a chamber choir, I'm pleased to inform this House that we have yet another world champion. Anita Herle Bauck recently finished as the top female tap dancer at a world championship competition in Germany.

Anita presently resides with her husband in the community of Chaplin in my constituency and teaches at Doris Sitter School of Dance in Moose Jaw. Anita grew up on a farm north of Marquis in the Arm River constituency and attended Vanier Collegiate in your own constituency, Mr. Speaker.

Her success is a testimony to the importance of hard work and a demonstration of her passion for dance. Anita's achievement is no doubt also a product of support from her husband, her parents, Marilyn and Gene, as well as the teaching skill of Doris Sitter and others.

Culture is alive and well in Saskatchewan, and I'm sure all members join me in congratulating Anita on giving our province yet another world's best. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Grain Transportation

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions this afternoon are for the minister of transport. Madam Minister, you and the member from Rosetown were happy the other day to be in Eston to cheer on the farmers there and try and horn in on the initiative of local producers who want to set up a short rail line operation.

Madam Minister, I'm not surprised that in today's paper the report is that less and less farmers are actively engaged in this province. I'm sure that that trend will continue and your government has done a lot with respect to hardships that farmers are faced with. Your government has had an all-out attack on producers for years, starting with the cancellation of the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) contracts. You don't fund highways properly. You don't reduce regulations for producers. You don't allow producers to market the products in a way they'd like to. And you don't, period, do anything to help farmers.

Madam Minister, how can you claim that you want to help farmers in this province when all you have done since your government formed office was hurt them?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well the hon. member opposite made a number of . . . or attempted to make a number of points in that speech, and I guess I can pick the one I want to answer. But overall I'll tell you what we don't do on this side of the House, Mr. Member, is we don't advocate the end of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — That would take away over $300 million out of the pockets of farmers. I'll tell you, if you wanted to be constructive and helpful to the farmers in your area you would get onside with this government — this Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Transportation and the rest of the government — and help us lobby the Liberal friends in Ottawa to have a transportation policy instead of abandoning rail lines in this province, instead of trying to kill the Canadian Wheat Board, and instead of trying to just use your political gain. Because there's a major cash flow crisis in this country right now, and I'd ask you to get onside with us and help make things better.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if you want, Mr. Minister, some suggestions on how to help farmers maybe we can help you out here a little bit. Your government is quick as usual to jump on everybody. Jump on the railways when they're abandoning lines. You ask producers . . . you don't ask producers for their help in any respect, you jump on the federal government if things aren't going the way you would like them to. But that's fine. But how about for a moment just looking in your own backyard. The number one hindrance to new companies taking on short rail line operations in this province, as was said at the conference that was held in Regina, is successor rights — your government's legislation that makes it unaffordable for new companies to come in. The producers in Eston told the ministers that . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now the hon. member for Kindersley has the floor and is entitled to be able to put his question in a way that can be heard and understood, and I will ask all hon. members to cooperate with his right to present his question. The hon. member for . . . Order. Order from both sides.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you for your help, Mr. Speaker. The number one hindrance to companies taking over short rail line operations in this province is, as you know, Mr. Minister, successor rights. Your government's legislation has made it unaffordable for new companies to start up here in this province. The producers in Eston told the ministers that that day; SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) has told you that; everybody says that in agriculture, Mr. Minister. Why don't you do something for the farmers of this province and eliminate successor rights? Try and provide a little help in that area, Mr. Minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I just finally . . . I just figured out this whole process. The member opposite is really trying hard to differentiate his politics of anti-unionism from the other guys that . . . (inaudible) . . . politics of anti-unionism. Nothing to do with the real question of helping farmers.

If he knew . . . If he would read his papers he would know that Omni Trax has signed an agreement and it is not an issue. They've signed an agreement of labour. If he wanted to get on the issue of transportation and agriculture, he surely would be more positive in terms of working together to try to formulate a national transportation policy. Maybe he could get some of his Conservative cronies in Ottawa to lobby the Liberal government in Ottawa. And maybe he could reach across and try to differentiate . . . or even better . . . or even better, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Now it seems the hon. members are just as enthusiastic about helping with the answer. And I'll ask that the Hon. Minister of Agriculture be allowed to conclude his response.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I asked the member, I asked the member . . . I understand that he's got a little problem with the differentiation of politics on that side of the House. But maybe he could go one step further than asking his friends to the left of him; ask some of his friends, ask some of his former or his present Liberal colleagues in his own caucus to talk to the Liberals in Ottawa about transportation policy.

Mr. Speaker, if this is an indication of what this so-called new party with old clothes is all about — putting politics ahead of the goodness of the farmers of this country — I am sorely disappointed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Night Hunting

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems the Minister of Agriculture has more political staff in his office than department staff.

My question is to the Minister for the Environment. On Monday I gave notice of a Bill to ban all night hunting in the province of Saskatchewan and I'm certain supporting it would make your job a lot easier, Mr. Minister.

Let's just recap your comments on this issue over the past few days. Saturday's *Leader-Post* reads, "No night hunting" and that "The province will ban night hunting in most of Saskatchewan by the end of February . . ." Yesterday you said in the House, "We are not saying we are banning anything at this time." This is a very serious matter, Mr. Minister, a serious safety issue, not something you can flip-flop with on a daily basis.

Mr. Minister, which ones is it going to be? Which ones, Mr. Minister? You're banning spotlight hunting; you're not banning spotlight hunting. Ban yes; ban no. Which one is it? Are you or are you not going to either support our Bill . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The hon. member has been quite lengthy in his preamble and I'll ask him to put his — order — to put his question . . . Order. The hon. member has the opportunity and the right, and I'll ask the hon. members to allow him, to put his question to the minister immediately now.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Minister, are you or are you not going to support my Bill or ban night hunting in the province. Which is it, Mr. Minister? Give us a firm answer and a firm date. Will you ban night hunting in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not just sure how many times we have to repeat our position but I'll read it verbatim from Friday.

> We are committed to end unsafe night hunting to meet the safety and security needs of Saskatchewan residents while respecting aboriginal treaty rights.

In a nutshell, we are all opposed to unsafe night hunting, we all want to end unsafe night hunting, and we will end unsafe night hunting by February.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower's Investment in Guyana

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on Monday I questioned the minister responsible for CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) about Guyana and received no answer. Yesterday again he chose to dodge the question, saying he was waiting for the Guyanese election results. And in this morning's paper, he says he's waiting on the Guyana decision because he's too busy to discuss it in cabinet. Well more results are in and the present government is still in the lead. Cabinet has had information on the Guyana deal for months. There's no sense waiting until next week to announce what you're going to do. So my question is for the Premier. I'm going to make it simple.

Mr. Premier, will you choose to listen to your political appointee, Jack Messer, and blow away $31 million of taxpayers' money, or listen to the people of Saskatchewan and scrap the deal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite we're going backwards. Yesterday they had won the election, today they're leading. I want to say to the member opposite that you should get your lines straight.

But I have a quote here that I want to give to the member opposite. And I . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . don't get tired of them because I have a whole book of them. And it says, and I quote, "Rod Gantefoer said . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. And I'm sure having asked the question, the hon. members will want to listen for the answer. And that the whole House . . . order, order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member had asked about the election in Guyana. Yesterday he said that the government had won. Today they're leading. Tomorrow they may have lost the election. So we really want to wait until the final results are in.

But on the issue of your credibility, I want to quote what you said about whether you are a Tory or a Liberal. You said, and I quote:

> No, absolutely no, not with the Tory party or any other party. I am a Liberal member of the legislature for Melfort-Tisdale, and that is what I will stay.

Now I know why they're yelling, I know why they're yelling.

The Speaker: — All hon. members on both sides of the House . . . I'll give the minister just a few seconds to wrap up his response.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I know why the member's yelling and hollering — so no one can hear what I'm going to say. But I'm going to say it anyway. I'm quoting the member, I'm quoting the member who says, "No, absolutely, no. Not with the Tory Party . . . " not with the Tory Party. But more than that, no other party either.

Now I want to say we need the branding iron and we need it quick for that boy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Channel Lake Petroleum

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my

question was going to be to the CIC minister but so far he has failed to answer anything, so I'll go to the Premier.

Mr. Premier, the whole Channel Lake has a pretty dark cloud hanging over it and there's a lot you can do to clear things up. First, hold a review into the entire transaction from beginning to end so the public knows what happened; second, shed a little light on who was involved in the decision making.

Mr. Premier, due diligence must be done. Normally, transactions of this size are put before two separate companies, like Watrous company or Kobiashi, to guarantee the best return for the seller — in this case, the Saskatchewan taxpayers.

Mr. Premier, I would like to know who made the decision to sell Channel Lake, how many individuals were involved; we would like a copy of the minutes. Would you at least provide us with that information, sir? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to give the same answer as I gave that member yesterday. Maybe if they'd quit yelling so much when I give the answers, they would be able to hear them.

But the decision to sell Channel Lake was made on the recommendation from the management of SaskPower to the board of directors and the board of directors made the decision. And that's how the decision was made and now that it's quiet and you've heard the answer, maybe that will solve the mystery.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Surgery Waiting-lists

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, it was almost two years ago that this NDP (New Democratic Party) government put a gun to the head of the Regina Health Board and forced them to vote to close the health centre, the Plains Health Centre. If this government has its way, the Plains will close its doors next fall.

Of great concern to many people is how this closure will affect the level of health care for the people of southern Saskatchewan, and in particular, the impact it will have on waiting-lists, which are already unacceptably long. Something our former members supported as well, and now they're heckling it.

To the Minister of Health: sir, you're predecessor wrote in a November, 1996, letter that work is under way to improve the current waiting-list system to make sure they don't wait any longer than they should. What has been done to fulfil this promise or have you conveniently forgotten about this commitment, as the Premier did about personally looking into why a 79-year-old woman waited six days for hip surgery?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, first I want to indicate to the member opposite that the decision around the consolidation of the hospitals in Regina was a decision that was made by the district health board after significant review of what would be the best system of delivering acute care, long-term care services in this community.

And the recommendation by the Regina Health District was that they would consolidate the three operations into two. So today you'll have the General hospital and the Pasqua Hospital providing a variety of services not only to the residents here in Regina, but across the piece of southern Saskatchewan.

Within the next year what you'll see in this community is you'll see a new MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). A new MRI is in the midst of being designed here and currently the funding is being put in place for this new piece of equipment that will not only serve people here in Regina, but will serve all of southern Saskatchewan.

In addition to that I want to say to the member that there will be an enrichment in the cardiovascular piece and there will be new equipment that will be added to that. Similarly, will serve not only the people in Regina, but will serve all of southern Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, at present we have a doctor shortage, we have a nursing shortage, we have a shortage of specialists, and a chronic bed shortage. The only thing we have an abundance of is patients who occupy waiting-lists, that need treatment seriously. The average wait for treatment has jumped from six and a half weeks to eight and a half weeks since 1993, and just yesterday the Minister of Health confirmed that surgery waiting-lists have lengthened because of increased demand. Unless this government has a proper plan in place to address this serious problem, the closure of the Plains Health Centre is premature.

The Liberal opposition will be introducing a motion following question period, calling on this government to put the closure of the Plains on hold until a review of the health care services for Regina and southern Saskatchewan is completed and it can be established that a safe and reliable level of care can be provided. Will the minister support this motion?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want to answer the question on behalf of the government, and say in answering the question that it would be very helpful if the Liberal Party in Saskatchewan acknowledged some basic facts, one of which at least has been acknowledged by their federal counterparts.

I have here in front of me *Leader-Post* of August 21, 1997. The headline says, "Health cuts have hurt: Rock." The story says, quote:

> Health Minister Allan Rock made a frank admission Wednesday that deep cuts to health care have hurt, causing anxiety which threatens confidence in the system.
>
> It is the most direct acknowledgement the Liberal government has made that the drastic cuts to money for health, education, and welfare in the 1995 budget (federal) have caused pain.

He said:

> "I will not stand here and tell you that the cuts in transfer payments . . . were insignificant. They were not. Nor will I

tell you that they have not had an impact. They have" (had an impact) . . . (Mr. Rock said.)

Go talk to your Liberal counterparts about that problem. They created it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Channel Lake Petroleum

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Channel Lake is getting murkier and murkier. Documents obtained recently by the Liberal caucus show that Lawrence Portigal, while on staff at Channel Lake, was also a director of another company called Radisson Petroleum. Now this Radisson Petroleum merged with Channel Lake. Then later, of course, this same Mr. Portigal negotiates on behalf of the government the sale of Channel Lake to another company direct.

An Hon. Member: — Oh, oh, there's an odour here.

Mr. Hillson: — And then a week later he emerges, he emerges as the president of the company he was negotiating with on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. All hon. members, all hon. members . . . All hon. members come to order.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, we had agreed in our caucus we should support each other, but you know with support like that . . . but anyway. How could Mr. Portigal have been acting in the best interests of the people of Saskatchewan and SaskPower when he was, at the same time as negotiating supposedly on our behalf, lining up a job with the people he was selling our assets to.

At what point did the minister know that Mr. Portigal was in what certainly appears to be a conflict of interest? What did you know and when did you know it?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, not to bring any levity to the question period, but it gives new meaning to the call "Odour, odour" Mr. Speaker, when the member opposite rises.

But I want to say to the member opposite that Mr. Portigal, in working for Channel Lake, did work on the negotiations. The company was sold. Mr. Portigal was then without work and the new company hired him. That's about as devious as the plot was.

Now as to who was the company that purchased Channel Lake, the holding company that owns the new company is a company called OPTUS Natural Gas Distribution. Now the plot thickens when you realize that one of the partners in this new company is the Hon. David Peterson. Now you will know who the Hon. David Peterson is, from Ontario.

So when you talk about how thick the plot is, this was a deal where a company was purchased in 1993, was then subsequently sold in 1997 at a profit of $2 million to a company with a board of directors, one of whom is the former Liberal premier of Ontario.

So I say to you, there couldn't be a more open process. The board of directors made the decision. It will come to Crown Corporations . . .

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

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I realize the minister is on record as saying this wasn't a significant transaction, but the fact is he didn't answer my question at all. When did he find out that Mr. Portigal had something else cooking besides looking after the interests of the people of Saskatchewan?

If the sale of Channel Lake had been by public tender, then the people of Saskatchewan would have had some comfort that we got the best price possible. But that's not what happened. We took the $5 million loss by what was a back-door, middle-of-the-night, un-tendered privatization — the sort of privatization this government says they're opposed to — of a major Crown asset.

Why was the sale un-tendered?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — As I say to the member opposite, that when you say the significant transactions, that I decided it wasn't required to take it there, that's not accurate. The Crown Corporations Committee sets the limits of what's a significant transaction. I didn't make that decision; members of the Crown Corporations Committee did.

Not one of you people in opposition who are raising this as an issue today has brought to the Crown Corporations Committee a concern that the transactions that are reported are too high or too low.

An Hon. Member: — I wrote a letter, and you have it in your office.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — The member from Shaunavon, or the member from Wood River, yelled from his seat that he sent me a letter this morning. Well . . .

An Hon. Member: — Two days ago.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Two days ago. Oh, two days ago you made your mind up that it wasn't the right level. So this is how concerned you have been about whether the limit for significant transactions are too high or too low.

I say to you, if it isn't the right level, bring it to the Crown Corporations Committee and offer up changes, and we'll bring the report to you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Infant Mortality

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, yesterday, Mr. Premier, you eloquently addressed important issues facing Canada. You cited . . . You sir, quoted the Catholic bishops, who stated that it is, and I quote: "a damning indictment" that one in five children live in poverty in

this country.

And I say to you, Mr. Premier, that it is a damning indictment that Saskatchewan holds first place in the rate of infant mortalities in the entire nation. Mr. Premier, tell us what your government is doing to address this very serious issue.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, as that member and all members will well know, this province has been recognized across Canada as placing children at the very first of our agenda, Mr. Speaker, and that's not a claim that I or any member of government makes. That is the report of, for instance, Canada's council on social development, who in a very recent report, and interestingly in the context of the unity discussions, in the context of Canada, has identified two provinces as showing leadership on issues regarding children, infants, and families — one of them being Quebec and the other being Saskatchewan. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the author of that very recent report, reported in *The Globe and Mail*, December 9, says: "It's not completely bleak. I think there are spots of light," referring to Saskatchewan.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, I say if this is as good as we can do in this province, it is a sad commentary for Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, the Manitoba centre for health and policy evaluation study shows that Saskatchewan has the highest infant mortality rate in Canada, almost double that of every other province. In addition, the studies showed that Saskatchewan has the second lowest per capita health care spending in this country.

Now, Mr. Minister, these figures alarm me and I'm sure they do you as well. So would you please outline the actions that are going to be taken to save the lives of babies in this province.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I'd be more than happy to provide for the member a copy of the recently published review of the child action plan over its last four years. Mr. Speaker, this is a lengthy document that speaks to the many, many, many initiatives undertaken by this government in partnership with individuals and organizations and communities in this province to deal with the very serious issues affecting families and children.

Mr. Speaker, the member asked, is there more we can do, more that we should do. The answer of course, is yes. With the cooperation of that member and hopefully all members and the community of Saskatchewan, we will address the needs of Saskatchewan children. But I say again that of all the provinces in Canada, this government and this province has been singled out for the efforts that we're now taking.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. Yes, Mr. Minister, and of all the provinces in Canada, we have the most babies dying in this province. Mr. Minister, obviously the child action plan is not addressing this very serious issue. Now I brought this up in the past session, about child deaths. I've asked you for further investigations, and I'm sure that your government has collected statistics on this that can either support or refute the research from Manitoba. Would you provide that information to this House in writing, please, if you have it?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, we have provided to that member and all members, and are more than willing to provide, all of the information around infant mortality and child deaths in our province.

Mr. Speaker, as you well know, and as members well know, an independent officer of our legislature, an officer who serves all members of this legislature and through this legislature the people of Saskatchewan, the Children's Advocate, in our province is undergoing some specific reviews of individual child death circumstances and a broader review of that circumstance in our province. She's working with the coroner. She's working with a community-based group of individuals, highly qualified.

Mr. Speaker, we're all concerned about these very significant and tragic deaths that occur within our province. And I can see, Mr. Speaker, us and we together, making progress.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 238 — The Wildlife Amendment Act

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move introduction of An Act to amend the Wildlife Amendment Act, 1997.

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

TABLING OF COMMUNICATION

The Speaker: — Hon. members, before orders of the day . . . Order. Hon. members, before orders of the day, I have a message from the Lieutenant Governor and I would ask all hon. members to rise. Order.

> Pursuant to section 68.7 (order, please) of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, I hereby inform the Assembly of the membership of the Board of Internal Economy effective November 5, 1997:
>
> The Hon. Glenn Hagel, Chairperson/Speaker; the Hon. Eldon Lautermilch, Executive Council nominee; the Hon. Joanne Crofford, Executive Council nominee; Mr. Myron Kowalsky, MLA, government caucus nominee; Mr. Grant Whitmore, MLA, government caucus nominee; Mr. Bill Boyd, MLA, opposition caucus nominee; and Mr. Harvey McLane, MLA, third party caucus nominee.

And it is signed by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

Members may be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members. I would like to recognize a constituent of mine who I see has hobbled in on four legs, Mr. Louis Wolkowski, from Canora-Pelly.

And I'd also like to extend my greetings to Mr. Rick Laliberte, MP. Rick and I had the pleasure of serving on the board of the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, and I wish him well in his venture into federal politics.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — I would like to request leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to the members of the Assembly I'd like to introduce another great Saskatchewanian. Bob Long, is in your gallery. He's had an honourable career in the House and in many public service roles beyond that we welcome here. And I want to also add our greetings, and welcome Louis Wolkowski, who's been a respected municipal leader in Saskatchewan for years. Welcome, Louis.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

MOTION — THIRD PARTY

Closure of Plains Health Centre

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I'll ask hon. members to come to order, please. Before recognizing the hon. member for North Battleford from the third party, I must first of all bring to the attention of the Assembly, that the motion as listed in the order papers is not in order.

The matter of preamble was a matter about which I made a ruling in this House two days ago. And I won't — order — and I won't take the time of the Assembly to repeat what I said two days ago in bringing a ruling on this precise point.

The offending portion of the motion is in fact in this case the final sentence: ". . . especially in view of the donations of money, grain, and other gifts received from the people of southern Saskatchewan" which in effect serves as a preamble in spite of its location within the motion.

And for that reason I don't find the motion in its current format to be in order, the problem being the preamble. I think it would be in order to pause for just a moment to allow the hon. member to determine whether he wishes to introduce the motion in . . . order . . . if he wishes to introduce the motion in proper format. And I will simply pause for a moment.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will so submit with that deletion of that phrase.

The Speaker: — In that case I will find the motion in order.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with pride that I rise on behalf of the third party to bring forward this motion to save one of the key elements, one of the key facilities in health care for this province. And I might say how pleased I've been to this House that all members have put aside partisan politics in the support of larger issues.

On Monday all members of this House rose as one to support the victims of hepatitis C infection. Yesterday we rose as one to support national unity and the initiative, on behalf of our Premier, to send a message to Quebec that they are a valued and integral member of the Canadian federation. Today we have another motion that it is my fervent hope all members of this House will join together as seeing the vital interests of the people of Saskatchewan.

And it was in that spirit that I invited my friend, the hon. member for Regina South, to join me in seconding this motion, because I know the member for Regina South is a man of conviction and a man of principles, and I also know that he campaigned in the last election saying, vote for me and I will save the Plains Health Centre. And I know that he is not someone to back away from promises and commitments, so I was sure that — and I am sure that — he is someone I can count on to support this motion. And I congratulate him for his support that I anticipate in that regard.

If I may digress for just one moment however, Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that in the early days of Confederation it was common for the nation's politicians to run in both federal and provincial elections, and in fact many members of the House of Commons also sat in the provincial legislatures. Now that practice was abolished about a hundred years ago so that you could not sit in both Houses, or so I thought.

So you can imagine my surprise when I read in the newspapers recently that there is a senator, a senator who hasn't been seen for years and years. And this senator in fact hasn't shown up for sittings of the Senate for so long his secretary wouldn't know him if he walked in the office. Now imagine my surprise, Mr. Speaker, when I read in the newspaper that the name of this mysterious senator, who is more often to be seen on the Baja than the Rideau, is none other than Andrew Thompson.

Probably just a coincidence, but I thought I would bring that to your attention, Mr. Speaker. Well I was hopeful that the member for Regina South would second the motion.

An Hon. Member: — I can't, I'm sorry.

(1430)

Mr. Hillson: — But he says he can't. So then I was thinking well, let's stick to our non-partisan theme. What about the former minister of Health, the present Minister of Finance. The man who rose in this House, the man who assured us at budget time last year that the days of cuts and closures were over; enough hospitals had been closed, enough beds shut down, enough nurses fired, that he was going to put away his meat cleaver and from now on we were going to see a softer, kinder, gentler government.

And I want you to know how warmed I was to hear the then minister of Health tell us that the days of cuts and closures were . . . was over and we didn't have to fear any further loss in health facilities and health care in this province.

Well unfortunately that didn't work out either. And then I thought, what about the present Minister of Health? He has the primary job of all citizens in this province, to look after the health care needs of the people of Saskatchewan. And I was hopeful that he would be able to second the motion. Certainly I look forward to his standing and fighting for health care in Saskatchewan and a key component in that health care.

So I hope that those gentlemen and all learned and hon. members opposite will rise to say that the Plains Health Centre is a key facility which must be preserved.

But I must advise, Mr. Speaker, that for purposes of today's motion that it will be seconded by that great fighter on behalf of rural Saskatchewan citizens seeking health care, the hon. member for Wood River.

Mr. Speaker, what the Liberals are proposing is a responsible approach to health care management. Had the NDP (New Democratic Party) done its homework, they wouldn't be in the embarrassing position now that . . . that I know they really want to go back on the closure of the Plains Health Centre. They realize it was a mistake, but unfortunately they're worried about losing face if they go back on it and leave the Plains Health Centre open.

Well I say, don't worry about losing face; serving the people of Regina, the people of southern Saskatchewan, the people of the whole province, is more important.

I know they're concerned about balancing the books and rejigging the accounts, but I hope they're also concerned about meeting the health care needs of the citizens of southern Saskatchewan. Unfortunately the government and its heavyweight approach to this issue has delivered a body-blow to knock the wind out of health care in the southern part of our province.

We know that waiting-lists in this province are long — among the longest in Canada. We know that the closure of a major facility such as the Plains can only have a further negative impact on those waiting-lists.

We know that out-of-town people, especially, will have a greater delay now as they are forced to fight through Regina traffic to try and find their way to one of the remaining downtown hospitals instead of the easy access they enjoyed, the easy access they enjoyed to the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, members of the loyal opposition have a reasonable and a responsible and a rational approach. We want to consult with health care management rather than take the position that the way to build health care in this province is to amputate at the knees to prevent costs from running away.

In their zeal to control the budget, Mr. Speaker, the NDP have cut in the wrong areas. The experience and expertise of the experts in the field has been ignored. Instead of consulting with those workers, front-care workers in health — the doctors, the nurses, the technicians — and all those people who have made the Plains Health Centre a facility of excellence, a facility the people of southern Saskatchewan can count on, the government bureaucrats have followed their own financial agenda which takes no account of any other considerations.

It matters not what professional men and women in the health care field feel, government knows best. This, in spite of concerns that closure of the Plains would place emergency trauma patients at risk; reduce the likelihood of attracting specialists; eliminate a teaching hospital; jeopardize the health care of critical patients, for whom are the most acute patients, of all Regina hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, the rate of critical care has been reported to be higher at the Plains than at other Regina hospitals. Critical care at the Plains is over 95 per cent versus about 70 per cent at the General and just over half at the Pasqua. So the prime, key, critical care facility in Regina has been the Plains and that's what the people of Regina and the people of southern Saskatchewan are about to lose.

The Atkinson report recommended, as we know, that more support must be given to one-of-a-kind units in the province. Trauma and cardiac care and cardiac surgery at the Plains are cited in the Atkinson report as some of the components that we must be eager to save.

The general surgery is higher, much higher, at the Plains than at the other facilities; over 90 per cent at the Plains. Indeed from the figures we see, it would make more sense to move some of these facilities to the Plains and consolidate at the Plains rather than to shut it down altogether with the forced consolidation into the remaining hospitals in Regina.

Services have been consolidated in Saskatoon as we know. In Saskatoon they have the Royal University Hospital, which serves as the teaching hospital, and the acute hospital, and the centre for excellence and care for all the people of northern Saskatchewan. Now Saskatoon and the northern part of the province is about the same size of city; same size of population. If it qualifies for a base hospital such as Royal University, does it not make sense that Regina should also have a base hospital?

The health load for the two cities is about the same. The health load for the hospitals in the two centres is about the same. One change though, Mr. Speaker, one serious, serious difference is that Saskatoon has approximately 100 more specialists than Regina. So we know that Regina already has a serious problem attracting specialists to this city and for southern Saskatchewan.

Will the removal of the Plains assist in that problem or make it worse? I think we all know the answer. If the Plains is lost, the discrepancy between specialists in Regina versus Saskatoon, as I say presently running at 100, can only increase. We are going to have far more problem attracting and holding specialists at the Plains for southern Saskatchewan.

Furthermore, it's been recognized that general surgery or orthopedics can be moved to any hospital because that's not as stressful or as difficult for an institution. Some departments can be effectively moved; others cannot be moved effectively from

one facility to another.

How does, Mr. Speaker, this government expect to attract specialists to Regina, to southern Saskatchewan, without the Plains hospital? What is the plan of the government to address the fact that Regina has so far fewer specialists than does Saskatoon? What will happen when the city's only standing trauma centre closes in October of this coming year, less than a year away?

For example, with the trauma unit at the Plains, it would be important to maintain its ties to support units like neurosurgery, cardiovascular and thoracic surgery, cardiac catheterization, and the CAT (computerized axial tomography) scan.

Mr. Speaker, the Plains is the key component in the health care team of southern Saskatchewan facilities. It's like taking the quarterback off the football team. What do you have left of a football team without the quarterback? And yet that is what this government is proposing. The Plains Health Centre is part of that team; it's an important part of that team. It was designed in the '60s under a Liberal government to be the base hospital for health care in southern Saskatchewan. And I do hope — I do hope — that the fact that the Liberals and Ross Thatcher wanted the base hospital in . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

The Speaker: — Leave is granted, and I'll ask that the clock be stopped while this is being done as well.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — My apologies to the hon. member from Battleford. A friend and journalist, freelance journalist, and former school trustee and member of the Saskatchewan Safety Council, Helga Fellehner, is in the gallery opposite. I would ask through you and to mall members, to introduce Helga to the House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

MOTION — THIRD PARTY

Closure of Plains Health Centre

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I say, the whole point of this special session is to put partisan politics aside, so I certainly hope that the fact that the Liberals and Ross Thatcher wanted a base hospital in Regina to serve the people of southern Saskatchewan is not a factor in the decision of saying that we shouldn't have the Plains Health Centre. I do hope that's not on anyone's mind, and we will just think about what's good for patients in Regina and southern Saskatchewan.

The lack of recognition being given presently to the teamwork approach in trauma, cardiac care, cardiac surgery, is puzzling because it runs contrary to what the Atkinson report recommended. The Atkinson report, accepted by this government, says that acute care is valueless without ambulatory care. So if the various components of health care have to link up and be cooperative, and each playing its own role so that there is not duplication but there is service for all people, surely closing the Plains simply does not advance this agenda.

Well I know the government will say there is the question of budget and of money, and that is always a concern, but let's look at what alternatives, what alternatives will there be?

(1445)

Well the government says that they can save about $10 million a year. But, Mr. Speaker, both the Regina General and the Pasqua are older hospitals. How much is it going to cost to expand and renovate and fix up those facilities? The Plains is actually the newest facility and the one in the best condition.

And what are we going to do? Simply cram all of the patients into the two remaining hospitals or, or do you say that these beds aren't needed and we can have further closures. Is the position of the government that these beds, this care, is not required?

Furthermore, let's look at that $10 million figure — $10 million will be saved in health care. But we all know, we all know that of that $10 million, about 7 or 8 million of that represents staff component, wages. In other words, in order to save to $10 million, the vast majority, somewhere in the neighbourhood of three-quarters, will have to come out of cancelled positions, laid-off nurses, fired health care workers. That's the money that's being saved. Let no one be in any illusion. The savings come from firing nurses. That's where the government plans on saving the money.

How many nurses have been fired already? How many thousands of nurses have lost their jobs in this province? But there's 10 million more yet to go, and that 10 million represents . . . approximately three-quarters of that amount comes out of nursing salaries and other front-care health workers.

So, so make no mistake. If we're going to save $10 million, we're going to have further closures, further cut-backs, further firings. As my learned colleague pointed out, we blew $16 million on a cable company in Illinois. So we're going to save 10 million bucks, we're going to save 10 million bucks by closing the Plains and firing a bunch of nurses, but we lost nearly double that on a cable company in Chicago.

And of course, and of course we're proposing to ship three times that amount to Guyana. So there's, you know, cut out Guyana, there's $31 million. That's more than three times of course, 31 million we're going to ship to Guyana; there's three more years of the Plains hospital. And there we have it for longer than this government's going to be in place anyway, because all they have to worry about is how we finance the Plains Health Centre till 1999.

Well another point on the Plains. A helicopter pad is at the Plains Health Centre. Now that's very important when we talk

about ambulatory care and the Atkinson report. If we . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, I hear my colleague across the floor saying, used every day, very needed, essential. And yet, so why are we going to dynamite it? Why are we going to do away with this helicopter pad, which means that people in rural Saskatchewan can get to the facility quickly, and hopefully on time, to meet their health crises?

So, Mr. Speaker, the one facility, the one facility in southern Saskatchewan, the only facility in southern Saskatchewan that has a helicopter pad to bring patients there, to bring patients to the Plains Health Centre, is going to be lost.

The Speaker: — Order. I'm sure the hon. member from Regina South will welcome the opportunity to get into debate, and I'll urge him to save his remarks until he can put them on the record.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I don't take offence at all. I understand how members opposite are anxious to express their support for this motion, to show that they are going to join with the Liberals to keep the Plains open. And I want, I want to be on record that I appreciate that anticipated support.

We have a proud tradition of health care in this province and one of the miracle stories from this province that made headlines around the world was the Karlee Kosolofski story, the little girl who made medical history from low body temperature, and her survival.

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

Ms. Stanger: — Leave to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a former member and former cabinet minister in this House and a friend of mine from my constituency, Bob Long, and I'd like you to welcome him here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

MOTION — THIRD PARTY

Closure of Plains Health Centre

Mr. Hillson: — So we were proud in Saskatchewan, and of course so happy for this little girl and her family, to think that medical history was made in this province because of the Plains Health Centre. How could anyone possibly think of losing that, of doing away with that?

I can only assume that members opposite get the same phone calls that we get all the time saying, thank heavens for the Plains Health Centre; mother or grandpa or whoever had a heart attack, rushed in to the Plains, and he or she is alive today because of the care they were able to receive at the Plains Health Centre. For heaven's sake, don't close it.

I assume members opposite are getting those same calls as I and my colleagues are receiving.

In closing the Plains Health Centre, are we considering population increases? Are we considering, are we considering the ageing of our population which will bring — even without an increase in the population — it will bring more pressures on health care services as our population ages?

What consideration has been given to the fact that demographic projections say that first nations will be an ever-increasing part of the configuration of our population?

Mr. Speaker, the savings, the $10 million a year, are going to require 10 years in order to be realized because part of closing the Plains Health Centre down, part of mothballing it and trying to get the remaining hospitals ready for the influx of cramming in the patients from the Plains centre, give or take, we're in about the 100 million range.

So again, we're going to save 10 million a year, but we lose 100 million by closing the Plains. So there's at least 10 years to get to the break-even point. Why, Mr. Speaker, are they worried about 10 years from now? They're not going to be around 10 years from now, Mr. Speaker.

Well, my fear though, my fear is that there are many sick and elderly patients in southern Saskatchewan who also aren't going to be around in 10 years if the government gets away with their projected closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Well I know that the government and the government ministers follow what's going on in other provinces and maybe we shouldn't be surprised that as disciples of the Ralph Klein/Mike Harris approach, they're taking a leaf of his book and saying that we can balance, we can balance the books by cutting the service. No service, no problem, end of problem. And the money has been saved.

But in this case, Mr. Speaker, the 10 million a year they are going to save is so minor compared to the 100 million it costs to close the Plains, or even, as I say, the 16 million that's lost on some loopy cable company project in Chicago. Well when you think of the tax windfalls this province has received in the last few years, we really can't see why this closure is necessary.

As we know — as we know, Mr. Speaker — the federal government reduced about 281 million from two years in health and social transfers. We hear about that on a daily basis in this House. What we are not told however, is during that same period that we lost about 280 million from Ottawa, the revenues of this province increased by nearly 700 million.

And that's not including record sales of oil leases that have reached record revenues for the last several years. So while we talk about this 281 million, we don't talk about the 700 million in increased tax revenue.

The Speaker: — Order.

Mr. Hillson: — Well I know the members opposite are anxious

to get in here so they can express their dedication to health care and I will be glad if this is another example where we stand together for the needs of the people instead of the needs of the balance sheet.

Because I was saddened when the Provincial Auditor this year wrote in his report and I quote, Mr. Speaker, when health districts set priorities, they are related to the department's expectations of financial restraint rather than the district's priority health care needs.

The financial restraints were in my parentheses. What the Provincial Auditor has told us, very clearly, is that health districts set their budgets according to the budgets . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Needs-based assessment, you're right. My colleague over there is absolutely right. But what needs-based? The needs of the Finance department as opposed to the needs of the patients. That's what the Provincial Auditor said, that's on the . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . That's not my statement. Needs-based funding.

That's what we've got, needs-based on the bottom line, on the cash line, not needs-based on patient services. That's what we have in Saskatchewan. Is it possible — is it possible, Mr. Speaker — that we can get back to the needs of the patients?

Well I know that . . . I know the friends opposite will say that this was after all a health district decision, this wasn't a government decision. But you know, the health district had a gun pointed to its head. They were told in a letter, a letter from the Health department to Dick Chinn, dated January 12, 1996 — a day before the board was to vote on whether or not the Plains Health Centre was to remain open — and they were advised in a letter at that time that the funding they would be receiving was on the basis that the Plains Health Centre was to be closed.

So the funding from the provincial government was on the basis that the Plains Health Centre will be gone. You will not be funded for the Plains Health Centre.

So the next day the board really had no decision to make and . . .

An Hon. Member: — An unregistered gun held to their head.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, I wonder what's going to happen to the Health department when we've got gun registration. Will they be able to hold the guns to the head of our health districts quite as effectively and quite as quickly as they have before?

But the board of the health district had no decision to make because they had already been advised by the provincial government that the funding for the health district . . . for the Plains Health Centre was being removed. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the decision of the board was strictly and solely on the basis that the funding for Plains Health Centre had been withdrawn by this government.

Now a group of nurses, group of nurses . . .

An Hon. Member: — Who's doing your research over there?

Mr. Hillson: — Well, okay, Mr. Speaker, my friend and colleague over there wants to know where we got our research. Well I learned about the importance of the Plains Health Centre by reading his campaign literature, and it was there that I first realized how important it was to fight for the Plains Health Centre when I . . . and I was moved, I was moved when I picked up his campaign brochure and read there: "Andrew Thomson and Roy Romanow — leadership that's working, leadership that will keep the Plains Health Centre open."

Now those are stirring words, Mr. Speaker, and . . .

An Hon. Member: — Table it. Table it.

Mr. Hillson: — Well a group of . . . Well if my learned friend, if he wants his campaign literature tabled, I won't object to that.

But I will say, a study of nurses from the Plains made two proposals for consolidation. One suggested converting the Regina General into a geriatric hospital and another said the Plains should become the acute care speciality centre. In this way we wouldn't have to close anything if the Regina General, if the Regina General became a geriatric centre and the Plains became the speciality acute care centre.

Now that's what the nurses, the front-care health workers said. I think that those are the people who know as good or better than anyone and we should listen to the health care workers, the health care professionals.

Well I don't think that the needs of southern Saskatchewan really came into account here. It wasn't a question of them deciding that there were too many beds. It wasn't a question that they sat down and said, there's an excess of nurses in southern Saskatchewan, there's an excess of specialists, there's an excess of hospital beds — we've got too many; we've got to get rid of some.

(1500)

That was not what happened. What happened was the provincial government said, your funding is gone. If you keep open the Plains Health Centre, you will receive no funding for it.

Well the Fraser Institute . . . And I know that's not the favourite think-tank of some friends opposite. And they certainly won't like this one because the Fraser Institute says that our waiting-lists are among the highest in Canada. And I have to ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will those waiting-lists shorten when we close the Plains Health Centre? Are we going to get in for treatment quicker when the Plains Health Centre is gone? Or do you think those lists are going to grow?

We know there's a serious problem attracting specialists to Regina — 100 fewer than Saskatoon. Is it going to become easier to attract specialists to Regina when we close the Plains? Or is it likely to become more difficult?

Now I ask the Hon. Minister of Education to bear with me because there's lots of interesting and important material here that I'm sure will be for her edification.

Now between 1993 and 1996 the median wait for an appointment with a specialist in this province has grown nearly two weeks. We've gone from about six and a half to eight and a half weeks. This put Saskatchewan as the second worst in Canada.

So there we had, 1993 to 1996 — this is what wellness did for Saskatchewan — two weeks onto our waiting-lists. Well what's going to happen to that two weeks in southern Saskatchewan after we've gotten rid of the Plains?

Well the median time between a GP (general practitioner) referral to a specialist in this province has now grown about three weeks under wellness. We've gone from about nine and a half to twelve and a half.

So there's a three-week increase in a wait to get a referral to a specialist. So there's wellness — there's what wellness has done. And I simply say, will the closure of the Plains increase this or make it worse?

With the destruction of health care facilities in rural Saskatchewan, the importance of a base hospital following the Thatcher dream in the '60s is even more important as people can't get health care in our smaller communities. And the government has told us that they're working on 911. We hope they get it up and running. But there doesn't seem to be any great speed there.

Well we've also heard that health board members are not supposed to be open with their discussions, to tell us, the people, how they really feel about the health board closure. But we do know, we do know that, we do know that they have done this because, simply because they cannot get heath care, they cannot get health care in their communities, they need to get health care at a base hospital such as the Plains.

So I say to my friends opposite, please, please do not tell us, do not tell us that this decision is because of a decision by a board. You know that's not so. The board made a decision because the Health department said your funding is gone. If the board's funding is put back into place, the Plains Health Centre will be saved.

Let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, that about two-thirds of the projected savings from the Plains closure will come from salaries, will come from fired nurses. We all know what that means, Mr. Speaker. The projected savings come at the cost of more laid-off health care workers and patient care will again decline in a province where we have lost thousands of nurses.

Already in this province, Mr. Speaker, health care workers have a high claim on workers' compensation and a sick-time claim nearly double the national average. Now that is a direct cost of wellness. Wellness isn't working for health care workers, Mr. Speaker. Wellness has resulted in burn-out and lost staff time because our nurses have seen their colleagues gone; they're trying to cope with a crumbling system. They're trying to cope with fewer and fewer nurses handling more and more patients, and that has resulted in now sick-loss time nearly double the national average.

Burn-out is already a problem with health care workers. If we close yet another facility and lay off a bunch more nurses — we cram those patients into the existing facilities in Regina — is burn-out of our health care professionals going to get better and easier or is it going to get worse?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have great trust in the NDP. I believe they will not be so mealy-mouthed as to suggest that they'll just sit on their hands and allow the Plains to be closed and shove all the blame off on the Regina Health District and say they have no responsibility in this matter. The health district voted for closure for one and only one reason alone: they had no funding.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the government tells us they set up health districts to allow for local control, to allow local residents to determine their needs and their priorities. This sounds great. But what we see in practice is that health districts have been set up as the fall guys. You know when the health district in my area didn't receive adequate funding they had to close the Rabbit Lake Health Centre. It's now been privatized in a province that says it's opposed to the privatization of health facilities.

If health districts are to have a role in health deliverance they have to have some role to play other than being the fall guys — the fall guys for inadequate funding by the provincial government. They can't be used just so the Health minister can pass the buck and say he's not responsible for health care in a province . . . in the province and that cuts are due to board decisions and nothing to do with him.

So I say to members opposite, please, please don't make the people of southern Saskatchewan have to sit and listen to you say that you really want the Plains to remain open, but you're going to stand by and let it happen because an underfunded health board was forced by you to make this unfortunate decision. Don't pass the buck that way. That won't wash with the people of southern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday we passed a unity resolution, again reaffirming that the framers of our constitution were right in establishing a federal form of government in which some things would be handled by the national government and some things by the provinces. Under that constitution, responsibility for health care was given to the provinces.

In a different time and age, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this was a responsibility our provincial government was proud to discharge, whether when we became the first province to provide public funding for cancer treatment and the first province to establish a comprehensive tuberculosis program — as we did in the early days under the Liberals — or when we established the first hospitalization and medicare programs, as occurred under the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation).

Surely this is a tradition worth preserving. Surely this is a proud heritage we will not allow to be killed by a provincial government which denies it has any responsibility for health, and instead tells angry and perplexed patients that they should forward their complaints either to the health district or to Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, this province was not built by leaders . . . Mr. Speaker, I assume the members are just too anxious to get in

here and say they also believe in the Plains Health Centre. Just provide adequate funding to it and it will remain open.

But I say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this province was not built by leaders who said, don't look at me; blame somebody else. I'm not responsible. I'd love to help out but circumstances prevent me from doing more than sitting on my duff and offering my heartfelt sympathy.

Mr. Speaker, this province was built by men and women of vision who, when they saw a need, they dealt with it. They were not buck passers and blame assignors like this crew. When this province was formed, there were almost no roads, no schools, no hospitals. And what did the government do? Did it say, phone the RM (rural municipality) office? Well of course they couldn't do that because there were no phones and no RM offices.

Did they say, blame Ottawa? No. They said, we're a new province; we're taking responsibility. We're building those schools, we're building those hospitals, we're building those roads, we're building a province. Let us remain true to their heritage, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan was not built on excuses. It was built on action. And I don't think, I don't think the excuse makers and the blame assignors, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot think, I cannot think that the excuse makers and the blame assignors of the present generation will leave the same, will leave the same heritage, the same monuments behind that the people who created this province have.

Mr. Speaker, we are a province of doers, not of whiners. Let us return to our heritage. Let us be a province of doers and not whiners.

Well Saskatoon has its Royal University Hospital. This serves as a centre of excellence and quality health care for all of the people of northern Saskatchewan. And coming from North Battleford, I certainly personally appreciate that, as do my constituents.

However, as someone who was originally raised near Rouleau where that little Karlee Kosolofski was saved, I feel for the needs of my friends and relatives who live in the southern part of the province. And I personally think that a base hospital in northern Saskatchewan, a base hospital in southern Saskatchewan, makes sense.

And I actually think that the people of southern Saskatchewan, I actually think the people of southern Saskatchewan are just as good and just as fine a people and deserve just as much consideration as the people of northern Saskatchewan. The people of Regina, the people of Regina, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of Regina deserve the same consideration in health care as the people of Saskatoon, even if the people of Regina don't have the Premier and the Finance minister representing their city.

Well the auditor told us very eloquently in his report this fall that health district budgets were not based on the health needs of the people but on the . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Pursuant to special order, the time allocated for debate on this motion is out and I would be obliged to ask the member to put the motion now.

(1515)

Mr. Hillson: — I didn't know I'd gone on quite that long, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If I may . . . Well, Mr. Deputy . . . If I may read the . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. The time is allocated and I would ask the member to read the motion now.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to move, seconded by the hon. member for Wood River:

> That this Assembly call upon the provincial government to save the Plains Health Centre from closure by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the Plains Health Centre may continue meeting the health care needs of the people in the Regina district and all of southern Saskatchewan as the area's only single standing trauma centre, and so that the unacceptable delays in surgery now being suffered by Saskatchewan citizens may be reduced, and so that the hospital may serve as a centre for cardiovascular care, surgery, neurology, pediatrics, obstetrics, gynecology, and urology for the people of southern Saskatchewan, including Regina, as it was intended.

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The division bells rang from 3:15 p.m. until 3:24 p.m.

Motion negatived on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 15

Krawetz	Bjornerud	Toth
D'Autremont	Draude	Gantefoer
Heppner	Osika	Hillson
McPherson	Aldridge	Belanger
Haverstock	Julé	Goohsen

Nays — 22

Tchorzewski	Johnson	Goulet
Lautermilch	Kowalsky	Calvert
Teichrob	Pringle	Trew
Lorje	Nilson	Serby
Hamilton	Stanger	Sonntag
Wall	Kasperski	Ward
Jess	Langford	Murrell
Thomson		

SPECIAL ORDER

MOTION — OPPOSITION

Saskatchewan Crown Corporations Accountability

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm very pleased to lead off this discussion of the many serious issues facing Saskatchewan Crown corporations for the Saskatchewan Party caucus. There's very little doubt, Mr. Speaker, that our Crown corporations are at a very serious crossroads, and the issues concerning Crown corporations such as SaskTel, SaskPower, SaskEnergy, and SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) cannot be ignored by the government any longer.

People in Saskatchewan are now very alienated from the Crowns due to this government's actions. While the members opposite continue to speak rhetorically about the Crowns being owned by the people of Saskatchewan, in practice it's because it's very clear that these are only words. The people of Saskatchewan no longer have any say in how the Crowns are operated. They have no say over the rates they pay and they have no say over the mandate of the Crowns; it's become all too clear over the course of the last six years under this government.

Mr. Speaker, there's no better topic which reveals the arrogance of this provincial government than when we discuss the Crowns. The members opposite operate the Crowns as if they were their own personal toys. Decisions are being made behind closed doors away from public scrutiny, away from the legislature. And all too often the Saskatchewan people learn too late that another venture by a Crown has gone sour and the people of this province will be forced to once again pick up the tab.

Yesterday in this House, the Minister of CIC stated that everything is in the open; everything is above board when it comes to the decisions made by Saskatchewan's family of Crown corporations. That's because this government, due to it's overwhelming generosity I suppose, allows us to ask questions about significant transactions of our Crowns.

Of course any such questions come months after the transaction is completed. And the minister states, this is just fine because that much was not even done a few years ago. What the minister doesn't state, however, is that a few years ago we didn't see the presidents of our Crown corporations and the Minister of CIC circumnavigating the globe just looking for more places in which to dump Crown money.

Last week SaskTel president, Don Ching, was kind enough to inform the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations that it is his goal to invest $200 million around the globe in the next three to five years. Apparently SaskTel's money is going to Australia, Europe, and the Caribbean, and we've already sunk a pile of money into New Zealand. And of course we won't learn about the details of these transactions until the contracts are signed, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And as we've learned lately, if these deals go bad it takes a whole lot more time to find out. When the NST (Network Services of Chicago) investment in the United States went up in flames we didn't hear a word about it from this government. Only when laid-off employees in the U.S. complained about SaskTel publicly did the residents of Saskatchewan — the supposed owners of the corporation — become aware that $16 million of their money was going down the drain. The government devoted all of one line to the NST fiasco in the latest SaskTel annual report, and even then not a word was mentioned about the details of what went wrong. We really still don't know the whole story, Mr. Speaker, and until there's a new government in town we probably won't know the details.

In the last couple of weeks we learned from the Provincial Auditor that our government had managed to squander another $8 million with SaskPower's Channel Lake Petroleum deal. Neither the purchase nor the sale of Channel Lake came before the Crown Corporations Committee, because the minister had deemed it insignificant. Then we find out that Channel Lake was sold without even being put to tender and that the man hired to negotiate the sale ended up sitting on the purchaser's board of directors. And we . . . when we the people of Saskatchewan were made aware of any of this by the members opposite, for those members, was this minister open and accountable then? Of course not. Sure, when they make some money off a deal like LCL, (Leicester Communications Limited) the fireworks are set off and the banners raised.

(1530)

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we heard lots and lots about LCL. But everything else is withheld from the public until someone else outside of the government blows the whistle. It's a contemptible way to treat the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we see this kind of behaviour continuing to this very day.

When the Premier decided to call this House back to pass the unity resolution, suddenly SaskPower's Guyana deal was put on hold, just so the minister would not have to answer questions this week. And we've seen him refuse to answer every day of the session so far. It's just shocking arrogance, Mr. Speaker.

Is there any wonder why the people of Saskatchewan are just slightly confused about SaskPower proposing to dump $31 million into a broken-down power company in South America? Is there any wonder that the people of Saskatchewan are concerned that at the same time our SaskPower's in Guyana, SaskTel is in New Zealand, and SaskEnergy is in Chile. It's getting harder and harder for Saskatchewan residents themselves, the owner of these companies, to get quality and affordable service right here at home.

Mr. Speaker, when these Crowns were set up it was to provide people here in Saskatchewan with equal access to affordable service where the private sector could not. The Crowns weren't just set up as another tax tool for the government. They weren't set up to allow the minister to jet all over the world looking for new investments. They were set up to give the people of Saskatchewan the best possible service for the best cost.

Man, how times have changed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Ask anyone who has applied for new farmyard service from SaskPower or for SaskTel or for SaskEnergy. Ask them what they believe the original edict of the Crowns was, and does it still hold true. And I think they will tell you that it does not because the cost of anyone wanting to get new service in rural areas today, the cost is totally prohibitive. Because to provide such service at affordable prices may eat into the Crown corporations' record profits. It may eat into some of the money

that this government now simply views as another source of tax dollars.

Somewhere along the line these Crowns have gotten off the track. Instead of investing in service here, Crown money is sent overseas where the Crowns may or may not be able to turn a fast buck. That's why SaskTel is willing to spend more than $200 million in foreign investments but is dragging its heels in enlarging local distance exchange areas here in Saskatchewan, which would have made a reduced cost and improved service for many residents in rural Saskatchewan. Does the government actually believe that its priorities are the priorities of the people?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've heard officials from the Crown state that these type of foreign investment decisions will make money for the Crowns and thus save jobs here at home. What I've never heard, however, is a quantifiable number.

Let's look at Guyana, $31 million. Will it create 10 jobs in Saskatchewan? That would cost $3.1 million a job. Let's be generous; let's say it creates 100 jobs in Saskatchewan. Then the cost of the jobs drop to $310,000 apiece. Seems like a pretty expensive way to create jobs in Saskatchewan.

How many jobs did the NST deal create? We know Channel Lake has created at least one job, but it doesn't seem enough to make that worthwhile either.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what the people of Saskatchewan are telling us is that the Crowns are heading in the wrong direction. They're telling us that it's pretty hard for them to swallow sending $31 million to Guyana at the same time as their own utility costs are rising, with no real accountability.

And what is the result, Mr. Speaker? The result is that the people no longer see the Crowns as their companies. They see them as the personal kingdoms of the likes of Jack Messer and Don Ching. The people of Saskatchewan are very quickly losing any sense of loyalty to these companies because they see them for what they've become.

And in this time when they're very, very quickly . . . we're heading quickly towards competition, the government is setting up a disastrous course for the Crowns they claim to love so dearly. Because the people are angry. And when they get true, full competition in telephone, in natural gas, in power, what's to keep them from switching to a company that offers them a lower price?

I was recently speaking to a Saskatchewan businessman who had switched from SaskTel to another company and has seen his long-distance bill cut in half. And this same company, which uses a large amount of power, has explored options other that our Crown, SaskPower. Why? Because he has come to the conclusion that the alternatives are slowly becoming more available to him and that they are better than any sense of continued loyalty to SaskTel or SaskPower. Because this business person, like so many other people in Saskatchewan, has no sense that the Crowns have any loyalty at all to him.

Mr. Speaker, this person's company spends seven and a half to eight cents per kilowatt-hour for power. In Alberta the cost for similar companies is four and a half cents. That's nearly double, Mr. Speaker. Of course he's going to explore other options.

Mr. Speaker, these Crowns have made their bread and butter on the fact that they enjoy monopoly situations, and that's going to end. And with the end of monopoly goes the advantage these Crowns have enjoyed for so long. And with the end of the advantage it is conceivable, it is possible, it is even likely, that the value of the Crowns is going to begin to fall as well.

That's why we have the spectacle of SaskTel complaining that they want a further exemption from CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) regulations. It wants an exemption from local phone competition because the government wants to hang onto the cash cow created by such an unregulated monopoly for a few more years. A few more years to plunder — something's very wrong.

It's very, very clear that this is a government that wants it both ways when it comes to the Crowns. They want the advantages of an uncontrolled monopoly coupled with the advantages of operating like a private company. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they simply can't have it both ways.

If these companies are to be government owned, they must be accountable to the public for their actions. They must provide service to people at home and forget about the rest of the world. If they can't do this or if they won't do this, then there's very little point in hanging onto them as Crowns. If they want to risk hundreds of millions of dollars all over the world, let them do it as private companies truly controlled by their shareholders.

It's very easy for this government and the likes of Jack Messer and Don Ching to make investments on our behalf in places like Guyana. It's very easy to take risks like these now, Mr. Speaker, because they're risking other people's money — the money of every taxpayer in this province. Because whenever there's a case like NST or Channel Lakes, these guys and this government know there's always the public purse to cover the costs.

Well private companies can't work that way, Mr. Speaker. A loss is a loss. There's no taxpayer-supported safety net.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if these companies are to remain as Crowns let them do the work that they're supposed to do. Let them work for the people of Saskatchewan, not work around them.

Mr. Speaker, in any situation when a monopoly of any kind is granted, there are certain conditions attached. A minimum service is required for an affordable price, which as I've already stated, is no longer the case here in Saskatchewan. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in all jurisdictions other than Saskatchewan, when a monopoly is granted it is understood that there'll be an independent control mechanism on that monopoly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan is the only jurisdiction in Canada which doesn't have a rate review panel. Our Crowns are free to do as they please. Yes of course, we have this 45-day review sham, which I would think even makes the members opposite blush. It's a PR (public relations) campaign which the

public immediately saw through.

A few months ago, the member from Rosetown-Biggar said the 45-day review period was no longer good enough and something had to be done. In short order, he was shuffled out of the CIC ministry. Now it appears nothing will be done any time soon since now the same member states that the 45-day review process is just fine and that there's no better rate review board than the provincial cabinet. It's stunning arrogance, Mr. Speaker.

Well even if it yet hasn't become clear to the members opposite, the people of Saskatchewan do want a rate review board — a review board that would not only examine requests for price increase before it happened, but also examine the level of service these Crown utilities are going to provide now and into the future; a review board that would also have the authority to examine the worth of investments the Crowns wish to make outside of Saskatchewan before they're made, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This type of board is commonplace everywhere, Mr. Speaker, but not here. Not in Saskatchewan where the government always knows what's best for the citizens.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the citizens are quickly coming to realize that when it comes to Crowns, the government doesn't always know best. And we need an independent board to put a clamp on these Crowns and this government. The public is demanding it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's becoming very, very clear to everyone, except the members opposite, that this is a minimum need of the people of Saskatchewan.

Another thing that's becoming eminently clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's becoming clear that unless the government opposite begins to seriously examine options for these corporations, outside the realm of government owned and operated entities, the companies themselves are doomed to grow smaller and smaller, and less and less competitive and important. And of course it is concern because they will become less valuable. And they'll be less valuable to the people of Saskatchewan, who will have to pay the price.

Mr. Speaker, when the government is elected, it must govern for the good of the current and future generations. Individual partisan ideologies cannot blind their leaders to reality. Because while these ideologies may have been valid 30, 40, or 50 years ago, the world is a very different place today than it was just a few decades ago, and indeed, even a few years ago.

And unless Saskatchewan, and this government in particular, begins to address and acknowledge the changing times, we will all pay the price for many years to come. Mr. Speaker, all options for the Crowns must be studied. And yes, one of these options must be privatization.

Mr. Speaker, just as one cannot be blindly bound to the notion that every one of these corporations has to be run by the government, neither can one say we must sell them off as quickly as possible for whatever price. We have to study each and every one of our Crowns thoroughly and responsibly to see what would be in the best interest of the province as a whole and all of the people who live here now and in the future.

In this age of competition and deregulation, options such as privatization simply must be studied because if it turns out that down the line these Crowns simply cannot compete in an unregulated open market, they will decline in value. They will probably decline in value irregardless. With the coming of deregulation they will begin to decline in value each and every year until the return for taxpayers is negligible.

We must begin the process of deciding what's best for the Saskatchewan of today and tomorrow, not the Saskatchewan of the 1950s. And I think the current minister of CIC knows this. He's bright enough to understand these things, but he's constrained by the politics and blind ideology of his own party. And that's sad, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's sad for the people of Saskatchewan who have to pay for the politics of the members opposite who have had their heads buried in the past.

Mr. Speaker, if there's a compelling reason to hang on to a certain Crown, then by all means let's keep it. But if there isn't, let's do what's right and get the best possible price for it. If we were able to apply the revenue from the sale of Crowns to debt we would save hundreds of millions of dollars in interest costs each and every way . . . year. And don't forget, once a Crown is privatized it'll begin to pay taxes to the province as any other private company. It'll soon look good to this government which never met a tax dollar it didn't like.

Mr. Speaker, these are answers that we need when it comes to our Crowns. These are answers that the people of Saskatchewan want but the answers aren't forthcoming from this government. We need to know the future of these Crowns. We need to know whether the people of Saskatchewan are still a priority for the Crowns. We have to know when the people of Saskatchewan are going to have a say in how the Crowns are run again and into the future. We need to know whether it's in the best interest of the people that these Crowns remain as Crown corporations.

(1545)

Mr. Speaker, these are the questions that desperately need answers. And so, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move a motion, seconded by the member from Saltcoats:

> That this Assembly condemn the government for its mishandling of Saskatchewan Crown corporations by failing to report losses in such ventures as NST and Channel Lake Petroleum, and demand the government immediately implement a mechanism for reporting such losses to the public, and further condemn the government for risking millions of dollars of taxpayers' money through ventures around the world without any public input or approval while the public pays higher utility rate bills, and further demand the government provide Saskatchewan families with a utility rate review commission so Saskatchewan people are no longer gouged by frequent and unnecessary Crown utility rate hikes, and as well implement a legislative approval process for all overseas investment on the part of Saskatchewan Crown Corporations over $1 million.

I so move, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is with

great conviction that I rise in the Assembly today to speak on behalf of this motion, to criticize the government for their mishandling of Saskatchewan Crown corporations. Given this government's reckless investment of Saskatchewan's taxpayer dollars in Guyana and failure to tender a reported loss such as Channel Lake Petroleum, I could go on and on but I will try and be as brief as possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to begin by reaffirming a very important message with my colleagues before we . . . my colleague has already touched on. This NDP government has totally forgotten the purpose and mandate intended for the provincial Crowns. Public utilities were established to ensure that at all times residents of Saskatchewan have access to high quality services at a fair price. Furthermore, many of Saskatchewan Crown corporations were set up because the private sector was not prepared to fill this expanded role.

Well, Mr. Speaker, times have changed, and competition is upon us — at least it is everywhere else besides Saskatchewan. But mark my words, you can't hold the wolves off forever. Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise to anyone but the members opposite that competition is here. And if they were to pull their heads out of the sand for just a moment, they too would see that they have not provided Saskatchewan Crowns with the proper tools to prepare for it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's look at SaskPower for a moment and determine whether it is serving the people of Saskatchewan well. First of all, is SaskPower ensuring that at all times all residents of Saskatchewan have access to quality service at a fair price?

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that Mr. Messer and the minister responsible for CIC have more clout with the powers to be than any of us thought to be the case. Often people joke about putting in an order for a mild winter, but I am positive that we have the members opposite to thank for the above average temperatures we are experiencing this winter.

I don't give the members opposite such blatant praise very often so maybe I should explain why. Power is one of those things that people often take for granted. If you pay your bill, you will have power. Simple as that. But I don't think people realize how dangerously close our province's only power supply was to running out of power last winter. And why should they know, the way this government keeps everyone in the dark?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of CIC and his buddy, Jack Messer, repeatedly tell the people of Saskatchewan that there's nothing to worry about and that we don't need new power-generating capacity in Saskatchewan until the year 2010. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if this is the truth, then why was it necessary to beg our neighbouring provinces to sell us extra power in the dead of winter last year?

I guess Mr. Messer and the minister and the people of Saskatchewan should put El Nino on the top of their list of Christmas blessings this year. We can thank him and not the members opposite for averting a power crisis this winter. And why? Well I think everyone in the province knows why. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister responsible for the Crown corporations is more concerned about trips to Guyana and throwing 31 million of taxpayers' dollars into a third world country than dealing with our power crisis at home.

From the very beginning, the deal to buy half of the Guyanese power company has been plagued with secrecy. If this is such a good investment, why did the government refuse to put the terms of the agreement on the table from the beginning so Saskatchewan taxpayers could probably scrutinize how their dollars were being spent?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is becoming increasingly clear that this NDP government simply does not care what the people of Saskatchewan think about this or any other investment they are making. The minister responsible for the Crowns believes that he has a clear mandate from the people of Saskatchewan to invest their money in whatever foreign investment he chooses, no questions asked.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's simply not good enough. The government has tactfully put the decision off long enough to avoid any scrutiny during this winter session. I would like to remind the CIC minister, Mr. Speaker, that he has publicly stated that he is waiting for the results of the Guyanese election to sign the deal.

Well, Mr. Minister, the results are in. What's it going to be? Are you going to kiss our 31 million away during this session? Or are you going to wait for the week to be over?

Mr. Speaker, let me remind the members opposite that Saskatchewan is the only province which does not have a Public Utilities Review Commission to hold the minister directly accountable, therefore the only accountability mechanism in place in this Legislative Assembly. Not bringing the decision before the Legislative Assembly for debate is a slap in the face of public accountability.

It is clear, Mr. Speaker, the minister would rather hold the decision off until the people of Saskatchewan are too busy with Christmas to worry about a front page news story. The arrogance of this government and their cavalier attitude towards risking taxpayer dollars simply never ceases to amaze us. Not only do they not care what anyone says about the Guyana deal, now they are asking people to just ignore the fact that they lost 8 million through the Channel Lake Petroleum deal.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government goes on and on about how open and accountable they are. I don't know about you, but I certainly do not think hiding Crown investment losses like NST, 16 million, and now Channel Lake, another 8 million, is open and accountable.

And why we didn't . . . Why the government didn't tell us about this loss? Why else? Because of a confidentiality agreement — the same reason they refused to release details on the Guyana deal.

Mr. Speaker, as a taxpayer, that leads me to believe the government has . . . must have other confidentiality agreements keeping them from disclosing other losses. Taxpayers deserve to know what other losses have been incurred that this government has not told us about.

How many millions more of Saskatchewan taxpayers' dollars are we investing at present and we have no idea what they are. What really is the limit of taxpayers' dollars that this government is willing to put at risk and being accountable to no one.

Not only does it matter to them, Mr. Speaker, that they have lost another 8 million, but they see nothing wrong with the fact they negotiated a deal to sell Channel Lake, a $21 million sale, without even tendering it out.

Mr. Speaker, this government promised that in order to make the Crowns more accountable it would reveal any significant sale or acquisition within 90 days. I cannot believe that $21 million falls short of this government's definition of a significant transaction, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not believe for a minute that the people of Saskatchewan think that $21 million is insignificant.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has become more than obvious to the people of Saskatchewan that they can no longer trust the members opposite to disclose losses . . .

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

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

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I also thank the member from Saltcoats for his indulgence in introducing three guests we have in the gallery opposite, Mr. Speaker.

Their father, Patrick Shaw, came over to brag about their presence today. He's our Sergeant-at-Arms and he serves us well and tries to accommodate the needs of the members. And when I looked up, my colleagues also mentioned what beautiful daughters he does have.

I'd like to introduce to you, Meaghan, Aaron, and Shannon Shaw and ask all members to join in giving them a warm welcome. They've just flown in to be here during the Christmas season.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to ask leave to introduce guests.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order.

Leave granted.

Mr. Bjornerud: — I'd like to thank the members. I'd also like to introduce a constituent of mine, Don Taylor, who is also a SARM director. Welcome here, Don. I would like you to join with me in welcoming him here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

MOTION — OPPOSITION

Saskatchewan Crown Corporations Accountability

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has become more than obvious to the people of Saskatchewan that they can no longer trust the members opposite to disclose losses and tender sales based on their own good judgement. More than ever Saskatchewan needs a mechanism in place to report all Crown losses. We should not have to find out the details of such losses from leaked information from the United States or elsewhere.

These mechanisms are needed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because under this current government the Crowns are accountable to no one. This is why my colleague from Melfort will soon be introducing a Bill to establish an independent Crown corporation rate review commission to replace the so-called scam of the 45-day review process.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the members opposite have recognized the need for such a process. As a matter of fact, a previous minister responsible for CIC realized that the people of Saskatchewan had no confidence in the 45-day review process and gave every indication that it would be replaced with a new rate mechanism.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all hopes of this were dashed the other day when the current minister announced that we will be sticking with the current system, inadequacies and all. But I have to admit he gave a sound argument. After all, why do we need a rate review commission when the government has already increased rates of every Crown imaginable this year, including the 8 to 10 per cent of SaskEnergy and now another 50 per cent increase in local telephone rates coming right behind. Irony of all irony, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The government continues their attempt to link the need for increased rates with competition when we all know exactly the opposite is true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to close by saying the way to prepare Saskatchewan for competition is not through increased utility rates nor is it through pushing through as many hare-brained deals as possible while the people of Saskatchewan have no choice but to buy one's service.

Competition and deregulation are coming, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you would be well-advised to prepare SaskPower for deregulation and competition by dealing with continually deteriorating infrastructure and imminent power shortages at home and not in Guyana. It would be everyone's dream, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to run around the world and play big shot spending somebody else's money; but in reality, if you're a shareholder of a company you usually have a say where your money is invested. That's not the case with this government.

I therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, second the motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will try to be brief and I do thank the members opposite for allowing me 10

minutes or so to put some points on the record, because quite frankly this government has not been mishandling Saskatchewan Crown corporations. The record clearly shows that our Crowns are doing quite well. They are providing high-quality services at a fair price and we are preparing for competition and deregulation. We are doing that by growing our companies and ensuring that they are strong provincially, strong nationally, and strong internationally.

(1600)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1996 the four major Crowns — SaskPower, SaskTel, SaskEnergy and SGI — had a net income, a net income, of $318 million. They made a huge contribution to the provincial economy. They employed collectively 8,500 people in communities all across this province. They purchased over $1 billion worth of goods and services from Saskatchewan suppliers. And they were involved in over $345 million in capital expenditures.

Our Crowns are an important part of the Saskatchewan economy and we intend to ensure that they remain an important part. The way we are doing that is by ensuring that we have good services at a fair price, at utility rates that are either the lowest or amongst the lowest in all of Canada, and at the same time making prudent and cautious investments, building on our expertise.

Now the members opposite like to crow about a couple of investments that, in their point of view, have gone bad. I will admit that we did lose $16 million in the NST Network Services in the United States. But they do not bother mentioning that SaskTel made a $114 million profit on the sale of Leicester cable in England. They don't talk about the fact that they were all present at a Crown Corporations Committee to review the significant transaction of $27 million of Saturn . . . in Saturn Communications in New Zealand. And they didn't say that that was something we shouldn't ought to have done.

I will admit that we did sell Channel Lake Petroleum. But the members opposite know quite well that we did not sell it at a loss of $8 million. In fact, as they know and they're conveniently forgetting, we made about $2 million for Saskatchewan taxpayers.

I find it passingly curious that they're going on about how we should have tendered it. If somebody has a Kentucky Fried Chicken joint, they don't tender the chicken for sale. It is usual that you tender when you're purchasing something, not tender when you're selling it. You try to get the best bargain that you can when you're selling something. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we made $2 million when we sold Channel Lake.

Now the members opposite are complaining that they don't have an opportunity to review the so-called losses on Channel Lake. I would remind the members opposite that this government, through the Crown Corporations Committee, has implemented a practice that is unique in all of Canada. We do have a procedure for reviewing significant transactions.

We have a procedure in place, despite the fact that when I reviewed both with major accounting firms in Saskatchewan and all across Canada, and when I did a search on the Internet, I could find no accounting body that had the temerity to define significant transaction. Our committee, the Crown Corporations Committee, did go ahead and develop a definition. Said definition talks about the acquisition or the divestment of assets greater than 1 per cent of a corporation's assets or, if transactions are considered to be significant — in other words if they're sensitive — that they would be reviewed by the Crown Corporations Committee.

Now the members opposite can call me at any point, ask me to meet with them here in the legislature or outside the legislature and indicate that they feel that an investment or a divesture is significant. If they want a meeting, I'm prepared to call a Crown Corporations meeting tomorrow morning 7 o'clock, 7:30, 8 o'clock, 8:30, just name the time — we'll have a meeting on this matter. We have nothing to hide with respect to the Channel Lake transaction.

Now the members opposite perhaps have forgotten, as when they were shuffling around and changing chairs this past fall, that they did want to expand the definition of significant transactions. So I asked the officials at CIC to contact them and to determine what more they wanted in terms of the definition of significant transactions. The office of the Saskatchewan Party was phoned at least three times and the answer that we got all the time was they were in too much disarray to deal with the matter of significant transactions right now.

Now I find it passingly curious then that they would . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Now the House has been very calm while the mover and the seconder . . . Order. The House has been very calm for the mover and seconder to make their points and I'm sure that they will have more points after the hon. member from Saskatoon Southeast and I would ask them to allow her to make her point.

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm sorry if the fact that the Saskatchewan Party was in disarray this fall has caused some members in this House to have some concern. But in fact if they want to review the definition of significant transactions, just ask me to call a meeting of the Crown Corporations Committee. We'll do that, we'll discuss it; we can review all the documentation on Channel Lake. Our government is committed to being open, transparent, and accountable. We are also committed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to maintaining either the lowest, or as close to the lowest as possible, utility rates in all of Canada.

Just going to read into the record, so that the members can have their memory refreshed, a few facts about the utility rates. We have the lowest gas and automobile insurance rates in Canada. We are amongst the lowest for telephone and power. Our Crowns have managed to keep the rates down while paying down debt, expanding and improving their services, and providing a return on investment to the people of Saskatchewan.

Not too bad for a social democratic government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Auto insurance rates have not increased since

1993, and now we're balancing them out so that people . . . the vehicles that cost more to repair will see some increases — there is no doubt — but premiums for other vehicles will fall.

SaskTel has not had a local phone rate increase in more than four years. You don't mention when we lower the long-distance rates. How come you don't come into this House and complain with decreases? You didn't come here and you didn't complain when SaskEnergy decreased their rate as a result of the cost of their product. But you are complaining now that they have to increase their rates because of a cost from their suppliers.

Now our 45-day utility rate review process is not perfect; we've admitted that. But we do find that it is the least costly, and an approach that can involve all the people of Saskatchewan is not an expensive, highly litigious PURC (Public Utilities Review Commission). And it saves the people of Saskatchewan money.

The last time this province had a PURC, it cost $3.2 million just in the last year alone to have a PURC. We're continuing to review the 45-day review process. It's not perfect, but it does give the public access. And it allows people an opportunity to challenge the rate increases or decreases and also to learn more about them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the motion is a fairly lengthy one. There are six parts to it as I read it, and I could probably go on for 60 minutes debating each one of the parts of the motion, but in the spirit of cooperation and to give the members opposite some time to paint a picture that is inaccurate and incomplete, I will take my seat. But I would urge all members in this House to defeat the motion.

And I would also request, once again, if members from the Saskatchewan Party or the Liberal Party wish to have a Crown Corporations Committee meeting, simply let me know and I will arrange one in the next day or so, so that you can come to the committee and we can discuss and debate these issues. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I really am excited about getting into this discussion about the Crowns, especially SGI. But before I do that, I would just like to mention to the hon. member across that there are people that are little miffed when the chicken places, joints . . . I'm sure that there's a lot more . . .

An Hon. Member: — I apologize.

Ms. Draude: — Okay. Apology accepted, I'm sure.

Within the area of SGI, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the area of SGI, mismanagement and political interference and misguided policies have added up to higher rates and poorer service to the Saskatchewan public in the last few years. The very fact that SGI has an accumulated deficit in its rate stabilization fund of $112.6 million speaks for itself.

The fact is even more galling when seen in the context of the sometimes desperate measures that the government has taken to correct it, just a little over two years ago when government introduced the no-fault insurance, it was over the objections of both the opposition and the public at large. No-fault was touted at the time as being the saviour for the financial mess at SGI.

In its own advertising proclaiming the benefits of the plan, SGI declared in big, bold letters that no-fault, and I quote: "will prevent the need for rate increases." It said that in the *Leader-Post* on April 26, 1994.

The minister at that time stated in numerous letters to the editor, quote:

> It's safe to say that the people of Saskatchewan do not want to pay an additional $100 for their car insurance. The personal injury protection plan will do that.

He said that in the Kindersley *Clarion* on May 18, 1994.

Yet in spite of the enormous effort and expense that this government undertook to sell Saskatchewan people on no-fault, it is clear that it has failed miserably. And what has been the cost of that failure? Victims like Bonnie Juneau complain of an underfunded rehabilitation system that treats patients in a cookie-cutter fashion.

Families like the Markwarts that have their lives disrupted. SGI has put them through torturous rehabilitation rather than trying to compensate them adequately. Victims like Sharon Diedrichs from Carlyle have found themselves on the short end of the convoluted logic of no-fault. Ms. Diedrichs was just starting her own business, but she ended up not being able to sue or seek compensation for the business losses that she had incurred.

The Crown has even spent money on spies to pry into the private lives of victims, and yet another desperate attempt to make this flawed system justify itself.

There have been lobby groups established, protests staged, demands for the review of the system from the Law Society of Saskatchewan, and they've even put forward suggestions that would improve the situation. But no one is listening.

The precedents for the no-fault that the government has used to point to have been crumbling. The system has been overturned in British Columbia and is under review in other places. And it's in a number of places in the States and it's also been overturned.

But our government, that loves to trumpet the supposed value of the Crown corporations to the public, totally ignores the suffering it has caused, and refuses to review the system. And now they want more.

Just last year they were proud to boast of no-fault's supposed success when SGI Auto Fund posted a modest $3.5 million profit. But now the financial mess at SGI has once again worsened. They refuse to admit that this system that was brought in over the loud protest of the public was flawed from the very beginning.

(1615)

This isn't the only area where both the corporation and the

government have hidden their heads in the sand. Last year the Justice minister sat on his hands while auto thefts spiralled out of control. The SGI minister at that time denied that the car thefts and vandalism had an impact on claims. Yet the corporation's own figures now show a nearly 30 per cent increase in this type of claim between 1995 and 1996, and a 57 per cent increase in Regina alone.

Likewise, wildlife damage increased but the NDP have refused to acknowledge the failure in their wildlife management policies.

Over and over again the NDP and SGI have made every effort to avoid embarrassment, and to avoid admitting mistakes as they try to point the finger of blame at everyone but themselves. And now they've come back to the SGI policyholders and asked them to pick up the tab for their mistakes.

Two years ago the minister of SGI said that a premium increase of $100 would be unacceptable. Well today the owners of new vehicles, vans, and sports utility vehicles will see their premiums increase by $143. Overall, in spite of their promises, Saskatchewan drivers will see their rates climb and their coverage decline at the same time. And still the government throws up its hands and says, whoops, I'm sorry, it's not my fault. I guess maybe that's what you mean by no-fault.

At the same time, that's what the NDP are continuing to inflict, this no-fault, on our province and they are ignoring reforms that have been successfully worked out in other provinces. In British Columbia the government's NDP cousins there have rejected no-fault and instead instituted a plan that includes, first of all, a lifetime ban for third-time drunk drivers. They've also sharply raised rates for repeated offending bad drivers. They have probationary licences for new drivers. They've increased surveillance technology for speeding and for red-light-running offences.

In Ontario, it's no-fault system gave greater rights to sue for victims who have suffered significant economic losses, and provides legislative benefits to victims instead of leaving such considerations up to an insurance provider. These and other proposed reforms have been ignored by this government, whose first, last, and only response to any problem is to squeeze yet more money out of the taxpayers.

All of the points very clearly point to the need for the kinds of reforms to Crown management that my colleagues have just spoken about. In spite of the statements of the Crown corporation ministers, past and present, the 45-day review period has not worked. Clearly, with regard to SGI, the government was not prepared to consider alternatives to rate hikes at public meetings. All they were prepared to discuss was their own strictly prepared agenda for a rate increase.

Going back further, the consultation process that surrounded the introduction to no-fault was like wash, just a wash. The government heard many concerns and many proposed changes to no-fault from the legal and medical professionals and from consumers themselves. And again none of these proposals saw the light of day. The government did only what they had decided to do in the very beginning.

The Saskatchewan Party's reforms to Crown management would fix these and many other problems in the Crowns. The appointment of Crown officials would be regularly reviewed to give the public a fair assessment of how well or how poorly these public servants are doing in their job. A legislative review commission would give all parties and all members of the public access to the financial history of the publicly owned ventures.

This is a simple business principle. Shareholders deserve to know what's going on. Shareholders want to know how their money is being spent beforehand, not after. Our proposals would give the public regular and timely reporting of profits or losses by the Crowns, so the kind of management that we see at SGI does not come to the light of day only when officials have to have another rate increase.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, this legislature needs to return its focus on what the Crowns are actually there for, why they were originally put forward in this province, and why people believe they're supposed to be there today. What they want is a service.

We can no longer afford to say that this is . . . that this sector, which accounts for as much as 40 per cent of all public expenditure, belongs in the realms of some private boys club. If Crowns are maintained to provide public service then they must, like any other aspect of government, be held to the light of public scrutiny.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure to enter this debate this afternoon and to add a few more points to some that my colleagues have already raised in regards to the motion before us, and the importance that Saskatchewan taxpayers recognize that indeed the Crown corporations that they are actually shareholders of, are indeed held accountable and are accountable to each and every one of them.

Mr. Speaker, as I've been listening to the debate . . . and I found it interesting that every time the government members need to be lifted up a little bit or get a pat on the back, they always seem to turn to the member from Saskatoon Southeast to give them that little lift. And while we certainly acknowledge the contribution that the member has brought to this Assembly this afternoon, I'd also like to suggest that while the member as Chair of the Crown Corporations Committee is all of a sudden more than obliging in asking all members to meet for Crown Corporations, she's basically had all fall to do that.

And talking with my colleagues who have been waiting for the phone to ring inviting them to a Crown Corporations Committee meeting, my colleagues have indicated that they were just given notice for a short meeting about a week ago, when they were waiting all fall and would have been more than willing, especially, Mr. Speaker, when news about rate increases started to filtrate through the system and taxpayers began to understand that, whoa, it's Christmas time and here we go again. It's normal for the government, or this government anyway, at a time of giving, rather than giving they like to take, and make these announcements about all these rate increases that are going to take place shortly after. And rather than being the Santa Claus they become the Scrooge of Christmas.

So I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, that we do have an opportunity to debate these issues and indeed call for a real review process in the province of Saskatchewan. And why do we do that, Mr. Speaker? We do it because while the minister and the members and all the government colleagues would like to argue that they have the best review mechanism in place or that we have a sound Crown corporations system and committee working in this province, we find that the taxpayers don't believe it, and we also find, Mr. Speaker, that the chief person who is responsible to keep track of government expenditures, the auditor in this province, has a number of concerns in regards to how the Crown utilities operate, and the fact of how they report their budgets.

And just for example, I want to bring forward an issue that the auditor brought to our attention again this year. The fact that in 1996, remember the extra little part on your Power Corporation bill, that expenditure for reconstruction charge. And the auditor's pointed out the fact that the corporation has failed to point out that they raised $14 million in 1996 as a result of this construction charge . . . reconstruction charge. The auditor is saying that if you're raising revenue — which this is, it's a revenue generator — if you're raising that money it should show up in your accounts as an income, as a revenue generator. However SaskPower chose not to bring that forward, not to reveal that that was another piece of revenue that they have generated.

And I would suggest to you that the taxpayers of this province, when they paid their power bills, whether it's on a monthly or a quarterly basis were paying it, and when they paid that, they felt that that was just another injection of cash into the utility that would be recorded at the end of the day. And the major problem that Saskatchewan taxpayers have, and I think, believe, that the auditor is pointing out, is the fact that if the corporations don't disclose every transaction, the taxpayer says, well you know, I'm making these payments. Why am I making these payments?

Number one, why are Crown corporations divesting . . . or investing outside of the province of Saskatchewan when they have such large . . . or making such good income, net income at the end of the year? I believe in 1996 it was $139 million. People of Saskatchewan look at our Crown corporations as corporations that are here to provide a utility or provide a service at a fair cost, not to gouge the taxpayers of this province.

And I think most taxpayers see Crown corporations and the rate increases as just a means of deriving revenue. And the member's right — it's a means of deriving revenue to run the ongoing operations of government.

However, taxpayers don't see it that way. Taxpayers believe that power and telephone and energy should be providing a reasonable return and a rate based on the fact that it's a public utility available to each and every one of us.

And so, Mr. Speaker, in view of the time we're in, I want to reiterate the fact that it's imperative that this province bring into place a review committee that is totally independent of government, as we have in other jurisdictions. Certainly it was revealed just recently that in many jurisdictions, the CRTC does have an opportunity . . . and have some guidelines in regards to how utilities pass on the cost to the customer.

And if you will, Mr. Speaker, in this province with the public utilities we have, with SaskPower, SaskTel, SaskEnergy and so on, SGI, the public really doesn't have an opportunity to have a say. The government argues that we've got a 45-day review period. But once the decision is already made what's the point of a 45-day review period? It seems to me that the cart's before the horse. The government should be out consulting with the public beforehand.

If a corporation has made millions of dollars, I don't think they should be suggesting a rate increase is appropriate when they already are showing a net benefit to the public. They should maybe be asking the public beforehand. However, what are you going to get if you ask beforehand? You're probably going to get the public saying, I don't think so.

And that's why I think it's imperative that we do have an independent body to review this process; that there is a body in place that the public can go to and feel that they have some confidence in relaying their concerns; that these concerns will indeed be raised, as the auditor raises them on an annual basis, semi-annually and annually, with each and every one of us.

Another one of the concerns we have with the Crowns is the fact that while the government would argue that — and the minister, as we've seen over the last couple of days, would argue — that the appropriate place to deal with some of these issues is in Crown Corporations Committee, I would suggest to you the public in general feel that the Legislative Assembly is a body that is more open to the public, more accessible, and actually gives a greater voice to concerns that are raised, and this is the more of the appropriate place that the government or the minister should not be deflecting questions to a Crown — a committee that meets maybe once or twice a year or a few moments, or even in some cases, is limited in the amount of debate it can enter into.

And in many cases, the biggest problem with the Crown Corporations Committee is that you're dealing with questions that probably took place two or three years ago. And that's one of the big problems we have when we deal with questions outside of this Legislative Assembly, whereas, as members, we can deal with them today. And I believe that's what the Saskatchewan public are looking for.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think this motion that we have before us is certainly an appropriate motion. I certainly commend the member from Melfort for bringing it forward and I will . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Pursuant to the special order carried in this House on Monday, the time for debate on this motion has now expired and the Chair is required to put the question.

The division bells rang from 4:29 p.m. until 4:32 p.m.

Motion negatived on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 14

Bjornerud	Toth	D'Autremont
Boyd	Draude	Gantefoer

Heppner	Osika	Hillson
McPherson	Aldridge	Haverstock
Julé	Goohsen	

Nays — 22

Flavel	Atkinson	Johnson
Goulet	Lautermilch	Kowalsky
Calvert	Teichrob	Pringle
Trew	Lorje	Scott
Nilson	Serby	Hamilton
Stanger	Wall	Kasperski
Ward	Jess	Langford
Murrell		

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the Assembly that the answer I tabled in the Assembly yesterday in response to written question 95 contains some incorrect information. I would ask leave of the Assembly to provide a moment right now for me to be able to submit a corrected answer to question 95.

The Speaker: — Order. The Government Whip has requested leave of the Assembly to provide a correction to the answer provided to the House yesterday. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure at this time to provide the corrected answer to question 95. Thank you.

SPECIAL ORDER

MOTION — INDEPENDENT MEMBER

Research Financing

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Before recognizing the hon. member for Saskatoon Greystone, the Chair must bring comment in ruling regarding the motion that is on the order papers. The motion is not in order, as currently drafted.

Again, as all hon. members will know and understand, the House received a ruling from the Chair on Monday related to preambles of motions. And I find this motion out of order on the same grounds, in that it contains a preamble which is not appropriate under normal circumstances for motions of the House. And I'll provide the hon. member the opportunity to indicate whether she would provide the motion to the House in proper form.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do ask for leave at this time, and the indulgence of members of the Assembly, to replace the motion before them with a motion that keeps the intent but without the preamble. I have given this to all of the House leaders and I will send one to the Table.

The Speaker: — The hon. member for Saskatoon Greystone has requested leave to introduce the motion, without preamble, maintaining the same intent. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very appreciative that people have granted me leave and afforded me the opportunity to raise this very important issue this afternoon. I've already met with the Minister of Health, the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Economic Development about the critical significance of lack of funding for biomedical, clinical, and health research funding to Saskatchewan.

And I know that every member will be equally concerned once the facts that were given to the ministers are placed before them. And I'm very pleased that I've had a chance to do so today.

And now let me dispense with the federal government's responsibility first. Canada has fallen behind the G-7 counterparts in the funding of medical research at an alarming rate.

There are several likely disturbing outcomes of falling behind other countries and other provinces that are, in effect, our competitors. Perhaps the most serious is that our most talented and dedicated researchers are leaving for places that have demonstrated a strong commitment to health research and related development. As a result, not only do we lose their skills and potential contributions, but these same people become our competitors.

Failure of our country to compete will lead to an inescapable conclusion. We will in future be buying all of our processes, our treatments, drugs, and other medical products from others. And no one disputes the fact that it costs money to conduct research, but it will pale in comparison to the costs of buying retail these goods and services from other countries where they have been researched, developed, and commercialized.

Now I am pleased to report cautious optimism on the federal front. After much work on the part of the scientific community, it appears that their concerns are being given priority consideration. And I am really thinking that there will be some changes in the new year from the federal government and its funding as far as health research is concerned.

I most certainly hope that that support from all parts of my motion today will serve to reinforce the efforts of those who have lobbied the federal government to improve what is within their mandate and will also serve to demonstrate the commitment of the Government of Saskatchewan to carrying out what is a provincial responsibility in health research.

If one is to look at medical research in Saskatchewan today, it is really quite of a concern to us. If we're looking at the medical research situation in Canada as a whole, it's considered serious. If we look at what's been happening in our province, it's particularly acute.

The infrastructure needed to effectively carry on research is disappearing. And by way of example, the College of Medicine alone reports that it has lost 6 per cent of its researchers and 25 per cent of its support staff in just the last six years. We, as a province, are loosing our ability to compete for nationally

funded research projects and the net effect of loosing our ability to compete undermines the quality of research that can be undertaken within our own provincial borders.

It makes us in a position of making it very difficult for us to attract and retain the best researchers. And this erodes our ability to maintain first rate health care delivery because good clinical care is based on education and research.

And if I may refer people to a recent article in the Journal of the American Medical Association, which confirms precisely what I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker. It is of great concern to me that, if in fact we remove a research component from a teaching hospital, it becomes nothing more than a gigantic family practice. And the direct relationship between research funding and an education-based hospital and direct health care services has been proven unequivocally in research.

Now it is very tempting to point fingers and I think that we experience that very often here. That rather than addressing the responsibilities that lie at a provincial level, we point fingers elsewhere. And I know that in this case, that it is very, very attractive to point fingers at senior government.

And there may be reasonable justification in one aspect of that, but it remains important to decide whether the province should identify medical research as an important initiative. It is important to analyse the benefits that would accrue from targeting adequate funds to put us back in the game, so to speak, in a competitive way. It is critical to make a deliberate rational decision on one issue. Do we care about medical research in this province? That's the question. Do we care about medical research in the province of Saskatchewan?

If we take no, action the result is clear. There will be no serious medical research done in Saskatchewan, the home of medicare. Based on the trend lines in the previous statistical information that was available, and I made available to the Minister of Health, taking no action does not paint a very rosy picture for our future.

If the provincial government were to take action, what would be the likely potential benefits? Well if the provincial government were to commit to an increased percentage of the health care budget being directed to medical research, then we have to ask what would be the likely outcomes.

I believe that there are three primary areas of positive outcome. The first are the potential improvements to our provincial health care system over all. Secondly, the impact of direct jobs to our provincial economy — and I'm going to describe what kind of jobs those are, Deputy Speaker. And thirdly, the impact of new investment and business activity in our provincial economy. That is the reason why, when I took three scientists with me, I asked specifically to see the Minister of Health and the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and the Minister of Economic Development.

(1645)

It is very possible when we deal with the first positive outcome to envisage several examples of how research has had an impact on our health systems in the past and how we could actually anticipate how this could happen in future scenarios. For example, the average length of stay in hospital for many, many types of treatment is vastly reduced from what it was even five to ten years ago. Undoubtedly this has a cost saving to our health care system and these savings have resulted in part, in a substantial part, from previous investments in health research.

For example we know that improved antibiotics have assisted in this — the discovery of insulin, polio vaccine and so forth. I mean, what would be the toll on our provincial health care budgets if we were having to treat these kinds of diseases today in the way we have in the past?

Secondly, if the proposal to increase the health research budget — that I'm hoping will happen — to conduct research into the elimination of tuberculosis were approved and was successful, can you even imagine the benefits to Saskatchewan people and to the province's health care system?

Now I do hope that I can for one brief moment get the members' opposite attention, because given that Saskatchewan has the highest proportion of aboriginal persons of any province in Canada and given that aboriginals have a rate of contracting tuberculosis which is 150 times greater than the rest of the population, imagine what the savings would be in human suffering, in terms of the cost of this province's health care delivery system, and in terms of saving costs for opportunities lost.

Another element would be in hereditary cancer screening programs that are being proposed in the province by the research community. And if it were adequately funded, what would be the cost savings here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which would accrue to the provincial health care system if this type of early diagnostic procedure were able to take place?

These are but a few examples. And if I may digress for just a moment, there's an area of course I feel particularly passionately about, and we're very blessed in Saskatchewan to have the MS (multiple sclerosis) neuroscience centre, which is probably one of the strongest infrastructures we have in this province. It's not in a decaying position like so many others. Why we don't utilize this to its maximum degree, I do not know. But one of the proposals that I put before the Minister of Health is this — and I say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to anyone listening today and to all the members of this House, that if this does not speak to the heart of an issue and proclaim what common sense is, then nothing does — for $1.2 million over four years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there could be hundreds of people in this province with all forms of multiple sclerosis treated. How?

Well at present we've been hearing a great deal about relapsing remitting multiple sclerosis, but there are throngs of many with another form of multiple sclerosis which is devastating, and that is chronic progressive MS.

There are very few treatments being put in place for this kind of MS. And one of the opportunities that we would have by simply spending $1.2 million over four years is to hire a clinical researcher, an added clinical researcher in this province. At this stage, we have one and that individual is working all the time. In 18 months he will retire and there will be no clinical

researcher to oversee different forms of research for MS in this province. And that is almost unbelievable, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Do you know that at this time, at this day, that there is an interferon which is an oral interferon. Betaseron is of the interferon family. There is an oral interferon — not an injection, oral — that for one one-thousandth of the dosage that these people who were just newly told that they could have Betaseron, one one-thousandth of that injection, they could take it orally. The receptors for being able to receive that interferon are in people's mouths with MS, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That means that it could be taken in immediately. It would cost less because it's one one-thousandth of a dosage. It could be used for a longer period of time, and, they believe, with virtually no side-effects.

Why wouldn't we do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And the reason why it is not happening, is because we do not have common sense ruling health care decisions in this province. It is not happening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we do not have the way in which . . . we need some vision for where we're going to go in this province in health research and health services for our people.

We have an abundance of people with multiple sclerosis. We have double the number of anywhere else in Canada. And at this time, if you speak to anyone who deals in this particular field, they say, let's not go forward and have double blind studies. Why would we have randomized, double blind studies when we have the people here and we have drug companies right now that would provide all of these state-of-the-art drugs for nothing, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

They would cost nothing. Not like $21,000 a year for Betaseron, but they would supply it right now if this research could be done to make comparisons, have people who have chronic progressive MS, relapsing remitting MS, people on Betaseron, people who could be on these new drugs and look across the board and decide what is truly helping these people in their quality of life, and end costs to taxpayers of this province. To me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is nothing but common sense, and I am still wondering why this issue has not been addressed when I raised it weeks ago with not just the Minister of Health but with the Minister of Finance as well.

If I may, there is a second positive outcome that could come from increased funding to health care, health research in the province. And I want to speak to that. Because the goal of every single government today is to provide an environment which is conducive to job creation. It has become perhaps the single most important criterion by which government policy is judged. While the biomedical, the clinical, and health research industry has much to offer in the way of job creation, it is imperative to understand the types of jobs which are created.

The jobs created by the health services sector tend to be high-value jobs, long-term positions. These positions attract persons who command relatively high salaries and therefore they pay a high proportionate share of the income tax and they also become established in a community. It's fascinating indeed to see what happens when people are excited at the prospect of being able to do the research in their field of expertise. If we get the best, they attract more money. And they not only attract more money, they attract more qualified people, which in turn attracts more money.

We need to target areas in this province in which we can be best. We've not done this in health research. We've not done it in the biomedical field, and we should be doing it in the biomedical field.

And I will contend at the end that just in the same way that we've been the best at ag-biotechnology, we should become a centre of excellence in particular areas of biomedical research, where we'll continue to attract people, serve our people, and build an economy in this province.

These kinds of positions create astonishing opportunities for our children. Not the kind that come from having part-time jobs or temporary jobs or the subject-to-layoff kinds of jobs or call centres or anything else.

It's not to say that people who work in these kinds of jobs don't make a contribution. But to create the kinds of opportunities for our children to stay in this province after they have graduated high school and university, to draw people here to stay in our universities and be trained in biochemistry, to be trained in different fields that they can actually apply here at home, is going to be so important if we're going to have a future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are not going to create a future out of wheat, out of rocks, and out of trees. If we want a real economy of the future, we had better get with it. And we aren't with it. And there is no plan to get with it. And I'm suggesting that this is an opportunity for people to finally get with it in this province by looking at targeting our tax dollars, our health care budget, a small proportion of our health care budget, like 1 per cent of our health care budget, on biomedical research.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — It is nothing short of an abomination, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we spend .27 cents of our health care dollar . . . of our health care . . . of $100 — every $100 spent in health care — on health research.

If this government chose to double that amount, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we would still be the lowest in Canada — the lowest of any province. And I am saying that's not good enough for the people of this province. And I believe, I honestly believe, that if these government members know these facts, it isn't good enough for them either. I believe that.

Not only do the kinds of positions that could provide quality employment opportunities come from increased funding in health research, they are going to illustrate — this will illustrate — that this province can offer the same kinds of relative opportunities that other provinces do.

Within the health care system, the attraction and retention of qualified personnel is very crucial. People who work within these disciplines are attracted to employment situations where they're likely to work with all sorts of other people who consider themselves among the brightest and best, and the converse is also true.

Now I'm running out of time, and what I'd like to do is talk about the third positive potential outcome if in fact there's increased health research funding in this province, and that's the impact on new investment and business activity in our provincial economy.

In the past, basic research was not perceived as the engine of business activity. That thought process has been transformed. And it's been transformed by the emergence of knowledge-based economies. To the people of Saskatchewan, I go back to ag-biotechnology as the best example of the effects of research on business creation and investment. And our Minister of Agriculture most certainly would know about this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the work that's being done at Innovation Place, which has really contributed an enormous amount — not just to the city of Saskatoon and the province of Saskatchewan, not just to the nation of Canada — but to the world. It makes a major contribution in the quality of life because of the work that they do.

While the success of that park is a relatively recent phenomenon, there is little doubt that people understand the linkage now between research, new businesses, and job creation far, far better than they have previously.

If I may, in the news recently, I think a lot of people have heard of Biochem Pharma and what happened in Montreal. And I too was as astonished as everyone else with the bomb that went off there and no one could comprehend why. But Biochem Pharma has done an amazing job.

If this government were to look at what the Government of Quebec has done in this field, where they sat down and said this is exactly what we're going to contribute to health research funding, and we're going to become the best at the following things, they did so knowing that there wouldn't be any return in the short term but that there would be amazing return in the long term. And it's happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's happened, with 1,000 jobs at Biochem Pharma, 1,000 of top-quality, long-term, sustainable jobs where they have an amazing kind of reputation throughout the world for the work that they're now doing.

Similarly in Hamilton with Vasoflux. And that just started from a basic research medical program — just a straight MRC (Medical Research Council) funded program. And it's now the most growing employment force in that city.

The key to all this business activity of course, is the funding necessary for expansion, for marketing, and commercialization. And I most certainly hope that the opportunities to lever basic medical research into strong, viable business activity is perceived and understood by this government. Because it's something that the people of this province could benefit from, not just in terms of their own health, not just in terms of their own employment opportunities, but also for all other taxpayers and the contributions that can be made at the economic level by having the commercialization, of the manufacturing, and so forth, of all of these things.

In conclusion, the key issue is this: will the Government of Saskatchewan take advantage of the tremendous opportunities in the area of basic medical research or not? If it does so, the government will be responsible for the industry's enhanced ability to attract and retain first-rate clinical researchers and basic scientists. And by doing so, the government will be responsible for creating the environment that puts our province on the map in medical research.

The result for our province will be that our children will have access to top-rate education at both undergraduate and graduate levels; that high-value jobs will be added to our provincial economy; that the province will enjoy an economic return from the new research development and commercialization opportunities which emerge.

The fact that .27 per cent of the provincial health care budget is directed to research is not acceptable. And this translates into an investment in research that is far, far less than most other provinces.

We want, I believe, to encourage people to come here. We don't want Briana Biotech taking their money to Edmonton because they say the tax credit system isn't good enough in this province to come here.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. It now being the normal time of adjournment, I would ask the member to move her motion now please.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move that:

> The Government of Saskatchewan urge the federal Minister of Health and the federal Minister of Science and Technology to increase the budget for all three granting councils without further delay, and certainly as part of the February 1998 federal budget, because Canada has fallen behind its G-7 competitors in the funding of medical research at an alarming rate;
>
> And further, that the Government of Saskatchewan commit itself immediately to the establishment of a meaningful target of the provincial health care budget directed to health research in order to address serious health care issues, some of which are unique to Saskatchewan, like tuberculosis, through discovery, development, and commercialization;
>
> And further, that the Government of Saskatchewan establish a tax credit system for investment in health care so that residents of Saskatchewan can participate in the Canadian medical discovery fund and take steps immediately to participate in the federal cost-sharing initiatives with respect to health research, namely the Canadian foundation for innovation program, the Canadian health services research foundation program, and the Medical Research Council regional partnership program in order to improve the quality of our health care system through the attraction and retention of the best and brightest in medical research and create new economic activity through high-quality, long-term jobs by levering basic research into commercial activity.

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, with leave to introduce an amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: — We are past time of adjournment and the question on the motion will be called.

The division bells rang from 5:03 p.m. until 5:06 p.m.

Motion negatived on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 13

Toth	D'Autremont	Boyd
Gantefoer	Heppner	Osika
Hillson	McPherson	Aldridge
Belanger	Haverstock	Julé
Goohsen		

Nays — 21

Atkinson	Johnson	Goulet
Lautermilch	Upshall	Kowalsky
Calvert	Pringle	Trew
Lorje	Scott	Nilson
Serby	Hamilton	Stanger
Wall	Kasperski	Ward
Jess	Murrell	Thomson

The Assembly adjourned at 5:07 p.m.

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