

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to present a petition on behalf of constituents of the Cypress Hills area in connection with the prospect of forced amalgamation of municipalities, and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call upon the government to reject proposals of any forced amalgamation of municipalities.

And it's signed by individuals from Gull Lake, Tompkins and Hazlet, Saskatchewan.

I do so present.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition representing the attitude of people across Saskatchewan concerned about government confiscating reserve accounts, and I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

I so present.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are opposed to forced amalgamation of municipalities, and the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to urge the Government of Saskatchewan to reject proposals of any forced amalgamation of municipalities.

And the signatures on these petitions today, Mr. Speaker, are from Humboldt, from Muenster, from Bruno, Guernsey, and Lanigan, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased, on behalf of the good folks of Weyburn and district, to present a petition on their behalf with respect to their court house, and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to continue the Court of Queen's Bench services in the community of Weyburn.

I'm pleased to present this petition from the residents of Weyburn and Midale.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present a petition in regards to the court house in Weyburn and I'm reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to continue Court of Queen's Bench services in the community of Weyburn.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the community of Weyburn itself.

Mr. Peters: — I rise to bring a petition in regards to the proposed or suggested confiscation of municipal reserves and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

And they're from Watrous and Drake.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of the citizens of Weyburn concerned about their court house closure and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to continue Court of Queen's Bench services in the community of Weyburn.

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

And it is signed by some citizens from Weyburn.

I so present or give.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I rise again on behalf of people in Swift Current and area concerned about the Swift Current hospital. And they've signed a petition. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to assist in the regeneration plan for the Swift Current Regional Hospital by providing approximately \$7.54 million and thereby allowing the Swift Current District Health Board the opportunity to provide improved health care services.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from Swift Current, Waldeck, and Webb.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition

on behalf of the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency who are concerned with keeping the court house in Weyburn open, and I read:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to continue Court of Queen's Bench services in the community of Weyburn.

And this is signed by residents of the city of Weyburn.

I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present to stop municipal reserve account confiscation. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from Guernsey, Drake, Watrous, Yellow Grass, and Maple Creek.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present on behalf of people of the province dealing with the confiscation of municipal assets. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the citizens of Lanigan and Guernsey area.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too present petitions on behalf of people . . . citizens in Saskatchewan regarding the Weyburn court house, keeping the court house open. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to continue Court of Queen's Bench services in the community of Weyburn.

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

Signatures are from the Yellow Grass, Weyburn, Fillmore, Milestone area.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, I also like to present a petition concerning keeping the Weyburn court house open:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to continue Court of Queen's Bench services in the community of Weyburn.

Signed by the citizens of Weyburn. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition to reduce fuel tax:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the federal and provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel taxes by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Petitioners are from Davidson, Girvin, Unity, Saskatoon.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with concerned citizens in municipalities about their assets. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

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

The signatures are from the RM (rural municipality) of Osler.

I so present.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from people concerned with the high cost of fuel. Petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the federal and the provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel taxes by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

Signatures, Mr. Speaker, from Southey and Strasbourg.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to present a petition on behalf of concerned citizens concerned with enforced municipal amalgamation. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

And the signatures to this petition come from the communities of Southey, Markinch, and Cupar.

I do so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition signed by citizens concerned about enforced municipal amalgamation, and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

And this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Avonlea and Rouleau.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly on the following matters:

To cause the government to continue Court of Queen's Bench services in Weyburn;

To halt any plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

To ensure reliable cellular service to Watson and area;

To provide funding for the Swift Current Regional Hospital; and

To cause the federal and provincial governments to reduce fuel taxes.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, members of the House, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce a very special visitor to our province who is seated, Mr. Speaker, in your gallery today. And I hope I have your permission and the permission of the House for a somewhat lengthier introduction than is our tradition.

Seated in your gallery with Herr Dr. Guenter Kocks, the honorary German consul to Saskatchewan is our special guest, His Excellency Dr. Juergen Poehlmann, who is making his first official visit to our province in his capacity as the German Ambassador to Canada. I'll ask him to rise at the end of my remarks in just a few short moments.

He's already up. All right. Well, how about a big hand to all of them now. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Please be seated because this may be a little bit longer, Your Excellency, than you would want or anybody else would want.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Poehlmann is a career diplomat and — don't

hold this against him — but he's a lawyer by way of official professional background and training. And he has been posted in the past to represent the German people in Brazil with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), and especially dealing with the vitally important issue of disarmament and arms control. He was appointed ambassador to Canada last year and, as I said, he's now making his first visit in that capacity to our province of Saskatchewan.

Yesterday he met with the Minister of Economic and Co-operative Development and the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training. Today, in addition of his tour of the Legislative Building, His Excellency is meeting with the Lieutenant Governor, the Deputy Premier, the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, the mayor of Regina, representatives of the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, and, as well, other members of the Legislative Assembly.

I'm going to have a private meeting with His Excellency later this afternoon. And I know, Mr. Speaker, that you entertained His Excellency at the honoured guests' luncheon where the members of this House attended.

Mr. Speaker, many families in Saskatchewan, including members on both sides of this House, are proud of their German heritage. Indeed, German pioneers and their descendants have made many important contributions to our province and our communities.

Our trading relationship with Germany continues to benefit all the people of Canada and the people of Germany. Germany is our fifth largest export marketer and our sixth largest import supplier. Saskatchewan trade with Germany involves about \$90 million per year of imports and exports.

German investors have significant interests in this province particularly, as an example, Thyssen Mining Construction of Canada and AgrEvo. And we'll look forward to developing and expanding our trading relationships with the German people in the years to come to our mutual benefit.

We already have a sound foundation upon which we continue to build. Since 1971 we've been involved in exchange programs, we have visitors at the University of Saskatchewan from Germany as students, and a parliamentary exchange program. And I could go on.

Let me say this, Mr. Speaker — that in view of the long and very productive and warm partnership the people of Saskatchewan and Canada have enjoyed with the German people, I would like to invite His Excellency the German Ambassador of Canada to once again rise and to once again accept the greetings of all the members of this House.

Thank you very much, sir.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with the Premier on behalf of the official opposition to indeed welcome His Excellency the German Ambassador, Juergen Poehlmann, and the Honorary Consul, Dr. Guenter

Kocks, to our Assembly here this afternoon.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure last summer of attending a Partnership of Parliaments tour to Germany along with a few members from the legislature — the hon. member from Saskatoon Southeast and the hon. member from Regina Albert South, as well as a couple of former members, the member from Weyburn, Judy Bradley, and the member from Lloydminster, Vi Stanger.

And it was an extremely enjoyable program and trip that the German people hosted for us. And we travelled throughout the country of Germany, many stops including Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg, Papenburg, and various other communities and cities in the great country of Germany.

We were certainly extremely impressed with the hospitality and warmth of the German people. Berlin was an extremely exciting city to tour. It is literally under construction with the new capital being . . . with the capital being moved from Bonn back to Berlin. It was extremely rewarding and exciting to see all of the construction that was going on in Berlin, and as well to tour places like Dresden and the reconstruction that is going on there in the former East Germany. So it was a very enjoyable trip.

On behalf of the official opposition, we'd like to join with the Premier in welcoming them to the Assembly this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry that I've provoked such hilarity in the Assembly. But I rise as well to welcome the German ambassador and especially also to welcome the honorary consul for Saskatchewan, Dr. Guenter Kocks. Dr. Kocks and I had a very interesting conversation over lunch about the importance of the Germanic studies program here at the University of Regina.

And as well, Dr. Poehlmann and I had, as well as the member for Kindersley and yourself, Mr. Speaker, we had a very intriguing conversation about the mutual benefits of exchanges that there could be between Saskatchewan and Germany, and about the importance indeed of having the media more involved in understanding the importance of our European ties.

I found that Mr. Poehlmann is an extremely charming, polite, and interesting gentleman to speak with. And I know that he is taking his role as Ambassador to Canada very seriously. And because Germany is a federal state, he is intrigued with the parallels between Ottawa and the provinces, and Berlin and the German provinces.

So I would like to as well welcome you to our fair province. I hope that . . . You are here I know just for a short time and going tomorrow to the wonderful city of Saskatoon. I hope that once you discover how wonderful Saskatchewan people are, that you will come back again and again and again. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a number of students from McLurg School in my

constituency. There's 54 grade 5 students that are here with Carol Grant and Verna Taylor, and I want to welcome them as well; and chaperones Bill Edwards and Lori Proctor.

Mr. Speaker, they'll be touring the legislature. They're a little late getting here today; their bus was a little late. But they'll be having a legislative tour and I'll be meeting with them I think around 2:30 for a question and answer session. Carol Grant's always brought a good class here. I think this is her fifth year in a row. It's a tough group to follow and I might have to call for some help.

But anyway I'd like you to join with me and have everyone welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 25, ask the government the following questions:

To the Minister of Justice: what are the details of all revenues and all transactions and/or services provided for a fee at the Queen's Bench Court in the Humboldt Judicial District in the fiscal year 1998-99; and what was the total revenue generated through these transactions?

And the second question, Mr. Speaker, is:

What was the yearly rental charge to the government for the Queen's Bench Court in Humboldt for the 1998-99 fiscal year; and how was this rental charge determined?

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Housing and Job Growth in Saskatchewan

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to tell of yet another good news story for Saskatchewan. On Friday my colleague the hon. member from Regina South told us more good news about Saskatchewan's economy. For the third month in a row Saskatchewan is leading western Canada in job growth — third month in a row, Mr. Speaker. We're better than British Columbia; better than Manitoba; and yes, Mr. Speaker, better than Alberta.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — As my hon. colleague pointed out last week there are 15,000 more new full-time jobs in Saskatchewan. Today you will be pleased to know that the doom and gloom that the members opposite continue to go on about is again unfounded.

According to the latest statistics from CMHC (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation) Regina has noticed an 87 per cent increase in housing starts in March of this year, a 50 per cent increase for year to date.

The figures also show that housing activity is expected to

continue to grow, a reflection of our improved job growth. All indications are the housing industry is expected to have yet another year — another very good year in Regina. But it doesn't stop there, Mr. Speaker. Forecasts call for an increase in housing starts both rural and urban across the province this year.

So despite the continual doom and gloom scenario the members opposite rave about every day in this House, there's plenty of opportunity and optimism in both urban and rural Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Recognition of Volunteerism in Southeast Saskatchewan

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to bring a bit of recognition to the number of volunteers we have in the province of Saskatchewan. Now this past Sunday afternoon my wife and I had the privilege of joining with the southeast Saskatchewan Association for Culture, Recreation and Sport to recognize the achievements of a number of individuals in our area in regards to their commitment and their volunteerism and the effort in promoting culture, recreation, and sport in the southeastern area of the province.

Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to commend the southeastern volunteer recognition group for their ongoing efforts of maintaining this recognition ceremony despite government cutbacks.

Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that volunteerism works in the province of Saskatchewan. And if it wasn't for the efforts of individuals, Mr. Speaker, we probably wouldn't have the community rinks in our small communities. We probably wouldn't have the museums that speak about our local heritage and talk about the efforts of our pioneers, Mr. Speaker. And we certainly wouldn't have the ongoing efforts of community groups that gather the funds that are needed for many worthwhile activities in our small communities.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think the award ceremony on Sunday was just another effort in pointing out how important it is for us to recognize the volunteerism that we have in this province — that there are many people who do volunteer their time. And I would like to extend congratulations to the many volunteers in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Clifton Associates Awarded International Contract

Ms. Lorje: — Well, here we go again, Mr. Speaker — more good news from the Saskatoon information technology industry. Once again we've scored big time in international trade.

Envista Technologies, a division of Clifton Associates of Saskatoon, has won a \$1.5 million contract from the World Bank to develop an environmental information system for the capital of Colombia — Bogotá.

And by the way, Mr. Speaker, Envista is also doing similar

work for the country of Panama.

Envista's work will help Bogotá's environmental authority process information on air, water, soil, and waste concerns in the Bogotá district.

Officials from Envista and STEP (Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership Inc.) have been working for the past year to win the World Bank project. This is just one more example of Saskatchewan's technological excellence winning markets in developing countries.

I congratulate President Wayne Clifton of Clifton Associates, who went head to head with American and European firms and won. And I know we are all appreciative of the work of the Minister of Economic Development and her department, who first identified this project on a recent trade mission to Washington, DC.

Once more, good news from Saskatoon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Boy to Undergo Heart Surgery in Alberta

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to convey my very best wishes to a young man from my constituency, Cody Phaneuf. Cody is an 11-year-old hockey player from St. Louis. In November 1999 it was discovered that Cody had an irregular heart beat and that surgery would be required to correct the problem.

The surgery is to be done in Edmonton. Cody's parents, Emile and Sylvia Phaneuf will accompany him and stay with him in Edmonton.

Now, Mr. Speaker, travel and accommodation is very expensive and the bill for this must be looked after by the family. The St. Louis Hockey Club are to be commended for undertaking a most caring initiative to help the Phaneuf family.

On April 8, they hosted a benefit dance to raise funds for Cody and his family to help them to defray some of the costs.

Mr. Speaker my thoughts and prayers are with the Phaneuf family during this very difficult time and I wish them all the very best.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Credit Union Expansion

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Credit Union Central Saskatchewan recently announced that 15 Saskatchewan credit unions intend to acquire the business and physical assets of 17 rural Bank of Montreal branches.

The Saskatchewan central chief financial officer stated that credit unions responded positively when approached by the Bank of Montreal for three reasons.

First, it is good business. The growth in business will allow the credit unions to serve their members and their communities more

efficiently.

Second, credit unions are very keen to keep bank customers' business in the local communities.

And third, it offers the opportunity to offer employment to local branch employees.

The credit union system in Saskatchewan has nearly 550,000 members. Its 144 credit unions operate 336 service outlets and employ more than 2,700 people. In approximately 140 rural communities, the credit union is the sole financial institution.

As a member of a credit union, I am particularly proud that credit unions are playing their part in providing service to rural Saskatchewan. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Fire-fighter Protection from Liability Act

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Later today in the Assembly I'll introduce a private members' Bill entitled The Fire-fighter Protection from Liability Act. The Bill is aimed at filling a major gap that exists in current urban and rural legislation . . . municipal legislation in our province. It is not driven by partisan politics in any way, Mr. Speaker, but rather by the need to afford Saskatchewan municipalities protection from legal action when they respond in good faith to a call from a neighbouring jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, in March of 1998 the city of Swift Current fire department responded to a call for help from a neighbouring municipality. They were able to put out the fire, Mr. Speaker, but for various reasons, none the fault of the department personnel, it re-ignited and further damaged the structure. Despite the best efforts of the firefighters and the adherence with proper procedure, the insurer of the property filed a lawsuit against the fire department in the city of Swift Current.

Had the fire occurred within the city boundaries, provincial legislation would have prevented such action. This Bill will simply afford that same protection to municipalities who chose to help their neighbours. It is tragic, but entirely understandable, that in the absence of such protection the city of Swift Current has indicated it can no longer respond to calls for help from neighbours with which it has no mutual agreement.

Mr. Speaker, we can fix this problem right here today in this Assembly. We can set aside partisan politics and help facilitate inter-municipal co-operation. I respectfully ask for the support of all members of this Assembly and of all parties in supporting this legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Qu'Appelle Valley Regional Science Fair

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the member from Regina Wascana Plains and I were happy to attend the first annual Qu'Appelle Valley Regional Science Fair held in Buffalo Plains School Division. The two-day fair featured projects and experiments in six scientific categories at

the junior, intermediate, and senior levels.

Yesterday I said that the future of the government leaders in Saskatchewan seems secure, based on youth parliament debates this past weekend. The same can be said of our future scientists.

In short, Mr. Speaker, we have some very interested, interesting, and capable kids in all areas of endeavour; and we need have no fear that progress will stop with our generation.

An event such as this science fair takes a number of people to make it a success. The Volunteer Week is a good time to congratulate the fair committee chaired by Rhonda Phillips, the many judges, and the several sponsors including SaskEnergy, IPSCO, Saskatchewan Education and the town of Lumsden.

And I particularly want to congratulate these young scientists whose projects took top honours. I don't have all the names, Mr. Speaker, but among the winners were Curtis Koskie, Kirsten MacNaughton, Lisa Bokinac and Derek Heisher. Committed young people like these help me believe our future is in good hands. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Municipal Amalgamation and Municipal Reserves

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Municipal Government. Mr. Minister, last night's meeting of the task force on municipal amalgamation attracted between 700 and 800 people in Yorkton. Unfortunately, you weren't one of those people so we thought it would be helpful if we brief you on what happened.

Mr. Minister, the people of the Yorkton area are pretty much unanimous, just like the people at every other task force meeting. They think your NDP (New Democratic Party) government's plan of forced amalgamation stinks but apparently that doesn't much matter to you or your NDP government.

Mr. Minister, we ask again: will you confirm for us today that the government will not introduce legislation in this session that includes forced municipal amalgamation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First I want to say to the member opposite, I recall that he invited me yesterday to travel to Yorkton with him. My understanding is, is that the member from Kelvington travelled with him and I don't see her in the House today, and that's probably why I didn't go either, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say to the member opposite . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I'll remind hon. members that the presence or absence of members in this House is not allowed, not permitted.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that I understand that in this province — and he should understand as well — that there was a committee that was established in 1998. And the work of that committee was to review with municipalities — urbans and rurals — about what kinds of legislation should be written to empower municipalities to have greater responsibilities, share of revenue sharing, greater opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to deliver services to enhance their economic development. That's what the . . . that's what that committee in 1998 was established to . . . it was put in place.

And nowhere has anybody said that there is going to be amalgamation in this province. Nowhere has this government said it. Now I haven't heard you say it. Nobody has said it, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to have amalgamation on this side of the House. Nobody has said that — except you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) is holding an emergency convention — the first time they've ever done that — to consider what actions they can take to stop your government from forcing amalgamation. But it may be already too late.

Mr. Minister, here's what you said just yesterday to reporters:

By the end of April, I would be bringing (in) a recommendation to cabinet guiding (and I repeat, guiding) the Garcea committee on what kind of legislation needs to be crafted for change.

Is that true, Mr. Minister? Are you planning to ignore Mr. Garcea's committee's public hearings, like the one last night in Yorkton, your constituency, and simply dictate to the task force on municipal amalgamation what the new municipal legislation will look like.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that we have no plan. We have no plan on this side of the House to do any amalgamation of any sort; no plan about amalgamation. Unlike, Mr. Speaker, what their chief of staff and that party talk about in terms of consolidation of municipalities in the province. This is what your plan says over there, Mr. Member.

Your plan says, written by your chief of staff, that what we should do is we should engage in not just a discussion, but we should engage in a call of action is what you people say — a call of action. And you say over there on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, that there is never a perfect time for voluntary consolidation, that you should proceed with consolidation. And that's your plan — not our plan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please.

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

Minister, if you have no commitment to amalgamate municipalities, all you have to do is stand up and tell them. That's what we're asking. That's what they're asking. Make that commitment today and the problem will go away for you and your government.

Mr. Minister, it looks to most people like your government has every intention of bulldozing ahead with forced amalgamation. And just when municipalities thought it couldn't get any worse, they started to hear about plans by the NDP to confiscate municipal reserve funds.

Is that your plan, Mr. Minister? To force amalgamation, then seize bank accounts and assets of municipalities; or seize reserves and then force amalgamation? What will it be?

Will you stand again in the House today and guarantee municipalities the NDP will not freeze their assets and confiscate the reserve funds.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I say to the member opposite that if anybody has a history of knowing to bulldoze around, this member from Saltcoats has a history of bulldozing around. And he goes around the province and calls meetings together, Mr. Speaker, and he makes statements like this, Mr. Speaker, to individual communities where he says that communities in amalgamation would lose all of their staff.

And then he goes on further and said that communities will lose all of their equipment. He goes on to say that all of those communities will lose their road signs and that they would be totally disempowered is what that member says. And that, Mr. Speaker, is about bulldozing communities. That's what's about bulldozing communities.

And I say to the member opposite that there has never been any suggestion on this side of the House or this minister that there would ever be any — any — taking of the reserves. The reserves are taxpayers' money. The reserves are in the municipalities, and those reserves would stay within the municipalities, Mr. Speaker, has been the position that we would take on this side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, the only bulldozing I have in mind is come the next election is I'm going to help bulldoze you out of the Yorkton seat. You will be gone.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, another question for the same minister. Mr. Minister, yesterday you said the assets and bank account . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order. Now just kindly allow the member to ask the question.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, yesterday you said the assets and bank accounts of municipalities were partly the property of your NDP

government. Would you explain to cities, towns, villages, and rural municipalities of Saskatchewan why you believe any part of municipal reserve accounts belong to the NDP government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think the member opposite is splitting hairs in terms of where the money comes from. And I think it's important for the member to understand that any time that a tax . . . the tax levying authority, like a municipality, receives money from the taxpayer and the provincial treasury provides money to the municipality, that pool of money, Mr. Speaker, comes from the treasury and comes from the taxpayer. But it is only one taxpayer's money, and it belongs to the municipality. Once that money is in the account of the municipality, it belongs to the municipality, Mr. Speaker, one taxpayer and it's the municipality's fund.

And I say to the member opposite, you did some bulldozing as a Conservative, you did some bulldozing as a Liberal, and now your bulldozing as a Saskatchewan Party member; that's your history, Mr. Member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, you know and I know that money is local taxpayers' money and that was the message they wanted to send you last night. Stay away from their money.

Mr. Speaker, there are municipalities across Saskatchewan today considering what they can do to protect their bank accounts and their assets. They're trying to protect themselves against a government that seems determined to shut down towns and take away all their savings.

Mr. Minister, will you stand in the House again today and clearly state that your NDP government will not confiscate — I repeat — will not confiscate the assets, reserve funds, and bank accounts of municipalities? Just make that commitment for the people in rural Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I think that part of the member's question clearly demonstrates what he's been saying around the province, where he says and he uses the words, this is about shutting down towns. This is what he says. There is no intent on this side of the House to look at shutting down any towns. This is what the member says.

And then the member goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, that somehow we're going to be capturing the reserves of municipalities and doing something different with them, which is again his words, Mr. Speaker; nobody on this side of the House.

And I say to the member opposite that the revenues or the reserves today that are in municipalities belong to the municipalities. They're the taxpayers. They're the taxpayers' dollars, Mr. Speaker, and I confirm today that those dollars will continue to stay, Mr. Speaker, with the municipalities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was a lot of noise over there and I was listening as carefully as I could and I couldn't hear the Minister of Municipal Affairs declare that he wasn't going to force amalgamation on municipalities. So I'm going to ask my question to the Minister for Education.

Mr. Minister, your government is planning forced municipal amalgamation. The reason that the NDP can bulldoze ahead with their plan for forced amalgamation of municipalities is because you joined the NDP. So let's hear what the Liberal leader and the Liberal members of the NDP government have to say.

Mr. Minister, Mr. Minister, do you and your Liberal colleagues support the Minister of Municipal Affairs in forcing amalgamation on municipalities? Do you agree that municipal reserve funds actually belong to the NDP government? And do you support the NDP plan to force municipal amalgamation from the top down?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, whether or not . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to just repeat one more time, because the same question was asked three times by the member from Saltcoats. And I said to the member from Saltcoats and I repeat to the Leader of the Opposition that the revenues today that are in the reserves of municipalities will remain in the reserves of municipalities, like they did in the past and like they will continue to do.

And I say to you, Mr. Leader of the Opposition, you have a member on staff today who talks about the importance of consolidation and restructuring in this province. You have a chief of staff who says that. And you have people who sit on your side of the House who in fact support that there should be consolidation and restructuring in this province, like the member from Swift Current, Mr. Speaker. And you should have a chat with his mayor and see what he says to him — you should spend some time with him — who believes in restructuring in this province.

You should have a chat, Mr. Speaker, with the member from Rosthern and their community, and find out from them what they believe in restructuring. And your member, your chief of staff talks about it. Why don't you tell the House what you . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're all talking about forced amalgamation. And we're wanting to hear what the Liberal portion of the coalition have to say on the issue. I thought it was a coalition but maybe it's not a coalition. Maybe it's the puppets and the puppet master over there.

Mr. Speaker, the question for the Minister of Education. The government says that he likes the idea of forced amalgamation. He also says municipal bank accounts, reserve funds, and assets belong to the NDP government.

Since your decision to join the NDP is the reason the government can move ahead with this plan of forced amalgamation and confiscation of municipal assets — you're the reason — people have a right to know where you stand. Do the Liberal members of the NDP coalition support forced amalgamation of municipalities? And do the Liberal members of the coalition agree with the government that municipal reserves and bank accounts are the property of the NDP government?

I'd like the Liberal leader to get out of his seat . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I think it's important for us to examine how we got to this place in time, because the members opposite don't seem to have an appreciation of how we got to this period of time.

The member should understand that in 1998, the municipalities, urban and rural, said to the province, what we want to do in this province is to provide . . . have new legislation that would provide us with greater authority and autonomy so that we could become freer as municipalities to provide a broader range of services; and within that encompass changes to legislation, changes to revenue-sharing, changes to the way in which we deliver services, changes to economic development policy in this province.

Municipalities asked that. Municipalities at least talked about getting together. And there's only one group of people in Saskatchewan so far who have been talking about forced amalgamation, and it's right there. You're the people that are talking about forced amalgamation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, parliamentary rules — you got to allow me to properly respond to the answer by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. But I want to tell you, in Yorkton last night there were 800 people there and most of them, most of them were asking what was the Liberals' position on forced amalgamation. Many of them had voted for the Liberals in the past and they felt they had a right to know.

Mr. Minister, my question is simple. Do the Liberal members of the NDP coalition support forced amalgamation of municipalities, and what is the Liberal party position on the Garcea report. Are you stuck to your seat or won't they let you get up and answer the question?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I just want to, I just want to reinforce, Mr. Speaker, one more time that on this side of the House . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order please. Kindly allow the minister to answer the question.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say that on this side of the House we've had for some time, Mr. Speaker, a process in terms of how we consult and how we talk to municipalities across the province, and how we try to provide enriched, enhanced services in Saskatchewan for Saskatchewan people.

And recently, Mr. Speaker, we just met around the round table of which SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and SARM sits at, and they talk about the importance of working together to redesign the municipal structure in this province. And we sit at that table, and we concur.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we talk about how we're going to do things collectively; on that side of the House they talk about forced amalgamation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Implications of Municipal Amalgamation for Businesses

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs as well as the Liberal spokesperson.

It is not just rural people who oppose the NDP forced amalgamation plan. We are starting to get many faxes and letters from Regina area businesses — from the RM of Sherwood. Almost all the people who work in these businesses live in Regina. They pay taxes in Regina. Many will lose their jobs if you push through your forced amalgamation plan.

I have a letter, I have a letter from the owner of the Wascana Greenhouses. It says, and I quote:

Forcing us to pay the high taxes and deal with the red tape of an urban metropolitan district could cause businesses like ours to close. Let us choose . . .

Mr. Speaker, it says:

Let us choose what is best for our businesses and best for our lives.

Mr. Minister, will you listen to the Regina businesses? Will you cancel your forced amalgamation plan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — First I want to say to the member opposite — and I know that he's new to the House, and he's new as a critic to Municipal Affairs — but I want to say to the member opposite; the kinds of questions that are being asked, or the kinds of questions you're asking today has very little to do with amalgamation.

What it has to do . . . the task force that went around and talked about exemptions in the province — talked about exemptions. And today you have bodies or communities in Saskatchewan who get privilege in terms of tax reduction called 331(1)(q).

And that's what you're talking about Mr. Member. It has very little to do with amalgamation. It has to do with changing the 331(1)(q). And you should go back to those ratepayers, and tell them what your position is on 331(1)(q). What is your position on 331(1)(q)?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, perhaps the members opposite don't care that business is going to be leaving Saskatchewan.

Regina businesses are lining up against your forced amalgamation plan. Businesses that have sent us letters like Abtec Construction, Graham's Tire, Wascana Greenhouse, which I've already mentioned; Brandt Industries; Ramco Paving; L & R Asphalt; Harrison's Service; Precision Industries; Four T enterprises; Armour Steel Fabricators; and, oh no, IPSCO.

These aren't just small businesses. They are big business, they're small business, they're Regina business. They're Regina business that employ Regina people. And they are telling us that they will be forced to shutdown if you ram through your forced amalgamation.

Mr. Minister, why are you attacking these Regina businesses, their employees, and their families? Will you cancel your forced amalgamation now?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Member, I want to say that this is the further accentuation of exactly the same kinds of things that the member from Saltcoats and the Leader of the Opposition talk about — and that's the kind of fearmongering out there.

I want to say to the member opposite that last week I met with the representation from IPSCO. Last week I met with IPSCO. Last week I met with the president of Brandt . . . or with Brandt. And what they said to me is exactly what you're saying, is that you met with those people — or your party has met with these people — and you talk about exactly the same kind of fearmongering that you are today.

And I want to tell you that when I met with them, when I met with them, Mr. Speaker, I assured them that Reggie Downs and the Saskatchewan Party reamalgamation and consolidation is not on. It's not on. And it might be for you, but on this side of the House it's not on.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I find it very curious that the minister would be saying that and send a task force out saying the exact opposite thing, and then directing them. That's a question in my mind.

These Regina businesses are saying, nothing but an NDP tax grab; a tax grab that may force them out of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, those aren't my words. I'm not the one saying it. Dawn . . . Cara Dawn Transport says, "it's a tax grab by an out-of-touch NDP government." Precision Industries says that

they have already discussed relocation with their employees. Brandt Industries who employs about 300 Regina residents says, it's another reason for business to move west.

Mr. Minister, at a time when we can't lose one more business in this province, you're driving them out. Will you listen to these Regina businesses and cancel your plans for forced amalgamation? Yes or no?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I have a difficult time understanding what the member is asking today when the member from Saltcoats asked me exactly the same question yesterday.

I want to say that yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the member from Saltcoats stood up in his place and he said, why don't you come to Yorkton and make a presentation to the task force? And today the member opposite says, you shouldn't be directing the task force.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the task force, Mr. Speaker, was commissioned by the government to go out there and consult with people. Now the member opposite says you should not consult with the task force because you're going to be directing them. Yesterday the member from Saltcoats wanted me to show up and make a presentation on how to direct them.

Now what is it? Do you want us to direct them or not direct them? What is it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Minister, yesterday — thank you, Mr. Speaker — Mr. Minister, yesterday you declined an invitation from the member from Saltcoats. He offered to give you a ride to the task force meeting in Yorkton.

Mr. Minister, I've ridden with the member from Saltcoats. I don't blame you. I don't blame you.

You may not know, Mr. Minister, you may not know . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order please.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister, you may not know that I've spent probably 20 years in the traffic safety business. And there is also a hearing in Regina tomorrow. Why don't you jump in with me? I can promise your safety to and from the meeting. At the meeting, you're on your own.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Minister, we expect dozens of Regina area businesses representing thousands of their employees to be speaking at this task force. Will you attend the task force meetings tomorrow and listen to what these businesses and employees are saying about amalgamation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I said yesterday in the House and I say to the member again — and I respect the number of years that he's worked in the public safety area and understands the municipal file relatively well in my view — but I say to the member opposite that he should examine fully about the work that's being done by the task force today and how it . . . when it was commissioned.

Because it would be inappropriate, as I said yesterday, for the minister to show up at a task force meeting of which you're garnering and gleaning information about which direction you should go and then make a presentation to the committee about which way you want it to go. It would be highly inappropriate.

And I say to the member opposite, I appreciate the fact that you were going to give me a ride again. I'm not prepared to travel with you, sir, because I know what happened to the member from Kelvington. And I'm not prepared to travel with you, Mr. Member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 231 — The Fire-fighter Protection from Liability Act

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I move the first reading of Bill No. 231, The Fire-fighter Protection from Liability Act.

Motion agreed to and the Bill read a first time.

The Speaker: — When shall the Bill be read a second time?

Mr. Wall: — With leave now, Mr. Speaker.

Leave not granted.

The Bill ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

Bill No. 24 — The Department of Agriculture Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 24, The Department of Agriculture Amendment Act, 2000 be introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to and the Bill read a first time.

The Speaker: — When shall the Bill be read a second time?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, by leave that we move to second reading now.

Leave not granted.

The Bill ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

Bill No. 25 — The Irrigation Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 25, The Irrigation Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read a first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Amalgamation of Municipalities

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today we have the opportunity I think to debate probably one of the most important things that could happen to towns, RMs, villages, hamlets, really the people all over Saskatchewan, with the restructuring that may be done if the minister and that government brings in forced amalgamation. And I will be bringing forward a motion at the end of my talk, Mr. Speaker, to deal with that.

I'd like to talk for a minute, Mr. Speaker, about the meeting that was in Yorkton last night, and I'd like to mention that the member, the Minister of Municipal Government was conspicuous by his absence. In fact on many occasions last night I had his constituents asking me where their representative was, and why he wasn't out there to hear their concerns along with the probably 600 other people from rural Saskatchewan.

This same minister will not stand up in this House and give those people, local government people out there, the commitment that he won't force amalgamation down their throats. He at the same time won't give them the commitment that him and his government won't go out and take every cent that they've saved by running their house and keeping it in order over the years, that he won't come along and take that money away and dump it into general revenue for this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, I think the biggest thing that people especially out in the towns and RMs in this province are going to lose, is their local autonomy. And by that I mean input into how they run their everyday lives, how efficiently they run the services that they supply for the people that they represent.

And I believe by what Mr. Garcea, and for that matter what this minister are trying to push upon us, we will lose all that local autonomy. We will lose the services that we have become familiar with out there.

We won't be able to call your local councillor, your local alderman at any time of the night or day and have them respond. What we probably will have is some bureaucrat who's probably making 60, \$80,000 a year, who by the way will be surely probably unionized, and if it's overtime you'll pay probably for six hours for a half an hour's work. And you won't get the service that you're getting from the volunteers that are running the show out there now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1430)

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, why on earth would this government want to replace volunteers with an expensive bureaucratic nightmare that the people of rural Saskatchewan, number one, haven't asked for, don't want, and don't need.

Mr. Speaker, the minister has got to take time to listen to these people, get off his personal agenda, and listen to the people of rural Saskatchewan. Some of those people which helped elect him this time around, but certainly won't be voting for him next time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — The minister today, Mr. Speaker, talks about me bulldozing, bulldozing. And as I mentioned in question period, and I had made the comment that the only bulldozing I thought I would be doing is bulldozing him out of his seat come the next election if they get the intestinal fortitude to have the nerve to call the next election. Maybe we should call that election now on forced amalgamation, and we'll see how popular that is to your government and especially to the Minister of Municipal Government.

The Garcea report, Mr. Speaker . . . and I find some of the things in there very amazing and I believe probably the minister had a lot to do with these. Number one, they say, we should have deficit budgeting, financing, for these district municipal boards.

Amazing, amazing comment for a minister that should be in touch with local municipalities who haven't had that right to deficit finance, have kept their house in order, have not run up real big debts, and are not paying the price for that as past governments have in this province. Including yours — the Blakeney government before '82 who also helped add to the debt we're paying off right now to the tune of we don't know what — 5 billion, 6 billion, 7 billion. We don't know how big it was because he kept books just like this government keeps books. Nobody seems to know where we really stand.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Garcea will admit, will be the first to admit that he has done no costing. Is there a dollar saving in what he's talking about? No, he says, we have done nothing to see if there'll be a money saving when we bring in district municipal boards.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I would guess that if you get large district municipal boards, cost saving has been neglected to be looked at for a reason. Because there won't be a cost saving. In fact when the smoke clears, we'll be paying a lot higher taxes. The problem being is that local people won't be setting those taxes, it will be your bureaucrats that you put in place, probably appointed by you to run local governments out there — the ones where we used to have local governments and now have no representation at all, thanks to you and your government.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. Garcea talks about is they said they have done . . . there is nothing to do with efficiency; they're not looking at efficiency.

Well now if you're not looking at a dollar saving and you're not

looking at efficiency, that tells me one thing — that tells me this is an agenda of the NDP and that minister. Because what else is there? What other improvement? You know, like who pays for administration? They talk about there's too much administration in rural Saskatchewan. Who pays for that? Not the government of the day. The local taxpayers pay for the local administration.

Now if anyone wants to cut down administration locally, wouldn't they be the ones — the local taxpayer — they would be the ones that should be asking for change. And yet they were the ones that were at the meeting in Yorkton last night. They were the ones that were at the meeting at Kipling yesterday. They are the people that are at all these task force meetings, and not one of them is asking for change.

And yet we have a government that again knows better than anyone what's good for the local people. And that minister didn't have the intestinal fortitude to come out and listen to those people, a lot of which were his people, last night, Mr. Speaker.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I was a reeve in my past life before I got elected. In fact that's one of the reasons that I stand before you now — because of the downloading this government did after they were elected in 1991. And it got my dander up at that point and I ran, if I remember, against an NDP member at that time, and he got beat on some of these same issues, just like that Minister of Municipal Government's going to get when the next election's called.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Again, Mr. Speaker, I say that administration is not the problem out there. The problem is with this minister and this government. The local taxpayers who pay the bill should be the ones to ask for what changes they want.

Mr. Speaker, I have a bit of a disappointment with some of the members of the task force. Some of these members, these exact members, have sat on councils out there. And I can't believe that they sit back and listen to what's happening, like they did last night, like the members of the task force, hearing what 800 people had to say.

And out of that crowd, Mr. Minister, you might be interested to know that two people were in favour of forced amalgamation. Now that's quite a ratio. I would say that works out to about 750, 760 to 2. And you're getting the feedback from Mr. Garcea that everything's lovely out there.

You've got to come out, Mr. Minister, pay attention to what people are saying. Remember that your government is supposed to be here for the people, not to do as much to the people as you possibly can in your short time in here.

Mr. Garcea I also believe . . . You talked about consultation yesterday, Mr. Minister. And I agree with you. When task force groups like this go out, there should be consultation. But consultation, Mr. Minister, is two ways.

Mr. Speaker, if there's consultation we have to hear from the task force on their views, but they have to listen to our views and I haven't seen that happening anywhere at any of these task

force meetings.

This government spent \$750,000 to date on Mr. Garcea's task force and haven't listened to one word that people have been saying out in rural Saskatchewan. They didn't stop there. They paid another \$100,000 for the Stabler report and this one's even wingier than the first one. This guy is a way off the chart. This isn't anything to do with what rural people are asking.

In fact Mr. Stabler told us that our problems out there are minuscule in our minds, that he understands what we need . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well now the minister, Mr. Speaker, is saying our problems are minuscule in our minds. A lot of people out there would be interested to hear that.

You know again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure whose agenda, whose drummer are we beating to here? If people in this province aren't asking for the changes that the government's bringing in, whose agenda? To whose benefit are these changes for?

You know, is it the minister's personal agenda? I wonder. Is it an NDP agenda? Well I kind of think so. Is it the Premier's agenda? Possibly. Whose agenda are we going to have to make all these changes out in rural Saskatchewan to make happy here? Just who is it?

An Hon. Member: — Jim Melenchuk.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Good point. The member for Cannington says the Leader of the Liberal Party. The same leader who, by the way, who wouldn't get up and tell us where that Liberal party stands on forced amalgamation.

Mr. Speaker, a number of the people last night were from the Melville constituency, Yorkton constituency, Saltcoats constituency, Canora-Pelly, Kelvington-Wadena, from a very large area. Some of those people, Mr. Speaker, have been past Liberal members and I reiterate past is the key word.

We wonder where the leader, the member for North Battleford, the member for Wood River, where do these people stand on forced amalgamation? The member for Wood River is a good example. Here's a member that represents rural people and I'll be willing to bet, if you asked that member and he gave you an honest answer, that he would agree with us and the people of Saskatchewan. We don't want forced amalgamation. It would be worth for someone to ask those people where they stand, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I honestly believe there's an ulterior motive here. We go out, we force amalgamation, we scoop up all the reserves, which I think is part of the program and the minister seems to want to deny at this point.

But this will be nothing more than another form of downloading because, number one, they have said, suggested that these district municipal boards can deficit budget, so that means they can build up a big debt. When they can't get enough money from the local taxpayers and the grants are cut off completely from government, they can run deficits.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we've saw what happens to previous

governments when they do their books and run their agenda like that.

Mr. Speaker, I think also it's a way of muting people. I think there's a lot of flack has come to this government over the last number of years. Number one, for downloading. Number two, for the way they've treated agriculture in this province. And it's one way by cutting municipal voices out there, that all they listen to now is probably appointed district municipal boards.

It's one way of putting a muzzle over people in Saskatchewan. A thing that this government seems to be famous for. Once again, Mr. Speaker, I say to the Minister of Municipal Government and also to Mr. Garcea and his task force, just for once, listen to what people are saying out there. At every meeting they're telling them, we want no part of forced amalgamation.

Amalgamation is happening on its own. Let's take away the handicaps that are sitting there, some of which this government could change — remove those impediments from amalgamating even faster.

And it's happening. Shared fire services, shared garbage disposal. The list just goes on and on — things that we are doing already. If they remove some of the obstacles from amalgamating towns and RMs, I think you'd see it happen quicker.

Why on earth do we have to shove this down people's throats when they don't want it. Why don't we assist them, rather than be the driving force to have it happen when there's absolutely no benefit for people out in Saskatchewan.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that what we're going to see if this plan goes through is, number one, we're going to see less services for the people of Saskatchewan, whether you live in towns, villages, hamlets, RMs. But what we're also going to see is that less services at more cost. Exactly the opposite of what people ask for and what people need in rural Saskatchewan.

Then we also hear now that the government is thinking — and again, Mr. Speaker, I'll admit it's rumour, but usually where there's smoke, there's fire — that this government is thinking of freezing capital funds that RMs and towns have built up, surpluses that the towns and RMs have built up, and reserve money that RMs and towns have built up. And the minister has been asked on two days in a row now, to make a commitment that they won't do that. And he has come nowhere close to giving that commitment to municipalities and the local taxpayers out there in Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move my motion. And I will read the motion:

That this Assembly urges the provincial government to cancel any plans to legislate forced amalgamation for Saskatchewan municipalities.

I move this motion, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the member for Indian Head-Milestone. I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About seven

months ago, when a person . . . when I was elected as a new MLA, I kept in touch with a number of the issues that had been going on in my constituency for a long period of time, and leading up to that election, I'd heard the term used about arrogance and whether this government had lost touch. As I campaigned for the six or . . . the month or so, the four or five weeks of the election call in harvest, I found that yes, it was. That this is an arrogant government that has never been more arrogant in its nine years of office than it is being over this issue, this amalgamation issue.

And certainly during the election campaign and after, we attended, all of us on our side of the House, attended a number of tax revolt meetings. Tax revolt meetings where people would get up and they would voice their opinion on how disgusted they were with the form of government that we have and how they were downloading onto the school divisions and things like that, and the RMs not really having any control over what the school divisions were charging for tax. But of course the RMs had to be the tax collector.

(1445)

And there was a lot of anger shown towards those RMs, but nothing compared to the anger that is being shown at these last round of task force meetings regarding rural amalgamation — not rural amalgamation but amalgamation of municipal governments.

You know, the sound bite of a thousand governments for a million people sounds very good, and yes, maybe something should be done. But when you send out a person such as Mr. Garcea who has gone then and taken it so far down the road of saying we need about a hundred or a hundred and twenty RMs or districts, and if you look at the Stabler report, that's even less — down to 11 to 17 — it just makes absolutely no sense at all.

So when you see people at these task force meetings . . . And I would really invite, invite the members opposite to go to some of these task force meetings and feel the wrath, hear how people feel when government comes along and tries to take their local governance away. And they're fighting mad over it and they're going to continue to fight mad . . . be fighting mad over it.

Not once in the last election did we hear anything about forced amalgamation from the NDP government, and nothing either from the Liberal government. You didn't hear a darn word about amalgamation.

And I really find it's just another form of deception that the people in Saskatchewan and especially in the smaller villages, hamlets, and towns, and RMs are facing. Not a word mentioned about it and seven months later here comes a government with a new mandate, going to slam it down their throats.

And they're fighting mad over it. They don't want to take it, and they won't take it any longer. And that's again, when you hear these task force meetings and people are literally hanging from the rafters because they're fighting mad. They've got a very good reason.

You know, I look at the government opposite and I don't know how people in our province can feel comfortable with pretty

much anything that's going to happen over the next few months. The PST (provincial sales tax) off-reserve purchases, not a word mentioned. We were called all sorts of names for mentioning it during the election; not a word mentioned from the other side. Six to seven months later — bang — there it is.

And not that I'm against it but I think it's a deception that this government is showing, and the arrogance that this government is showing that is very, very hard for the people of Saskatchewan to stomach. And I think you're going to be hearing more and more anti-government sentiment as this carries on. If it doesn't get derailed before it gets to its landing station, I guess.

We're not only told this is going ahead come hell or high water, it is going ahead prior to the completion of the Garcea task force final report. And I question, you know, what is the point of spending \$750,000, sending a professor and a number of board people out to hear what are the concerns with this. And then we hear the minister standing up and saying it doesn't matter when they get done or what they say in the final report. I'll be taking it to caucus in April and we'll be deciding on the issue.

Now what is the point of having these task force meetings? Every one of these task force meetings that were held, week prior and this week, have had representation from the Saskatchewan Party. At least one of our MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) sometimes 2, 3, and 4 of our MLAs will be at these task force meetings not only to present the position of the Saskatchewan Party, but maybe more importantly is to hear the position of the local governments — the municipalities, the villages, and the hamlets in that area.

And we're certainly hearing it — we're hearing it loud and clear. And I think maybe that's why you'll notice during question period that the whole issue was centred around amalgamation and the arrogance of the government to force amalgamation, because that's certainly what this report is looking to say.

The minister has said the legislation will be in place before the Garcea report is issued. If those members on the hearing committee stay till the end of that hearing I really question why they would do that. When the government comes out and says they'll be going to cabinet and making a decision, while these fellows go from community to community and catch the wrath and the anger of what's out there, I really wonder why they're even sitting on there.

I mean as soon as I would have heard that I would have had to say to the minister, either you're going to listen to what we report, or you go ahead and make the decision on your own and we'll say goodbye. And that's certainly the position of the minister.

When the minister in . . . and when the minister in this House is asking . . . or denying any rumour that they are talking about freezing or confiscating municipal reserves — funds built up through sound management and leadership practices through the RMs or local villages — that should not even be an issue. It shouldn't even be on the table.

I look in the paper today, Tuesday, April 11; SARM calls an emergency meeting. And it quotes the minister here. It says:

There are many, many options you can look at. I'm not speculating at all (that) what we're going to do with the reserves because (nowhere) we're nowhere near (making) . . . those (decisions) . . .

I would say to the minister, that's not your decision. What is he doing saying, well don't worry, we haven't got to making that decision yet. If it was up to me, get out of the ball game — that's not your decision. We'll handle our money, where we collected it, how we want to, and when we want to. And, Mr. Speaker, I really question the minister when he talks that way.

Still the government has not told us how this is going to save any money and how it is going to provide better service. Yet, they are going to force it on the people outside the cities in both rural and small urban municipalities whether they want to or not.

And I often think when I think of that whole theory about forcing it and not knowing if there's any economic savings, Mr. Minister . . . I've started up a number of businesses, a couple of businesses on my own, as I've mentioned before, through the traffic safety industry more than anything else. But I know if I had to . . . and on the farm, I mean I'm currently farming. If I went to a bank and said, you know I need \$100,000 to get this thing going, to get this thing on the road to working. The bank would first of all say what is your business plan? Does it make economic sense? Because I'll guarantee there isn't a bank in the province that is going to give me money to set this thing on the road when I've got no business plan.

And that's exactly what this task force is travelling around saying: we've got to go down to 100 RMs or local governance with no business plan.

The member from Saltcoats mentioned earlier that, is there going to be any savings? And, of course, I really believe that this task force nor this government wants to touch that issue. They don't want to touch that issue because I would hazard a guess that they know what that answer is going to be. And it's not going to be in their favour.

They're going to go through this whole episode of creating 100 municipal governments, and then realizing and having to go to the taxpayer and say: yeah, well it does cost a little bit more but we never thought of studying that before. And I would think that that would be the very first thing I would study if I was going to go to a model like that.

They have not shown the benefits, yet the government seems intent on dictating from Regina how these people govern themselves. It's the height of central planning.

Mr. Speaker, I think the people in rural Saskatchewan and in these villages . . . I can think of a village that I've been to — a couple of meetings that they've had over this very issue, the village of Odessa — who is extremely upset with the way things are going and the whole intent of this amalgamation.

They have gone and they have raised money for their local rink;

they have raised money in their community for everything that they have wanted in their community. They feel quite comfortable with their tax rate, with their mill rate. They feel comfortable with the services that their local government has to offer, and yet they may not have control of that. It seems like it's a central planning thing to be eaten up or absorbed by the bigger communities around. And I think it's a real shame.

So, Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to second the motion put forward by the member from Saltcoats:

That this Assembly urges the provincial government to cancel any plans to legislate forced amalgamation for Saskatchewan municipalities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — I want to start out by quoting the 1992 report "A Call to Action — Reforming and Revitalizing Urban Government in Saskatchewan". Now that report was written by the members' opposite chief of staff Reg Downs. And what does Reg say? Change is inevitable, is what Reggie says.

Now I note that the member from Saltcoats and also the member from Indian Head-Wolseley would like to offer a ride to the Minister of Municipal Government. It seems to me they should be giving Reggie a ride.

I'd like to give this House a few statistics so that you can put into context Mr. Downs' statement that change is inevitable.

In 1936, Mr. Speaker, this province had 143,000 farms; in 1996 down to 57,000 farms. Change is inevitable. That was a 40 per cent reduction.

In 1951, Mr. Speaker, 50 per cent of the labour force in this province was employed in agriculture; in 1996, 16 per cent of the labour force employed in agriculture.

We have today, Mr. Speaker, 836 municipalities serving a population of a little over 1 million people. That works out to one municipal government for every 1,225 people. Contrast that with Manitoba that did municipal restructuring some 30 years ago. They have one municipality for every 5,665 people.

Now what does the party opposite say when we decide to consult with the people through the Garcea task force and talk about restructuring? What they do is fearmongering. They use inflammatory language and they go out, they create a rumour, and then they repeat the rumour. And they repeat it and repeat it until it becomes propaganda. And they figure if they repeat it often enough people will start to believe it.

Mr. Speaker, that reminds me very much of the woman who wrote the world's dirtiest limerick and won a contest. Mr. Speaker, that woman was phoned up by CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio and was asked to read her dirty limerick for the people of Saskatchewan. And she said oh no, Mr. Speaker, couldn't possibly do that because it's so dirty. I've only written it; I can't say it out loud.

They prevailed upon her to read out this dirty limerick. So she said, I'll tell you what I'll do — I'll substitute the word duh for

every dirty word in my limerick. So then she started, and she read:

duh duh duh, duh duh duh, duh duh duh,
duh duh duh, duh duh duh, duh duh duh,
duh duh duh duh duh,
duh duh duh duh duh, forced amalgamation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Speaker, in the words of a former premier of this province, there is so much more we can be. And, Mr. Speaker, there is so much more that the rural municipalities can be as well.

I sincerely hope that at SARM's emergency meeting on Monday, that they come up with some proposals to voluntarily manage change. I wish they were meeting in Saskatoon, by the way, so that the city of Saskatoon could get the benefit of the hotel rooms and the meals and so forth. But I appreciate that they're meeting here in Regina.

But it is important for those RM people to understand that change, as Mr. Downs says, change is inevitable. There are problems in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and it would be my hope that they will voluntarily recognize the problems, the challenges, and the opportunities.

Now I don't know if they will voluntarily recognize this because I know in 1993, the government introduced the intercommunity co-operation program. We provided over a million dollars over three years to foster inter-municipal co-operation in service delivery. This resulted in the voluntary consolidation of a rural municipality with two adjoining RMs.

In 1996, again aware of the need to recognize that change is inevitable and it is important for people to manage change, the government introduced the service district Act. That provided for the voluntary creation of district boards to assist municipalities with the delivery of regional services.

(1500)

In May, 1996, the province, SUMA, and SARM voluntarily signed a memorandum of understanding to prepare a plan to build strong municipalities. The municipal restructuring assistance program was introduced in 1997 to facilitate amalgamation and this program resulted in the dissolution of four villages and the amalgamation of one RM, and was subsequently discontinued last year.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have said well why would anybody be interested in restructuring. I'm going to give you some good solid reasons why you might be interested in restructuring.

Administrative duplication. Look at the fact that you have RM offices side by side with town offices. Look at the fact that there is little emergency planning and little emergency planning capabilities within this province in the RMs.

Look at the fact that the legislation requires that all of those

RMs have to have individual separate audits rather than being able to pool together and have audits for like-minded and regionally situated RMs. Look at the fact that land use and planning and development activities are difficult if not impossible.

And, Mr. Speaker, if you don't care about any of those things, which I would think that the member from Saltcoats, a former reeve, certainly does care about, take a drive through rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it saddens me to drive out into rural Saskatchewan and to see the change in the landscape. Mr. Speaker, by the end of this year almost 300 wooden elevators will have disappeared from the prairie landscape. They're going to be replaced by 40 concrete, inland grain terminals.

Now those concrete structures might be very good, but consider the implication to the municipalities. The one RM that has that inland grain terminal does very well from a taxation point of view. But what happens to all the other RMs surrounding that inland grain terminal? I'll tell you what happens, Mr. Speaker. Where it used to be that farmers would drive 8 to 10 miles to that wonderful symbol of Saskatchewan, the wooden elevator, to deliver their grain, now they're driving up to 100 kilometres to be able to deliver their grain. And the impact, the impact, Mr. Speaker is that all those roads are taking a pounding.

In the meantime though, because that inland grain terminal is located in only one municipality, all the municipalities that are on that hub have no taxation abilities. They are becoming have-not RMs and this is something, it seems to me, that the people of Saskatchewan are asking us to understand and be aware of — to be aware of the changing economic circumstances and the eroding population in our rural communities and our towns.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Speaker, having listened to the debate from the members opposite, I have to tell you I will not be supporting their motion.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move an amendment, seconded by the member for Regina Northeast. And my amendment would be to:

Delete all words after government and insert the following:

To continue its consultative process and to work together with SUMA and with SARM to identify areas of needed change.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's truly a pleasure for me to enter into this very timely and very important debate.

Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member from Saltcoats indicated that he has served some time on municipal council as

a reeve. And I must admit, last night, Mr. Speaker, I attempted to go through the bios of all the opposition members to try to establish if any of them had spent any previous time on municipal government. And I'll quite freely admit, Mr. Speaker, that the reading was so boring I fell asleep, so I didn't get through it all.

But, Mr. Speaker, I did also have the opportunity from 1980 to 1990 to serve for 10 consecutive years as a municipal councillor for division 5 of the RM of Clayton 333, an RM from which at that time, Mr. Speaker, I had the dubious honour of retiring after 10 consecutive years in municipal politics without a defeat.

But it was . . . As an RM, Mr. Speaker, that's located in northeastern part of Saskatchewan, an area that primarily was developed — or opened up I suppose is the right term to use — after the Second World War, basically, Mr. Speaker, because it's a heavily wooded area. And the event I guess of the Second World War and from that the addition of heavy duty caterpillar tractors much facilitated the opening up of that land and the settling of it. So much of that land was settled by returned veterans from the Second World War and my dad was one of them.

So it is a relatively newly developed part of Saskatchewan. And remembering the stories that were told by my grandfather and my father of the days of the various contractors that would move through the area toward the purposes of contracting the opening up, clearing of land, it seems to me — and I could be wrong, Mr. Speaker, so don't hold me to this — but it seems to me I remember a story in the back of my mind, they talked about a contractor that called himself Bulldoze Bob. Apparently he could only bulldoze downhill.

I'm not sure of that story, Mr. Speaker, but during that period of time on municipal council, I found it very interesting because if you look at some of the facts that surround the time, having got on council in 1980 — and I'm working from memory here — but I believe at that time the population of the RM of Clayton was somewhere in the area of 1,450 people. Some 10 years later that population had dropped to just over a thousand, I think it was a thousand and fifteen, a thousand and seventeen if I remember correctly.

And in, oh a few weeks back, I talked to the secretary-treasurer or administrator, as he's known now, in the same RM who was there when I served, and he tells me the population is just slightly over 800.

So you can see over that period of time there's been a significant drop in the population of the RM as it is right across this great province of ours, Mr. Speaker. It's just a clear indication of the depopulation of rural Saskatchewan that has been going on since the 1930s. With that of course will come change.

And when this issue has . . . I've had the opportunity to spend countless hours on the telephone talking to some of my former councillors that served the same time I did. I've also had the opportunity to speak to some individuals who are councillors now in the RM of Clayton as well as some of my farm friends out there, some retired, some still active on the farm.

The interesting part, Mr. Speaker, that of the nearly two dozen different people I've spoke to over the last couple of weeks on this particular issue, none of them — not one of them — has suggested there isn't need for change. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they have all agreed there is need for change.

So the need for change is not the debate, Mr. Speaker, the need for change is not the debate — that is a generally accepted rule. What the debate is, is what form will this change take. And that, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say, that is exactly what our government is doing. Our government is out there seeking consultation from the general public as to what that change will take.

An Hon. Member: — We listen. We listen.

Mr. Harper: — We listen, we listen, Mr. Speaker, not like the members opposite who spend most of their time — most of their time — with their heads buried in the sand; not listening to the people but rather trying to dictate to them. That, Mr. Speaker, is quite clearly indicated in the writings of their chief of staff which has . . . in abbreviated language would say that there is no opportunity for the consultation process.

It's a time for action, a time for thrusting their way upon Saskatchewan people rather than listening to what Saskatchewan people want and what Saskatchewan people need. Because quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, there is nobody better in determining the future of this province than the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — At the same time, Mr. Speaker, in talking to over two dozen people who are directly involved in local government, either formerly or presently, or live out there full-time, they have not only suggested that there is need for change to address the fact that governance of this province — rural Saskatchewan and urban Saskatchewan — governance of this province has not been changed, has not been updated to meet the changing times, to meet the challenges that face us.

But what they're saying is that we also have to be forward looking when we're putting together that change and that proposal for change. We cannot base that on the past. We cannot base those solutions and suggestions and ideas on the present. We have to have a combination of the experience that we've learned from the past, the realities of the present, and what the future holds.

And that, Mr. Speaker, is the direction that we have to look at it collectively in this province by all people in Saskatchewan. And that, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say, is what our government is doing.

I find it interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the only province in Canada to have more local governance than Saskatchewan is the province of Quebec. But Quebec, Mr. Speaker, has a population of seven million people.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to have the opportunity to participate in this debate, and I hope from my remarks, Mr. Speaker, you will have ascertained that my

support will not be for their motion but will be for our amendment.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My past life has been municipal government. I spent eight years on the SARM board so I can identify. And they're out of touch. I'm sorry — totally out of touch.

When they talk about a consultative approach and this amended motion, Clay just said . . . Mr. Serby, the hon. member said that he was going to go ahead with it without more consultative approach. I wish the hon. member from North Battleford had had the courage to attend the meeting in . . . the Garcea meeting in North Battleford and would have seen how his councils in his area felt about amalgamations.

Mr. Speaker, he would have . . . if he was a true . . . if he wants support in the Battlefords again, he should have been there and should have listened to what the people were saying . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Speaker, when you talk about aluminum pots, the hon. member has had it over his head most of his life. So, I would suggest he . . . And I'm not about to share the pot with him.

When we talk about amalgamation and forced amalgamation, I personally don't . . . there's nothing wrong with amalgamation. The word forced is what's bothering us in Saskatchewan. That's the word. It's to take the word forced out of it and it all flies.

The mover of the resolution also suggested that our population, our farmers have dropped in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and I agree with that. But the RMs in Saskatchewan are not governing people but are governing property.

(1515)

And I think, Mr. Speaker, that since we have the most roads, or next to the most roads in Canada, we in rural Saskatchewan have to be concerned about where we are going with that road project because those people need services to their land not, as the minister or the hon. member suggests, it's based on population. Population in rural Saskatchewan has very little to do with government right now.

I found it very interesting today that in question period when it was suggested that a number of businesses in the Regina area were closing, or could possibly be closing on account of the taxation thing, the Premier said it was a good idea if those businesses closed. Here we are in Saskatchewan fighting to enhance business, and there is the Premier in his wisdom saying it's all right if the businesses close, it's fine. That's what he said, I'm sorry. That's what he said.

Those members across invented the word arrogant. I mean they have no idea what is going on in Saskatchewan. I have to think that they don't even know what's going on in their constituencies.

An Hon. Member: — But their constituencies are Regina and

Saskatoon.

Mr. Peters: — Well, I'm not sure that they even know what's going on in there, Mr. Speaker. They're quite lost I would say — extremely lost I would say.

The words forced amalgamation also has a tendency to . . . that precede the vision in rural-urban thing and that is an issue that is a concern to us as a party. It doesn't seem to bother the members across that that split is there. It's a concern because they . . . well they've sort of given up in rural Saskatchewan I would have to say. They've given up totally on what's going on in there.

To think that big is better is an ill-conceived conception, I would say. It's not reasonable. We did that in '91 and '92. We amalgamated a number of health boards and created a monster in Saskatchewan — major monster. And if we talk and think that this amalgamation or this forced amalgamation is going to be any different, it will only be worse.

The people in Saskatchewan are extremely tired of being told how it shall be in Saskatchewan by a government that has totally lost touch with reality.

An Hon. Member: — The gates are down, the lights are flashing, but the train isn't coming.

Mr. Peters: — You wouldn't know, hon. member. You wouldn't know. You wouldn't recognize a flashing light if you saw it.

The seizure, or the suggested fact that they are going to seize the reserves of municipalities in Saskatchewan — and the minister of course denied that he was going to seize them — but the bigger . . . I look at the bigger picture. I see these amalgamations happening and those reserves being put into that pot and wasted. The money will be wasted there because of inefficiencies.

I also find it very difficult and almost impossible to understand that the government has not done a feasibility study. Everything else we do in business has to have a feasibility study, and here we are suggesting that we're going to amalgamate and go to 125 municipalities; and if we go to the Stabler report, which is even more devastating to the province and we haven't done a study. Nobody says . . . nobody has any idea what that cost might be, that amalgamation cost might be, or the costs that happen after . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . We get it. We've got it. We're hearing it every day.

When SARM calls an emergency meeting, and that has never, ever happened in its history, 95 years of history, and we don't . . . and we have an emergency debate in regards to amalgamation, I think we have some really major concerns with that amalgamation.

We have no problem with the word amalgamation. Our concern and RMs and villages' concern is the word, forced amalgamation. We would live with amalgamation, but forced amalgamation isn't an option in rural Saskatchewan. And when I talk about rural Saskatchewan, I talk about everything but Saskatoon and Regina.

I would like to . . . What I see in this amalgamation is a simple move to increase the provincial power and reduce the voice of Saskatchewan. And I will be supporting the motion presented by the member from Saltcoats.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to enter this debate and talk a little bit about what the content of this debate is about.

The issue of need for change in rural Saskatchewan is not being questioned by anybody. SARM, SUMA, in fact rural reeves, rural councillors, understand that there is a need for change. Change is inevitable.

Now I want to talk a little bit about going out and seeking input from the public. Mr. Speaker, this government has hired an independent body, a review committee, to go out and seek input from the people of Saskatchewan without putting politics into it. I challenge the members opposite to take the same view. They attend the meetings; they're putting forward their party position. We're not doing that.

We want to listen to the people of Saskatchewan. We don't want to tell them what's best for them. We are not taking the opportunity to play politics. This is about listening to the people of Saskatchewan.

Now unfortunately the members opposite don't believe in letting people listen to the people of Saskatchewan. They want to go out and make political points. It's not about doing the right thing — it's about politics. And that's a sad world we live in.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the words of Mr. Fred Suttor, who served for many years as . . . in the municipal field for over 40 years. He's a municipal administrator in various locations and also served as a municipal adviser for the Department of Municipal Affairs.

He points out that rural municipalities had more responsibilities in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s than they do now; that they have changed, not necessarily for the good over the last number of years.

He also goes on to point out that the municipal system appears today much as it did in 1914 — just as it did in 1914. Most of the rural municipalities were formed with an area of nine townships 18 miles by 18 miles . . . or more than 85 years ago, Mr. Speaker, more than 85 years ago.

The typical rural municipality of the pre-1930s had a population of 3,000; has now been reduced to 400, yet the makeup of rural municipalities remains unchanged despite depopulation and fewer responsibilities and computerization.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Suttor who spent many, many years as a municipal adviser and in municipal politics, sees the need for change. Further, Mr. Suttor talks about a number of reports from the 1950s and '60s that recommended consolidation due to changes in demographics and in rural Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about that there are many, many reasons to examine the restructure of our municipalities, both

urban and rural.

Now the one difficulty you have talking about this issue with people that are directly involved is it's very difficult to ask 4,500 municipal officials to voluntarily amalgamate or to look at an issue that really deals with their own sense of security and their job security. This is like asking employees in a company to cut their own job — something that's very difficult to do.

We must take a much broader look at the issue of municipal amalgamation and move forward in a way that meets the needs of the people of rural Saskatchewan, and in fact meets the needs of people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, it's without doubt that there are many things that are driving change in our province, both rural and urban, many of them outside the individual control, outside municipal control; in fact, outside provincial control. We now have an economy that's largely controlled by large multinational corporations from outside this country's boundaries.

In the last 30 years, Saskatchewan population has shifted. Our rural population has decreased by 25 per cent in the last 30 years; the urban population has increased by 29 per cent. It's occurring. Change is inevitable.

The current system of local government was established about a hundred years ago. Local governments were established to provide local services in a very different environment than exists today. They were established when automobiles travelled at one-tenth the speed they're capable of travelling today, and computers were just a thing of the future.

Municipal structure hasn't kept pace, so I think those things alone indicate the need for some changes.

Mr. Speaker, our world is changing. We need to keep pace with that change. Mr. Speaker, the people who live in the municipalities in rural Saskatchewan are no different than the people who live in urban municipalities. We're faced with change that is largely outside our control and we need to look at what needs to be done to meet those needs.

As an example, Mr. Speaker, cities are spending 11 per cent of their revenue on governance while villages spend 31 per cent. Are they getting their bang for their buck in delivering the services that need to be delivered in those communities?

Mr. Speaker, what this government is doing is consulting the people of Saskatchewan. We're not out there fearmongering. We're not predetermining what the outcomes are going to be. And, Mr. Speaker, when that report comes in, this government will debate, will debate openly with the people what we are looking at doing regarding changes to legislation for municipal and rural municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, I want to clearly indicate to you that I support the amendment and not the original motion. I'd like to thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to thank

the member from Regina Dewdney for his sudden interest in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the goal of legislative renewal or municipal amalgamation should not be to serve the best interests of the provincial government or municipal governments. Any change in structure at the municipal level must be driven by what's in the best interests of the taxpayer. In other words, Mr. Speaker, that means delivery of the best possible services and economic development opportunities at the lowest possible cost to the taxpayer.

This government has commissioned two studies into municipal amalgamation: the Garcea task force on municipal legislative renewal and the *Functional Economic Areas in Saskatchewan: A Framework for Municipal Restructuring* by Jack Stabler and Rose Olfert.

Between the two studies, Mr. Speaker, the cost to the taxpayer of this province is already approaching a million dollars, and the meter is still running. Clear evidence, Mr. Speaker, that the interests of the taxpayer are not the main concern of this government.

The Garcea interim report recommends a reduction from about 850 urban and rural municipalities to about 125. And the Stabler report, which has been completed without public consultations, recommends a reduction to either 11 or 17 municipal districts in the province.

Mr. Speaker, neither the Garcea or Stabler reports contain any cost-benefit analysis to back up their recommendations. And this is the fatal flaw that severely undermines the credibility of both reports and exposes them for just what they are — academic conclusions bought and paid for by this coalition government to justify their long-term desire to gain more control over all municipal governments in this province, be they rural or urban.

Is the status quo the only reasonable option, Mr. Speaker? Of course not.

(1530)

Municipalities should always be searching for ways to improve and or share responsibilities and authority if it is in the best interest of the taxpayer. In other words, Mr. Speaker, service delivery should be organized to deliver the best possible service at the lowest possible cost to the taxpayer.

A principle lost on this government, Mr. Speaker, as evidenced by their commissioning of not one but two reports which will end up costing in excess of a million dollars, while the minister boasts that he will decide what will be in the Garcea final report. And he will do that and take his recommendation to cabinet in April, Mr. Speaker — some four months before the completion of the Garcea report.

In some cases, Mr. Speaker, the best way to achieve this goal of best and cheapest service delivery may be municipal amalgamation. But this should only happen when it is in the best interests of the taxpayer, not because it is imposed upon them by the provincial government. Almost everyone agrees,

Mr. Speaker, that municipal amalgamation forced from the top down by the provincial government is the wrong approach to municipal renewal and will not work.

Mr. Speaker, whenever I see a government that is intent on doing something that is opposed by almost everyone who is familiar with the issue, I ask myself, what is the real agenda?

It's clear to me, Mr. Speaker, that their agenda is twofold. With the present number of municipalities it's just too difficult for the provincial government to maintain absolute control over local government. Mr. Speaker, most people would tell you that's a good thing. But this government doesn't like it.

It's no coincidence that Garcea's interim report recommends granting the right to deficit finance to these large municipal governments. Because, Mr. Speaker, this government's main agenda is to create municipal districts large enough that the provincial government can download more of the cost of health, education, and highways as well as lesser items too numerous to mention onto municipal taxpayers.

Of course, local taxes would skyrocket and the new larger municipalities would soon be deeply in debt. But this government believes that with a smooth selling job they could come out smelling like a rose.

Of course, all the blame for higher taxes and deficit financing and poor services would be placed squarely on the shoulders of the municipal governments. Meanwhile without the financial burden of the services now downloaded onto municipal government, the provincial government thinks it would appear to be the very picture of fiscal responsibility and good management.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have some bad news for the members opposite. The people of Saskatchewan are a lot smarter than you give them credit for. If you do this, they will punish you at election time for as long as any of you show the poor judgment to let your name stand.

The members opposite like to talk about this document that I have in my hand, "A Call to Action — Reforming and Revitalizing Urban Government in Saskatchewan." This is a meeting . . .

An Hon. Member: — Who wrote that? Who wrote that . . .

Mr. Stewart: — I'm going to tell you, I'm going to tell you who wrote it. This is a meeting, this is a meeting of 98 municipalities in 1992. Mr. Reg Downs was a staff member who recorded the results.

The findings of which meeting are as follows, and they're organized into 10 points. The word amalgamation, and especially enforced amalgamation, do not appear in the findings of this.

Number one . . . here's the findings. Listen up:

We need to immediately begin the process of urban government reform. We need to clearly define the role and the responsibilities of each level of government. We need

to give urban government a level of authority equal to its level of responsibility. The need for greater local autonomy. The need for municipalities to co-operate more with one another and share services, facilities, and ideas. The need for urban government structure that's able to adapt to change quickly and effectively . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. The time for debate has expired. We've come to the time for the questions and answers — question and answer. And just to remind hon. members in the interest of time to keep your questions very brief and concise, to those that participate in the debates.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the member from Saskatoon Southeast. Madam Member, you quoted from that document. I wonder if you could tell us whether or not a person writing the report is the author, or the persons commissioning and directing are the author. Such as the SUMA president, Ted Cholod; the mayor Lloyd Hock of Biggar; Mayor Terry Haggart of Eastend; Mayor Morris Taylor of Tisdale, city commissioner Jim Penrod of Moose Jaw. Is the staff person the author, or is the authority that commissioned, outlined, debated and decided on the report that author?

Further, Madam, it says in here that the Crown corporations be required to pay property taxes. That was one of the recommendations from this report. Madam, why has your government not followed through on these recommendations?

Ms. Lorje: — Well, first of all, answering the second question, I would say that the member opposite knows full well that this government has moved on giving grants in lieu of taxes for Crown corporations. He knows that and he should not be trying to persuade this House that the opposite is true.

Now secondly he asks about whether or not a staff person is the author of the report or is it the people who put their names to the report. I was not involved in the process of the drafting of that 1992 report, so I have no idea just how much of Mr. Downs's fingerprints are on that report, though I would suggest that they probably are very considerable. And I would say it's a tricky question to answer. He might ask that same question of another process, the Channel Lake process.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member from Battleford-Cut Knife. You know it seems to me this whole resolution before the House this afternoon is based on a false premise. It's based on a false premise that there's some plan for forced amalgamation. It seems to me the hon. member is saying that they repeat that there's a plan for forced amalgamation, they repeat it enough times someone will actually believe them.

And so . . . but the fact is there is no plan for forced amalgamation. There is no plan to confiscate reserves. The Liberal party last fall campaigned on a platform and I quote:

Saskatchewan Liberals are absolutely committed to ensuring any changes to municipal structure be driven at the grassroots level. We will foster an atmosphere of dialogue but emphasize changes must be approved at the municipal level.

Now my question for the member for Battleford-Cut Knife: was he in the House today when the Minister of Municipal Affairs said we're going to consult with the people, we're listening to the people, we're going to act on what we hear from the people, there will be no confiscation of reserves?

The Speaker: — All right, order. Order, order.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I did hear, and I did hear the minister, but I have . . . he hasn't answered questions this week so why would I start to think that he answered that question right.

I would also . . . and it's very definite in Garcea's report, Mr. Speaker, that there is something going to happen and I guess . . . and whether it's forced amalgamation . . . we're suggesting it will be forced amalgamation and . . . Thank you.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the member from Saskatoon Southeast. She talked about grants in lieu and the whole issue of property tax. And I will agree that government does offer grants in lieu, but just in the city of Regina alone they asked for \$12 million. And when you look at last year, this past year's budget, the total budget for all of the province was 9 million.

So it's easy to give grants in lieu when you give them to the amount that you want to give and not proportionate to the property tax. And I wonder if that's what that member means is that that's just perfectly fine if grants are in lieu to the amount that you feel is correct?

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat again that the Crown corporations do provide grants in lieu of taxes to the municipalities. And I would also like to point out that if the member opposite truly believes what he says and the position he's taking, perhaps he could join with us and talk to the federal government about their grants and their structure and the sufficiency thereof.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I should preface this by saying, I'm only a cabinet minister — I'm only a member of Executive Council — but nonetheless I have not seen any plan, any government report for forced amalgamation. I am not aware of any government report for forced amalgamation. I'm not aware of any government report for confiscation of reserves.

I challenge, and I ask the minister . . . the member from Battleford-Cut Knife, you say there's a government report for forced amalgamation; I'm not aware of any such thing. Will you file it with the House now? Will you file what you say is a government report for forced amalgamation, a government report for confiscation of reserves? I've never seen any such thing and I challenge you that no such thing exists.

Mr. Peters: — If the hon. minister had had the courage and foresight to appear at the North Battleford meeting he would have recognized that. It's in the Garcea report. You don't have to read very good to see what's in that report. And I'm sorry, 125 municipalities, 125 municipalities in Saskatchewan — that's what they're suggesting.

So that's what's in Garcea report . . . (inaudible interjection) . . .

Yes . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . \$750,000 worth of money put in . . .

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I have a question to the member from Indian Head-Milestone. In his remarks he was talking about that he was told that there would be amalgamation and confiscation. And I was wondering if he could reveal to the House who it was that did the telling. By whom were you told?

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When you go through the Garcea report and the interim Garcea report it talks about directive, consultative approach which is really . . . seems an awful lot like forced amalgamation.

And I really think the whole Garcea report is what got people, and has got people so incensed, and that's why you're having 800 and 500 and 600 showing up at these task force meetings day in and day out.

So it's nothing that we're trying to do as far as fearmongering. They simply read the report that your government commissioned for \$750,000.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. The member is unable to say who it was that told them. Would the member then not admit that he's rather drawing a long bow talking about amalgamation — that he's just making that up?

Mr. McMorris: — I disagree totally that we're drawing any sort of a long bow conclusion from a report that the government has commissioned. There is not a person from one of the RMs — whether it's a RM in my constituency, out of my constituency, whether it's a town, village, or hamlet — that haven't assumed, and they're the ones that are talking about forced amalgamation. It didn't start on this side.

I am being told by so many of them that when you look at the Garcea report and you read the Garcea report, that that's what they're saying, is forced amalgamation.

Mr. Addley: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've heard quite a bit in the last while about forced amalgamation. And I'm quoting from a document called "A Call to Action — Reforming and Revitalizing Urban Government in Saskatchewan". It says:

It is vital that this process begin immediately. Too often when important changes are necessary, people wait for the perfect moment to begin — when they have enough money, when everyone's in complete agreement, when they are certain they will have all the answers. All these conditions will never exist. The perfect moment to begin is now.

What I want to know is, we've been accused for the last two weeks of offering forced amalgamation, yet here's a document that says, from the chief of staff of the Sask Party . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. The time for the 75-minute debate has expired.

(1545)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 1 — Research and Development in Saskatchewan

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the end of my remarks today, I will be moving the following motion:

That this Assembly encourage the partnership of government, universities, research institutes, and private organizations in their continuing investment in and commitment to research and development in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday last I was pleased to rise in this House and inform members about our government's commitment to research and development. Our government recently approved a \$25 million investment in the Canadian Light Source Synchrotron through the Department of Economic and Co-operative Development. I'll say more about that later in my remarks, Mr. Speaker, but I'd like to outline some of our other investments in this very important area.

Introduced as part of the 2000-2001 provincial budget, a \$10 million innovation and science fund will help renew and build research infrastructure at this province's universities and research institutions, and perhaps more importantly will help to lever new federal research spending in Saskatchewan through matched funding programs.

It is anticipated that the fund will lever a R&D (research and development) pool of up to a hundred million dollars over the next four years. The fund will act as the province's source of funding for Saskatchewan-based projects submitted to the Canada Foundation for Innovation, in addition to research initiatives of strategic importance to the province.

Research and development is key to our future prosperity.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — If you look at it in an illustrated sort of a way, you can think of it as a wheel of fortune or perhaps the ever-expanding circles that you observe when you drop one small pebble in a pond.

R&D produces knowledge and technology used to enhance our productivity. Productivity enhancements generate economic growth. Economic growth attracts more investment. More investment allows further innovation, creating new programs and services, and forming new partnerships. So you can see, Mr. Speaker, that one small investment from the province can help create ever-widening circles of activity.

Traditionally, Saskatchewan spends less on research and development than most other Canadian provinces. In addition, based on Statistics Canada figures from 1995, federal spending on R&D in Saskatchewan is only 80 per cent of the national average. Furthermore, Saskatchewan universities only receive about 2.8 per cent of National Research Council's grants and funding — 20 per cent below the national average and seventh among the provinces.

But, Mr. Speaker, that was then and this is now. Recent and anticipated initiatives by the federal government have provided provinces with a unique opportunity to promote research and development. A prime example of this is the Canada Foundation for Innovation which will be investing \$1.9 billion in research infrastructure across the country.

While the CFI (Canada Foundation for Innovation) will fund up to 40 per cent of a project's capital cost, the remaining 60 per cent must come from other sources. Due to the public nature of many of these projects, matching provincial government funding is generally required. In May of 1999, the Medical Research Council of Canada and the province of Saskatchewan agreed to a cost-shared regional partnership program designed to increase the level of medical research expenditure in the province. This initiative, which is cost-shared 50/50, levered \$5 million in new federal funding for research in this province.

Another example of this collaborative approach is the efforts between the province, the National Research Council, and other stakeholders in the development of the Saskatchewan innovation blueprint. It is anticipated that the implementation of recommendations in the blueprint will lead to important cost-shared initiatives with federal agencies.

Further initiatives in this vein include the creation of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research which replaces the Medical Research Council of Canada this month. The institutes will consist of networks drawing together top researchers from across the country, and will focus on a full spectrum of research activities.

It is imperative for the province to support Saskatchewan researchers and research programs to help ensure that these individuals and these programs are key elements in the health institutes being established, and that a significant portion of CIHR (Canadian Institutes of Health Research) activity will be constructed in Saskatchewan.

So why establish a science and innovation fund? It's simple, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to keep those circles in the pond growing ever wider. Given the federal government's clear direction in increasing research expenditures and partnering with stakeholders and other governments, Saskatchewan needs a mechanism to capitalize on such opportunities.

The innovation and science fund will help renew and build the research infrastructure at the province's universities and research institutions, and help lever new federal research spending in Saskatchewan.

GenServe Laboratories officially opened last week at Innovation Place in Saskatoon. Money from the Canada-Saskatchewan Agri-Food Innovation Fund — funded two-thirds by federal government and one-third by the province — was used to buy equipment while the Saskatchewan Research Council will pay GenServe's \$140,000 annual operating costs for the first three years.

To quote from Agriculture Minister Lyle Vanclief: "Research is a key to the future strength of Saskatchewan's farmers and its farm economy."

Work done at the new Saskatoon lab will create opportunities for farmers down the road. At the same time as we are creating opportunities for farmers, Mr. Speaker, this type of project creates high-paying, high-tech jobs for the people of Saskatchewan.

And Saskatchewan is doing very well in the area of creating jobs, Mr. Deputy Speaker; in fact, very well. In fact information released by StatsCanada on Friday showed that Saskatchewan led Western Canada in job growth over the last 12 months.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — Fifteen thousand more people were employed last month than in March of 1999. More good news for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — The economic impact of agricultural biotechnology research and development in Saskatchewan is of great importance. There are approximately 25 R&D organizations located in the province. The sector now employs 1,240 workers with salaries totalling \$43 million.

Innovation Place — located in Saskatoon in my constituency of Saskatoon Meewasin and right next to the University of Saskatchewan — is recognized as one of the most successful research and development parks in North America. The primary focus of this research park was to create a science and technology incubator to foster the growth of the advanced technology industry in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, research and development is of major importance to our universities, and early last week we announced funding for key research and development projects at Saskatchewan's two universities.

This funding is provided through the provincial strategic initiative fund and the Canada Foundation for Innovation, and provides money for a specialized electron microscope at the University of Saskatchewan, a toxicity laboratory at the University of Saskatchewan, an information laboratory at the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) department of computer science, and an electron microscope for energy and environmental research at the University of Regina. Didn't want to leave them out.

The provincial government is also providing \$50,000 for the purchase of a lab scale dryer at the U of S bioprocessing lab. The strategic investment fund, renamed from the strategic initiative funds in the recent budget, complements the new \$10 million innovation and science fund.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I said at the beginning of my remarks today that I would have more to say about the Canadian Light Source Synchrotron. The Synchrotron is the largest scientific project in Canadian history.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — This project is going to put Saskatchewan on the scientific map. Researchers and scientists from all over Canada

— indeed from all over the world — will recognize the work being done there as leading edge.

As I explained in my member's statement, the Synchrotron represents unprecedented opportunities for Saskatoon and for the province as a whole — 2,000 person-years of employment in the construction phase alone plus 200 permanent positions when completed. It will generate \$35 million per year in new research and development spending, and greatly increase Saskatchewan's ability to make value-added products.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — As you can see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the rings of economic opportunity are continuing to widen. The facility at the University of Saskatchewan will be used by researchers in the fields of agriculture, biotechnology, mining, petrochemicals, and medicine, to name just a few. It will attract research projects from across Canada and around the world. Who knows, perhaps someone will figure out how to prevent coyotes from scavenging a dead cow so that we can reduce firearms needed to shoot them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — But seriously, Mr. Speaker, the Synchrotron project is a fine example of our co-operative approach to economic development in this province. I guess when you throw a stone, sometimes you hit a coyote.

The Synchrotron project is a fine example of our co-operative approach to economic development in this province — government, the private sector, the universities, and the community all working together.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Regina South:

That this Assembly encourage the partnership of government, universities, research institutes, and private organizations in their continuing investment in and commitment to research and development in Saskatchewan.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the member for Saskatoon Meewasin who has outlined in some detail as to why the universities, why the research facilities are so important, not only to the economy of Saskatoon and the economy of Regina, but in fact all of Saskatchewan's economy. And in fact this afternoon I want to spend some time talking about what these research centres do.

Some of the importance as to what they mean for Saskatchewan's new economy, and some of the bright lights that I think we have to look forward to over the coming years as these research centres really hit their stride.

As we know, and I think the member from Meewasin stated, the first research centre — the real true research park that we saw

here in Saskatchewan — was the Innovation Place park which is attached to the University of Saskatchewan, started in 1996-97, conceptually started then. The first tenants, of course, moved in in about 1980.

This park, as I understand, is largely modelled on some of the redevelopment that was being done down in Denver, Colorado. I don't know if anybody has been down to Denver from this Assembly, but it's very interesting to see how they've started to, back in the mid '70s, started to see how they could work on commercializing more of the knowledge and research which was being done in their institutions.

I was down in Denver, Colorado about six years ago. And it is in fact a truly impressive thing to go and take a look at the redevelopment that is happening in the south part of that city, almost all of it directly attached to the knowledge-based industries.

Saskatoon has seen many of these same benefits. And in fact Innovation Place is really a place that all Saskatchewan people can be extremely proud of. It is architecturally beautiful, it is extremely important economically in the attachment that it has to universities. The fact that it attracts in the kind of world-class researchers that it does, and the fact that we have been able to incubate some very good technological companies on this site is, I think, testament to the good work that's been done over the last 20-some years.

We need not go into a great deal of detail talking about some of the companies up there, but obviously we look at POS, we look at SED Systems, some of the very important work that's being done in all sorts of fields. Everything from biotechnology through to space science research.

In fact, Saskatoon has really benefited from this, as has Saskatchewan. It's helped put us, I think, on the map technologically.

In terms of Saskatoon's success and the University of Saskatchewan . . . And I want to spend a couple of minutes talking about this. It may seem strange for a Regina member to do so, but the success that Saskatoon's Innovation Place has, in fact, is felt throughout the province.

And I like the analogy that the member from Meewasin used about dropping the pebble and the ripples ever expanding. Because it's very much what has happened through these research centres.

(1600)

Take, for example, the work that has been done by a small company called Biostar. Now Biostar in fact was a commercialized venture. It was spun off — and I think it was 1994, 1993-94 — spun off really to commercialize a lot of the research that was being done by VIDO, which was the Veterinary Infectious Disease Organization at the university.

What the university was finding, and what the researchers were finding, is that there was a lot of good research happening. But there was a problem with getting it from the researchers' notebooks and tables and concepts and theories into production

so it could, in fact, help people involved in animal husbandry.

Biostar was set up largely to do this and really in many ways, it was one of our first . . . what you would call now dot-com type companies. This is the first of our real technological companies that started to spin off from the research that had been done at the universities.

Biostar has been a real success in terms of not only what it is highlighting for Saskatoon's researchers at the University of Saskatchewan, but also the impact it's having in the cattle industry both here in Saskatchewan and throughout North America.

VIDO and the work that the researchers do there is excellent work, but the difficulty is in commercializing it. And this is really one of the tough pieces that our researchers are facing these days, is how to get that information out, how do we commercialize it, and how do we get it into the hands of people who really need it.

The first speech I gave in this House in 1995, I spent some time talking about our need as a government and our need as a legislature to focus in very sincerely on how we move more work from simply being on the microscope to being in the marketplace. And this continues to be a very important part of our potential for economic development in this province.

I think that the examples in Saskatoon at Innovation Place — and whether it's through Biostar or whether it's through other examples of what's going on up there — are in fact very telling. I want to say for example, in the area of agriculture, one of the other very important initiatives which has come out of that research park and come out of what is happening in Saskatoon at Innovation Place is their work on new plants and in fact a planned biotechnology.

It's interesting to note that 35 years ago there was no canola grown in this province, which is really quite amazing if you think about it. Canola, as we all know, is a huge crop now in terms of both the overall value of it and also just in terms of the number of acres that are seeded. Thirty-five years ago there was no canola planted in this province, and so it is in fact a testament I think to the work which was done at the university, the work which has been done by our researchers, that we are now a world leader in canola growth and production.

Canola is an interesting example because it also, I think, points to the debate that over 35 years we have seen the introduction of this new crop. We've seen it go through various improvements, various enhancements, various modifications, and various names.

It leads us now today to a new set of issues that I think we need to grapple with and that is the question of genetic modification of foods — GM foods or GMOs, whichever you want to call them — genetic modified organisms. This is the next generation of issues which the researchers in our knowledge centres are going to have to grapple with. And in fact I believe that Innovation Place in Saskatoon is extremely well positioned to deal with this.

I received an e-mail — as I assume most members did — a few

days ago from Mr. Peter McCann. And he was talking about . . . It's entitled simply April 2000 issue of the AgBiotech Bulletin. I don't know if members take much chance to read these issues, but I found it very interesting in terms of what Mr. McCann had to say.

He was talking particularly about genetic modification of food, and of the work which is being done at the universities. And he says, and I quote here from his e-mail:

Its impact (this is agriculture genomics) on agriculture, nutrition and human health could be of similar magnitude to the impact of the computer on other spheres of activity.

I thought that was kind of an interesting thought. I had not really thought about this before. But the work which is being done in Saskatoon could have that kind of magnitude.

If you think about it in terms of canola and you go back and talk about what is happening there, here we have a \$3 billion industry — a \$3 billion industry based on canola, largely worked on here in Saskatchewan — and the changes are continuing to happen.

The debate though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is an important one, and I found that this was the most interesting part of the balance of the e-mail, that it talks about the debate that we are seeing throughout North America, throughout Europe, and in much of Asia about the impact of genetic modified foods.

As the member for Kindersley mentioned earlier today, he and I spent two weeks in Germany this summer on a parliamentary exchange. As part of that, it was interesting to listen to the dialogue that was happening among German legislators over the question of genetically modified crops. There is a huge concern, particularly in Europe, that GMOs and GM foods are in fact going to be a . . . are not . . . are going to be a harm.

This is an issue I think many of us here do not spend enough time contemplating; which we do not spend enough time contemplating in our universities, and I dare say that we do not spend enough time contemplating here in the legislature.

There is a move on in Europe which would require canola which is genetically modified to be sold separate from canola which is not genetically modified. Now for those members opposite who are farmers, they will know the problems that you have by combining these two sets of seeds.

Can you imagine having to keep track of the genetic modified crop and keep it separate from the other. Today most of it is simply meshed together. And it's, as I understand, virtually impossible to tell apart.

But in Europe, the contemplation by European Parliament and particularly led by France, is that they want to see a separation of these kind of food products. This is an important issue and is something that, if you think about its implications for Saskatchewan farmers, could have some very potential adverse effects.

Most of us when we think about the genetic modified foods, we may have heard the fact that McCains has decided not to accept

genetically modified potatoes. This is not an issue which particular affects Saskatchewan, but I think it does show the fact that there is a large Canadian company — Canada being one of the leaders in genetic modified food products and the development of it — a major Canadian company that is refusing to accept them not on scientific grounds, not on scientific grounds, but on the ground that the public is not accepting of it.

An Hon. Member: — Well you don't have to worry about it because the marketplace will take care of it.

Mr. Thomson: — Well now this is an interesting comment. The member for Humboldt says we don't need to worry about it because the marketplace will take care of it.

An Hon. Member: — That's right. The argument is that the cost of it is just too high.

Mr. Thomson: — Well this is exactly the problem you've got and if you . . . let me retrace my steps for a minute.

The problem we have in Europe is that the European Parliament may very well, particularly driven by France which is attempting to protect its own markets, may very well poison the atmosphere for genetically modified food products.

Not out of . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the members opposite find this to be a laughing matter, I'm not sure their constituents would share the humour in this. But what we've got is a situation here where we may very well be having to deal with this on a very quick basis. The marketplace is in fact not accepting, not accepting of genetic modified food. And this is a real problem for us.

Fine, in potatoes it may not be a big issue because at this point we don't have a great deal of potato production. But when we . . . if we translate that through to what France is looking at doing in terms of genetic modified canola, imagine what the impact is on farmers in your riding. Imagine what the impact is if all of a sudden the switch is going to have to be away from genetic modified canola, which has been grown — I think I've got the number here in terms of the number of bushels. I think it's 75 per cent, one the member said — 75 percentage is modified.

Now we're fortunate in Saskatchewan that people have had some time to adjust to this. I think because of our close connection to the growth of these products, that we have a better understanding in many ways of what in fact biotechnology — agricultural biotechnology means.

In fact as says here in this newsletter that I'm reading, an Angus Reid poll was conducted. And the Angus Reid poll says 87 per cent of Saskatchewan people know about genetically modified food products.

This is in fact the highest in Canada, with the exception of Vancouver which also had 87 per cent noting awareness. The difficulty we have is that fully two-thirds of people either said that there would be no benefits, were uncertain of the benefits, or believe that there would be a detrimental effect of having genetically modified products.

This is a fairly major concern if you think about it and the potential impact it has for us. Certainly a third of people were able to identify the fact it improves yields; certainly people were able to say it may reduce the amount of reliance upon pesticides; people believe that it may provide better food quality. But there is an underlying concern among many people that these foods are not . . . that they are somehow foreign, and as such are not what we should be dedicating ourselves to.

I say this not because it is the number one problem, but because it is obviously an issue we need to deal with to make sure that the marketplace does not get too far out of sync with what we are doing in the science labs and under the microscope.

And I think that this is a very important issue for our researchers to deal with. The University of Saskatchewan is in fact aware of this and they note that they are looking at ways to deal with this very issue.

For instance, there is an increased focus at our university and across . . . the University of Saskatchewan and across the nation on the need to focus in on the ethics, the environmental concern, the science of it, of growing these various products. And I think that this is a real positive to see that they are starting to move into these other directions, because this is an extremely important area for all us.

I think it's also very interesting to note the important scientific work which is being outside of agriculture in other areas. For instance, I note that the Royal University Hospital has developed a . . . I don't want to say a vaccine, but they have developed a treatment for cold sores. This is of course . . . the University of Saskatchewan's medical research as we know in the past has certainly . . . when Sylvia Fedoruk was Lieutenant Governor I think she was a symbol in many ways of some of the great scientific research that had been done in this province around cobalt medicine.

We are now moving, and we see this happening with our researchers, a movement towards dealing with other issues. The fact that they are being able to deal with the virus that causes cold sores is, I think, a very important part of what's happening at the university in terms of medical research.

Saskatoon does not have a monopoly on all the good news and all the good research though — I hate to tell my Saskatoon colleagues. There is some dissension I notice among our ranks that they may have, but Regina is only a step or two behind I think in terms of the work that we are seeing down here, that we are seeing being done here by our researchers.

I'm very proud to talk about the new research park which is being built adjacent to my riding. Over at the University of Regina, on the south part of the campus in what is becoming known as the knowledge corridor, there are two new buildings under construction. These two new buildings will focus . . . in many ways they will mirror what has happened up at Innovation Place and they will serve as an incubator for many new businesses and new technological advances.

The two areas that the researchers at the University of Regina have identified that they want to focus in on are changes around petroleum, both the technological: how do we extract more

petroleum; how do we add value to the petroleum; how do we deal with Saskatchewan's heavy oil resources; how do we make that more profitable for companies to extract.

At the same time the Petroleum Technology Research Centre is also dealing with some of the environmental issues. So for instance, we know that there is a partnership going on with the federal government to deal with the greenhouse gas issue. I think most members in this House were shocked when we found that the Prime Minister had signed the Kyoto Agreement without any real knowledge as to what its impact would be on our western economy, but nevertheless we are stepping up to the plate in an attempt to deal with our commitments under that.

(1615)

The Technology Research Centre will have, as a large part of it, research dedicated to deal with climate change and the mitigation of the problem the greenhouse gas has caused. There was an article certainly in *The Globe and Mail* a few weeks ago that members probably did see showing that Saskatchewan has in fact seen an increase in its greenhouse gas production.

This is problematic but not completely unexpected. Obviously most of our electrical production comes from burning fossil fuels, burning coal in particular, and unless we scrub the carbon dioxide it's exercised out into the environment. As we know the economic growth, particularly in north central Saskatchewan, has facilitated and required the addition of more coal-fired plants and we have increased the amount of power production down in the Estevan area in order to produce more electrical energy. The result is that we have increased the amount of CO₂ that we are dumping into the atmosphere. Now that in itself may be . . .

An Hon. Member: — Venting.

Mr. Thomson: — Sorry, yes, venting into the atmosphere . . . may be of some concern, but I am pleased that Saskatchewan is also partnering with the federal government and with industry to provide research to deal with how to mitigate some of those impacts.

And I think that this is one of the things that in the next decade that we will see great advances on that will stand the members . . . successive members from Regina will have the ability to stand and talk about the great things that are happening only a few blocks from here in terms of dealing with climate change and new technology around it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I won't spend too much longer today talking, extolling the virtues of what is happening in our province. But I do want to say that the work which is happening along the Petroleum Technology Research Centre, I want to highlight for just a couple of minutes.

This centre is something I'm very proud of. It is something that this government has worked very hard on and it is something the university really I think shows the partnership and the great things that can happen when we work together. But the initial idea for it came about probably some eight years ago when

professor, I believe it was Amit Chakma, brought forward the suggestion that he wanted to do a world centre for petroleum research here in Saskatchewan.

I think at the time a lot of people, you know, thought, oh that's kind of an interesting idea; that's a nice idea. I don't know what that means but shouldn't it be in some OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) nation? Why are we doing it here?

And maybe the members opposite I think at the time would think, why would we not do it in Alberta? But we do it here because in fact the people that have the idea and the person in this very particular case that had the vision, makes his home here; was attracted to work at the University of Regina and in fact is one of the great minds in Canadian science today and is recognized as such.

Out of that idea some eight years ago, we have been able to now get to the point where Petroleum Technology Research Institute has been established, a research centre has been established, with a series of very practical objectives. I think people often think what R&D work is all, you know, kind of out there; that there is not in fact the practical applications that there are to it.

Petroleum Technology Research Centre is a very practical, down to earth, grounded, perhaps undergrounded, you might say, an issue. Its purpose first and foremost is to enhance the production and value of Saskatchewan oil and natural gas resources with an emphasis on heavy oil. One of the difficulties we have in this province, as you know, is the fact that we do not have a great amount of sweet light crude oil. We have a great deal of heavy oil and, of course as members from oil producing ridings will know, it is in fact more expensive to pull out and refine.

We have certainly seen some advantages . . . or some advancements rather, in the past years in Weyburn where we have seen the new CO₂ initiative which will greatly enhance heavy oil recovery out of the existing wells. We have certainly seen some enhancements here in Regina as we deal with the heavy oil upgrader which has, despite some concerns over the way it was financed, nevertheless is a boon to our economy.

This technological centre though at the university which is located not many blocks from this Legislative Building is also aimed at developing new technology to improve the economic health of the oil industry, expand employment, and reduce industry costs.

It is interesting to note this is not a partnership we are doing solely by ourselves. Nor is this a partnership we're doing solely . . . or in a simple partnership with government. This is a partnership that involves industry as well, as well as our universities. It is showing great co-operation I think among these various groups.

It is also going to have the added benefit of allowing a spinoff within the university of a more academic group of petroleum engineers which will hopefully focus even further in on how we can continue to make better use of our oil resources.

Saskatchewan's oil sector, as you know, is extremely important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to this province's economic growth. It is extremely important to the fiscal position that this province finds itself in, and it is something that we need to turn our attention to making sure that we are able to maximize the value while mitigating the adverse effects of it. This is exactly what the PTRC, the Petroleum Technology Research Centre, is envisioned to do and what I believe it will do.

I find it very interesting that within this belt of lands around us that's Wascana Park, we have within it such a venerable institution as the Legislative Assembly that speaks to the vision that the leaders a hundred years ago had — nearly a hundred years now — had about what they thought this province would be and the vision of a democracy and the ability to move this province forward.

A few kilometres down the park, we have now a new centre which is looking at how we preserve and enhance the economic benefits that we've inherited in this province. And I think that this really does say a great deal about the testament of Saskatchewan people and the foresight of our governments, both the governments of old, the government of today, and governments that may come down the road.

The partnerships that we've established in our universities, the partnerships we've established with academics, the partnerships we've established with industry are today, and will tomorrow, continue to provide benefits to ordinary Saskatchewan people — whether you're the farmer growing canola on your field or you're the young guy out working in the oil rigs. These things have a very real impact on your life, and it's something that I think we are all very proud of.

We need to remember that in order to farm smart, in order to work smart, we need to make sure that we are fully integrated right from the microscope through to the marketplace. And that is what these funds are doing, that is what the member for Saskatoon Meewasin spoke for, and that is what this government believes in.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very pleased to second the motion moved by the member for Saskatoon Meewasin and to follow her excellent comments in support of this. And with that, I'll take my seat.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — I would like to begin speaking to the motion put forward by the member from Saskatoon Meewasin and I'll end with an amendment that I would like to put forward.

The motion as it begins is that it says that this Assembly encourage the partnership of government and universities, research institutes and so on and so forth. I find that rather interesting, Mr. Speaker, because what exactly does it mean to have a partnership with the government? And if this means assistance with funding, I'm not so sure that the partnership in many cases will work because the government has cut back on many aspects of funding for education and research.

And, more likely, I feel that partnership would mean that the government would have some facet of control, which means

that they'd control what would be researched, they'd control who would research it, they would control where it would be researched, they would control how it would be researched. And historically, Mr. Speaker, that's what a partnership with an NDP government is all about.

But if the partnership does mean funding, then I suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that those research areas that will get the government funds will be those that will give the results that the government has pre-decided that they want to get.

And if the members opposite want examples of this, we need only mention the Garcea report and the Stabler report. They were both paid research papers and they were told prior to doing their work and prior to being paid, what the mandate was and what the results were supposed to tell.

Anyone that might have an innovative or original idea . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order.

Ms. Harpauer: — Anyone with an original or innovative idea, I suggest to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would find out that there would be no funds available.

Another question that needs answering on this motion is in the terms, partnership — I've lost my place. It's interesting that the members opposite bring about all the sorts of research that has been done, and in addition, they keep bragging about the Synchrotron to the University of Saskatchewan. And I don't question that that was an excellent project. It's a great asset for Saskatchewan.

But the other member opposite was bragging and went on for some length about the development of canola. Interestingly enough, canola was developed by Dr. Keith Downey, and it was financed not by this government, it wasn't financed by the Saskatchewan government — it was financed by Agriculture Canada. So although it has been a great development, Saskatchewan cannot run with the fame for that.

I also find it's rather interesting when they talk about research and all the money and interest that the government has in research, but then in today's *Leader Post* there's an article that states, and I quote:

The University of Saskatchewan is behind a \$100-million eight ball when it comes to looking after its billion dollars worth of facilities, according to the senior university official.

Becker estimates the U of S needs to spend 10 to 11 per cent of the total value of its facilities to catch up on maintenance that's been put off for lack of . . . (funding).

Unless the problem is addressed, the university could end up with more problems, like closing entire buildings. It has already shut down the College building, and the Physical . . . Building was torn down after an emergency evacuation.

The people who used the buildings had to find new space but that's not easy . . .

So I suggest that if this government is backing research, the U of S

is the facility where a lot of research is done, so somehow I think we should keep the buildings standing so that we could have research in the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have three school-age children — three daughters — and all of them, in my beliefs, are exceptional, but the eldest, Crystal, is very close to completing her grade 12 and she has some direction now of where she wants her future to go, what she wants to do. Her marks are exceptional. She's very focused, she's very self-disciplined, and she is a very diligent student.

She will complete her grade 12. She'll have four level 30 maths, she's going to have four level 30 sciences, and two level 30 socials. And I have no doubts that she'll pursue her education and career in the scientific field. So access to research facilities and research data will really assist her, Mr. Speaker, in furthering her education. And I think that's great.

The sad thing is, at the end of the day, I really truly fear that she'll have to leave the province to seek employment in her scientific field. And I will read all about her successes that she'll achieve somewhere out of the province rather than within it.

We can talk about partnerships all we want, but if we do nothing to provide the environment to encourage people and industries to stay here in Saskatchewan who are going to time and time watch our young people be trained here to work elsewhere.

The member from Saskatoon Meewasin mentioned that we have created jobs, that we're doing very well in creative jobs. But how many of those jobs are high-tech jobs? That's not included in the statistics that she's been giving us. Or how many of them were just minimum wage jobs?

And that's not to say that we don't need minimum wage jobs — we do. But we also need to keep our youngest and our brightest here. We need to give the environment that will encourage them to stay here.

Another point in the private members' motion is partnership for development, and again, I find that very, very interesting. This government has stifled development and they mentioned economic development more than any other government has before it. It doesn't supply the tax breaks, it doesn't supply the infrastructure, it doesn't supply the incentives, it doesn't supply enough freedom from restrictions to encourage any economic development. Any development that takes place in this province is in spite of this government; it is not because of it.

(1630)

And in the member's motion, they want to drag in private organization into their partnership agreement. Why is that not surprising? I find it rather ironic that the members opposite want to draw private organizations into the partnership since we've seen an exodus of private businesses from this province since this government was in power in 1991. And a good example of that is the Canadian Bible College which has just announced that it too will be leaving.

The government's policies and so-called initiatives have stifled growth and productivity in Saskatchewan, and this recent budget, which some businesses had hoped would be the lifeline, has in fact turned out to be another reason for businesses to leave the province.

So we can form partnerships all we want, but with this government we'll still be contending with a massive brain drain, and it concerns me that my daughter will be one of them. Real economic development needs people; and with this province's tax system, they're leaving the province.

The government has shown no initiative in supporting education in the last budget, and in fact, they've implemented a few cuts to post-secondary students. So because of that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move the following amendment, seconded by the member from Redberry:

That the following words after "Assembly" be deleted and substituted with:

regrets that the provincial government's recent decisions that affect students negatively, such as the claw back of millennium scholarships, the cancellation of the provincial student job program with no warning, and the ending of the six-month interest-free period of student loans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to speak to the motion to begin with, and I will speak to the amendment later.

The private members' motion really is too little. The government really has given too little too late for a partnership with government, and too little too late with the universities, and too little too late with the research institutes and private organizations.

And I'd like to just speak on a bit concerning research and development. It is an extremely important aspect in this province. And we have entered a technological-based society — a global village — and over the years, we have seen many benefits from this research and development. But before we go on to that, we have to use these technologies in research and development to the benefit of our province and of our people.

And in many places in rural Saskatchewan, these research and development innovations and initiatives can be used to create businesses and economic development in rural areas. The only problem with that is we have to have the infrastructure in place in rural Saskatchewan and small-town Saskatchewan to take advantage of these developments.

And the first thing a company does when it goes to look at building a plant or making an investment in a community, it looks at the roads. You have to have good roads to get your equipment and materials in and out and your finished product . . . produce of course. If you have a manufacturing capacity, you'll have families that are living and working in the community, and you'll need proper schooling for the students of the employees of these . . .

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

Ms. Jones: — Mr. Speaker, I would ask for a ruling as to whether or not the amendment is in order. As from what I heard of the amendment and your explanation of it, it doesn't seem to speak to any of the subject matter that was contained in the original motion. So I would therefore ask for a ruling.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On the point of order as raised by the member opposite, this amendment deals directly with education which is part of the amendment put forward by that member, Mr. Speaker. So it is very relevant and very cogent to the arguments being presented.

The Deputy Speaker: — I thank the hon. member for Saskatoon Meewasin for raising the point of order, and I thank the Government House Leader for addressing the said point of order.

The Chair made a choice or a decision when the amendment was presented that in fact the amendment is in order in that in private members' day motions, amendments have to be clearly off target or off of the subject to be deemed to be out of order. We have a tradition in this Assembly of motions and amendments being considered to be in order.

And I'll further point out as the Opposition House Leader said, both tend to surround education and the amendment clearly does, so the amendment is in order.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you. I will continue to speak to the motion and to the amendment. As I was saying, in order to take advantage of these new innovations with research and development in rural towns and areas, we need to have a good basis for economic development.

And when you have factories, you need people to work at those factories. And the companies that are setting up these factories look at the community involved and see if they have proper roads to get material in and out and getting their finished product out to markets, also schools for the children of the people that work at the factories, and of course hospitals and proper health care.

And in too many cases we have seen that companies take a look at many areas in Saskatchewan and they've seen that the government has not kept up the standards and the infrastructure to warrant investments in areas. And I believe the government has made a big deal about their support of research and development and the partnership with universities. But they also have to take a look at what we're going to do with those innovations, and put in the infrastructure that will allow the people of Saskatchewan to take advantage of all the things coming out of the innovations.

Also the other problem that we have, in the past 10 years we've seen our best and brightest leaving Saskatchewan because of the government's lack of commitment to our youth. And it is rather ironic that the member opposite draws private organizations into the debate since we have seen an exodus of business since this government came into power in 1991.

The government's policy and so-called initiatives have stifled growth and productivity in Saskatchewan and this budget — which some businesses hope would be a lifeline — has in fact turned out to be more of a deterrent.

As Saskatchewan is dealing with the brain drain, this government has done little to nothing to address this very serious problem. Students have left our province in droves and all we have left is reading about their successes elsewhere.

It's commonly said that Saskatchewan people have built many economies in this world. They've built the economy of Alberta and built many areas in the United States. And our youth and our graduates have gone around the world to develop and better the economies in the areas that they've lived in. It's up to this government to keep these people in Saskatchewan to better the province that they were born in.

It is typical of the NDP to talk about their commitment to students and the future of our province when actually they have done more to hold back our youth.

A recent example is the cancellation of the student summer employment program. This is a plan that many students and businesses have counted on in the past, and it's . . . many students have relied on this program to assist in paying for their education and pay down some of their student loan debt. The private businesses that the member opposite brings into debate also counted on this program as a means to hire local students and give them some real world experience.

And it's very important that our young people have this experience, not only in the financial resources that are very important, but to give the young people experience and experience of working in Saskatchewan. Unfortunately this government has taken that away from them.

But all that they have to . . . have done to students does not end there. They have cancelled the interest-free portion of the student loan repayment program. Now this interest-free status allowed students a six-month grace period to find gainful employment before they had to begin repayment on their loans.

To make matters worse, this is . . . that our graduating students will have to leave Saskatchewan because of the lack of professional opportunity here at home.

Now I'd just like to read a bit of comments from our leader and our party concerning these various announcements.

As our news release said, the NDP targets students in the latest tax. Saskatchewan post-secondary students are the latest victim of the NDP tax grab. And on April 4th our leader, Mr. Elwin Hermanson, blasted the NDP-Liberal . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. I wish to remind the hon. member for Redberry Lake that it is not proper to use the proper names of currently sitting members of the Legislative Assembly. To be more specific, you did so in naming your party leader. So I'd just ask that you be aware of the prohibition on using proper names.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I thought I was in

order because I was quoting from a document but I will certainly name the member. He's the Saskatchewan Party leader and the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Now he blasted the NDP-Liberal coalition government for cancelling the six-month interest free grace period on the Saskatchewan student loans following graduation. And the minister . . . NDP-Liberal Finance minister was bragging about a \$350 a year tax benefit for graduating students.

Now what really happened is the government were doing a bit of a shell game. In an example, if a graduating student has \$10,000 Saskatchewan student loan at the current interest rate of 9.5 per cent, the latest tax grab would cost him \$475. That's \$125 more than your so-called tax cut.

And that's I guess another example of the student loan tax grab by the NDP-Liberal government. Both the NDP and the Liberals promised to make post-secondary education more accessible and now both are inflicting a massive tax grab on Saskatchewan students.

Also a recent announcement was concerning the millennium scholarship fund. Now the government confiscated this millennium scholarship fund from almost 4,000 students. And it's just an example of what the government has been doing.

And what kind of a message does that give to our young people? When our young people go out and apply for these loans and scholarships and after they've been accepted, they must have felt terrible when they realized that they weren't going to receive any benefit from it.

And the NDP government was keeping \$9.8 million in millennium scholarship funds that should have gone to thousands of Saskatchewan students. Now this money should have been returned immediately to the students, but unfortunately haven't. As was said, that Mr. Romanow was acting like a confused Robin Hood, stealing from the poor to give to the rich. The millennium scholarships were supposed to help students, not Mr. Romanow's NDP government.

Now the federal government set up the millennium scholarship fund in 1999 to increase access to post-secondary education to low- and middle-income students as a complement to existing provincial program. This year 3,870 Saskatchewan students won millennium scholarships averaging \$2,500 each.

And that money should have went to the students, but instead the NDP government decided to confiscate the millennium scholarships from needy students . . . from needy students neither increases accessibility to post-secondary education nor complement provincial aid programs. And the government is simply reducing provincial student bursaries by the amount of each student's federal millennium scholarship and then using the windfall money to backfill provincial operating grants to the university.

(1645)

It goes on to say that the big losers in this scholarship confiscation scheme are the very students the millennium scholarship fund was intended to help. And I think it's very

poor judgment on the part of the provincial government to have this happen.

But it's not only the post-secondary students that have been hurt by this government. K to 12 education has been grossly underfunded by this government to the tune of \$380 million. School boards have seen increased dependency on local taxpayers. Education portion of property taxes in many areas pay more than 40 per cent of the local school boards. In several school districts the local taxes account for over 7 per cent of the funding.

Throughout this winter I attended many, many tax revolt meetings, and that was the biggest problem that the people of Redberry Lake had. They were very upset of the high portion of the tax that they had to pay on their property tax bill. And this government just never, never got the hint and are not helping the Saskatchewan people, especially in rural Saskatchewan, with this problem.

And this goes to the very heart of other issues that come up. The amalgamation situation — the forced amalgamation — and what effect it has . . . it will have on rural Saskatchewan and the dampening effect it will have on economic activity. And it goes on and on.

Of course the biggest problem for businesses in Saskatchewan after they've had the research and development and they've had the innovations and the products to bring forward, if they want to set up a shop in Saskatchewan, there's a high tax rate that they have to pay in the province. And the recent expanded PST is just another dampening effect on businesses in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I would at this time like to second the amendment put forward by the member from Watrous.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, today we're talking about a Bill to promote research and development. But what has this government done for post-secondary education? I guess we'd have to say there's a lot of problems in post-secondary education as there is in all education in the province of Saskatchewan today.

We believe that we should promote our youth, but let's look at the facts of the government.

I had a girl in my constituency, a young lady actually, who was attending the University of Saskatchewan. She applied . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . no, she probably will be now though. She applied in September. She received a student loan. This young lady got married in October. Upon getting married, she had to file a new form and was then informed that she would not be now eligible for the student loan.

So now, not only is she not eligible for a student loan next year to complete her education, but she has to pay back the money that she received this year. This girl has found this a great hardship. A new young married couple and now they have to pay back the student loan that she has already used and now will not be eligible.

And this is the government that believes in students and wants to keep our children in Saskatchewan and educate them in Saskatchewan.

This is the same old story. This government puts the people of Saskatchewan last, and all their talk about the belief in education and keeping our young people here is just empty rhetoric.

Another issue is the student loans. Many, many students depend on a loan to go to school. They need to get a job when they get out of school so that they can start paying back their student loans in good faith, and many of them want to and believe that they should pay back their student loans, Mr. Speaker. However, this government has decided that the minute that they get out of university they should be able to start paying back the interest on their loans.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, how can a student start paying back the interest on a loan before they even have had a chance to access a job? Yet this government does not care.

The next legislation that this government is bringing in is to hinder students from getting summer jobs. Students of Saskatchewan need summer jobs, especially this year when many of the students are sons and daughters of farmers and the dollars are very, very tight. They were depending on these student jobs to help them go back to university next fall. But what does this government do? They cancel the partnership program for students.

So how many jobs are there going to be for students there? How many Crown corporations are going to hire students this summer? Many of those Crowns depended on the partnership program. I'd like the government to answer how many students is SaskTel going to hire. In my constituency I understand they're not hiring anyone this summer. Is this a direct result of the partnership program cancellation?

And this is the government who drove the Canadian Bible College out of Saskatchewan. No, no, we can't make any room for change in Saskatchewan. We'll just keep the rules the same way they've always been.

Doesn't matter if we have a Bible college or not. We'll let it go to Alberta rather than get out of the mud and find a way for them to stay so they can use their credits. Oh no, we wouldn't want to do that. That would be too easy. We'll let them leave. We'll let the 500 students leave and all the faculty and all the spin-off benefits. We'll let them leave the province of Saskatchewan. That would be easier.

This is a government that says that they believe in the young and in a higher education, yet they do everything to make access to higher education more difficult.

Well, Mr. Speaker, our young people have a choice and many are choosing to leave. Some of them are opting to leave and get a job in Alberta where they can make good dollars and they could actually keep more of their dollars in their pockets, rather than stay in Saskatchewan and get an education.

This government is all talk and no action, and what is more

ironic is that the government says they want to work with business when they are the government that works diligently every day to drive business out of this province.

I move this debate be now adjourned.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:53 p.m.

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