

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise on behalf of citizens of the Cypress Hills constituency petitioning the government to reduce fuel taxes by 10 cents a litre. And the prayer reads as follows.

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.

And the petition is signed by individuals from the Consul, Eastend, and Maple Creek areas.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to present petitions on behalf of the good people of the Humboldt constituency and the area surrounding it who are concerned about the high prices of gasoline and asking to have the taxes lowered. And the petition . . . the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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.

And the signators on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Humboldt, Lanigan, and Regina and Middle Lake.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition as well today to stop the municipal reserve account confiscation:

Whereby 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 people that have signed this petition are from St. Brieux and Yellow Creek. Thank you.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well on behalf of citizens concerned about enforced municipal amalgamation. 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.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of St. Brieux, Lake Lenore, and Pathlow, Mr. Speaker, as well as Melfort.

I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present petitions and this one deals with the 10 cent a litre tax cut. Reading the prayer:

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.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petition I present today is signed by individuals from the communities of Melfort and Kinistino.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also present a petition in regards to the high price of fuel. And the prayer reads as follows:

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 per litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

And it's signed by people from Shamrock, Earl Grey, and Stoughton.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also stand to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens concerned about the forced 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 forced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

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

And this is signed by people from Annaheim, St. Gregor, and Muenster.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present a petition on behalf of people in Swift Current and area concerned about their hospital. Mr. Speaker, the petition calls on the provincial government to assist in the regeneration plan for the Swift Current Regional Hospital.

And it's signed by people from the city of Swift Current.

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

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

on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan who are very concerned about the issue of amalgamation:

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.

I present this on behalf of people from Cupar and Southey.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, I also have petitions that I picked up at an RM (rural municipality) meeting last night, approximately 550. The prayer reads:

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 as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

These petitions come from the Abbey, Lancer, Forget, Stoughton, Heward, Carlyle, Arcola, Balgonie, White City, Edenwold, Pilot Butte. In fact there's a large number, Mr. Speaker, from the Regina Wascana Plains area.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too present petitions on . . . with citizens concerned of the fuel tax . . . 10 cent a litre fuel tax. The prayer reads as follows:

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.

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

Signatures on this petition are from the Indian Head, Moose Jaw, and Southey and Cupar area. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to reduce the 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.

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

From the Southey, Earl Grey area.

I so present.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to read regarding the fuel tax. The petition reads:

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.

The petition is signed by good citizens of Southey, Melfort, and Strasbourg. I so present.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition in regards to the reduction of fuel tax. The prayer reads as follows:

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.

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

Petitioners, Mr. Speaker, are from Cupar and Southey. I so present.

Mr. Hart: — I too, Mr. Speaker, have a petition to present on behalf of the citizens calling for a reduction of fuel tax by 10 cents a litre. The prayer reads as follows:

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.

And the petition is signed by citizens of Raymore, Strasbourg, Southey, and Shamrock.

I do so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also bring a petition regarding the reduction of fuel taxes.

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.

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

And I have petitioners signed from Cupar and Earl Grey.

I so present. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition regarding enforced municipal amalgamation. And the prayer reads:

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 petition is signed from individuals from Belle Plaine.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition opposed to forced municipal amalgamation. 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 forced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

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

The petition is signed by the good citizens of Cupar and Southey. I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

To not expand the provincial sales tax;

To halt plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

To provide funding for the Swift Current hospital;

To abandon plans to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan some students from the schools of Bruno and Cudworth, 38 in total.

And I must say, Mr. Speaker, that it is indeed a pleasure to have these students here today because I hold especially the students from Bruno and the staff very near and dear to my heart as I worked with special needs children in that school for 10 years, and so I'm always happy to have them come to the legislature so we can have a chance to discuss the issues of the day.

Accompanying the students, Mr. Speaker, are teacher, Mr. Jake Jmaeff and Mr. Brad Hauber, and chaperons, Dianne Lepage, Michelle Hoppe, and Rhea Lavoie.

And the students have issued some questions in advance for me, questions that they, as the wonderful students they are throughout Saskatchewan, and especially from that area, concerns about agriculture and taxation and as well as forced amalgamation. So I look forward to meeting with you after question period and discussing these issues.

Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is my pleasure to introduce some students as well from my constituency in Saskatoon Northwest. We have grade 7 students in your west gallery from St. George School in Saskatoon. They are accompanied by, I think, four teachers: Ms. Troesch, Ms. Foster, Ms. Koller, and Ms. Smith.

And St. George School has a total enrolment of 245 students with 11 teachers. The principal is Ms. Laura Foley. And St. George is a community-based neighbourhood school with strong parental and community support.

And I look forward to meeting with the students, as I have in the past during the September election, later this afternoon where we can share some refreshments and address some of the concerns that may have.

And please join with me in welcoming them into the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, I also want to join my colleague, the Minister of Education, in welcoming this class from Saskatoon.

I want to especially welcome a dear cousin of mine, a family member — Dallas. Dallas is here with this class. Dallas, whose mother was my first cousin, is now Dallas Gold. But I want to extend a very, very special welcome to Dallas. And I really do hope that your day at the Assembly here is both pleasant and informative.

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I also want to take this opportunity again, to you and through you, to introduce in your gallery, my brother John and his wife Nora.

John and Nora are here visiting from Manitoba. And it's a very special visit, Mr. Speaker, because my brother John is going to be going to Kosovo on Sunday as part of his tour as a member of the army. And I want to point out that we're very pleased to have the opportunity to meet with him and spend some time with him this morning.

And to also ensure that on your trip and on your tour of duty, brother, God be with you, and good luck.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to join my colleague in welcoming the students from Cudworth and Bruno and the staff as well. I spent about a decade in that school division and know the high quality of education that's being presented there to the students. So welcome here and have a good time meeting with your MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) at the Dairy Queen. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Sandra Schmirler Olympic Gold Park

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to give the Assembly a progress report on a very special project that is underway in the community of Biggar. The Sandra Schmirler Olympic Gold Park. Biggar is the hometown of Sandra Schmirler. Last year the community decided to construct a park in her honour as a tribute to their hero's outstanding international achievement and Olympic gold medal. Her community and province have rightfully redoubled efforts to show proper tribute to Sandra after her recent passing.

The community has been fundraising for months and I'm happy to report that they have now raised the necessary funds for completion of the park. Now is the time to thank some people for lending a hand to this valuable project.

I want to pay tribute to all those in the community who are working so hard, especially to Judy Redlick and Jerry Besse. I also want to thank the many, many individuals who contributed money to the project.

Companies which made substantial contributions include Prairie Malt, the credit union, UGG (United Grain Growers Limited), CN (Canadian National), the UTU (United Transportation Union), Westwinds Esso, the Royal Bank, CIBC (Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce), Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation, and the Association for Community Living.

The federal government also contributed substantial funds to the project, as has the province of Saskatchewan through SaskPower, which we just learned today, the final major piece in the puzzle is in place. This park, to be officially opened on August 6, will be a fitting legacy for a fine person and a clear sign of the esteem in which Sandra was held not just by the people of Biggar but all of the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Good News In Economic Statistics

Mr. Harper: — In Tory land of gloom and doom, Mr. Speaker, there comes two more good news announcements from the Saskatchewan economy, which should wipe away the crocodile tears of the opposition. But I say should because it probably won't, because good news is not in their vocabulary.

First, new car sales. And the opposition says, who could afford to buy new cars in Saskatchewan? Well, Mr. Speaker, according to StatsCanada, 21 per cent more people bought new cars in February of this year than February of last year. In fact, Saskatchewan led the country in increased new car sales at 21 per cent, while Alberta was at 10 per cent, where — I'm told — there is no sales tax.

Yesterday the member from Regina South told us about the natural gas drilling. There is good news in the oil patch as well. April sale of Crown petroleum and natural gas netted the province of Saskatchewan \$5.68 million more in February than the February sale.

Most of these sales were in Kindersley, Lloydminster, Estevan, Weyburn, the Swift Current areas, and I'm happy to share the good news with those members.

As well, Mr. Speaker, in the first quarter of this year 603 new wells were drilled — good for jobs, good for the local economy, and good for Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Report of Children's Advocate

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Children's Advocate released a scathing report condemning the government's handling of children in its care. The Minister of Social Services responded to this report by criticizing the Saskatchewan Party for not raising this issue in question period. Of course the reason we didn't raise it in question period is that the report was embargoed until it was tabled in the House after question period.

But of course the minister may have forgotten that little rule. But even after it was brought to the minister's attention, both the minister and his staff continued to condemn the Saskatchewan Party for not raising the issue in question period. Obviously the minister is not wanting to let the facts stand in the way of his partisanship.

Mr. Speaker, statements made by the minister show a deep disrespect for the traditions of this House by a veteran member who should know better. I ask that he apologize for saying the Saskatchewan Party should have ignored the rules, as the Liberal leader did, and broken the media embargo.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

International Special Librarians Day

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many fine and eloquent parliamentary phrases that we in our profession never tire of using. They are as natural to the tongue, as Hamlet would have said, as caviar to the general.

Undoubtedly one of the most common lines heard daily in these corridors and in our offices is this, Mr. Speaker. I can't find the answer to this; somebody call Tim Prince quick. Or variations on a theme — call Michele Howland, call Leslie Polsom, call Jane Blackett, call Laura Pogue.

These people, as you know, Mr. Speaker, are the information geniuses at our Legislative Library, the most visible members of the very capable library staff led by Chief Librarian, Marian Powell.

We mention them but once a year — which is not nearly often enough — on this day because this is International Special Librarians Day; a day on which we recognize the contributions and the necessity of those who run special libraries — the law, medical, scientific, and legislative libraries.

Their theme this year is "Navigating the World's Knowledge." And they do just that for us. In this world of cyber-saturated details, the vast amount of information available to us would

not be of much use if we did not have these skilled navigators to guide us to our knowledge destinations.

Thanks to Marian and her crew, we get where we're going and in record time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Congratulations to Naicam Army Cadet Corps Girls' Biathlon Team

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The cadet program offers the youth of Canada many opportunities and also teaches leadership, commitment, a positive outlook, and perseverance.

This year I am once again proud to stand in the Assembly and congratulate 2815 Naicam Army Cadet Corps girls' biathlon team of Louise Weber, Janel Wilson, Jennifer Griffith; and coaches Marie Leonard, and Scott Ponath.

This team, after gaining the provincial title in competitions in the army, navy and air cadet corps, represented Saskatchewan at the national biathlon competition at Valcartier, Quebec, in March.

I am delighted that our Saskatchewan representatives captured the silver Overall Aggregate Award, silver in the Sprint Award, and gold in the patrol race. Not only did they do well in skiing, they also captured the Sports Etiquette Team Award; and their coach, Captain Scott Ponath, was awarded the Best Coach Award.

Louise also achieved her dream of six years and captured the Myriam Bedard Award, which is the highest award to the fastest male and female in the cadet biathlon championship.

Louise who also competes with Saskatchewan biathlon stated:

I honestly don't know what kind of person I'd be if I wasn't involved with sports. Sports have taught me respect, not just for others, but also for myself. It has given me a positive outlook on life and I've reached new heights I never thought I could. I have learnt to believe in myself and trust I am capable of accomplishing anything.

Congratulations to 2815 Naicam Army Cadet Corps.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Volunteer Week

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we heard earlier this week, Mr. Speaker, April 9 to 15 is National Volunteer Week. And last night in Regina, there was volunteers who made outstanding contributions to the city of Regina honoured at the United Way Vital Link Dinner. This event has been honouring Queen City volunteers since 1988.

Now time does not permit me to talk about all of their accomplishments, but I want to mention the names of the recipients and the areas in which they were recognized. These names will be familiar, I'm sure, to many people.

Louise Yaremchuk was honoured as a distinguished volunteer; Elizabeth Totten for her work with youth; Jacqueline Shumiatcher for her contribution to the arts; Sheila Hohne for her work in community development; Dr. Eleanor Bujea in the category of cultural diversity; Linda McKay for contribution to recreation; Judy Lyons, recognized in the special events category; Dr. Robert E. Capp for his work in human services; and Danita McCormick for her contribution to sports.

All of these volunteers have enriched our city and their dedication to hard work has made Regina a much better place to live. But, Mr. Speaker, I also want to mention that their recognition is an important symbol of our collective values and speaks to the personal attributes that we all strive to achieve.

So once again I congratulate all the recipients and ask you to join me in thanking them for their contributions to the community.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Samuel McLeod Legacy Award

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to stand before you and my colleagues in this Assembly to tell you about an accomplishment by a resident in my constituency of Saskatchewan Rivers.

Mr. Speaker, every year in Prince Albert they host the Samuel McLeod awards for excellency in business. And this year, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ab Pellegrini is receiving the legacy award. Mr. Speaker, Ab Pellegrini has been in business in Prince Albert since 1963. I must say that's quite an accomplishment in our province which has been under a shadow of high NDP (New Democratic Party) taxes for the better part of 40 years; a NDP government which forces businesses out of Saskatchewan to set up elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, Ab Pellegrini has also been an active member of the community over the years. He's a member and director of the Prince Albert Kinsmen Club, past president of the K-40 Club, past president and life member of the Prince Albert Chamber of Commerce, and a charter member and past president of the Downtown Business Association. Mr. Pellegrini is also an active promoter and supporter in the city of Prince Albert.

Mr. Speaker, the legacy award is a special award which honours outstanding Prince Albert business people.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join with me in congratulating Ab Pellegrini on receiving the Samuel McLeod Legacy Award.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Children's Advocate's Report

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday afternoon we received a report titled *Children and Youth in Care Review: Listen to Their Voices*. To the Minister of Social

Services: Mr. Minister, this report is shocking. It raises many, many questions, the first of which is a concern in this report that early recommendations after the death of Karen Quill have not been met, and two and a half years later there has been almost no improvement in the system.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: what immediate and specific actions will you be taking to implement these recommendations presented by the child advocate in her report?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question. I want to point out to the hon. member and to the Assembly and to the people of Saskatchewan that we too and the government had questions about the foster care system in Saskatchewan. And it's for that reason, Mr. Speaker, that we ask the . . . ask the Children's Advocate, who is an independent member or officer of the Legislative Assembly, to undertake an independent review of the system.

We appreciate receiving her review. We have made some progress, Mr. Speaker, in the last number of years, and she points that out in her report. And we look forward to taking her recommendations and to making further improvements for the system of children in care in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest problems highlighted in the child advocate's report was time and work overload. The report says of the files the review committee examined, Mr. Minister, it says 73 per cent of the cases either didn't meet the contact standards or there wasn't enough information to determine if the standards were met.

According to this report there was tremendous overload on existing workers and they say it is impossible to meet the policy standards for client contact. Mr. Minister, as you have been the minister responsible for some time now, were you aware these standards were not being met? And if you were, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: what actions were you taking before this report was released to deal with this problem?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Again, Mr. Speaker, I would thank the member for the question. I want to point out to the member that the Children's Advocate in her report, in commenting on the progress that the department has made following her report on the death of Karen Quill which was also a commentary on the system of children in care in Saskatchewan, she states that the progress that the Department of Social Services reported is significant. She also points out that the Department of Social Services must be commended for the specific work they have done thus far to improve services to children in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we added significantly to resources in this area in child protection services in Saskatchewan. We have made a further investment significantly with respect to the Saskatoon children's shelter. The resources in the area of child welfare have doubled, Mr. Speaker, in the last 10 years. We have put many resources into the system and we will look to . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the minister is aware of the many levels of policy violations in his department. Mr. Minister, Mr. Speaker, we have to ask the minister if he does not talk to his employees. I will read a quote from the report. A social workers says, and I quote, page 35:

There's worry that there could be another death (at) any time. There isn't time to be vigilant about that. There's a mandate that can't be met because of the lack of resources and the overload.

And, Mr. Speaker, the minister says, they have put more money towards it. Mr. Speaker, the workers are saying there aren't the resources to meet the needs.

Mr. Minister, the case workers in this system are crying out for help. Kids in foster care are not being seen by their workers in some cases for over a year. Mr. Speaker, to the minister, how do you explain that you did not know about the level of the problems within the system and in your department?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for the question and would point out to him and to the people of Saskatchewan that in the wake of the Quill report the government moved to add significant resources. There is an increase in about one-third of the staffing in the area of . . . There is a significant increase in resources, Mr. Speaker, of about a third in the area of child protection. We also moved to improve our policies, our procedures significantly, our training for staff, also improve supervision staff, Mr. Speaker. We are confident that those changes will over time see improvement in practices as well, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's quite evident that the minister really has not been following up on the concerns in his department, and that's what this report is telling us.

Mr. Speaker, if I could quote another comment from the report coming from a social worker: "Until this province decides that children are important, there will be no real change." This worker is saying no real change.

Mr. Minister, is that true — there has been no change? No improvement in your department because this NDP government believes children aren't important? Is that true?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question and I want to point out to him and the people of Saskatchewan that the care of children, the safety of children, the needs of children, are foremost in our thoughts and it's one of the reasons that the government itself asked for this report. Because we wanted an independent third party review to help us to identify ways that we can make further improvements in the wake of the improvements that we already made following the Quill report, Mr. Speaker.

And I would point out again to the member that the Children's Advocate herself points out in her report that the Department of Social Services, Mr. Speaker, must be commended for the specific work they have done thus far to improve services for children.

Is it enough, Mr. Speaker? No, it's not. Do we want to do more? Yes, we do, and we shall, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, here are some more comments from this same report, and from a foster parent and I quote:

The low priority attributed to children and families translates into insufficient funding.

From a social worker, and I quote:

The 50 new positions didn't make any real difference. These workers were already there as non-perms.

And, Mr. Speaker, another foster parent says and I quote:

Since the Quill report there has been a real emphasis on standards and making the paperwork prioritized but there is no improvement working with the kids.

Mr. Minister, how do you explain that there has been no improvement for the children and the social workers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question and point out to the member that in the advocate's report that the advocate indicates that there have been significant improvements, Mr. Speaker. We asked for this report to assist us in further planning for the needs of children in Saskatchewan and we look forward to making improvements in that system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, you have a foster parent in this report saying, and I quote:

The kids in my home haven't seen their worker in 10 months.

From a foster child, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

Because I never saw my worker, I didn't ever get the chance to ask her, when my foster parents weren't around, if they really had the OK . . . to be hitting me.

And, Mr. Speaker, here's another comment from a foster child, and I quote:

Does anyone who works there really know what the rules are? Every time I get a different worker, I have to tell her what I should be getting. None of the other kids I've ever talked to were told the same rules I was. Don't we deserve

the same things?

Mr. Minister, how do you explain that your own department policies are not being followed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, it is for the reasons that the member identifies — the concerns with standards — that we asked for an independent assessment by an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly, so that someone from outside of government could review the system we have, and if you like, offer improvements or a suggestion for improvements to the system.

Mr. Speaker, we want to improve the system — that's why we asked for the report. We are committed to making those improvements, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to inform the minister that if he is not part of the solution, he is part of the problem. And, Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on with this report and I'm going to.

This from a foster parent, and I quote:

Worker turnover is so confusing for kids and prevents relationship building between kids and workers.

From a social worker, and I quote:

There is a risk to workers when they don't bring kids into care — but it is more damaging to the child to be brought into care.

And from a child in care, I quote:

There are some very good workers who do their jobs well, and will fight for you. But they (just) don't last.

Mr. Minister, will you admit the high turnover of social workers in your department is due to your shoddy management of the whole system?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, we have taken the point of view as a government that those public servants that work for the government need to be supported, respected, and need to, need to have the resources to be able to do their work, which is why, Mr. Speaker, we moved in the last number of years to increase the staff in the child protection area by a third.

We also improved the policies, procedures, the training for staff as well as supervision, and the Children's Advocate recognizes that in her report, Mr. Speaker. Is it enough? No, it isn't. Should we be doing more? We will. We shall, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, here is a quote from a mental health worker:

Children are moved far too often. That's . . . (the

Department of Social Services') answer to everything.

From a child in care, and I quote:

Moving a kid is almost never worth it. Usually it's just a right-now solution to a bigger problem.

From a social worker, and I quote:

I used to be in favour of long-term orders, but there seems to be no planning for these children. It sentences them to a life in the system.

So, Mr. Speaker, children are being shuttled about the system, but then we hear information management is nowhere near adequate.

And, Mr. Speaker, this next quote just absolutely blew my mind. I'm just appalled at this. Then this is from a foster parent. You can joke about this, but I don't see the way these kids being treated as any kind of a joke at all.

We had a baby in our care for two months and hadn't received payment.

And this is on page 44:

When we called to ask about payment, the worker was relieved to know we had the baby . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Would the member kindly go directly to her question?

Ms. Eagles: — This file had only a birth certificate in it — no other information.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: this is unbelievable and inexcusable. How do you explain that your department is losing children in the system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her question. The Children's Advocate report is interspersed with a number of anonymous quotations, Mr. Speaker. We are very concerned . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Hon. Members, order please. Allow the minister to respond to the question.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, when we read the quotations as the member has now read out to the Legislative Assembly, we as a department are very concerned about those kinds of allegations. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, we have asked . . . I have asked my department to review with the Children's Advocate some particulars of those allegations so that we can see what the circumstances of those are.

Mr. Speaker, we as a government are very concerned about the needs of children in Saskatchewan which is why, upon our election in 1991, we moved to see if there is better ways to focus service for children under the children's action plan. We feel we have made significant strides in that area. We will

continue to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Municipal Amalgamation

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the cracks are starting to show in this coalition government. Today, the president of the Liberal party is saying the NDP's plan for forced amalgamation could spell the end to the coalition government. Greg Gallagher is saying he's getting phone calls from Liberals saying they have to take a stand even if it causes the coalition to come unravelled.

Mr. Speaker, I know it's hard to believe there's actually Liberals left to phone Greg Gallagher but at least he's listening. He knows the NDP plan for forced amalgamation is dead wrong and the Liberals should not support it.

To the Minister of Education: who are you going to listen to? Your own party and Mr. Gallagher? Or the NDP Premier who's stroking your cheque?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order, hon. members. Hon. members, this is a valuable period of time and I would hope that you would kindly allow questions to be asked and answers to be given.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House when we talk about consulting with people, when we talk about exploring with SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) the kinds of directions that we want to go collectively with municipal reform in this province . . . It takes the wisdom of all of the people who sit on this side of the House.

And, Mr. Speaker, this coalition has talked at length, talked at length about the importance of rebuilding Saskatchewan, providing opportunities in Saskatchewan today so that local municipal governments and provincial governments can work in harmony and ensure that we have stronger economic opportunities and we can develop stronger social policy so that communities in fact can be enriched by those kinds of services, Mr. Speaker.

Those are the kind of things that we're doing on this side of the House. There's no words on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, about forced amalgamation, unlike what they say over there when Mr. Downs . . . Mr. Downs who talks about enforced amalgamation.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the member from Saskatoon Northwest is supposedly capable and worthy of the Education portfolio, I wonder why he can't get up and speak for himself and the Liberal Party. Mr. Speaker,

I ask again for the Education minister to answer the question. If he's an equal partner in this government, why can't he get up and speak for himself?

Mr. Minister, your NDP partners are probably already planning how they're going to boot you out of the coalition before the next election. Why don't you beat them to it? Listen to your president, listen to your party, listen to thousands of people who are showing up at task force meetings, and they're saying no to forced amalgamation. Greg Gallagher is saying no to forced amalgamation. Will you stand up for the Liberal Party and speak on their behalf and say no to forced amalgamation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, you see a government today that has . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that I find it absolutely astounding that we see the member from Saltcoats today standing up and talk about how you work at booting people out of parties. Because when you take a look at the history of this individual here, Mr. Speaker. I mean he's part of the group of people who were working real hard at getting rid of the person now who is involved as our Lieutenant Governor. He was the leader of that particular parade, Mr. Speaker.

And then he was part of the agenda, Mr. Speaker, that proceeded not only to get the new Leader of the Opposition but to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that the old Liberal leader wasn't in the Chair.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order, please. I'm having a difficult time hearing members from both sides when they're offering their questions or answers, as I'm sure the rest of the hon. members are, so please — please — keep it down.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well maybe, Mr. Speaker, we should let the member for Wood River answer the question. I think he still talks for the Liberal Party.

Mr. Speaker, at least there's one good thing about this coalition. When the Premier and the Minister of Education fly somewhere together, they only have to buy one ticket — the minister qualifies as carry on baggage.

Mr. Minister, when are you going to stand up and do something useful within this government? Now's your chance. Why don't you stand up to this Premier, listen to your party, listen to Saskatchewan taxpayers, put a stop to forced amalgamation? Will you get up and do that today, Mr. Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — On this side of the House, I want to say to the member opposite that we've had a lot of discussion about

the restructuring and reorganization of this province with SUMA and SARM in terms of reform; we've had lots of that discussion, Mr. Speaker. And we've said that we're going to do that in a collective manner, and we're going to do that, Mr. Speaker, in a consultative manner. And we're going to do that to ensure that Saskatchewan people and the province continues to grow and thrive.

Unlike, Mr. Speaker, what happens on that side of the House. On that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we hear on a regular basis that party talking about forced amalgamation, and that's the only part of the province that we hear it. We hear it from the Saskatchewan Party talking about forced amalgamation.

On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, this is the voluntary amalgamated party on this side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Review of Personal Injury Protection Plan

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question, Mr. Speaker, is for the Minister responsible for SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance). Mr. Minister, for months, Mr. Minister, we've been saying that your no-fault insurance review is a sham. The legal community is telling you it's a sham. Accident victims are telling you it's a sham. And now the head of your own review committee bails out on it. He must think something of similar ideas. Justice Thomas Wakeling is used to working independently as a judge; but because of your meddling in that particular review committee, Mr. Justice Wakeling has quit.

Will you scrap this review and start over? Will you hold a truly independent review, one that doesn't set restrictions on the committee so it can do its work the way it wants to do it and the way it should do its work?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The legislation related to The Automobile Accident Insurance Act sets out a mandate for a review of the personal injury protection plan. We have appointed people to do this task and unfortunately the Chair has resigned as of yesterday. But the people that we have arranged to do this work are very capable people who will listen to all of the things that happen within that program.

The mandate is as set out in the legislation. It says that it should . . . we can deal with all matters relating to this plan. That includes a comparison of what we had before, what we have now; it also includes a comparison with other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, we have a very good insurance program in this province for personal injury in automobile accidents. We are going to work to improve it with the assistance of . . .

The Speaker: — Order, next question.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, obviously there's a problem between you and this review committee because you don't seem to be on the same page. That may be because of the way you arranged that committee and its content as you said. Maybe if you left them alone and not try to meddle with it, they'd be doing what they ought to be doing.

The bar association, the Legal Aid Commission, and Justice Wakeling all feel that your review system has gone off the rails — the coalition of no-fault victims — these are all boycotting your process, Mr. Minister.

Can't you see something is seriously wrong here? You need to scrap the whole review, to start over, remove the restrictions, and make sure that everyone that wants to participate in this province can participate. Will you do that?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I reiterate again what I said when the committee was appointed in December, what I said yesterday, what I've said today — this committee does not have restrictions on what it's supposed to do. Its job is to improve the system in Saskatchewan so that we have the best insurance system in North America.

We know that we have very good rates for all of our citizens. We know that we have very good coverage for most of our citizens. We also know that there's some things that we can do better. And we're going to work hard to make sure we have the best system in North America.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 232 — The Automobile Accident Insurance Amendment Act, 2000

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that in reference to Bill No. 232, The Automobile Accident Insurance Amendment Act, 2000 that it be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 27 — The Certified Management Accountants Act

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 27, The Certified Management Accountants Act be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day, I wonder if I could have leave of the Assembly to make introduction of guests?

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to the House, a long-time friend of mine and a friend of many people in education and certainly somebody that many people in this Assembly already know. And that's . . . in your gallery, we see our visitor Mr. Stirling McDowell — Dr. Stirling McDowell.

Dr. McDowell served as the general secretary of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation for many years — at the

time when I was there. And more recently of course served to chair the commission that set our pay and rations right here in the House, Mr. Speaker, a thing known as the McDowell commission. I welcome Stirling back to the House for the visit. I hope you enjoy your afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Permission to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you. I would like to join with my colleague in welcoming Dr. Stirling McDowell to this Assembly. He has indeed had an illustrious career, and he has many items of note and import on his CV (curriculum vitae). But one of the things that members of this Assembly may not know is that he is a constituent of mine in the constituency of Saskatoon Southeast.

I don't know if he's one of the 38 that helped get me elected, but I think he's a fine gentleman, and I welcome him here to this House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 22 — The Local Improvements Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The proposed changes are intended to Bill No. 22, amendments to The Local Improvements Act, 1993, the changes are intended to clarify the procedures for appeals of special assessments to the local board of revision and to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board.

These housekeeping amendments will do three things, Mr. Speaker: improve the appeal rights of landlords; will make the local boards of revision more accountable for their decisions; and will provide a consistent approach to handling appeals.

Mr. Speaker, the urban, rural, and northern municipalities Act have been recently amended to provide for an improved property assessment appeal process. Amending The Local Improvements Act, 1993 makes this appeal process consistent with the improved provisions of the municipal Act.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities have expressed concerns when they must follow different legislative processes for similar functions. And therefore a consistency approach . . . a consistent approach to handling appeals should be welcome.

Appellants should also welcome these revisions as appeal processes for all of the related Acts will now become consistent.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 22.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a few comments before I would move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 22, The Local Improvements Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure whether government members are actually that concerned about the appeals process or they're aware of the many concerns that have been raised. I would have to guess that the minister is just as aware of the concerns in regards to property assessment and appeals as my colleagues are on this side of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, there's no question that the appeals process needs to be reviewed. In fact, as MLA from Moosomin, I've been calling for this process for a number of . . . period of years. And why have we been suggesting that this appeals process be reviewed? Because of the fact that under the current mechanism, Mr. Speaker, it puts communities and local businesses and local landowners at odds because they're basically dealing with the very individuals and the governmental sources that they have to work with on an ongoing basis.

And as an MLA having dealt with businesses and dealt with individuals who are concerned about the assessment, especially as the assessment has changed . . . and over the past number of years, we've seen some significant changes in the assessment process and in the assessment mechanism and how assessments are set.

And for many people whenever there's an assessment change, Mr. Speaker, there's much consternation amongst individuals, concerns about the fact that if the assessment changes and the assessment increases, will that assessment reflect the reality and the true value of the property I have? And at the end of the day, will that mean that I will have more taxes to pay? Will I be paying my taxes fairly, Mr. Speaker, or am I going to . . . is my business going to be gouged in regards to the assessment and the taxes that I will then be paying?

So, Mr. Speaker, what my colleagues and I have been calling for, we've been calling for an appeals mechanism that really is outside of and more far-reaching, that has more authority to sit down and look very closely at properties and determine whether or not the assessment is a fair assessment on the property so that landowners, business owners, and communities, local governments feel that the assessment certainly meets the need . . . meets the target that's been presented to them.

And having said that, Mr. Speaker, I think what we want to do is certainly take a very careful look at this piece of legislation to determine whether or not The Local Improvements Amendment Act, 2000 indeed meets the concerns that have been brought to our attention by landowners and businessmen and women across this province over the past number of years.

(1430)

Mr. Speaker, we will be facing another assessment in the near future. And as individuals who have served on local councils, while we as former councillors are aware of the fact when an assessment takes place and when an assessment on a piece of property increases, most councils to my knowledge then just reduce the mill rate to reflect the change in the assessment.

However, just reducing the mill rate doesn't necessarily mean that your taxes will hold the line or may go down in some cases. Most cases, I think, many property owners feel that any time there's an assessment review and a change in the assessment, they end up being hit much harder for taxes on that property.

So therefore, Mr. Speaker, the fact that this piece of legislation is here today is something that my colleagues and I want to take a very careful look at to review. And certainly as we get into further debate on this piece of legislation, we will be raising a number of questions that are being brought to our attention, areas that we feel maybe the legislation does not quite meet the need that is out in the community.

But certainly we want to commend the government as well for taking a look at the . . . how appeals, the appeal process is put in place.

And, Mr. Speaker, we look forward to further debate on the question. We look forward to debating this question with the minister, and to determining what's the fairest method of an appeal mechanism that indeed recognizes the needs of not only the local property owner but local governments as well, and treats every property owner and landowner fairly.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I move now to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 23 — The Planning and Development Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 23 amends The Planning and Development Act, 1983. The current Act provides for the framework for municipalities to manage the fiscal development of communities. Municipalities and others have suggested a number of ways that the Act could be improved.

These amendments reflect our commitment to responding to the needs of local government. The amendments, Mr. Speaker, include five . . . the amendments include:

The correcting the definition of conseil scolaire and adding a cross-reference to this term to conform to The Education Act, 1995;

Secondly, allowing major telephone and fibre optic transmission lines to also be considered as essential public services;

Thirdly, giving greater discretion to local development appeal's boards and the Saskatchewan Municipal Board in deciding greater appeals or certain appeals;

And fourthly, allowing the creation of a local commission to provide advice in the planning areas in northern Saskatchewan;

And finally, allowing the services of certain types of subdivisions . . . decisions to be made to the subdivision appellant by personal services as well as by registered mail.

These amendments will contribute to simplifying the land use planning process for municipal councils and the public.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments proposed in this Bill are evidence of our commitment to maintaining a legislative framework for effective land use management which serves the public interest and responds to the changing needs of Saskatchewan communities. I would now urge each of the members on this side on the House to support this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I move the second reading of Bill No. 23.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just a few comments regarding Bill No. 23, The Planning and Development Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, as I understand the minister, the minister is telling us that this Act is going to simplify a number of areas in regards to municipal governments and how they undertake fiscal development within their, within their areas. And the minister, I believe, if I'm not mistaken, I heard the minister say that they'd been listening to a number of the concerns of local government.

And indeed, Mr. Speaker, if that's what I've heard the minister saying, and this piece of legislation is indeed addressing areas of concern, areas that have been almost served some constraints in the manner in which local governments can govern themselves, can certainly address the fiscal areas of responsibility that they have within their jurisdiction, then we're pleased to hear that.

However, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you as well that we would be more than pleased if the provincial government would also give the same ear to the current debate that is taking place in this province in regards to amalgamations. And, Mr. Speaker, I believe the minister mentioned in his second reading speech, talked about areas where local governments wanted to have the opportunity . . . and in fact, I think the five points the minister is talking about will allow local governments some of those opportunities to continue with the local amalgamating of services that this government seems to want to refuse to listen to when it comes to the overall picture as we have it in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, what we have and what this Bill is basically speaking about, laying out a cornerstone for it, is laying out a cornerstone to address some of the irritants that are currently in place within the municipal Act that restricts rural governments — would be they RMs or be they small local communities or even hamlets — in the way they address appeals and whether the way they address even the Education Act.

And I believe the minister talked about The Education Act, 1995 that basically says to local governments that when you receive any sort of tax level of taxation . . . or payment of taxation, that according to the 1995 Act you must submit that percentage off of that amount that has been paid to the local Education department of . . . or Board of Education.

And, Mr. Speaker, we are aware of the fact that around this province even today, even despite the budgetary address that was presented by the Minister of Finance, despite that and the commitment to \$25 million to offset education taxes, that there are ongoing meetings in regards to a revolt, a tax revolt in this province, and a tax revolt that is coming about as a result of the tax on education — education tax on properties.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that there isn't any one member in this Assembly that doesn't understand what the individuals are talking about who are going around and talking about the tax revolt. Because we're all aware of the fact that when we pay our taxes, we go to pay our tax, almost two-thirds of what we're paying in is going to fund educational services within our local communities and our local school districts.

And, Mr. Speaker, I can understand why so many people are becoming irritated by the fact that the off-load on education. And so it will be interesting to see the part of the Act — I believe it was point no. 3 — and what really is the significance of that point in regards to The Education Act of 1995.

Mr. Speaker, as I look at the . . . as I begin to look at the piece of legislation, we want to take a close look at exactly what is in the legislation, why the legislation is here, is it necessary, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, we've been discussing forced amalgamation for a good period of time in the Assembly. In fact there are meetings again today in the province of Saskatchewan in regards to forced amalgamation of local governments. And I guess the concern I would have is the legislation we have — Bill No. 23 that is currently before this Assembly — is this Bill going to be irrelevant in the near future?

If the minister comes in, as we hear the minister indicating that he is going to be making a decision regarding the larger scheme of forced amalgamations, whether or not the minister should have taken some time rather than bringing a piece of legislation and asking the Assembly to join with him in passing it, then finding that it's irrelevant because he's come in with another piece of legislation on the broader picture.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I will be taking a very diligent time to look at this piece of legislation to assess what the minister is attempting to do, what this government is attempting to do in regards to the planning and development of local governments. We want to take the time to review it and indeed see whether or not the legislation meets the current needs and requirements of local governments that have been brought to our attention.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 17

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen that **Bill No. 17 — The Child Care Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to address some of the concerns that I've found in this particular Bill.

I've looked over this Bill at some length and I'm finding that in

fact that there is some very positive things that this Bill puts forward, and I think some of those things need to be supported and we would certainly agree with them. But there are some concerns that I would like to bring to the attention of this Assembly with regards to this Bill.

First off, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk a little bit about how important it is that we look at these amendments very, very carefully. In fact, we are looking at the children of this province. It's an asset that . . . It's very important that it's an asset that we have to make sure that we protect, and it's our responsibility here in the legislature to be able to do just that.

How it affects the children is doubly important for somebody like myself who has had the opportunity to raise children, who's had an opportunity to see them grow and prosper and in fact to see them remain here in this province. And I think that's an objective that we would like to make sure we can pass along in fact to their children as well.

Also as part of the concern, and my personal concern, is in fact the opportunity I'm having now of experiencing grandchildren. The grandchildren that I'm so very proud of are spending a great deal of time in the care of others during the working day.

Unfortunately, unfortunately, it has to be that way in many, many cases and in many, many families. With the economic conditions that we are now experiencing, with the time restraints that parents are certainly under, it is doubly critical that the care of these children, in others' care, be looked at as a very important issue.

I look at the future of the province, and of course we have to look at these children, and how these children are reared is very important. Traditionally, as you well remember, the rearing of children was very close to home in a, what we would call, a traditional family environment. And those are important times for growing children, making sure that these children understand the values that are passed on to them by parents and certainly other members of the family. And it's clearly an important part of our future, making sure that those values are passed along to our children.

With the economic environment of today and with the time restraints placed on parents, it is critical that we're finding . . . and maybe unfortunate . . . maybe it's an opportunity but the reality of the day is that both parents very often are out of the home, both earning a living, and both pursuing their careers. And I believe that's important as well.

To facilitate that kind of change in the nurturing of our children, I think it is very timely that this Act be looked at. And certainly some revisions need to be put in place.

As we shift away from this traditional family value, we have to make sure that we have confidence in where these children are going to be supervised. And I'd like to take a moment and a few minutes to further my concerns in the objective of confidence, by not only the parents, but the community generally.

I guess, as I mentioned, we're very pleased to see that the government will be amending some of these provisions in this Act.

One of the provisions that I noticed was the restriction of child care services to a primary resident. And I think that that is a provision that is rather restrictive. And I see that some of the amendments that are being put forward will try and address this a little bit further and expand the location — allowable location — for child care in this province. I think that has a positive aspect, and that should be commendable.

(1445)

In the minister's second reading of the speech, he brought up a very important point, and I think it has to be addressed in these amendments. And I'm glad to see it's there, and I want to reinforce how important I think it really is. His point being that the farm families are also in a very changing time in terms of their ability to traditionally supply the support the urban and the rural areas of Saskatchewan. This I think is another example of the inconsistency that we're experiencing. From my earlier career as a teacher I noticed that there was a different opportunity for children in our schools between urban and rural.

It was always a struggle to maintain the rural schools and the schools in the small towns. To maintain the numbers, to maintain the curriculum that was needed, and it left little time for enrichment of that curriculum.

As opposed to in the cities, that was a different environment. And rural children adapted accordingly. And I think under . . . and should be congratulated for being able to adapt to that inconsistency.

We're also seeing inconsistency in other areas of things like recreation facilities; different opportunities are present for our children in the urban versus the rural. Even there's difference in opportunities for cultural involvement, certainly part of the upbringing and care and nurturing of our children.

I mention these things just as a comparison to what we're experiencing in child care. When you compare the child care opportunities in the city, they are certainly different than child care opportunities in the rural communities.

Even in the urban communities where we normally think of child care, some of these amendments I think are very appropriate, overdue, and again as I mentioned, very supported by this particular side of the House.

But when it comes time to compare child care opportunities, rural and urban, I think a very stark difference very quickly arises between those two. As you can understand from what we would assume as the traditional family upbringing of children in the rural, where very often both the father and the mother, although both being involved in the farm, one or the other often was available to spend a lot of time in that very formative years of child rearing.

And I think that was one of the major assets . . . or one of the major benefits that we experienced in the rural areas as our children were raised and became very productive parts of our society.

But that too is changing in the rural area as you know. There has been an extensive change in the focus of the farm

community — a very extensive change in the focus of how farms in fact are existing. We are trying desperately to sustain these farms. It seems to be an uphill battle. There's a lot of problems associated with the farms these days in terms of commodity prices; certainly the depopulation of the rural areas. Those kinds of things are bringing a crisis to farms that we've never seen before.

As part of the consequence of that farm crisis — and maybe not well understood, but very, very vital — is the fact that children are being raised in that particular environment and continue to need the care and the nurturing that is so important in the formative times of their life.

One of the consequences of course is that both parents — both the father and the mother — who have always been very involved directly in farming now have to become even more involved and more intent on actually performing the operations of the farm. There isn't any cash left over or budget available for hired help or for contracting out and we see both the mother and the father becoming so very involved that we often fear that the children are going to be neglected. Fortunately, I think some of these amendments are pointing in the direction to give assistance here.

We also see that because of this farm crisis that we've been discussing for a long period of time, we also see that it is necessary for both parents not only to work on the farm, but very often one, or both in fact, Mr. Speaker, have to leave the farm to try to earn enough money for the . . . to sustain the farm in its present form.

These people should be commended. They're trying their very best to make a very tough, difficult situation palatable. It's a family farm, it's their way of life, and they should be, as I mentioned, be encouraged to do whatever they have to do to maintain this. Maybe it's our job to try and set the parameters a little bit differently, but they're experiencing the real world and they're going to have to try and adapt. There's another reason that we see that there is a need for child care from the rural point of view — just because that way of life has changed so very, very much.

So I'm very pleased to be able to support anything in these amendments that will address and help satisfy that need for daycare in the rural . . .

Because it's such a busy, busy time of the year, in particular in spring and again in fall, it is maybe even more difficult to understand that the farmers need more and more help at that particular time, which is a very awkward time because there is less and less opportunities for child care in those particular times.

But these amendments, to some extent, take the pressure off parents during those busy times so that they in fact don't have to be so concerned or the concern is all-consuming, so that they can be comfortable that they are dealing in the world of the farming needs. They'll be able to focus on what they're doing without having to think peripherally of where their children are and how they are being cared of. I think that's a very important part of the rural life as we now know it.

I guess what I'm looking at in these amendments, Mr. Speaker, are some of the things that cause me a little bit of concern. And I want to move away from the reasons why I think that these amendments are so important in terms of urban and rural, and so important in the rural.

I see where traditionally there was always the child care, but up to a certain number . . . the number I believe is a number of eight. And there could be further limitations by some age restrictions. But I see now the amendments are moving forward to involve what is called group family child care homes.

And I think that is a very useful and a very good move which in fact allows to have several children maybe from the same family that wouldn't have the opportunity to attend the daycare during the day. It gives them the opportunity to in fact go to the same daycare and be able to associate with their siblings as long . . . as well as some of the new-found friends that they're I'm sure going to find at the daycare.

I guess the problem that I might have here, Mr. Speaker, in this area, and we have to be very, very careful about this, is some of the concerns that we've already experienced and stated publicly about the ability of government to actually put the correct legislation in place, and then in fact to make sure that the government has the ability to monitor what is going on. Or we have to be comfortable, we have to be confident that the legislation that is contemplated here, when it is enacted, in fact is going to serve the right purpose and will in fact meet the objectives that I think all of us agree need to be, need to be met.

That whole aspect of confidence gives me some concern, and particularly the confidence right now because of the report of the . . . the child's advocate report that was tabled yesterday. There's a lot of really major concerns expressed in that report, and it's concerns about the ability of this government to monitor what is happening to make sure that what they have put in place actually is what is needed and is actually doing the job that is intended under the general objectives of that legislation.

Some of the things that bothered me when I was reviewing the aspects of this legislation focus again like I mention on the confidence that parents have to have in the system, because they are entrusting their children to care providers in an environment that is away from the traditional family environment. And so that confidence is very important, not only confidence from the parent, confidence from grandparents like myself, but confidence from the community generally that those objectives are in fact being met.

But it bothers me when I read headlines that I see in the last day or two — in fact just this morning in *The StarPhoenix*, there's comments about the review that was put forward yesterday. And when I read those kinds of headlines and some of the statements in those . . . in the paper, I start wondering now, will those same kinds of things start applying or same concerns or lack of confidence? Will those apply to the new regulations or the new amendments to daycare?

One of the things and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the things that bothered me as I was trying to extrapolate to the daycare, came highlighted from this work in social . . . the report in Social Services. The statement that I would like to quote out of

this Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* just this morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, goes like this, and I quote:

Some Saskatchewan foster children who say they're neglected or abused never had their complaints investigated because social workers are too busy, says a disturbing report into the province's foster care system.

Now I know that that is not a direct application to what is happening here, but I am speaking to confidence that parents, grandparents, and family members have to have in the system. And I can't emphasize enough that these amendments have to focus on putting that confidence in place. Without it, it is going to lead us down maybe into the same kind of problems as we were experiencing here with this foster children review.

And again I quote from the same paper, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

The agency is either unwilling or unable to follow its own regulations in placing and monitoring the majority of (these) children . . .

Again it's not a direct correlation but in fact it does lack . . . it gives me a sense or a lack of confidence that the overall objective, which was likely very positive and praiseworthy, has in fact been neglected and has slipped by the general objectives that was needed. So we need to make sure that those kinds of confidence levels are maintained.

(1500)

I talked a little bit earlier . . . again talking about the vision of this particular legislation and about the confidence needed. And again when I read in the Regina *Leader-Post*, again of today's issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see this quote, and if I could, I quote:

Social Services Minister Harry Van Mulligen said he was unaware that there were such high levels of policy violations in his department . . .

Those things, those kinds of reports in our paper certainly don't help the confidence in the public that's needed in a system that is going to be even more regulated. And again, it is so critical because these children are so vulnerable and need our protection. Not only the protection and confidence of parents, grandparents and community, but it is our responsibility here as legislators to make sure that the objectives, as good as they are and as admirable as we think they have to be, is carried through so that people will in fact feel comfortable in allowing their children to attend.

I mentioned earlier a bit of a problem about the things faced on the farm, and unfortunately, it's a fact that children are the ones through no fault of their own often become victims of circumstances. And because the farming situation becomes so stressful, there is concern that the children are picking up those stress levels and acting out of ordinary. They're doing . . . or behaving differently than they would if things had been going as smoothly or as they had in the past.

Fortunately, at my time, when I was an active farmer, things were much more positive on the farm and I felt real proud that

we were able to contribute to the upbringing of my children. And hopefully through them, now to my grandchildren, some of the values that we need to pass along to them from our traditional family viewpoint.

But again, this crisis on the farm does, in fact, spill over, and that's why it is so critical that the children have an opportunity to go to daycare in the rural areas as well as in the urban centres. I quote now from an April 4 edition of *The Leader-Post*. They talk about the farm crisis may hurt children, and I quote:

The effects of the agricultural crisis on farm children may be showing up in the disruptive behaviour in small-town schools (or in the rural areas) . . .

And this is a quote by a rural education director. And I think that sums it up very, very nicely. We have to make sure that there is opportunity and, with this legislation, the confidence that in fact we can supply our children with the care and nurturing while we are so very, very busy and preoccupied with our lives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as legislators and parents, again it's really our duty, as I mentioned, to ensure that these very vulnerable members of our society do have every protection that we can offer. And that's why it's so important for these amendments to be considered very, very carefully.

Some of the advantages that we can offer in daycare . . . And I'm witnessing those kinds of things from my grandchildren's upbringing and some of the things that they are now experiencing because they are full-time attendants of daycare, and I really believe that the daycare is a very positive influence on their lives. And I think it's important that we ensure that.

Some of the very positive advantages that they can get in these daycare centres is the social interaction that they experience with other children and certainly with somebody other than their parent. I think that's a very important item. They learn to play, they learn to share, and they learn to co-operate with other children. And I think they become much more adaptive to an environment when they finally get to situations, for instance, in school where they will have to interact with other children.

I think they're learning under new circumstances, and I have to commend the daycare workers that I'm familiar with that they in fact are very professional, they're very conscious of what they are doing, and they in my experience with my grandchildren are performing excellent tasks and opportunities for these children to learn.

And I think if the objective is to go down that particular lane and to expand those opportunities for the children in the advantages that I've just stated, I think that is a very commendable thing, and we want to make sure that those are included in these amendments.

We want to give our children and our . . . and the parents that are responsible for raising them . . . that there is hope in the future. We don't want to continually keep telling them that there is no hope for them in this province. We want to make sure that they do in fact have both opportunity in this province

as they grow up. And the foundation for all of that future hope is in fact in the upbringing as we have the opportunity now to ensure in these amendments.

I guess I see . . . and I raise that particular point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the context of my environment which is living in Lloydminster, as you know, and in this border area. And I'm not reluctant to bring that area up again because I think that there is a micro-climate right there of economic activity where we see daily, graduates from our schools moving away out of our province.

And an objective of all of ours is to make sure that the opportunities that we have remain right here in this province, and make sure that we can try to put greener pastures in place, so that three out of four of our graduates do not leave after graduation. That hope and confidence is really the basis of child care. It starts at that level.

I find it a little disconcerting, however, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we talk about the things that are proposed in this legislation.

One of the things that I'm concerned about is the section 3.2. The paragraph states that:

A person may operate a family child care home either with or without a family child care . . . licence.

That is a bit disconcerting because the children that will be attending those daycares are again so vulnerable that I think that we need a way to be able to monitor what is happening there, and to make sure the objectives are being met.

Without a licence, we would have no authority on behalf of the province, there would be no authority to actually review what is happening in these homes, in these daycare centres. So without a licence, I raise that as a red flag in that I think it's an important aspect that should be considered I think when these amendments continue to be reviewed.

I think it also should state in these amendments, how the action — what actions need to be taken and how the objectives are to be played out. I don't see that in the amendments. And in my quick and brief review of the Act, I think that's a bit lacking. And I hope that in the regulations that will hopefully come along and be developed on the basis of these amendments, that there is some kind of a response, some kind of a plan, and some kind of an action plan that we can follow to see if there is consistency from one child care facility to another, and in fact if these objectives again are being met.

Some of the difficulties again that I referred to earlier in some quotes really talk about abuse — in that case of foster homes. But abuse is always a huge, huge consideration when we're talking about children, but especially children of the child care age. That is very, very alarming to me how, how some of those things in care foster homes has been allowed to proceed. And I surely don't want to see those kind of things perpetuated into daycare.

And without the proper licensing and without the proper action plans and checks and balances, I'm not sure how that will be

performed, but it is very, very critical. And I would certainly encourage those aspects to be either put into the amendments, added to them, or certainly developed in the regulations that will be coming from those.

All in all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would have to say that this is a pretty good piece of legislation. I think its objectives are just fine; they're right on the mark. I do think that we do need to spend just a wee bit more time in talking to some of the people that are involved in daycare, getting some more of their input. I know I would like to have a little bit more time reviewing some of the background to this.

I think the minister should be complimented and acknowledge . . . I'd like to acknowledge that some of the things that he has contemplated here for daycare, especially in the rural areas, making it easier and more accessible for farm families, I think is very commendable, if the conditions and the constraints are in place.

Having said those remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this time I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 18

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 18 — The Public Employees Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, public pensions are indeed a very, very important part of our society and need to be reviewed from time to time to determine exactly whether or not they're operating in the manner that they were prescribed in the first place and in the manner in which people expect them to be operating. That is why it's not unusual for the government to be presenting amendments from time to time to correct some of the deficiencies in the pension programs when they are discovered.

I guess the thing you have to be somewhat concerned about though is whether or not the changes that are being made actually serve the best interests of the employees that are in the pension plan or are they designed to serve the best interests of some other group.

We believe that the pensions that are in place for our public service should be there to serve the interests of the employees — not to serve the interests of the government, not to serve the interests of the investors, but to serve the interests of the employees that have invested in these particular pension plans.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's with this in mind that we are interested in debating and discussing these particular plans. This amendment seems to bring forward a change that would make the pensions more flexible, more useful to the people who are involved in them.

And there's approximately about 35,000 people that are

involved and enrolled in these plans and this plan holds about \$2.2 billion. \$2.2 billion, as you're well aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a lot of money. And the fact is that's equivalent to one-third of the entire budget of the province of Saskatchewan. The province's budget this year is \$6.3 billion and this pension holds \$2.2 billion.

I guess one of the questions that should be raised on this Bill is whether or not that entire \$2.2 billion is in fact actually in place or is this part of the unfunded pension liabilities that the government has accrued over the last 50, 60 years since the first pension plan went into place for people on the taxpayers' roll, that being the teachers' pension plan.

(1515)

Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, most of this money is in place. We'd certainly be hopeful that it is because if it isn't, then it's a liability on the province's roll and is of concern, I would think, to everyone in the province, particularly those that are enrolled in this pension plan. I'm sure they would feel much more comfortable knowing that the money that they have invested themselves in this pension plan is secured and that it is indeed protected through the system.

The employees enrolled in this, Mr. Speaker, which will make voluntary contributions to this pension plan as of January 1, 2001, it would seem that they will be able to withdraw their voluntary contributions upon retirement and not have to rely on, as in other cases, Mr. Speaker, that it be paid out as part of their pension plan over a longer term, but that they will be able to access these monies directly.

Which is certainly of benefit to them, because when you retire, a good many people in this province, when they do retire, pack up their bags, sell their home, and move. Now they may move from let's say Regina to the cottage out at Echo Lake, or they may move to Christopher Lake or some place like that.

Unfortunately though, Mr. Speaker, too many of the people, when they do retire, move to be closer to their grandkids. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we all know, too many of those grandchildren are not in Saskatchewan any longer; they are in some other part of Canada, primarily in Alberta.

That does cause some problems, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because that means that the energies that these retirees could be putting into building our communities, to volunteering in our communities, is lost to Saskatchewan and is of benefit to someone else. The expertise they have built up over their lives now serves some other community other than our own.

And it would be much, much more appreciated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if those energies could be kept here in Saskatchewan to build our own communities. But those individuals have the right to make their own choices and to go to wherever they wish to.

In this change, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the retirement age has been lowered from age 55 to age 50. And that is a very, very major change, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When you're doing actuarials, when you're looking at the amount of returns that you can get off of your pension plan, withdrawing early from a pension plan

seriously decreases the value of your pension plan.

It does though allow a person who is retiring from a profession to gain access to their pension money and perhaps at age 50 to start a new career. I can certainly see how that might be financially beneficial for them, providing, let's hope, that they're starting that new career choice in Saskatchewan where it continues to benefit this province.

There also is some changes to the spousal benefits. The current legislation says that spousal benefits cannot be less than 60 per cent. This has been changed with the percentage being set in regulation and the percentage is to be 60 per cent. The only big change here is that with old Act, one could assume the benefits would be greater than 60 per cent because it says, cannot be less than 60 per cent. With this change, now there is no opportunity for it to be greater than 60 per cent. It's limited to 60 per cent.

I'm not sure that that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a beneficial change. It certainly makes things perhaps cleaner for the pension fund. They know exactly then that employee A's pension is \$1,500 a month and their spouse will receive 60 per cent of that, so \$900. Because at some point in time they may have had other circumstances that allowed for that to be increased beyond that 60 per cent point, and now those opportunities will be lost.

Another change moves this Bill into sync with the federal Income Tax Act, that the maximum age for members to make contributions has now been reduced to 69 from 71. I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what they're trying to do here is move people out of the workforce to a certain extent, by limiting their contributions up until the age of 69 and not beyond that.

You know there are people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that are very long-lived. There are people who, as they reach the higher ages, are in very, very good condition. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of my neighbours . . . I'll tell you a little story.

This lady was at this time about 83, 84 years old, and she still put part of her pension money aside, her Canada pension, for her old age. At 83 she was not yet old. And indeed, this particular lady, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is currently 94 years old and still not old . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes and the member from Meadow Lake speaks up, he says and you, Mr. Member, still look like you're 29. And indeed, Mr. Member from Meadow Lake, I still am. Well thank you, members opposite.

One of the things that we need to take a very serious look at though, with any changes to the public pension, public service pension, is how is it affecting those members that have come into the pension plan since its inception.

We have had some concerns raised with us by people who were in the pension plan prior to 1981. There were changes made at that point in time under the NDP government of Allan Blakeney, that were not well explained to the people in the pension plan at that time. And some of the options that they had available, they missed out on because the plan was not explained to them properly. They didn't access them in the manner that they should have done so.

In fact, this has led to some very serious concerns by the unions involved in representing those particular employees, those pension members. And indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm told that they are now in court to try and settle the difficulties that have arisen with these changes. That people have been denied some of the benefits they should have been entitled to, and it is going through the court system. And that the government is arguing — and I'm not sure that it isn't partially a valid argument — that the unions had some responsibility to explain to their membership exactly what the benefits that they had negotiated with the government of the day, the Allan Blakeney government, what those benefits in that pension plan were.

But the lawsuit is arguing that those benefits were not explained to the pension holders, and that because they were not explained, they were denied some of the opportunities they should have had.

What the pensioners that have held this are arguing is that they should be allowed to buy those pension years back in again, so that they would have received the benefits that they would have accrued had it been explained properly to them in the first place.

And I guess we'll have to wait and see exactly what the courts decide on this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I think it's very critical that when these kind of changes are made to an Act, that they're made in such a manner as they serve all of the people in the pension. That those that are currently in the pension have the entire changed structure explained to them, so that they know clearly, exactly what is available to them when they are in the pension and when the changes take place.

Again I would like to mention the unfunded pension liabilities that are held by the province, and have a concern whether or not this particular pension is part of that.

The teachers' pension plan certainly is, but that does not cover the entire amount of the unfunded pensions which the Provincial Auditor says is \$3.7 billion. Three point seven billion dollars, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a significant amount of money. In fact, it's almost 25 per cent of the money that the government holds in general debt of \$11.2 billion.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think people with the pensions need to be reassured by this government that their pension money is indeed safe, that it will be paid out as it becomes due to them. Because I know that I'm sure that you're as concerned about your future financially as any other person across Saskatchewan, as any person involved in this pension plan would be.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are quite a few people across this province that are concerned about the pension plans that need to have an opportunity to have a look and see exactly what these changes entail, what they mean, and how they're going to affect their life today, and how they're going to affect their life in the future. As you can tell, it's a fairly substantive piece of legislation that deals with a lot of very technical terms.

Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would move at this time that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 14

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Serby that **Bill No. 14 — The Film Employment Tax Credit Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Thank you very much.

I'm delighted today to stand and talk about the film employment tax credit. We're talking about movies; we're talking about actually culture and having fun here in Saskatchewan. And that doesn't happen very often in this province. Anytime the government talks about doing something that's fun in this province they usually find a way to tax it.

So when they talk about tax credits for the film industry, I think that we're delighted that this government is saying the film industry, we're having a chance to develop our potential and culture, that's absolutely great.

In 1998 the film employment tax credit was introduced, to find a way to grow the film industry in Saskatchewan. Now this was probably . . . I know that this is a competitive industry. Right across Canada there's always . . . the provinces are trying to attract the industry from the States, so Saskatchewan introduced this tax credit.

In a nutshell the film producers receive a tax credit from Saskatchewan government for employing people in their production. So that means people in Saskatchewan get a chance to be in the movies, and I think this is something that was heralded across the province as something that was going to be a real winning idea.

The theory is that it will cause more television and film productions to be shot in this province. The film industry has run where there's a lot of competition between provinces. Americans have taken a great interest in producing films here in Saskatchewan because of the difference in dollars.

I know that for years we all have watched the Academy Awards and watched the movies that are produced right across the world, and the incentive to come up to Canada actually increased a lot when we started to see a difference in the Canadian dollar.

The tax credit seems to be paying off, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although it's still fairly early in this game. But we have learned lately that the film production has doubled to just over \$50 million annually. And I guess the question is how high can it go? Maybe it's going to be the backbone of this province before we know it.

The Bill that we have right now before us alters the definition of the eligible employees and residents it requires in order to get a tax credit. Actually, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're going to want more details on this to ensure that we aren't just putting jobs for current Saskatchewan residents on the wings and allowing more people to come in that aren't Saskatchewan residents.

As well the reporting mechanism in this Bill appears to have

changed at the request of those involved in the industry. The added procedure is also being taken into consideration in the amendment, and actually they're saying it's just going to bring it into line with other provinces.

Such reporting is needed to ensure that eligible requirements aren't being skirted since the tax credits are based on the number of employees hired. Smaller production companies have found the requirement for a complete audit is very expensive, and I know that small businesses — no matter which business it is — can't afford the cost of a full-blown audit.

(1530)

They're implementing a three-tier system with only those productions over \$500,000 needing a full audit; those under \$200,000 will simply have to sign an affidavit; and between 200,000 and \$500,000, they'll require a review engagement.

And, Mr. Speaker, it seems that whenever there is a good idea brought forward in this province, someone is going to be a winner and someone's going to be a loser. It's clear from some of the numbers the government has thrown out in a few instances, that this isn't good for the economy. This tax brace will be good.

And I want to make it clear from the onset, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we support the concept of tax credits or tax incentives to expand the economy and in creating jobs — it's great, it's a good idea. And that includes the film industry.

But what we really do object to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is this NDP's government continued desire to pick winners and losers. Whenever you decide that some group of people is going to get a tax credit, then you have to decide somebody else is not going to get a tax credit. And those who don't get the tax credit are going to pay for the other people.

So how do you decide? How do you sit around a caucus table and say this is an industry I think should succeed, this is an industry that shouldn't succeed? That's not the job of government — is to decide which business is going to be a good one in this province and which one isn't going to be.

A few years ago we had this government deciding that the hog operations were the only way to go. And before you knew it, the industry actually went into a tailspin. I've had a number of my constituents say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that whenever the government gets involved in something, it's a sure sign you better get out because it's not going to last very long.

I think the producers around the Outlook area can tell you the same thing because last year we found that SPUDCO and the whole potato industry went into a tailspin because of this government's insistence of getting involved in business. I don't think there was . . . The real producers out there, the ones that were making their living and gradually growing the industry and they had seen over a number of years how they could actually make a difference; they knew that they could count on their suppliers and they could sell, they had markets for the products that they were selling.

And all of a sudden this government comes and gets involved

and they say, you know what, if a little is good then a lot should be a whole lot better. But they had no idea how to make it work. You can't all of a sudden decide that I'm going to expand the market by 400 per cent without figuring out what's going to happen on the other end. But this isn't something that this government has figured out — is that there's always a result to your actions, especially when you're in government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the one thing that I think this government can take credit for is letting anybody believe that business people know and have any faith in this government. They don't have a clue how to make a business run. And I think you can see that in every detail of this government's work.

Actually CFIB (Canadian Federation of Independent Business) did a very good report not too long ago and they were talking about things like the small business corporate tax rates. Effective January 1 of this year, Saskatchewan's rate is 8 per cent — 8 per cent for the small business corporate tax rate. And you know what that is? It's the second highest rate in Canada. That's not a good incentive. That's not a way to encourage people to start a business in this province. Given announced reductions in small business corporate tax in Ontario and BC (British Columbia) and Manitoba, people that are planning to either start a business or expand a business will not be looking in Saskatchewan.

And I think that this government doesn't understand that you have to have faith in people. You have to know that they know how to make the business work and you don't have to tax the living daylight out of them just to make sure that they can stay in this province.

Over 80 per cent of the CFIB members agreed the government should reduce and eventually eliminate Saskatchewan's small business corporate tax rate. We believe that. The Saskatchewan Party said that in their platform. They knew that to encourage businesses and to get the economy moving in this province, we had to remind people that profit isn't a swear letter . . . swear word, it's not a four-letter word. We actually have to allow people to make some business and to create some money so that they will stay in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the commercial property and business tax in Saskatchewan is the third highest tax concern of Saskatchewan small businesses. It's a strong concern for firms in the retail and the service sector. Sixty-four per cent of members agree that the education component of local business taxes has to be . . . is causing a huge concern.

Over 60 per cent of the funding now for education in this province comes from property tax owners. If you own a business in Saskatchewan, you're going to be paying on your property, on your personal property, and you're going to be paying on your business as well. Businesses are saying, how much more can I stand. The education portion of this business tax and property tax in this province is hurting businesses badly and it's encouraging people to leave as quickly as they can.

The profit incentive nature of property taxes creates hardship for very many small businesses. The CFIB members are saying that they have to remove education components from local businesses to make Saskatchewan more competitive.

Mr. Speaker, in 1992, when this government came into power, they knew that they had to develop, or they believed they should develop some sort of a plan to get this economy moving. And I think it's very interesting when they developed what they called *A Partnership for Renewal* and they set out a number of objectives that they wanted to reach in five years to see if they could get the province moving.

Well first of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want you to know that I believe in this province. I love it, I've lived here all my life, I've never moved, and I've fought hard to make sure that the economy can survive. In fact one of the reasons why I ran, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is because I thought maybe somehow we can get an idea of what it takes to run a business if we could get somebody into the legislature who's actually been there.

So I looked at this *Partnership for Renewal*, and I thought okay, some of these ideas aren't even bad.

One of the ones . . . The third objective that the then Minister of Economic Development brought out in 1992 was to ensure a competitive tax system for business. And they were supposed to have a supportive, specific strategy by saying we're going to review the tax system to ensure that it supports productive investment to contribute to economic development and employment creation. And they said that was underway.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's look at that. How many people are . . . have left the province since 1992? We have the same number of people overall in this province that we did 10 years ago. Well a lot of those people are either under the age of 15 or over the age of 55, but not the ones that are working everyday to try and get this economy moving.

And I'm sure that it's a . . . The number of businesses that talked to us since the budget are saying, this is not . . . the budget is not something that's going to make me stay in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to . . . the fourth goal that was set up by this government in 1992 was to move towards equitable regulations for businesses. This, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a laugh. Any person that tries to operate a business in this province is saying the rules and regulations and red tape in this province will choke you. Every time you turn around, you need another permit or a business licence or some kind of a regulation this government sets up, and there's no end to it.

We see the occupational health and safety standards boards that are set up, and they're within small businesses that actually cost the administration a lot of money.

I think the one thing that this government doesn't recognize is that employers in this province treat their employees very well overall. Most people know that you cannot keep a good employee if you don't treat them well. We always . . . There seems to be this feeling that employers don't like their employees. They say . . . every time I see this government talk, they talk about employers as if they're the bad people.

I've never figured out why we have to have a Department of Economic Development and a Department of Labour in two different ends of a page. It's the same people we're talking

about. Everybody has the same goals — they want to have a good job, and they want to have some money to take home at the end of the day. It's not going to happen if you're going to try and create a barrier between those employers and employees.

The regulations this government brings forward creates a lot of problems when it comes to businesses.

The next goal that this government had is one that I'm very concerned about now . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. I just wish to remind the hon. member that the Bill before the Assembly is The Film Employment Tax Credit Amendment Act, 2000. I've been listening very carefully and it has been some time since I've heard a reference to the film tax credit Act, the Bill before the Assembly, and I know the member will want to tie her comments into the Act before the Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — I'm sure that . . . I apologize, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm sure that I was talking about how we wanted to create a business environment in this problem . . . in this province — this problem, all right — in this province, and that though we agree with the fact that the film industry can be an important asset and an important part of this province's economy, how can we do that when we're picking winners and losers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the type of thing that's happening: we have a government saying the film industry is a great one; we're going to give it a tax credit; we're going to help the industry get on its feet. And yet on the next hand we're thinking, how are we going to pay for this. Who is actually paying for this tax credit? That tax credit is coming from the pockets of every one of us who aren't in the film industry.

As soon as you choose to give some person, some group of people, a tax incentive, somebody else is going to lose. And this province has been doing it for 10 years. You decide to pick winners and losers. The film industry is a winner right now. We're pleased. Everybody's happy. But who's the losers?

And what I'm telling you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is there's reasons why this province has got one of the poorest rates of job growth. We have a large number of our educated children leaving the province as soon as they get their education because there's incentives in other provinces that's going to let them go ahead as individuals.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a business person in this province, whether you're in the film industry or whether you're in any other business, you know that one of the biggest problems you have is the tax burden. Now the property taxes in this province have risen substantially and the education portion of it has more than doubled in the last eight years. And businesses, whether it's the film industry or manufacturing, business is feeling that very hard.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the regulations again . . . And I'm sure that the film industry is feeling the pinch of them as well,

because every time you turn around, there's another rule and regulation you have to deal with in this province.

Some of the business people that have phoned me and said, have you talked to this government about the labour laws. I'm sure that all of us are well aware of the certification that went on for a union in my area. And I wonder, are industries like the film industry going to have to be dealing with these union rules and labour laws that are very, very restrictive and make it very difficult for businesses to determine if they should actually start in this province or if they should intend to expand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we talk about how we're going to pay for this tax credit, today in the legislature we had a report from the Children's Advocate on the social welfare system in this province.

And I think it was, no matter which side of this House you're from, it was very disheartening. It was something that made all of us uneasy. None of us were proud to see that report. Whether you're opposition or whether you're in government, that was the kind of report that it doesn't make you proud and it doesn't make you happy to know that your province has that kind of problems.

So, you know, the question always goes back to, why isn't it different? And one of the reasons it's not different is always the lack of money. So when we have a government deciding that they're going to pick winners and losers in businesses and we're going to have tax credits given to different people, we wonder, could that money be better spent some place else?

Why would we have the social . . . the welfare workers working in this province tearing their hair out trying to figure out how they're going to meet the demands in that system, how they're going to look after the children under their care, when we have on the other hand millions of dollars given out to a business. We don't have to give businesses tax breaks and incentives if we actually have an environment for them to succeed without a tax credit. The money can then be spent on things like social services to ensure that our children are looked after.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other group of people that I think are probably wondering if they have the time today to be watching this legislative session, is the farmers in this province who've tried desperately this winter and probably for a year now to get this government's attention about how desperate their needs are for money and how they are so pinched. We know that a lot of them are on bankruptcy or in dire straits right now wondering how they're going to put their crops in.

And they see the \$5.2 billion . . . or \$6.2 billion that the government is going to spend this year in the budget. And they look down the row and say, where's the money going for me? Or where is the government going to spend all of this money? And they see how they've changed priorities since 1992.

We saw how much money was being spent on agriculture in 1992 compared to today. I don't have the exact number in front of me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I know if you compare what number was spent for the film industry in 1992 compared to the film industry today, it would be considerable different.

So a decision is being made by a number of people on that side of the House — 31 people, I guess it is, Mr. Deputy Speaker — how to spend that \$6.2 billion. They didn't choose farmers to be at the top of the priority list, they didn't choose the social workers to be at the top of the priority list, and they haven't seen education to be at the top of the priority list. But we have decided that there are a few million dollars we should give to the film industry.

(1545)

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to ensure that people know I'm a moviegoer — I love them all — and there's been some great productions that have been put out of Saskatchewan. I think that we're all proud to go to these productions and see them. But what we have to say, is that the best way to spend our dollars? Is that really a good way to spend our dollars?

And so I think in times right now when we have the report that we saw today talking about children that were in danger in this province, how much . . . I mean those million dollars could be spent in other places.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm sure that when we look around this province, we know that there are other areas, other businesses that would like to be starting up, and they are saying, I wonder how you get to be at the top of the government's priority list so that you can get a tax break.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that Saskatchewan has the second highest small-business tax. And since the disaster at the polls in Saskatchewan last year, we heard this government talking about reducing taxes, but we've yet to really see any results. Even with the supposed reduction in our personal income tax this year, after all the information that the opposition has brought forward, we know that at the end of the day there's people who are going to have less money in their pockets now than they were last year at this time.

General tax relief for all employees would give positive impacts. They can't deny that since they seem to embrace the concept in the film industry. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's obvious from the minister's words when he introduced this Bill that there was . . . they could see that there was a reason and there was some positive things happen when there was a tax break. The film industry saw that happen. They over doubled their sales in the last two years.

But what would happen if we could do that to all industry in this province, not just the film industry? What happens if everybody would be given the same chance and we wouldn't have to be picking winners and losers, Mr. Speaker?

Instead of tax relief, businesses are fearful of tax increases, especially those just outside of Regina and I would think just outside of Saskatoon as well. My office has been inundated with letters from businesses from the RM of Sherwood, which employs thousands of Regina residents, who fear that the government's plans for forced amalgamation because they think their property taxes will skyrocket. And they say that that's going to be enough to make . . . (inaudible) . . . This is another case of winners versus losers in this government's grand scheme of economic development.

So, Mr. Speaker, although the film industry is one industry that we can see is growing in this province, we understand why it's growing. We understand that the tax credit is one of the reasons why it's growing. What we have to ask the government is why they don't think that other industries in this province deserve the same recognition and the same help?

So we're going to be consulting with more people in this province to talk about what they think would be the right way. And we would ask at this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd ask to adjourn debate on this Bill.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 3

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Crofford that **Bill No. 3 — The Health Labour Relations Reorganization Amendment Act, 1999** be now read a second time.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on The Health Labour Relations Reorganization Amendment Act, 1999.

This Bill simply extends the provisions of the health reorganization passed in 1996. It seriously reduced the number of bargaining units in the health care profession in this province.

This reorganization was commonly known as the Dorsey commission. The number of bargaining units were reduced from 538 to 45. The SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union), usually a stance supporter of the NDP, was upset in particular about the changes made since many of its members were moved to other unions. In total, it lost about 3,500 members.

This Bill was supposed to make labour negotiations more manageable. It is ironic then that we've had so much labour strife in the health care field in the last years.

In reality, this Bill did little to calm labour problems because the government has done nothing to improve working conditions. We still hear from nurses and other health care workers constantly about the working conditions in our hospitals.

While reducing the number of bargaining units did make sense, the heavy-handed approach the government took in accomplishing this was typical. If we are to attract health care professionals to Saskatchewan, especially nurses, we're going to have to do a whole lot more than tinker with how the unions operate.

We've heard over and over this government's commitment to hire hundreds of new nurses in Saskatchewan who are desperately needed, but we don't seem to be making progress very fast. Instead of tinkering with the health care unions, let's get on with the job of improving the health care system.

I'd like to quote, Mr. Minister, from the Hon. Minister of Education, from an article that he replied to in 1996. And I

quote Mr. Melenchuk:

Most health research in Canada has emphasized local control over health delivery . . . But that's not what has happened under the NDP health reform . . .

"It is a sham board controlled by the provincial government," he said. "They've destroyed local control."

Mr. Melenchuk . . . or the Minister of Education continues:

"We have a level of bureaucracy. We have a huge Health Department," he said. "We have more money going into our Health Department now than we did four or five years ago and our service delivery has decreased. To me, that indicates a problem."

And further on that, I'd like to quote from Mr. Duane Adams, who at that time was the deputy minister of Health. And he says, Duane Adams says:

reports of a health-care crisis in Alberta and Ontario have fuelled fears here. But he says it's wrong to make such comparisons.

"We didn't start out to slash the budget," he says, noting (that) Saskatchewan is the only province where health spending is about the same as when reform started.

"We set out to offer new services that would be sustainable for the future and provide a better quality of life for (our) people."

"We're so far ahead of every other place in Canada and even world-wide that maybe we're too far ahead for some of the Saskatchewan public," he said.

Well, I think the people of Saskatchewan would be a little bit disturbed to hear that this was what he was talking about in 1996 about the future of wellness, and to see what has happened in the last four years in this province.

Mr. Adams further says:

"We borrowed everything that made sense and applied it to the Saskatchewan situation, and then looked down the line 20 years and said . . . this (is) what's needed for the future?"

The "hard part" — reorganization of services and putting the brakes on increasing costs — was expected to take four to six years. A key step was local governance of health care through (the) creation of 30 district health boards. Hastened by (the) federal transfer cuts, most of this work has been completed.

I further quote, and this is from the Premier, the member from Riversdale:

"The majority don't come into contact with the system so they base their opinions on public debate. This sounds like I'm being critical of the media. I'm not, but it is easy to arouse emotions on isolated examples, which is what we

get in the news, instead of the reality of the day-in, day-out functioning of the system.”

People have lost their jobs and their lives have been disrupted as a result of reform, . . . (the member from Riversdale) admits. “They don’t like it and they talk about it.

“But that will quiet down as the current insertion of the philosophy of wellness becomes more or less complete . . .

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

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Leave to introduce a guest, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House, Mr. Elmer Henderson, former deputy fire chief, city of Saskatoon, and currently involved with the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association here in the city having meetings today, and I would ask everyone to join with me in welcoming Mr. Henderson.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 23 — The Health Labour Relations Reorganization Amendment Act, 1999

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the labour front, let’s bring fairness back to our trade union laws. Just as it is wrong not to allow someone to form a union, it is also wrong to force people to join unions. It is wrong to make it nearly impossible to decertify even if a majority of workers want that.

We should have a system in place that is fair for both employers as well as employees, or we are going to start losing more people in this province.

The major problem in our province is the heavy hand of unions trying to organize in workplaces where they clearly are not wanted. We have owners of businesses in many cases and majority of workers in their shop who do not want a union, but the union is allowed to go in and use the heavy hand and use the labour laws of this province to disrupt the workplace and to put a union in places where they are not wanted or needed.

It’s the same type of approach we saw with the creation of health districts themselves and what we will probably soon see with the NDP’s drive to amalgamate municipalities. And like the amalgamation of health care unions, there will probably be very little consultation in the areas of municipal amalgamation either. And what consultation there is will likely be ignored as the province moves ahead with the legislation.

As is the case with municipal amalgamation, we were told at the time of the Dorsey report that these changes would make labour negotiations more smooth and make the system better. Well what did we see with the health districts? What we see mainly was the loss of local control. We seen services cut. We seen the cost in health care continue to rise at the expense of services being lost.

This government went in and confiscated assets, they confiscated property, they confiscated reserves of the people in the health districts that they had spent lifetimes saving and keeping for the day when they would need a new hospital or an ambulance. And this government took them. They even so much as took furniture out of buildings and it was never seen again. They took equipment. And then they wonder why the people of this province are concerned about amalgamation and what is going on in the RMs today. They do not trust this government and they have full reason not to trust them.

And then we were faced with the nurses’ strike last year. Clearly amalgamation in the health care sector did not cure the real problems, just like the government’s plan for forced amalgamation will not do anything to improve the lives of those in rural Saskatchewan.

When the original Dorsey recommendations were put in place, not only were some union members angry, there were plenty of non-union workers who were angry to find themselves being forced to join the union. This is typical of the NDP labour policy. We’ll soon see the same thing in the construction industry, where the government plans to force non-unionized employees into unions where they want not to be.

The other issue that we are . . . the union employees are very concerned about, and need be, is the recklessness of this government. When they decided to close the Plains hospital they had total disregard for the people of this province and the health care that they would receive. They also had total disregard for the people that worked in the Plains hospital and they disrupted the nurses and this has never been corrected to this day.

We were guaranteed in this province that we would not lose beds, we would not lose any level of health care, and we have seen what has happened in this province.

At that time the people of this province held meetings all across southern Saskatchewan pleading with this government to leave the Plains hospital open. They did not listen. At that time we had the Minister of Education who went out to these meetings who actually was the ringleader of these meetings and he had great credibility at that time. He said he would chain himself to the Plains hospital. Where is he today? Is he speaking out on behalf of the people of this province to guarantee that they receive adequate health care?

What the people of this province want is health care that is timely and where they can be guaranteed that they can receive the service when they need it. We haven’t. The NDP, instead of giving us better health care by closing the Plains which was promised . . . we will not lose any of the service, we’ll get as good a service in the other two hospitals in Regina, there won’t be any problems.

What they did is that they spent \$100 million or more to close a hospital and to give us less services. This is what the NDP's idea of wellness is.

And certainly the issues were brought to a boiling point last year when the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses engaged in a strike in an attempt to improve the conditions in the workplace, in an attempt to make sure that the issues of recruitment and retention were going to be sufficiently addressed.

And everyone in this province will remember how absolutely convinced the nurses are that these issues are fundamentally important to improvements in the health care delivery system in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it sort of strikes me as bizarre, but in many instances where this government seems to lose track of the connections between what's happening in the workplace and health care and about some theoretical model such as the proposed Dorsey report.

(1600)

Mr. Speaker, what happens in many instances is there is simply no understanding at all of what front-line care workers are attempting to do and what they struggle with day after day as they try to provide first rate service in a system that is entirely under pressure and in many instances, badly underfunded.

I'd like to quote, Mr. Speaker, from some of the issues that have been brought up at the SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses) convention that is currently being held in Moose Jaw. We have the president of the SUN, Rosalee Longmoore, stating, Mr. Cline . . . or sorry, I've got the wrong one, wrong page . . . I did have the right page.

I quote Rosalee Longmoore:

Mr. Cline in this province says that the health budget is almost 40 per cent of the provincial budget. He does not tell you that the way they calculate that figure is by taking our total reserves, subtracting the payment on the debt which is significant, and then saying that health care costs are about 40 per cent of the remaining revenue.

The announcer then continues to say:

Longmoore warns delegates that health districts will have much tighter budgets this year because the government has cut back funding and it will have a negative effect to say the least, on Saskatchewan nurses.

And then I quote from some of the nurses that were in attendance at this meeting. And they're very upset about their leadership supporting the government of this province and helping them with their fundraising.

Kathy Abel, a nurse from Saskatoon, and I quote:

Some of us feel that we all need to be getting the same message. I believe SUN still has a policy that we don't affiliate with any political party but we're receiving mixed messages. And if I'm going to lobby the government and

tell them that they're inappropriate then I want my leaders also to be giving the same message. And sometimes I don't think that message is very clear.

When our leaders went to the NDP fundraising banquet, the Premier's fundraising banquet in November, six months after that man legislated us back to work, I find that shocking and appalling and so do the members, 2,400 strong, in my district.

Again I'd like to quote, Mr. Speaker, from Bev Hondros from the Saskatoon Health District.

Regarding this being at the Premier's dinner, I realized that it was an opportunity but I don't know if you read the editorial that came in the Saskatoon paper shortly after that. Basically they made fun of us that we condemned the government while we were on strike. We basically said they don't have a clue what's happening. They're not listening to us.

And then the president and the executive director were at a fundraising dinner. Would they be at fundraising dinners for the other two parties? And I know it's a balancing act of this as an opportunity; do we use it? But I think this was in bad judgment just because of the timing.

And then I'd like to quote from Garry Reid from local 75 who said:

I just wanted to add to the discussion about attending the Premier's dinner. I felt like I'd been kicked in the stomach when I read in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* the editorial about your attendance at that function regardless of what the SFL's (Saskatchewan Federation of Labour) intent about an opportunity to build relationships. I think SUN should have declined, given our policy that we don't affiliate with political parties, and we think we need to give our heads a shake in the future for thinking about doing this.

And this is how the members of the SUN union feel about this government and about their leadership attending events, that they do not support and they do not want to have any part of.

This morning, or yesterday morning I believe it was, on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio, they also interviewed a nurse, Corinne Slobodian. And when she was asked by the reporter . . . (inaudible) . . . they were talking about the nursing strike in Saskatchewan, and it lasted 11 days before the government legislated the nurses back to work. Well that may have been a year ago, but as Sharon Durrand reports, it's still fresh in the minds of many nurses.

And the reporter, Sharon Durrand, continues on and says:

Saskatchewan nurses are still singing the same tune. They say they've come a long way since last year's labour dispute, but it's obvious that many issues still haven't been resolved. Corinne Slobodian works in a nursing home and health care centre in Cudworth. She says many nurses are disheartened.

And I quote from what . . . and Corinne Slobodian who then replied to this question said:

The bottom line is they are still working, going to be working in those extra hours without extra time off and it's really hard to stay positive in knowing that you're there in the public's best interest and you're there to provide safe nursing care.

And when asked by the reporter about the plans include more cuts, she compared these cuts to what the government did to health care in 1992. Bev Crossman, the SUN executive director, and I quote. This is from Bev Crossman who is the executive director of SUN, and she said:

Louise Simard's 52 hospital closures could pale by comparison of the impact of this budget.

And then the reporter replied:

Crossman believes all signs point towards privatization, so she urged SUN members to fight to keep health care public. The union's meeting will wrap up on Friday. This is how the people that are employed by the SUN union in this province and who are members of the executive feel about this government.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I think is important to recognize is, all across this province every single day, literally thousands of nurses and licensed practical nurses and front-line care workers that belong to other bargaining units are working diligently 8 and 12 hours a day and sometimes into overtime to try to provide the very best health care that they're capable of providing. They're the unsung heroes in the whole health care field that are toiling under some pretty diverse, adverse conditions, in many instances, to see that health care is delivered properly and effectively in a caring and compassionate way.

And, Mr. Speaker, quite often what happens is that instead of the government assisting that process, in many instances they're part of the problem rather than being part of the solution.

Mr. Speaker, there's many, many concerns, and we've had the privilege of talking to many of the health care providers in this province over the last few months. And there's grave concern at all levels in the hospitals — from neonatal for concern about an inadequate level of staffing; nurses being asked to work in different departments where they're not properly trained, but yet they're needed, and so they come in to relieve.

Many nurses are working overtime hours simply because they know that if they don't go in to work that their colleagues will be short staffed. They know the patients will not get the proper care. And so they go in day after day after day to provide care for the people of this province.

They are what are holding the system together. And if it wasn't for the nurses in this province and their support staff, we would be in graver shape than we are.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — We now have some wind in . . . some rumours in the wind about how we might have to cut some support staff in order to balance the budget, especially in the Regina Health District. I had the privilege of speaking to a nurse who works in the Regina Health District. She works in emergency, and she said that there is grave concern about this, that this might happen — that they might lose some of their support staff. Because she said it is the support staff is the only thing that keeps them going day after day and night after night. And if they lose their support staff, the system will fall apart.

She said that there are unit clerk nurses. They coordinate the ward. They are the lifeline. They're the ones that when the emergency nurse needs a doctor called, they go and call the doctor.

There's an admitting clerk. They cannot do without the admitting clerk to handle the paperwork.

There are porters. The porters have many, many functions, but one of their most important functions is to transport blood and make sure that they have the supplies that they need when they need them in the emergency department.

There are LPNs (licensed practical nurses) who assist the RNs (registered nurses) many times having to take over and watch their patients when they have a really critical issue come into the ward.

There are lab techs that they can not do without.

There is the security guards. They cannot do without the security guards because many times they have people that are admitted that need someone to watch them. And the main thing about the security guards is the condition that these nurses put up with day after day when they have to get to and from their cars in the parking lot, and they need that security.

I would like this government, Mr. Speaker, to tell me which one of these support staff are they going to eliminate and still keep this system functioning in our province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Further the nurses work as a team. This is not a game of pitting one against the other; they are all needed and they are all needed to give adequate care in our province. And I would hope that this government would look at this very, very closely before they make a decision to cut support staff in our hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to quote — just in closing I'd like to talk about the nursing home situation in Saskatchewan — I'd like to quote from the minister from Saskatoon . . .

An Hon. Member: — Northwest — Saskatoon Northwest.

Ms. Bakken: — Saskatoon Northwest, in an article from 1996, and I quote:

Saskatchewan has more nursing home beds than the national average which is about 129 per a thousand seniors over the age of 75. The province now has about 142 beds

down from 150 beds for every thousand seniors over 75. But if you need a nursing home bed you should have access to one. The bed should be open. It shouldn't be taken by someone who doesn't need to be there.

And he continues on to say:

Despite all the squawking and complaining 80 per cent of the health funding is still spent on institutional care.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the major issue is here now the Government of Saskatchewan has decided to increase the fees on nursing home beds and is going to make it very difficult for some of these seniors to be able to afford this care. Not only do they have to pay their . . . for a monthly fee for their nursing home beds, but they're also now asked to pay for everything else that they need in the nursing homes.

And to think that a senior that is making \$28,000 a year in income is somehow considered rich in this province and can afford to pay the high-end scale of the fee is absolutely ludicrous. And I think that it'd be hard pressed for anyone in this Assembly to be able to live on 28,000 a year and to pay . . . immediately to be given . . . said, well if you want to retain your place of residence, you're going to have to pay upwards of 4 to \$500 more a month to do so.

And I think that this is putting a great hardship on the seniors of our province who have saved all their lives so that they could look after themselves when they became in need of home care . . . of nursing home care, and now we're asking them to pay more and more. And it is certainly and is simply not acceptable, Mr. Speaker.

And at that point, I'd like to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — I understood the member adjourned debate.

Ms. Bakken: — I would like to say that I was not to adjourn debate.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and participate in the debate on The Health Labour Relations Reorganization Amendment Act, 1999.

But if I could beg your indulgence for just a second before I proceed. Today is a very important day in my son's life and I'm not there, so I'd just like to take a moment and wish my son, Tyrrell, a happy 10th birthday.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we are aware, Mr. Speaker, this is basically an extension of the legislation that was passed in 1996. The intent of this legislation was to bring peace and harmony when it came to labour relations within the health care system.

But the legislation has had a rather bumpy road right from the beginning, originally when it was challenged in court by the SGEU, and basically on the right of people to choose their union and to determine whether they should be unionized at all, or not. And this is a major civil right that I think was denied a

lot of individuals in that process.

Consequently I think a lot of what we're seeing today, and a lot of the difficulties that people are experiencing in the health care system, may in fact be related directly to the origins of this legislation. What was supposed to bring peace and harmony into the health care system, in fact appears to have caused far more disgruntlement and dismay and concern out there than what there ever has been previously.

I can think of numerous different situations that I have been made aware of recently that I think reflect very well the degree of concern and the degree of upset that there is. And not only, as the government would like us to believe, on the part of people receiving service in the health care system; but on the part of the people providing that service as well.

(1615)

A lot of the employees, a lot of the personnel directly involved in health care in this province, are very, very disappointed. They are having a harder and harder time getting up every morning and going to work. And this is because of a lot of the arbitrary decisions that are made about the way that they do their job, about the way that they live their lives everyday where they feel that they no longer have ownership.

There are individual situations. I can think of a situation in a community close to ours where a nurse couldn't, wasn't feeling well enough to go to work one morning but was called in . . . Actually, she hadn't been scheduled to work that day anyway, but was asked to come in and work. She told management that she wasn't well, and that she didn't feel she could do her job very well, being ill. They left her no choice. It was either come in or not have a job.

Well, very difficult, very difficult for that kind of an individual to do that job when they're being forced to do it where they have very little confidence in their ability to do it.

And how about the confidence of the people that are receiving the service — that that individual is receiving. There are the individual stories such as that. Then there are the stories as they affect entire communities. And the community I'm of course the most familiar with is the community of Carrot River.

Interestingly enough, this is a community that has taken health care in their community very responsibly. They've always contributed or attempted to contribute to any decision-making processes that were made with respect to services in their community. But time and time and time again they have been overruled, intimidated — whatever the case is — into accepting the kinds of things that they know probably aren't in the best interest of their community but are the kinds of things that they're told they won't get the service unless they abide by them.

I think back to originally when the hospital was built in Carrot River. And this was under the previous NDP administration. The community very much wanted a hospital that was built adjacent to their nursing home. This was probably a community on the leading edge because what were they talking about? They were talking about an integrated facility. Now that's 17,

18 years ago that these people were talking about wanting to do that because in that community that's what made the most sense. That was what they seen the most effective way of meeting the needs in their community and of delivering service in their community.

But what happened, Mr. Speaker? The Department of Health came along and said, sorry, but you can't do that. It makes no sense to put a hospital next to a nursing home — makes no sense. So they ended up having to agree to a location that was a couple of hundred feet away from that nursing home if they wanted to have their new hospital built.

Actually, interestingly enough, the department wanted them to originally build it about 13 blocks away, which is about as far away as you can get in Carrot River, but they did get them to within a couple of hundred feet of the nursing home.

Well they thought that at least by doing that they may very well have had gotten partially what they needed. There might have been efficiencies that they could have gained by being together, by being that close, but that's where their hospital ended up.

Well time went by and then we got into health care reform and the wellness model. Well interestingly enough . . . And once again I think this is contrary to the opinion of the members opposite. Somehow they think the people in small communities can't make decisions for themselves, that they can't think for themselves.

The community of Arborfield, just a few miles down the road from Carrot River was approached by the Department of Health. The Department of Health said, well, we're going to be looking at the way we deliver service in this province. We have this thing called the wellness model that we would like to implement but that means that your hospital in Arborfield is way too close to Carrot River, it costs too much money, and it's too old. Would you consider closing the hospital?

Well that argument made some sense to the people of Arborfield. They agreed — they had an older hospital. There was a hospital that was outliving its usefulness. They were fairly close to the community of Carrot River, they were fairly close to the community of Carrot River, and they were quite confident in the health care services in Carrot River. So they said, okay, we as a community we will agree that our hospital be closed.

And in return for that they got from the people of the day that they were working with, a guarantee that because they had expressed and displayed such a reasonable approach, that the hospital in Carrot River would remain open for them for as long as they . . . as the community of Arborfield needed it. Well that's the second time that the community was let down.

Now the third time is that not very long ago the government announced that they were going to close the hospital completely. The community, as I am sure everyone is aware, protested and was very determined in making their feelings known about the loss of their hospital.

I think they actually did get the attention of the government and within a short while there were some Department of Health

officials out in Carrot River speaking with town council, RM council. But what they delivered them was in essence was an ultimatum. It was take our new plan now or lose everything.

The community at this very point is having a debate with itself. They have to decide amongst themselves whether what is being offered in the ultimatum will meet their needs and will be what they need for the future. Very obviously, it's not going to meet all their needs and very obviously there are going to be some very serious shortfalls in health care in Carrot River.

But the really interesting thing to note, Mr. Speaker, is that — after having been let down originally when the hospital was built and not being allowed to go the route of an integrated facility; after having lost the hospital in a neighbouring community and being promised that theirs would remain to service that community, then being issued an ultimatum, the interesting thing to note is that the community, in order to get the kinds of services that are contained in that ultimatum, now has to come up with \$255,000 of its own money. So promises have been made; promises have been broken.

And now, after all of that, to maintain some meagre form of health care in their service . . . in their community, I'm sorry, they are going to have to pay again to the tune of in excess of a quarter of a million dollars. After, as the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy noted, they as a community — as many other communities in this province have done — they've responsibly managed their funds. They have set their funds aside. They have established reserves. They had trust accounts. They have done all of these things because health care was something that they wanted to be able to provide in their communities. Something that they wanted to feel that they had some ownership of. But now that sense of ownership is fast fading.

No longer do communities feel that they have that ownership. Their ability to be able to control whatever health care services in the community of their own has been completely stripped from them. The control is . . . has been relocated 100, 200 miles down the road or more in some cases. Their trust funds have, have now got someone else in charge of them. The very monies that they scraped to put together in order to be able to guarantee themselves a future has been, has been confiscated for all intents and purposes.

And yet now, and yet now, when they want to maintain the most meagre of basic services, they are asked to pay again. And in the case of Carrot River, what are they going to do? The RM and the town are going to have no choice but to go back to their ratepayers.

They're going to have no choice but to go back to the very people that have been paying disproportionately education tax on their property tax. The very same people who have been so frustrated with the whole issue of education tax on the property tax that there have been property . . . Our part of the province, the northeast part of the province was one of the very last areas of the province to start with the tax revolt meetings. The member from Indian Head-Milestone has the honour of having had I think the first seven or eight in the province. But we were, we were one of the last areas because people, people will try and grit their teeth, and they will try and get through. They will

try and deal with, with things no matter how tough it gets. But as the pressure increases and as it gets tougher and tougher to make ends meet, and then you add financial burdens like another quarter of a million dollars being required on the part of municipal taxpayers, then they start to lose their patience. Their patience wears thin. And that's when you start to see the tax revolts. And I think that's why we're starting to see more and more of those kinds of things happening in our part of the province.

The issue of ownership is not a small one, Mr. Speaker. And I met with the Minister of Health a number of months ago and we talked about health care services in the community of Porcupine Plain. And I think that it's difficult for a lot of people to understand just how important it is for people to have ownership — ownership of their destinies, ownership of their services — to feel like they're a part of something.

When they no longer feel that they have that ownership, when they no longer feel that their contributions are valued, that's when the system starts breaking down. And no longer do people feel like they have ownership in the health care system.

And that's not just the communities; it's not just the individuals. Those are the people that are actually employed in the health care system. That sense of ownership, that sense of loss, has gone.

An example that I think about quite often is a situation that we had in my home town of Porcupine Plain. As long as we . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I would be more than pleased to let the member know exactly what it was.

We had a community that was very aggressive. And I think in a lot of ways we are still aggressive in terms of wanting to provide the best that we can for a community. So when it came to the provision of health care services, people were prepared, through health care auxiliaries, service clubs, whatever the case, to do whatever it is that they had to do — to fundraise, to volunteer their time, their work, their services, the services of their businesses, whatever it took — to be able to provide the best health care that they could in their community.

Well with health care reform, the ownership started to ebb away. And more and more people felt distanced from the decision-making authority — felt distanced from their ability to be able to change the course of events. But even so, Mr. Speaker, they still felt it was important, they still felt it was important, they still felt it was very important to do what they could when they could.

And I think of the particular situation in Porcupine when the district health board came to our community, and they said, we can't afford to buy a fetal heart monitor for your hospital in Porcupine Plain but we would very much like you as a community to join together, fundraise, whatever it takes, purchase this for use in the hospital in Porcupine Plain.

(1630)

Well what did our community do? They did exactly what I'm sure everyone else, as the member opposite just indicated, what everyone else would do. They joined together. They fundraised.

I belong to the Lions Club in Porcupine Plain. We contributed; purchased the fetal heart monitor. The fetal monitor is put in the hospital.

Now we feel like we've made a contribution. We will benefit. There's a tangible benefit to us, the community, to ourselves, to our children.

But interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, we find out a few short months later that all the while that we were doing that, that we were fundraising for that fetal heart monitor, we find out that there was a plan afoot in our community — a plan to eliminate obstetrics in our community.

So I ask you, Mr. Speaker, how can one continue to have faith and how can one continue to contribute and to want to do what you can in order to build and make a community better when you find out that the decision-making authority, which is so far removed from you, is undermining the very efforts you are making?

Eliminating obstetrics in Porcupine Plain would have meant that that fetal heart monitor, not very long after the community had raised money for it, after they had made all sorts of contributions, put in all sorts of work and effort, would have been moved off to probably Tisdale. Betrayed.

And I think that's not too strong a word for the way that people felt because now all of a sudden this effort has been completely undermined. There is no tangible benefit. The very thing that they worked to be able to put into that hospital is being taken away from them. It's being removed. That's community funds. Those are community people, you put that effort into it.

Now I don't think, I don't think . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . One of the members opposite is saying that this is irrelevant to this Bill. Well I guess I would strongly object to that statement simply for the fact that in our community our health care workers are as much a part of our community as anyone else.

Mr. Speaker, they belong to those very same service clubs that raise the money for that fetal heart monitor. They belong to the town councils and the RM councils. They see what's happening. They understand how those kinds of things are going to affect them, and what it's going to do in terms of undermining their efforts.

I mean the whole issue of ownership — whether it be with an employee, whether it be a community, a service club — is the very thing that has sustained our communities and has sustained this province for almost the last hundred years. And now that is being removed from us.

The other issue, in terms of employees and the effect on them, health care reform has resulted in some rather tragic stories in our community in terms of individuals and the way their lives have been affected. And one — actually it's a little humorous — that I remember probably the best is an individual that, after the reorganization and a lot of the consolidation, the amalgamation, ended up being a victim of some of those efforts on the part of this government to eliminate the services in rural Saskatchewan.

Actually this lady, I met her in the hospital waiting room one day and she was crying. And I went over — I've known her for a long time — and she had worked with the home care system. And I went over and I talked with her and she said something to me that appeared to be very poignant — a little humorous but very poignant.

She said, Carl, I don't understand this. She says a hundred years ago we killed off all the buffalo and we built railroads. She said, today we're tearing up the railroads and we're bringing back the buffalo. In her estimation, Mr. Speaker, that sort of epitomized health care and how she felt about it as someone who had contributed her entire career to it, who had attempted to do the best that she could because she was part of the community. She felt ownership in what she was doing.

She wanted to do the best that she could because it affected all of the people around her — her family members, her community members, the people that she went to school with, the people that she went to church with. And this is the degree of disappointment that this lady exhibited about the . . . the degree to which we have deteriorated in our communities and the degree to which we have lost our sense of ownership.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Dorsey report was supposed to have brought, as I indicated earlier, peace and harmony to the health care system. But I'm having a very difficult time finding where that peace and harmony is today.

I just spoke with a nurse today and, between the stresses of the job, the working conditions, and all of the other issues that the nurses have so eloquently stated, in this hospital, this nurse and the nurses that work with her are facing a situation right now where they don't have any ability at all to book holidays. They are just terrified that someone might become ill and why? Because they are so short of nurses right now that they aren't even able to staff what they have to by using everyone to the maximum degree that they can.

Now I might add that this in Porcupine Plain and the nurse I was talking to today made an interesting observation. And she said, how is it that with all of those pressures and stresses, the fact that we can't fill our shifts, the fact that we have to cancel our holidays, the fact that we can't . . . It's scary if someone gets sick. How can all of that be when not too far down the road in Carrot River nurses have just been laid off?

Well as I understand it, Mr. Speaker — and I'm going to be looking into this a little more because I find this a very, very curious thing — and as the nurse in Porcupine I was speaking to today understands it, there's a number of different provisions within the agreements and then within the termination agreements of the nurses in Carrot River that would obligate the Pasquia Health District to pay them time and a half or double time if they came to work in Porcupine Plain, which is absolutely ridiculous.

You've got nurses that have just been laid off — they have no jobs. But they, because of the various and sundry terms of the different agreements that are included in the terms of their separation, would cost the . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Exactly. One of the members asked, where's the common sense? A good question. Where is the common sense in that?

How can you have nurses in one community terrified that someone is going to get sick and that they will not be able to provide the service working under the conditions that they do, and yet a number of nurses in a neighbouring community, who it is absolutely cost prohibitive for them to bring in and to be able to work in that hospital? It does make absolutely no sense at all.

The other issue, and this relates back to ownership, and ownership . . . And I wish the members opposite could grasp the importance of that concept of ownership at the community level, because it is vital to the success of any policy, of any legislation, of any management strategy that one can even possibly think about — whatever it is that you do.

And I think about the hospital in Hudson Bay. The Leader of the Opposition and I, during the election, we were able to tour the hospital and it's a relatively new facility. It looks pretty good. But when you get into it and you talk to the staff, they shake their heads — they shake their heads. They can't believe the way that this building was designed. There's a phenomenal amount of wasted space in this building. The space that is needed for the important tasks isn't sufficient.

And when I asked the staff, I said did we . . . did anyone ask you for your input? Were you given any type of opportunity? As a result of this happy new situation that you have as a result of the Dorsey report, did anyone approach you? And did anyone, did anyone ask for your input into the design of this facility and how perhaps it could be made to work the best for you? Absolutely not — no one approached them.

So what they have now is a huge amount of wasted space — great, big, long bowling alleys. But I think, more importantly, in terms of the staff themselves . . . I mean everyone's very well aware that in a hospital setting, on occasion, you can become involved with behaviour difficulties and other issues and the safety, the safety of staff is paramount.

It is important to consider the safety of staff when you're designing and building these kinds of facilities. Staff cannot have blind spots where they can be surprised around a corner. Staff cannot have to leave stations where they have very important jobs to do and where they are observing people in critical situations. They can't leave their stations to look at what's happening elsewhere. They have to be able to have clear lines of sight. They have to be able to be aware of who's coming towards them. They have to be aware of what their environment is around them.

And when you talk to the staff in Hudson Bay, they'll tell you that's not the case. Because no one consulted with them. No one. No one allowed them any ownership in that process at all.

Interestingly enough, the Dorsey report and the subsequent legislation and this amendment are analogous in a whole lot of ways around the issues of ownership, and some of the other issues that I talked about, to the proposed amalgamation of municipalities.

These are a lot of the very same kinds of things that we're going to deal with in that whole issue. And yet, somehow the recognition that ownership in all of these processes, the ability

to be able to self determine, the ability to be able to determine whether you want to join a union or not, the ability to determine which union you want to join — no one seems to respect that ability to be able to take ownership for those decisions.

Those decisions can't be decisions that are made arbitrarily on the part of the government just with the view, as my colleague says here, to control. The dependence that I think this government would like the communities and the staff within the health care system to have on them won't succeed. It won't succeed at all.

Because if people don't feel ownership, if they don't feel that they are a part of the decision-making process, if they don't have the right to self determine, then any effort, any initiative, is doomed to fail, Mr. Speaker.

And I think we've seen a really good example of that in the health care system over the course of the last number of years. We've seen it more and more. We've seen people lose that faith in their ability to be able to contribute to it. As they see the decision-making process moving farther and farther away from them, they are starting to feel like it's more and more hopeless all the time for them to be able to self determine.

(1645)

And I guess it's really interesting that somehow the members opposite are the government and they represent the party that . . . I mean for years we were told: these were the people — these were the people — that advocated for the underdog; these were the people with the great social policies; these were the people who were interested in making sure that everyone got their fair share.

Well what a contradiction, Mr. Speaker, because the reality of what's happening in health care today is completely different than that. The local ownership isn't being respected. The local ability to be able to contribute is not being respected.

I mean people need to have the ability to be able to feel like they're part of something. And we see the issue around health care reform, and as I was indicating a little earlier, we've got all of the issue around municipal amalgamation now. I think that more and more we're going to see people losing faith in the system as it exists.

Some of this can't be cured by a single Act. There isn't any other kind of immediate individual sort of action that has to occur. With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very disappointed to hear the end of such a great speech. And I was really enjoying what the member from Carrot River had to say because I think he was really dealing with the issue of The Health Labour Relations Reorganization Amendment Act, 1999.

And I think he was touching on a lot of areas that I think I'll be touching on as I go through my time remaining. And I really appreciate some of the things that he was saying.

The SGEU usually is a staunch NDP . . . supporter of the NDP, which was upset in particular about the changes since many of its members had to move to other unions. In total it lost about 3,500 members, which is really kind of ironic that that's what the NDP was promoting.

This was supposed to make labour negotiations more manageable. It is ironic then that we're not . . . that we had so much labour strife in the health care file this last year. And we did have a lot of strife, and some of that came very close to home.

With the latest strike that happened last year, the nurses walked out and were out for a number of, well, a number of days. I think they would have liked to have seen the process work through, but of course it didn't work through because of this government forcing them back to work. Which was really kind of ironic from a government that is supposed to be labour friendly. And they forced them back to work.

I had the opportunity to go to a couple of the rallies that were held around the province during that period. And the one I remember going to at the Regina Centre of the Arts where there was literally thousands of nurses stomping mad over the way this government was treating the labour and the nurses — the front-line workers, I guess. And it was just amazing to see the emotion that was involved in that room, and everything else.

I didn't see very many government members there. In fact I saw no government members there. The friends of labour, of course, but I didn't see many of them there.

I also had the opportunity of talking to a number down in the Weyburn area, girls that I know very well, that were having to walk the picket line. And they were forced back to work when they felt it was unnecessary.

And you know, I really . . . It's ironic again, like I said, that this party which is standing up for labour relations is forcing nurses, front-line workers, women, back to work when they were just trying to exercise their right which Bills like this is trying to promote. And it's just amazing.

In reality this Bill does little to calm labour problems because the government has done nothing to improve the working conditions. I'd like to talk on the working conditions for a second, because again this comes very close to home. Cindy, my wife, is a registered nurse and works in the operating room of the Regina General Hospital, had worked in the operating room of the Plains hospital. Remember that Plains hospital? I don't know if any of you remember the Plains hospital. I sure remember the Plains hospital.

I also remember the so-called Education minister chaining himself to the Plains . . . to the doors. Now he seems to be chained to the Premier. It's kind of ironic. He's into chains I guess.

But the Plains hospital was a great hospital. It had a lot of things going for it, had a real good working atmosphere in it. And then along comes the government and closes them down, forces them over to the Regina General Hospital. And now things are getting better but it's been a long, long period.

There's been a lot of trouble.

And this is supposed to make things work better and the conditions better. Well I can tell you right now, that this has done nothing to improve conditions. You can juggle it. It's a little bit like the budget where you take people from one . . . money from one spot, put it into the other and you say you're doing wonderful things. And it's just a juggling act, and that's all that this did with the unions. It juggled the unions around and did absolutely nothing to improve working conditions on the hospital floors.

You know, and the ironic part was is, the government comes along and says we've got to close this Plains hospital — not when the General is ready to go; oh, no, they wouldn't think about waiting until the General was perfectly finished and ready to go — we'd have to close it by, remember the date, October 31; had to have the Plains closed by October 31, had everything moved over to the General.

Well you can imagine how working conditions improved, when working conditions improved when you got jackhammers operating right beside the operating room. Now that's really improving conditions for the front-line workers. Not only do you have jackhammers working beside the operating room, you don't have enough people in the operating room to man them properly. You know, and how is that ever going to, how is that ever going to improve the working conditions?

We still hear from nurses and other health care workers constantly about the working conditions in their hospitals. And it's not just in the Regina, it's not just in the Regina General Hospital, but it's in hospitals throughout the province.

Well, I heard people mentioning earlier, and I, and I know this happens because it happens right here, right at our own home, where perhaps — whether it's stress, whether it's a flu, whether it's kids or whatever — that maybe a day off would be good, and it's really tough to get into work. But there is no way that that nurse — and my wife being no different than any of the other ones — would take that day off because you know that there's not enough people there to fill the bill. And as soon as you take that day off, you put twice as much pressure and twice as much stress on everybody else in that hospital, you know.

So this is supposed to, to ease that problem and improve working conditions, and it's done absolutely nothing, nothing to do with that very thing.

While reducing the number of bargaining units did make sense, the heavy-handed approach that this government took to accomplish was very typical. It's typical with the heavy-handedness of the government.

You know we're talking about rural amalgamation and it's, we know best. As government, we know best what's for you and this is the way it's going to be. Don't, don't worry about anything. We're government and we know best. And I really question that whole philosophy.

I know of a number of people obviously in the health care business, industry because as I mentioned earlier that my wife is a registered nurse, an operating room nurse.

I know a number of friends that are LPNs, LPNs that really, really question the whole purpose of this process. They got put into a union where perhaps it had nothing in common with anybody else in that union. But that's where they were going to be. It was just driven from top and they had so very little to say about it.

Another area, if we are interested, if we are to attract health care professionals to Saskatchewan and especially nurses, we're going to have to do a whole lot more than tinker with how the unions are operating and how the unions are organized. We need some things that attract nurses.

And I look, you know, at that last year when the strike was on and how the NDP was spinning it that the nurses didn't care. All it was — and I quote right from a Government of Saskatchewan full page article, full page ad bought by government, put through the whole province — it says, this dispute is about, this dispute is about money. Only about money. And that's what they put in the papers. They advertised it from one end of the province to the other that this was purely about money.

And you know when we got to the election on September 16, and we saw that, oh maybe they're not their friends. When they took quite a kicking and almost a complete kicking, then maybe when they think about putting ads like this in — this dispute is all about money. Well believe me, it wasn't all about money.

Other quotes:

Nursing union officials walk away from the contract offer that would have solved many of the workplace issues nurses say are important.

I find that really, really hypocritical. That they would put a full-page ad in the newspaper and they would say that they walked away from the bargaining table because the nurses say these . . . they say they're important. As if they don't know what is and what isn't important at the workplace. They're the ones in the workplace. They're the ones doing the work. I think they know what issues are important.

And I don't think they need the government going against them, taking full-page ads in every provincial paper accusing them as if they don't know the issues in their workplace. And I think it's an absolute shame.

And so when you talk to the front-line workers and they say, what have you done, what has the government done to attract workers into this province, well I can say that I know of a number of nurses that came in — I know them personally — that came in from New Zealand, that I got to know through the Christmas season, through whether it was a Christmas party or just a house social, that I got to know.

And they came in from New Zealand on good faith that they were going to help out in the system. But I'd be very interested to find out the statistics from the government opposite, from the members opposite: how many of those people are still here? How many people are there still here?

Because, you know, I know of three out of the few that I met

that have gone back simply because the agreements were not kept. They try and attract and they got them here, so for the next time they go try and recruit nurses from around the world, i.e., New Zealand, how many people are going to believe what the government said.

An Hon. Member: — Who trusts these guys?

Mr. McMorris: — Exactly. So you know, as far as attracting health care workers to the province, they're a long ways from doing it because some of the articles they take out in full page newspapers, some of the agreements that they've made that they haven't kept and sent them back to their homes. Of course when they go to recruit the next time, I'm sure the word gets around.

It's kind of like the term that I used to use an awful lot and it's a term in traffic safety — ABS — anti-lock brake system. But in this case it's anywhere but Saskatchewan — anywhere but Saskatchewan. And that's not because of reshuffling the labour Act, it's because of the heavy-handedness of the government opposite.

I think what we need to do is let's find out a way to make the jobs of those working in the health care tolerable once again. This will make it better for the workers but it will also make it better for the patients. I haven't talked to a health care provider in the system that that isn't their first and foremost priority — is to make the stay for the patient as nice and as comfortable as possible. But it's impossible. They just can't do it.

You know, there's a huge part of the nursing curriculum that talks about compassion and dealing with the patient. And they just don't have the time to do it. And I know they don't have the time to do it. They are running from one spot to the next spot and for the first, I would say, three and a half months at the Regina General Hospital they were running from one spot to the next spot just trying to find what spot they were looking for. Because it was a maze from one spot to another. And I think I'll . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. It now being 5 p.m. this House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.

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