

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of citizens throughout Saskatchewan who would be so pleased to see the tax rate on gasoline lowered. And their 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 tax by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

And the signatories on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Humboldt, Saskatoon, Burr, Jansen, Herschel, and throughout the province.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition today against forced amalgamation for municipalities. 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.

People that have signed this petition are from Wadena and Fosston.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens concerned about the high level of fuel prices and 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.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Gronlid, Star City, and Melfort.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition in regards to high price of fuel. And the petition 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.

I so present. And they're from Saskatoon — signatures from Saskatoon.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also stand today to present petitions on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens concerned about the forced municipal amalgamation. And, Mr. Speaker, the prayer reads as follows:

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

And the people that signed this are from Watson, Porcupine Plain, Melfort, and Weekes.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise again on behalf of people in Swift Current who are concerned about the Swift Current hospital.

Mr. Speaker, the prayer references a desire on the part of people for the provincial government to assist in the regeneration plan to the Swift Current Regional Hospital of approximately \$7.54 million, thereby allowing the Swift Current Health Board the opportunity to provide improved health care services.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from the city of Swift Current.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to reduce fuel tax. The prayer goes 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.

Petitioners are from Bladworth, Davidson, Kenaston.

I so present.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition concerning the reduced fuel tax in this province. And the prayer 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.

Mr. Speaker, the signatures are from Melfort, Ridgedale, Star City.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition to present on behalf of citizens concerned about the high cost 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 a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And it is signed by citizens of Cupar, Markinch, and Southey.

I do so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition regarding the high cost of 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 tax by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

And the petition is from the citizens of Meadow Lake and Spiritwood.

I so present.

Clerk: — The following petitions for private Bills are presented and laid on the Table by members as follows:

By Mr. Wartman, the petition for the Regina Golf Club in the province of Saskatchewan;

By Ms. Lorje, a petition for the Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan Inc. in the province of Saskatchewan; and

By Mr. Thomson, of the Archiepiscopal Corporation of Regina and the Episcopal Corporation of Saskatoon in the province of Saskatchewan.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

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

To cause the government to provide funding for the Swift Current Regional Hospital.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the member for Indian Head-Milestone, it's truly a pleasure and an honour through you and to you to the members of the Assembly, to introduce 29 grade 11 and 12 students from Sedley, Saskatchewan. They are accompanied today by their

teacher, Sandi Robertson, and chaperons, Debbie Unser and Eugene Deis. So we want to welcome them here.

And I want to assure them, although the member from Indian Head-Milestone was unable to welcome you here, he assures me that he'll be dropping by the school and providing you all with Dairy Queen treats at the appropriate time.

So I wish all members would join me in welcoming you here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, 15 grade 8 students from the Herchmer School in my riding, Regina Elphinstone. They're here with their teacher, Aaron Anderson, and I know all members will want to join with me in welcoming the students here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly, a young gentleman in your gallery. His name is Jacob Eliason. Jacob is an exchange student from Sweden. He's under the Youth Rotary Exchange program. He's been in the Lloydminster area for about eight months.

He's had the opportunity to come to Regina and tour the Assembly, and we're very pleased that he's able to come and spend a little time with us and really witness how hard we do work here. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I was on my feet, I should have taken the opportunity to introduce through you and to you to members of this Assembly, one of the members of the city council of the city of Swift Current, and the implementation officer for southwest 911 — the first rural 911 system in the province of Saskatchewan. I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming Doug Line to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Canada Life Expansion

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Normally I save all the good news for Fridays, but this week I wanted to get a quick start. I want to bring to the attention of members a very good news story out of yesterday's announcement that Canada Life would be locating another 75 positions . . . another 75 jobs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — These 75 positions will be located here in the western regional headquarters for Canada Life. One of the pieces of this story that was not picked up as much by the media yesterday, but it's nevertheless very important, is the fact that they're taking advantage of the JobStart and Future Skills program to help train these new people.

Yesterday's announcement will bring the total number of full-time permanent positions at the Regina office to over 800. Mr. Speaker, this announcement is simply more proof that things are going very well for our economy and that jobs are being created here in Regina, here in Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Davidson Citizen Runs in Boston Marathon

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I informed this Assembly that a constituent of mine from Davidson, Mr. Bob Bender, was competing in the 2000 Boston Marathon. I would like to give the members an update.

I understand that race day was not much different from our typical Saskatchewan weather — cold and windy. The temperature hovered around 8 degrees Celsius; the winds at 10 to 20 miles per hour. Not exactly ideal weather is it, Mr. Speaker? Only a dedicated and trained athlete would be able to complete a 26-mile marathon under these conditions.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we have such an athlete in my constituency. Having been raised on the Saskatchewan prairies, these weather conditions are not new to Mr. Bender. Bob can be seen running down the gravel roads in various types of weather conditions. And I am sure he's run under worse conditions than those at yesterday's Boston Marathon.

Bob completed . . . Bob completed the 26-mile marathon in 2 hours and 52 minutes. He finished 14th in his age division. As I mentioned yesterday, Bob recently celebrated his 50th birthday. Overall he placed 606 out of a field of over 17,000 runners.

I'm sure the members would agree that this is quite an accomplishment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Earth Day

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this Saturday, April 22 is Earth Day. It is a day for us to recommit to preserving and restoring our environment.

All Canadians concerned about the environment will observe this day along with millions of people worldwide in 164 countries. Earth Day is the largest environmental event celebrated on the planet.

As we approach this day, I draw to the attention of all members of the Assembly the words written by 1,600 scientists from 71 countries — including over half of all Nobel Prize winners — in a document entitled *World Scientists' Warning to Humanity*.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote from the words of these scientists. They say, and I quote:

Human beings and the natural (environment) are on a collision course . . . If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to

sustain life in the manner that we know . . . No more than one or a few decades remain before the chance to avert the threats we now confront will be lost and the prospects for humanity immeasurably diminished.

Mr. Speaker, I urge everyone to get involved with local Earth Day events and to make Earth Day a very successful event.

The Speaker: — Order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Election Results in Prince Edward Island and Yukon

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's been a tough few weeks for the NDP (New Democratic Party) in Canada. In Saskatchewan the NDP's budget has fallen flat and all of Saskatchewan is opposing the NDP's plans for forced amalgamation.

Yesterday the NDP lost government in the Yukon, and also yesterday in Prince Edward Island the Tories under Pat Binns trounced the NDP and the Liberals winning every seat but one. There is a Saskatchewan connection to Prince Edward Island, Mr. Speaker. Premier Pat Binns is from Radville, a great part of the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy that I proudly represent.

Mr. Speaker, again, congratulations to Premier Pat Binns on his huge election win in Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Liberals Win in Yukon

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday was a great day for Liberals in Western Canada — a historic day. Liberals for the first time won the Yukon election. Liberals won 10 seats, six for the NDP and one for the Yukon Party — 16 out of 17 for the good guys.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — And while Saskatchewan Conservatives are sleeping, thanks to their former leader, Conservatives in PEI (Prince Edward Island) are celebrating. Yukon Liberals won on the same issues that Liberals in Saskatchewan ran on — good management, less confrontation, and the ability to act as honest brokers.

Mr. Speaker, there are important lessons to be learned from the Yukon election. Perhaps the first and most significant lesson is that naming your political party after where you live is no guarantee of success. In fact, the Yukon Party's failure clearly shows that no matter how much you try to change your spots or bury your head in the sand in hopes that no one will see you, the public will always see through you.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the failure of a party named after a province or territory. I wouldn't be surprised if the Saskatchewan Party tried to change its spots once again by calling themselves the new green, progressive, Saskatchewan, liberal, social democratic, conservative, reform, alliance,

neighbourhood block party to avoid the fate of their Yukon cousins. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Party's Role in World History

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to shed some light on what has been cause for speculation in this House concerning the significant role of the Saskatchewan Party in world history.

Yesterday the Premier alleged that a certain SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) report written in 1992 was in fact a Saskatchewan Party publication. The fact that this report was published five years prior to the formation of our party did nothing to distract the Premier from his delusional state.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of these allegations, we've decided now it is time to come clean regarding the Saskatchewan Party's role in history.

I would like to confirm for all of the members of this House and the voters of Saskatchewan that our party has indeed played a role in history over the years. It is true that the hon. member for Lloydminster had a hand in drafting the Magna Carta, Mr. Speaker. The member for Cannington's signature may not appear on the Bill of Rights, but it was his quote that said . . . that gave the right of the people to keep and bear arms and shall not be infringed. It's also indeed true that the member for Rosthern penned Kenny Roger's greatest hit, *The Gambler*, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, that is not all. We also had a hand, of course, in writing the Maastricht Treaty, The Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty of 1994, and the World War II Instruments of Surrender. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party has been deeply involved in the drafting of most of the significant documents in the history of our civilization, save for two, The Regina Manifesto and the Liberal-NDP Coalition Agreement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Increased Number of Physicians in Saskatchewan

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Universal health care is part of the Canadian identity. In just 38 years it has gone from being an ambitious experiment by a progressive provincial government to the one clear badge of pride for Canadians. And I am proud that this government has always been and will continue to be committed to universal accessibility to health care.

Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to announce to the House that the number of physicians in Saskatchewan has remained steady and has even seen an increase. This assures that the people of Saskatchewan will continue to be able to access a physician when needed. According to the Department of Health, the number of physicians and specialists working in this province has increased during the period of March '96 through March 2000.

The numbers suggest that we will see continued increases. As well, the retention rate for family medicine graduates from the University of Saskatchewan is over 70 per cent for the second year in a row.

I want to commend the Saskatchewan Medical Association and the government for working together to make sure that more physicians make Saskatchewan their permanent residence. We hope that our good relationship with the SMA (Saskatchewan Medical Association) will continue so that we can build on this momentum.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Bank of Nova Scotia Branch in Chociceland

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish I was rising in this Assembly to tell my colleagues about more good news for Saskatchewan, but unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that is not the case.

Mr. Speaker, I have learned that yet another Saskatchewan business is closing its doors. And no, Mr. Speaker, it is not moving to the supposedly greener pastures of Alberta; it is closing for good.

Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Nova Scotia in the town of Chociceland, which is in my constituency of Saskatchewan Rivers, is closing its branch after serving customers there since 1949. The bank is shutting down for good.

The people of Saskatchewan are under a constant attack by an arrogant NDP government, Mr. Speaker, which has ruled the province a better or should I say the worst part of 40 years. This socialist regime has built an environment that is business unfriendly and tax happy.

Mr. Speaker, how long will these attacks on the people of Saskatchewan continue? The members opposite got a wake-up call September 16. But what was their reaction? They waved dollars in front of their Liberal friends in a sad attempt to retain their death grip on Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Chociceland who went to the Bank of Nova Scotia will now have to drive to Nipawin for such a service. That means a drive on unsafe NDP highways.

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that this government wakes up and smells the coffee — which I think costs 6 per cent more after the budget. People are leaving, businesses are leaving, and this government is doing nothing to change it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Municipal Amalgamation

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Premier. Well, Mr. Premier, I see

you're using the same brilliant negotiating tactics you used with the nurses last year. You obviously didn't learn anything because now you're using those same strong-arm tactics with local governments.

Mr. Premier, delegates at yesterday's SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) emergency convention are rejecting your May 15 deadline and they are rejecting your plan for forced amalgamation.

Mr. Premier, will you remove these two conditions before you sit down with SUMA and SARM? Will you drop the May 15 deadline and will assure municipal leaders that you will not proceed with forced amalgamation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question and report to him and to the House that I have not received any formal communication from Mr. Harrison of SARM respecting their convention of yesterday, although I do understand that efforts are being made to arrange a meeting with members of the government sometime tomorrow involving the leadership of SARM and the leadership of SUMA.

I will want to see what resolutions, if any, were passed. I understand three were passed at SARM. I've not seen those. I would like to see what the outcome of the SUMA debate is today before obviously making any further comment on that, and if a meeting is arranged tomorrow and I'm a party to it, I'll be there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, these people have learned nothing. This same Premier that called an election in the middle of harvest now wants to amalgamate local government in the middle of seeding. You just don't get it, Mr. Premier.

You say you owe it to the people working in municipal government to move in a timely fashion. But those same people are telling you: back off.

Mr. Premier, both SUMA and SARM are saying this deadline is too tight. SUMA says the issues involved are too complex. SARM says your government has shattered the trust of local governments, and it will take more than just a few weeks to rebuild.

Mr. Premier, are you listening? Will you remove the club above their heads and back off on your May 15 deadline?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I told I believe both Mr. Badham but for sure Mr. Harrison — Badham and Harrison — but for sure Mr. Harrison when we reviewed the letter on the two occasions in my office that May 15 was a target date that the government would like to have set out with respect to the proposals being set up and developed and discussed.

I indicated that it would be tough. I also said — my exact words — to Mr. Harrison were that this date is not written in stone. And that we're flexible with respect to this. I repeat that in the legislature today. And that is known to the president of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, the RM (rural municipality).

But I do want to draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, the following. This process started back in 1996 with a memorandum of agreement — in 1996. Regional meetings of SUMA and SARM in '97-98 and from there the task force report of Garcea and the recommendations of Garcea which the hon. members misrepresent . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Premier, I realize this started in 1996, the memorandum of understanding, but you neglected in the last election campaign to mention that you were going to force municipalities in this province to amalgamate. Another one of your unclaimed promises.

Mr. Premier, it's no wonder municipal leaders don't trust you. There's a letter in the editor . . . in today's *StarPhoenix*. It called SARM short-sighted, dishonest and blinded by partisan politics. And who is that letter from, Mr. Premier? Your former minister of Municipal Government, Carol Carson; your 1999 NDP election candidate, Carol Carson. The one that got thumped by the Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Premier, do you support the statements made by your NDP candidate? Do you agree that SARM is short-sighted, dishonest, and blinded by self-interest?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, so far as I know there is no department in this side of the House responsible for the statements made by former statements either on this side or . . . (inaudible) . . . the House.

And I want to make one point with respect to the hon. member opposite. If they want me to start answering questions pertaining to letters written by private citizens who once were in public life, then they'd better be ready to start answering questions and statements made by people in private life who sat on the treasury side of the benches, namely, the former premier, Grant Devine, and how they administered the Government of Saskatchewan.

But they are doing everything that they can do to escape any kind of attachment during that period from 1982-1991. In fact, the statement made by the member from Swift Current today did everything to run away from their history.

Well they can run as far as they want, but everybody knows who they really are. They don't answer for their administration; I don't answer for the private views of private people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, all I

ask you do you agree with her comments? I didn't ask for a tirade — just yes or no. Do you agree?

Mr. Premier, there is absolutely no evidence that forced amalgamation saves money and improves services. In fact, all the evidence is to the contrary. I'd like to read a quote:

Amalgamation was supposed to ensure lower taxes and better services. It has achieved neither . . .

Poorer services. Higher taxes. Soaring debt. (and) Lost jobs. All . . . from the . . . amalgamation plan - and don't forget the erosion of local identity too.

Do you know who said that, Mr. Premier? Nova Scotia NDP Leader Robert Chisholm in regards to that province's experience with forced amalgamation.

Mr. Premier, there's no evidence that forced amalgamation saves money or improves services. SUMA says that, SARM says that, even the NDP . . .

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

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, are you listening? Will you drop your dictatorial attitude and back off forced amalgamation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that none of us were offered a tirade by the hon. member from Saltcoats in this presumed last question.

But let me say that this side's position has been very clear and straightforward right from day one — right from 1996 when we signed the MOU (memorandum of understanding), when we had SARM and SUMA and the Government of Saskatchewan as signatories to not having a forced amalgamation. Forced amalgamation are the words of the Saskatchewan Party. Forced amalgamation is the misrepresentation of this issue by them and the false statements by . . .

We believe that the consensual way to approach this matter is the best way. It's the co-operative fashion to do it. That's the policy of this government and we wish that they would join in this cause to build a stronger rural Saskatchewan, a stronger Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Education

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, my question's for the Minister of Education and I really hope the Premier lets him answer. People are starting to wonder, since he isn't allowed to speak in here, is he allowed to speak at the cabinet table? Or are you even allowed to sit at the cabinet table or do you have a little kid's table over somewhere in the corner?

Mr. Minister, school divisions throughout this province have had the opportunity to analyze the devastating budget that was

presented. And I'm wondering what they're telling you.

Specifically, how many school boards are going to be forced to cut services? How many are going to be forced to cut teaching positions? And how many will be forced to raise taxes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly the budget that we tabled is of record now. And I want to point out to the members opposite that the increases to the Education budget on the base were the highest of the big three departments between Health, Education, and Social Services; that we are increasing the budget \$28.5 million — 18.5 million in increased funding to the foundation operating grant, an additional 5 million in capital, an additional 14 million for special education, an additional 2 million for learning technology, and then a doubling of the northern communities fund.

That is our budget, Mr. Speaker. And we're very proud of it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education seems very pleased with his budget. But you know what? The people out there are not pleased with the budget.

I'm going to give you some answers of questions that I asked every school division out in this province. I sent out a survey. And out of those that have responded to date, 80 per cent of them said they're going to have to cut services, 85 per cent say they're going to have to cut teachers, and 71 per cent say they're not going to be able to go ahead with capital improvements. And that's because of your failure to deliver an adequate Education budget for the children of this province.

Mr. Minister, how can you support a budget that's going to devastate education in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly we've commented on the increases to our budget, and they are substantial. But we also recognize that the contributions of the provincial government is on an equalization basis — that school divisions have the autonomy, they are the ones that determine service delivery within their area, and we provide that on an equalization basis.

And not only that, but when you listen to the comments from some of the school divisions — and I wouldn't trust a survey from the Saskatchewan Party — the fact is that financial officers in the major school divisions in Saskatoon indicated that without the substantial increase by this provincial government, they would have had to increase their mill rate higher than the rate of inflation. And it is in fact lower than the rate of inflation, where the . . . these people across the floor — zero, freeze, frozen, unzero, not one cent, not one cent for education.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier only

allows the minister to comment on one area of this government, and that area he has failed.

We also asked whether school boards plan to raise the mill rate as a result of this budget — 76 per cent of those people said yes. In fact the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) are telling us they expect the mill rate to go up by at least one-half a mill on average across the entire province. That's a \$20 million tax increase, Mr. Minister. That brings the total hidden tax increase in this budget to over \$85 million.

Mr. Minister, you campaigned on a promise to cut education tax. How can you possibly support a budget that shows a 20 per . . . \$20 million increase in taxes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And certainly when we talk about our budget we're very proud.

And I haven't even mentioned the \$25 million to . . . in agriculture rebate on agricultural land. And when you, when you start adding it up — 28.5 million, 18.5 million on the foundation operating grant, an additional \$1.9 million in grants in lieu, the additional \$14 million for special education projects, the additional 5 million for capital to cover 115 capital projects in communities throughout Saskatchewan — the numbers add up to more than \$50 million.

And because it's given on an equalization formula, there will be, there will be school divisions that have to look within their own divisions and make difficult decisions. But the fact of the matter is it was a substantial increase — two to three to four times the rate of inflation — and what we would have got from the members opposite is the rate of inflation — zero. Not 1 cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister just doesn't get it. School boards say you have to increase taxes, and there's property tax revolts all around this province. They're saying they cannot afford it.

Mr. Speaker, people used to say that children should be seen and not heard, and I'll bet you right now that's what the Premier is thinking about his Education minister. Many school boards in this province have amalgamated, Mr. Minister, voluntarily. And it's worked very, very well that's because they did it on their own. Yet the other day you said you would vote for forced amalgamation of municipalities.

As Education minister you know school boards have had a very positive experience with voluntary amalgamation — no government imposed deadlines, no threats from the provincial government. Given that experience, why on earth would you vote for a program of forced amalgamation for municipalities?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, the policy on voluntary amalgamation whether we're talking about school divisions or whether we're talking about rural municipalities, our position is clear: we favour voluntary amalgamation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that we have seen voluntary amalgamations of school divisions where we have seen 30 school divisions amalgamate to 10, a drop from 120 several years ago to 100 school divisions today. And we are proud of the relationship that the government has had with the stakeholders in the education system. It has worked very well. And I would like to see that relationship develop between the government and rural municipalities. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Weyerhaeuser Self-Generation Project

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy and Mines.

Mr. Minister, I know you're aware of the valuable contribution Weyerhaeuser makes to the city of Prince Albert. Weyerhaeuser is Prince Albert's largest private sector employer. The company contributes millions of dollars in property and education taxes and Weyerhaeuser is a valuable and active member of the Prince Albert community. Weyerhaeuser's latest initiative, a self-generation project that will lower operating costs and reduce greenhouse emissions, is meeting significant opposition from the Prince Albert city council.

Mr. Minister, do you support Weyerhaeuser's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by generating some of its power through self-generation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that this government, and certainly the work that's been done with the greenhouse gases and with the work on the energy side, we're very, very pleased with in terms of what Weyerhaeuser has done.

What I want to say to the member opposite is that the government officials on our side of the House, Mr. Speaker, have reviewed the Prince Albert bylaw and the current legislation does not appear to provide the legal basis. And what's happening today is that that discussion between the city of Prince Albert and Weyerhaeuser is continuing, and it's my view that we'll get a resolve here as it relates to the two bodies.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping I could direct my question to the Minister of Energy and Mines. Now the Prince Albert city council has currently passed a bylaw that will slap a multi-million dollar tax on Weyerhaeuser's self-generation project. Weyerhaeuser has stated that if the city taxes the electrical power from this self-generation project, the company will be forced to significantly reduce its voluntary contributions to further enhance, to beautify the city of Prince Albert.

Now Mr. Cody, the mayor of Prince Albert, is asking the NDP to sponsor provincial legislation that will tax not only Weyerhaeuser's self-generation project but all generation

projects in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, does the NDP government support Prince Albert Mayor Cody's plan to reduce Weyerhaeuser's ability to enhance any further upgrading or even expansion in Saskatchewan? And does the NDP support Mayor Cody's plan to slap big taxes on all self-generation projects in the province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I just want to highlight one more time for the member opposite because, as I've said, we've not had a formal request from the city of Prince Albert to change the legislation.

I want to say this to the member, that this is about a discussion that is going on between Weyerhaeuser and the city of Prince Albert. And on this side of the House, it's our view that that kind of participatory involvement is important.

And I want to say to the member opposite that currently what's happening is that the current legislation that we have does not provide for the legal basis for what you're talking about to occur. So, therefore, what we're encouraging the city of Prince Albert and the corporation of Weyerhaeuser is try to resolve that issue on their own.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to try once more here for the Minister of Energy and Mines. This is an Energy and Mines issue.

Mr. Speaker, certainly the city of Prince Albert would like to carry on negotiations with Weyerhaeuser over the issue of self-generation. Unfortunately the city in their wisdom decided to pass a bylaw first, using the . . . rather the method of this government, carry a big stick and then walk softly. So instead, Weyerhaeuser has decided not to participate in negotiations until this bylaw is withdrawn.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the mayor has sent a letter to the Premier. The letter lays out the Mayor Cody's tax . . . the case for taxing Weyerhaeuser's self-generation project.

Mr. Minister, would you state the position of the NDP government? And I want the position of the NDP government on Mayor Cody's plan to slap a multi-million dollar tax on Weyerhaeuser's self-generation project.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker. I am going to try one more time for the member opposite, so that he understands exactly the process that we've been using to date. What I've said to the member opposite is that the city of Prince Albert and Weyerhaeuser are meeting and are discussing how they're going to deal with this particular issue.

Now, I can understand that the member opposite . . . that there has been a request, a request by the city of Prince Albert through its bylaw. But I want to say to the member opposite that the city of Prince Albert has not formally approached the

government for a request to provide the city with legislative authority to pass the proposed bylaw.

And I say to the member opposite that the city of Prince Alberta today, and Weyerhaeuser, are working to resolve this issue on their own.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have to direct this question to the Premier; obviously the Minister of Municipal Affairs didn't understand it.

Now the mayor has written a letter . . . Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the mayor has approached this government; he wrote a letter asking NDP government for support of his self-generation tax plan. Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling that letter today.

The mayor of Prince Albert wants the province to pass legislation that will slap a heavy tax on every self-generation project in Saskatchewan. Mr. Premier, the Kyoto Agreement requires the province to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Weyerhaeuser is attempting to do its part by developing its own self-generation project. Now the company's being told that they will be heavily taxed if they go ahead with the project.

Mr. Premier, does the NDP government support Prince Albert Mayor Don Cody's plan to slap a multi-million dollar tax on Weyerhaeuser's self-generation project?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I'd like to say one more time, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, that throughout the discussion process with Weyerhaeuser in Prince Albert . . . And we recognize two things, Mr. Speaker.

The first of all, that Weyerhaeuser is a good corporate citizen in this province and contributes tremendously to the economy of this province, in the same way that the city of Prince Albert recognizes the value of that corporation to their community. And I say to the member opposite and to this House, that the mayor of Prince Albert and the senior executive of Weyerhaeuser are working through this issue together on their own.

And so I say to the member opposite, we don't need to bring it in here and we don't need to play politics with it in the way in which you like to do on this side of the House. Instead of trying to conquer and divide the business of Prince Albert and the city of Prince Albert, let them have their discussions. Let them continue to try to work that out on their own.

And if it makes its way to this House or makes its way to my table, then we'll have an opportunity to deal with it. But don't get in the way of good progress to date, Mr. Speaker, when communities and corporations are . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'll have to

continue directing my questions to the Minister of Municipal Affairs because he's the only one who's not stuck to his seat.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Speaker, the city of Prince Albert is running newspaper advertisements on the self-generation tax. The city is supporting . . . is searching for an NDP MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) to sponsor Mayor Cody's plan to oppose a multi-million dollar self-generation tax on Weyerhaeuser.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, SaskPower and SaskEnergy are co-sponsoring a \$50 million project to educate the public on greenhouse gas emissions. Mr. Minister, maybe you should be encouraging the Prince Albert city council to sign up.

Mr. Speaker, my question is very simple. It's the only one they can understand. Does the government support a tax on greenhouse gas reductions and the Kyoto Agreement as proposed by Prince Albert Mayor Don Cody?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a prime example of the way in which this opposition party approaches a number of issues. Because rather than talking about the fact that you have a municipal council today that's working with the corporation to try to find a solution, he singles out only the mayor. And then he says that the mayor is a New Democrat in the same way in which you singled out . . . in the same way in which you single out Joe Garcea. What'd you say about Joe Garcea?

You don't talk about all the members on the task force, you talk about one man — Joe Garcea. And what you do is you try and divide the work of the people — dividing and rule. And I say to the member opposite, today in Prince Albert, you have the city of Prince Albert that's working, collectively with Weyerhaeuser, to try to find a solution on the surcharge. And, Mr. Speaker, we're going to let the community and the corporation work it out, and we're not going to call on you to get into the middle of that and play the politics that you like to do with two sides.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 28 — The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 28, The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Amendment Act, 2000 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. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, please.

The Speaker: — Would you kindly state your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on several occasions in question period yesterday, the Premier quoted from a document entitled: "A Call to Action — Reforming and Revitalizing Urban Government in Saskatchewan."

In doing so, the Premier seriously misrepresented this document. On three separate occasions, on pages 754 and 756 of *Hansard*, the Premier said the document was written by the Saskatchewan Party. On one more occasion, on page 756, the Premier said the document is ". . . the word of the official opposition . . ."

In fact this paper is a SUMA document prepared in 1992 following the SUMA fall symposium on urban government reform. This symposium was attended by over 200 municipal leaders from 98 Saskatchewan communities. Representatives of SUMA and SARM also attended this, along with representatives . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — This is absolutely not a point of order — he's reading a document. And I just say to you, Mr. Speaker, and ask if you will rule on the issue of whether this in fact is a point of order?

The Speaker: — Hon. members, this appears to be a dispute between two members with respect to certain facts. I will, however, on the basis of what the House Leader has raised, I will review the contents of the documents that you've referred to and come back with a ruling . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . If you would just kindly, briefly, outline your point of order.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this occurred approximately four and a half years ago, in 1993, before the Saskatchewan Party was formed. Yet on every occasion yesterday the Premier referred to it as a Saskatchewan Party document. He never once referred to it as a SUMA document.

Again to quote the Premier, at one point on page 755 of *Hansard*, he actually fabricated a quote by injecting the words . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. That's bordering close to unparliamentary. Would you complete your point, please? Make it succinctly. Thank you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier said, and I quote from page 755 of *Hansard*:

Your conditions are that, quote: "these conditions for amalgamation will never exist; the perfect moment to act is now."

Mr. Speaker, that quote does not appear anywhere in that SUMA document. In fact the word amalgamation does not appear in the SUMA document.

The Premier interjected the words "for amalgamation" into the

quote.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday you admonished all members for behaviour unbecoming the traditions and practices of this Assembly. I would ask that you further consider the serious matter of misrepresenting and misquoting documents, and have the Premier apologize — acknowledge that — and apologize for this misrepresentation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I will review the comments in the outline of the point of order the hon. member has raised and report back to the House.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to present the answer to the question. Thank you.

The Speaker: — The question is tabled.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 2 — Municipal Reserves and Assets

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'll be moving a motion later in my talk this afternoon to deal with the freezing of municipal reserves and assets of municipalities — whether it be urban or rural — out there in Saskatchewan. But before I move that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk to it for a few minutes.

As we know . . . and maybe the Minister of Municipal Government doesn't seem to understand this because a couple of days when asked whose money this is, Mr. Speaker, that minister made the comment that actually it was part local municipalities and partly the government's money. Well, I may and like to inform that member, Mr. Speaker, that surpluses and reserves out there are in no way, shape, or form any part of this government or any other provincial government's funding or money. They belong to the local taxpayer and that's where they should stay, Mr. Speaker.

These people have kept their house in order through good management, through the downloading of this government, since 1991. Some municipalities, as much as two-thirds of their funding has been cut, and through all of this have amounted up a number of surpluses, reserves, capital funds; have looked after their house, kept everything in order even though all the things that happen from that government. And now we have a rumour going around that those funds may be frozen by this government.

So I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that this is only rumour even though the minister wouldn't deny it. I hope it's only rumour and that we never see this come . . . to come true. Most municipalities that I've talked to out there are scared to death of this government and what they may do. And forgive them if they're somewhat cautious of some of the things that have happened in the past. Forgive them if they're cautious what may

happen to their reserves.

Mr. Speaker, I find it amazing that one of the past ministers of Municipal Government, Carol Carson, the former member for Melfort I believe, calls SARM or the members of SARM, short-sighted, dishonest, blinded by partisan politics. That attitude, Mr. Speaker, got her where she is today — thumped twice by our member from Melfort, a member of the Saskatchewan Party. It's no wonder she's out there, not a member in this House, Mr. Speaker.

That arrogant attitude, Mr. Speaker, is running rampant on that side of the House. It happened in the Blakeney days and it's happening all over again. We see this every day now with the way that this government is treating municipal governments at all levels. Whether it's city, town, rural, hamlet, village, whatever it is, Mr. Speaker, that arrogant attitude is carrying through.

How a few MLAs on that side, Mr. Speaker, and the bureaucracy that they built up, know better what is better for people, especially in rural Saskatchewan but even the cities, than the people do out there when you see the backlash that's going on there today, Mr. Speaker.

We see at meetings like there was in Yorkton the other day where there's 800 people, lack . . . missing one person, Mr. Speaker — the Minister of Municipal Government — which I found amazing considering he represents that constituency and didn't seem to have the intestinal fortitude to go out and listen to what his people have to say, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, these meetings had, as I said, 800 in Yorkton against forced amalgamation; 350 at Kipling, Mr. Speaker, against forced amalgamation; 500 in Melfort against forced amalgamation; Prince Albert, 550 against forced amalgamation. The message was clear everywhere Mr. Garcea and his task force went — we don't want any part of forced amalgamation. We didn't ask for it; we don't need it; we don't want it.

And I wonder what part of that message this government can't get, Mr. Speaker. It was loud and clear. And why these select few people in here — mostly from the city, I may comment on, Mr. Speaker — are telling rural people, we know what's best for you.

Well I say, Mr. Speaker, it's time they started listening to the people of this province. Listen to what they have to say. Let's let them be a government for the people, not a government for themselves, a government that's only worried about survival of that NDP regime over there, worried about the survival of that NDP coalition, Mr. Speaker — not one bit worried about people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to comment too . . . you know, it goes back — and you've heard this before, Mr. Speaker — why I as a politician am here today. And it goes back to that same minister, that same arrogant attitude, Carol Carson, when she was the minister of Municipal Government.

Mr. Speaker, from '91 to '95, I was reeve of an RM and we had downloading and funding cuts left and right, so that we as municipal governments out there could balance the budget

because these people had no idea how to go about cutting costs and trying to balance it themselves. They let for a good example or a big amount of that money local municipal governments do their dirty work.

And, Mr. Speaker, in about 1994, we set up a meeting in Yorkton when I was reeve, and we invited this same Carol Carson, at that time minister of Municipal Government, to come out and explain to us how we could handle these funding cuts, where were we going to pass them on other than to the local taxpayer. We wanted to explain to her that yes, we were trying to cut services, we were trying to make every end of our local government more efficient, but there was a limit, Mr. Speaker, to how far we could go.

Now remembering, Mr. Speaker, this was 1994, do you know what happened, Mr. Speaker? Carol Carson never had the decency, as minister of Municipal Government, to come out to our meeting, explain to these same local people, Mr. Speaker, why she saw it was necessary to download to the level that this government was doing.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in hindsight she did me a big favour. Because when she wouldn't show up, I decided to get involved in politics and, Mr. Speaker, that's the reason I'm here today. Local people out there supported me because they didn't like what this government was doing to them then and they don't like what this government is doing to them now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1430)

Mr. Bjornerud: — They've got a big club, Mr. Speaker, being held over their heads with forced amalgamation and once again today, the Premier will not deny it. The Minister of Municipal Government will not deny it. Mr. Speaker, the Premier says we aren't talking about forced amalgamation.

Well then it's easy. All he has to do is either in this House, outside in a scrum, is say we will never force amalgamation on local municipalities; and you know what, Mr. Speaker, we'll back off. Because that's what we're asking and that's what the people of Saskatchewan are asking. No forced amalgamation, Mr. Premier. Please come out and say it.

Mr. Speaker, we've gone a step further. We'd like the Leader of the Liberal Party to stand up. It was because of the actions of that leader that we have a coalition government, Mr. Speaker. Otherwise we would have a minority government that also the people of Saskatchewan elected on September 16 and we wouldn't have to be dealing with forced amalgamation cause that government wouldn't dare bring it forward if it wasn't for the Liberals in this province making this coalition government. People of this province were looking forward to a minority government because they thought that government would be responsive to the wishes of Saskatchewan people.

What do we have, Mr. Speaker, we have the same old, same old arrogant attitude between that coalition government that's looking more and more every day than nothing more than an NDP regime that's lost in time, back in the ages, out of touch with people, Mr. Speaker. It just goes on and on over there.

That government does not for a minute listen to what people say out there.

In fact, the Minister of Municipal Government did a double take in a scrum the other day. You know what happened, Mr. Speaker? The minister actually started to make sense. He said, you know, and if I can . . . I'm not quoting him, Mr. Speaker, but the feeling I got he was saying, is maybe we could back off. Maybe we could slow it down. And he said that out in the media, Mr. Speaker, at least that's my take of what he was saying.

I followed in a scrum, Mr. Speaker, and I said, you know that's the first positive feeling I've had from that minister over municipal amalgamation. In fact, in the first part of that scrum, I commended that minister, Mr. Speaker, because I liked what I was hearing. I finally heard that minister say, maybe we can slow it down. Maybe we'll take our time. Maybe we'll talk to the municipality. I was really optimistic, Mr. Speaker.

You know what happened? Out comes the bureaucrats and said to the media, hold on. We've got to explain our position. Well we did a double take, Mr. Speaker because then the minister did another scrum. And my goodness, Mr. Speaker, we went from here to here in a matter of 30 seconds. Because then after checking with his bureaucrats, the minister is saying, oh, I'm keeping my options open. The same rhetoric we've been hearing for the last two, three weeks on forced amalgamation.

I mean, who is running the show, Mr. Speaker? The minister, the Premier, or the bureaucrats? When it takes bureaucrats to have to come out and we do a double take, Mr. Speaker, it was very disappointing for me to see that happen. As critic for rural municipal government, can you imagine how disappointing that was when the people out especially in rural Saskatchewan heard that now we have a minister maybe starting to listen and 30 seconds later throwing that page away and saying, no, I'm going to listen to my bureaucrats. They always tell me what to say; I better say what they're telling me.

Amazing, Mr. Speaker, that we don't have a minister that can think for himself, think on his feet, speak for himself. He doesn't need his bureaucrats to come out with a paper and say, oh no, Mr. Minister, this is where you'll really stand. It may be not what you believe in, but this is exactly what you're going to say. Amazing, Mr. Speaker, when we have a weak minister like that that can't stand up for himself. And you know who's paying the price, Mr. Speaker? The people of Saskatchewan. Because once forced amalgamation . . . should it ever be brought in and pushed through, we can't turn back.

Health reform is a perfect example. When I was a reeve, Mr. Speaker, I was part of what we thought under the Louise Simard regime and Health reform meetings out there, we thought we had input. We had nothing because about halfway through our negotiations and talks, that minister at that time, Health minister, came out and did what she wanted.

Health reform has been a disaster, Mr. Speaker. We know that, that government knows that, and the people of Saskatchewan know that, but guess what we're going to do now? We're going to force amalgamation, create these same kind of monster bureaucratic nightmares, as Health has done because we haven't

learned that health care was a disaster. We're going to do it all over again, and again against the wishes of the Saskatchewan people.

Again I say, Mr. Speaker, how on earth does a small number of members on that side of the House and a large bureaucratic machine know better what's good for Saskatchewan people than actually Saskatchewan people know what's good for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, as you hear speakers over here today talking on this issue, you're going to know that we're talking from the heart. And do you know why that is? Is because we represent those same rural . . . town and rural people. We represent them. We're bringing their views forward. That's why we honestly know what we're talking about and believe in what we're talking about and we don't need our bureaucrats to tell us what we think and what we will say.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on but we have 25 members, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, and I'm sure are very serious about what's happening in this province with forced amalgamation and freezing of the reserves.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move my motion now to let others have their say on this issue. But, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the members opposite — whether you are backbenchers, cabinet ministers — listen on this issue and listen to what we're saying. We represent people in rural Saskatchewan. We're not criticizing you; we're asking you to listen.

Please listen to what our people are saying. We don't want forced amalgamation. Get the club away from above our heads and we'll sit down and talk, but we will not have you force your way upon us.

Mr. Speaker, with that I'd like to move the motion, and I will read it:

That this Assembly urge the government to abandon any plans to freeze or otherwise take control of municipal reserves and assets.

Seconded by the member for Swift Current, Mr. Speaker.

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to stand behind my colleague here in regards to amalgamation — forced amalgamation. And I would like to bring forth some concerns of the people from my constituency in regards to forced amalgamation. They are running around trying to figure out what they should do, especially when it comes out that this Assembly urges the government to abandon and freeze the plans of all the assets of the municipalities.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what would you do if you were a councillor or a reeve — what would you do? You can't stand there because you have an obligation to the people that you represent. They put you in power; you have to represent them. And our government is not listening. Our members opposite, like our

health districts, are not listening.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency, I've had many reeves phone me and tell me: what should we do? Shall we sell off our assets? It's no use keeping them if they're going to be frozen. And I said to the members or to the members of the RMs: well take it in stride, but as this government is moving very quickly, maybe you should too.

I stand with my member who put forth the motion in stating that, why May 15? Why can't this be held off? Joe Garcea got up and did task force meetings all over this province. And to my recollection, not one member . . . not one member from the members opposite got up enough courage to come over and listen to one of those meetings — not one.

But I guarantee you, I guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, we all took our turns over this side listening because we represent the RMs. We represent the people in the RMs. We stand up and say that this is wrong, and if the members opposite would have got up and gone to these meetings they would have known that this is wrong. Every meeting that we went to, and I attended the one in Prince Albert, there was lots of members that spoke there regarding the amalgamation. And they said, we don't want forced amalgamation. In other words, to the government: what part of no don't you understand?

It's just like in the election that was held here not that long ago. When 60 per cent of the vote . . . popular vote went to our party. When that happened, when that happened, sir, it showed that we were in . . . with dealing with the people of this province. The people know where we come from. We are in touch with the rural people in the towns and the villages.

And it's amazing that after winning the most popular votes there, we are still the opposition. But we as the opposition, Mr. Speaker, are going to do our utmost to hold this government accountable.

And this is one step . . . this is one step, sir, that we are going to hold them to it. Because the RMs, the people from the RMs want us to be accountable to this government. We have to be because this is so wrong.

Mr. Speaker, the SARM president, Sinclair Harrison, has spoke many, many times from SARM in regards to this forced amalgamation. He and SARM members have said to this government many, many times to back off. We don't need it now. We are in favour of voluntary amalgamation. But I don't believe this government opposite understands the word voluntary amalgamation because voluntary doesn't fall in their word vocabulary. It's one way or no way.

As one member from the Prince Albert meeting mentioned to me, he said, you know, I thought this province of Saskatchewan, under legislation in a democratic way, was for the people, by the people. Maybe the members opposite should read that and understand that.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday there was a group of people from the RM . . . all RMs ventured their way to Regina to a meeting with the SARM delegates. My brother, Robert, who represents the RM of Meeting Lake was also on that bus that came down here.

They came down here with a forceful attack to stop the government in what they were doing.

There was 295 RMs represented in the meeting yesterday. Mr. Speaker when that comes out of 297 present RMs that could have been there, that's two RMs that weren't there. Now that should tell the government opposite that the people with the RMs are concerned — very concerned. The people that talked about tax revolts were mad. And these same people are bringing forth their concerns regarding the forced amalgamation.

We don't need the amalgamation, they said. There was representatives from all of my constituency there. Most and all of the reeves, some of the councillors ventured from Shellbrook, Big River, from Canwood, Parkside, all them centres, to show their frustration in that meeting yesterday towards the members opposite and the government.

Today we have a group of people in Regina called SUMA delegates that are also meeting. And as a present mayor who — I resigned as of March 31 — as a present mayor I would have been there to voice my concern and frustration toward this government in their forced amalgamation.

But delegates out today are meeting there to tell the government also that they side in with the RMs, that we do not need forced amalgamation. As I stand here, my former colleagues said, and I quote: "Make no apologies for whipping up opposition on this issue because the province has been ignorant to rural concerns."

Well, Mr. Speaker, that has never been more true and prevalent. They do not understand rural Saskatchewan. In fact, 99.9 per cent of them don't understand rural Saskatchewan. We have to get out of the cities of Saskatoon and Regina in order to find out there's more to Saskatchewan than the two big cities.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the heart of Saskatchewan comes from rural Saskatchewan. That's how this province got going. That's how this province diversified and keeping the life of Saskatchewan going. And it's rural Saskatchewan that does that. And maybe they should look at where the backbone, where the backbone of this province comes from. And the backbone of this province comes from farmers, small-businessmen.

And in that backbone of the province, there is a local government called RM government or municipal government. Well, Mr. Speaker, that municipal government runs the most efficient government you could ever wish for. If our present government could think about doing some of that, it would make this government a lot better and this province a lot better.

(1445)

Mr. Speaker, our RMs and council run an accountable government, something that this present government opposite doesn't understand either.

Mr. Speaker, when I talk about the concerns of my constituents — and there are many, many concerns — I realize that they're speaking from the heart. They are a group of people that have worked with their own to make sure that the roads are kept up; they have worked with the people to make sure that there's culverts in these roads. And that is all part of municipal

government.

When we look at that, Mr. Speaker, and look at what our government may be doing in freezing the reserves or assets, where do these RM officials go to? What do they do? We need, we need RM governments. We need them because they run a good system. Mr. Speaker, not only do they look after the roads that's in their area, they look at tax collections, and everything else. And, Mr. Speaker, they do a great job of it.

Now as my member before me said that there are lots of people here on this side that want to speak to this; they all have concerns. Well I would like to present more concerns, but I think everybody else should have a say. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I will be seconding the motion put forth by the member of Saltcoats.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've said it many times before outside this Assembly and now I'll say it inside. There is not now and never has been any plan to confiscate municipal reserves. That is and always has been the position of the Government of Saskatchewan. This resolution, Mr. Speaker, is an example of the big lie — say it often enough and someone might end up believing it.

I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that during the recent election campaign the Liberal Party took the following position on municipal amalgamation. And if I may, I wish to read a brief excerpt from a letter from our provincial leader:

Saskatchewan Liberals are absolutely committed to ensuring that any changes to municipal structure be driven from the grassroots level. At no time will a Liberal Government force municipalities or school divisions to amalgamate, or apply undue pressure on local governments. We will foster an atmosphere of dialogue, but emphasize that any changes must be approved at the municipal level.

That was our position before the September election; that continues to be our position. I happen to believe there is a need for reform of the municipal structure. But those reforms must be worked out with the people and not forced down their throats.

I am distressed though, Mr. Speaker, with the wording of this resolution. It assumes, in the total absence of any evidence, that there is some plan to confiscate municipal reserves. This is the big lie, and it's being repeated and repeated and repeated and spreading hysteria in our province with no basis whatsoever.

The past two weeks, the past two weeks I have spent considerable of my time as the member for Shellbrook-Spiritwood has said he has spent his time . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. I wasn't sure if the member had made a comment with a word that may perhaps not be acceptable in the House. If that was so, kindly withdraw and apologize.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I certainly didn't accuse any hon. member of lying. However may I just say that this resolution is based on a premise which is a considerable variance with the facts . . . and I believe in it.

There is no evidence, there is no evidence, and there could be no evidence of a plan to confiscate municipal reserves because no such plan existed. And by voting for this resolution, members would be giving credibility to something which is incredible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Now as I said, I've spent considerable time in the past two weeks talking to RM councils; telling them no, your municipal reserves are not going to be confiscated so please do not listen to hysteria and fearmongering and dissipate your reserves because that would be most unfair to the councils, the municipalities, and the taxpayers.

I take it that members opposite are encouraging their councils to do just that. I think this is terrible and I have been telling them — do not dissipate your reserves, do not believe those who tell you your reserves are going to be robbed — that is simply not so.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — You know the bizarreness of this situation is demonstrated by the fact that when I say this resolution is based on fiction, on ether, on thin air, the members opposite get worried that I'm impugning something. Yet they are the ones who had spread across this province a story that the government plans to confiscate reserves when no such plan did or ever did exist.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Well I want to tell the people of this province today, and I implore councillors of municipal . . . rural municipalities, do not dissipate your reserves. And if any councils takes the advice of members opposite and do that, they are going to feel terribly ripped off when they realize they have been burned, they have been had by — I won't use the word, Mr. Speaker — by a fiction, an invention, a fabrication.

Mr. Speaker, now is the time for the people of Saskatchewan, both rural and urban, to pull together. No good can come of dividing us further by spreading false rumour. This government is committed to working together for the good of the entire province. We cannot afford to put up walls where none exist or should exist. Our strength is in working together.

Well the Saskatchewan Party says they're working for rural Saskatchewan. But they seem to want to divide and conquer, putting one group against the other. Once their strategy of demolition is completed, then they'll probably be off for what they are continually telling us is the greener pastures of Alberta.

They are forever throwing up to us that, you know, there's nothing in Saskatchewan worthwhile. Our history, our tradition, our character, our uniqueness, all to be thrown in the ashcan, and what we should try and do is become Albertans. Well ironically, Alberta did away with rural municipalities over 50 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, let me make my position clear. I do favour municipal reform. We have more municipal government per

capita than almost anywhere else. We have 160 villages with a population of less than a hundred. Do we need close to 900 municipalities today? Few think that is the case.

Certainly the member for Battleford-Cut Knife thinks there is a need for municipal reform. During debate in this Assembly last week, the hon. member for Battleford-Cut Knife said that he favours municipal amalgamation. The member for Battleford-Cut Knife, with the Saskatchewan Party, said he believed there should be municipal amalgamation. But he went on to say that that amalgamation ought to be voluntary. I agree with him, and I congratulate him for having the courage to say so, particularly following on his flattering remarks about the government's budget when he was speaking in North Battleford recently.

Mr. Speaker, the coalition government has no plans to freeze or take control of municipal reserves or assets in any way, shape, or form. That money belongs to the municipalities. For the Saskatchewan Party to suggest that this government is going to steal municipal reserves is preposterous and borders on the slanderous.

The Speaker: — Order, hon. members. Some of the words, kindly choose them judiciously if you would, please.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Then I will say that the assumption which lies behind this resolution is a considerable variance with the facts. And to vote for this resolution adds credence, adds credence to what is being peddled here — spreading fear and hysteria in the province when there is no basis in fact for the fears they are attempting to spread.

Well, this spreading fear and hysteria is not my way of doing business. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have been fearmongering. They have been encouraging municipal councils to dissipate their reserves out of fear that they will be stolen by the province if they do not.

This is loose rhetoric which is harmful and damaging to our province. And I must say when they find out that they have been burned, they will realize they were led down the garden path when they were told that their reserves were going to be stolen.

Well the member for Saltcoats brags about, as he calls it, whipping up opposition — an opposition based on fear and emotion and not on facts. He says he doesn't apologize for this. He says there's anger.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if I thought, as a citizen of North Battleford, that the provincial government was going to steal our \$15 million in reserves, I would be angry. I'd be extremely angry as a North Battleford resident and taxpayer. But the fact is that anger, that emotion would be based on hysteria being spread with no basis in fact whatsoever. And to whip up that sort of emotion or to whip up that sort of emotion with no facts behind it, to whip it up out of thin air, I think is deplorable politics.

Well I would certainly never suggest that any member of this Assembly would purposely mislead the public, but I certainly hope that members opposite would make some small effort to inform themselves on this issue before they speak further on government plans to confiscate reserves when it's simply not

so.

Mr. Speaker, the policy position of the Saskatchewan Party seems to be gauged on whichever way the wind is blowing at the moment. Well, Mr. Speaker, Lincoln was right — you can fool some of the people all the time, and all the people some of the time, but you can't fool all the people all the time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, at the risk of repeating myself, may I say again this government has no plans to freeze or otherwise take control of municipal reserves or assets. May I say again, the Liberal Party campaigned in the last election against forced amalgamation, and that continues to be the position of our party.

And in that vein, I would like to move, seconded by the hon. member for Prince Albert Carlton, an amendment to the motion brought by the member for Saltcoats, which will bring this motion in sync with the facts of the situation, as opposed to invention based on thin air and rumour mongering.

And my amendment reads as follows:

By deleting all words after the word Assembly and substituting the following therefor:

understands that the provincial government has clearly stated it has no intention of claiming municipal reserves, and has also stated that by law these reserves fall within the jurisdiction of municipalities to be used as they determine in accordance with their legislative mandates and the needs of our common taxpayers.

This is seconded by the member for Prince Albert Carlton.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1500)

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to second the amendment proposed by the member from North Battleford because I think this amendment, Mr. Speaker, puts the whole debate into its proper and truthful context.

And what it does, Mr. Speaker, is it puts the lie to a couple of lines in the motion originally sponsored by the member from . . .

An Hon. Member: — Saltcoats.

Mr. Kowalsky: — . . . Saltcoats. Mr. Speaker, the original amendment, the original amendment . . . the original amendment to which the member from Saltcoats uses these words, abandon any plans to freeze — abandon any plans — making the assumption that there are some type of plans on the part of somebody to freeze or take control of municipal reserves and assets, Mr. Speaker.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, Mr. Speaker, by law — by law as stated in the amendment of the member from

the Battlefords — by law, the money that is in the hands and in the coffers and in the reserves and the bank accounts of the municipalities, belongs to the municipalities. It's quite straightforward, Mr. Speaker, quite straightforward.

And the members opposite use the word devious. And I agree. That was a very devious thing for them to do to try to put it into this original motion, and saying and implying that there were some type of plan to freeze or otherwise control municipal assets.

Mr. Speaker, what has been happening is over the last month, the opposition members have actually trivialized this debate by going up and, quote, their own quotes: "whipping up the opposition to amalgamation or to any change," — period.

And how have they done it, Mr. Speaker? Three ways. They've whipped opposition using basically three words. Number one, using the word forced. It's their word, nobody else's. It's their word, Mr. Speaker. It didn't come from any place else that I know of. Their word, forced.

Number two, number two, using the word confiscation, Mr. Speaker. Nobody else's word; their word. Confiscation — that's their word. They've gone from meeting to meeting to meeting whipping up the opposition, using the words forced, using the words confiscation; and in doing so have trivialized the debate; have trivialized the debate.

Because, Mr. Speaker, at this stage they've put themselves into a situation where they've trivialized . . . they've put them there in a situation where they cannot even put forward one positive idea, not one positive idea of how the workings between provincial government and municipalities can be improved.

How the working between municipalities and school boards can be improved. How the workings between the municipalities and the ratepayers and the municipalities can improve. Not one word are they putting forward, Mr. Speaker — not one word. Instead their words are forced and confiscation. That's what they're using.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, there's a third, there is a third concept that they have been promoting which is totally and . . . totally and patently untrue. And that third one is that they are saying there is no provision now for voluntary amalgamation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — I just want to draw the attention of all members of the House and to the member for Prince Albert Carlton, that . . . I just urge you to choose other words to describe the circumstance and not to suggest truth or untruth around the remarks of any hon. member. So if you could just seek other words, I think all members of the House would appreciate that.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About the concept of whether or not there can be voluntary . . . any kind of voluntary amalgamation or movement between municipalities at this stage, Mr. Speaker. I ask the members and I ask you, Mr. Speaker, is it possible now for any two municipalities, or three or four, should they want to get together and make some kind of arrangement for a different legal status. Let's use the word amalgamation. Should they choose to voluntarily amalgamate,

is it possible? Is it possible right now under existing law, Mr. Speaker.

And I ask the members opposite to consider it. Is it possible? Is it possible? And, Mr. Speaker, I tell you if you have two municipalities or more who've passed motions at their own ridings, at their own municipalities, and they come to the minister's office with a letter stating that and they write a note to the minister, Mr. Speaker, it can be done. It can be done, Mr. Speaker. It can be done.

Now you can make legislation to make this whole thing . . . give it a process of some sort. You can identify the process but, Mr. Speaker, it can be done. And to say that it can't be done under the current circumstances is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, I have some experience about the coming together of units and of boards. And this government has some experience with that. And the most prominent experience, of course, is with the reform and the reorganization of our health system in Saskatchewan.

And everybody is aware we used to have something like several hundred health boards — boards of one hospital, boards of another hospital, boards of a home care district, boards responsible for a seniors' high-rise . . . senior residences, Mr. Speaker. There were several hundred of them. What we did as . . . this government put forward legislation which provided for areas within the province to get together and draw their maps.

And then they also came up with a system of setting up a government structure within each one of these, Mr. Speaker. And it was a very necessary step. And before that was even started, there was overall approval. There was overall request on the part of people in the health system.

This government has a record, Mr. Speaker, of putting forward and . . . putting forward suggestions and working with people in Saskatchewan — rural Saskatchewan, urban Saskatchewan, large centres, smaller centres — with the most successful reform project ever in Canada in health, right here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And it can be done on the municipal level. But it cannot be done when we have people over there, the Tories on the other side, quote, "whipping up the opposition," using the words forced and using the words confiscation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I remember going to some of those meetings on health. And there were people — at that stage, they were members of the opposition — who would get up, and they would try to weasel something in this way or put in a wedge into what was going on in another way.

But, Mr. Speaker, overall, overall, it worked. People kept their eye on the ball. They kept their eye on the needs that were identified, and they said — and they voted it — and they said that they were going to have just the system that we have evolved with. And I'm very proud of the fact that they were able to do it. And I'm very proud of the fact that they ignored a lot of the distracters that were going on at the time.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, over the long haul, the same thing's

going to happen here with municipalities. It will happen, Mr. Speaker. The people in the municipalities are going to tell the opposition to butt out eventually. They will eventually tell them to butt out.

They will tell them that, Mr. Speaker. They will say, they will say, cool the rhetoric. They will say, cool the rhetoric, cool the rhetoric, because we have problems we want to solve. That's what they're going to say. That's what they're going to say, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have another example of an amalgamation that was successful, and was run successfully right in my own community. And that is the amalgamations that was referred today by the Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education indicated to this House that there were 30 school units that have combined now to 10 school units in Saskatchewan. They've done so quietly and voluntarily, without the interference of the opposition members, thank you very much.

And what have they done, Mr. Speaker? As a result of this combination, the students in these areas have got better services and more services, Mr. Speaker. And I'm very proud of being part of a government that has fostered that kind of a relationship, Mr. Speaker.

In my own area, Prince Albert — the unit, the Prince Albert rural unit, the Kinistino unit, the Prince Albert public school district, and the Prince Albert Comprehensive High School Board worked on this issue for several years. It took them a while and they had to overcome some difficulties.

And of course, Mr. Speaker, whenever you're integrating one staff with another staff from another unit, there are always differences because they had different agreements to begin with. There have got to be some compromises put into place. There may be differences in mill rates. You got to make adjustments for differences in mill rates. You've got to take people's feelings into account. You got to try, you got to take this into one step at a time, Mr. Speaker.

But what has happened in Prince Albert? They've ended up with one school board called the Saskatchewan Rivers school district, Mr. Speaker. As a result — and this you can verify by asking the division head, Mr. Speaker, the director of education, or asking any board members — were there any benefits to this? Was it worthwhile? And the resounding answer that you will get from any board member there or from the director of education . . . and yes, I think now, Mr. Speaker, also from the staff members in general, the teaching staff, and the custodial staff will be a resounding yes, it was worth it. It was worth it. Why? Because they know what they're there for. They were there for the students.

And as a result of all the work that was done in the Saskatchewan Rivers school district, there are now 26 more teachers than would have been there, than would have been there under the old circumstances. And the services offered to these students are now equally available to everybody in the area, not just to the people directly in the city of Prince Albert, but equally all over.

Mr. Speaker, I say that's a good model. I say that's a model that other school districts can follow. I say, Mr. Speaker, that that's a model that municipalities might want to look at. They might want to look at and from that establish what are the needs, what are the things that we should be doing together? Where are the areas that maybe we should be combining and where are the areas that we shouldn't be? And they will do that with any kind of encouragement.

I predict they will do it even despite what the members opposite are doing at this stage, Mr. Speaker, using the words forced and using the words confiscation, Mr. Speaker. Using the words forced . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . See and here he goes again. He says, that's what you're going to do, Mr. Speaker. That's what you're going to do, he says. That's what the member says here in this House; that's, I suspect, that that's what the member says at all the meetings that he's gone to. I suspect that that's what he says — crying wolf.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I say you can cry now and you can raise . . . you can cry wolf now, but in the end, Mr. Speaker, in the end they are going to tell you to butt out, Mr. Speaker. They are going to tell him to butt out, Mr. Speaker.

(1515)

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind, in anybody's mind at this stage, about what is happening in rural Saskatchewan. No doubt, Mr. Speaker. The circumstances driven by economics, driven largely by what's happened to our wheat trade, driven by the transportation system, the changes in the transportation system, there is decay of infrastructure; there is decay of roads, Mr. Speaker. There is decay of railroads. There is decay of services in rural Saskatchewan.

And what is happening, Mr. Speaker? This decay points to a need. To me it points to a need. It points to a need to say, hey, open up. We've got to look at this. We've got to look at this and we've got to come up with a solution.

The opposition has now put themselves in a situation where it's impossible — impossible — for them to ever come up with a solution. It's impossible. Why? Because they are focused on the words forced and they're focused on the words . . . What's the other word? Confiscation. Confiscation. That's what they're focused on. Confiscation and forced.

I sometimes wonder where that comes from. It didn't come from the inside of this government, Mr. Speaker. It has to come from the interior. It must come from the . . . somehow from the interior, from the ideas that they have in their own minds. Maybe some kind of suppressed ideas, Mr. Speaker. Rather a strange situation.

I'm advised by one of our members, I'm advised by the member from Cumberland, who says that the soundings that are coming from there are very much like the cheerleading that used to come from Grant Devine and his mentality. What you've got to do is, quote, "whip up the opposition." Well they've whipped it up all right.

They've whipped it up to the situation they've got on the tiger. I wonder now how the members opposite are going to get off of

this tiger. Very interesting situation. How are they going to get off the tiger? They've cried wolf so many times; how are they going to get off it? Well we'll see. We'll see. I suspect they won't know how to get off of it, Mr. Speaker, until they are advised to butt out by the people in their rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, today . . . I was talking about the rural infrastructure and what was happening to it. Today we had one of the members opposite talking about a bank closing down in Choceland, Mr. Speaker.

And while the banks are closing down in rural Saskatchewan, I want to compliment somebody else at the same time, and that is the credit unions that are opening up in rural Saskatchewan. The credit unions are opening up. The banks looking at this and they're saying this is small business; we don't want to have anything to do with you. But the credit unions owned and operated by the people of Saskatchewan are moving in to fill the void.

And I'm very, very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to see new branches opening up in places like La Ronge fairly recently. And taking over the branches that the Bank of Montreal had — 16 branches that the Bank of Montreal had around rural Saskatchewan. And in doing so are actually doing something about helping rural Saskatchewan become a sustainable, vigorous — vigorous — area where people want to move into.

And I tell you the longer any changes are put off, the worse it gets, and people just don't want to come in if all they hear is doom and gloom in an area. They don't want to come in. What they want to hear is they want to hear optimism. They want to move into an area that's progressive; an area that says, hey, we're up here and we're ready to change. And we have identified and we want a change.

And, Mr. Speaker, there's where the opposition is making a big mistake, and there's where they are being harmful to rural Saskatchewan. Fortunately we have no members elected to the opposition from any of the larger centres, because I'm sure that attitude they would try to bring right into rural — into urban Saskatchewan as well, Mr. Speaker. Can I get a copy of that . . . of that amendment?

Mr. Speaker, during this debate one of the things that's happened is — that I regret very much — is the personal attacks that have been laid on Mr. Garcea. I actually believe, Mr. Speaker, that it's been a shameful thing of some of the things that happened.

Here we have a person, a respected person from the University of Saskatchewan, aided by other people on his committee: Mr. Wright, who has served honourably the citizens of Saskatoon, and this province and many other areas; Mr. Val Kononoff, who has served honourably, has excellent intentions; Ms. Maria Lynn Freeland has served on a city council, an honourable person. And what has happened, is these people have been vilified. Why? For political gain, Mr. Speaker; for nothing but cheap political gain. Particularly Mr. Garcea. They have singled him out and at these meetings have chosen not to ask questions and not to say okay, what is it that you see? What is the advice that you might present? But instead, of vilifying him.

Mr. Speaker, I wish I wouldn't . . . I wouldn't want to wish that kind of treatment on anybody. Even if somebody had deserved it, I wouldn't wish that kind of treatment. But least of all people like these four people that I mentioned.

Mr. Garcea had been commissioned by the government to do a survey across the province, try to get the information out, put it down on paper, and bring it back. And do it in civilized fashion and in a civilized forum. But instead what happens? They get to these meetings, Mr. Speaker, and whipped up by the opposition, they get abused. They get abused. Mr. Speaker, I say that's shameful. I say that is very shameful.

And eventually, Mr. Speaker, the worm is going to turn. And, Mr. Speaker, the opposition will be told by their very people that they think they're supporting now, they will be told to butt out — by them, by them, Mr. Speaker. That is my prediction.

Mr. Speaker, I want to mention that for years we've been hearing that voluntary restructuring is a good idea. This government supports voluntary restructuring if the idea comes from SARM and SUMA and the people involved. And as I said it's possible now — shouldn't be denied that it's not possible now, might not be under the best circumstances, the processes aren't laid out clearly — but it's possible, Mr. Speaker, it's possible now.

And I say that, Mr. Speaker, we ought to await the report of the Garcea . We ought to take a look at what things have been identified that are possible and that are desirable, and then upon the advice from the RMs we should co-operatively work towards a solution.

And, Mr. Speaker, therefore it is with great pleasure that I second this motion, this amendment moved by the member from The Battlefords; and the amendment reads:

That we delete all the words after the word Assembly and substituting the following: therefor, that the motion would read:

That this Assembly understands the provincial government has clearly stated it has no intention of claiming municipal reserves and it's also stated that by law — by law — these reserves fall within the jurisdiction of municipalities to be used as they determine in accordance with their legislative mandates and the needs of our common taxpayers.

And that motion . . . that amendment is to replace, Mr. Speaker, is to replace the words to abandon any plans existing, because those words tend to mislead and misrepresent the current situation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak against the amendment in favour of the motion. The words from the members opposite are interesting to say the least. They speak of confiscation and force. And they say that's the members opposite's words. But unfortunately it's not our words — it's the words of the people of Saskatchewan.

And this is the fear that the government has brought on to the

people of Saskatchewan and if they had attended any of the task force meetings, they would have heard those words for themselves.

I attended the afternoon meeting in Saskatoon and there was a 100 per cent vote against forced amalgamation. And if the members were there they would have heard that for themselves. The people at these meetings are fearful of forced amalgamation and they're forced to . . . and they're scared of their money being confiscated.

And the government is . . . talks in riddles a little bit when they talk about seizing this money. The money would be seized. It would be taken from the smaller municipalities and put into the larger municipalities that's predetermined by the government. And that money would be taken away from the smaller municipalities.

These RMs and villages and hamlets have been good managers in the past. They're responsible people. They're people that are looking out for the communities and they know what's best for their residents.

The people on the RMs and town and hamlets have not . . . As the member from North Battleford has said, he has been telling them what he thinks.

Well on this side of the House, the people of the RMs and the towns and hamlets have been telling us what they think the government's going to do and what the fears of this . . . fear from this government. And it's the fear that they will . . . the forced amalgamation will take place and that their funds and assets will be frozen.

Now we only have to look into the history of what the government's done in the past, and you look at the health boards. The same thing has been said there. They have set up, set up the boundaries, they've frozen the funds, and it's been done without anyone's vote or . . .

Now RMs, RMs have coming to members on this side on a regular basis. And we're listening to them. And what they're telling us and asking us is what should they do, how to protect their assets and funds. And there's a number of things that RMs are thinking about doing — anywhere from setting up trust funds to hide the money from the government, or just giving it back to the taxpayers and then taking out loans and running their operations that way so that this money cannot be taken away from them when the government comes in and has a forced amalgamation.

The member from North Battleford brought up a number of things. He says what he tells the RMs. Well he . . . the government is not listening. And the member is not listening to what the RMs and the people are saying to him. The people of Saskatchewan do not trust this government. That's the point. They don't trust the government; they don't have any confidence in this government or what they say and what they will be doing.

And not only you talk about the health boards and what's happened in the past, just look at the election campaign. Did the government, did the NDP government during the election

campaign talk about amalgamation, forced amalgamation, seizing of funds, or any of these things? No. It was never brought up. The election . . . The people of Saskatchewan wanted lower taxes; they wanted something to be done about the farm crisis; fix the health care, roads, and highways.

And on election day, the people of Saskatchewan spoke. They spoke loud and clear. And the Premier says, oh he says he's always got the message; he's always heard what the people have said. Well he's been saying that for two years, and again he has not heard what the people of Saskatchewan have said. And he has not listened to the people of Saskatchewan.

And you can go on to other things. The people of Saskatchewan just does not trust the government because in one month's time, forced amalgamation will be forced on the people of Saskatchewan.

The Garcea report has created very much controversy. And again, the people of Saskatchewan have gone to these meetings and said again and again and again that they are against the forced amalgamation and against Garcea's report. And again and again they have said that this report and this committee is wasting their time.

Even a member of the Garcea committee has come to me and asked me . . . has told me that they have a feeling that they're just a front for the government to take the fall for this forced amalgamation. And also the waste of \$750,000 for a committee's report which is going to be directed by the government — top, down.

(1530)

The Garcea report talks about economic development. Well, there's no basis in the report in forced amalgamation that reflects that there would be a greater opportunity for economic development in these larger government areas. The biggest problem that we . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No savings whatsoever. The biggest problem for rural Saskatchewan is raising capital for projects, and which is intertwined with raising capital as the higher taxes. But not only those two areas.

Any business that is wanting to set up anywhere in rural Saskatchewan would have to look at some of the fundamentals — conditions of the roads and highways, the health care system in the town, the education system, and the taxes of course. Now this is all within the provincial government's area of responsibility. And if they keep underfunding in all these areas, well naturally the rural areas are going to dwindle and not be a place that businesses are willing to set up in.

I'd like to just explain a situation that took place in Blaine Lake a few years ago. The citizens and residents of Blaine Lake, the town of Blaine Lake and the RM of Blaine Lake, started working on a plan to build a beef packing plant. And they jumped through all the hoops in front of them set out by the government, and they were in a position of going to the community to raise money. All they had to do was get the government's permission.

And everything was in place except government permission. And that fell through, and the packing plant concept fell

through and has gone to another area.

Now voluntary amalgamation can take place but the government has to get the obstacles to those out of the way. They need to look after a number of areas that come up in discussions when they're talking about amalgamation of hamlets or villages with RMs. And that's two or three important areas are the liabilities that the RM would take on concerning their village's leaking sewer lagoons or underground tanks that may exist in these towns.

And right now if a hamlet went into an RM, the RM would have to take on this liability and responsibility and that's just not fair. That's where the government should step in and help in those circumstances to overcome those liabilities. And not only to get the environmental problems out of the way, but to help voluntary amalgamation; also increased power rates that the village or town would have if they went into an RM.

I'd like to read some parts of some of the submissions put forward by a number of RMs to the Garcea report, and when we talk about economic development in the rural areas, this is an example that RMs have to come over. I'd just like to quote this. This is from the rural municipality of Redberry. It says:

Dear Sir:

Your December 1990 rural road classification report was reviewed at our regular council meeting which led to the following resolution:

That we appeal to Saskatchewan Highways that we retain No. 40 Highway as our number one road classification due to increased traffic to elevator closures. Trusting that the status of this highway will not be changed from its present number one classification.

I've had a number of complaints from this area, the people living on No. 40 Highway — and the highway is deteriorating rapidly. It's a danger zone. There's been a number of accidents on this highway. Fortunately no loss of life. There's been much damage done to equipment and people are very hesitant to even drive down that highway in many areas.

Well when we talk about rural economic development, this situation with Highway No. 40 is of great concern. It's an obstacle that is there that any business would have to take into account when it's talking about setting up a business. It has to get its products and raw materials to and from market.

I'd like to read a bit from the submission by the rural municipality of Vanscoy which is in the constituency of Redberry Lake:

It says:

This municipality would like to express their views on the recommendations as outlined in the interim report of the task force on municipal legislated renewal.

Number one, municipal purpose. The report indicates that the fundamental purpose of the municipal government should be to provide good governance, foster sustainable

development, ensure a good quality of life for the communities.

This is precisely what our current municipal system is providing. The decisions made by council are based on the best interests of the ratepayers who are also their friends, neighbours, and relatives.

Who better to determine the future of rural municipalities than the residents themselves. This municipality, referring to Vanscoy, contains a potash mine, four seed processing plants, an organic pharmaceutical operation, a chemical plant, a livestock sales facility, a feedlot, a large chicken operation, and 12 other smaller industries. We have four hamlets, two country residential subdivisions, and numerous farm and rural residential holdings.

Is this not fostering development?

Municipal status, number two. We agree that the status of the rural municipal government as an order of government should be formerly recognized.

Number three (and it goes on to say) under municipal legislation, as previously discussed The Rural Municipality Act, 1989, has been amended from time to time when changes have been required to . . . We believe the retention of this Act is essential for managing the issues we are facing today and into the future.

Municipal finances. We are in agreement that the province and the municipalities should negotiate ways to reduce the pressures on the property tax base in regards to education. SARM has continuously lobbied the provincial government to provide tax relief for the education portion of property taxes.

At a recent tax revolt meeting held in a municipality, ratepayers indicated their opposition to the increased cost of education on their property tax. The ratepayers were not in disagreement with the municipal portion of the tax bill.

And it goes on to say:

The number and size of municipalities — we strongly disagree with the recommendation of major consolidation of municipalities. Voluntary amalgamation will occur where it is necessitated. Should we just consolidate? That is what the majority of other provinces have done. Have we not always told our children not to follow because that is what everyone else is doing, but to be unique, and do what is best for themselves?

With larger units, we believe there will be a loss of volunteerism in a community sense. We are already sharing services with our neighbours where it makes sense. We have a joint fire department involving two rural municipalities, two urban municipalities. We provide assistance to the recreation associations in the area. We have a small municipal police department. Every municipality is aware of their own needs requirements. We have a diverse needs and successfully strive to achieve these objectives.

And that's from the RM of Vanscoy.

I'd just like to take a few minutes to give a bit of the presentation put forward by the mayor and council of Blaine Lake. The report from Blaine Lake goes on to repeat:

The report uses questionable (referring to the Garcea report) . . . The report uses questionable research methodology, improper research tests, hypotheses. It does not merely set out to argue through a pre-determined point of view. Research that does so is called pre-judged research and is second rate.

It goes on to say:

The report has a very narrow economic focus. It presumes the integrity of the economic model into which it proposes to cram the circumstances of rural Saskatchewan. History is ripe with failed attempts to manipulate populations in this way. Collectivization in the Soviet Bloc forced resettlement programs in various Third World countries — Mozambique, Tanzania, and closer to home the movement of people from out-ports and Newfoundland.

It goes on to say:

Take a brief look at some of the variables that fell outside of this task force. Losses incurred by displaced people; the cost to the society of displacing people; the cost to the society of doing away with large numbers of small businesses; lack of operating cost comparisons between present and the proposed models of administration; and the report does not assess increased costs resulting from the increased response times to emergencies resulting from centralization. Increased operating costs resulting from bureaucratic inefficiencies. No value given to reduced social costs of people living in a small community and taking care of their own needs.

And it goes on to say:

Other problems the report does not address: out-of-province migration, loss of tax revenue.

I'd just like to read the conclusion from this submission by Blaine Lake:

Our conclusion is that we see nothing in this report that would make us better off than we now are. Centralization will not benefit us economically. Rather, we in rural Saskatchewan will lose significantly in terms of real estate values, medical services, infrastructure, delivery of goods and services, and social fabric. Since your report is so fundamentally flawed in the scope of its inquiry, about the best you can say to us is that we think or we believe this or that will work. While we believe it won't make that . . . (while we believe it won't) . . . and that makes us about even. We seem to have brought about as much relevant data to the table as have you.

It is our view that the writers of this report have a low opinion of those who choose to live in rural Saskatchewan. You condescend to us by making vague promises of

consultation, yet in the report you urge the government to force centralization on us. You theorized from the ivory tower of academia and now centralization is going to be good for us but it is us who will lose billions of equity in our homes.

We have no doubt whatsoever that we are expressing a significantly majority view. What you have proposed does not have our best interests at heart. The proponents of these views do not have as their motive the greatest good of the greater number, rather they want the play economic checkers with their money and our lives. Thanks, but no thanks.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I'm very pleased today to be able to stand and to support the motion put forward by the member from Saltcoats which is stated:

That this Assembly urges the government to abandon any plans to freeze or otherwise take control of municipal reserves and assets.

Now, Mr. Deputy Chair, the member from North Battleford stood a while ago in this House and he was alluding to the fact that basically we were using scare tactics, that there was no evidence to support this motion put forward by the member from Saltcoats. He says that there was no evidence to support that this government has indicated in any way or form that they will freeze municipal reserves.

Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, unfortunately this government has never been up front with anything it's done and all the people in rural Saskatchewan are very clear about that.

Mr. Deputy Chair, what are people in the province to think after the evidence that they've have that this NDP government has shown them of the destruction meted out to rural Saskatchewan by this NDP government? When the Minister of Municipal Affairs indicates to the media that his decision would be reflected in the final Garcea report, what are the people of this province to think? When May 15, a May 15 deadline is imposed on SARM and all RMs in this province to come up with a plan, what are the people of this province to think?

When health districts, under health district formation under Louise Simard and under the NDP came into play, there was clearly included in those measures of forming those health districts, a plan that confiscated reserves from the hospitals. So what are the people of this province to think?

Naturally the people of this province are brighter than the NDP government would give them credit for. Naturally the people of this province know what's going on. Naturally they know that this government's hidden agenda is no longer hidden. The people of this province are standing up and they are putting up arms and they are intent to stop this destruction of all of Saskatchewan, not only rural Saskatchewan.

(1545)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the greatest transgressions of democracy is for a government to insist on maintaining power and control by taking over every bit of self-determination that people in this province have enjoyed. And that is what this government has done.

Time and time again they have done it to the people. They have done it in health care; they have done it out there with taxes; they're taxing people to death; they're squeezing the life out of this province. And everyone in this province knows it.

And why? For what ends do they do this? To what end? To maintain power in the province. That is the only reason; that is the sole reason. And the people of this province know it; they understand you; and they know exactly what you're doing.

Mr. Deputy Chair, forced amalgamation threatens the freedom that people enjoy in this province. It threatens the autonomy of people. It threatens self-determination. It threatens self-determination that grassroots people have enjoyed for hundreds of years. It drains the life out of people because they feel helpless. They feel helpless when they see a government such as this NDP government controlling people's lives over and over again. It threatens, Mr. Deputy Chair, the very democratic principles that this country was built on.

Mr. Deputy Chair, I have received from the RMs in my constituency, some of the most thoughtful position papers on the interim report that Mr. Garcea has put forward, some of the very most thoughtful papers. And I want to honour these RMs by reading some of these papers here in the Assembly.

And from the RM of Fish Creek, the administrator says:

It is quite evident that rural Saskatchewan is opposed to the Garcia Report, the Jack Stabler Report and any form of **forced amalgamations**. The council of the municipality is requesting that you and the Saskatchewan Party support our position of opposition to this matter. The provincial government has failed to address the need of these reports, nor to mention the waste of tax payers money to fund both of those reports. If there is a need for amalgamation, then it must come from the grassroots, the people who know what is best for them and not the provincial (NDP) government.

One has to question the motive of the provincial government. How can forced amalgamations work. Our council is not against the idea of amalgamation where it is necessary and locally requested by the residents. There are many small villages and towns that could become part of the rural municipality, but they are the ones that need to decide what's best for them. Both reports (the Garcea report and the Jack Stabler report) state that it will help keep families in the business of farming and help keep open small businesses in our town's (if there's forced amalgamation). They have no evidence to prove this theory as it (is) not substantiated by any supporting evidence.

The provincial government spends approximately 2 % of its annual budget on local governments. This amount is not substantial and should not warrant the destruction of responsible local governments who operate efficiently and deficit free.

The provincial government should have learned their lesson with health care reform and leave amalgamation issues to the people who know what's best for them. "Bigger is not (necessarily) Better"

The administrator of the RM of Fish Creek states that:

We already share in services such as equipment, fire protection, regional parks, recreation boards, rail line committees, water pipelines, libraries, Redas, waste disposal just to name a few. There maybe areas to expand upon this tradition of co-operation, but amalgamation (and certainly forced amalgamation) is not the answer. Larger units will mean higher taxes, poorer service and loss of local autonomy. If larger units become a reality, try calling your representative (at that time) to report a problem and you'll be calling to someone who will probably live many, many miles away. A trip to the municipal office could be 100 miles away or more (than that), this is not service or an improvement. If residents are forced to go to the city to pay their taxes and utilities or just to discuss an issue it will mean that they will probably spend some time shopping in the city, does this help our local businesses (thrive) . . . ?

No matter where you go or who you talk to, people in this area are totally against this issue and we trust . . . (that the Saskatchewan Party) will support us.

And I guarantee you that we will.

Mr. Deputy Chair, I have a succession of letters from different RMs and from concerned citizens that are not necessarily on municipal councils. And many of them make references to the provincial government policies, sort of in line with the communist state and that really does alarm me. It alarms a lot of people, but I have heard that said over and over again in the last few years.

People are now referring to this government as a communist government, a dictatorial government, who cares nought about the people but cares only about maintaining their own power. And I would suggest to the members in the backbench that maybe you should actually go out there and talk to some of the people.

Go to coffee row, get out there and talk to them, and I think you'll have a rude awakening as how to people in this province really think about your government and how very worried they are about what's going to happen to their homes and their families, what's going to happen to rural communities. We are already experiencing major destruction. And, if forced amalgamation takes place as your government is intending to do, the destruction of this province will be irreversible.

Mr. Deputy Chair, another report that I have had submitted to me, and there was submitted also to the latest round of Garcea presentations, was the paper, a position paper from the RM of Aberdeen. Mr. Deputy Chair . . .

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — Order. Members I'm having difficulty hearing the member for Humboldt and I'd ask all members to reduce the noise in the Chamber. Let's give the . . . Order, order. Let's give the member for Humboldt the

opportunity to make her remarks without undue interruption and I'd ask all members for their co-operation in that regard.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Deputy Chair, what I'm going to be quoting from is the document that has been submitted to the task force on municipal legislative renewal, to Mr. Garcea, from the RM of Aberdeen. The RM of Aberdeen points out some very fundamental flaws in the interim report that has thus far been tabled. And one of the things that is a major flaw is the very fact that there is failure to analyse municipal functions. The Garcea report stated that form should come before function. Now there is a comprehensive analysis here of what has happened in that report, and also some very good suggestions as to how to do this the right way, that the government may want to consider.

I commend the RM of Aberdeen for this because it really does state some very workable purposes, workable statements that could be, could be adopted by government, and that could in fact leave the whole idea of amalgamation as a voluntary process.

The first fundamental error, as I had mentioned, is failure to analyze municipal functions.

The second fundamental error that was posed by the RM of Aberdeen was the assumed homogeneity of Saskatchewan — meaning that the interim report seems to suggest that differences among municipalities are undesirable. There are comments in this report decrying inequality of resources, local variations in the provision of services, and other differences between municipalities. And the theme springs from an assumption that municipalities should all be alike. As desirable as this might be in theory, it ignores a great deal of reality.

Saskatchewan is a diverse province in terms of population density, age, demographics, ethnicity, land quality, resource base, and social attitudes. Under the present structure there is no such thing as a typical or average municipality — nor can there be unless the plan is to create municipalities so huge that they submerge any semblance of locality. Accordingly, divergence among municipalities is a reality that cannot be wished out of existence.

And the third fundamental flaw in the Garcea interim report that is pointed out by the RM of Aberdeen is the fallacy of optimal organization. The RM of Aberdeen points out that unfortunately the task force seems to have been bitten by the same bug as provincial and federal governments engaged in an endless spiral of reorganization.

One need only look at the multitude of Saskatchewan government departments, under which administration of tourism has recently fallen, to see how absurd the exercise has become — Natural Resources, Parks and Renewable Resources, Tourism and Small Business, Environment and Resource Management, and so on.

Similarly the different names under which rural municipal administration has fallen are too numerous to recite. Obviously some administrative structures do not work. However, for the better part, the key to good administration is not so much what you call it or how you organize it, but rather how you actually carry it out. All the rest is empty activity.

The fourth fundamental error in the Garcea report is the failure of the task force to support its conclusions.

The fifth and largest error is the indication by Garcea to have a directed, consultative renewal. And this is the most objectionable suggestion in the interim report, in that the wishes of municipal governments ought to be overridden in the renewal process. In other words the task force is suggesting that its suggestions are too important to leave to the vagaries of the democratic process.

This of course ignores the fact that the most important thing in government is not the product but the democratic process by which the decision is made. To suggest that the democratic process ought to be muzzled for its own good is the equivalent of the soldier who told the media during the Vietnam War that a village has to be destroyed in order to save it.

Now the RM of Aberdeen has put forward a proposal for municipal renewal, a proposal by the people. And they state that clearly it's not enough to simply point out the errors in this interim report. There is a challenge here that has been issued, and the RM of Aberdeen takes the position that there are opportunities for municipal renewal that ought to be taken, small and large.

Number one, recognize the differences and deal positively with diversity. The same solutions will not work everywhere. Each community has its own needs and can fashion its own solutions. Thus rather than the cookie-cutter approach to municipal renewal, any legislation should provide for and permit local variation. And they go on with further explanation of this.

The second proposal from municipal renewal by the people is starting small, and they talk about that in here. They have some very good suggestions. And I'm going to table this position paper from the RM of Aberdeen so that members opposite may be able to have the privilege of looking at it and certainly considering it.

The third proposal for municipal renewal by the people, voluntary renewal . . . or voluntary amalgamation is the need to test and refine. And they state here one of the biggest problems with the process advocated by the interim report is that it involves the simultaneous regionalization of all parts of the province. And that poses two major difficulties.

The first is that to the extent that there are resources to assist with the process, these are spread dangerously thin. It is impossible to be in all places at the same time. Choices will have to be made and the result will be uneven assistance to the various regions of the province.

The second and more important is what if it doesn't work? If that should occur we have abandoned the system of local government that, regardless of its many flaws, still works relatively well in favour of a system that will work poorly. In order to succeed, chances need to be taken and the risk of failure must be courted. The problem with the scheme proposed by the interim report is that it courts province-wide failure.

(1600)

How much better it would be to experiment to see if municipal renewal works. And, Mr. Deputy Chair, that was what the Saskatchewan Party opposition has proposed — that we have a pilot project in place before any hare-brained scheme of doing this all at once takes place. And there are other places in this division paper that cites examples that can be of assistance, and I invite the members again to have a look at this.

The final piece in the puzzle, municipal powers and funding. And as stated here as was noted, the task force process has provided little enlightenment about the role and function of municipal government. No, a pilot project can sort out issues of this nature, however a pilot project may be put in place if in fact those things were sorted out ahead of time. What are the functions?

What is required is a focused debate on what constitutes a core area of municipal functions — what is less central and what falls outside?

To illustrate the point there are likely no functions that are truly municipal. Certainly road construction and maintenance is often offered as a core municipal function but it is not as simple as that. A municipal road that serves only to bring residents to the centre of a municipality serves a purely municipal function. What, however, of a road that serves to take the residents of one municipality to different municipalities? And what of a road that serves to take them out of the province?

In each situation the case for municipal power over the road varies. And again I would love to continue with this full explanation, but the position paper is really quite lengthy.

And so the RM of municipality closes their presentation here with a message of thanks. And they say:

The Rural Municipality of Aberdeen thanks the members of the task force for the opportunity to make the presentation. Thanks are due also to the ratepayers of the RM of Aberdeen for their support and encouragement, and thanks too to the staff and board of SARM . . .

And also some other municipalities who have assisted in their presentation.

And I would . . . like I said, I would invite the members opposite, the members of the NDP government, to take a look at this wonderful position paper.

Mr. Deputy Chair, the people of this province have spoken loud and clear in respect to forced amalgamation. They are truly speaking louder than ever before because they truly are afraid. They feel that all power is being taken out of their hands by this government, and they certainly are going to fight to their last breath, you could say, in order to maintain and save their RMs.

And I would like to just read one more . . . some excerpts from one more person in my constituency. A woman who has been there for her community, time and time again, who has paid attention to what is happening, who has over and over again looked at how the people in those areas have worked together to maintain their communities, their towns, and certainly their self-determination.

And this is a woman from Middle Lake, Saskatchewan who attended the March 2 ratepayers' meeting in Middle Lake. And at that meeting legislative renewal and municipal consolidation was discussed. And she says:

... my husband, many other farmers and village councillors were very upset with the meeting. The most upsetting point is that the gov't is not listening to the public and everything is cut and dried before we have a chance to speak our minds.

First of all our forefathers have put together the constitution which they felt would protect and enforce freedom for their generation and (for) ours. Now (it seems like this government, this provincial government) ... wants to take that away from the municipalities.

Our forefathers worked so hard, with hard manual labour and sweat to build towns, railroads, telecommunications, now railroads have disappeared and elevators are taken down from the local areas causing every farmer to have to buy their own semi-truck to transfer their grain to far away places, breaking down highways and inconveniencing the little farmer (for) whom it is almost impossible to survive.

Now with the (proposed) consolidation of RMs, who have built those roads, (who have) kept the snow off (the road, who have patrolled the roads) ... and still run their own business with money in the bank, (the NDP government) ... want to take that away so (that they) ... can fill their own coffers and leave the farmers to die.

One of the first items on the agenda ...

I am quoting from a letter ... this is a letter coming from one of my constituents:

One of the first items on the agenda of the Garcea recommendation is to borrow money, and where will you get it from to pay it back — (you'll get it from) "The farm land."

So what can happen in the end, the farmland can just be taken back, just like in Russia.

Where is our democracy? This is Communism!

What about the Health Service? (What about the health services). The Directors of care or administration (seem to have very little say) ... They have to do what they are told and the Home Care is not a Wellness Centre. It is only for the money that some people work there.

These people, Mr. Deputy Chair, are despairing. They don't know really what's happening, but they know that there's a great deal of money that is issued to some areas of health care and not to others.

This woman states that it is obvious in this health system:

... there is no love for seniors. They are not allowed to do this or that. Anybody can sit and watch a Senior eat and give them their pills. And it seems that our system is so

very hard on these people, that they seem to have no rights anymore.

She says, I am very disgusted with the fact that love and concern are supposed to be shown for our seniors and aren't.

And she suggests that:

If you want to save money in the municipalities consider leaving things as they are instead of trying to run the whole province. It costs more money to have gov't run the country because they don't care where (the money) comes from. (And it comes from) "The Taxpayer."

How can the cities know what the rural areas need? You are trying to improve our country in the wrong way.

Why didn't it work in Ontario. You can't compare us to a province of Nova Scotia and P.E.I.

Please LISTEN.

Please listen to the ratepayers of this province.

And, Mr. Deputy Chair, with that I would like to thank the Assembly for the opportunity to make my comments on behalf of the constituents of Humboldt and on behalf of all ratepayers there.

We are, I assure you people of the Humboldt constituency, fighting to maintain that you have the determination; that your communities maintain the right to determine their own destiny and to form their communities and the areas in which they live, in the way that they deem best. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of interest this afternoon I've listened to this debate. And as the members opposite seem not to want to listen to our responses in question period, our responses here, they want to go out and they want to build hysteria out in the people of Saskatchewan.

I think if they in fact supported what they put forward in their original motion, they would vote for this amendment. Because how many times does the Premier have to say what our position is? He puts it in writing to SARM and SUMA; our position's clear on the issue of taking municipal reserves.

But, Mr. Speaker, we say that there's no foundation in law to do that, we tell them that, and they simply do not listen. They come here, Mr. Speaker, and they talk about forced amalgamation; they talk about all these things that we're supposedly doing. The only thing we're doing is having a task force of independent people going out and listening to the people of Saskatchewan. What's so wrong with listening to people? I don't know, Mr. Speaker.

This government, this government, this government's not out at meetings telling people what's going to happen and creating hysteria. No, we're letting the people speak freely and we're going to listen to what they have to say. We're not out there telling them all the evil things somebody else is going to do.

Because, Mr. Speaker, we're not into playing those types of political games. But, Mr. Speaker, I can't be at fault for what the opposition wants to do.

Mr. Speaker, everybody, everybody talks about that there needs to be change — SARM says it, SUMA says it; they've been saying it for 40 years. I challenge the members opposite — I challenge the members opposite — rather than being so disruptive to come on board and help with some co-operative change. Get around the table, be part of it; don't be such a destructive force, don't always want to play politics.

Mr. Speaker, it's shameful, it really is shameful that the focus of debate is about something that nobody ever intended to do, created by an opposition who simply wants to play politics, Mr. Speaker. I don't know. It's a sad world we live in when the focus is always about how you can stir people up and get them mad versus doing anything positive for the people of this province.

Our goals, Mr. Speaker, are about improving our economy, improving our rural economy, so that those communities in rural Saskatchewan are more viable in the 21st century. It's not about doing evil things; not about this sort of black world that the opposition talks about — that we're just so mean and evil we want to do everything negative to hurt people. Mr. Speaker, I don't know. It really surprises me.

Mr. Speaker, I think that without any further rhetoric or political speech coming from the opposite side, I want to take time to look into this issue in more detail. And at this point, Mr. Speaker, I will move we adjourn debate.

The division bells rang from 4:12 p.m. until 4:22 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 27

Trew	Hagel	Van Mulligen
MacKinnon	Melenchuk	Cline
Atkinson	Goulet	Lautermilch
Thomson	Lorje	Serby
Belanger	Nilson	Crofford
Hillson	Kowalsky	Sonntag
Hamilton	Higgins	Yates
Harper	Axworthy	Junor
Kasperski	Wartman	Addley

Nays — 18

Elhard	Heppner	Julé
Draude	Boyd	Gantefoer
Toth	Peters	Eagles
Bakken	Bjornerud	D'Autremont
Weekes	Brkich	Harpauer
Wakefield	Hart	Allchurch

Debate adjourned.

Motion No. 3 — Economic Diversification

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, as I was saying, Mr. Deputy

Speaker, I am very happy to have the opportunity today to address some very real issues that are happening throughout our province both in urban and in rural Saskatchewan. Some of the many success stories that we have around our province and it gives us an opportunity to talk about some of the issues that real Saskatchewan people and Saskatchewan families are experiencing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan's economy is more diversified today than it has been at any point in its history. It is an economy which is no longer . . .

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

Mr. Boyd: — To introduce a guest, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the member from Albert South for yielding to allow me to introduce a guest.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, seated in your gallery is a gentleman from my constituency. I think he now lives in Medicine Hat but he certainly has farming interests in the Eaton area and Leader area and very instrumental in economic development in that area.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to the Assembly members, Mr. Bill Dearborn, and welcome him here to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

**Motion No. 3 — Economic Diversification
(continued)**

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's always a pleasure to have people join us in the galleries who have an opportunity to witness what we're discussing today.

This debate this afternoon and the resolution I'm sponsoring in the House in fact is very much a sign of the optimism that we feel on this side of the Assembly about the future of our province.

Though the members opposite have droned on now for some hours this afternoon talking about the negative pieces, about how government organizes itself, what we are interested in talking about on this side are the very real situation of how Saskatchewan people are coming together, investing in our province; how our families are growing here, and how we are seeing a better future for young people and for our businesses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this approach is one that works not only in Regina, not only in Saskatoon, in Prince Albert, in North Battleford, it works in every community in our province. And the members opposite will know this because representing some

of those areas, they will know the success stories in those communities.

Things are not a big, dark cloud sitting over rural Saskatchewan today. Rural communities are thriving. There are new businesses; there are new ventures; there's optimism; and there's investment happening.

Certainly there has been some shock to our normal provincial economy with the problems we have in the grains system, some of the problems we have with prices. And certainly that is being felt to a certain extent in rural Saskatchewan. However, there are also a great number of successes.

Take, for example, the situation up in Carrot River. To listen to the member from Carrot River speak, you would think that everything has gone wrong in his riding. You would think that there is nothing good happening in the communities of Hudson Bay that he represents, that nothing good is happening in Porcupine Plain, that nothing good happens in northeast Saskatchewan. Nothing could be further from the truth.

What we're seeing, particularly in this member's area, is we are seeing an expansion of the forestry. We're seeing a lot of new development and new technology being employed to further deal with the forestry issue. We're seeing partnership being built between community businesses, between the provincial government, and with Aboriginal people.

We're seeing that part of the province move forward from the disastrous situation that we had with Simpson Timber in the '50s; to start to revitalize, to regenerate, to move forward in positive economic development. But we don't hear a word from the members opposite about the positive things.

It's as my friend from Saskatoon Sutherland says, the sky is always falling, but only on that side of the Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1630)

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is important that we take a look at these success stories. It's important that we celebrate the successes. Because if we fail to do that, it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom, that the economy will in fact start to suffer the problems that the members opposite seem to allude to.

Business people do not believe in the gloom and doom put forward by the members opposite. They certainly don't believe in it here in Regina. They don't believe it in Saskatoon. They don't believe it in Weyburn. They don't believe it in Melfort. They don't believe it in Swift Current. And you can go to the next level of smaller communities and you can say it's the same there as well. Business people are optimistic.

I was recently in Estevan and had an opportunity to meet with business people from that area, and they were talking about how optimistic they were feeling in terms of what was happening in the oil patch. Obviously Estevan is a community that relies heavily upon oil resources for continued growth.

The one thing that they were saying to me, though, is that we needed to figure out how to get more Saskatchewan people to get these Saskatchewan jobs. As is the nature in much of our industries, we have a problem in our labour force in getting people trained up and being able to take the jobs which are available. We know particularly in areas of heavy industrial welding, we've got shortages.

Our government has laid out a plan over the past several years to work more closely with industry, to work more closely with SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) to make sure Saskatchewan people share in the successes of Saskatchewan businesses.

These are some of the successes that we have that we never hear about from the members opposite. I think it's unfortunate that we do not spend more time celebrating the good news in our communities.

When people talk about Saskatchewan's economy and Saskatchewan's growth and Saskatchewan's benefits, I think that all too often the members opposite would leave the impression that those successes stop at the radius of the Regina city, or in Moose Jaw, or in Saskatoon. Nothing could be further from the truth. Nothing could be further from the truth. Because if we take a look at where the jobs are being created, a large number of the jobs that are being created today, the full-time jobs that are being created, are in fact in rural areas and smaller communities.

Whether that is in the forest sector because in part of the partnership agreements that we are working on, the new forestry strategy, which was very successfully announced this past spring; whether it's because of the expansion of our oil and natural gas sector; whether it's because of the work that is being done by our ministries to make sure business have an easier time dealing with negotiating the red tape that previously was associated with some of the expansion; whether it's in new industries such as information technology; whether it's in new industries like biotechnology; whether it's in the expanding industry that I never thought we'd really see take off in this province, such as film and video — these are areas that Saskatchewan people have new opportunities in.

It used to be that people had to leave Saskatchewan because they didn't fit into the core set of businesses or they wanted to work in other areas. This is no longer the case. Saskatchewan's economy is in fact greatly diversified today.

It's interesting to take a look at the statistics that talk about how the province has grown in terms of its job numbers. Saskatchewan today leads the West in job growth — best in the West. Best in the West. And for the members opposite, and for the members opposite, I would just add this little asterisks to it and say, by the way, Alberta's in the West too.

Because the members opposite always say, oh, but why aren't we more like Alberta. Why would we want to slow things down? We've got more than 3 per cent growth in our jobs — more than 3 per cent. That's better than Alberta. It's better than Manitoba. We are seeing this growth here. Fifteen thousand more people working in this province now than a year ago; 5,700 more young people found work in this province now than

a year ago; 15,000 more full-time jobs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the good news about Saskatchewan. This is good news from Saskatchewan business people, from Saskatchewan workers, from co-operators, from researchers. This is good news from everywhere except the members opposite.

But we're not petty on this side, we're not petty on this side because the good news is in your ridings too, members opposite. The good news is in your communities as well. Business is doing well — steady growth, more jobs, new industries, more success stories.

And what this comes down to is if we can celebrate the work being done by Saskatchewan people, if we can harness that and continue to move it forward, we will see an extension of the largest economic growth record in this province's history.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Sustainable growth, sustained economic growth — that's what this government believes in, this is what we are here to work for, and this is what we're doing.

The members opposite can tie themselves up in knots worrying about how many governments we have. The fact is on this side our eye is on the ball — and that's how many people are working, that's how many businesses are moving forward, that's how we are expanding our industries. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is what we believe in. We're not caught off in navel-gazing and worrying about how the things are organized on paper and flow charts and organization. It's not relevant to us. What we're interested in is how do we build those partnerships to help our province move forward.

Saskatchewan has moved forward in terms of its economic diversification like we have not seen before in this province's history. Now some of the members on the opposition benches — I know, know this — some of them have been very important parts of helping our economy grow. What I don't understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is why those members don't stand up and celebrate those successes as well.

I ask again, is it because it is bad for Saskatchewan or is it because it is bad for the Saskatchewan Party to put out these success stories?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — We know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that what we are seeing from the members opposite is an attempt to paint a picture of gloom and doom, gloom and doom. Well that is not shared by Saskatchewan people.

People in our communities are feeling good. People in our small towns are feeling good. People in my neighbourhood are feeling good. Why? Because there are people that are seeing their businesses expand. Because we're seeing consumer confidence. Because we're seeing young people being able to work in this province. Because we are seeing Saskatchewan has turned the corner.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Eight years ago there were a lot of concerns about what was happening in this province. The government that was previously here, the government of Grant Devine, had talked a great deal about diversification. I think that they said at one point that Saskatchewan was the kind of place where you could mismanage it and still break even. Grant Devine always liked to say, don't say whoa in a mudhole.

The good news is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we don't need to say whoa in the mudhole, because we're not in that mudhole any more. We have gotten ourselves out, and Saskatchewan people are seeing the benefits today of fiscal responsibility, of an economic development plan that started with the *Partnership for Renewal*, has moved onto the *Partnership for Growth*, and is now in a Partnership for Prosperity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a partnership started not by this necessarily . . . not by this government but by the people who have come to us to ask us to build that coalition. That is what we have seen and that is the legacy of this government. People are better off today than they have been. Our province is in better shape. Young people have a better chance of finding a job.

When I graduated from university some years ago, everyone felt that they needed to leave. In 1989 and 1990 there was very little hope in this province. There was a time when people didn't understand what was going to happen; they understand that the debts were not sustainable; they knew that the taxes were going to be a problem. Because as Grant Devine used to say, taxes are nothing . . . deficits are nothing but deferred taxes.

When we came to office, when this government came to office in 1991, it had to deal with those issues. It set forward a plan which we have followed, not slavishly, but we have followed and amended and allowed to grow in a way that today we are in the midst — I don't say we are at the end — we are in the midst of the longest sustained period of growth in our economy's history.

And that is something we should all be very proud of, and it's a caution that I would say to members, it's something we need to be very mindful of. Because if we take on that attitude of gloom and that attitude of doom that the members opposite would do, what we will see is we will see the inevitable come to be. We will start to see consumer confidence slip. We will start to see people hold back in their expenditures. We will start to see jobs evaporate. That is not good for Saskatchewan people. But I bet you the members opposite think that's good for the Saskatchewan Party. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is what we are here to make sure does not happen today, does not happen next year, does not happen next term.

This province is in a period of sustained economic development, sustained economic growth that all Saskatchewan people are sharing in. People in the cities, people in the towns, people in the country, all Saskatchewan people — young people, old people, working people — have the opportunity to participate in, and they know that this is true.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — A point of personal privilege, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — State your point of personal privilege.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, it has just come to my attention that in a press report in *The Leader-Post* of today, it was reported that I moved an amendment to the motion of twinning, insisting that the Yellowhead be included in any twinning plans as well as the Trans-Canada. That was correct.

However, I am described in the page of *The Leader-Post* as North Battleford NDP MLA Jack Hillson. I trust you understand the humiliation and embarrassment that such an error can cause. And I would ask that the House take steps to make sure that such errors do not recur.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. I thank the hon. member for North Battleford for stating his point of personal privilege. However, there was nothing that this Legislative Assembly did to cause *The Leader-Post* error. As such, I have to rule that in fact you had no point of personal privilege.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I of course would, if it had been true, welcome the member for North Battleford into the NDP caucus with open arms.

But nevertheless, we still have room for the Liberals on this side. And I would note that Liberals are enjoying the economic successes as much as the rest of us, and that certainly the good people in North Battleford are as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am mindful that other members will want to extol the virtues of our Saskatchewan growth, and I do not want to take too much more time today.

As such, I will move, seconded by the member for Regina Sherwood:

That this Assembly congratulate Saskatchewan business people, workers, co-operatives, and researchers for working with the government to diversify the economy which has since 1991 led to steady growth and a record number of people working.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak on behalf of the motion moved by my colleague from Regina South dealing with our economy of the 1990s.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to take a few minutes and go over for the benefit of members of the House and for the people of Saskatchewan, the highlights of our economic performance during the 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's economy posted the second-highest economic growth during the 1990s in the country. Our real economic growth averaged 3.7 per cent from 1993 to 1998, compared to an average growth in Canada of 3.1 per cent during the same time period.

I'd like to point out as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Alberta posted the highest growth at 4.8 per cent; BC (British Columbia) by 2.3 per cent; Manitoba by 2.3 per cent; and Ontario by 3.5. Not very bad company, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan had the highest real growth in real GDP (gross domestic product) during the 1990s. Highest in the country. Saskatchewan's real GDP per person grew by 3.3 per cent on average. In Canada, the growth was 2 per cent. We're 1.3 per cent above the Canadian average.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan outperformed the national average in almost all other economic indicators during the 1990s. These economic indicators included personal income growth which averaged 3.5 per cent for the time period 1993 to 1998, compared to a growth in personal income of 3 per cent in the rest of Canada. Personal disposable income grew by 3.2 per cent compared to national Canadian growth of 2.5 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

(1645)

Saskatchewan's manufacturing shipments increased by 3.5 per cent, compared to a national . . . sorry, 9.5 per cent compared to the national average of 7.9 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, housing starts in our province grew by 9.5 per cent during the 1990s. Whereas housing starts across the rest of the country declined, in effect, by 2.1 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, retail trade grew by 6 per cent in this same time period compared to a Canadian growth rate of 4.9 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm sure I need not go on much further to point out that during the 1990s, Saskatchewan . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . no, Saskatchewan's economy experienced real, sustained, and although not spectacular, definitely moderate growth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the employment level in our province reached 480,100 in 1999 — the highest ever in the history of our province based on the Labour Force Survey — Canadian Labour Force Survey.

In the same time period, full-time employment in our province increased by 39,000 — that's 39,000 jobs during the 1990s. In this figure, as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to point out to members that youth employment during this area, during the same time period, increased by 7,300.

With the exception of employment in the health care sector, which has been unchanged, Mr. Speaker, and public administration, where jobs in effect did decline — all other sectors of the economy including construction, manufacturing, and mining experienced growth in employment during the 1990s.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I might like to take a couple of minutes and also highlight some of the comparisons of our budget and fiscal situation with other provinces in the country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, eight of Canada's 11 senior governments are currently forecasting balanced or surplus budgets in the current fiscal year. Sorry, and I'd also like to say that the only ones that aren't are Nova Scotia . . . it looks like BC, unfortunately BC . . . and Ontario. So it's again, our province is in very, very good company when it comes to fiscal management.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some other areas that I'd like to point out in terms of our economic performance during the 1990s include the fact that we have diversified our economy quite considerably with, certainly in agriculture, and as I pointed out to my colleague from Regina South, other elements of our economy have been diversified quite considerably during the 1990s.

Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to also take a couple of minutes to point out some of the financial accomplishments that have been experienced here in the last year. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as was pointed out by the Minister of Finance during our budget, we achieved in this province our sixth consecutive balanced budget here in the past year.

An Hon. Member: — Seventh.

Mr. Kasperski: — Seventh, that's right. Sorry. You're right. That's right.

Anyway, I'd like to maybe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, turn to some . . . a recent labour force development report that just came out in March of this year. And this is very good news for us here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our labour market continues to be strong with employment increasing in March by 15,000 from March 1999 to March of 2000 — 15,000.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, in March 2000 it represented the third consecutive month that Saskatchewan led Western provinces in job growth with the 3.2 per cent increase in employment compared to 3.1 in Alberta, 1.9 in Manitoba, and 2.3 in British Columbia.

In March 2000, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan maintained the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada at 5.2 per cent, which was down from 7.3 per cent in March of 1999. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the number of unemployed, the number of unemployed in Saskatchewan dropped by 10,200 or 28 per cent between March of last year and March of this year. This was the largest percentage decrease of all provinces in Canada.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for those aged 25 and over, the unemployment rate in March, 2000 was 4.0 per cent, down from 5.7 in March of 1999, while the unemployment rate for the province's youth — that is the age group 15 to 24 — dropped from 14.7 per cent in March, 1999 to 11 per cent in March of 2000. Mr. Deputy Speaker, nationally the youth unemployment

rate is 13.5 per cent, which is two and a half per cent above our youth unemployment rate.

More locally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, here in Regina, we're at . . . the city of Regina was tied for the lowest unemployment rate among major Canadian cities which in March, 2000 was at 4.3 per cent, down from 5.8 per cent the year before. The unemployment rate in Saskatoon was at 5.9 per cent, down from 7.5 per cent the year before.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan enjoyed the lowest unemployment rate in Canada for the second month in a row at 4.6 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, the level of employment in March, 2000 stood at four thousand . . . as I indicated earlier, 478,100, up from 463,000 in March of 1999.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Full-time employment in the province increased by 17,100 during the same time period. Employment increased in every major sector, Mr. Speaker, except public administration compared to March of the year before.

Employment in agriculture was up 400; in manufacturing up 1,200; in construction up 1,500; transportation, 5,200; retail and wholesale trade up 200; finance, insurance and real estate up 1,200; and the service sector was up 5,700 jobs.

Mr. Speaker, these are good news statistics which back up the optimistic remarks of my colleague from Regina South in the resolution that he has moved that during the 1990s we here in Saskatchewan have experienced slow, steady, but most importantly, sustained growth which is good news for all of us here.

I think that it's . . . Mr. Speaker, on that note, I think I might note it's approaching 5 o'clock here and I might at this time move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:54 p.m.