

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand today on behalf of citizens throughout Saskatchewan who are opposed to forced amalgamation in municipalities. The prayer on this petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the community of Wadena.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I too rise today with a petition that is opposed to forced amalgamation of municipalities.

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.

The people that have signed this petition are from Wadena and Watson.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present petitions and this one has to do with the gas tax. And the prayer reads:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Fleming and Moosomin.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise on the price of gas, not on amalgamation. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

I so present. And they're from Swift Current.

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

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

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

And this is signed from folks at Macoun and Estevan.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today on behalf of people in Swift Current concerned with the Swift Current Regional Hospital, Mr. Speaker. And the prayer can be summarized as follows:

That the provincial government assist in the regeneration plan for the Swift Current Regional Hospital in the provincial budget by providing approximately 7.54 million, thereby allowing the Swift Current District Health Board the opportunity to provide improved health care services.

And this petition is signed by residents of the city of Swift Current.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am also presenting petitions on behalf of citizens of this province regarding the fuel tax. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that the 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 as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition is signed by citizens from the Cabri, Waldeck, and Swift Current areas, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition to reduce fuel tax:

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

Signed by the people from Swift Current. Thank you.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition in regards to the fuel tax.

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

This petition is signed by the good citizens of Swift Current and Foam Lake.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present upon behalf of Saskatchewan citizens concerned about the high tax on fuel. 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's signed by citizens of Saskatoon and Melfort.

I do so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in this Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding 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 petitioners are from Bateman and Swift Current.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition regarding forced municipal amalgamation, and the prayer reads as follows:

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

And the petition is signed by individuals from Chaplin and Morse community.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

To halt plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

To cause the government to provide funding for the Swift Current hospital;

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

To abandon plans to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

And in addition, the following petitions for private Bills have been reviewed and are hereby read and received:

Of the Regina Golf Club in the province of Saskatchewan, praying for an Act to rename the Regina Golf Club;

Of the Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan Inc. in the province of Saskatchewan, praying for an Act to provide for the continuance of the Mennonite Central Committee;

Of the Archbishopial Corporation of Regina and the Episcopal Corporation of Saskatoon in the province, praying for an Act to provide for the reorganization of the Saskatchewan Roman Catholic dioceses.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all the members of the House, I'd like to introduce a grade 12 basic adult education class from SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology). They are the Social Studies 30 class and they're seated in your west gallery, Mr. Speaker.

They're accompanied here by their instructor, Warren Gervais, and I understand that they have toured the legislature and they are here to take in part of the proceedings. I hope they enjoy the visit here.

I ask all the members to offer them a very warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you some guests we have with us today who are actually actively involved with working on behalf of the people in Saskatchewan who suffer from Alzheimer's.

D.J. Rodie is a student at Campbell Collegiate in Regina. He assists his family in their home to provide care for his grandmother who suffers from Alzheimer's disease. We also have Bob and Edie Laidlaw who are members of the Alzheimer's society — and Bob himself suffers from the Alzheimer's disease — and Donnalyne Mackie, who is the fund development and media coordinator at the Alzheimer's society of Saskatchewan.

They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I'd like all members to help me welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour today to introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the

Assembly, a group of 12 people from Swift Current — I should say 11 from Swift Current, I think one from Herbert — with the McKerracher Support Services in Swift Current. And they are here today with Bill Colquhoun who is a coordinator of that particular initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you I had an opportunity to meet with the group prior to the proceedings today, and they had many good questions and we enjoyed our visit. I would just ask all members to join with me in welcoming them here to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly, a delegation from Albania seated in your gallery. The personal property registry of the Department of Justice invited a delegation from Albania to come to Saskatchewan to attend a training program on April 17 and 18.

As you know, the purpose of the registry is to provide notice of third party interests in personal property and protection of those interests by providing a means of determining priority between competing claimants. I'm sure you knew that, Mr. Speaker. The participants were hired under a foreign aid project administered by World Learning Inc. of Washington, DC (District of Columbia) and USAid.

Deanna Koskie is also here. She's the former director of the Saskatchewan personal property registry and she was hired to facilitate the training tour of two North American registries, in Texas and here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Professor Ron Cuming of the University of Saskatchewan worked with Albania to develop the personal property security legislation based on our own legislation, Mr. Speaker, which he drafted.

The focus of the training is on the design and operation of a modern registry for secured transactions; and ideas and concepts that come from this tour will be utilized to finalize the moveable property securing charge regulations of Albania and to develop a technical solution for the national state system for the registry of security charges in Albania.

Upon their return, Mr. Speaker, to Albania the delegates will operate a new registry patterned in large part after Canadian systems and functions under a law drafted principally, as I say, by Canadian experts.

Mr. Speaker, we in Saskatchewan are proud and have a right to be proud to have the reputation as being leaders in the world market in this area. We welcome the opportunity to share our systems and expertise.

And I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to welcome Yair Baranes, director of the program, Aida Hasanpapaj, Rezarta Vukatana, Majlinda Sulstarova, Sheptim Spahija, and Deanna and Morley Kuski. Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Legislative Assembly to welcome them to Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all colleagues in the Assembly a group of students seated in your gallery. They are a part of the Aboriginal student mentoring program.

And we have with us today, co-ordinator of the program Dave Abbey, who works with Highways and Transportation; from the Public Service Commission, an employment equity co-ordinator, Lily Tingley; from Saskatchewan Justice, Lynda Bankley. And they have with them students who are part of the mentoring program.

There's Nadine Carter, from Saskatchewan Property Management, and her mentoring student, Pat Watson is in the gallery . . . Pam Watson. And then there's Charity Lerat from Robert Usher Collegiate, and Scott Sangwais from Robert Usher Collegiate, as well.

I'm hoping, Mr. Speaker, I have a number of notes here about the program and the students involved. It's an excellent time for them to see the activities of the government departments and their workplaces, but also to be here to see the proceedings today.

And I ask all members to welcome them here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a constituent in the west gallery.

Because he's very modest about his background, people wouldn't know this. But having had experiences in his lifetime with areas of the world where war was the norm, this man is probably more committed to democracy than many people that you will find. But probably for the same reasons that people who have had experience in war areas.

So I congratulate Paul Meid for his long-time commitment to democracy, and I'm glad that he's one of my constituents. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

North Battleford North Stars Win Championship

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — It is with some hesitation that I rise today, Mr. Speaker. As you know, it is not in my character to gloat.

Last night before a capacity crowd of 2,700 people in North Battleford, some hanging from the rafters, North Battleford won the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League championship.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Last week it was looking pretty bleak. North Battleford was down three to nothing, and down two goals in the fourth game. The Weyburn-Big Muddy MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) said I'd lost hold of my

good sense by betting on the North Stars. But I hung in there — and so did they.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — After offering up the historic Weyburn court house, we finally agreed that if North Battleford won, she would wear a North Stars' jersey in the House. And if Weyburn won, I would wear a torn-off cover of the Weyburn phone book. I know our viewers will be relieved that North Battleford won.

Mr. Speaker, a little known fact is that Weyburn has never won an SJHL (Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League) championship while represented by a Saskatchewan Party MLA.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, we're all winners today. The member for Weyburn-Big Muddy has a really classy new jersey, the North Stars have again proven that Battlefords is the home of the winners and I live in a great community, and all the best to the North Stars and the Anavet Cup.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I knew I was in trouble last week when the Red Wings were up three to nothing and I heard CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) reporting that they had pretty much locked up the series. We all know CBC's record of declaring winners just a little too early. And I've lost track of how many times, how many times Weyburn Red Wings have actually won, but it has been many, many times they've won . . . (inaudible) . . . winter.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the players and coaches of the Weyburn Red Wings on an excellent season and I'd also like to congratulate the SJHL champion, North Battleford North Stars. I'd like to congratulate their players, their coaches, and their fans, and their MLA.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Council for International Co-operation Presentation

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, Canada enjoys a solid reputation as a world leader in the area of global justice and development. This reputation is not only by accident. We have some of the most compassionate and humane people living in Canada and indeed, right here in Saskatchewan.

Today in the legislature, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Council for International Co-operation is presenting *Linking Saskatchewan With the World*. It is an opportunity for us to learn about Saskatchewan's own contributions to international development.

Both the government and the people of Saskatchewan have shown that they have strongly supported international development. Through the matching grants program, the matching grants-in-aid program, the Government of Saskatchewan supports development projects. And the people of Saskatchewan have also shown their commitment to global

development by donating almost \$8 million annually to international development organizations.

I urge all members and their staffs to attend this event. It begins at 4 o'clock this afternoon in room 218. There will be three presentations given by international development program participants from Saskatchewan.

All of us should take the opportunity to learn more about what the people of our province are doing to make the world a better place to live in. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Non-Language

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign the Liberal platform called for measures which would provide education property tax relief to taxpayers. Then last week the Liberal Education minister was telling school boards as they felt the need for more funding, they should just raise the mill rate. He followed that up yesterday, Mr. Speaker, by bragging about the fact that mill rates are in fact going up.

But, Mr. Speaker, as a former teacher, I noticed something even more disturbing in the minister's comments. The use of a word that doesn't even exist — the word unzero. Mr. Speaker, you have expressed concern over unparliamentary language in the House, but I want to express my concern about the use of this non-language, this so-called un-English in the House, particularly in the presence of an impressionable un-old and un-adult students sitting in the visitor's gallery.

Mr. Speaker, there are few enough positive role models in our world today from our province's Education minister to think that he can lapse into un-language without un-positively affecting our children's attitude to education.

I can already hear the conversation between children and their parents taking place around the province. "But Mom, he didn't have to know how to speak properly to become the Minister of Education." "While that may be true, little Johnny, but he did have to sell his soul to the devil."

Fortunately there is a word in the English language which describes what will happen to our Liberal Education minister. It's the word unelected.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Aboriginal Student Mentoring Program

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm proud to recognize and speak about the Aboriginal student mentoring program sponsored by the Public Service Commission. This program's main objective is to bridge the gap between Aboriginal students and the workplace.

As many of us know, Aboriginals are underrepresented in Saskatchewan's labour force. This program goes a long way to addressing this problem. It builds valuable skills that will increase hiring opportunities for Aboriginal people. Students

from Balfour, Martin, Thom, and Usher Collegiate from Regina in grades 9 through 12 will work with mentors in executive government every Wednesday afternoon.

This interaction will bring positive experiences and exposure to both government employees and Aboriginal people. It will also help the students develop effective strategies for career opportunities and assist in helping the students to develop a network system in the labour market.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that we have some of the students from the mentoring program here with us today; and I want to welcome you to the legislature and wish you well in your participation in the program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

1999 Tourism Ambassador Award Winner

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand to recognize a great ambassador for Humboldt and winner of the 1999 Tourism Ambassador Award, Ruth Wilson.

The Tourism Ambassador Award is presented to an individual who makes a major contribution to the promotion of Saskatchewan as a tourism destination and who has a significant impact on increased visitation to the province in 1999, and Ruth Wilson of Humboldt is that person. Wherever she goes, whether it is at a tourism banquet or visiting her family in Germany, Ms. Wilson promotes Humboldt and Saskatchewan.

Ruth's involvement with Humboldt tourism began in 1990 when she was hired as a special events festival co-ordinator to promote a German theme and develop a weekend event called Summerfest. Later she took on the job of tourism and special events director and represented Humboldt at consumer shows in North Dakota, Alberta, and Manitoba.

Ms. Wilson worked at bringing bus tours into Humboldt; she converted the old CIBC (Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce) bank building into the Willkommen Centre, a German museum.

Due to Ruth's efforts, many visitors from Germany, United States, Europe, England, Japan, and other countries have come to visit Humboldt. Officially retired, Ruth still works as Humboldt's German theme ambassador and is employed by the town in the summer. She is also involved with several other committees that promote Humboldt, like the mural committee and the water tower committee.

Ruth's energy is endless and she is to be highly commended for her excellent work. Congratulations, Ruth Wilson.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Wild Rice Industry

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More good news. There is a lot going on in the North these days, and that bodes well for the economy. And this is a gradual development

of Saskatchewan's lake-grown wild rice industry is certainly a prime example.

The 14th annual Saskatchewan wild rice conference being held today in La Ronge. Two industry awards will be presented by the Saskatchewan Wild Rice Council for outstanding contribution to the development of this industry. The team of Dennis and June Christianson of Denare Beach and Kaz Parada of La Ronge are this year's recipients.

About 260 growers are involved in producing wild rice in Saskatchewan. In the past year, the processed value of the crop was estimated to be at \$6.75 million. Much of that money, Mr. Speaker, stayed in the region to create spinoff jobs and economic activity.

In addition, marketing efforts have been increased and considerable quantities of Saskatchewan wild rice are now sold outside traditional North American markets. One very important aspect of the wild rice business that fits in extremely well with this government's overall strategy to promote value-added production.

These Saskatchewan-owned companies are well integrated and include the facets of production, processing, and marketing. Another key aspect to the wild rice business is the strong involvement of the Aboriginal community in all phases of that process, Mr. Speaker.

We believe that Saskatchewan will continue to be the leading producer of lake wild rice and that product . . .

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Elementary School Announced for Melfort

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure to be in attendance at a very happy announcement in my community of Melfort this morning. And, without incriminating myself, I hurried back to Regina in order to share the good news.

Mr. Speaker, this morning the Minister of Education was in Melfort to announce the building and the approval of a new elementary school in our community. It is very much appreciated. The application for this school has been on the table for a good number of years.

And it really is a tribute to boards past and present for their perseverance in bringing and explaining this project to the Department of Education. I have to also say it's a tribute to the Department of Education who have evaluated the project appropriately. And it was a pleasure to welcome the minister to Melfort this morning where he made the announcement that that school was approved.

And so, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of everyone in Melfort and our constituency, thank you to the department, thank you to the school board and officials, and thank you to the minister for a good news announcement this morning.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Municipal Amalgamation

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Minister, the verdict is in. SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) is saying no to the NDP's (New Democratic Party) plan of forced amalgamation. SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) is saying no to the NDP's plan of forced municipal amalgamation. And the vast majority of Saskatchewan people, over 80 per cent, are saying no to the NDP's plan for forced municipal amalgamation.

Mr. Minister, will you do that? Will you, without wavering, without changing your story, will you today agree to remove the NDP threat of forced amalgamation from any discussions with municipalities?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want to answer the question on behalf of the government to say as I did yesterday to the legislature, I am meeting later today, some time after question period — I think it's in mid-afternoon — with the president of SARM and the president of SUMA, with respective officials, in order to get from them their first-hand report of the outcome of their deliberations on Monday and Tuesday. We have not yet received that. There have been press reports.

We believe that that is important and I look forward to receiving their reports and having an open dialogue with the Minister of Municipal Affairs being present as well.

And I simply would say that I hope that where we end up at some point or other is *The StarPhoenix* opinion editorial of today which says, quote:

Premier Roy Romanow is correct in calling for a roundtable discussion among representatives of Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association and Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities and the government (on this issue).

And that is our approach.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the Premier read the entire article which called for no forced amalgamation.

Mr. Speaker, we should look at the government's record in regard to dealing with municipal government, and I'm glad the Premier's here and answering on behalf of his government.

Mr. Premier, the only contribution that the NDP has made to municipal restructuring is to build barriers, not break them down. First you blame the municipalities for not considering

amalgamation on a voluntary basis, but then you turn around and refuse to amend the municipal legislation so that voluntary amalgamation can take place.

On one hand you say you favour voluntary amalgamation and then you go in and pose an artificial and totally unnecessary May 15 deadline for municipalities to come up with an amalgamation plan or you will then force them to amalgamate.

Mr. Premier, will you finally agree to take some constructive action? Will you remove your unnecessary May 15 deadline for municipal amalgamation and will you agree to amend municipal legislation to remove barriers to voluntary . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, there's absolutely nothing new in this question today. It was asked yesterday and asked previously.

I said yesterday, and I'll repeat again to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, the position of the government is — and I've indicated this to Mr. Harrison and to Mr. Badham — that in any project there should be timetables and timelines and goals to be strived for, but that the date of May 15 is not written in stone. I said that and I think all the participants will confirm that to be the case.

I want to remind the Leader of the Opposition before I take my seat, that way back in 1996 an MOU (memorandum of understanding) was signed involving SUMA and SARM, which MOU set out a detailed work plan and set out a date of December 1, 1996 as a deadline. Signed by Mr. Harrison and signed by Mr. Westby, presidents at that time.

So the precedent has been established and I think it's a laudable one in that regard. We're open on the May 15 situation. We want to go back to the table. And may I add, not only that, but the newspaper editorialists in this regard also share the same objective.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I wish when the Premier quoted articles from the newspaper, he would quote them in context and tell the people of Saskatchewan the whole story.

I happen to have that editorial and it says:

The provincial government must make it absolutely clear that the future of rural Saskatchewan will be decided by the people who live there.

He forgot to quote that part of the editorial. Instead, Mr. Speaker, he brings an artificial deadline of May 15 which now he says he's open to, but will not reject outright.

Mr. Speaker, another question to the Premier. Municipalities are not buying your plan of forced amalgamation because they haven't seen any evidence that massive amalgamation will

really benefit local taxpayers. The NDP has no evidence that amalgamation will save money or improve services. There's no evidence. You haven't shown them.

SUMA has proposed that the government co-operate in voluntary pilot projects . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. I would ask the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to go directly to his question please.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question to the Premier is: will you agree to work with municipalities on a voluntary basis to implement pilot projects to evaluate the potential benefits of municipal restructuring? Will you follow SUMA's advice?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I think it's patently clear to the members of the House, to the journalists, to anybody interested in this debate, what we've been saying right from day one. We want a voluntary, consensual agreement. The editorialists are saying the same thing. That is a position that I have set out in writing to both the president of SARM and SUMA.

And while we're at the question of being faithful in the quotations of editorials, I note that the Leader of the Opposition failed to put this sentence in that same editorial:

There is no urban conspiracy to destroy rural Saskatchewan, and politicians who play the card are being more than disingenuous, they are being destructive.

You're playing the card and you're being destructive.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I'll tell the Premier who's destructive. The people who are destructive are the people who will not go to the meetings; the people who will not be consistent in their message, who one day say forced amalgamation and the other day retract, and then come back to forced amalgamation.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party is proposing a five-point plan to end the deadlock over this forced amalgamation issue.

Number one, remove the unnecessary May 15 deadline that you imposed. Number two, remove the threat of forced amalgamation from discussions with municipalities. Number three, work with Saskatchewan cities to expand their legislative authority — you could do that. Number four, amend municipal Acts to remove legislative barriers to voluntary amalgamation. And number five, work with municipalities on voluntary pilot projects to assess the potential benefits of amalgamation.

My question to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. This proposal is a positive first step in fixing the mess that your government has made. Will you support the Saskatchewan Party's five-point plan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the question is will the government support the Saskatchewan Party's five — what he forgot to mention — very old five-point plan.

Ever since 1996, since 1996 there are exactly . . . more than five points. There are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 points involving all of the issues that the member talked about, the memorandum . . . It's a MOU; the MOU of 1996. The one that you referred to in question period yesterday. It's the MOU that was signed in 1996 by the then minister, and by SARM and the SUMA presidents.

And this person gets up and he says would I support the Saskatchewan Party plan. We signed it over four years ago.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Treatment for Alzheimer's

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

We have guests with us today, Mr. Speaker, who have first . . . who know first-hand how devastating Alzheimer's disease is to a family. But they also know hope, given to them in the form of Aricept, the only drug approved in Canada to treat Alzheimer's.

Bob and Edie Laidlaw have experienced the positive effects of Aricept. In November, Bob was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and has been taking Aricept since Christmas Day. Since he has been taking the drug, his performance on the mental abilities examination improved by six points. His family and friends have noticed dramatic improvement in Bob's day-to-day participation and enjoyment of life.

Madam Minister, we know the formulary committee is considering Aricept for coverage under the provincial drug plan. When do you expect to make an announcement on this issue?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I also welcome the guests from the Alzheimer society and their supporters today.

Saskatchewan health officials met with the Alzheimer society on March 16 and outlined the process, the studies, and the research projects that led to their decision and their review of the drug.

We asked the Alzheimer society to bring forward any new information they had that would contribute to the decision-making process of the drug committees. They have brought some — the society has brought some new information forward — and the drug committee is reviewing that. And we do expect an answer very shortly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, there's a young man in the gallery today named D.J. Rodie, a high school student in Regina. D.J. helps care for his grandmother who suffers from

Alzheimer's. She has been able to remain in her home because she has been taking Aricept for two and a half years.

At a hundred and fifty dollars per month, this drug has cost her \$4,800, but she has been able to remain in her home. If she were to have been placed in long-term care for that time, it would have cost the health care system approximately \$25,000.

Madam Minister, it is very important for Alzheimer's patients to have as much quality of life as possible. Are you encouraging the formulary committee to look at all aspects of improving this drug including the potential cost saving to the health care system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have two drug review committees in the province that do exactly that. They review all the information, the research, the clinical studies. They base their evaluation on those clinical reviews and they give their best advice to us to make the decision on whether we cover the drug or not. We are now waiting for that advice.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, Aricept is approved under the provincial drug programs in Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta. The company which makes the drug also has a trial prescription program for a two-year period. In this program, if a patient does not show improvement after 12 weeks on Aricept, the patient comes off of the program and it costs the government nothing. The company covers the whole cost. The company which makes the drug formally presented this program to you in May of 1999 and have not yet received a response.

Madam Minister, why have you not responded to the presentation and will you now consider entering into this trial prescription program?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said the drug review committees that we have in place to look at all the evidence that is available on the drugs that come to us is now looking at Aricept with the new information that was presented, and we are waiting their recommendation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, right now Aricept is the only drug on the market for Alzheimer sufferers. It is their only chance for hope, their only chance of prolonging a quality of life and holding back the symptoms of this disease. Sadly it is not a cure, but it does serve to keep Alzheimer's victims at home longer.

The cost of Aricept is prohibitive for many patients and their families and yet for those people who are benefiting from its use it is a lifeline. Covering it under the provincial drug plan would cause far less than providing long-term care for Alzheimer's sufferers. You have a plan from the drug company that subsidizes its cost and only keeps patients on it if they

show improvement.

Madam Minister, will you commit today to giving Alzheimer's patients some relief and enter into the Aricept trial prescription program?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a process in place in Health that allows two drug committees to review all the drugs that are referred by Health Canada. We rely on their information. They have the expertise to tell us the benefits of the drug. We don't ask them to look at hope, we ask them to look at clinical research studies to give us their best advice — the scientific advice on the benefit of the drug to society as a whole.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Weyerhaeuser Self-generation Project

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Mr. Premier, once again your colleagues appear to be confused. They've given a number of different answers about the city of Prince Albert's plan to slap a \$1.8 million tax on Weyerhaeuser.

First, the Minister of Energy and Mines refuses to even answer the question; then the Minister of Municipal Government says there are no plans to introduce legislation. Then he goes outside the House and says yes, the government is considering legislation. Then the member from P.A. (Prince Albert) Carlton phones the *Prince Albert Daily Herald* newspaper and says there is no plan to introduce legislation.

So we've heard three different answers. We hadn't even asked the Minister of Education yet.

Mr. Premier, is your government considering legislation to allow the Prince Albert city council to slap this unfair tax on Weyerhaeuser?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that unusual to the performance of some of the other members on his side of the House, I want to say this.

The member opposite from Saskatchewan Rivers could have come to me and could have said, I hear something happening in Saskatchewan today, unlike what happened to the member from Swift Current. Unlike what happened to the member from Swift Current, unlike what happened to the member from Kelvington. Both of those two members who had an individual issue in their own community came to me and said, can we resolve some of these issues. And the . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs to answer the question please.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The member from Swift Current did that. He called me to the back of the bar, we had a discussion about what was happening in Swift Current. And the member from Kelvington came up to my office and we talked about an issue

in her community.

But not the member from Saskatchewan Rivers. The member from Saskatchewan Rivers wants to play politics with an issue that's important to the community and to the business world. And I say to the member opposite, shame on you. Why didn't you come to my office and have that discussion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will keep asking the question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs because he's the only one who's going to get up.

Mr. Minister, you have stated that we are playing politics over here. How can we be playing politics? The letter that came to this government on your side came from the mayor of Prince Albert. He's the one playing politics with your side of the government. He is not playing politics with this side.

He is requesting that you stand up and say you're going to support his private members' Bill that he's trying to get someone over there to sponsor.

Mr. Minister, are you willing to penalize Weyerhaeuser for generating its own power and reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday I said in this Assembly, and I said to the media yesterday that when a piece of information . . . and yesterday I did finally receive the letter from the city of Prince Albert. And the letter that came to me, Mr. Speaker, addresses the kind of issue that the member from Saskatchewan Rivers asked.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, now, that this is what I've done. When we're asked to examine legislation in the province we look at three different issues. We look at whether or not change in legislation provides good public policy, whether or not it has an impact on community or industry.

And now I've had a chance to take a look at the legislation or that request on the bylaw, Mr. Speaker, and I say to the member opposite and to the people from Prince Albert, that I'm not going to be amending the legislation, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to be amending the legislation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Implications of Workers' Compensation One-time Payment

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour. Mr. Speaker, last year the provincial government and your department did the right thing. You authorized the Workers' Compensation Board to make a one-time payment to the widows whose benefits had been terminated during remarriage prior to 1985.

These women received a one-time payment of \$80,000 from the WCB (Workers' Compensation Board), which was to be tax-free. But now to the dismay of the widows over age 65,

Revenue Canada is asking for repayment of their old age pension benefits for the last year.

Madam Minister, were you or your department aware that Revenue Canada would expect this repayment at the time you settled with the widows last year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were very pleased to be able to provide the settlement we did last year. And as we said last year, the \$80,000 lump sum payment was and continues to be tax-free.

What the member is talking about is how income affects pension entitlement. And Revenue Canada has, as part of their rules, from all kinds of compensation and benefit programs — not just this one — that this is the rule that it's included as income for the purposes of calculation.

That being said . . . That being said, we certainly sympathize with the circumstance here. And I've asked the WCB to meet with the appropriate federal officials to see whether there might be some mechanism — including income averaging or something — that would enable them to not have to declare this income all in one year. And we're working with them to resolve that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, the women who are facing this tax grab from the Revenue Canada are pensioners. Coming up with the money to pay back one year's worth of pension benefits will not only be difficult, it is fundamentally unfair.

They say at no time did you or your department or the WCB indicate the federal government may request any portion of this payment or that their old age pension be compromised.

Madam Minister, have you contacted Revenue Canada? And what steps are you taking to rectify the situation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we've contacted . . . begun the contacts with appropriate federal officials. We've also contacted the federal . . . some of the federal MPs (Member of Parliament) for this area to assist in this. And certainly the opposition could be very helpful if they would also contact federal representatives in this matter.

But I do ask them to appreciate that these are federal rules, not provincial rules, and certainly we'll do everything we can to assist in resolving this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Long-term Care Fees

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, I have a letter from a senior in Saskatoon who has

lived in Saskatchewan for over 80 years. He talks about how his contributions have helped build this province, how he has paid his own way through the Depression to obtain a degree of agriculture in the U of S. (University of Saskatchewan). He says he and his wife have paid provincial taxes for 70 years and he thought they had a plan for retirement. That was until the government changed the rules.

Mr. Speaker, this man's wife is now in a long-term care home and he has been told the monthly rate will be going up by \$500. He also maintains his own home, is struggling with property and school tax increases, utility rate increases, and medical costs.

To the Minister of Health, how can you justify increasing the burden on our senior citizens by increasing the fees for long-term care?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Long-term care in this province is a service that gives people room and board, medical care, personal care. It's a service that many people need at near the . . . in the end of their lives, or near the end of their lives when they need extra service. That service has been provided in this province for many years, subsidized by this government considerably.

Now we're looking at raising the maximum rate of long-term care fees that haven't been raised for several years. This will affect 20 per cent of the 9,000 long-term care residents in the province. Eighty per cent of the residents in long-term care will not see an increase.

The districts are working together with people to help them adjust to this and determine what, if any, effect it will have on people. And that will take effect October 1 of this year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This sounds like something from two-tier Harvey.

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote more from this letter: "The government is trying to justify these increases, but is it at an expense of human misery."

He says the government is hurting a group that, because of their age, are not able to fight back. He says this NDP government is turning the golden years into devastating years. Mr. Speaker, the impact of this NDP budget on senior citizens in this province is devastating.

This man, and many other seniors, have worked hard; planned for their retirement; and now are facing day-to-day worries of how they will get by.

How will they care for their spouses in long-term care? How will they pay for their own care if it is needed? They are uncertain if they are able to pay for their monthly bills.

Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Finance: what hope can you offer senior citizens on fixed incomes struggling to cope with

expensive NDP taxation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The long-term care fee increases . . . There's 9,000 long-term care residents in this province; 80 per cent of them will not see any change in their long-term care fee.

An Hon. Member: — Eighty per cent?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Eighty per cent. But of the 20 per cent that it will affect, they will see an increase from a dollar to four hundred and about sixty-seven dollars. This is no change — there'll be no change in how it's determined. There'll still be no property taken into account or capital investments; just the interest on their investments.

But interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, our maximum is still way below many of the provinces in this country. Ontario, a Tory province, 1,827 is their maximum; Prince Edward Island, a Tory province, \$3,257; Newfoundland, \$2,837; Nova Scotia, 4,481; New Brunswick, four thousand . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker: — Yesterday, April 18, the Opposition House Leader raised a point of order concerning a document quoted by the Premier during question period on Monday, April 17, 2000. The member alleged that the Premier misquoted the document and misrepresented its origin. Having reviewed the record and the commentary of parliamentary authorities with respect to rules governing the citation of documents, I am prepared to rule on this matter.

In debate or in posing or responding to questions, members are at liberty to interpret facts as they see fit and by doing so they . . . order . . . members are at liberty to interpret facts as they see fit and in doing so they are free to use a document to support an argument.

The only prohibition is that the quote cannot contain unparliamentary words. However, when a member indicates that he or she is quoting from a document, the accuracy of that quote is wholly the responsibility of the member. It has never been as a practice nor is it the duty of the Speaker to authenticate anything said in debate or in question period. When a member prefaces a comment with the word quote, it is taken at face value and *Hansard* includes the portion of the commentary in quotation marks.

It is the nature of debate that anything said should not be considered in terms of irrefutable fact. The rules take this into account. For instance, rule 34(1) permits a member to explain any part of a speech misquoted or misunderstood. The accountability for the veracity of comments made in this Assembly is a matter for debate and as such is not a matter of order.

I draw members to the attention, to page 480 of the Australian *House of Representative Practice* which in plain terms outlines parliamentary practice in this regard. And I quote:

The Chair has always maintained that Members themselves must accept responsibility for material they use in debate, and there is no need for them to vouch for its authenticity. Whether the material is true or false will be judged according to events and if a Member uses the material, the origin of which he or she is unsure, the responsibility rests with the Member.

Therefore, in conclusion, let me say that it is up to the good sense and discretion of members to determine how to present information and use documents in debate or in question period. It is not necessarily a matter of order. While I cannot rule in favour of this particular point of order, I do want to caution all hon. members to use good sense and discretion when quoting from and characterizing documents.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 26 — The Tabling of Documents Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Tabling of Documents Amendment Act, 2000. Enacting the amendments in this Bill will provide the Assembly and the public with more timely information thereby improving public accountability.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, allows documents to be submitted to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly when the Assembly is not sitting. It considers the documents submitted to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly as having been tabled and allows the document to be made public.

Under the existing Act, Mr. Speaker, documents can only be tabled in the Assembly when it's sitting and this requirement has delayed the release of documents and hindered the government's ability to provide increased accountability to the members and to the public.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, will over the next four years provide for a gradual reduction in the amount of time allowed for the preparation and tabling of documents. At the end of the four-year phase-in period, documents will be required to be tabled within 120 days regardless of whether or not the Assembly is sitting. This will result in the timely release of documents and improved accountability.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill will come into force on assent. And I'm pleased to move second reading of An Act to amend The Tabling of Documents Act, 1991.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just a few comments regarding the current Bill, Bill No. 26, The Tabling of Documents Amendment Act.

As I understood, and I realize we're getting close to the Easter weekend break and it was somewhat difficult to hear everything that the minister was saying, but I gathered from the comments the minister was saying, this piece of legislation is supposed to simplify how documents are tabled and how they're recognized and come forward with a manner in which they can be presented and addressed a lot more quickly than they have been in the past.

However, Mr. Speaker, I think it would certainly be appropriate to give . . . that the opposition take the time to review the piece of legislation and indeed see to it that the reasons for the piece of legislation are certainly applied and followed through with what the minister was indicating to us earlier this afternoon.

And having said that, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be appropriate for us to take a few more days and a bit more time to review this piece of legislation to make sure that it indeed accomplishes the goals that the government intends through the Bill.

Therefore at this time, I move adjournment of Bill 26, The Tabling of Documents Amendment Act, 2000.

Debate adjourned.

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

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, behind the bar on the government side of the House here, we have two very special guests, people with whom many of us have worked with over several years. And I'm speaking of the member — former member — from Carrot River, Andy Renaud. And the former member from Lloydminster, who served this Assembly honourably. And we're very glad to see them come and visit us again. And the guest, Vi Stanger from Lloydminster.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are also honoured to have with us another former member who is seated in your gallery, Mr. Larry Birkbeck who represented the Moosomin constituency.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 27 — The Certified Management Accountants Act

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to

move second reading of Bill No. 27, The Certified Management Accountants Act. This is a new Bill, Mr. Speaker. The original Act governing certified management accountants was called The Management Accountants Act and was introduced in 1978.

We're pleased to provide a service to the accounting profession and the general public, Mr. Speaker, by introducing an up-to-date version of the Act. Since there have been no substantive amendments to the legislation since 1978, The Management Accountants Act is now seriously outdated. Evidence of this is in the name of the Act itself. The Certified Management Accountants Act better reflects the current nature of the profession.

The current Act provides the society with broadly defined powers and the provision to make bylaws to carry out the objectives of the society. The bylaws currently enacted clarify powers of the society with regard to composition, election, remuneration, and meetings of the council; membership and education requirements, member fees, and the discipline process.

This Bill incorporates the current provisions included in the bylaws. While many of the existing provisions have been retained, this Bill makes substantial improvements by providing further protection and accountability to the profession and the general public.

For example, included in the Bill is a provision for representatives of the public to be included on the institute's council and disciplinary committee. These appointees represent the interests of the general public. The Act will also require the institute to file an annual report. And in addition, bylaws that affect the public will require approval by government.

The Bill reflects general government policy regarding professional legislation. The majority of the sections in the Bill are standard sections that appear in all new professional legislation and were prepared using guidelines provided by the Department of Justice.

Over the last eight or nine years, we've been gradually updating professional legislation in Saskatchewan to bring it up to date, to make professions more accountable, to include public representation, and to try to promote consumer protection.

Through this Bill, the society's legislation will be brought up to date. Its legislation will also be comparable to that of the association of certified general accountants of Saskatchewan, which is sort of a sister organization to the management accountants, Mr. Speaker.

These changes that are represented in the new law will come into force on a day to be fixed by proclamation of the Lieutenant Governor.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of an Act respecting Certified Management Accountants.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to the minister giving his reasons for the upcoming

piece of legislation, I can appreciate the fact that certainly there is periods of time when we need to review legislation, pass legislation; and certain Acts, to update those Acts and make sure those Acts certainly conform and reflect the realities of the day.

And what the minister has been indicating that there's certainly a number of areas that the former Act needed to be updated. I think, as I recall, the minister indicated that a fair portion of the former legislation is going to be left intact.

It would appear, Mr. Speaker, that it would be appropriate as well to take the time to call the professional association and seek some input from the accounting profession in regards to this legislation so that we have a clear understanding of their views and their ideas to indeed determine whether or not all of the concerns have been brought forward, whether they are truly reflected in the legislation, or whether or not the legislation certainly may go beyond what the accounting profession has been asking for.

So, Mr. Speaker, having said that, my colleagues and I would certainly like to take a little more time to review the legislation and certainly take a closer look at it, give it further scrutiny. And therefore at this time, I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 9

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen that **Bill No. 9 — The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 1999 (No. 2)** be now read a second time.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise today to speak about something that is very near and dear — certainly to everyone in this province — and that's our children and the protection of our children.

And I want to spend quite a bit of time talking about this Act and certainly how it reflects upon our children in society and how it's going to reflect upon the needs of parents and the need for parenting.

One of the great concerns of course that we always have is that far too often governments in this day and age are starting to become far too involved in the raising of children and taking a great deal of responsibility away from parents.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the raising of children is a very responsible activity and a very trustworthy opportunity and something not to be taken lightly. Mr. Speaker, there is nothing more important in this world than our children, preparing them for the future. And certainly for many of us who now have grandchildren, it is certainly a great honour to be able to say that our children have progressed to that time in their life where they can start to reap the rewards of seeing their own children grow to maturity and the mischief that they can get into, and

certainly the deeds that they will accomplish as they reach school age and through school; and hopefully they'll all be able to achieve the straight A's that their parents did, or somewhat close.

Mr. Speaker, the responsibility for raising children and looking after children should be and always needs to remain the primary responsibility of the parent. There is a great deal of concern that in today's society that children nowadays are being pushed more and more into a state-run system for parenting. In today's society, with the taxation limits that are being pressed upon young people, in many cases both parents are being forced to rise everyday and be gainfully employed just so that they can provide the necessities of life — good food, good clothing, good shelter.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, then the opportunity to have . . . to bear children, to watch them being raised in a responsible manner becomes very tough on those young parents. And so more and more now young parents are being forced to seek opportunities where someone else is taking on the responsibility for raising their children.

And I think that is a great misdeed that is being placed upon our society. It is certainly being proven over and over again that those children who spend fewer and fewer hours with their primary parents in the long run suffer at a far greater rate by the time they reach adulthood than those children that are allowed on a day-to-day basis to spend quality time and quantity time with those people that gave them life.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important then to touch upon something here that is near and dear to all of us who are parents, who have taken the chore of raising children far more seriously than maybe the state, or certainly the state-run institutions are willing to admit.

Mr. Speaker, it has been proven time and time again that by the time a child who has spent a great deal of his early childhood — specifically starting from the age of 18 months — and spending everyday, five days a week, up to 10 hours a day with a child care deliverer who is not their primary parent, through the period of early childhood and then, as they reach school age becoming latchkey kids, so to speak, Mr. Speaker, that by the time those children reach high school, the statistics are starting to prove over and over and over again that those children start to regress as they reach maturity.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it has certainly been pointed out that children who spend time in state-run and state facilities that set guidelines for how children should be raised, when they start kindergarten, the state always seems to step forward and say, oh, these children are a little more advanced. Now, Mr. Speaker, it's been noted that we're going to accept that fact. They certainly are.

But one of the things also must be remembered at any given time, that as we prepare our children for school, we must let them be children. It's a proven fact, Mr. Speaker, that anyone can teach a child to read. But, Mr. Speaker, have they learned what they have read? And, Mr. Speaker, we know that it's an absolute truth that no, they have not learned what they have read — they just know the words. And, Mr. Speaker, that is

unfortunate.

Children need to grow up at a progressive rate that they are able to handle and not at a rate that is pressed upon them by state institutions or state government and their own agendas for taking over the responsibility of parenthood.

Mr. Speaker, those children who by the time they get into high school and have spent a considerable amount of time — much more so with their parents than those parents who are forced because of economic situations not to be able to provide 24-hour care for their children — those children that have received the quality and quantity time with their primary parents are certainly far more advanced in their social development, in their behavioural development, and are far more prepared by the time they finish high school to move on, Mr. Speaker, to post-secondary education; or as in the case of by far the largest majority of children these days, Mr. Speaker, to move into the workforce.

Those children who have been raised by someone other than the primary parent, by the time they reach the end of high school, Mr. Speaker, they are lacking something that can only be achieved by spending time with their parents.

And we're finding out more and more, Mr. Speaker, as we observe children specifically through the educational system, Mr. Speaker, that those children who have not had that quantity and quality time with their parents, by the time they finish high school, Mr. Speaker, they are not prepared emotionally, socially, behaviourally, to move forward and become active participants in today's society.

In fact what's been shown on many occasions, Mr. Speaker, is that these children, as they leave high school, are probably far more dependent upon their parents at the end of high school than they were prior to entering kindergarten. And that's very unfortunate, Mr. Speaker.

This puts a great deal of stress upon the governments of the day. It puts a great deal of stress upon society, whether it's in the Department of Social Services who have to then start to look after these children because they're not prepared to take on society head-on, or whether it's the Department of Justice because these children are not prepared emotionally and behaviourally to accept the responsibilities of society and start to perform acts of crime. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that is a great disservice to us all.

But certainly what it does, Mr. Speaker, is that it puts a great deal of burden on an already overtaxed society. Mr. Speaker, it is important that as we examine the pieces of legislation that look at enhancing . . . or looking at family services that the Bills relate to the fact that the primary caregiver are the parents.

Mr. Speaker, we find too often that when the government becomes involved in child rearing that what happens is that the . . . some person, generally someone in the bureaucracy who has very little knowledge of your children, tries to impose, through legislation, clauses that are generally regressive to child rearing in this province. And certainly whether it's in this province or in this country . . . And we're certainly finding that in many parts of the world.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important then for us to sit back and take a look at Bills that are brought forward such as this. Are they being brought forward to benefit the child? Are they being brought forward so that the parents of these children are going to have the opportunity to be able to actively participate on a 24-hour basis the rearing of their children?

Mr. Speaker, what is more and likely needed in the long term is a plan by this government. And certainly with the co-operation of the opposition party, we would certainly be more willing to look at legislation that would ease the tax burden on parents so that both parents would not be forced on a day-to-day basis to have to rise out of bed early in the day, take their small children off to child care centres, some of them state-run — they're state-operated; certainly driven by the state in their desire for having two working parents — and try to look at a process where we can keep one of those parents at home on a full-time basis.

Mr. Speaker, we'll probably hear throughout many parts of this debate that this might be a little pie in the sky, but, Mr. Speaker, sometimes we have to raise the bar a little bit. But are we raising the bar too high for the children? Well I say not.

If we're going to be able to come forth on a day-to-day basis and think about the future of this province so that we can grow economically, that we can grow socially, then, Mr. Speaker, those people that we have to look at that are going to carry the burden far into the future — our children and our grandchildren — and does this Bill enact upon us the opportunity that those children will have the benefits of the future that I've spoken about already?

Mr. Speaker, we need to remind ourselves that, in the future, that nothing is more important than the children. And, Mr. Speaker, we need to remind ourselves of the gift of having . . . bringing children into this world. And too often we get driven by the needs of government — the government's own need and greed to finance itself; it's forcing young parents to work, both of them having to work, and sometimes one of them being forced to work two jobs — that, Mr. Speaker, the children often get left out of this.

And as we see, Mr. Speaker, in certainly our larger centres, and having a lot of familiarity with the city of Prince Albert that I live very close to, is that one of the great problems that arising now is, and has been I guess for quite a few years, Mr. Speaker; is that because of both parents working with their need to try to finance the operation of the family — trying to provide food and clothing and shelter — is that the children are the ones that are being left out of the picture.

And now, Mr. Speaker, of course I mentioned earlier the latchkey situation where your children as they reach a somewhat more responsible age — that people think they're more responsible — simply come and go as they please, without the opportunity of having the guidance of good parenting.

And unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that is putting a great deal of pressure upon society. Because as children will be children, what happens, Mr. Speaker, is that these children have a tendency not to get the opportunity to be involved in good

community organizations that provide them with the opportunity to expend energy. They simply don't have . . . the parents don't have the time to get them into dance lessons or into Scouts and Guides or singing lessons or hockey or baseball.

Instead what happens, Mr. Speaker, because of the financial pressures upon these families being unable to afford the time to get these children into these opportunities and unable to afford the financial pressures to get these children into these opportunities, what happens, Mr. Speaker, is that these children soon start to make their own opportunities as they go about their after-school lives.

And in many cases, Mr. Speaker, when that happens children can have a tendency to get into mischief. We know that they are certainly enthusiastic in our society nowadays, and they seek to, they seek to find their own, their own thrills in society, Mr. Speaker. And this is where we start to run into trouble with children. And it is at this point that children start to actually regress from their earlier progresses that sociologists have pointed out are achieved by children being involved in daycare centres at a very early age.

And it's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, it's at this time that many children then start to become involved with the government departments that then need the financial resources in order to deal with them into the future and to deal with them properly. And those departments, Mr. Speaker, certainly two of them that are paying the biggest price for this are departments of Social Services and the Department of Justice.

And unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, when we stop and think about the pressures that are being brought upon these two departments, if we just had a little bit of vision for this province . . . Now that's one thing we've certainly heard a lot of comments about in the last few weeks here, is vision for this province or lack of vision.

If we had a sense of vision for the province, Mr. Speaker, that would pertain to children we could greatly reduce the pressure upon government departments — more specifically departments of Social Services and the Department of Justice — in having to deal with children if they had the opportunity to spend more quality and quantity time with their parents.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one of the great unfortunes of the budget is that we had to take a look at departments that were under a great deal of pressure because of the stresses of society and the pressure society is putting on them, and the government inability to be able to meet those pressures because of financial restriction.

Well I'd like to say, Mr. Speaker, that if this government had some sense of vision for the future of this province past the next budget we wouldn't have to worry about those problems.

If we would have had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, of providing a progressive sales tax reduction, a sense of vision for a progressive income tax reduction, Mr. Speaker, it would provide the opportunity for young families then to be able to look at the opportunities of maybe one of the parents being able to stay home with those children.

And, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that has been proven by sociologists time and time again is that when one of the primary parents, either the mother or the father, is allowed the opportunity to spend quantity and quality time with those children, we reduce significantly the pressures upon the Department of Social Services and the Department of Justice.

Well that's two areas that child care certainly could benefit from . . . by bringing forth progressive tax reduction measures in this province. But, Mr. Speaker, there's also a third area.

Child care in many cases nowadays is starting to become a great deal of concern to educators in this province. And, Mr. Speaker, if we don't stand forward now and start to help the primary educators of this province, who every day are being faced with extensive pressures in order to educate the children as we try our best as a society to get them ready for the future, whether they continue past secondary education to post-secondary education, or whether they continue past secondary education and go directly into the work force.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the pressures that are being put upon the education system by having these children in the system nowadays that do not get the quality and quantity time of primary parenting . . . it's putting a great deal more pressure upon the education system. And I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's important for us to step back for a few minutes and really think about what's important for the future.

Now is it important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the state to be looking at legislation that looks at enhancing the powers of the department? Or is it important for the Department of Social Services to be making recommendations, Mr. Speaker, to the Department of Finance and saying, look, what's important for the future of this province? Do we have a vision?

And does this vision include the children . . . our children, Mr. Speaker, and our grandchildren? Is the vision clear enough for the future? But even, Mr. Speaker, our grandchildren — Mr. Deputy Speaker, pardon me — even our grandchildren are included in this vision. And, Mr. Speaker, this is what we need to stop and think about.

Education is of significant importance; we've talked about it many times in this hallowed Chamber. But for some reason or other it always seems to get quite a bit of lip service but it seems to end right there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now if we're going to continue to provide quality education in our classroom, providing educators the opportunity to provide first-class education in the classrooms, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And is it important that child care remain the primary responsibility of the parents, or do we continue to continue down the road, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that primary child care being brought forth and tied up by the province?

So at this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think we need to start looking at this Bill a little more closer as to what we may want to be able to do with it, and so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would ask that we adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 17

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

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a great privilege to stand today to talk about . . . talk to Bill No. 17, The Child Care Amendment Act, 2000. This for the most part, is a housekeeping in nature, this Bill. But it is important that we look into the amendments very carefully since this Act will affect the care of children by those outside their home.

And as I was sitting here thinking of the different things that I was going to discuss during my speech, I got looking up and down the rows and I believe every one of us on our side of the House is a parent. We have one or two or three children on our side of the House and it's a responsibility that we must take very, very seriously.

I know our two sons are quite young and we've gone through this process of trying to decide whether they should be going out to daycare, to child care, or whether we have somebody in, the whole responsibility of whether we need to have both parents working. Because I think in an ideal world there are very few of us on this side of the House, and perhaps on that side of the House, that doesn't realize that it would be better . . . maybe the children would be better met if one of the parents was to stay at home.

Unfortunately that's not always the case. Because of economic reasons, because of taxation reasons, because of a lot of reasons, I think that's what forces a lot of families into both parents working, and then leaving the kids to either have a babysitter come in or take them out to child care, daycare facilities, and things like that.

So there are a number of things in this Act, the amendments, that really need to carefully be looked at because, as I mentioned before, it's a very serious issue. In my own personal life, I guess that I could speak a little bit about, is Cindy, my wife, went back to work part-time and we had a person coming in. It wasn't always a solution. We went through different people coming in and they wanted full-time work, part-time work, and it was a real, real juggling act.

But we also found it very, very frequently that it wasn't the easiest thing to get them into daycare facilities, either. When I would be busy at the farm or when I was travelling on the road in my previous occupation, I would be gone for two or three days at a time. And if my wife had to go to work, it would be leaving well before 7 o'clock because of the shift work and there is a lot of facilities that weren't able to accommodate the needs that we needed for daycare.

And so it's an extremely tough issue. And I think if there's one thing that will stir up people's emotions is when you start dealing with your kids and who's going to be looking after your kids.

(1500)

So it's an area that we just don't take lightly because it is an

area that . . . as I've talked to many people and I've watched parents raise their kids and I don't think there isn't one parent that says you only get one shot at it. You only have one chance. Very seldom do you get to turn the cycle of the clock back and you start all over again and you learn from maybe some of the mistakes you might have made, not knowing that they were mistakes at the time. You just don't get a second shot very often.

And so I think that's when issues like this arise in the House and we start talking about the amendment Act, this Child Care Amendment Act, 2000, we have to really take it seriously and look at: is it best, as the speaker prior to me from Saskatchewan Rivers mentioned, is it the best thing for the children? And I think that's what we have to look at at the end of the day.

There are a number of things. We were pleased to see that this government is amending portions of the Act that restrict those from providing daycare services other than the primary residence. In other words, if it's not the primary residence, they're not in their primary residence, about whether they can operate in other areas and things like that. And I think those are things that really seriously have to be looked at.

Again, as a parent — and most of us in this House probably are parents — there have been some real horror stories of some of the daycares, some of the child care services that have operated in our province. And I don't have to go too many years back to look at a situation just outside of Saskatoon. And I mean, every parent's nightmare that would have to have been.

And so again, as we deal with this issue, it's not something to pass over quickly and say oh, we think it's in the best interests until we know for sure that it's in the best interests.

In the minister's second reading speech, he brought up a very good point of farm families which are extremely busy during the seeding time, making it very difficult to provide adequate child care. And it is.

I mean we sometimes in this House talk about rural-urban issues and the difference between rural-urban issues, but it is really quite a struggle for parents in rural Saskatchewan, with very few farms now that don't need all hands on board when it comes to seeding. And especially all hands on board when it comes to harvest.

With the crops that we're growing now, they have to . . . seem to have to be in in about a two-day period even though it takes you five days to get them seeded. So when that two-day period hits, we all have to be on board. And quite often it would be, you know, the husband running 12, 20, 18-hour days, 16-hour days, and the wife, his wife working side by side with him for that whole length of time.

And I think in harvest we all know that, with the crops again, how valuable they are sitting in the field. The sooner you get them off when they're ready to be taken off, the better off you are. And it really is just pure economics. That if you don't do it, you're in trouble.

And so, you know, again, as you get both the husband and wife working long, long hours — working well into the night — the

need for daycare services in rural Saskatchewan is a definite need. And I think quite often they are lacking out there. Talking to a number of friends of mine that are going through this, they really have trouble finding adequate facilities to take up the gap, I guess.

I think some other things. When we talk about the agriculture sector in rural Saskatchewan with daycare and that type of thing, just the whole situation that we're facing in this province with the ag crisis, and there's so many more stresses put on the family due to it.

I have a couple of newspaper clippings here that talk about: "Farm crisis may hurt children." And I was very interested to read it. It was from a former colleague of mine from the Avonlea High School. She is now the director of education. But when I taught in the high school system, I worked side by side with Georgia for a long time and I know her passion and compassion for the kids. And it says, "The effects of the agricultural crisis on farm children may be showing up in disruptive behaviour in small-town schools," a rural educator says, director says.

And I think it's definitely the case. And, you know, sometimes it's because the parents haven't been there to perhaps, after they get home from school, to look after the homework needs and things like that because they are busy out on the combine; they're busy trucking. And then that all translates the next day into maybe some disruptive behaviour back in the school system.

So this Child Care Amendment Act, 2000 does have some very good amendments in it, but there are also some real concerns. And one of those concerns definitely comes in rural Saskatchewan through the agriculture and the stresses and the demands put on people in agriculture today.

These amendments will take some of the pressure off the parent so they not will be concerned with the well-being of their children while they're out farming, and as I touched on, that they're out for many hours. In some of those cases . . . I mean, we really look at this as being a good thing.

These amendments are also looked at . . . look at the number of children being cared for in group family child-care homes. And I understand that this legislation will continue to enforce the limit of eight children with further limits by age. And I mean that's certainly . . . And again in rural Saskatchewan with more and more people moving away from rural Saskatchewan, it's tougher and tougher to find the facilities. So there's fewer facilities and we start grouping more and more kids and then what is the quality of care?

As the member that spoke before me said, I think that is the most important issue and can we assure and insure that the quality of care is sufficient? Although we do not disagree with any of these changes in principal, we certainly have concerns with the government's ability to care for our children, particularly with the tabling of the Child Advocate report a number of days ago.

And that just brings up a whole other issue. Of course we would like to see that it would . . . the Social Services and that whole

department would work without a problem. But just hearing day in and day out since that Child Advocate's report came out of some of the different problems — I was listening to the news before we came into the House and how some of the Social Services workers were saying they just don't have enough people. The caseload is far too great.

And I guess when you get a caseload that is that great and then you hear of the horror stories like, boy, we're sure glad that you'd phoned so we knew where that child was because we had lost track of him. You know? And it really makes you wonder and it really makes you question when we start giving up our children or allowing other people to look after them — are they competent, are they qualified? And issues that were raised with the Child Advocate's report last week really heightens our concern.

And I mean, as I said before, it's our most precious resource, and as parents, we get one shot at it — we want to make sure it's done properly. And it just makes me shudder when I hear of horror stories like what we heard through the Child Advocate's report.

And as I mentioned it's ongoing. I mean again, today in the news we heard people from the Social Services area speaking of some real concerns and these concerns need to be addressed.

There is much to be said about the NDP's track record on child care. Unfortunately not too much of it are positive things, i.e., the latest thing is the advocate's report. But I think if we went back in years prior, there are concerns on a number of issues.

As legislators and parents, it our duty to ensure that the most valuable members of our society are protected — and it is of course our children. And, you know, so often that we are . . . we're the ones making the decisions as they're growing up, making the decisions for them. And we really have to make sure that those decisions are made with as much thought and as much information as we possibly can. We don't want to rush into any of these things because the ramifications down the road are quite often unchangeable.

And, you know, as I mentioned earlier in my speech, we've all talked to parents that after they look back, they say, well I would have done this different or I would have done that different. Well as legislators, I don't want to have to look back and say in this amendment we should have done this different, and we should have done that different. You know, we want to make sure that we do things the proper way, the best way, the most intelligent way, with as much information as we can possibly garner when it comes to this amendment, this Child Care Amendment Act, 2000.

Since the budget was released we have heard this government talk about their renewed commitment to children and the future of our province. Well, the budget and the future of our province, it almost seems to be a bit of an oxymoron, especially if we're looking at a positive future for our province. Because, I mean, we've had the budget debate, and we've talked about it, and we've talked about it. But I do look at when it's a renewed commitment, do you know what I mean?

I would hate to as a parent say well, I'm going to renew my

commitment now to my children as if I've let it lapse for the last 8 or 10 years. Personally, my way of thinking is when we're raising children and when we go into the deal of raising children and we make the agreement that we are going to have children and raise them, it's a full-time commitment. Not halfway through do we decide to renew our commitment. It is a commitment from day one to I guess the end of us as parents. It's a lifetime commitment; it's not a renewed commitment. It's nothing like that. It's a lifetime commitment. And it just concerns me when I hear the government opposite, the members opposite talking about a renewed commitment.

As you're saying, perhaps a renewed commitment to the future of our province, because I think over the last number of years we've seen the commitment to our province and the future of our province not as bright as what we'd like to see it. And I think that's what the budget tried to address and perhaps — from our side of the House — and I really feel got off track in a number of areas.

And that all sounds well and good, but it is one thing to be providing our children with a safe environment in which to grow up in and foster, but it is another to be giving them any hope for the future.

And I mean I think everyone of us, we see our children grow and we'd like to see them continue on through the high school, university and go on to work in our province. But unfortunately far too many of us — and I haven't got to that point, in fact, I'm a long, long time before I get to that point, but I'm talking to some of our colleagues and I know the member from Swift Current has a long road ahead too, a long time. But I know some of the people in our caucus that have had children, have gone through the school system, high school system, and nothing more than you'd love to see them working in our province, but they're not.

And you just have to look at the numbers. I mean our province just has really had a hard time growing in population. And why is it? Is it because we don't produce as many people as die off in a year? Well that's not the case at all. I mean, we're on a positive side of that ratio, but we're not growing in population. And far too often it's because . . . we on this side often say that maybe the grass is greener on the other side of the pasture.

But it's just not something that is said, it's something that is proven. And far too many people have voted with their feet by crossing the border. And it's a sad, sad thing. And it's not necessarily again the production issue, if I can use it that way, it's a case of where the opportunities are. And I would love to see those opportunities in our province as opposed to other provinces.

And I think, again talking to some of the members on the western side of the province — our member from Lloydminster talks about it on a regular basis — and we through the rest of province and myself in Indian Head-Milestone maybe don't see the effects of it quite as obviously as what a member from Lloydminster who just looks across Main Street and sees the other provinces, Alberta. And so it's just a continual thing for them. And it's brought to their attention over and over and over again. And sometimes, perhaps us in the other parts of the province are maybe a little sheltered.

And because of that I remember going through the budget speech and hearing a member opposite say, well just don't tell them that it's greener over there. Just keep them in the dark. It doesn't matter if they know that it's better somewhere else, just don't tell them.

And I think that's far too often been the attitude and the response of the government that we've been under for the majority of the last 30 and 40 years, is don't tell them what's going on outside of our borders. Let's build walls around our province so people, you know, don't see what we could have been or what we should be doing.

Unfortunately most kids, as they go through the school system and the university system, university tells them to broaden their mind, and unfortunately all the walls we want to build to keep them in won't hold in those broadened minds, and that's where they move on to other areas.

I find it rather disconcerting that the members opposite talk about this commitment to our youth as if they are doing something wonderful, some wonderful thing by acknowledging the needs of children. And I touched on it earlier, is that renewing is not the word that I'd never want to be . . . would ever want to be discussing because it's a lifetime commitment. It's not a renewal of a commitment, it's not a change of gear, as in now we're going to pay more attention to it; it's something that needs to be paid attention to through a lifetime, through a lifetime of parenting.

(1515)

Over the years we have heard some horror stories of how children have been treated in care homes. And I touched on some of the issues that have come up in the news over the last number of years, 10 to 15 years. And I think of the incident north of Saskatoon which, as I mentioned before, would just send shivers down my spine and I'm sure every parent that's ever . . . that has been a parent, scares the daylight out of them.

So, you know, the needs of children in care homes cannot be overlooked. I mean it is the most important issue to any parent. It doesn't matter, wages, dollars and cents, or anything else, it's the protection of our youth and our children, and that's by far the most important.

I am pleased to see that this legislation recognizes this and will ensure that none of the children being cared for in group family homes will be neglected. And I mean that is by far the most important issue. And for that I will have no problem moving this Bill on eventually. But it's very important to look at making sure that there will be no neglect of the children.

There are some concerns regarding the licensing aspect of the legislation. For example, section 3.2, paragraph, states that:

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

That "with or without" really does concern me. You know, I think they are able to operate a child care home either with or without a child care licence. So what's the point of having a licence if you need it or you don't need it?

Unfortunately, we heard after the debate, after the debate on the budget that you can't go fishing with or without a licence. But for some reason in this Act, we can operate a child care home with either or without a family child care licence. And that gives me some concern.

And I would think that, you know, being so into raising fees on licensing fees and things like that, they would just automatically think, boy that would be a great way to raise a little more revenue . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Surprising they missed that, is right. I guess maybe we hope that they didn't hear this and won't then review and then say, boy there's another place we could add some taxes.

This concerns me in light of the fact, as I mentioned earlier, that some children have been abused in some of these homes. And if the operators of these facilities are not permitted to carry a licence, there may be some difficulty in holding them accountable.

But those are questions that I have no doubt the minister will be more than happy to respond to when we get into the Committee of the Whole — the whole issue of whether you do or you do not have to be licensed. It is a bit of a concern.

All in all, this is a good piece of legislation. As the official opposition that represents the majority of rural communities across Saskatchewan, I'm pleased to see that the government is finally acknowledging the needs of farm families and some of the constraints that they are living under.

And I touched on it earlier, but I mean we're getting fewer and fewer farmers out there because it's tougher and tougher, and it's glad to see that maybe they're acknowledging some of those pressures.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this time I would like to move that I adjourn debate on this Bill.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 19

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 19 — The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In reading over the Bill I realize that coming under CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) regulation will make SaskTel unique among Saskatchewan's Crown owned utilities.

SaskTel will actually be under a watch of a regulatory agency and that would . . . the agency would have the power to say yes or no to rate hikes. And I believe that this is a very positive step, considering that to date all of the Saskatchewan Crowns only have to state their rate hikes one day and they're rubber-stamped the next day.

There has been up to date no accountability to the very customers that the Crowns are supposed to serve. So there is a

positive viewpoint of going under CRTC regulations.

But while we welcome the rate review mechanisms brought about by the CRTC regulations, there are some serious issues that need to be addressed before we proceed too quickly on this Bill. Ultimately this Bill will affect the real people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and their concerns must be our first and foremost consideration when we look at this.

The people that it has the potential to impact in a very negative manner are those that live the farthest away from the major centres such as Saskatoon and Regina. While CRTC seems to recognize the concept of remote services, it doesn't seem to recognize rural areas of Saskatchewan as being such remote areas. This has generated a real fear out there, and quite rightfully so.

At present rural customers are already paying more than their phone . . . for their phone services than their urban counterparts. I know my own phone at home I pay \$9 per month rural mileage fees. And I pay an additional 18.65 per month for having a second rural line. And that comes to a total of 27.65 a month. And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because my home is in a rural location in Saskatchewan I pay an additional \$331.80 per year for my phone service.

The problem arises in that there has been no assurances from this government that these inequities will not become even greater under the jurisdiction of CRTC. There has been talk that the base price per telephone line may go as high as \$130 per line per month, and this just simply will not be realistic. It will not be affordable to many of the people of this province, and nor will it be affordable for the non-profit facilities in our towns such as their rinks and their community halls.

I've even heard some people say that if SaskTel rates go up that high they will simply have their phones removed from their home and they will rely solely on their cell phones. And won't that be a real claim to fame for Saskatchewan technology.

I sincerely hope this piece of legislation will ensure that the basic telephone service rates, long-distance rates, and the Internet rates remain realistic and affordable for all of the Saskatchewan people.

CRTC does not seem to recognize the vast rural areas that are part of what makes up our province, and I strongly urge all members in this Assembly to fight for this oversight. We must remain united and firm that the people of Saskatchewan are entitled to have equal access to equal services.

Besides the possibility of increased costs to the customers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also like to address the problems of the transition period of moving into using CRTC regulations.

The hon. member of the Crown corporations mentioned in his speech on this Bill that SaskTel employees have worked diligently to help ensure that the transition is a smooth one. He went on to say that they have been working to ensure that SaskTel customers see little difference in how quickly SaskTel provides them with products and services, and that SaskTel's goal was to ensure that they could continue to quickly and adequately respond to market demands and pressures.

Now I have a constituent, Mr. Speaker, who I can quite assure you does not agree with our minister of Crowns. His name is Charles Smith and he has a business named Combine Salvage in my constituency. He's written me a letter and I would like to that the opportunity to read this letter. And I think then more members in the House will realize that this transition period isn't going as smoothly as perhaps the minister has suggested.

The letter was dated February 15, and it goes on to say:

I've been encountering a ridiculous situation with SaskTel. Here is a summary of what has taken place so far.

This letter is compilation of phone conversations and events which have led me to where I am today in a dispute with SaskTel over line activation charges. In the early '90s my wife and I decided to move our business, Combine Salvage Incorporated, from our farm location south of Allan, Saskatchewan, to a location at Elstow, Saskatchewan, which has Highway 16 running past it. I indicated to the people at SaskTel that there was a good possibility of our business expanding, and they might want to consider this when plowing in new lines. After the lines had been plowed in I asked the SaskTel technician, Mr. Brian Fisher, if they would need to plow more lines in. His reply was that they would never be plowing in my yard again and they said they had plowed in excess of 20 . . . lines to our location. We started with three lines in 1993, and continued to add lines as required until the last activated line in December 31 of 1998. And that left us with a total of six activated lines.

On July 6th 1999 I realized our phone system was backlogged as we were going into our busy season. I telephoned SaskTel and requested another line activation and a meridian phone. The cost of the line to be approximately \$500, and the Norstar meridian phone to be approximately \$250. I was prepared to pay between \$800 and \$1000.00, once all the incidental charges, GST, etc., were added. On July 9th, SaskTel contacted me to tell me that the line connection fee would be \$3,095. Needless to say, I was shocked. I had a lengthy discussion with a SaskTel representative by the name of Rene who indicated to me that they would need to plow in new lines. I informed her that I had ample lines in my building already, no plowing would be necessary. She asked me how I knew that. I told her that I asked Brian Fisher, who was SaskTel's technician and he said I had (20) pairs of lines.

At this point, I really wonder if SaskTel could give me a correct answer on anything. She then said that even if I have available lines in my building, they would likely have to plow in more lines to activate my lines further back in the system. My reply to this statement was that 7 months earlier, SaskTel activated a telephone line for me and there was no problem. Also, on July 6th, 3 days earlier, there did not seem to be a problem, until the price went from 400-and-some-odd dollars to \$3,095. She said that she would check with the engineers and get back to me. I did not hear from her, so I called her on July 11 and she had left for holidays.

On July 12 I called SaskTel and talked to a woman by the name of Chris. She put me in contact with Byron Bergren. At this point in time, the situation took a fundamental turn.

Byron . . . informed me that yes, I had ample lines in my building, and yes, they could activate them, no problem. The problem was that CRTC regulations came in force on March 1, 1999 and SaskTel had to charge me the full cost of plowing lines to our business. End of discussion. I pressed on asking why SaskTel did not notify customers as to these changes. He said that an announcement had been made on the news. I found it hard to fathom that SaskTel would reach their customers on such an issue in the form of a news release. When I suggested that it would have been appropriate for SaskTel to have contacted all their customers personally, his reply was: "how in the world could our business and other customers expect SaskTel to personally contact us all". My question to him was, how many of SaskTel's customers do you send bills to? There was a long silence at the end of the line, followed by a curt response that a Muriel Gareau from Prince Albert would get back in contact with me.

This is a real letter from a constituent:

On July 14, Gord Marsh from SaskTel called and reaffirmed SaskTel's position. At this point, it seemed obvious to me that SaskTel was entrenched in their position. And I had a business to run so I decided to pick up the matter on a later date.

On February 14, the year 2000, I spoke to a woman by the name of Jan at SaskTel. I inquired about getting another line activated. She said the cost would be \$3,082 for the new line activation. The price had gone down a few dollars. I then asked what it would cost a new rural business to have a phone put in. She said the first line would be \$492. I asked her what I had to do to start up another business on my property and get a new line. She said I had to get a legal subdivision done, and they would plow in a new line. I asked her if she could give me this in writing. She then said that she would need to consult an engineer and see what the details might be.

(1530)

On February 7, the year 2000, I received a call from a woman by the name of Dawn-Marie from SaskTel who informed me that to get a new line for \$492, all I had to do was to get a legal subdivision done on my very own property, and SaskTel would plow in the new line. In essence, I could get my parking lot next to my building subdivided for a couple of hundred dollars, SaskTel would plow in a new line for \$492 — from however many kilometres away — when all they had to do was join two wires in the wall of my building to activate a new line. I put this scenario to Dawn Marie, and she confirmed that that's exactly how SaskTel would handle my situation. Just to further illustrate the ridiculousness of this whole situation, I put forward one more scenario. If I owned a section of land and I wanted to put a phone line on each quarter, four lines in total, in the middle of the section — each line conceivably could be one metre apart from each other — what would SaskTel do? Dawn-Marie said they would plow four separate lines from the appropriate location to the middle of the section, and it would cost me \$492 times four.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I said are you sure you wouldn't just plow in one cable with four lines in it? The response was no, we would plow four separate trenches. She said all you need is a separate land title and we will plow in four new lines. She then shared with me that SaskTel was preparing for CRTC regulations to come in effect in June of the year 2000. Well this was news to me again because I was told it was March, previously. Their story was that regulations were in effect, and they would be severely reprimanded by CRTC if they connected my line for a mere \$492.

To summarize this situation, I must say that I feel many emotions. I am shocked, dumbfounded, angry, disillusioned, and mostly insulted. I'm a third generation Saskatchewanian. My grandparents were homesteaders and farmers. My parents were business people and farmers. And my wife and I are also farmers and agri-business people. We directly employ 15 people full time in our agriculture-based machinery and export business. We pay taxes in this province and have paid taxes here our entire lives. Our employees pay taxes here and live in our community. I am insulted when people lie to me and speak out of both sides of their mouths, treating me like some country bumpkin who might accept whatever feasible excuses come to one's mind.

I am doubly insulted when SaskTel, a corporation, a publicly funded business admits that they will waste tens of thousands of dollars in taxpayers' money, human resources, and violate our environment by trenching lines all over the face of the province, when they are not even required. I am even more insulted when every SaskTel representative I talked to maintained that it is impossible to let their customers know by mail or some definite method, what the future plans are for SaskTel.

As a lifelong resident and taxpayer of Saskatchewan, I can officially say I am unwanted. Our hard work and dedication to a team and a company are not appreciated. I am beginning to understand why many of our people and companies are setting up or moving to other jurisdictions. The reasons? Companies like SaskTel say "we don't want you".

My situation is absolutely ridiculous. My time should be spent running my business, spending time in my community and with my family — not butting heads with a service provider that I've been paying for all my life.

We are a young business, an expanding business. The seeds have now been sown in my mind to begin looking at people and places who appreciate good, solid corporate citizens and treat them accordingly.

End of letter.

This letter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is why I question our minister's statement that he's trying to make the transition period a smooth one and that SaskTel's number one priority is its customers.

Mr. Speaker, our minister for Crowns did indeed reply to Mr. Smith's letter. And I would also like to read a quick insert from his letter. The minister of Crowns replied, saying:

I would like to clarify that the most recent changes to SaskTel's installation rate policy are not the result of SaskTel's pending regulation by CRTC which takes effect on June 30, 2000. However, in preparation for CRTC regulations, SaskTel is taking a number of steps to ensure that corporation's activities are consistent with CRTC regulations. This includes a strict adherence to SaskTel's policies and procedures, meaning that while exceptions may have been made to rules or practices in the past, SaskTel today must (adhere) that rates and policies apply consistently to all customers.

The change to SaskTel's installation rate policy instituted on March 1, 1999, was designed to clarify SaskTel service connection charge rates — especially as they apply to rural locations — in order to reflect more accurately the cost of providing service in those areas. As you are likely aware, SaskTel operates in a highly competitive environment for long-distance service, and it is increasingly difficult for the corporation to subsidize services that have historically been provided by SaskTel at a . . . loss.

With respect to advising customers of this policy, SaskTel did send letters to customers who were in the process of having additional lines installed and had received formal estimates prior to March 1 . . . Because Combine Salvage did not have a formal request for adding additional lines pending, we did not send a letter to you regarding this change.

SaskTel has a very large number of regulations and policies. These change frequently and in many of these cases no mass advertisement is done.

Now this tells me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that our minister was more interested in lining SaskTel's pockets before the June 30 deadline when CRTC regulations actually came into effect, than in keeping his customers informed.

Mr. Smith, being a business owner, should not have had to have a formal request filed with SaskTel before he was privy to important information that would affect his business.

I would like to add, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because this is just, just too irresistible of an opportunity to give up — Mr. Smith, a contributor to Saskatchewan's economy and economic growth, is being inhibited by a Crown governed by our provincial government. He is having no difficulties with his business and the local municipality.

In closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to echo the words of my exceptional colleague from Cannington. I too feel that it is critical that we talk with the third parties that are interested in this Bill to determine whether it serves the needs of the customers of SaskTel, whether it serves the needs of SaskTel, and whether it serves the needs of all the people of Saskatchewan. Therefore, I move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 20

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 20 — The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

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

An Hon. Member: — Fine member he is.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to rise again today in this Assembly to speak to the proposed amendment before us to The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation Act.

The SaskTel Holding Corporation is the holding company owned by the government that houses all the services SaskTel offers outside the core local and long-distance telephone services. This Bill deals primarily with SaskTel Mobility and getting it into line with CRTC regulations.

I will admit that SaskTel has come a long way, Mr. Deputy Speaker — a long, long way. I remember a long time ago when we first got our telephone system ploughed into our yard and my farmyard, and that's . . . well, it's really not that long ago because that would reveal my age, but it sure was nice to get the SaskTel system into our house.

I remember the first few phone calls that came through and everybody was running to answer the telephone. It was quite a unique experience to do that. It was definitely a unique experience to get some phone calls on the telephone from the girlfriends. You didn't have to go all the way over there to visit them. It sure helped out.

But that was a long time ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and since then . . . but since then SaskTel has come a long way and now we have things like cell service. I would like to speak a little about the SaskTel system and the phone system that we have today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my area there was many areas where the cell phone system just does not work. It works in a very, very few spots in my town and my area, and the constituents are always complaining about they cannot talk to me for the simple reason they have no SaskTel Mobility system.

I do recall though, because of a few members opposite that have cabins at a lake by Christopher Lake, that their SaskTel service was not very good and they needed service to get down to the legislature and whatever have you, so they actually got a new SaskTel system for cell phones.

And that system came into Christopher Lake and it was a benefit to the members opposite. If that was implemented into all the areas in Saskatchewan, like in my area, my constituency, as well as all over Saskatchewan; it would also help with SaskTel systems.

I also would like to know to the members opposite that the old SaskTel system that was up, when it was taken down it was in perfect hands. Why could that not be moved to one of the areas

that doesn't have SaskTel Mobility and cell service and it would help out one of those fringed areas.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation Act is an organization, as I said, that deals with SaskTel Mobility. I would like to talk about how SaskTel Mobility affects our agriculture system in Saskatchewan. And being Saskatchewan is based on agriculture, in every which way you turn, many of the people that live in this rural area are somewhat frustrated at the increases that their government has put on to the SaskTel system, many increases that our patrons are constantly paying.

And as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the farm crisis that's in effect, it's tougher and tougher to try and make ends meet. And when the increase to the SaskTel bills keep going up at the rate their going, it just adds more confusion and frustration to the taxpayers who have to keep paying this.

As you know in the agricultural system with the crisis that's going on, the farmers are saying, where do I cut to make ends meet, to make things payable, to make things work?

Well one of the reasons that . . . one of the things they're looking at is the SaskTel thing. Maybe they should do without a phone. Maybe they should just go with a SaskTel cell phone and never mind the other phones. It is one way that they can create some more cash and keep our farm and agricultural system viable.

The other aspect that I want to talk about a little bit is how SaskTel infringes on small business. And as you know, Mr. Speaker, our province is made up of agricultural institutions, but it's also made up largely of small business. And without small business and farming, this province would not survive.

Without reasonable rates from SaskTel, our small-business people will not be able to survive. They also look at their monthly statements and see how their phone increases have gone up, and they keep going up. And to the players of that, they say, how can we keep in contention of being in business? How can we keep going on? Why is the government keeping on doing this? But as you know, our government is proud of tax increases and raising everything up.

Small business is a viable feature in Saskatchewan. It keeps the people going. It creates and stimulates the economy, creates new money. And we need small business. And without small business in this province . . . SaskTel and how they keep adding to the cost of small business, it is time that the government look at what it is doing to our province both in agricultural and in small business.

(1545)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do have a few questions about this Bill. SaskTel has increased rates along with the power and the . . . or SaskPower and SaskTel; the increases are something like \$41 million. The company must make available a schedule for all charges, rates, terms, and conditions for the services they provide. I think it's mandated that they should do this. The people out here should have the right to know what's going on. Will they do it? That's the question.

As the Minister of Finance stated, it's up to us to implement these costs and increases. It's up to the opposition government to find out where they have been increased and to look them up. And I guarantee to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the opposition party on this side will do their utmost to find out where the increases are. And if those increases are with SaskTel, then we will find them and we will bring them forthwith.

This Bill also gives SaskTel the right to strike private deals with customers outside its usual rate structure. This is something I'm not in agreement with, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know our present government of opposite is doing this with other facets of our system. They have set up deals also with trucks on highways which is a very serious problem, but I will deal with that in Highways department.

We have other questions when this Bill gets to the Committee of the Whole, Mr. Speaker. When we talk about this Bill, Bill 19, we will want to take our time and look over the implications of what these legal changes will mean to the average Saskatchewan resident.

SaskTel is moving into a brand new world and an ever more competitive world. And we would hope that this government will take the opportunity over the course of this debate over these Bills to enlighten us on some of the future plans for the upcoming of SaskTel.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the things that needs to take place with this province when we're dealing with the tariffs on monopolies, when we're dealing with tariffs on Crown corporations, is that there be review process put in place that allows for input and allows for information to be gathered.

We have always been . . . they have always had rate increases, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And so far the government has failed to provide a public review process independent of the government. Here again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the number of third parties involved in this particular pieces of legislation, they need to be consulted and they need to have their views heard.

And therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to move debate adjourned.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 3

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

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a privilege for me to be able to enter into the discussion and debate about The Health Labour Relations Reorganization Amendment Act. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you'll forgive me if I'm a little bit concerned and other members on this side of the House are concerned whenever we're dealing with an Act involving pretty much labour anything, bus especially labour reorganization, that's been

proposed by the members opposite, Mr. Speaker.

We've had plenty of experience in these matters. One need only look to the CCTA (Crown Construction Tendering Agreement), Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we understand now that . . . and it's with a bit of a knot in our stomach frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we're anticipating the son of CCTA which will soon be brought forward by members opposite. And it will plan probably, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to visit more destruction on the construction industry in our province than its predecessor did.

We've also seen labour changes in other areas that have been wrought by this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that are a cause for concern. And you need only to talk to the many entrepreneurs across the province, especially those involved in short-line manufacturing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to have them confirm for you and for all of us in the Assembly that some of those changes to labour legislation in this province have done some damage, frankly, to those entrepreneurs and to those businesses. And to the potential for them to continue to create jobs and to grow the economy and to pay taxes to fund all of the things that we need, including of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, including health care facilities which the Act speaks to as well.

Whenever we talk about the NDP government reorganizing labour legislation or bringing labour legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, frankly, it's a little akin Colonel Sanders bringing in a health plan for chickens, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The only thing that we can be assured of is the destruction and the carnage that the chickens will face, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's the only, it's the only certain thing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill does extend the provisions of the health reorganization that was passed in 1996, and it seriously reduces the number of bargaining units in health care professions in the province. The reorganization was commonly known, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the Dorsey commission and you will be familiar with that as many members of the Assembly will be. The number of bargaining units were reduced at that time from three hundred and . . . or 538 — I beg your pardon — to 45.

The change in part, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was supposed to make labour negotiations more manageable. It was supposed to make labour negotiations more manageable. And I think we, I think we all have some questions on this side of the House — and frankly members on that side I think do too — about whether or not labour negotiations in the health care sector have become more manageable since the introduction of this Act, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I wonder what the nurses would say about that. I know what the nurses would say about that in Swift Current, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They would be stifling laughter, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They would be stifling laughter.

While reducing the number of bargaining units perhaps made some sense, some sense back in 1996, I think what we found is that working families had some problems with the heavy-handed approach that the government used in this regard. Really it's the same type of approach, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we saw with the creation of the health districts themselves, where they basically just forced regions together into these

large health care districts.

And frankly, many people have been telling me in Swift Current — and I think people telling members across the province — that frankly, it hasn't worked very well.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. I appreciate that members on both sides of the House may have some views on this matter and indeed will have an opportunity to enter debate either now or in Committee of the Whole when this Bill gets there.

In the meantime, the hon. member for Swift Current has the floor, and I invite all members to allow him the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate the help. It's as if Colonel Sanders has come into the House itself; all the chickens are clucking on the other side, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. I just wish to caution the hon. member for Swift Current, and all hon. members will probably appreciate this, when a ruling is made from the Chair it is not to be commented on, but rather it provides an opportunity for hon. members to continue with their speech.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Similar to the amalgamation of the health care districts, or rather the health care unions; there will probably be very little consultation in this with this particular Bill. That certainly has been the case with the forced amalgamation talk that you continue to hear from the other side of the Assembly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And, as is the case with municipal amalgamation, we were told at the time of the Dorsey report that these changes would make labour negotiations more smooth and make the system run better. They would make labour negotiations more smooth and make the system run better.

Well I think that the nurses' strike last year certainly bears out the fact that labour negotiations in the health care sector are anything but smooth between that minister, between the Minister of Health and the health care unions in the province of Saskatchewan. In fact, they're running so smooth that the health care unions, namely SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses), didn't even want the minister at their convention, at their annual convention, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They weren't really interested in hearing from the minister any more, and I can hardly blame them frankly, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — When we were faced . . . when we were faced with the nurses' strike last year, clearly amalgamation in the health care sector didn't cure that problem, Mr. Speaker. Just like the government's plan for forced amalgamation will do anything but improve the lives of people in rural or urban Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, when the original Dorsey recommendations were put in place, not only were some union members angry, there were plenty of non-union workers who were angry to find themselves being forced to join a union — being forced to join the union, Mr. Speaker.

And this is typical of NDP labour policy. We see it in sector after sector. It's heavy-handed, Mr. Speaker, and it's destructive. It doesn't do a service to health care. It doesn't do a service to our economy. Mr. Speaker, it doesn't do a service to the short-line manufacturing sector or the entrepreneurs across this province who try, in spite of this government, to create jobs and create wealth and pay taxes in this province. The kind of health care that we're talking about today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — If we are to attract health care professionals in the province of Saskatchewan — especially nurses, Mr. Speaker — we're going to have to do a lot more than tinker with labour policy. We're going to have to do a lot more than to bring in this kind of legislation.

We've heard over and over this government's commitment to hire hundreds of new nurses in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and they are desperately needed. They're needed in Swift Current; they're needed across the province, Mr. Speaker. But we don't seem to be making much progress. Instead, Mr. Speaker, we're tinkering with health care labour regulations and legislation. That's the answer of the government, Mr. Speaker.

We need to find a way to make the jobs of those working in health care tolerable once again. This will make it better for workers, but it will also make it better for patients, Mr. Speaker. We need to find out about what's going wrong with our health care system and we need to do whatever we can to try to make the working environment more tolerable for health care professionals.

So with those remarks, with those remarks . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. I believe the member from Swift Current has adjourned debate on Bill No. 3, The Health Labour Relations Reorganization Amendment Act, 1999. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion.

Debate adjourned.

(1600)

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Vote 37

The Chair: — Before I call the first subvote I'll invite the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to introduce to the members of the committee four officials who are joining me here for estimates today, Mr. Chair. To my left is the deputy minister, Neil Yeates. Seated directly behind him is the assistant deputy minister, Lily Stonehouse, and beside her is Frances Bast, the senior policy adviser, finance and operations branch. And seated behind the bar is Brady Salloum, who is the executive director of the student financial assistance.

Subvote (PE01)

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to welcome the minister's officials here this afternoon to participate in these estimates.

I would like to say at this time that I find that the Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training have a responsibility, a very important responsibility to this province. They're responsible for the operation of our post-secondary education . . .

The Chair: — Order. Order, order. Order. I invite members on both sides of the Assembly to allow the hon. member to continue with his questioning in such a manner that not only can the Chair hear it, but the minister who is even further away from the hon. member. I invite all members to honour this.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I was saying the Department of Post-Secondary Education, the minister and his department have a very serious responsibility in this province, that being the future . . . the training after students leave our primary education system, after leaving high school. Nowadays most people need some additional training or education to make their way in the world, and I think it's a very important responsibility, and I hope that the minister and his department will assume their responsibilities and take it very seriously.

I realize that as in every department there's a problem with trying to do as much as you can for those people who are using your services, and yet on the other hand maintaining quality. And I think that is very important in the area of post-secondary education, that balance between access and quality. And we hear that from all sectors of society that are concerned with this area.

But we must maintain that measuring stick, not only in our public institutions, but also in our private institutions. And I know in recent months that a number of students and parents have expressed that concern about access and quality, and particularly in the private schools that we have.

In the last election the tuition fees and access to post-secondary education was an election issue. Members opposite had their plans; they brought them forward. The public judged those plans and those programs, and they found them somewhat lacking.

I guess the first question I would like to ask to the minister is: what plans does your department have to improve access to post-secondary education in this fiscal year?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. member for his question and also the introduction he brings to the estimates. One of the things that . . . And I would also add I'm not surprised that he does that, quite frankly.

The hon. member from Last Mountain-Touchwood— as the Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training critic — and I spent some time together in the month of January while I was engaged for many of the meetings, together with the Education minister of the government, in public meetings on consultations on the subject that he raises — post-secondary education accessibility.

And I'm very pleased to acknowledge that the hon. member attended a good number of those meetings. And when he comments about the serious responsibility of the department and the importance of the department to take the job very seriously, I also want to acknowledge that I think he does that as well. And I look forward to a good and responsible change in the best interests of Saskatchewan people who are served by post-secondary.

The hon. member talks about the balance of priorities and maintaining quality of including access to post-secondary programs, and I think we have a common mind about the importance of that and I want to acknowledge that as well.

To summarize the conclusion that we came to following the public meetings — in my mind there were, in this budget, \$16 million in expenditures that were directly responding to the public discussions that we had. And I'd like to outline them for the hon. member.

We heard, in my judgment, a number of important messages. And I think the hon. member will want to acknowledge . . . I'm sure will have much discussion about this at the public meetings that we responded to here.

And just before describing them, I'd like to just reiterate something that I know the hon. member for Last Mountain-Touchwood could recite in his sleep if I fall faint here in the middle of the comment, Mr. Chair, because we referred to them over and over again as their criteria for the public meetings that we were going to use in drawing our conclusions.

One, that we would make decisions that would do the best we could to respond to real student need. Secondly, that it would support quality post-secondary education. And thirdly, that it would meet the test of fiscal prudence. And that, simply put, being an important thing that we described over and over again because it's the test of fiscal prudence that enables decisions to politically have sustainability.

So it's with that in mind, Mr. Speaker . . . or Mr. Chair, that we drew four conclusions in addressing the access. Rather than it being a single program, really a combination of things reflecting what people were saying and I think a balance of things, largely it was my sense that the public were wanting prudent and fiscally prudent responses.

The point number one: there was a message from the public to do the best we could to support the post-secondary institutions; to enable them to do their best to keep tuitions as affordable as possible; and at the same time, to permit them to deal as best they could with the access question.

And in response to that, Mr. Chair, in times of inflation of under 2 per cent, in the budget there was a 4 per cent increase in funding to the post-secondary institutions in the amount of \$10.3 million. That was 4 per cent increases in the budgets of the university sector, SIAST, the regional college sector, and, Mr. Speaker, intended for those purposes.

Now when we were out and about folks said to us that accessibility, financial accessibility, is influenced . . . a factor is

tuition and that's something that they look at. But over and over again what we heard particularly when we got outside of Regina and Saskatoon — and I acknowledge that some of the members who are here attended meetings in their locations and would have heard this as well — there was a strong statement of support for doing what I call bringing the campus to the student, where people were acknowledging, for example, the important role that regional colleges provide in our education . . . post-secondary education system as brokers as well as deliverers to bring credit training to rural and northern Saskatchewan.

And they asked us to recognize that for many families, many students one of the biggest deterrents, if you look at financial deterrents to having access to post-secondary education, was not so much tuition fees but the cost of living away from home. And that was . . . we were told over and over again that for many that's a much bigger factor and the more you can address that, particularly in rural and northern Saskatchewan, the more effectively you're — bringing the . . . by bringing the campus to the student — providing access. That doesn't necessarily mean having entire programs but at least start the programs.

And in that then it was important to me that we responded with the 4 per cent increase in funding to the base of the regional colleges. But at the same time that we're moving forward in the area of technology enhanced learning, thereby attempting to take advantage of advances in technology to more effectively bring the campus to the student; a lot of acknowledgement that through the use of the SCN (Saskatchewan Communications Network) delivery program that a lot of good things are happening to regional colleges. And to work to continue to expand that as much as possible but to work to move to the on-line . . . world of on-line training as a way of expanding those accessibilities.

So in this budget, the technology enhanced learning portion of the post-secondary budget was increased by about . . . from a quarter of a million increased by \$1.4 million to \$1.65 million in order to expand the technology enhanced learning delivery.

Also we heard, Mr. Chair, that people say to us if you're trying to address a specific areas of disadvantage for some, rather than trying to address that by some kind of program that covers everyone, get focused on what you're . . . spend the tax dollars most effectively by focusing them where the disadvantage is.

And I thought that was good advice and consequently, Mr. Chair, we decided to increase the employability . . . sorry, the employment assistance for persons with disability program, the EAPD program, which provides support for persons with disabilities to have access to training that's credited and leads to employment and is intended primarily to overcome those barriers related to the disabilities themselves. An increase of 25 per cent in the budget there and by a million dollars from 4 to \$5 million.

And finally then, Mr. Chair, the advice we got from the public was this: they said it is legitimate to try to address directly the financial realities of students. And they also gave us a piece of advice, Mr. Speaker, that they said that approaches which are focused on the beginning of the study period were not as attractive as financial assistance which would be targeted and

would be perceived as a reward, it come toward the end of training as opposed to the beginning of training.

They also said that what they would like to do is to have some comfort as well that their tax dollars were being used as the incentive for people who were getting their post-secondary qualifications to establish their careers here in Saskatchewan. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, we put that together and also in the context of the labour market forecast which was released about a month . . . in February, which points in this decade to the tightening of the labour market not only here in Saskatchewan but across the country.

This is occurring, Mr. Chair, because there is a retirement of the baby boomers, and that will affect us in Saskatchewan just a little earlier than the rest of the country because of the relative ages of our populations here. But also said that there was some inherent wisdom in the advice we were receiving to address the matter of providing financial assistance preferably at the end, and preferably as well in a way that would be incentive for becoming a Saskatchewan taxpayer.

And consequently, Mr. Chair, we concluded it would be prudent to introduce Canada's first graduate tax credit that would be available in this calendar year, Mr. Chair. And so that would provide for students a benefit, a direct benefit of \$350 and implemented in this budget year at a cost of \$3 million.

So when I put them together, to the hon. member for Last Mountain-Touchwood, a 10.3 million in direct funding to institutions, 1 million increased employability assistance for persons with disability, 1.4 million technology enhanced learning; and 3 million graduate tax credit, and a total package of \$16 million then in response to the direct question of access to post-secondary. And I thank the hon. member for his question.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, for your answers to the question. I'd like to focus on the \$350 tax credit that was brought down in the budget for students who have graduated. Could you explain exactly how that tax credit program is going to work? Also how many of your students, graduating students, will be affected this year by that tax credit? And has your department done any work in trying to estimate how many graduates will be staying in the province as a result of this tax credit. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chairman, the assumption that we have made in calculating the budget for this is that about 95 per cent of the graduates from post-secondary this year would take it up this year. I point out that when the legislation introduced — we'll get into the detail of that, and I know you want to — that it will not require the take-up to be necessarily in the year of graduation, although it's capable of doing that.

So we've assumed 95 per cent of 8,700 graduates. And the graduates that would be affected would be from programs of six months of continuous study or more, and would include then obviously graduates from university and SIAST programs, but also from private vocational schools and journey persons who achieve their . . . apprentices who achieve their journey person status.

Mr. Hart: — Just to re-ask the one part of my question: has your department done any type of analysis as to the effect of that \$350 tax credit in students . . . graduating students' decisions to stay in the province? Have you talked to student groups and asked them what type of an effect this would have on their future plans?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, the consultation on it, as the hon. member will recognize, he participated — or not participated but attended a fair amount — heard from numbers in the public meetings that we had, including students. But also employers spoke, as you'll recognize, hon. member, that employers spoke very favourably about it as a vehicle for recruitment in the province.

There was not . . . there has not been a specific formal study that's been done and that's something we will be wanting to do to evaluate. But it is . . . it seemed to be another reason for establishing one's career here in the province of Saskatchewan. There are some pretty attractive circumstances, I think right now, that I anticipate will be reinforced by this.

I can quote for you specifically the study done by SIAST of 1998 graduates, done six months after graduation. And that showed of those who were wanting to enter the labour force after graduation 90 per cent six months after graduation were employed. In excess of 80 per cent were employed in their field, precisely in their field of study and 90 per cent of them were actually employed here in Saskatchewan.

We see that as a very attractive phenomenon that's been consistent for the last little while for sure, and something that's important to work to retain and see continued.

Mr. Hart: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. As you mentioned you had the series of meetings in the month of January, 15 across the province, and I attended over half of them. And as you said, we heard a lot of good suggestions come out of those . . . presented at those meetings. There were suggestions from various sectors of society: individuals, people on social services trying to get into post-secondary education, representation from union groups as to how we could incorporate more co-op programs in skills training and those sorts of things.

I wonder, do you have a cost on . . . the cost of conducting those meetings that took place in January?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, I'll have to get a precise calculation for the hon. member and provide that as soon as possible. I don't have that here. It will be a minimal number.

The reason I say that is because the only costs that were actually involved would be costs like travel and rental of meeting halls — that sort of thing. The people who were involved were all people who were in the employ of the department. So there were . . . there weren't any what I would consider to be extraordinary costs that would be involved.

But we'll provide that . . . I'll provide that number for you as soon as I can.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, I'd like to present another question to the minister. I realize you've mentioned here this afternoon that there is a number of items and issues that you've

dealt with as a result of those meetings.

I'm wondering is the minister and his department going to prepare a more comprehensive report of the . . . of all the suggestions that were put forward at these consultation meetings? And if you are, if the minister is going to be doing that, when will that be done?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, to the hon. member. There is not and has not ever been a plan to publish a report as such — a final report.

When we were holding the public meetings, as I explained over and over, is that the final report in effect would be the . . . would be ultimately in the decisions that would be found in the budget. And that was certainly . . . and I've outlined that response.

However, having said that, I would remind the hon. member that one of the things that was done throughout the consultations is that the ideas that came forward were all recorded, placed on the web site, so that they were available for anyone who was interested at all to be able to see specifically the kinds of ideas and advice that was provided to us — whether it was from students or educators or families of students or people who have just called themselves nothing more sophisticated than interested taxpayers. And that was an ongoing exercise that provided for people, and still does, the ability to see what kind of ideas were brought forward.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I would like to move on to asking the minister and his department officials some questions dealing with the whole area of student loans.

How many students in all post-secondary institutions, both public and private, will qualify for student loans or have qualified in this past academic year? And what is the average size of the student loan that those students may happen to have?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, to the hon. member, and he may want to . . . I may want to get clarification of the second part of his question.

In the 1999-2000 loan year — a loan year runs from August to July — and so the loan year that we're currently in, I think that's what you're asking for? Yes. There are 17,200 students who are assisted. And their loans are in the amounts . . . The hon. member will recognize that when a student takes out a student loan it's really two loans. One is the Canada student loan; the other is the Saskatchewan student loan. And so to report those amounts separately. The amount of federal student loans in this fiscal year is \$71 million, and provincial loans is \$59 million.

And then there are loan reductions, Mr. Chair, in the amount of \$39.5 million. Those are reductions of benefits that occur to students from their loans as a result of a combination of the Saskatchewan student bursary, the Canadian millennium scholarship bursary, and the Canada and the Saskatchewan study grants and remission programs.

(1630)

I'm not sure what you're . . . can you just clarify for me what you were asking for when you said the average . . . you were wanting to know the average and I wasn't just sure just precisely what it was, and if you can clarify a little we'll do our best to answer that.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, to the minister, the question I was asking is what is the average amount of a student loan in this academic year? If we have 17,200 students with student loans, what is the size of . . . what does that average out to be?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — I'm not sure if this is the information the hon. member is looking for. The average student has a debt loan of \$12,500. But that would not be the amount of money borrowed in this year. That's when you put all of the total debt together that student's carrying on student loans. And so that will obviously range from some students who, for example, are in a program of, say, a year or less to students who would be in a four- or five-year program.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, to the minister: the minister mentioned that there is a \$39 million student loan reduction programs made up of the Saskatchewan student bursary program, the millennium scholarship program, and one other program. I wonder if the minister and his staff could provide some detail as to the amount of reduction in each one of those programs; and compare that to previous years, particularly the Saskatchewan student bursary program.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, I would provide for the hon. member, I think is what he's asking for, for the current year that we're in and then our projected or estimated . . . our estimates regarding the next loan year but within this government fiscal year: for the 1999-2000 loan year — the one we're in — and the Saskatchewan bursaries, the bursaries provided are \$18.2 million this year, and we're estimating that to increase to \$19.8 million for the next student loan year.

On the Saskatchewan study grant for the 1999-2000 low year . . . loan year, I should say, \$4.5 million; and estimated for the 2000-2001, 5.0 million. On the Canada study grant for the 1999-2000 loan year, 4.5 million in forgiveness; and estimated for next year, \$4.9 million.

On the Saskatchewan remission provided in the 1999-2000 year, loan year, \$2.46 million; and for next year, 2001, \$2.63 million.

And on the Canada millennium scholarship provided, that's a constant \$9.775 million for the 1999-2000 and projected for the next year.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, to the minister, there has been quite a bit of confusion in the minds of students and parents as to exactly how the millennium scholarship is administered in this province. Some of the students, many students I might say, were under the impression that they would receive this millennium scholarship and in the past they have also received a Saskatchewan bursary, and so that they would have a net gain. In fact when they received their annual statement of student loan, they realized that one was removed and they were really no better off.

I wonder, in the interests of clarity, would the minister clarify exactly how the millennium scholarship is administered in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, the millennium scholarship . . . and I want to acknowledge that there has been some confusion about it and I . . . in retrospect my advice to the federal government in introducing the millennium scholarship would have been to call it something more accurate which would be a millennium bursary. I really would have preferred that that would have been the terminology used because I think it would have — for those students who found themselves feeling a bit confused about it — would have helped to clarify what it was intended to do and what it does.

The Saskatchewan bursary program was expanded, enhanced here in Saskatchewan actually a year in advance of the introduction of the millennium scholarship, and provided for Saskatchewan students an advantage that the millennium scholarship then continued a year before the millennium scholarships came into play in this loan year. And Saskatchewan signed an agreement on May 7, 1999 in anticipation of that and introduced enhanced student bursaries for the 1998 year. And then the 1999 agreement came into place.

It provides then, through the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, funds which provide for bursaries of 2,000 to \$4,000 to students and intended to be targeted to those with the greatest need.

And what happens then is that when a student receives a millennium scholarship then their provincial student loan is reduced by the amount of that scholarship, so that it becomes for them an amount that is truly of that value for them because it's reducing the amount of debt that the student would be carrying on the student loan. And I think, Mr. Chair, that will describe how it came into place and how it works to benefit students here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, to the minister, another question dealing with the student loan, the whole student loan area and the administration of student loan. I understand that the federal government has not been able to renegotiate an agreement with the chartered banks to administer the student loan.

I know there's a lot of students are wondering is there going to be a student loan program? If so, who is going to administer it? Where do I get my application forms? Will the monies be coming forward on schedule as they have in the past? And all those types of questions.

I wonder if the minister could clarify that whole area of administration in the student loan for the, for the upcoming academic year?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chairman, the question that the hon. member asked is a very important one, and one of concern to many students . . . as we've already talked about the number of students who, who look to student loans as a way of financing their post-secondary education.

I think the most . . . probably the single, most important thing to have understood very clearly is that the application forms for next year's student loans will be available June 1. And that clearly implies that there will continue to be a student loan program.

That is a firm commitment of both the federal and provincial governments. We continue to work together. We and other provinces obviously all have a strong interest in the federal government's continuation of the Canada student loan program. And we continue to be in contact and work together with them in that regard on an ongoing basis.

It's a priority area of concern obviously for the Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training. And the important thing, I think, is to clarify although some of the precise details as to just how it will be delivered have to be worked out. From a student's point of view, it's not likely to feel very different than it currently does, and the important thing is to assure students that the Canada student loan, Saskatchewan student loan programs will be continuing in the next academic year beginning August 1. And the application forms are anticipated to be ready and available as of June 1.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I think students will be somewhat reassured by the minister's answer. I think there was a certain amount of apprehension out there, and I guess until they actually see those funds deposited into their bank accounts for the first month, they will, you know . . . I think at that point in time they will hopefully realize that the program, as we all hope, will continue to aid students in accessing post-secondary education.

Mr. Deputy Chair, I'd like to ask the minister, in the budget that was presented very recently in this Assembly, the minister's government saw fit to reduce or eliminate the interest-free, six-month interest-free period which students had before they had to start paying their interest on their student loans. And I realize that was only on a portion of their student loan, but quite often for students who haven't found a job, every dollar that can be saved in interest costs is very important to them.

And I wonder, has the department . . . does the department have any programs in place to help those students who are unable to seek or to obtain employment, to help them recover at least some of the benefits that were lost by the cancellation of that program?

(1645)

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, the hon. member quite correctly identifies the relationship between the Saskatchewan student loan and the Canada student loan. The average student who's graduating with a student loan will find that typically a third or less of the total debt load, it will be on the Saskatchewan student loan. And so he quite correctly identifies that.

There is an interest relief program that is available for students regarding their Saskatchewan student loan. And the way it works is this, is that at the point of six months past graduation, if the student is not employed, then he or she can apply to have . . . to receive the benefit of the interest relief program.

What that means is that for up to 18 months — so it can be a period that long — that no interest will accumulate that's covered by the province, and that no payment is required under Saskatchewan student loan. So that's the program that's . . . that is there available for students regarding their Saskatchewan student loan if they're not employed at that point.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I thank the minister for his response to the question. I would like to ask the minister a question with regards to the cancelled partnership program. The minister indicated in the answer to a written question that there was a cost saving to his department of \$777,000.

What I would like to hear from the minister is how many employers participated in the last . . . last year in this program? How many . . . what was the number of students that were able to obtain summer employment as a result of the program?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, I obviously appreciate the enthusiasm and the interest from your side of the House there, Mr. Chair, and we'll anticipate that continuing.

I can't . . . I don't have here the number of the employers, but the number of jobs that were touched by the program is 1,524. And just to put that into a context, Mr. Chair, it's important to I think understand the relationship between the Saskatchewan partnerships program and the federal summer employment program which is also there available for employers.

The Saskatchewan program provided a dollar twenty an hour to the employer for wage subsidy. The federal program provides a minimum of \$2.50 an hour and as much as \$5.60 an hour. It's quite a substantial difference between the benefits provided by the provincials compared to the federal.

And therefore I guess it would not be surprising that 64 per cent of the employers who had applied for the provincial program ultimately withdrew their application, said they didn't want it — the provincial program — because the federal program was more attractive.

So there was a substantial . . . there was a very substantial message in terms of the attractiveness of the provincial program compared to the federal program.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I thank the minister for his answer. I would like to comment that although the number of jobs may not sound as . . . or 1,524 may not sound like a lot of jobs to those students who were able to get a summer job as a result of this program, I'm sure it was a very important program to them. I know there was a number of community organizations and towns and villages who hired students out of these programs. And to them, it was an important program.

I realize that in the budget of \$4 million, that \$777,000 is perhaps not a large amount of money if you look at it in that context. However, if you look at it from the individual basis perspective, money earned by those students during the summer, it was very important to them. And I'm sure there are concerned students out there wondering where they may be getting jobs this summer.

Will students see a direct benefit from the elimination of this

program? And if so, in what areas will they see that benefit?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, just in response to the hon. member, when we've looked at the take-up of the provincial program, although \$777,000, depending on your point of view, sounds like a lot of money or not a lot — it still seems to me that there is a responsibility to be prudent fiscal managers of the tax dollars that we're spending.

As you pointed out and we both said at the beginning of the estimates here, the task of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training is an extremely important one and extremely challenging with resources available. And that says to me that there is an ongoing and continuous responsibility to be ensuring that you're spending those tax dollars as prudently as you possibly can.

Although there were 1,500 jobs that were touched by it, just given the rejection of the program by employers who had originally applied for it and then said that they didn't want it, it really causes one to question whether the job was actually creating many new jobs at all that otherwise would not have been created with the dollar twenty amount per hour that we're able to provide.

There'd be certainly no doubt that it would be providing a subsidy. But whether it was actually stimulating jobs that otherwise would not have been there is really questionable; and therefore deemed appropriate, given the much richer federal program, to allow Saskatchewan employers to take advantage of that. Because they were clearly telling us in their response that that was their view and to redirect the funds to more prudent use.

When you asked your question, I couldn't hear it specifically and I just ask if you wouldn't mind repeating the question.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, certainly I would be happy to repeat the question for the minister's benefit.

Those savings of \$777,000 that will be saved by the elimination of the partnership program, will those funds be redirected specifically in such a fashion that students will benefit from them directly, or will they just be put back into general revenues and absorbed in the overall budget of the department? That was the gist of my question, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, it's my view and just picking up from what I commented without having heard . . . being able to hear your question, we will already talked about some of the direct benefit ways that have resulted in increased funding in the budget. And so . . . I can rename them if you like, but the funding to institutions we've talked about, the support for disabled . . . people with disabilities, technology-enhanced learning in the rural and northern areas, the graduate tax credit — these are all the things that directly benefit students.

And so this becomes part of the way of being able to afford some of the things that you deem to be a more prudent expenditure of the tax dollars to achieve our objectives.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I would now like to turn my questions for a moment — and I realize the hour is late and

we're nearing adjournment — but I would like to ask the minister one question in the area of skills training. His department administers a whole myriad of programs that are aimed at skills training and employability and all those sorts of things.

I wonder, could the minister list for me today what programs in the area of skills training does his department administer.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — The answer to the hon. member's question, Mr. Chair, is a combination of things. There will be funds through the skills training — we referred to that — that will find themselves flowing through to training for Saskatchewan people in a combination of ways.

One is through the JobStart Future Skills program, which is focused on training for direct skill application. The multi-party training plan, where the department is working together with institutions and industry to develop training programs targeted to anticipated needs in the province so that we're doing the best we can to provide Saskatchewan training for Saskatchewan people to take Saskatchewan jobs.

Grants to . . . some of it will be in the form of grants to SIAST as our technical delivery system and which is made . . . of which great use is made by the regional colleges for delivery in the regional areas, and the colleges will be involved along with the career and employment services centres in identifying the needs and the priorities.

And then also through the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission there would be funds that are directed there to provide training towards journey person's status.

Mr. Chair, I think we're probably about as far as we're going to go today, and I want to thank the hon. member for his questions and we'll look forward to continuing this at another time. Unless he wanted to vote it off right now.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5:02 p.m.